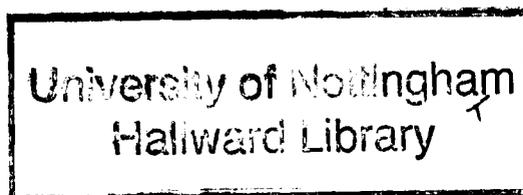


**Interpreting Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of  
the Marketing of an Extreme Right Party.  
The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang**

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Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham  
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# Table of contents

Acknowledgements.....	8
List of Publications.....	9
List of Tables.....	10
List of Figures.....	10
Abstract.....	12
<b>Chapter 1 - Marketing and Politics: a match made in heaven? .....</b>	<b>13</b>
1. Introduction .....	13
2. Research questions.....	16
3. Methodology.....	18
4. Thesis structure.....	19
<b>Chapter 2 - The Extreme Right in Contemporary Europe: an Overview .....</b>	<b>21</b>
1. Introduction .....	21
2. The definitional mire.....	24
3. The Western European extreme right.....	27
3.1. Electoral success: possible explanations.....	27
3.2. Ideology and electoral themes.....	29
3.2.1. Xenophobia.....	30
3.2.2. Socio-economic policy: neo-liberalism and solidarism.....	32
3.2.3. Anti-establishment .....	33
3.2.4. Law and order .....	35
3.3. The communication of extreme right parties: an identified ‘gap’ in literature	36
4. Conclusion .....	38
<b>Chapter 3 - Political Marketing: relevance and issues .....</b>	<b>39</b>
1. Introduction.....	39
2. Political consumption.....	39
3. Political Marketing: theory and practice.....	43
3.1 The nature of political marketing: current literature.....	45
3.2. Political marketing theory.....	49
3.3. Relationship marketing.....	51

3.4. (Political) marketing discourse.....	53
4. Political marketing and propaganda.....	55
5. Conclusion.....	58
<b>Chapter 4 - The Vlaams Blok and the Vlaams Belang.....</b>	<b>60</b>
1. Introduction - the political context: the extreme right and political marketing.....	60
2. Politics in Belgium: a journey through a political labyrinth.....	63
2.1. The Belgian federal model.....	63
2.2 - Political parties: the linguistic divide.....	65
2.3. The extreme right in Belgium. Different parties, different fortunes.....	67
2.3.1. The Front National: the misfortune of the French-speaking extreme right	67
2.3.2. The Vlaams Blok and the Vlaams Belang: background information ....	69
2.3.3. Who votes for the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang? Ideological voting and	
protest.....	75
2.3.4. The ‘ <i>cordon sanitaire</i> ’: an efficient strategy against the extreme	
right?.....	78
2.3.5. The propaganda machine of the Vlaams Blok.....	81
2.3.6. The Vlaams Belang: the return of the Vlaams Blok.....	83
3. Conclusion.....	85
<b>Chapter 5 - Methodology: Critical Discourse Analysis.....</b>	<b>87</b>
1. Introduction.....	87
2. The notion of discourse.....	89
2.1. Marketing discourse.....	90
3. The study of discourse.....	92
4. Alternative methodologies.....	94
4.1. Content analysis.....	95
5. Critical discourse analysis (CDA).....	97
5.1. Basic assumptions in CDA.....	98
5.1.1. CDA and discourse.....	98
5.2 Specificities of CDA.....	99
5.2.1. Political involvement of the researcher.....	99
5.2.2. Ideology.....	101
5.2.3. History and social processes.....	102

5.2.4. Context.....	103
5.2.5. Language and society.....	103
5.2.6. Linguistic categories.....	104
5.2.7. Alternative approaches to the study of discourse.....	104
5.3. Limitations: conversation analysis and criticisms of CDA.....	105
5.4. Method.....	106
5.4.1. Wodak. Why adopt the historical-discourse approach?.....	107
5.4.2. Characteristics of the discourse-historical approach.....	110
6. Illustration: application of CDA. Frank Vanhecke's editorial.....	113
6.1. Introduction.....	113
6.2. Full Text: "Today We Were Executed But We Will Rise".....	115
6.3. Analysis.....	117
6.3.1. The semantic dimension.....	117
6.3.2. The strategic dimension.....	118
6.3.3. The linguistic dimension.....	122
7. Conclusion.....	125

**Chapter 6 - The Micro Level of Analysis: Persuasion of the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang's discourse** .....

<b>Belang's discourse</b> .....	127
1. Introduction.....	127
2. Persuasion.....	128
3. Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang: most salient features.....	132
3.1 Semantic dimension.....	133
3.1.1. Democracy.....	135
3.1.2. Freedom of speech and anti-racism.....	144
3.1.3. Vox populi - the voice of the silent majority .....	151
3.1.4. Selective screening of content.....	155
3.1.5. Reality construction and semantic manipulation.....	161
3.2. Strategic dimension.....	165
3.2.1. (De)legitimizing strategies.....	166
3.2.2. Legitimizing the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. The quest for credibility	170
3.2.2.1. Eliciting credibility.....	172
3.2.2.2. Third-parties' endorsements.....	173
3.2.3. Avoidance strategy.....	183

3.2.4. Reversal strategies.....	185
3.2.5. Constructive strategies. Identification with readers.....	187
3.2.6. Discursive strategies: summary.....	190
3.3. Linguistic and syntactical dimensions.....	191
3.3.1. Persuasive grammar.....	191
3.3.2. Syntax and punctuation.....	199
3.3.3. Spoken delivery.....	202
3.3.4. The effect of the syntactical construction, and level of language.....	204
4. Conclusion.....	208
<b>Chapter 7 - Images as texts. A visual analysis of the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang</b>	210
1. Introduction - relevance of the visual.....	210
2. The centrality of image .....	212
3. Text and image. Persuasion and rhetoric.....	215
3.1. Text and image.....	215
3.2. Persuasion and visual arguments.....	217
4. Image analysis.....	219
4.1. 'Reading' images.....	219
4.2. An analytical approach to the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's images.....	221
5. A visual analysis of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's material.....	225
5.1. The portrait.....	225
5.2. Group photographs - the corporate identity.....	227
5.3. Representation of the 'foreigners'.....	234
5.3.1. Identity construction and gaze.....	239
5.3.2. The exception: lone man in a street.....	241
5.4. A perfect place in a perfect world: the Vlaams Blok's Brussels.....	244
5.5. Othering - the issue of identity and the Turkish question.....	246
5.5.1. Context.....	247
5.5.2. The visual construction of difference .....	249
5.5.3. The representation of women in the brochure.....	253
5.5.4. Is it all about Islam?.....	255
6. Conclusion.....	257

<b>Chapter 8 - The Marketing Strategy of the Vlaams Blok and the Vlaams Belang.....</b>	<b>260</b>
1. Introduction. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang and marketing .....	260
2. Branding and Politics.....	263
2.1. Political brands: do they actually ‘exist’?.....	264
2.2. Commercial brands: useful theoretical concepts.....	268
3. Political marketing strategy.....	272
3.1. The strategic behaviour of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang in the political market	273
3.1.1. Market positioning.....	274
3.2. Segmentation and positioning of a political brand.....	281
3.2.1. The evolution of the positioning of the Vlaams Blok: the timeline.....	283
3.2.2. Positioning of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang’s brand.....	286
3.2.3. Evolution of the positioning: the case of the Vlaams Belang.....	292
5. Conclusion.....	295
<b>Chapter 9 - Discussion.....</b>	<b>297</b>
1. Introduction.....	297
2. Research questions.....	297
3. How does the party market itself?.....	298
3.1. The marketing of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang.....	298
3.2. Evidence of a political marketing discourse.....	300
3.3. Marketing as metaphor.....	302
4. How does the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang manufacture its persuasive discourse...	303
4.1. Texts and images: a coherent narrative.....	303
4.2. Persuasion.....	303
4.3. Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang and reality construction.....	306
4.4. Identity construction .....	309
4.4.1. Identities: the construction of closed categories.....	310
4.5. Selective newsworthiness.....	311
5. Reality construction and legitimacy - a repackaged offering.....	312
5.1. the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang’s discourse and its effect on Belgian society	312
5.2. Treatment of the problematic features of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang discourse	314
6. Conclusion.....	315

<b>Chapter 10 - Conclusion</b> .....	317
1. Introduction.....	317
2. Summary of the thesis.....	317
3. Contributions of the research.....	319
3.1. Practical applications.....	320
3.2. Methodological contribution: application of CDA.....	321
3.3. The theoretical insight for understanding the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang's success	322
4. Limitations of the research.....	323
4.1. Methodological limitation: content analysis.....	323
4.2. The marketing mindset.....	324
4.3. Political marketing.....	325
5. Suggestions for further research.....	326
5.1. Critical discourse analysis methodology.....	326
5.2. Web-based data.....	327
5.3. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang.....	328
6. Final words: a reflexive comment.....	329
 <b>Appendices</b> .....	 333
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	367

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## List of Publications

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## List of Tables

Table 1 - Political families in Belgium, by linguistic group

Table 2 - Content of the first brochure of the Vlaams Belang for Brussels. *Brussels, My City*, “The time bomb is ticking...”, (2004).

Table 3 - VOTER as actor table (Brochure. *Liste 10 Bruxelles Notre Ville! Touche pas a la démocratie* ; Vlaams Blok, 2004 : 3 ; see appendix 7)

Table 4 - POLITICAL PARTIES/’THEY’ as actors (Brochure. *Liste 10 Bruxelles Notre Ville! Touche pas a la démocratie*; Vlaams Blok, 2004: 3; see appendix 7)

Table 5 - THE VLAAMS BLOK as actor (Brochure. *Liste 10 Bruxelles Notre Ville! Touche pas a la démocratie* ; Vlaams Blok, 2004 : 3 ; see appendix 7)

## List of Figures

### Chapter 6

Fig.1. Vlaams Belang (undated) Franse Tijd. Vreemdeling (‘French time bomb. Foreigners)

Fig.2. Vlaams Blok (undated) Immigratie: De Demografische Tijdbom (‘Immigration: The Demographic Timebomb)

Fig.3. Vlaams Blok (undated). Dossier. Vreemdelingen (‘File. Foreigners’)

### Chapter 7

Fig.1. Vlaams Blok, Campaign brochure, June 2004: 1 (Frank Vanhecke and Johan Demol)

Fig. 2 Vlaams Blok, Campaign brochure, June 2004: Cover page

Fig. 3 Vlaams Belang, Political Programme brochure “De Kracht van een Overtuiging”, (undated, page 10)

Fig.4 Vlaams Belang. Group photograph in leaflet “*Turkije in Europa? Neen!*”

('Turkey in Europe? No!')

Fig.5 Vlaams Belang, Magazine 1: Brussels, My City Magazine (2004: 4)

Fig.6 Vlaams Belang, Political Programme brochure "*De Kracht van een Overtuiging*", undated, page 28 and

Fig.7 Vlaams Belang (Political Bureau), "*De Kracht van een Overtuiging*", (undated, page 7) ('The Strength of Conviction')

Fig. 8 Vlaams Blok, Brochure 6: *Feiten/Réalités*, May 2004: 8

Fig.9 Vlaams Belang, Magazine 1: Brussels, My City Magazine (2004: 5)

Fig.10 Vlaams Blok, Brochure 6: *Feiten/Réalités* (May 2004: 9)

Fig.11 Vlaams Belang, Magazine 5: 02/05/2005: cover page

Fig.12 Vlaams Blok, Brochure 6: *Feiten/Réalités* (May 2004: 22)

Fig.13 Vlaams Blok, Brochure 6: *Feiten/Réalités* (May 2004: 23)

Fig.14 Turkish flag

Fig. 15 Vlaams Belang, "*Turkije in Europa? Neen!*" ('Turkey in Europe? No!')

Fig. 16 Vlaams Belang, "*Turkije in Europa? Neen!*" ('Turkey in Europe? No!') (2005: 1)

Fig.17 Vlaams Blok, Stop Immigration, undated

Fig. 18 Vlaams Belang, photograph 1 "*Turkije in Europa? Neen!*" ('Turkey in Europe? No!') (2005: 9)

Fig. 19 Vlaams Belang, Photograph 2 "*Turkije in Europa? Neen!*" ('Turkey in Europe? No!') (2005: 9)

Fig. 20 Fig. 18 Vlaams Belang, photograph 3 "*Turkije in Europa? Neen!*" ('Turkey in Europe? No!') (2005: 9)

Fig.21. Map of Europe. Vlaams Belang, "*Turkije in Europa? Neen!*" ('Turkey in Europe? No!') (2005: 11)

## Abstract

This thesis develops an in-depth understanding of a specific case at the intersection of extreme right politics, marketing and language. More specifically, the research focuses on a Flemish extreme right party, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang which provides a rich site of enquiry for the analysis of political communications, marketing strategies and discursive processes. Critical discourse analysis of the verbal and visual elements of Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang publications reveals, on three levels, the strategic use of lexical, rhetorical and other linguistic devices to brand and differentiate the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang from other political parties. The thesis demonstrates that the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang manages to legitimate its political product by dismissing unfavourable features (such as racism and xenophobia), and repackaging them (as nationalist) for a wider audience as a ready-to-consume product that achieves electoral success. The main contributions of the thesis are fourfold. First, the research provides a marketing-related explanation of the success of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. The pervasiveness of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse in Belgian politics makes the analysis of the party interesting in its own right. The critical discursive analysis reveals the underlying market-orientation of the party and the methods and techniques that the party uses to communicate and persuade. Second, this research demonstrates that marketing can be used to advance an ideological discourse that places consumption in a central position in people's lives. The application of critical discourse analysis thus provides a novel and valuable contribution to the understanding of political marketing. Third, the thesis sets the stage for furthering understanding of how marketing is deployed with increasing sophistication outside its traditional, commercial domain, and, more specifically, in politics. Finally, critical discourse analysis has an emancipatory goal in uncovering ideologies, and providing a voice to the silenced and the oppressed. This thesis is located firmly within that tradition with political reflexivity implicit throughout.

# Chapter 1: Marketing and Politics: a match made in heaven?

## 1. Introduction

This chapter introduces my thesis, a four-year research project aimed at studying the marketing of an extreme right party, the Flemish Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. First, the objectives of the research are identified, together with the reasons for studying the extreme right's marketing strategies and communication. Second, the research questions are stated. Third, the methodological approach, critical discourse analysis, is briefly outlined. Finally, the structure of the thesis is described with a summary of the content of each chapter.

### *Research objectives*

The overall aim of the research is to provide an in-depth analysis of the discourse of an extreme right party, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, and propose an alternative approach to the study of the extreme right, namely a critical discursive approach to the marketing and communications of a specific political party.

### *Why study the marketing of an extreme right party?*

Consumption has now been established, through the influence of marketing thinking, as a 'dominant force' in society (Brownlie *et al.*, 1999). This force extends beyond the commercial realm into other spheres of human society and the

“discourses of marketisation and commodification are increasingly intruding into new realms of life such as relationships, politics and family” (Hackley, 2003: 1328). Business models and commercial discourses are becoming pervasive in political and social contexts (Norris, 2004; Hertz, 2001). Politicians have adopted a commercial logic in order to cater to this ‘market’ of citizen-consumers (Brownlie, 1997) and political parties are often managed like businesses (O’Shaughnessy, 1990). The ‘marketisation’ of politics and political discourse could arguably be linked (as cause and effect) to disillusionment, apathy and alienation from political parties, especially among the younger generation (Norris, 2004). Thus, marketing, as a ‘dominant force,’ seems to have created a political consumption that enables involvement in social life, and the creation and maintenance of social relationships enriched<sup>1</sup> by this consumption representing values which consumers feel unable to express through traditional channels (Putnam, 2000, in Gibson *et al.*, 2003; Brownlie *et al.*, 1999). The notion of political consumption is therefore not only a challenge for marketing as an academic discipline, but also for political parties if they want to make politics meaningful to their electorate (Dermody and Scullion, 2001) and if they want to understand the citizen-consumer. The production of politics by (professional) political actors is also influenced by marketing. The application of marketing techniques in political practice seems increasingly widespread and substantial sums of money are spent each year on political advertising, much of which goes to

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<sup>1</sup> For the time being, the argument focuses on consumption as a mode of expression in contemporary society, and holds the rather uncritical view that consumption is “liberating” (see Firat and Venkatesh (1995) for discussion).

communication professionals, through channels very familiar to mainstream marketing scholars and practitioners.

### *The extreme right*

The issue of interest for this thesis is the behaviour of political parties and the way that they seek to market themselves to potential voters. To explore the pervasiveness and potential use of marketing in the political sphere, it was deemed appropriate to focus attention on a specific area of politics: the extreme-right. The success experienced by the extreme right across Western Europe, and the persistent loyalty of its voters raises many issues which have sparked the interest of academics and society. My own experience in Belgium, where the extreme right has been persistently successful since the start of the nineties, combined with my business education background, allowed me to consider the explanatory potential of a marketing outlook for the study of the extreme right. Although a wealth of research has been dedicated to the extreme right and to the reasons for its contemporary re-emergence, the research has mainly adopted political, sociological and historical perspectives. Being primarily interested in marketing and broader societal issues, my attention was drawn to the extreme right's apparent market-orientation, and the potential role of marketing in the extreme-right's attractiveness and persuasiveness.

### *The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang*

The variety and the diversity of the political parties regrouped under the label extreme right makes the study of the 'extreme right' particularly complex (see chapter 2). Studying the 'marketing of the extreme right' is a colossal project, beyond the scope of a doctoral research project. Therefore, the topic was narrowed down to a particular case, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, which was selected as an exemplary topic for this research. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang (i.e. Flemish Block/Flemish Interest) is a successful extreme right political party of Flanders, the northern region of Belgium. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is a successful extreme right party which has been able to gain more and more voters since the beginning of the nineties to become a major figure in the current Belgian political landscape. In addition, the party provides interesting insights as to how a political party can successfully apply marketing strategies in that the party leaders recommend in internal documents the use of marketing to enhance their representatives' political campaigns.

## **2. Research questions**

This research project tackles the following general questions: How do extreme right parties market themselves? What are the marketing strategies and techniques used (with a particular focus on branding)? For example, how are the national identity and the 'community' of nationals defined by the extreme right and how are the exclusionist and discriminatory discourses of the extreme right packaged in

order to become ‘acceptable’ and legitimate, therefore gaining wider support? The variety and the diversity of the political parties regrouped under the same label makes the study of the ‘extreme right’ particularly complex (chapter 2). This is why an extreme right party, the Belgian (Flemish) Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang has been selected for the purposes of this research (chapter 4). The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is one of the most successful, articulate and organised extreme right parties in Western Europe and as such provides a rich set of data for a research project on marketing and extreme right politics. The specific research questions can be summarised as follows:

*How does the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang mobilise marketing and political persuasion to gain popular support and acceptance?*

*1 - “How does the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang market itself? What are the marketing strategies and techniques used?” (chapter 8)*

*2 - “How does the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang manufacture its trademark discriminatory discourse in a persuasive way that has gained acceptance and legitimacy in the Belgian political scene?” (chapters 6 and 7)*

This research is a multidisciplinary project which requires a methodology that explores and enables emergent themes. Critical discourse analysis provides such an analytical framework and proved invaluable (chapter 5) in addressing the research questions and in dealing with the particular discursive nature of the project.

### 3. Methodology

A critical form of discourse analysis is adopted for this research. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a methodological framework is concerned with discourses as the instruments of power and control, and discourse as an instrument of the social construction of reality (Van Leeuwen, 1993). The basic assumption of CDA is that there is a dialectical relationship between discursive events and the context in which they are embedded (de Cillia *et al.*, 1999: 157). Through discourse, social actors constitute knowledge, situations, social roles as well as identities and interpersonal relations between social actors (de Cillia *et al.*, 1999: 157). CDA seeks to unveil the web of domination, power, discrimination, and control existing in language (Wodak, 2001). This particular approach of CDA should prove particularly useful for the study of discourses with powerful ideologies, yet with hidden effects and hidden power relations (Meyer, 2001) which can be found for example in populism and marketing. In this project, the object of investigation is the persuasion and the construction and marketing of alternative realities, in subtly or overtly racist and nationalist discourses (arguably a feature of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse). More specifically, Wodak's discourse-historical approach provides a detailed method for approaching the discourse of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, and the tools to gain insight into the online discourse of extreme right parties.

## **4. Thesis structure**

### *Literature review*

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the contemporary extreme right, a recurrent political phenomenon of the Western European political landscape. Theories and explanations of their success highlight the complexity of the phenomenon. Chapter 3 discusses issues related to marketing and political marketing, and its relevance to the conduct of politics. Chapter 4 presents the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang in detail, and provides an overview of the Belgian political landscape.

### *Methodology*

Chapter 5 presents the methodological framework adopted in this research, focussing on its discursive approach. The critical discourse analytical framework is described and its relevance in addressing the research questions is discussed in detail. The chapter ends with an illustration of the method applied to a selected text from the Vlaams Blok.

### *Empirical study*

Chapter 6 focusses on the textual and verbal elements of the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang's publications. Critical discourse analysis uncovered various argumentation strategies. The chapter also explores the rhetorical strategies of the party, and the way language (vocabulary, grammar, rhetoric) is used to construct persuasive arguments, articulate argumentation strategies, and eventually gain voters' trust. Chapter 7 tackles the visual elements of the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams

Belang's discourse. The contention is that the analysis of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse does not end with the party's use of language. The visual elements are analysed using critical discourse analysis, specifically adapted to apply to images. The visual analysis raises issues of representation, and national identity: e.g. a European identity vs. an Islamic identity. Chapter 8 addresses the marketing strategy of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. More specifically, it addresses issues concerning the party's positioning and segmentation of the Belgian political market. This chapter demonstrates the tangibility of the marketing orientation of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang management. It also indicates how a study of marketing assists in an understanding of the evolution of the party's discourse.

### *Conclusion and discussion*

Chapter 9 brings together the various concepts highlighted in different literature and the key findings from the empirical chapters. The discussion provides a synthesis by specifically addressing the research questions, how they were addressed throughout the project, and highlights the original contributions of this thesis. Finally, chapter 10 provides an overall view and highlights the contributions of the thesis. Limitations and suggestions/implications for future research are the final section of this last chapter.

## **Chapter 2: The Extreme Right in Contemporary Europe: an overview**

### **1. Introduction**

This chapter sets out to provide an overview of the literature dedicated to the analysis of the Western European extreme right. The extreme right is a fascinating topic for a range of studies linked to politics, historical studies, sociology, and also marketing and communications, as the chapter aims to show. The chapter tackles issues related to the definition and description of the extreme right. This is followed by a discussion of the extreme right parties' success across Europe. Then, the particular elements of the nature of the extreme right party and the ideology of this political family are highlighted. First, the current 'extremist' political situation in Western Europe is presented.

#### *The extreme right in Europe: a modern and pervasive phenomenon*

Between 1980 and 2003, so-called extreme right (or far-right) parties were very successful in many countries, such as France, Austria, Italy and Belgium (Mudde, 2000). In France, Jean-Marie Le Pen went through to the second round of the presidential elections in April 2002. The Freedom Party (FPÖ) was included in the

coalition government of Austria<sup>2</sup>. In 2001, extreme right parties were invited to enter in coalitions to secure parliamentary majorities by centre-right governments in Italy, Denmark, Norway, and Portugal. The extreme right wave is, as Betz (1998: 6) notes, “one of the most significant political developments of the past few years” in Western Europe. Only a handful of European countries, such as Sweden, Finland and Ireland, have seemed immune (so far) to the rise of the extreme right<sup>3</sup> (Nollet, 2000).

Parties that are successful today represent a new breed of right-wing extremism, in the sense that they have little if no affiliation to inter-war Nazism and fascism. According to Camus (2002), the successful parties of this family are the ones that have been able to modernise and offer a mix of ultraliberalism, xenophobia, authoritarianism, a social affairs’ discourse, and the acceptance of democracy, (hence their label of a “parliamentary” movement<sup>4</sup> (Camus, 2002; Mudde, 2000; Betz, 1998). Hainsworth (2000) also argues that today’s extreme right is very much the product of contemporary developments, and not a return to a fascist and Nazi past. Ignazi (1997) considers far-right parties’ emergence to be a response to the post-industrial area and the new postmodern values it has created. This ‘new

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<sup>2</sup> The Austrian FPO experienced failure on the 24 November 2002 and during the elections of January 2003 (Camus, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Nollet (2000) notes that that the extreme right is completely absent in Iceland and in micro-states, such as Monaco, Lichtenstein, Andorra, Saint-Martin and Gibraltar. It is beyond the point of this thesis to explain this ‘anomaly’. Instead, it is the growing significance of extreme politics in the Western European political landscape that is puzzling and of interest here.

<sup>4</sup> Mudde (2000) has identified another type of extreme right party, the “extra-parliamentary groups” which remained loyal to fascism. Those groups have been marginalised because of their extreme intolerance and violence which has alienated public opinion. The “parliamentary” extreme right parties have been carefully distancing themselves from the factions’ actions in order to avoid the negative association with violence, fascism and anti-democracy (Camus, 2002; Collet, 2000; Betz, 1998).

breed' of right-wing extremism has some particular attributes as well as a modernised discourse. It is characterised by a constantly changing, issue-oriented political strategy “that combines verbal radicalism and symbolic politics with the tools of *contemporary political marketing* to disseminate their ideas among the electorate” (Betz, 1998: 2; emphasis added).

The success of extreme right parties across Europe is a concern to political actors and society in general, because of their radical stance and xenophobia, their growing popular acceptance, and their introduction to legitimate governing institutions. If unsettling, their growing success is also puzzling, given their authoritarian and discriminatory discourse. Many researchers have aimed to provide explanations for their appeal. The extant literature on the extreme right has been conducted mainly by social scientists, political scientists and historians who have studied different aspects of the extreme right parties including: ideology (e.g. Mudde, 2000; Freeden, 1994; Gardberg, 1993); historical roots (e.g. Davies and Lynch, 2002); the reasons for their existence and the profile of the voters (e.g. De Witte, 1996); explanations for the parties' success (e.g. Kitschelt, 1996; Koopmans, 1996; Betz, 1994); country-specific analyses of the extreme right movement (e.g. Davies, 2002; Fieschi, 2000; Tarchi, 1996); the affiliation with fascism (e.g. Eatwell, 1996; Mudde, 1996); and “ideologico-cultural” dimensions focussing on their political programmes and xenophobic discourse (e.g. Anastasakis, 2000: 6). These perspectives provide interesting insights into the phenomenon, but sometimes conflicting theories (e.g. the conceptualisation of the extreme right vote as protest vs. ideology-oriented (see Coffé, 2004)). Interestingly, no author has

focussed on the way the extreme right communicates, packages its candidates and messages, and generally, uses modern marketing techniques to manufacture a desirable offering in the political marketplace. This research sets out to fill this identified gap, and to provide an additional explanation for the success of the modern extreme right.

Interest in the extreme right movement is not limited to scholars. Politicians, media and citizens have also come to realise that the extreme right is not an ephemeral or marginal phenomenon but a real force striving to penetrate democratic institutions and mainstream politics (Anastasakis, 2000). There is also an interest in the “impact of far-right political mobilisation within national societies and Europe” and in finding ways to strengthen democracy by dealing with the implications of the extreme right (Anastasakis, 2000: 3). Extreme right politics is complex (not least because of the deeply emotional and visceral reactions it inspires) and it is necessary to provide first a description and discussion of the significant inter-related terms used in this research.

## **2. The definitional mire**

The interchangeable use of the words denoting extreme right parties by the media may lead to confusion. Confusion is not limited to the ‘non-experts’ in the field. It is worth noting that even among scholars there is little agreement about definitions and terminology (McLean and McMillan, 2003; Anastasakis, 2000; Hainsworth,

2000; Mudde, 2000). Across the broad literature dedicated to the extreme right, words are “used synonymously and without any clear intention” (Mudde, 2000: 13). Anastasakis (2000: 4), in a comprehensive analysis of the literature available on the topic, highlights the plethora of terms existing in literature: “radical right and far right” (see Cheles *et al.*, 1991); “mimetic or nostalgic fascism” (see Griffin, 1993); “new populism” (see Betz and Immerfall, 1998); “radical right-wing populism” (see Helms, 1997); “new right” (see Minkenberg, 2000); “new post-industrial extreme right” (see Ignazi, 1997) and “new radical right” (see Kitschelt, 1995)”. Such labels are used according to each authors’ respective emphasis on specific characteristics of the extreme right (Anastasakis, 2000). These various definitions highlight the far-right’s “organisational complexity and ideological heterogeneity” (Griffin, 1993, in Anastasakis, 2000: 5).

The vagueness of many of the definitions leads to the lack of a broadly accepted classification of parties belonging to the extreme right (Mudde, 2000). For instance, scholars disagree on some ‘borderline cases’, i.e. whether to classify a party as conservative or ultra-conservative instead of as extreme right (Gooskens, 1994; in Mudde, 2000). The Austrian Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Austrian Freedom Party or FPÖ) illustrates the issue well. On the one hand, the FPÖ is considered by Gallagher *et al.* (1995, in Mudde, 2000) to be a liberal party, and should not be labelled as extreme right. On the other hand, Mudde (2000) and McLean and McMillan (2003) unambiguously classify the FPÖ as belonging to the extreme right. It is interesting to note that the parties themselves often reject the label of ‘extreme right’ (Mudde, 2000), and adopt more flattering self-

description (e.g. conservative and nationalist party). For instance, the Vlaams Blok in Belgium is described as a “culturally racist, separatist, and authoritarian party of the ultra-right” (Swyngedouw, 1998: 72), but for its supporters it is a mere populist, ethnocentrist protest party (Swyngedouw, 1998).

The classification and descriptive complexity also derives from the dynamic nature of political parties. Parties are not static: they develop and may discard issues (e.g. the centrality of immigration policies) in favour of others, as a result of the changing social base of their electorate (Mudde, 2000). To deal with this, the extreme right is defined here as a *political family*, whose members share common characteristics but also feature differences that classify them into subtypes, such as ‘modern’, and ‘post-industrial’ extreme right parties, or ‘old’ and ‘traditional’ parties (Hainsworth, 2000; Mudde, 2000). This broad qualification acknowledges the specific and particular nature of the different political parties within the broader extreme right-wing movement (Hainsworth, 2000).

Among the different terms<sup>5</sup> available to refer to the phenomenon under enquiry (such as right-wing radicalism and populism), the ‘extreme right’ is the one chosen throughout this thesis. Scholars in Europe tend to use the label ‘extreme right’ (Eatwell, 1998: 3), or ‘right wing extremism’ (Mudde, 2000). ‘Extreme right’ is broadly accepted as the “most satisfying collective noun” (Mudde, 2000: 16). Although there are disagreements on what constitutes an extreme right programme.

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<sup>5</sup> For the definitions of the other related concepts, such as right-wing radicalism and populism, see Glossary, Appendix 1

Mudde (2000, 1995) notes that the other recurrent elements in literature on extreme right parties are: 'nationalism', 'racism', 'xenophobia', 'anti-democracy' and 'the strong state'. Therefore a party featuring a combination of nationalism, xenophobia, law and order and welfare chauvinism<sup>6</sup> can be classified as belonging to the extreme right family.

### **3. The Western European Extreme Right**

#### **3.1. Electoral successes: possible explanations**

Scholars provide a range of explanations for the success and longevity of extreme right parties. In Anastasakis's (2000) overview of the literature on the extreme right, he indicates that the success of the extreme right can be explained by four constitutive dimensions: 1) the *fascist legacy*; 2) *socio-economic changes*; 3) *protest politics*; and 4) the *xenophobic platform* (Anastasakis, 2000). First, the *fascist dimension* should not be over-emphasised, because, as Anastasakis (2000) and Hainsworth (2000) argue, contemporary European extreme right parties are mainly influenced by post-war democracy (fascism is therefore not discussed further here). Secondly, the extreme right is considered to be a reaction to *socio-economic changes*. Anastasakis (2000: 28) argues that the economic crisis experienced by industrialised countries acts as a "catalyst for social distress". Immerfall (1998: 249) supports this argument claiming that the success of the extreme right is, above all, associated with the uncertainties produced by large-

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<sup>6</sup> See Glossary (appendix 1)

scale socio-economic and socio-cultural changes and the subsequent psychological stress on the most vulnerable portion of the population. In order to explain the rise of the extreme right in the major countries of Western Europe, Immerfall (1998: 250) puts the emphasis on “economic, political and socio-cultural marginalization processes”, technological changes and the rise of the global information society. However, Mudde (2000) and Anastasakis (2000) note that there is no straightforward correlation between economic depression and the rise of the extreme right. Countries with low unemployment, such as Norway or Switzerland, have also experienced a high level of extreme right voting. Betz and Immerfall (1998) proposed the following explanation: social dislocation, globalisation and economic crisis have led to the rise of anxieties, fear and resentment among the socio-economically weakest. Therefore, it is more the *fear* of unemployment and social dislocation than its actual experience that leads people to vote for the radical right-wing (Immerfall, 1998: 250). The third dimension that might account for the success of the extreme right is the *politics of protest*. A vote for the extreme right is therefore considered as an act of protest against incumbent mainstream political parties (but not necessarily against democracy itself). Governing parties are deemed responsible for the malaise of the population seemingly unable to solve people’s problems. Turning to the extreme right is a way to register discontent and send a warning to the government. The last explanatory feature is linked to the *xenophobic platform*, i.e. to the voters’ actual acquiescence to the ideology and policies of the extreme right, with its trademark mix of xenophobia, racism, exclusionism, opportunism and populism (Hainsworth, 2000; Mudde, 2000). Extreme right parties claim discrimination against their ‘own people’, in favour of

the 'last entrants' (e.g. economic immigrants and asylum seekers). As a consequence, their inflammatory discourse generates and feeds on a climate of xenophobia and intolerance (Anastasakis, 2000). This feature leads into the next section where the common themes defended by extreme right parties and salient elements of their ideology are discussed in further detail.

### **3.2. Ideology and electoral themes**

The extreme right is characterised by particular features, such as an inclination to ultra-liberalism, authoritarianism, an anti-establishment stance, and xenophobia (Mudde, 2000). According to Mudde (2000), a party adopting an ideology featuring a combination of nationalism, xenophobia, law and order and welfare chauvinism<sup>7</sup> can be classified as belonging to the extreme right family. Other common aspects shared by the Western European extreme right parties are the acceptance of parliamentary democracy and pluralism (Camus, 2002; Mudde, 2000), and a claim for national unity and national preference (i.e. granting political, economic and social rights only to nationals). In order to understand the nature of the extreme right, the next sections describe the key features of 1) xenophobia, 2) the economic orientation of neo-liberalism, 3) anti-establishment, and, 4) 'law and order'.

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<sup>7</sup> See Glossary, appendix 1

### ***3.2.1 - Xenophobia***

Xenophobia can be defined as the fear or hatred of foreigners. According to Davies and Lynch (2002: 358), such emotions are frequently stirred up by extreme right parties in an effort to promote national chauvinism or hostility to immigrants. Xenophobia is the feature that unambiguously characterises extreme right policies. In many countries, even when there is no large foreign population, extreme right parties manage to exploit xenophobic feelings to raise new votes. The Danish and Norwegian examples are striking: there are 7% of foreigners in Denmark and only 2.5% of the Norwegian population are from non-EU origins (Camus, 2003). However, the Norwegian Progress Party or Fremskrittspartiet (FPN, ultra-liberal and xenophobic right) raised 14.7% of the vote in the September 2002 legislative elections; and the Danish extreme right joined a governing coalition in 2001. In contrast, in Sweden which has 11% of foreigners, the Sverigedemokraterna (close to the French Front National) won only 1.4% of the votes. This might be a good illustration of a 'halo' effect (see Perrineau, 2001: 28): Mayer (1995) explains that the extreme right (in her example: the French Front National) realises lower scores in localities counting a high concentration of foreigners. In those localities people live alongside immigrant populations, while at the periphery with a lower concentration of foreigners (or none), fear and fantasies develop. Similarly, Camus (2003) suggests that xenophobia-motivated votes are cast due to the fear of foreigners, and negative images of foreigners rather than their actual presence.

A second explanation for the relatively high electoral successes of the extreme right lies in the rejection of multiculturalism in ethnically and religiously

homogenous societies. The rise of xenophobia is attributed to the fear of a loss of national identity which is itself a direct consequence of liberal globalisation and waves of immigration. The hostility demonstrated by extreme right parties towards European integration and enlargement to include Eastern European countries (particularly Turkey), can be examined in the light of the same argument. Free movement of labour throughout Europe raises the fear that new foreign workers may threaten national unity. Nation, national identity and ethnocentrism are central to the extreme right's value system (Hainsworth, 2000: 12). Extreme right parties postulate a homogenous society where national identity is passed on through blood and heredity (Camus, 2003, Hainsworth, 2000). Hainsworth (2000, 1992) argues that nation and nationalism are projected as the affective binding that provides meaning and identity to the individual in a rapidly changing world. In other words, love for the nation and nationalism provide the glue for social cohesion between nationals ('who belongs and who does not' is where xenophobia might be expressed most blatantly). Loss of identity and moral decay, both by-products of the multicultural model, are to be feared. For example, Camus (2003) notes that in the rhetoric of the extreme right, the foreigner is depicted as the basis of corruption via interbreeding, because as the fecundity of foreigners is very high, society will eventually experience the progressive replacement of 'real' citizens by naturalised foreigners (Camus, 2003). In such a scenario, everything that is international, multinational or global is seen as a threat to the cultural identity and integrity of the nation. Examples of such threats include Third-World immigration, Islam, communism, multiculturalism and globalisation (Hainsworth, 2000). Issues of

identity are therefore considered here as important questions regarding the ideology of the extreme right and its rhetoric.

### ***3.2.2. Socio-economic policy: neo-liberalism and solidarism***

Modern extreme right parties are committed to free-market economics and capitalism (Betz, 1998; Kitschelt, 1995). In their philosophy, the state should not intervene in the economy, and the deregulation of the market is favoured. Betz (1998) notes that extreme right parties encourage entrepreneurial initiatives and small and medium-sized companies. In their programmes, they propose lower taxes, cutting subsidies to agriculture and industry, cuts in public-sector spending, and large scale-privatisation (Mudde, 2000; Betz, 1998). Some extreme right parties also argue for a form of '*solidarism*', i.e. a system where the economy should be aimed at maintaining the welfare of the whole nation and where national solidarity replaces class struggle (Mudde, 2000: 189). It is not unusual to see the two positions being presented in the parties' programmes: a form of welfare state, along with neo-liberal rhetoric (Mudde, 2000). The 'Third-Way' is often invoked as the adequate socio-economic solution. It proposes an alternative system to capitalism and communism, lying somewhere in-between both (Davies and Lynch, 2002). The economic system favoured by extreme right parties is also described as being a form of "petit-bourgeois type capitalism" (Immerfall, 1998: 255), i.e. a society of producers where the people get their rightly earned share. All these propositions lie within a discourse of welfare chauvinism where policy should only benefit the community of nationals, defined by ethnic criteria and blood ties (Mudde, 2000). Hence, 'nationals' should have priority over immigrants in the job

market, for council housing and for health and unemployment benefits. In this regard, economic nationalism has become the extreme right's new leitmotiv. Protectionist measures are advocated, in order to protect national economies against foreign competition (Mudde, 2000; Betz, 1998). This is why, Mudde (2000) argues, most extreme right parties reject the EU and its Maastricht Treaty.

### ***3.2.3. Anti-establishment***

According to Anastasakis (2000), unemployment, economic recession and personal insecurity are key elements in creating a climate of dissatisfaction towards governments and mainstream parties and leads towards a vote for the extreme right, which has been conceptualised by some as a protest vote. Many scholars, such as Swyngedouw (1998, 1992), De Witte (1996), Eatwell (1998, 1996), reject this explanation. Eatwell (1998: 27) argues that it is essentially a question of rational choice, i.e. the voters choose the party that is closest to their policy preferences. Interestingly, it appears that some extreme right political parties present themselves as protesters. For instance, the Dutch Pym Fortyn List and the German Partei Rechtsstaatlicher Offensive, both experienced local success by using protests against governing mainstream political parties as a core 'sales' argument (Camus, 2002). Similarly, in Belgium, the Vlaams Blok claims that it is the only 'anti-system' party and does not hesitate to present itself as 'different' by denouncing the scandals which have compromised the political class:

***"Belgian establishment party politicians do not serve the people. Instead, they serve their own parties, their immediate circles and their trade unions. Embezzlement of public funds, corruption and political scandals are too***

*common in Belgium [...] The Vlaams Blok refuses to play this corrupt game. We will always resist the scourge of political appointments and the accumulation of sinecures.*” (<http://vlaamsblok.be/index.shtml>)

It seems that a distrust of the political classes leads to more votes for extreme right parties. This is possibly due to the affairs, scandals and corruption in which members of mainstream leading parties have been involved (Betz, 1998). Social democratic parties are seen here as protecting the more privileged members of society (Immerfall, 1998), such as the skilled and relatively rich workforce in the subsidised and protected sectors of the economy (Immerfall, 1998), and, significantly the immigrants. Extreme right parties often claim that state benefits are intended for ‘foreigners’<sup>8</sup>. In other words, voters vote ‘ideologically’ for ‘protest’ parties.

Immerfall (1998) argues that xenophobic feelings might arise from the frustration of seeing foreigners competing for (and unfairly winning) council housing and unemployment benefits. Weakening and marginalisation of the fringes of the population have been identified by Immerfall (1998:250) as consequences of post-industrialism and globalisation: downsizing, decreasing wages, and educational requirements. Since the growing prosperity of society allegedly does not benefit our ‘own people’, it was shown that extreme right voters tend to be more pessimistic about the future than people voting for other political parties (Immerfall, 1998). As a consequence, Immerfall (1998) argues, feeling ‘forgotten’ by the political elite, voters turn towards populist parties claiming to speak and

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<sup>8</sup> They seem oblivious to the fact that, as argued by Faniel (2003), most immigrants are on the bottom rung of society’s ladder due to, for example, discrimination in the job market.

fight on their behalf. Extreme right parties also appeal to the more comfortably-off classes by denouncing the high level of taxes and arguing for neo-liberal policies. Accordingly, they also win votes from affluent citizens who are dissatisfied with high taxes and social regulation that stand in the way of personal advancement (Immerfall, 1998: 252).

#### ***3.2.4. Law and order***<sup>9</sup>

The ‘law and order’ aspect of extreme right parties’ policies is related to a belief in order and authority, accompanied by a demand for harsher punishments for breaking the law. Extreme right parties advocate long sentences, harsh prison conditions, and even, for some, the re-establishment of the death penalty (Mudde, 2000). In their view, a strong state should have a strong police force in terms of personnel, equipment and authority (Mudde, 2000). This is congruent with a belief that “human life is possible only in a well-ordered community” (Mudde, 2000: 107). The immigration issue is linked here with crime and insecurity in the rhetoric of the extreme right where parties call for a ‘zero-tolerance’ policy and extreme measures, such as the expulsion of foreign delinquents (Mudde, 2000). All these elements are clearly apparent in the following quotation from the British National Party’s website (the BNP can be unambiguously classified as extreme right in the British political landscape):

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<sup>9</sup> Davies and Lynch (2002: 256) define **authoritarianism** as the “tendency to value the importance of authority rather than pluralism and diversity as a basis for social order [...]; political leaders in democratic systems can also exhibit an authoritarian style of leadership in which they assume the mantle of national leadership and act as authority figures”.

*“We [the BNP] would simply adopt a policy of “Zero Tolerance”, replacing liberal concern for the ‘rights’ of criminals with a proper emphasis on the rights of victims, and on the rights of people not to become victims. We would toughen up the courts to apply stricter sentences, put the necessary resources behind the police and release them from the paralysing straightjacket of political correctness”. (FAQ, BNP information pack<sup>10</sup>)*

### **3.3. The communication of extreme right parties: an identified ‘gap’ in the literature**

Media coverage has the power to attract and focus audience attention on specific problems. Social movements depend heavily on external media to convey their messages to influential actors outside the protest group (Smith *et al.*, 2001), but they also have the power to exaggerate some events, to reduce others, and generally to be the sole arbiter as to what is worth showing (McLeod, 1995). Hence an acute problem arises for parties that have limited access to mainstream media (whether through news coverage or through purchase of advertising space), and for the ones suffering from unfavourable media coverage. The media have not always painted a favourable picture of protest groups - quite the contrary according to Smith *et al.* (2001) and McLeod (1995). The mainstream mass media are even accused by opposition parties of serving the ruling hegemony and alienating the population. For instance, Frank Vanhecke, the leader of the Flemish extreme right Vlaams Blok, asked mass media and political leaders to stop their ‘smear campaign’ against his party:

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<sup>10</sup> BNP Information Pack, FAQ section, in [http://Content.IE5\WXQB8J6F\InfoPackWeb\[1\]\infopackweb\bnp\Faqs.htm](http://Content.IE5\WXQB8J6F\InfoPackWeb[1]\infopackweb\bnp\Faqs.htm) , as accessed 18/02/2004

*“They [the media and political leaders] are co-responsible for the climate of intolerance in which Haider, Le Pen and Dewinter are presented as a threat to democracy and therefore a legitimate target. To prevent further tragedies I call on politicians and journalists to stop demonising the Vlaams Blok.”* (<http://www.vlaamsblok.be/index.shtml>)

As was shown earlier (see section 3.1., p. 27), research has identified a range of possible contributors to the success of extreme right parties (see among others Anastasakis, 2000; Kitschelt, 1995; Betz, 1994), exploring, for example, “ideologico-cultural” dimensions of the extreme right movement, located in its xenophobic discourse (Anastasakis, 2000: 6). The proposition here is to adopt a managerial perspective to the study of the success of an extreme right party characterised by controversial and undemocratic advocated policies. Most extreme right parties have, according to Rensmann (2003), doubled their electoral turnout over the last two decades turning *new* voters into *loyal* voters. Although citizens are increasingly apathetic and uninterested in mainstream politics, their loyalty<sup>11</sup> to extreme right parties and their willingness to vote, pose important questions about political consumption and the potential for a case-study in successful political marketing. Lin (2004) also suggests that marketing theory could provide new insights to help explain the recent success of the extreme right in Western Europe.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, according to Swyngedouw *et al.* (2004), the Vlaams Blok has the most loyal electorate in Flanders, Belgium (80%) of voters that voted for the same party in 2 consecutive elections.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of the extreme right in Western Europe, its nature and its ideological idiosyncrasies. Extreme right politics has attracted a lot of interest given its electoral successes. The range of research focussing on the extreme right indicates growing concern with the increasing success of extreme right parties across Western Europe. They are rich sites of enquiry for scholars interested in their enduring appeal across Europe, in a contemporary world where citizens have been described as detached from politics. The extreme right was conceptualised in this chapter as a political family characterised by xenophobia, authoritarianism, neo-liberalism and solidarism. The existing literature on the extreme right stems mainly from politics, sociology and history, and provides many analyses, case studies and theories dissecting the phenomenon from nearly every angle. However, the current literature on the extreme right omits consideration of the marketing of parties adopting this specific ideology. This project endeavours to fill this gap, and explore the explanatory potential of marketing to understand the discourse of the extreme right. The next chapter examines political marketing as a discipline and as a practice, and discusses the main theories and concepts of marketing which could illuminate the observed political activities and processes.

## **Chapter 3: Political Marketing: relevance and issues**

### **1. Introduction**

The rather young discipline of political marketing was developed to respond to the evolution of the political actors and political marketplace. Political marketing is therefore the focus of the next section, which explores the explanatory potential of its theories for the processes observed in political practice. This chapter starts with a review of the political marketing literature, with a particular focus on the relevant theories for this research (or the lack of them?). The potential weaknesses and criticisms aimed at political marketing are also addressed and a venue for a 'solution' (or possible reconciliation) is offered in the form of a discursive approach to the discipline and its object(s) of enquiry, namely marketing within the political arena.

### **2. Political consumption**

Grasping the meaning of consumption is a challenge for both marketing as an academic discipline and for political parties in order to construct politics as meaningful to an increasingly cynical electorate. The discussion in this chapter is targeted at understanding political consumption and its significance for marketing

within the civic and political sphere. The political consumption experience takes many forms, one of which is voting (Dermody and Scullion, 2001: 1088). Voting represents among other things a form of political participation, a granting of authority and a feeling of freedom (Dermody and Scullion, 2001). Although *votum*, the Latin root of voting, means ‘ardent passion’ (Mitchell, 1990), voters do not seem to be animated by anything passionate when they go to the poll (if they even bother to vote). A low turnout of the electorate supposedly shows that citizens are not satisfied with traditional political actions, such as voting and party membership (Mitchell, 1990). For example, in the June 2004 European elections, abstention was massive throughout Europe. On average, 56% of Europeans did not vote. Only 44% of the French and 38% of the British electorate voted; and, in Poland (though a recent member of the EU), only 15% of eligible voters went to the polls. Political parties and other traditional forms of political participation are apparently losing their appeal.

According to Lees-Marshment (2001: 17), there was a time when loyalty and long-term support for political parties were strong in Britain. Until the 1970s, the British electorate was culturally, economically and socially aligned with the same political party throughout their lives (Dean and Croft, 2001). In that ‘golden age’, political values and “long-term socio-psychological attachment” to a party were transmitted through the political orientation of the family circle (Lees-Marshment, 2001: 17), through social class, and through socialisation, e.g. by the membership of a club or of a trade union. However, voters’ loyalty has diminished and voters are more critical of political parties (Lees-Marshment, 2001). This breakdown of

political allegiance seemed to have coincided with the increasing adoption by UK political parties of the tools of mass marketing (Dean and Croft, 2001). According to Blumler and Gurevitch (1995, in Ward *et al.*, 2004), voters' apathy can be attributed to four socio-economic factors. First, citizens' general contentment in Western democracies, explained by the fulfilment of their basic needs, does not provide the motivation to take part in traditional forms of political action. Second, an increase in leisure time and leisure opportunities has resulted in people preferring to spend their free time in more 'entertaining' activities than political action (Lees-Marshment, 2001; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). Third, the trivialisation and 'sensationalisation' of politics in media coverage have turned politics into another form of entertainment (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). Fourth, the decline in social connectedness has made people less likely to engage in social interactions (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). Finally, the decrease of support can also be explained by the decline of social class division, increasing access to better education, and the modification of family structure and its decreasing influence on the political orientation of its members (Lees-Marshment, 2001). An additional reason for the people's political disengagement could be linked to the politicians themselves. Fund-raising (at least in the US) is an important stage in a political campaign. The role of money is paramount and with it the interests of the money-providers (Ridling, 2001; Mitchell, 1990). As a consequence, trust in political parties and government has declined and voters' cynicism and apathy has increased (Putnam, 2000, in Ward *et al.*, 2003). For example, a 2004 survey by the *Université de Liège* (Belgium) indicated that, if voting was not compulsory in

Belgium, one Walloon<sup>12</sup> out of four would never vote<sup>13</sup>. In a 1998 poll, 60 % of the French expressed no confidence in political parties (Hertz, 2001). It appears that the people have low expectations that they can change the *status quo* by voting.

Disillusion, apathy, and alienation towards political parties are common features of today's electorate, particularly among the young (Norris, 2004). That might explain why alternative means of political action (e.g. demonstrations, petitions, online protest), or social movements (e.g. single issue groups) are attracting so many supporters who want to 'make a difference'. Consumers are using their so-called consumer sovereignty to initiate the changes they believe are vital to the well-being of society<sup>14</sup>; and hence to integrate political or activist values with the consumption process. Voters' apathy must not be understood as the complete desertion of politics by people (the success of single-issue movements points to the opposite), but rather as disillusionment with traditional forms of politics such as going to the ballot and belonging to a political party.

Political parties might have lost sight of what is important to citizens, and what might trigger a greater involvement in the more traditional forms of political participation (e.g. voting and party membership). It seems that, if there are any political parties which have grasped the importance of listening to voters and yet

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<sup>12</sup> Walloons are the inhabitants of Wallonia, the southern region of Belgium

<sup>13</sup> In *Le Soir*, 27/08/2004

<sup>14</sup> Which could be described as the rise of the so-called political consumer, where political consumption denotes the embodiment of political values in the act of consumption (Hertz, 2001).

are still able to attract voters, it would be the ones referred to as 'the extreme right' (see chapter 2). Extreme right political parties' theses are controversial, sometimes undemocratic, but nevertheless increasingly successful in Western European democracies. The loyalty of extreme right voters and their systematic turnout at the polls is puzzling and raises many questions about extreme right political parties' successful connection with voters. Betz (1998) noted, almost in passing, that the extreme right use modern tools, such as political marketing, to appeal to voters. Betz's (1998) contribution on the topic of the extreme right and marketing stopped at this statement. The focus of the present enquiry is thus the (possible) marketing-orientation of extreme right parties, and the use of marketing by politicians to enhance the persuasiveness of their offering.

### **3. Political marketing: theory and practice**

Political parties and politicians have used marketing extensively to achieve their political goals and connect with voters but, according to Lees-Marshment (2001), so far appear to only borrow marketing tools (e.g. market research, focus groups, media campaigns, segmentation, and targeting) in an *ad hoc* and pragmatic fashion. This application of marketing, it is argued here, is a reaction to widely acknowledged problems of engagement with the formal political system. According to Mortimore (2003), for example, marketing can be used as a tool to deal with voters' distrust and apathy. This is evident from the burgeoning

campaign budgets, and the increasing importance of the influence of political consultants in campaign planning (Schneider, 2004; Kinsey, 1999; Plasser *et al.*, 1999; O'Shaughnessy, 1990). That these political consultants are selected for their marketing expertise rather than political commitment or ideology could be an indication of the increasing recognition of the utility of a marketing approach in politics. As noted above, the need to 'connect' to the politically apathetic and those distrustful of the formal political system, combined with the perceived success that marketers have had in connecting with fickle consumers, could motivate the use of marketing tools and concepts in the political domain (broadly following Mortimore, 2003). It is not surprising, therefore, that business practices have pervaded the political arena. This is illustrated by TV news reports and in newspapers where words and phrases such as *exchange*, *stakeholders*, *focus groups*, *market research*, *buying ideas*, are commonly used to describe political processes and behaviours (see Dean and Croft, 2001; Chilton and Schaffner, 1997)<sup>15</sup>. The extent to which business (and marketing in particular) and politics share more than jargon has been widely explored by academics in the field of political marketing (see among others Lock and Harris, 1996; O'Cass, 1996; Shama, 1973). The relevance of marketing concepts, theories and techniques for the practice of politics has not been accepted *de facto* by all. The following section provides an overview of the current theoretical development within the field of political marketing.

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<sup>15</sup> Whether this is a reflection of the pervasiveness of the market ideology or a more conscious decision by politicians to use this rhetoric/ideology, is not discussed here. What is interesting is the consideration that 1) the use of business vocabulary illustrates the rhetorical power of market ideology and 2) as shown earlier, people's 'consumer education' makes them comfortable with the rhetoric of consumption.

### **3.1. The nature of political marketing: current literature**

Kelley (1956) is, according to Scammell (1999), to be credited with the first use of the term 'political marketing', in his study on the increasing influence of professional persuaders in politics. For Kelley (1956), 'marketing' essentially meant persuasion and was an updating of a familiar theme since the First World War, that mass democracy required new instruments of social control (Scammell, 1999: 723). At first 'political marketing' was used more or less interchangeably with 'propaganda' (since the purpose of the activity was the same: mass persuasion). The 'new' marketing label reflects partly a quest for a more neutral term, since propaganda was being discredited (see discussion, page 55). But the use of marketing also reflects the observation that professionals from the commercial marketing industry, especially marketing, were increasingly involved in political persuasion (Scammell, 1999).

Kotler and Andreassen (1991: 42) define marketing as a "mindset of consumer-centeredness" (in O'Cass, 1996) inside the organisation. Applied to political processes, marketing becomes 'political marketing', i.e. the application of business practices to politics and the mindset of 'voter-centredness', to use an analogy with Kotler and Andreassen's (1991) definition. In other words, the voter is at the centre of strategic marketing decisions within the party. Lees-Marshment (2001) adopts a similar view by arguing that political marketing is about political organisations adapting business-marketing concepts and techniques to help them achieve their goals. Political marketing is not exclusively or primarily concerned with political communication or campaign formulation (following Schneider,

2004). Indeed Shama (1973: 764) defined political marketing as “the process by which political candidates and ideas are directed at the voters in order to satisfy their political needs and thus gain their support for the candidate and ideas in question” (Shama, 1973: 764). Lock and Harris (1996) have also argued that exchange theory is useful to analyse political marketing. In their words, political marketing is:

“as a discipline, the study of the processes of exchanges between political entities and their environment and among themselves, with particular reference to the positioning of these entities and their communications [...] As an activity, it is concerned with strategies for positioning and communications, and the methods through which these strategies may be realized, including the search for information into attitudes, awareness and response of target audiences” (Lock and Harris, 1996: 22).

Thus it appears that political marketing is a practice and a discipline concerned with processes of exchanges and relationships between political entities, about techniques borrowed from business marketing, but also about concepts and strategies. Political marketing is a holistic process that encompasses the whole behaviour of the political organisation and its application of marketing concepts (not only techniques) (Ingram and Lees-Marshment, 2002). ‘Political communications’ is a popular subject of enquiry within the discipline of political marketing (see for example, Moloney *et al.*, 2003; Blumler, 2001; Dermody and Wring, 2001; Caywood and Preston, 1989). But the scope of political marketing is

not limited to election periods or to political communications. The concepts and theories of political marketing have also attracted much attention from scholars (Wring, 1997; Omura, 1979; Shama, 1975, among others).

Political marketing as a discipline has yet to build a strong conceptual core, but the many analogies between consumer marketing and political marketing cannot be ignored (see among others Niffenger, 1989; O'Leary and Iredale, 1976; Kotler, 1975; Shama, 1973). For some, political marketing relies on the double assumption, as noted by Needham (2006), that 1) voters' choices made at election time are analogous to the choices of commercial products and services made by consumers; and 2) by extension, there is a parallel between marketing a consumer product and promoting a political party. Baines *et al.* (2002) argue that the differences between political marketing and commercial marketing have been overstated. Kotler and Kotler (1999), Butler and Collins (1994) and Shama (1973) perceive the marketing in business and non-commercial contexts as similar and consequently a broadened marketing concept would be particularly relevant in politics. Similarly, according to O'Cass (1996) and Mandelson (1988; in Baines *et al.*, 2002), there seems to be a high degree of synergy between political campaigning and marketing. O'Cass (1996: 38) goes further stating that "the very essence of a candidate and political party's interface with the electorate is a marketing one and marketing cannot be avoided". According to Shama (1973) many concepts and tools are shared by marketing of goods and services and political marketing. Egan (1999) supports this arguing that the 'crossover' of concepts from traditional marketing and political marketing is relatively easy. For

example, a political campaign is, in this view, similar to the product development and product launch of a commercial company (Kraus, 1999). Here, both marketing and political campaigning are considered as techniques for reaching, informing, communicating with, and persuading the electorate (Baines *et al.*, 2002).

The stance adopted in this research is somewhat congruent with O'Shaughnessy's (2001) and Lock and Harris' (1996) positions, namely that political marketing scholars must develop a sound paradigm and relevant concepts; even if it means, it is argued here, borrowing from commercial marketing. Newman's (1994) argument that political candidates can be considered as specialised service providers<sup>16</sup> (such as solicitors), or estate agents (Marland, 2003) is attractive and should be nevertheless empirically evaluated. If there are indeed differences between business marketing and political marketing, a case could be made that "political marketing is just as distinctive from commercial marketing as is social marketing<sup>17</sup>" (Marland, 2003: 106).

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<sup>16</sup> For example, the noted similarities between political marketing and service marketing, are first, the nature of the product: "intangible, complex, and not fully understood by its customers" (Scammell, 1999: 727). Second, the purchase decision is also a more thoughtful process, some service products are expensive to purchase with long-term personal consequences (such as private health, legal and financial services) (Scammell, 1999). Third, there is a high level of uncertainty linked to the purchase because the consumer cannot physically see the product ahead of the purchase. There is therefore a high dependence on information, and depending on the cost/significance of the purchase, likely to seek out trusted information sources such as consumer watchdog media or personal recommendation from the social circle (friends, colleagues, family). Successful marketing in these types of service sectors has found to be associated with strategies that treat sales not as one-off purchases, but as exchange relationships where the customer invests trust (and money) and the producer fulfils his promises (Scammell, 1999: 727-728).

<sup>17</sup> **Social marketing** is about the "design, implementation, and control of programs seeking to increase the acceptability of a social idea or practice in target group(s)" (Kotler, 1975: 283).

Perhaps the key point is the adherence to the marketing concept, and a consumer-oriented approach that 'puts the customer at the beginning rather than the end of the production-consumption cycle' (Scammell, 1999: 725). The marketing concept contends that customer satisfaction is best achieved by attention to customer wants and the needs at the start, as well as the end, of the production process (Scammell, 1999: 725). As straightforward as it may seem, this point is still contentious within the field of political marketing. This point is discussed in detail in this chapter. The development of a political marketing theory is addressed first.

### **3.2. Political marketing theory**

Efforts have been made to extend political marketing as an academic discipline beyond the limitations of mass marketing theory. These extensions reflect advances in both marketing theory and political marketing practice. For example, the discipline of political marketing includes studies of exchange and relationships between political entities and the way that techniques borrowed from industrial, services and relationship marketing are, or could be, deployed by political marketing practitioners (see for example Lock and Harris (1996)). As a separate discipline, political marketing is developing its 'own' concepts that include the total behaviour of the political organisation and the application of marketing concepts and techniques as well as the responses of the citizen-consumer (e.g. Ingram and Lees-Marshment, 2002; Wring, 1996; Omura, 1979; Shama, 1976, among others). This broadening of both political marketing practice and the theorising of political marketing has necessitated that political marketing emerges as an interdisciplinary subject (e.g., Hunt, 1983; in Henneberg, 2004) studying not

just the application of marketing tools and concepts to politics, but also the whole range of social theory that informs the study of post-industrial consumer society.

Not unexpectedly then, the political marketing literature reflects both the varied intellectual heritage and the eclectic nature of its practice. Attempts to extend the discipline seem to be genuine reactions to emergent conceptual and practical issues. Unfortunately, because of the seemingly *ad hoc* development of political marketing theory and practice described earlier, the theoretical heart of the discipline is currently poorly defined, contested and criticised as thin and static (Henneberg, 2004). This is perhaps due to the lack of integration of the new developments in marketing scholarship and the dominance of the now contested managerialist and mix-management perspectives (Henneberg, 2004). Most harshly, because of its lack of a well-developed intellectual core, political marketing is even described as something like an “academic parvenu” (O’Shaughnessy and Henneberg, 2002: xiv) or as an intellectual *arriviste* (Bauman, 1997). This pastiche of theory has left political marketing as a discipline that:

“[had] to develop its own frameworks adapting those from the core marketing literature and, second that it has to develop its own predictive and prescriptive models if it is to inform and influence political action” (Lock and Harris, 1996: 16).

Lock and Harris’s 1996 prescription seems still valid nearly ten years later, when Henneberg (2004) assessed the state of political marketing theory development

and arrived at the conclusion that it is static and, so far, quite limited in scope, because it focusses mainly on the use of marketing mix-related concepts and tools by political actors and on comparative studies of political campaigns. However, efforts are being made to develop sound concepts and theories<sup>18</sup> and the theoretical foundations needed to provide a sound understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

### **3.3. Relationship marketing**

As a consequence, adopting political marketing as the conceptual foundation in this thesis raises some concerns. As a form of solution, Henneberg (1994) puts forward concepts from *relationship marketing* in order to make sense of political marketing and to invigorate political marketing theory development. Relationship marketing has been developed on the premise that business activities are dependent on relationships, and that co-operation and collaboration are more important than an antagonistic perspective (Henneberg, 1994: 8). There appears to be some consensus in the business world that success is not built on one-off sales, but on long-term relationships between the company and the customer. Thus the key elements of a successful relationship are trust, loyalty, two-way and honest communication (Treasure, 2002; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The perspective of the Nordic School of Services Marketing on relationship marketing is of particular interest here. As stated before, the standpoint on political marketing adopted is that political candidates can be considered as service providers (Newman, 1994;

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<sup>18</sup> See *Journal of Political Marketing* (2007) Theory and Concept Development in Political Marketing, Vol. 6 edited by Nicholas O'Shaughnessy and Stephan Henneberg

Kotler, 1975). In the Nordic School of Services Marketing approach, it is argued that the offer of service is co-produced between the seller and the buyer. Services marketing encounters are seen as a series of exchanges which together form the episodic relationship (e.g. logging on to a party website), and ultimately an exchange relationship (e.g. loyalty at the poll for the party) (Henneberg, 2004: 10). Relationship marketing theories can therefore be used to describe and prescribe the tactical and strategic activities of a variety of political actors (Henneberg, 2004: 10). There are therefore clear similarities between long-lasting service industries and political markets (Scammell, 1999). For example, one key concern is the significance of reputation, or public image.

Adopting relationship marketing theories to develop political marketing theory is an interesting project that would no doubt enrich the discipline and inform political practice. Potential solutions, though, can also be found in theories and methods that have been suggested in both the marketing and political science literatures. That which is explored herein is a *discourse approach*, applied in the marketing literature to understand identity and power relations in advertising (e.g., Elliott and Ritson, 1997; Elliott, 1996) and similarly applied in critical and political fields to understand political disputes and political rhetoric (e.g. Schön and Rein, 1994). Given the nature of the phenomenon studied and the ‘contentious’ nature of political marketing and the extreme right discourse, a discourse approach is considered appropriate, as is discussed in further detail in the following section.

### **3.4. (Political) marketing discourse**

Marketing is, according to Morgan (1992: 137), “better understood as a set of practices and discourses which help constitute and shape social relations in modern western societies”. Far from being a neutral way of looking at the world, marketing is, according to critical theory, an ideology-laden phenomenon. In other words, marketing is far from being ‘neutral’ (Morgan, 1992). Marketing discourse contributes to the way people view and understand the world. It is “part of the process whereby a particular form of society is constructed, one in which human beings are treated as things, where identity is reduced to ownership of commodities and all social relations are conceived in market terms” (Morgan, 1992: 154). If one accepts the idea that mass consumption is the cultural norm in 20<sup>th</sup> century western industrialised societies (Morgan, 1992), it follows that individual and social identities are constructed through consumption values (Morgan, 1992: 137). Marketing builds a context where social agents live and interact, and is used as a resource by the same agents to make sense of their social context. It is a discourse through which social actors (i.e., organisations, consumers, and institutions) understand and attempt to control those social processes (Morgan, 1992: 137). Marketing can be understood as an instrument which frames and legitimates political discourse in the eyes of voters. The ability to connect with voters is a key issue for political parties and it seems that marketing discourse is mainly used strategically by parties to make their speech ‘voter-friendly’ and encourage the consumption of their political ‘product’. Therefore marketing is used as a form of legitimating discourse to make politics accessible to people who have been socialised by a consumer society.

*Discourse: a brief introduction*

'Discourse' is a central concept in this research and is defined in further detail later (see chapter 5, p.89). There are two aspects to the conceptualisation of political marketing practice as a discourse. The first argument is that a marketing discourse can create a logic that leads people to find solutions to their wants and needs in the market. A marketing discourse constructs people as consumers, rather than, say, as citizens and our attitudes, expectations and behaviours follow from that broad identity construction. Within that broad identity of 'consumer', marketing provides people with the symbolic resources to construct or represent one or more identities (all being some variation of a consumer identity) (Morgan, 1992). The ideology of marketing, embodied in such a marketing discourse, has contributed to the current centrality of consumption in creating meaning and significance in people's lives. (Gibson *et al.*, 2003; Brownlie *et al.*, 1999). Marketers not only help provide for the physical needs of consumers but also provide the symbolic material for their identity construction and expression. As such, marketing has shaped and continues to shape the social sphere by defining the space within which social relations are constituted as social exchanges. This discourse appears to have emerged in political marketing and constructs voters not as active citizens in civic society but as consumers deciding which policies and politicians they will 'buy' with their vote. Politicians, on the other hand, play the appropriate role and seek to 'sell' themselves and their policy (market) offerings (Savigny, 2004).

#### 4. Political marketing and propaganda

The introduction of marketing practices into politics has not been celebrated by all. For example, applying a market-orientation to a party is in opposition to the traditional view of an elitist democracy where politicians must lead by conviction and ideology, rather than being led by public opinion (Butler and Collins, 2003; Palmer, 2002; Scammell, 1996). The use of marketing is considered by some as unethical because it supposedly manipulates and misleads voters, by promoting people with media skills (Baines and Egan 2001; Scammell, 1995; Newman, 1994; Sabato, 1981) and favours image over substance (Egan, 1999). Marketing supposedly transforms important messages into sound-bites and removes rationality from the voters' decision-process (Baines and Egan, 2001; Lees-Marshment, 2001). Applied to politics, marketing is equated to spin and manipulation. It is not uncommon to hear political marketing being spoken of as equivalent to *propaganda* (O'Shaughnessy, 1996; Scammell, 1995; O'Shaughnessy, 1990) with all the negative connotations attached to the term (Salmon, 1989, in O'Shaughnessy, 1996). For example, in common parlance the term 'propaganda' is not only used to characterise a message identified as negative and dishonest (Jowett and O'Donnel, 1999: 3), but also to describe the persuasive, biased and deceptive communication of totalitarian regimes. A more educated approach to propaganda would provide a less 'emotional' description. Propaganda has also been described as a one-way communication process in which passive audiences are manipulated by political elites (Wring, 1996). Propaganda means to disseminate or promote particular ideas (Jowett and O'Donnel, 1999: 2), and more

specifically it is “the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist” (Jowett and O’Donnell, 1999: 6). Of course this definition could be applied in some degree to marketing itself. Similarities between propaganda and political marketing do clearly exist. The deliberate intent to persuade is central to both. It should not be overlooked that human communication is rarely neutral (O’Shaughnessy, 1996) and that persuasion is an integral part of human nature (Jowett and O’Donnell, 1999: 47). Therefore the persuasive essence of marketing cannot be used to ‘dismiss’ marketing discourse, as being altogether manipulative.

#### *Differences between political marketing and propaganda*

Political marketing and propaganda share the characteristics that little information is passed on to the receiver, controlled media are used and persuasion is central (O’Shaughnessy, 1996; Wring, 1996). Political marketing is attentive to the audience and holds a customer focus (O’Shaughnessy, 1999), therefore the political product can be changed according to the needs of the customers/voters and the message is adapted to the audience (O’Shaughnessy, 1996). In contrast, propaganda is pushed forward by ideology (O’Shaughnessy, 1996) and does not seek mutual fulfilment of needs and understanding (Jowett and O’Donnell, 1999: 46). The goal of propaganda is to “further the desired intent of the propagandist” (Jowett and O’Donnell, 1999:6). O’Shaughnessy (1996: 58) described propaganda as didactic: the propagandist is convinced that his or her ideas are correct and attempts to persuade the audience to adhere to them. Without marketing’s

concerns with people's needs and wants, what is actually referred to is a modern form of propaganda (Scammell, 1999). It is the centrality of the consumer, or voter that sets marketing apart from propaganda.

Political science typically links the marketing of politics to the decline of political cleavages, and the rise of the catch-all<sup>19</sup> parties (Scammell, 1999). In other words, the less clear the ideological divide, the more parties will have to rely on the techniques of marketing to manufacture difference, the party's role becoming "analogous to that of a major brand in the marketing as a universally needed and highly standardized article of mass consumption" (Kirchheimer, 1966: 192). If this might be often true, there are however strong examples of the use of marketing pioneered by the most-ideologically-committed parties, the New Right in the USA and Thatcher's Conservatives in Britain (Scammell, 1995).

On the view of the discussion above, one cannot help but notice how insubstantial are the differences between political marketing and propaganda, and yet how fiercely political marketing scholars defend (perhaps understandably) their discipline. Critics, influenced by propaganda studies, ask whether marketing actually brought anything genuinely new to politics, or whether it is simply a version of age-old propaganda activities allied to modern technologies (see Scammell, 1995; O'Shaughnessy, 1990). Unsurprisingly, political marketing scholars advocate the application of a marketing orientation to the conduct of politics, implying (more or less overtly) that marketing is beneficial to democracy

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<sup>19</sup> catch-all parties are ideologically broad and inclusive parties.

(Kotler and Kotler, 1999), and could only contribute to a better representation of constituents (Savigny, 2004). These are manifestations of a political marketing discourse which presents itself as legitimate and self-evident.

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, there is still no consensus about a definition of political marketing, “nor even that it is the most appropriate label for the common focus of study” (Scammell, 1999: 718). ‘Political marketing’ is currently competing with other labels to describe the same subject. Examples include political management; packaged politics; promotional politics; or modern political communications (Scammell, 1999: 718). Political marketing has, though, clearly become accepted by scholars in Britain, Germany, and the USA, who are attempting to establish it as a distinctive sub-discipline which is developing cross-disciplinary political/marketing/communication perspectives to explain the promotional features of modern politics and as a tool of analysis of party and voter behaviour (Scammell, 1999: 718).

The most important point made in this chapter is the relevance and usefulness of political marketing theory and concepts in addressing the research questions. In the view of the above discussion, a straightforward application of managerial theories of marketing might be considered weak if not detrimental for the validity and credibility of the present research. Political marketing as a discipline is ‘under

development' and there is some promising research which uses the relationship marketing paradigm and empirically applies it to analyse and understand political practice (see for example Larson, 2002; Dean and Croft, 2001). The locus of the enquiry in this thesis is a particularly successful party of the extreme right, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang in Belgium. The party has shown on several instances its use of political marketing for campaigning. The following chapter describes the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, its nature and ideology, in addition to explaining in detail the relevance of the choice of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang for this research.

## Chapter 4: The Vlaams Blok and the Vlaams Belang

### 1. Introduction - the political context: the extreme right and political marketing

This chapter presents the specific site of enquiry of the analysis of the marketing of the extreme right. As discussed in the first chapter, research has identified a range of possible contributors to the success of extreme right parties (see among others Anastasakis, 2000; Kitschelt, 1995; Betz, 1994), exploring, for example, “ideologico-cultural” dimensions of the extreme right movement, located in its xenophobic discourse (Anastasakis, 2000: 6). However, it seems that the extreme right literature has overlooked the application of marketing to create a successful connection with the voting public. Lin (2004) suggests that marketing theory could provide new insights to help explain the recent success of the extreme right. Most extreme right parties have, according to Rensmann (2003), doubled their electoral turnout over the last two decades turning *new* voters into *loyal* voters. Although voters seem to be increasingly apathetic and uninterested in mainstream politics, their loyalty<sup>20</sup> to extreme right parties and their willingness to vote represent a potential example of a case-study in successful political marketing.

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<sup>20</sup> According to Swyngedouw *et al.* (2004), the Flemish Vlaams Blok has the most loyal electorate in Flanders (80%) of voters that voted for the same party in two consecutive elections.

This chapter aims at presenting the particular extreme right party selected, as a site of enquiry for the research. This thesis examines a particularly successful party, the Flemish Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, specifically in the way it has marketed its policies to large audiences and experienced increasing support in Belgian elections since the 1990s. The perspective adopted here provides interesting insights as to how a political party can successfully apply marketing strategies. Any organisation that manages to get 25% of market share<sup>21</sup>, despite a concerted campaign against it (the so-called '*cordon sanitaire*'<sup>22</sup>, and a number of lawsuits<sup>23</sup>), is worth examining, irrespective of one's acceptance of the liberal democratic assumption that their product is inherently flawed (i.e. extreme rightist with strong features of racist and discriminatory discourse (see Mudde, 2000)). The Vlaams Blok itself (unofficially) advocates the use of marketing<sup>24</sup> to enhance its political campaigns. Since 1991, a team of professional advertisers has been hired to design the party's advertising campaigns (Vander Velpen, 1992). The result of their work was a strong visual campaign that set the trend for subsequent

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<sup>21</sup> On June 13<sup>th</sup> 2004, nearly 1,000,000 people (i.e. 1 Fleming out of 4) voted for the Vlaams Blok at the June 2004 elections.

<sup>22</sup> The *cordon sanitaire* is an agreement signed in 1989 between the main traditional parties (Socialists, Liberals, Christian-Democrats, Greens and Volksunie), to never formalise political agreements with the Vlaams Blok. The media followed the lead and little (if at all) broadcasting space and time was from then on dedicated to the party (De Winter, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> Three non-profit associations linked to the Vlaams Blok have been sued by the Centre for Equal Opportunity and the Fight against Racism, for breaching the law against racism. After years of legal proceedings, the Vlaams Blok was condemned in 2004, for racism and the party leaders decided to disband the party to avoid further prosecutions.

<sup>24</sup> In an internal document of the Vlaams Blok, the candidates are advised on the best way to lead a political campaign. "*Political marketing is a global project with which the candidate can organise well his or her political activities. The VB is choosing without a doubt an anti-demagogic practice, with which we have so often tried to be the voice of the people*" (Filip Dewinter, one of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams elite members, unknown date). The Vlaams Blok stresses the importance of marketing as a political instrument, and at the same time rejects the accusation of manipulation, spin and demagogic practices that could be associated with the use of marketing in politics (Baines and Egan 2001; Scammell, 1995, in Harris, 2001; Newman, 1994; Sabato, 1981).

promotional activities. Bosseman (2001) examined the evolution of the Vlaams Blok's positioning, targeting and messages from 1977 to 2000. Her work supports my observation that the Vlaams Blok has actively used marketing to enhance its political impact. In addition, since persuasion lies at the heart of marketing, and of political communications for that matter, a particular focus is on the persuasiveness of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse<sup>25</sup> and the rhetorical strategies used to convince voters that the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's offer can 'maximise their utility' to borrow economists' jargon.

Understanding the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse can only be achieved if one understands the peculiarities of Belgian politics, the circumstances surrounding the creation of the Vlaams Blok (Flemish nationalist movement), and current developments in the international, European and national scenes. The chapter sets out to clarify these contextual issues with a presentation of politics and political parties in Belgium. This is followed by a discussion tackling the issue of the extreme right in Wallonia and Flanders. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is given particular attention: its nature, ideological programme and its voters are presented in detail. A particular strategy developed by mainstream political parties and media to fight the extreme right, the *cordon sanitaire*, is discussed, along with the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's communication strategy to reach potential voters, regardless of the *cordon*.

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<sup>25</sup> The term 'discourse' is defined and discussed in chapter 5. See also Appendix 1, for the glossary.

## 2. Politics in Belgium: a journey through a political labyrinth

### 2.1. The Belgian federal model

Belgium has been a constitutional monarchy since 1831. In 1993, after several revisions of the constitution, the country was transformed into a federal state. It was the strained political situation between different communities<sup>26</sup> in Belgium that made the shift towards federalism a necessity. Belgium is characterised by its three communities: the Flemish (Dutch-speaking) population in the North of the country; the Walloons (French-speaking) population in the South of the country and a German-speaking minority in the East of the country. Brussels has been granted the status of a bilingual region. Brussels is in fact an enclave which has the majority of French-speakers, within the Flemish territory (see map of Belgium, Appendix 2).

Early conflicts between the different communities regarding social and linguistic supremacy and other cultural claims, led to legislation where the Dutch language was finally granted a place in the administration. In 1920-1921, Wallonia experienced an acute economic crisis, and after years of marginality, Flemings became the majority in Parliament. Linguistic conflicts began putting the Belgian

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<sup>26</sup> It is worth noting that Belgian society is divided along three lines: socioeconomic, philosophical (Catholics vs. Non-Catholics); and socio-linguistic (Flemish vs. Francophones) (Dierickx, 1978). Despite these deep divisions, the Belgian political system has proved stable. This is due to the readiness of the political elite to compromise, which is also known as '*consocialism*' (Dierickx, 1978: 133). Today this is not necessarily the case anymore. After the federal elections in June 2007, at the date of printing this thesis (i.e. 3 months later) Dutch-speaking and Francophone political parties have not reached an agreement to form a government. The King designated an 'explorer' in charge with finding a solution to the actual political crisis (see *Le Soir*, <http://www.lesoir.be/actualite/belgique/l-explorateur-recoit-leterme-2007-08-29-546548.shtml>)

state into a huge financial deficit, due to higher and higher competition for funds<sup>27</sup> between communities. In 1968, a project to revise the constitution was under discussion. The proposal was to construct a new Belgium based on regions and linguistic communities, under a federal state model where autonomy would be given to sub-national entities, called the Regions, in charge of managing the state. Revisions of the constitution took place in 1970, 1980, 1988, and in 1993. The revisions provided a new political map of Belgium and there are now five levels of competence and power: the federal state, the regions, the communities, the provinces, and the communes (or 'towns'). The three cultural Communities are the Flemish, the French and the German Communities and there are also three Regions: *het Vlaams Gewest* (Flanders or Flemish Region), *la Région Wallonne* (Wallonia or Walloon Region) and *Bruxelles-Capitale* (Brussels Capital) (see Appendix 2). Each of these entities has a council<sup>28</sup> holding legislative power and a government holding executive power, except for the Flemish Community and Region which has merged and has a common council and government. The state, the three communities and the three regions have their own parliaments, which are authorised to legislate and constitute their government<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> For example, when Wallonia invested in the Ariane rocket, Flanders demanded an oceanography centre.

<sup>28</sup> Note that at every level, there are different areas of allocation of powers. The federal state's jurisdiction lies in the domains of Justice, Social Security and Money, external relations, and external commerce. The three regions deal with the matters related to their territory: planning, environment, water, energy, economic questions, transport, employment. The three linguistic Communities' jurisdiction are related to the issues linked to people, such as training, culture, education, health, TV and radio. In addition, the country is divided into ten provinces, which jurisdictions are the special schools, leisure, and roads. There are 589 communes (towns).

<sup>29</sup> Site of the *Missions Economiques Françaises*, see <http://www.dree.org/belgique/documents.asp?Rub=1&F=HTML&Num=1246>

Belgians vote for their representatives according to the region in which they live. They vote every four years in the federal legislative elections; every five years in the regional elections; every six years in the province and communal elections; and every five years in the European elections<sup>6</sup>. The elections follow a proportional representation electoral system, in which seats are divided between the different parties according to the votes cast.

## 2.2. Political Parties: the linguistic divide

In Belgium, there are three main traditional families of parties, with (now) independent linguistic wings. The voters choose the candidates in the lists they want to vote for, in the language of their region. In the region of Brussels, one can vote for either French-speaking parties or Dutch-speaking parties. The main and most prominent parties are summarised in the following table:

**Table 1- Political families in Belgium, by linguistic group**

<b>Political family</b>	<b>French-speaking political parties</b>	<b>Dutch-speaking political parties</b>
Socio-Christians	CDH (Centre Démocrate Humaniste)	CDandV
Socialists	Parti Socialiste	SP.A-SPIRIT (Socialistische Partij.Anders-Spirit)
Liberals	MR (Mouvement Réformateur)	VLD (Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten)

Other parties include the greens or ecologist parties, with Ecolo in Wallonia and Agalev in Flanders. The extreme right is represented in the North and South of the

country in the form of the Front National and the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, respectively.

In May 2003, the extreme right did extremely well in Flanders with the Vlaams Blok (the party scored 18% of the votes). On the 13<sup>th</sup> June 2004, Belgians voted for their local government and for the European Parliament. In Wallonia and Brussels, the Socialists won an overwhelming victory and the Vlaams Blok's progression was contained in Brussels. However, the Vlaams Blok (or Flemish Bloc) became the second largest party in Flanders with its 32 seats in the Flemish government, behind the CD&V with its 35 seats. At the June 2004 elections, nearly 1,000,000 people voted for the Vlaams Blok. The Vlaams Blok also won seats at the European Parliament (giving it a total of three members of the European parliament). The Vlaams Blok became the Vlaams Belang (or Flemish Interest) in 2004, after legal problems (which are explained on p. 83). The Front National (FN), a French-speaking extreme right party, won 8.14% of the votes in Wallonia (from an early 3.95%) securing three seats in the Walloon parliament. That result puzzled the other democratic parties, given the FN's lack of structure, of policy, and electoral campaign. The case of the FN is also quite interesting in its remarkable lack of success in Wallonia, a region crippled by unemployment and crime. Differences in the performance of the Front National and the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang are further discussed in the next sections.

### **2.3. The Extreme Right in Belgium: different parties, different fortunes**

This section presents the Belgian extreme right. At the image of the Belgian political scene, the extreme right is divided by language. The Northern region counts the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Blok, a party that has been consistently successful in Flanders and is even scoring reasonable figures among Brussels' Dutch-speakers and French-speakers alike. Wallonia has its extreme right party, the Front National. The FN represents almost the complete opposite to the Vlaams Blok (apart from its extreme right ideology): the FN is unsuccessful, lacks credibility, and does not have a charismatic leader and well-articulated policies.

#### ***2.3.1. The Front National: the misfortune of the French-speaking extreme right***

The Front National, or National Front, first emerged in Brussels in 1985, founded by Daniel Féret. It was created as a 'brother' of the French National Front (FN), even copying the name, logo and acronym of the French FN (Faniel, 2003). But since 1989, Jean-Marie Le Pen, the leader of the French FN, has withdrawn support from the Belgian FN. The FN advocates policies of unity of the country, pro-monarchy, ultra-liberalism and anti-immigration. In 1988, the extreme right was non-existent in Wallonia. In 1993, it experienced its first electoral successes: from 5% at Liège to 14.4 % at La Louvière (Carrozzo, 2002). In 1994 and 1995, the FN and Agir (Agir is another minor French-speaking extreme right party in Wallonia) experienced some minor success: 175,732 votes for the Front National and 42,917 votes for AGIR, in the European ballot. However, AGIR disappeared after 1995, because of internal tensions. The FN lost half its votes in June 1999 and was considered then as a marginal party (Nollet, 2000).

Since then, the FN has suffered a range of internal crises: rivalries, divisions, and internal struggles (Coffé, 2005a; Faniel, 2003). Its downward slide continued in the local elections of October 2000 (Faniel, 2003), and, on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2003, Daniel Féret, the leader of the FN since 1985, was sued for the distribution of racist leaflets. According to Carozzo (2002), the relative success of the Front National was mainly due to the acute unemployment crisis<sup>30</sup> in Wallonia and scandals which tainted the traditional parties. The FN was perceived by voters as inefficient and parasitic and lost its popular legitimacy. In that context, the temporary success of the Front National has been labelled as a ‘protest vote’ (Caruzzo, 2002). In light of this message, the mainstream political parties adopted a new strategy involving being more approachable and in touch with people’s concerns. Such efforts were rewarded at the following elections, which saw a drop in the votes for the FN. However, the June 2004 election results indicated that the appeal of the extreme right had not disappeared in the South of Belgium, which continues to be burdened by high levels of unemployment and criminality.

Contrary to its French-speaking counterpart, the Vlaams Blok is much older and far more successful. An analysis of the progression of the two parties showed that the votes for the FN follow a serrated curve over the last 12 years, while the Vlaams Blok has been continuously rising over the last 20 years (Faniel, 2003). Coffé (2005a) compared the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang to the FN and tried to explain the differences in performance by analysing individual factors. She

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<sup>30</sup> For example, 60,000 lost jobs (coalmines, iron and steel industry) from 1960 to 1990.

demonstrated that along with political and social factors, the success of the extreme right in Belgium is down to the individual parties themselves (Coffé, 2005a). According to Art (2006) and Coffé (2005a: 90), the reasons for the poor results of the FN lie in its poor organisation, and in its lack of leaders, members and organisational background. In contrast with the FN, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is efficiently structured, well-organised, and has charismatic leaders (Art, 2006; Carter 2005; Coffé, 2005a). It also has the advantage of the existence of a traditionally well-organised nationalist sub-culture, which provides the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang with ideological and organisational coherence (Coffé, 2005a).

### ***2.3.2. The Vlaams Blok and the Vlaams Belang: background information***

#### *The Vlaams Blok*

The Vlaams Blok was created in 1978 from the merger of two small nationalist parties run by radical dissidents of the Volksunie, which was then the most important nationalist post-war party (Camus, 2003; Faniel, 2003). Karel Dillen, a radical Flemish nationalist from the collaborationist political movement, was the instigator of that merger and remained the leader of the new party for many years. The new party could tap into the ideological and human resources from a strong Flemish nationalist subculture (Art, 2006)<sup>31</sup>. From 1979 to 1985, the Vlaams Blok transformed itself from a minor protest group into a political party. In the mid-

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<sup>31</sup> By contrast, Art (2006) notes that Wallonia never possessed a strong nationalist subculture; and that which did exist was largely from the left. Art (2006) explains that the absence of a nationalist subculture in Wallonia largely accounts for the failure of the Front National. In contrast, the Vlaams Blok has been able to capitalise on the nationalist ideology and common history to install its legitimacy in Flanders (Arts, 2006).

eighties, a group of young students under the leadership of Filip Dewinter from the Nationalistische Studentenvereniging<sup>32</sup>, an extreme right syndicate influenced by the French Front National, joined the party (Faniel, 2003). Under Filip Dewinter's influence, the Vlaams Blok changed its direction. From a platform claiming the independence of Flanders and a complete amnesty for ex-collaborators, it shaped itself into an anti-immigrant party (Camus, 2003; Faniel, 2003; Swyngedouw, 1998). Filip Dewinter also launched a restructuring of the party's organisation, the development of militant activities, and the introduction of new blood to the party's management (Faniel, 2003). Until 1996, the party was run by Karel Dillen, Filip Dewinter and Gerolf Annemans. Dewinter is still responsible for the party's organisation; Annemans is in charge of nationalist policies focussing on the reform of the state, while Karel Dillen is still seen as the unifying force of the party (Swyngedouw, 1998: 62). This leadership trio seems to be the stabilising force that has ensured the remarkable lack of destructive tensions between the different factions and currents in the party. The Vlaams Blok (and the Vlaams Belang) has indeed seemed to be able to strike a balance between the core ideologies of Flemish nationalism, Flemish separatism, and anti-immigrant/anti-immigration<sup>33</sup> stance (which, according to Coffé (2005b), is the real vote gatherer for the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang). Filip Dewinter, inspired by the example of the French FN,

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<sup>32</sup> Translation: The Association of Nationalist Students. see <http://www.nsv.be/>

<sup>33</sup> The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is a xenophobic party, and as such is considered as an 'anti-immigrant' party (blaming the foreigners for criminality, unemployment and other societal issues, and demanding the immigrants' repatriation (e.g. Dewinter (1992)'s "*Immigration: the Solution. 70 Propositions for the Resolution of the Foreigners' Issue*")). The party is also an 'anti-immigration' party, because it denounces the so-called incoherence of the immigration policies of the government. The Vlaams Belang has adopted a more pragmatic position by calling for the complete assimilation of the foreigners into Flemish culture (instead of forced repatriation), and as such reject multiculturalism. Therefore both terms, 'anti-immigrant' and 'anti-immigration', are valid to describe the party.

seems to have been the first to notice the potential of exploiting anti-immigration sentiments to broaden the Vlaams Blok's audience (Coffé, 2005b). This anti-immigrant policy orientation was first met with resistance by the supporters of Flemish nationalism, and created tensions within the party (Mudde, 1995). However, they eventually chose to focus on the electorally rewarding anti-immigrant strategy and to combine it with their original policy on Flemish nationalism (Buelens and Deschouwer, 2002; in Coffé, 2004).

### *A String of Electoral Successes*

It is really from the beginning of the nineties that the Vlaams Blok appeared to become an electoral force. In the November 1991 elections, the Vlaams Blok scored 10.3%, tripling its 1987 result, and winning 18 seats in parliament. That day is still known as "Black Sunday"<sup>34</sup> in Belgium (Mudde, 2000). There were other Black Sundays to follow. On 13<sup>th</sup> June 1999, at the Federal elections, the Vlaams Blok became the third largest party in Flanders, and the largest in Brussels. On 8<sup>th</sup> October 2000, in the city council elections in Antwerp the party gained 33% of the votes. On the 18<sup>th</sup> May 2003, the Vlaams Blok gained about 18% of the Flemish votes (about 750,000 votes) at the federal elections. One in four of the electorate voted for the Vlaams Blok in Antwerp. The Vlaams Blok's success was not limited to Antwerp; it also won votes in villages where there were no foreigners (Swyngedouw, 1992: 83).

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<sup>34</sup> The origin of the term can be found in the fact that the far right in Belgium is usually associated with *black* (though this is not the official party colour of the Vlaams Blok), and in the fact that elections in Belgium are always held on a Sunday.

By 1991, the Vlaams Blok had become the fourth largest party in Flanders (Mudde, 2000). It even strengthened its position during the European elections, with a score of 12.6%. The rising trend continued in 1994 when the Vlaams Blok became the largest party on the city council of Antwerp, and consequently entitled to take part in the city's administration. However a *cordon sanitaire*, or quarantine, created by the other parties, excluded the Vlaams Blok from entering any governing coalition (Mudde, 2000; Swyngedouw, 1998). In the legislative elections in 2000, the Vlaams Blok scored 33% of the votes in Antwerp, an increase on its previous 28%. It was the largest party in the city, with 19 out of 54 seats and the only opposition party (Van Der Brink, 2003). At the legislative elections on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2003's the Vlaams Blok attracted 150,000 voters (Faniel, 2003) scoring very well in Ghent, Antwerp and Brussels (Faniel, 2003). Delwit (2003) claimed that the Vlaams Blok has become the first Flemish party in Brussels, because even French-speaking voters are voting for the Vlaams Blok. At the June 2004 regional elections, more than one Fleming out of five voted for the Vlaams Blok. It became the second largest party in Flanders, with its 32 seats in the Flemish government. This represented an average 8% increase on 1999. It scored nearly 30% in Antwerp and 20% nearly everywhere else. In 2004, the Vlaams Blok was renamed Vlaams Belang (for reasons explained in section 2.3.6, p. 83) and participated in the elections in 2006 under the new name.

It was predicted that, in 2006, when mayors would be directly elected by proportional representation, Filip Dewinter would become the mayor of Antwerp.

This scenario was only prevented by the victory of the Flemish socialist SP.A-Spirit which won 35.3% and became the first party in the city. The party registered 33.5% of the votes – a slight progression compared to the 2000 elections – but did not win any additional seats in Flanders. This was considered as a major victory for the traditional parties, because for the first time the progression of the extreme right had been stopped. However, Frank Vanhecke, the president of the Vlaams Belang claimed victory: “we are the winner of this election”. This was not empty bluster, because the Vlaams Belang had achieved 20.6% (i.e. an increase of 5.6 % points) in the whole Flemish Region suggesting that the party had consolidated its position across Flanders and beyond its Antwerp stronghold<sup>35</sup>.

#### *The Nature of the Vlaams Blok*

Far from being a single-issue party, the Vlaams Blok expresses its views on a wide range of issues and in a variety of original literature, within the framework of a “comprehensive ideological programme” (Mudde, 2000: 166). When campaigning, the Vlaams Blok focusses on three major themes: firstly, the denunciation of foreigners; secondly, Flemish nationalism; and thirdly the incompetence and dishonesty of the other parties (Faniel, 2003). The Vlaams Blok has also certainly benefited from political scandals affecting the other parties. Every time a scandal involving the members of mainstream politics breaks in the media it tends to confirm the validity of the anti-establishment rhetoric of the Vlaams Blok. The party has always positioned itself as an honest party caring for people’s rights, and

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<sup>35</sup> Metro No,1312 (09/10/2006)

denouncing the 'diseases' of society (along with those responsible for those 'diseases').

The second axis of the Vlaams Blok ideology is the rejection of immigration. It has been argued that the Vlaams Blok created "a dominant ideological space" (Swyngedouw, 1998: 68) by engaging in anti-immigration agitation in sensitive neighbourhoods, where crime and unemployment are high. Part of this strategy is the attribution of such problems to immigrants (Swyngedouw, 1998: 68). Furthermore the Vlaams Blok presents itself as the only party willing to provide clear solutions (i.e. immigrants out) (Swyngedouw, 1998: 68). For example, the Vlaams Blok argues that the beneficiaries of social welfare must be Flemish and must work in order to receive benefits. For long-term unemployed people (i.e. over one year), the Vlaams Blok plans obligatory enrolment in community service, such as maintenance of the streets and parks. Women are to be encouraged to stay at home, and would receive a 'breeder' salary. Employers are to be strongly encouraged to give priority to Flemish people and would have to pay a specific tax if they employ foreigners (Nollet, 2000). Thirdly, the Vlaams Blok wants the independence of Flanders, and the separation from the Belgian state. It requires the redrawing of the borders to include Brussels as its capital. Flanders is to become a mono-ethnic state, non-European immigrants will be repatriated and European 'foreigners' assimilated (Nollet, 2000).

According to Swyngedouw (1998), the party's complete political programme is not transparent to the general public. The party does not mention, for example, in

public pronouncements some of its views regarding unions, and its corporatist social views; which according to Swyngedouw (1998), could revive memories of the pre-war period and the Nazi occupation and are at odds with the interests and views of the majority of the Vlaams Blok voters (Swyngedouw, 1998). Even though many Vlaams Blok officials have roots in wartime Nazi-collaboration, the Vlaams Blok argues that it is a new party and avoids any overt association with that troubled period (Swyngedouw, 1998: 67). It is perhaps notable that the Vlaams Blok is one of the few contemporary extreme right parties which have a legacy of links to fascist parties from the inter-war period (Camus, 2003; Swyngedouw, 2000).

### ***2.3.3. Who Votes For the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang? Ideological Voting and Protest***

A section on the Vlaams Blok's ideology would not be complete without a discussion of those who vote for the extreme right. The electorate of the Vlaams Blok seems to be characterised by its strong loyalty to the party. According to Nollet (2000), eight out of ten voters will continue voting for the Vlaams Blok in the future. It appears that the party has two types of members: activists and paying members. The presence of active core groups in different neighbourhoods, namely in Antwerp, have ensured the organisation of demonstrations against the presence of immigrants, against the building of mosques, and the blaming of immigrants for crime and unemployment (Swyngedouw, 2000).

The party membership is mainly composed of workers, and people from lower socio-economic groups, young people and those without religious faith (Nollet, 2000). The Vlaams Blok has however attracted voters from all sections of the population (Swyngedouw, 2000). Interestingly an analysis of the profiles of Vlaams Blok voters in Antwerp shows that the lower the level of education, the more likely a person is to vote for the Vlaams Blok, and that blue-collar workers represent an important share of Vlaams Blok total vote. However, it appears that the Vlaams Blok has also extended its electoral base to white collar workers (lower middle-class workers) and to the self-employed.

*Immigration: the vote gatherer*

Studies have indicated that it is mainly the rejection of immigrants that is motivating the Vlaams Blok vote, and that a loathing of the political class plays only a secondary role in this choice (Nollet, 2000). Billiet *et al.* (2001) also found that the Vlaams Blok's electorate is characterised by a negative attitude towards immigrants and a strong repressive attitude towards criminals. Similarly, Coffé (2004) has argued for an ideological motivation of Vlaams Blok's voters by noting that voters referred to the main policies within the Vlaams Blok manifesto as the motivating force of their electoral behaviour (Coffé, 2004). In other words, voting for the Vlaams Blok is not a mere expression of protest or aversion to other political parties and political institutions. This is an important finding because the extreme right vote is often conceptualised as being a form of protest (see among others Anastasakis, 2000; Stouthuysen, 1993). On the one hand, in the protest vote model, voters show their discontent with all other traditional parties (and political

institutions) by choosing the extreme right. On the other hand, ideological voting is conceptualised by Downs (1957) as a vote which is inspired by a consideration of the party's programme. Voters, in this model, are assumed to know the extreme right party's position on a number of issues and support these. Hence, ideological voters agree with the stated party line.

### *The ideological vote*

In the case of the Vlaams Blok, Coffé's (2004) research shows that the strongest determinant in 1999 for voting for the party was immigration. Flemish nationalism and independence of Flanders only encouraged a minority to vote for the party. According to the same study (Coffé, 2004), a large majority of the Vlaams Blok electorate agreed with the party's position on immigration issues and the only other significant motivating theme was seen as 'crime'. These findings do not preclude the significance of protest-voting as it is in the nature of the Vlaams Blok's political programme to 'be against': against immigrants, against criminality and against established parties. Hence both protest and ideology can be used to explain the success of the Vlaams Blok (Coffé, 2004). This is an important finding, because, according to Coffé's (2004) research, choosing to vote for the Vlaams Blok is ideological, i.e. the voters' choice is based on the party's programme, and their agreement with the party's policies. Coffé's (2004) findings confirm the initial observation about the persuasiveness of the party discourse which must have an impact on attracting, convincing and retaining voters. This has important implications for this thesis which seeks to highlight the party's communication strategies; and also seems to confirm an initial 'intuition' about the quality of the

Vlaams Blok's persuasiveness. The communication material of the Vlaams Blok has an important place in the party's strategy and significant amounts of money, time and effort are spent by the party to ensure that key messages reach the intended targets. This is however no easy task, because the Vlaams Blok faces a particularly difficult political situation, namely the *cordon sanitaire*.

#### **2.3.4. The 'cordon sanitaire': an efficient strategy against the extreme right?**

The *cordon sanitaire* has been created as a form of 'anti Vlaams Blok' strategy. It is in essence a form of political quarantine. All the mainstream democratic parties have made the commitment not only to refuse any cooperation with extreme right parties, but also not to debate with them on TV (Faniel, 2003). The idea originated in 1989, when the leaders of five Flemish parties signed an agreement where they would never negotiate with the Vlaams Blok and would not make immigration a political issue (Gijssels, 1992; in Mudde, 2000). This agreement was violated some seven weeks later when the mainstream parties took an anti Vlaams Blok stance but also at the same time used "conciliatory gestures whenever it proved opportune" (Mudde, 2000: 89). A new *cordon sanitaire* was signed a few years later, in reaction to the increasing strength of the Vlaams Blok. Local, regional and national representatives of the major parties engaged in the new cordon (Mudde, 2000: 90). This time it proved more effective. For example, in 1994, a *cordon sanitaire* excluded the Vlaams Blok from power in Antwerp's city council, and the situation lasted for six years (Mudde, 2000: 91). The more successful the Vlaams Blok was at the polls, the more isolated it became from other political parties. For example, in the days following the elections of June 13<sup>th</sup> 2004, the Vlaams Blok

was the second largest party in Flanders. However, the other Flemish political parties were still determined not to form a coalition with the Vlaams Blok and were left with no choice but to form an awkward coalition with each other (three parties are now needed to form the majority of the *Vlaamse Raad*, the Flemish Council) leaving the Vlaams Blok as the single party of opposition.

#### *Media Quarantine: Northern vs. Southern media*

Mass media also supported the quarantine strategy by refusing to interview the leaders of the extreme right, even during election campaigns. However, the strategy proved to be double-edged and has been attacked by the Vlaams Blok in the name of freedom of speech. It has actually provided high levels of publicity for the Vlaams Blok, arguably allowing them to claim 'victim' status. It has also been thought to act as a good excuse for mainstream parties not to debate with the Vlaams Blok about current problematic political issues. Currently there are many breaches of the *cordon sanitaire*, especially in Flanders where articles in the press are dedicated to the Vlaams Blok and TV debates have been organised with the leaders of the Vlaams Blok. For example, a documentary dedicated to Filip Dewinter ("*De Dag...van Filip Dewinter*", i.e. "*The Day...of Filip Dewinter*") has been broadcast by Kanaaltwee, a Flemish channel, on the day following the June 2004 elections. In this programme a journalist followed the Vlaams Blok's leader for a whole day, showing him having breakfast at home with his family, working and giving his opinions about a wide range of issues (e.g. fulminating against signs with Arabic lettering on grocery shops). Criticisms were voiced (mainly in the French-speaking press) that this sort of programme provided a complacent and

favourable image of the party and its elite. The Flemish press has justified its non-compliance with the *cordon sanitaire* by arguing that, because the Vlaams Blok has representatives in Parliament, it is the journalists' duty to reflect all points of view existing in Belgian democratic society (Lits, 2003).

It is worth noting that the situation is very different in the North and the South of the country. The media quarantine is strictly followed by the French-speaking media in the North (Lits, 2003) but in the South, the extreme right party leaders enjoy 'neutral' media coverage, just like any other mainstream politician. Some commentators see this as harmful because it strengthens the extreme right parties' 'fame', respectability and visibility (Faniel, 2003). It is argued (Faniel, 2003: 54), that this gives voters the impression that the extreme right are parties "like any other" making it more difficult and less legitimate to fight the Vlaams Blok and its thesis. Consequently, the French-speaking press continues to maintain the media quarantine (Faniel, 2003). This stance can be explained by the fact that the media do not want to amplify the party's position (Lits, 2003). In 1994, the RTBF (French-speaking television) refused to interview the leaders of the extreme right and refused legally-granted air-time to the FN during election campaigns (Lits, 2003). Sued by the Vlaams Blok, the public TV company was declared wrong and the whole affair again provided further publicity to the extreme right as a supposed victim of a political plot (Lits, 2003). In addition, Lits (2003) argues that this affair gave the impression that the extreme right have interesting ideas that should not be hidden from the public, implying that the public is not mature enough to take sensible decisions. The situation is indeed delicate and the quarantine double-

edged. On the one hand, the media could let the extreme right parties express their opinions, hoping that this will not provide a large audience and legitimate their undemocratic arguments. On the other hand, the media could refuse access to extreme right parties and thereby provide publicity and 'victimise' them (Lits, 2003). Facing this dilemma, the media in the North and the South of the country have taken opposite stances. In this context, where the Vlaams Blok has a limited public forum in which to propagate its message and manifesto it has been forced to find diverse ways to reach its audience.

### ***2.3.5. The propaganda machine of the Vlaams Blok***

It is no understatement to say that the political and marketing communications of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang are well developed and organised, especially since 1989 when the party started receiving public funding (Swyngedouw, 2000). Lits (2003) argues that the extensive financial resources of the Vlaams Blok (including the benefits from state funding of political parties) have been used for wide advertising campaigns and to fund rallies where party members and activists can meet the voters who contribute to its electoral success. The Vlaams Blok also issues: a quarterly regional publication entitled *Eigen Volk Eerst Krant*<sup>36</sup>; a monthly party magazine called *Vlaams Blok Magazine*; a weekly newsletter called *E-Magazine*; brochures presenting the programme of the party or its stance on different issues, such as abortion, drugs, and security. A number of books have been written by the leaders of the party, such as *Baas in Eigen Land*<sup>37</sup> (Filip

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<sup>36</sup> Translation: *Our Own People First Newspaper*

<sup>37</sup> *Masters in our Country*

Dewinter, 2000), *Karel Dillen, Portret van een Rebel*<sup>38</sup> (Verstraete, 1992) or *Europese Gedichten*<sup>39</sup> (Dillen, 1991). The party also organises conferences and one-day seminars (Swyngedouw, 2000). It is worth noting the existence of subordinate party organisations, such as the *Vlaams Blok Jongeren* (Vlaams Blok Youth) (Swyngedouw, 2000). The Vlaams Blok Youth organisation has its own brochure and organises a yearly summer ‘university’ for the young. Local political action receives support via airtime allocated to the Vlaams Blok, on TV and public radio, under the airtime arrangements for all political parties represented in the Flemish Parliament (Swyngedouw, 1998:68). Allocation depends on the number of seats in the Parliament. The more successful the Vlaams Blok gets, the more air time it gets (Swyngedouw, 1998: 68). The Vlaams Blok has also been targeting the French-speaking population of Brussels. In November 1996, the first newsletter, both in French and Dutch, was distributed to 450,000 houses. It focussed on what the party defined as the big issues facing the capital, such as insecurity, ghettos, and taxes. The stated aim was to gain votes from the population of Brussels, the city designated by the Vlaams Blok to become the capital of the independent state of Flanders. In addition, the Vlaams Blok has not limited itself to paper-based literature but has also a well-developed active website (see [www.vlaamsblok.be](http://www.vlaamsblok.be)).

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<sup>38</sup> *Karel Dillen, Portrait of a Rebel*

<sup>39</sup> *European Poems*

### ***2.3.6. The Vlaams Belang: The Return of the Vlaams Blok***

The Vlaams Belang was created in November 2004, after the condemnation of three non-profit associations linked to the Vlaams Blok for racism by the *Cour de Cassation*<sup>40</sup>. As a consequence, the Vlaams Blok had to disband in order to avoid further prosecution. The Vlaams Belang was founded immediately, with the same leaders and same structures as the Vlaams Blok. In order to understand the Vlaams Belang, it is important to understand the position the previous Vlaams Blok held in the Belgian political landscape, particularly because the continuity of leadership, ideology and programme has been emphasised by the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams<sup>41</sup> leaders themselves. Coffé (2005b: 217) cites Frank Vanhecke, the Vlaams Belang's president, who said that when the Vlaams Blok changed its name to Vlaams Belang, nothing would really be changed: "*we are changing our name, but not our stripes*".

As explained before, the Vlaams Blok's political programme is articulated around three major arguments: first, the incompetence and dishonesty of the other parties; second, the denunciation of the current immigration policies; and third, Flemish nationalism and independence (Faniel, 2003). In 1992, Filip Dewinter argued, in the infamous 70-point programme, that what was needed for the protection of Flemish identity, and the application of the 'serving one's own people first' leitmotiv was a halt to immigration and the accelerated repatriation of foreigners, along with harsher regulations against criminal and illegal immigrants (Coffé,

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<sup>40</sup> The highest institution of justice in Belgium

<sup>41</sup> To stress this continuity, a combination of both names '*Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang*' is used to refer indistinctively to both the Vlaams Blok and the Vlaams Belang, unless stated otherwise.

2005b). This argument was softened in 1996, when the repatriation solution was replaced by the possibility of assimilation of non-EU immigrants (Mudde, 2000) and, in 2000, the 70-point programme was finally discarded (Deweerd, 2001). In the Vlaams Belang's programme, deportation is now limited to immigrants "who reject, deny or combat our culture and certain European values such as separation of the Church and State, freedom of expression and equality between men and women" (in Camus, 2005). According to Coffé (2005b), the Vlaams Belang is now trying to be perceived as a nationalist right-wing party, which still has immigration, security and anti-establishment feelings as its driving forces, but which has cut the ties with its unsavoury past. The structures and the leaders are similar. If the party has softened some of its (legally) problematic stances, it still adopts a very clear view regarding immigrants and immigration: Filip Dewinter said that: "*multiculturalism leads to multi-criminality*" (in the Annual Report 2005 on Human Rights in Belgium). Filip Dewinter leaves no ambiguity about the Vlaams Belang's orientation with "*any Muslim woman wearing the headscarf will sign thereby the warrant for her repatriation*" ('Buitenhof', Nederland 3, 14/11/2004). He also sparked the polemic when he said in an interview by Jewish Week (28/10/2005): "*'Xenophobia' is not the word I would use. If it absolutely must be a 'phobia' let it be 'Islamophobia'*"<sup>42</sup>.

Along with the 'softening' of their policies, these controlled outbursts might have been intended to avoid the alienation of the existing loyal Vlaams Blok voters. These seemingly paradoxical stances between xenophobic and islamophobic

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<sup>42</sup> See <http://www.filipdewinter.org/page.php?linkID=238>

statements, a right-wing conservative rebirth, and subsequent ambiguity lead to the need for a careful segmentation of the voters' market and sound positioning of the party (see chapter 8). By adopting what seems like paradoxical approaches, the Vlaams Belang seems to be aiming at both attracting a larger audience (which might be interested in its tough approach on criminality, and/or in its call for a greater autonomy for Flanders); and at the same time reassuring the voters of the former Vlaams Blok (who were not shy of voting for an anti-immigrant party), that the party did not change and would continue defending the nation and identity of its people.

### **3. Conclusion**

Belgium's particular politics is a mix of community quarrels, calls for greater autonomy for the regions and stripping little by little the federal institutions from their content and power. In addition, the political scandals that have tainted most mainstream parties, the malaise after the Dutroux scandal<sup>43</sup>, unemployment crisis, all of which contribute to the development of the background from which the extreme right extracts its theses and gains ground. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is a well-structured and well-managed party (Art, 2006). It is definitely not what could be called a single issue party. The party campaigns on the

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<sup>43</sup> Dutroux was a pedophile who kidnapped, sexually abused, and murdered several girls in Belgium in 1995 and 1996. The coverage of the scandal traumatised Belgium. Discontent against Belgium's criminal justice system grew because of a number of shortcomings in the Dutroux investigation.

independence of Flanders, the necessity to purify politics from patronage and corruption, and getting rid of foreigners that do not assimilate into Flemish society. The Vlaams Belang essentially revives the same themes developed by the Vlaams Blok, but attempts to be perceived as a right wing conservative party rather than as an extreme right party (label that the Vlaams Blok always rejected anyway). To convince voters of the changes, and more generally to convince voters of the soundness of the party's ideology, the party has orchestrated memorable communication campaigns, with the help of advertising professionals. In addition, the party leaders advocate the use of political marketing to organise successful local elections. The focus of interest of this research lies in the way the party uses modern marketing tactics and strategy, to deploy a persuasive discourse. This requires a methodology that acknowledges the nature and complexity of the discourses studied, but that could also highlight those (hidden) processes in play. As is explained in further detail in the following chapter, a discursive approach is adopted in this thesis. Considering the discourse of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang and understanding marketing and political marketing as discourses is congruent with the ontological and epistemological stances held by the researcher. Those philosophical stances and the relevant research methodology are explored in detail in the next chapter, which explains the methodological choices made in order to understand the political marketing and persuasiveness of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang as an archetype of the successful contemporary extreme right.

## **Chapter 5: Methodology: Critical Discourse Analysis**

### **1. Introduction**

This chapter aims at presenting the philosophical assumptions guiding the research process and the methodology adopted. This is essential because philosophical assumptions are likely to influence the choice of methodology and information gathering techniques. It also provides, according to Hudson and Murray (1986), philosophical guidelines for further development of the conceptual area. This is followed by a section extensively dedicated to the critical discourse analysis framework and its theoretical underpinnings. The chapter ends with an illustration of the way a critical discourse analysis is operationalised in this research.

#### *Basic assumptions: social constructionism*

Human experience can be viewed through the lenses of different alternative epistemologies. The issue facing the researcher is to choose the most suitable paradigm for the needs and goals of the research. This research is located within social constructionism (Phillips and Hardy, 2002; Gergen, 2001; Gergen, 1999; Berger and Luckman, 1967) taking the position that “reality is produced, constituted or constructed through language” (Hughes and Sharrock, 1997: 145). Language is considered as constitutive and constructive, rather than reflective and

representative (Wood and Kroger, 2000; in Phillips and Hardy, 2002). In such a philosophical framework, the core of the enquiry lies in language and discourse.

This research departs from the more conventional approaches of political marketing which endorse positivist epistemological positions of rational choice theory (Savigny, 2004). Methodologically, the extant political marketing literature begins with simplifying assumptions to produce a generic model from which propositions are deduced, and then tested against empirical evidence to establish the validity of the predictions (Lees-Marshment, 2001; Butler and Collins, 1994). This is not the case in this thesis which positions itself within the social constructionist paradigm. The focus of the research on extremist and marketing discourses implies that discourse and language hold centre stage. According to Phillips and Hardy (2002: 2), “without discourse, there is no social reality, and without understanding discourse, we cannot understand our reality, our experiences, or ourselves”. Discourses construct individuals’ experience and reality, but also limit them because one has to act within the frame of discourses. That said, humans also contribute to the construction and reproduction of discourses. A dialectic relationship is installed between discourses and society, or social systems, in which they operate (Wodak, 2001; de Cillia *et al.*, 1999; Fairclough, 1989).

### *Discourse analysis*

One of the major roles of social research is to understand and interpret socially produced meanings. For instance, discourse analysis focusses on the processes

whereby the social world is constructed and maintained (Phillips and Hardy, 2002: 2). Researchers, especially the ones operating within a discourse analytic framework, seek to highlight the historically specific rules and conventions that structure the production of meanings in particular historical contexts (Howarth, 2000: 128). The approach of discourse analysis adopted here is similar to Phillips and Hardy's (2002: 4) and Fairclough's (1992). Discourse analysis explores the relationships between texts, discourse, and context (Phillips and Hardy, 2002; Fairclough, 1992). This helps understand, through the analysis of the historical and social context, how meanings are constructed and how a broader reality is constructed and experienced by people (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). The meaning of social life is central in the discourse analysis methodology. Discourse analysis seeks to explore the way in which the social reality is produced, and holds the assumption that the world cannot be known separately from discourse (Phillips and Hardy, 2002: 6)

## **2. The notion of discourse**

Fairclough (2003) also uses the word discourse to describe a particular way of representing aspects of the world, i.e. the processes, relations and structures of the material world, but also thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so on (Fairclough, 2003: 124). Discourse can be understood as the actual practice of talking and writing (Woodilla, 1998; in Phillips and Hardy, 2002); but discourse is also an interrelated set of texts and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception that

bring an object into being (Parker, 1993; in Phillips and Hardy, 2002). Indeed, as Fairclough (1989) explained, discourse is part of social practice and contributes to the reproduction of social practice. It is constructed through time by the interrelations between texts, changes and new forms in texts, and new systems of distributing texts (Phillips and Hardy, 2002: 5). Fairclough uses the word discourse to refer to the whole *process* of social interaction (Fairclough, 1989: 24 emphasis added). What is meant by ‘process’ is the production of text (where text is the product) and the interpretation of text (where the text is the resource) (Fairclough, 1989).

Therefore, different discourses are different representations of the world (Fairclough, 2003) at different levels of abstraction. To illustrate this particular notion of discourse, Fairclough (2000) analysed the discourse of the Third Way, which is a political discourse attached to a particular position within the political field. Liberalism, Communism or Thatcherism, are all examples of discourses that could be found within the political domain (Fairclough, 2003: 125), and Taylorism for example is a discourse of management. Those are all discourses at a high levels of abstraction which develops as an articulation of different discourses (Fairclough, 2003). The notion that marketing is also a discourse is discussed below.

## **2.1. Marketing discourse**

Marketing, most commonly recognised as an academic discipline and a business practice, could also be understood as a discourse in itself. Morgan (1992: 154) critically assessed marketing and considered it as a “substantial and powerful

discourse which is currently dominated by a highly positivistic and normative approach to knowledge". More broadly, marketing discourse contributes to the way people view and understand the world. It is "part of the process whereby a particular form of society is constructed, one in which human beings are treated as things, where identity is reduced to ownership of commodities and all social relations are conceived in market terms" (Morgan, 1992: 154). If one accepts the idea that mass consumption is the cultural norm in 20<sup>th</sup> century western industrialised societies (Morgan, 1992: 137), one recognises that individual and social identities are necessarily within the scope of and constructed through consumption values (Morgan, 1992). Marketing constructs a certain context where social agents live and interact, and is used as a resource by the same agents to make sense of their social context. Marketing is a discourse through which social actors (i.e. organisations, consumers, and institutions) understand and attempt to control those social processes (Morgan, 1992: 137).

Marketing is also an intellectual product, i.e. it is the product of a knowledge community in a specific place at a certain time, with interests to defend and narratives of identity to uphold (Hackley, 1999: 58). Marketing is often conceived of as a way of looking at the world and marketing rhetoric is presented as a liberating force for consumers. This view ignores that marketing actively constructs a world where individuals build their identities through commodities (Morgan, 1992), and is "a particular way of seeing and 'doing' human relationships" (Morgan, 1992: 143). Discourses are always ideologically loaded (Hackley, 1999: 158) and are ways of providing an account of the world (Hackley,

1999: 159). Marketing as a discourse, is no exception and includes particular assumptions about the world (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; in Morgan, 1992). Morgan (1992) has argued modern society has been pervaded by a market logic and a marketing ethos. Goods and services are part of people's self-image (see among others Mittal, 2006; Grace and O'Cass, 2002). According to Morgan (1992), market mechanisms are used to monitor and evaluate social relations (through the monetisation and the commodification of social relations). This might explain why marketing has so easily 'invaded' the political arena (see chapter 3). Of course, the use of marketing techniques, such as focus groups or voter segmentation does not necessarily mean that a political party thoroughly applies the marketing concepts adopting a marketing mind-set. It could be argued that marketing is merely a metaphor used by parties to make their speech 'voter-friendly'. In this thesis I examine the extent to which the Vlaams Blok's and Vlaams Belangs's texts are artefacts of a marketing discourse. The starting point of such an enquiry must be to understand marketing as a discourse, and to try and shed a new light on the use of marketing discourse/rhetoric by political parties.

### **3. The study of discourse**

In the discourse analytical framework, discourses are believed to play a central role in structuring the individuals' sense of reality and their notion of their own identity (Mills, 1997). According to Fairclough (1989: 74) discourse is part of social practice and contributes to the reproduction of social practice. Discourses,

via active social subjects in their societal contexts, produce and shape social realities but discourses are also shaped by reality. Put in Jäger's words (2001: 36), discourses "live a life of their own". Discourse analysis approaches discourse as constitutive of the social world. Consequently, it does not limit the study to how language reflects and reveals phenomena, in the way other qualitative research methods<sup>44</sup> might do (Phillips and Hardy, 2002: 6). Discourse analysis examines the production of reality performed by discourses – which are societal means of production – and conveyed by people (Jäger, 2001: 36).

The 'problem' in research about marketing and political discourse is their 'taken-for-grantedness'. Ideologies naturalise the world views defended in discourse and make them unquestioned, because they are invisible to people. The researcher is also immersed in those ideological frameworks; he or she holds stronger or weaker political values; is in a web of emotions, feelings, attitudes. These two constraints – the subject of enquiry and the enquirer – must be taken into account in the process of research. The focus on discourse, power and politics already points towards a critical approach to marketing and discourse in general. Discourse analysis, and more specifically critical discourse analysis, is the methodology that should provide the methodological framework to allow a rigorous enquiry into political marketing. The next chapter exposes and discusses the critical discourse analytical framework and its relevance and utility in this research.

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<sup>44</sup> Such as narrative analysis or conversation analysis.

#### 4. Alternative Methodologies

Among the wide range of methods available to the social scientists, the choice was set on discursive methods. The most pragmatic reason being the lack of direct access to the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang organisation and members. Therefore, any method involving a direct interaction with the party or its members, such as (in no particular order) interviews, ethnography, participant observation, conversation analysis, functional pragmatics<sup>45</sup> and the like, were considered impossible. Indeed, the researcher, a female Muslim from an immigrant background, belongs to one of the main groups targeted by the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's rhetoric (i.e. foreigners and Muslims). Nevertheless, attempts were made to contact the party (emails and a phone call), but both attempts were left unanswered. Therefore all methods involving a direct interaction with party members were eliminated. The second reason is that the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Blok's communication material provides a very rich source of information and processes which deserves enquiry in its own right. The philosophical stances and the researcher's areas of interest (critical approaches) all direct their attention towards research focussing on discourse, power and ideology. The relative sensitivity of the topic (the extreme right discourse researched by a Muslim Belgian from a non-EU immigrant background) demands a reflexive recognition and transparency of the author's political stance. Any claim to objectivity, or a lack of reflexivity for that matter, would understandably be met

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<sup>45</sup> Functional pragmatics are a linguistic method whose application is restricted to oral communication, and to dialogue texts (Titscher *et al.*, 2000).

with suspicion and doubt. For these (contextual) reasons, because of the nature of the research itself, and because the critical discourse analytical framework's rigour and intellectual sophistication and articulation (see previous sections), CDA has been chosen as the most appropriate method for this research. CDA provides a fit between the research requirements, its nature, its search for latent processes (e.g. ideology and power struggle) and its emancipatory purposes (i.e. the possibility of changing the human condition). Thus CDA is the most appropriate research methodology to address the research questions of this thesis. It is nevertheless interesting to consider a couple of other discursive methods, such as content analysis (representing a more quantitative approach to discourse analysis), in addition to criticisms against CDA.

#### **4.1. Content analysis**

The main difference between CDA and content analysis arises from the nature of the object analysed. CDA is a linguistic method: it analyses coherence (constituting the meaning of the text) and cohesion (which refers to the components of the textual surface, i.e. the textual-syntactic connectedness (Titscher *et al.*, 2000: 227)). The analysis of the relationship between these two dimensions is confined to linguistic method, while non-linguistic methods such as content analysis, focus on coherence. Content analysis, as its name indicates, asks concrete questions about the content using rather precise and narrow research questions for the purpose of hypothesis formulation (Titscher *et al.*, 2000). The content of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse is not the main focus *per se*. In order to ensure the quality and rigour of the research, and avoid any

polemical opinions concerning the theses defended by the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang the content is not debated or refuted. Content, or semantic elements of discourse are analysed, but only as a part of the whole discourse analysis also including the analysis of strategic and linguistic dimensions.

In CDA, texts are a manifestation of discourse, and are explained through social structures and socio-historic contexts, which are considered as macro-structures (Titscher *et al.*, 2000). CDA links the micro-elements of texts to the discourse and to macro-structures. Content analysis is more limited in its focus. For example, according to Graber and Smith (2005), content analysis is the most widely used method for examining political messages. Researchers frequently examine messages for cues to underlying political, social, and economic conditions, such as international tensions, confidence in government, or fear about economic declines (Graber and Smith, 2005: 491). Content analysis focusses on denotational dictionary meanings or connotations from extended meaning evoked by the literal messages. A weakness of content analysis is the common practice of coding only small portions of news stories, thereby omitting many important themes and nuances and limiting coding to meanings (Graber and Smith, 2005). Content analysis offers the potential for interesting applications and insight in this research. However, content analysis offers a rather limited range of advantages, especially when compared to CDA. Perhaps a combination of both could provide a more complete picture of a given phenomenon. However, the combination of both methods is not considered as a priority here, as this research is, in addition to addressing the research questions set earlier, an exploration of the potential of CDA for analysing political

marketing. CDA appears to be the most appropriate methodology here, but it is not without weaknesses and its fair share of criticisms.

## **5. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

Given the specific research focus on the strategic use of language by extreme right political parties to communicate, persuade, legitimate issues and promote particular theses, a discourse analysis approach appears to be the most appropriate methodology. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) explicitly focusses on the dynamics of power, knowledge and ideology that surround discursive processes (Phillips and Hardy, 2002: 20). CDA explains the role of discourse in the way that power abuse is constituted and sustained (Phillips and Hardy, 2002; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). The goal is to analyse the “dialogical struggle (or struggles) as reflected in the privileging of a particular discourse and the marginalization of others” (Phillips and Hardy, 2002: 25). CDA is useful for studies seeking to analyse how political strategies are shaped by and help shape contexts. This is why it is considered as relevant for a research project which aims to gain further insight into marketing and extremist political discourses, because it can help explore the key areas of persuasion, ideology, and conflict (Elliott, 1996; van Dijk, 1996; Fairclough, 1995). In addition, CDA is particularly relevant for this research because its focus lies on the connection between power and meaning and on how processes of social construction lead to a social reality that is taken-for-granted (Clegg, 1989; in Phillips and Hardy, 2002).

Discourse analysis is expected to help hunt down and challenge the taken-for-granted truths (Phillips and Hardy, 2002) which, it is argued here, are the common material of the extreme right discourse. For example, experiences and other stories about ‘minorities’, or pseudo-arguments, are presented as facts and used to justify racist attitudes (van Dijk, 1993: 125). Apparent truthfulness is an important characteristic of a persuasive discourse. The ‘facts’ are unsubstantiated and claim to “confirm” what people are already predisposed to believe as the truth (Jowett and O’Donnell, 1999: 158). The next section sets out to provide a thorough description of CDA: its theoretical basis and its method of data analysis.

## **5.1. Basic assumptions in CDA**

### ***5.1.1. CDA and discourse***

CDA is not interested in language *per se*, but in the linguistic character of social and cultural processes and structures (Titscher *et al.*, 2000: 146). It is concerned, according to Van Leeuwen (1993: 193), with a) discourse as the instrument of power and control and b) discourse as the instrument of the social construction of reality. The basic assumption of CDA is that there is a dialectical relationship between discursive events and the context (situations, social structures, institutions, and so on) in which they are embedded (de Cillia *et al.*, 1999: 157). According to Wodak (2001: 66), “discourses as linguistic social practices can be seen as constituting non-discursive and discursive social practices and, at the same time, as being constituted by them”. Through discourse, social actors constitute

knowledge, situations, social roles as well as identities and interpersonal relations between social actors (de Cillia *et al.*, 1999: 157). In addition, CDA claims that discourses are not only expressions of social practice (Jäger, 2001), but are also ideological (Wodak, 2001). Accordingly, CDA seeks to unveil the web of domination, power, discrimination and control existing in language (Wodak, 2001). Language is, according to Habermas (1977; in Wodak, 2001), a medium of domination and social force. For example, it is through language that power relations are legitimated (Wodak, 2001). In accordance with this view, Jäger (2001: 34) sees discourse as “the flow of knowledge<sup>46</sup> – and/or societal knowledge stored – throughout all time (Jäger, 1999, 1993; in Wodak, 2001) which determines individuals and collective doing and/or formative action that shapes society, thus exercising power.” This particular approach of CDA should prove particularly useful for the study of discourse with powerful ideologies, yet with hidden effects and hidden power relations (Meyer, 2001) which can be found for example in populism and marketing.

## **5.2 Specificities of CDA**

### ***5.2.1. Political involvement of the researcher***

CDA differs in various points from other qualitative methodologies and even other text and discourse analysis approaches. First, the difference between CDA and the other approaches is the explicit political stance adopted by the CDA researcher

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<sup>46</sup> Knowledge is, according to Jäger (2001: 33), all kinds of content which make up consciousness and/or all kinds of meaning used by respective historical persons to interpret and shape surrounding reality”.

(Wodak, 2001: 5). The critical discourse analyst is interested in studying social problems, such as social inequalities and plays an advocacy role for those suffering from social discrimination (Meyer, 2001: 15; Titscher *et al.*, 2000). CDA researchers want their research findings to have practical applications (Meyer, 2001; Wodak, 2001; Titscher *et al.*, 2000). By revealing the structures, the researcher acts as a facilitator for change. The role of research is ultimately seen as “a guide for human action” (Wodak, 2001: 10). This orientation of CDA towards political involvement and application of the research findings can be witnessed in the type of research where a CDA methodology has been adopted. CDA holds the assumption that language repeats and legitimates injustice and inequality (Titscher *et al.*, 2000). CDA has been applied in the fields of gender, media discourses, identity research and research into issues of prejudice, namely racism, anti-Semitism or sexism (Wodak, 2001; Titscher *et al.*, 2000; also for research on those topics see Wodak *et al.*, 1999; Martin-Rojo and van Dijk, 1997; Pedro, 1997, among others). Because CDA makes explicit power relations which are frequently hidden (Meyer, 2001: 15), it can make people aware of hidden alienating forces (Wodak, 2001; van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 1989) and, through this awareness, empower and emancipate them (Titscher *et al.*, 2000: 147). In other words, “one of the aims of CDA is to ‘demystify’ discourses by deciphering ideologies” (Wodak, 2001: 9). The ultimate goal in studying extreme right discourse and their marketing could be to understand, but also to expose, the strategies of xenophobic parties in presenting and marketing ideals that exclude other human beings on the basis of their race, culture and/or religion.

In all subjectivist research, it is held that the observer is part of what is observed (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). The researchers acknowledge their participation in the construction of social reality through the research process itself. The researcher's position is the result of discursive processes, and not based on any notion of truth (Jäger, 2001: 34). Besides, it is accepted in that research tradition that research is not value-free because the researchers inevitably influence their findings and should therefore make sure that the readers are aware of the authorial contribution (Watson, 1994). In CDA, value judgements are acceptable in the choice of object and questions of enquiry, but are forbidden in the 'context of justification'<sup>47</sup> (Meyer, 2001: 17). The way in which the researcher using CDA arrives at the results and conclusions must be made intelligible and recognisable (Titscher *et al.*, 2000). It is also therefore necessary to acknowledge the 'biography' of the researcher for this research project. In this case, reflexivity is implicit, but made obvious, because it pervades the whole thesis.

### **5.2.2. Ideology**

Ideology is central in research adopting a CDA approach. Ideology is, according to Gramsci (1983; in Titscher *et al.*, 2000: 144), the means used in a political society to achieve the agreement of the majority. Ideologies are considered, within the CDA field, as playing a major role in establishing and maintaining unequal power relations (Wodak, 2001). The interest of CDA in ideology highlights the ways in which meaning is constructed and conveyed in a social context (Thompson, 1990;

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<sup>47</sup> Fairclough (1996) also pointed to the fact that the open-endedness of results is required in CDA which is interpretative and explanatory (Titscher *et al.*, 2000). Interpretations are always dynamic and open to new contexts and new information (Titscher *et al.*, 2000: 146) that may change the results (Titscher *et al.*, 2000).

in Wodak, 2001). Meanings are produced and reproduced in a dialectic process of negotiation (Titscher *et al.*, 2000: 145). The effects of power and ideology on the production of meaning are obscured and acquire a stable form, and they are consequently taken as given (Wodak, 2001). This is why dominant discourses seem to provide a rational and sensible set of assumed truths beyond doubt (Jäger, 2001). CDA investigates those discourses, reveals their contradictions and the means used to make those truths accepted (Jäger, 2001).

### ***5.2.3. History and social processes***

Secondly, another important assumption of CDA is that all discourses are historical and can therefore only be understood in relation to their context (Meyer, 2001: 15; Titscher *et al.*, 2000: 146). In the CDA tradition, the analysis should recognise that the values, norms, laws, rights, and other critical aspects of discourse that the researcher uses are also historical outcomes of discourse (Jäger, 2001: 34). While other paradigms in discourse analysis only focus on texts as objects of enquiry, CDA also focusses on the social processes and structures surrounding the production of texts. It is within those processes and structures that individuals create meanings in their interaction with texts (Fairclough and Kress, 1993; in Wodak, 2001). Discourses are indeed intertextually linked to other discourses (Titscher *et al.*, 2000: 146). Culture, history and ideology characterise the context of the discursive event.

#### **5.2.4. Context**

The context of an utterance is granted special attention in CDA. This is the third specificity of CDA which, just like discourse analysis, holds that it is impossible to strip discourse from its broader context. In the analysis, under the discourse analysis tradition, it is important to mention the broader discourse, the location of individual texts in larger bodies of texts (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). CDA is even more concerned by context. This is evident by the relevance of social, psychological, political and ideological elements of the context in which the texts are embedded and by the ensuing calls for interdisciplinarity and intertextuality (Meyer, 2001: 15). Interdisciplinarity and intertextuality are particular features of CDA. Intertextuality refers to the perspective that every text is part of a series of texts<sup>48</sup> to which it reacts and refers, and which it modifies (Titscher *et al.*, 2000: 146).

#### **5.2.5. Language and society**

Fourthly, as noted earlier, CDA sees language as a form of social practice (Titscher *et al.*, 2000; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997) and holds the assumption of mediation regarding the relationship between language and society (Meyer, 2001) – or put simply, language determines society but is also determined by social reality – while other methods such as conversation analysis, see it as deterministic. CDA theory argues that there is a dialectical relationship between a particular discourse and the social structure, institutions and contexts (Fairclough and

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<sup>48</sup> See for example, the CDA of Corporate Social Responsibility discourse by Burchell and Cook (2006), i.e. the appropriation by the business community of the language of the ecological movement, and the subsequent creation of the business discourse of sustainable development.

Wodak, 1997). CDA analyses language through texts to investigate their interpretation, reception and social effects (Titscher *et al.*, 2000: 146).

### **5.2.6. Linguistic categories**

A last difference between CDA and other methods is the focus on specific linguistic categories into its analyses. While other methods do use linguistic categories, CDA focusses on elements such as deixis<sup>49</sup> (e.g. demonstratives, adverbs, pronouns), of prime importance for the critical approach (Meyer, 2001), because their analysis highlights the characteristics of cohesion and coherence in texts and discourses. CDA holds that the operationalisation of discourse depends on linguistic concepts, such as actors, mode, time, tense, argumentation (Meyer, 2001: 25), because they are the basic working components constituting texts and discourses (see Titscher *et al.*, 2000).

### **5.2.7. Alternative approaches to the study of discourse**

Within CDA there are two different views on the relationship between language and society. On the one hand, there is Fairclough's model, and on the other hand, there is Wodak and van Dijk's approach (see section 5.4.1, p.107) (Meyer, 2001). Fairclough's model is, according to Titscher *et al.* (2000), suitable for the analysis of the contexts of social and discursive change, such as in his study of the way universities in England are marketed (see Fairclough, 1993). Wodak's approach is suited to the analysis of implicitly prejudiced utterances. Her approach facilitates

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<sup>49</sup> In pragmatics and linguistics, deixis is a process whereby words or expressions rely absolutely on context (e.g. demonstratives, adverbs, pronouns). In other words, its deictic or indexical expressions only acquire their meaning only to the speech situation in which they are situated

analysis and decoding of allusions typically concealed in such utterances by referring to background knowledge (Titscher *et al.*, 2000: 165). Examples of this approach are found in the study of the organisation of the European Union (see Iedema and Wodak, 1999; Straehle *et al.*, 1999), or the discursive construction of national identities (see de Cillia *et al.*, 1999; Wodak *et al.*, 1999). Wodak's approach is the one adopted in this research, because that specific method 1) has already been fruitfully applied to influential research (see among others de Cillia *et al.*, 1999; Mitten, 1992; Wodak *et al.*, 1999) and has highlighted the way national identities and a particular reality are created through discourse (which is of interest in this research); 2) is interdisciplinary (as is this research) and combines in its analysis historical, socio-political and linguistic perspectives (which are keys to understanding the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's marketing discourse). Wodak's discourse-historical approach is developed in further details in section 5.4.2. on page 110.

### **5.3. Limitations: Conversation analysis and criticisms of CDA**

Most of the criticisms directed against CDA come from conversation analysis (which is considered as a social scientific approach (Meyer, 2001)). Conversation analysis treats talk and social interaction as a sufficient object for analysis, rather than as a window onto wider social processes or as a medium for data collection (Arminen, 1999: 251). According to Schegloff (1998), CDA does not consider seriously the discursive material of its analysis. He argued that conversation analysis should be carried out first if CDA wants its critical analysis to be linked to data, otherwise the analysis is merely ideological (Schegloff, 1998). The perceived

ideology-laden stance of researchers adopting CDA poses problem and provides ammunition to the opponents of the method. According to Widdowson (1995; in Meyer, 2001), CDA constructs a biased interpretation and not a proper academic analysis. He views CDA as based on ideological commitment, which inevitably makes critical discourse analysts select texts that will support their preferred interpretations (Widdowson, 1995; in Meyer, 2001). Widdowson (1995) does not see CDA as capable of examining several interpretations – in the way any other research does/should do – especially because of that ideological bias (Widdowson, 1995). However, according to Fairclough (1996) such criticism does not take into account that, within the CDA approach, researchers are always explicit about their positions, contrary to other methods, such as content analysis where, according to Titscher *et al.* (2000), the underlying assumptions held by researchers are often more implicit, or simply not determined in advance. By contrast, in the CDA framework, the critical analysts must always make transparent their choices in the research process (Wodak, 2001: 65).

#### **5.4. Method**

CDA is characterised by variety in data collection, or in Meyer's words (2001: 30), "there is no accepted canon of data collection". The methodological approaches of CDA are eclectic: they vary from small qualitative case studies to large data samples collected through fieldwork and ethnographic research (Wodak, 2001). It is important to note that data collection is considered in CDA as a continuing procedure, i.e. with analysis going back and forth from interpretation to

data (Meyer, 2001: 18). This is due to the hermeneutic procedure of analysis adopted by most CDA researchers (Meyer, 2001: 16). More precisely, the analytical procedure is characterised by a hermeneutic circle. Here the meaning of one part can only be understood in the context of the whole, which is itself composed by the meaningful elements that the researcher can access (Meyer, 2001: 16). Even if there is no predetermined recipe of step-by-step instructions, for doing critical discourse analysis, a method has nevertheless been selected: it is the discourse-historical method developed by Ruth Wodak and associates.

#### ***5.4.1. Wodak. Why adopt the historical-discourse approach?***

In this project, the object of investigation is the persuasiveness of the discourse and the construction and marketing of alternative realities, in subtly or overtly racist and nationalist discourses. The framework developed by Wodak *et al.* (1999) to study discriminatory discourse provides the tools to gain insight into the online discourse of extreme right parties and has been adapted to the needs of this thesis. The discourse-historical approach was initially developed to study the constitution of an anti-Semitic stereotype image that emerged in public discourse in the 1986 Austrian presidential campaign of Kurt Waldheim (Mitten, 1992; Gruber, 1991; Wodak *et al.*, 1999; in Wodak, 2001: 70). The approach was further developed in studies dedicated to the racist discourse against Romanian immigrants and to the discourse about nation and national identity in Austria (see Matouschek *et al.*, 1995; Wodak *et al.*, 1999; cited in Wodak, 2001: 71). Discourses of national sameness ('us') and otherness or difference ('them') are identified and analysed in relation to political and social exclusion of specific out-

groups (Wodak 2001: 70). Without pre-empting the analysis of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse, it could legitimately be assumed that, as an extreme right party, the categorisation of people and the identification of an antagonist group (see van Leeuwen, 1993) could be a feature of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse.

In their article on the discursive construction of national identities and nations, Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak (1999) claim that through the triangulation in their methodology and methods, they were able to provide a detailed picture of Austrian identity in public and quasi-private settings of various degrees of formality. They were also able to identify and contrast divergent concepts of national identity as well as divergent identity narratives and highlight the multidimensionality of the phenomenon under enquiry (see de Cillia *et al.*, 1999). In order to reach a similar outcome for this specific project, the research methodology adopts a similar research design to de Cillia's *et al.* (1999) and Wodak's (2001) where they studied discourse in terms of *three interrelated dimensions*: 1) the content/topic; 2) the strategies and 3) the linguistic means and forms of realisation.

#### *Dimensions of discourse*

In the *first dimension* – content – de Cillia's *et al.* (1999) distinguish between semantic macro-areas present in the discourse under investigation. *The second dimension* – strategies – refers to “more or less accurate and more or less intentional plans of practices adopted to achieve a particular social, political,

psychological or linguistic aim” (Wodak, 2001: 73). For example, they identified constructive strategies<sup>50</sup>, where persuasive linguistic acts serve to build a particular national identity and establish solidarity and identification with the ‘we-group’, and at the same time distancing and marginalising from the ‘others’ (Wodak, 2001; de Cillia’s *et al.*, 1999). There are also identity perpetuation and justification strategies which attempt to maintain, support and reproduce national identity, to support continuity. In that scheme, the immigrants are constructed as a threat to national identity (Wodak, 2001; de Cillia’s *et al.*, 1999). Justification and legitimation strategies are used to defend and preserve the problematic narrative of controversial events in national history. *The third dimension* of discourse analysis looks more specifically at the linguistic means and the forms of realisation, with a focus on lexical units, argumentation schemes and syntactical means expressing the preliminarily identified strategies (Wodak, 2001; de Cillia’s *et al.*, 1999). In this third dimension, particular attention is granted to the use of pronouns such as ‘we’, ‘you’ or ‘them’, the use of metonymy, synecdoche, personification and their particular effect on discourse, its persuasiveness, and so on, always in accordance with the strategies in action in the given discourse. It is worth pointing out that the discourse-historical approach finds its focal point in the field of politics, where it tries to develop conceptual frameworks for political discourse (Meyer, 2001: 22).

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<sup>50</sup> Transformation strategies are used in order to transform the meaning of one well-established aspect of national identity into another. Dismantling and destructive strategies serve to demythologize or demolish existing national identities or elements of them.

#### ***5.4.2. Characteristics of the discourse-historical approach***

##### *Interdisciplinarity*

The discourse-historical approach is characterised by its interdisciplinarity, the principle of triangulation and the ethnographic approach to sources of data (Titscher *et al.*, 2000: 158). The first characteristic is the orientation towards interdisciplinarity; for example, in their analysis of the discursive construction of Austrian nation and national identities, de Cillia *et al.* (1999) combined historical, socio-political and linguistic perspectives. Similarly in this project, an eclectic mix of approaches is used, for example marketing theory, argumentation theory, rhetoric and persuasiveness, and political theory, to name only a few. The content of an utterance must be confronted with historical events and facts, as well as published reports in order to highlight intertextuality. Texts must be interpreted by specialists in other subjects, to stay true to the principle of interdisciplinarity, which is an important characteristic of the approach (Wodak *et al.*, 1990: 57). In addition, texts must be described as precisely as possible at all linguistic levels (Wodak *et al.*, 1990: 57).

##### *Triangulation*

The second characteristic is the principle of triangulation. The validity of the favoured interpretations of discursive events must be theoretically justified (Wodak, 2001: 65). This is another reason why Wodak (200) advocated triangulation in the discourse-historical approach, where, through different approaches and methods, along with varied empirical data and background

information, bias is minimised. Triangulation permits exploration of the interconnectedness of discursive and other social practices as well as structures (Titscher *et al.*, 2000: 157). To go back to de Cillia's *et al.* (1999) article, in order to explore the "interconnectedness of discursive practice and extra-linguistic social structure", de Cillia *et al.* (1999: 157) apply the principle of triangulation, i.e. several inter-disciplinary methodological, theoretical approaches are used to analyse the discourse under investigation.

### *Fieldwork and ethnography*

Thirdly, the study should always incorporate fieldwork and ethnography to study the subject of the research from the inside, as a precondition for any further analysis and theorising (Wodak, 2001: 68). This last requirement for the application of a discourse-historical approach of discourse analysis can prove to be problematic. Any interviews, participant observation, or direct interaction with the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang has been dismissed at an early stage (because, as was explained earlier, there is an issue of direct access to the 'site'). However, in Reisigl and Wodak (2001), the authors also restricted their data in their case studies. The most important thing is to be sure to contextualise the websites and their analysis within their broad socio-political and historical context. If possible, other sources of data, such as speeches or programmes, can be added in order to complement findings.

## *Context*

In addition to the three characteristics developed above, the discourse-historical approach stresses the importance of the ‘context’ of the discursive events. It is important to record setting and context as accurately as possible, given the importance of context in the understanding and interpretation of the discourse. According to Wodak (2001: 65), the CDA approach “attempts to integrate a large quantity of available knowledge about the historical sources and the background of the social and political field in which discursive ‘events’ are embedded”. In addition, the historical dimension of discourse is analysed by exploring the ways in which particular genres of discourse are subject to diachronic change (Wodak *et al.*, 1994, 1990). Because the discourse-historical approach is characterised by a focus on a specific problem and not on specific linguistic devices, the analysis draws on an eclectic pool of theoretical and methodological approaches. The understanding of the object under investigation dictates the choice of the most useful and relevant theories and methods. Besides, there must be a constant movement between theory and empirical data. Because intertextual and interdiscursive relationships are investigated, it is important to consider recontextualisation in order to connect genres, topics and arguments. The historical context is granted a particular position in this approach (hence its name). It is always analysed and integrated into the interpretation of discourses and texts (Wodak, 2001: 70). As noted before, for CDA research in general, practice is the ultimate goal. Research findings must enlighten practice, and be applied with the aim of changing certain discursive and social practices (Wodak, 2001: 70).

The following section provides an illustration of how a critical discourse analysis is conducted. A text edited by the Vlaams Blok was selected, because it encapsulates the ideology of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang and represents a rich source of rhetorical and persuasive textual artefacts.

## **6. Illustration: application of CDA. Frank Vanhecke's editorial<sup>51</sup>**

### **6.1. Introduction**

Wodak's *et al.* (1999) approach to the study of discriminatory discourses provides the basis for analysis of the Vlaams Blok and the Vlaams Belang's respective discourses. More particularly, a selection of texts from both parties have been analysed in detail covering a range of communication materials including brochure campaigns, newsletters, leaflets and the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's respective websites. The following chapters (5 and 6) provide a full account of this detailed analysis.

The aim of the next section is therefore to provide an illustration of a full CDA of an online editorial from the Vlaams Blok. The text was written after the Vlaams Blok's condemnation for racism and the announcement of the subsequent disbanding of the party. The understanding of the research subject should dictate the choice of the most useful and relevant theories and methods. In the case of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, Jäger's (2001) method has proved particularly

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<sup>51</sup> Full text available in <http://vlaamsblok.be/index.shtml>, and Appendix 3

invaluable when integrated with Wodak's approach. The combination of the two has facilitated a fine tuning of the analysis of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's communication material. Therefore, along with the identification and analysis of the three interrelated dimensions<sup>52</sup> of the discourse-historical approach (i.e. content, strategies and linguistic means), Jäger's (2001) model, extends the analysis to focus on discourse as a regulating body in terms of what can be said in a certain society at a given time but also of what cannot be said or is not said. This would cover, for instance, denial strategies, relativising strategies, or strategies to remove taboos, and strategies restricting what can be said (Jäger, 2001). In Jäger's (2001: 52-61) method, the main focus is on linguistic instruments such as: figurativeness, vocabulary, pronominal structure, argumentation types, and so on.

The analysis of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's communication material<sup>53</sup> highlights the presence of strategic and rhetorical devices (such as the ones highlighted and described by Wodak and Reisigl (2001); and de Cillia *et al.* (1999)) which build a coherent argument using emotional cues to enhance the persuasiveness of the discourse. Several texts were selected and analysed (see chapter 5), but one of those stood out: a text that encapsulates all the elements of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's ideology has been identified and thoroughly analysed. It is an editorial written by Frank Vanhecke the Vlaams Blok leader,

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<sup>52</sup> Reminder: the three interrelated dimensions are: a) the semantic elements of discourse (i.e., the content or the topic); b) the strategies<sup>52</sup> adopted to achieve determined aims and; c) the linguistic means and forms of syntactical means used in the text (de Cillia *et al.*, 1999)

<sup>53</sup> The selected pages from the brochure were translated into English by the author (a native Belgian who is fluent in French, Dutch and English) and then back-translated by a professional translator, to ensure the veracity of the translation. Hence, "the cultural distance between the researcher and the researched" (Humphreys and Brown, 2002: 932) was minimized.

commenting on the condemnation of the party for racism in November 2004 and announcing the end of the Vlaams Blok era. This text is also particularly relevant because it was written and published right after the court decision. The next section provides the full text, also available in Appendix 1.

## **6.2. Full Text: “Today We Were Executed But We Will Rise”<sup>54</sup>**

*“Today (9 November), our party, the Vlaams Blok, has been condemned to death. This afternoon, the Belgian Supreme Court upheld the verdict, issued by the Court of Appeal in Ghent on 21 April, which declared the Vlaams Blok a criminal organisation. In order to preserve our party members from prosecution, we are now forced to disband. What happened in Brussels today is unique in the Western world: never has a so-called democratic regime outlawed the country's largest political party.*

*The Vlaams Blok was supported by almost 1 million voters in last June's elections. We got 24.1% of the vote in Flanders, where 60% of the Belgian population lives. Voting is compulsory in Belgium and no other party was supported by more people. Our party has grown continuously for two decades. Since 1987, it has won twelve consecutive elections in a row. Belgium, established in 1830 by French revolutionaries, is an artificial construct dominated by the Socialist Francophone minority in Wallonia. Our party's main objective is the secession of Flanders from Belgium. Flanders is the free-market oriented Dutch-speaking and politically minorised (sic) northern part of the country.*

*We are the democratic voice of an ever growing number of Flemings who, in an entirely non-violent way, want to put an end to Belgium. Our electoral strength is causing panic amongst the Belgian establishment. A recent opinion poll of the Brussels newspaper Le Soir and the Francophone state television RTBF (24 October) indicates that the Vlaams Blok currently stands at 26.9% of the Flemish vote.*

*Despite the fact that a political party should be fought in the voting booth, the Belgian regime has been harassing the Vlaams Blok with criminal prosecutions for over a decade. The Belgian Parliament, where Francophones are overrepresented, changed the Constitution in 1999 in order to limit freedom of expression. It also voted a series of new laws with the sole purpose of*

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<sup>54</sup> In <http://vlaamsblok.be/index.shtml>, as accessed in November 2004.

*criminalising and de-funding our party, including an Anti-Racism Act and an Anti-Discrimination Act which define "discrimination" so broadly that every individual can be prosecuted on the basis of them. (The text of these infamous bills can be found on our website [www.flemishrepublic.org](http://www.flemishrepublic.org)).*

*Moreover, according to Belgium's draconian new laws, every member and collaborator of an organisation that propagates "discrimination" can be punished with fines or imprisonment. Furthermore, the onus of proof has been reversed, so that the complainant does not need to prove that the accused "discriminates" or propagates "discrimination" but the latter has to prove that he does not.*

*Since 1993 the power to prosecute for discrimination and racism was transferred to a government quango, resorting directly under the Prime Minister, the so-called Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight against Racism (CEOFR). This quango has now been vindicated by the Supreme Court, an institution composed of political appointees, half of them French-speakers.*

*Have we ever condoned discrimination on the basis of race? No, but that did not matter to the Belgian establishment and its political courts. We were condemned on the basis of a selection of excerpts from texts provided by the CEOFR. These excerpts were taken from an anthology of no more than 16 texts published by local Vlaams Blok chapters between 1996 and 2000. According to the court what we wrote was not necessarily untrue, but our "intentions" were of a criminal nature. The Ghent ruling, today reaffirmed by the Supreme Court, stated that our texts (though some were mere quotes of official statistics on crime rates and social welfare expenditure and another was an article written by a female Turkish-born Vlaams Blok member about the position of women in fundamentalist Muslim societies) were published with "an intention to contribute to a campaign of hatred." Such a procès d'intention (a conviction based on speculation about our supposed motives) is a real disgrace, and the fact that the Belgian judiciary had to resort to this proves that no other reasons for convicting us could be found. We have never propagated, advocated or practised any discrimination. Never.*

*The consequences of the conviction are, however, serious. According to the law, every member of our party or everyone who has ever cooperated with it, even if he has not committed any crimes himself, becomes a criminal by the mere fact of his membership of or his cooperation with our party. The Ghent verdict literally stated: "Rendering punishable every person who belongs to or cooperates with a group or society [...] serves as an efficient means to suppress such groups or societies, as the lawmaker intended. Rendering punishable the members or collaborators of the group or society inherently jeopardizes the continued existence or functioning of the group or society [...]."*

*Indeed, the reaffirmation of the Ghent verdict by the Supreme Court forces us to disband our party in order not to endanger its members and collaborators. Therefore, a party congress next Sunday will convene to officially disband the party. We will, however, put to the congress the establishment of a new party to*

*defend the political priorities that the Vlaams Blok has always fought for: an independent and democratic Republic of Flanders; the traditional moral values of Western civilisation; and the right of the Flemings to protect their national identity and their Dutch language and culture.*

*I thank those who founded our party in 1977 and all who have supported it in the past 27 years. They have fought the good fight. I thank our one million voters. They deserve a democracy. Belgium does not want to grant them one; we will. Today, our party has been killed, not by the electorate but by the judges. We will establish a new party. This one Belgium will not be able to bury; it will bury Belgium.”*

### **6.3. Analysis**

#### **6.3.1. The semantic dimension**

The first dimension in the discourse-historical approach is about the semantic dimension, linked to the content of the discourse under investigation. Consistent with the party's ideology<sup>55</sup>, the themes tackled in the Vlaams Blok's website are the corruption of mainstream parties, the call for the independence of Flanders and the rejection of immigrants. In this editorial text (see “*Today we were executed. But we will rise*”, Appendix 3), alternative interpretations are avoided providing the impression that there is a *unique* persuasive account of “what is actually going on” (see Teo, 2002), and that the description is of a *unique* ‘reality’. Systematically on the party's website (see [www.vlaamsblok.be](http://www.vlaamsblok.be)), Frank Vanhecke claims that Flanders does not have the status and position it deserves within Belgium.

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<sup>55</sup> The Vlaams Blok's core ideology is underpinned by a platform claiming the independence of Flanders, and on an anti-immigrant stance (Camus, 2003; Faniel, 2003; Swyngedouw, 1998)

*“Flanders is the free-market oriented Dutch-speaking and politically marginalised northern part of the country”.*  
<http://vlaamsblok.be/index.shtml>).

*“The Belgian Parliament, where Francophones are overrepresented [...]”.*  
<http://vlaamsblok.be/index.shtml>).

Therefore rejecting this situation and embracing the Vlaams Blok’s view is normal and legitimate, especially since the Vlaams Blok holds that Belgium itself does not have any legitimate foundation: Belgium is “[...] *is an artificial construct* [...]”.

### **6.3.2. The strategic dimension**

The strategic dimension refers to “more or less accurate and more or less intentional plans of practices adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic aim” (Wodak, 2001: 73). Several rhetorical devices and narrative strategies can be identified in Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang’s discourse, which contribute to providing a clear and persuasive narrative for the reader. First, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang’s political and identity struggle is presented in a typical ‘us’ versus ‘them’ dichotomy. For instance, in the same editorial, Frank Vanhecke links Flemish identity to the party’s struggle for political existence.

*“[about the creation of the new party, the Vlaams Belang] the establishment of a new party to defend the political priorities that the Vlaams Blok has always fought for: an independent and democratic Republic of Flanders; the traditional moral values of western civilisation; and the right of the Flemings to protect their national identity and their Dutch language and culture”*

Second, dismantling or de-legitimizing strategies were also identified in the same text where opponents are systematically delegitimized. Dismantling and destructive strategies serve to de-mythologise or demolish existing national identities or elements of them (de Cillia *et al.*, 1999). For example, Frank Vanhecke starts by undermining Belgian identity, by explaining its lack of substance: *“Belgium, established in 1830 by French revolutionaries, is an artificial construct dominated by the Socialist French-speaking minority in Wallonia”*; and goes on to argue that anti-democratic attitudes are embedded in Belgium because the government only serves the interests of a French-speaking minority, to the detriment of Flemings:

*“What happened in Brussels today is unique in the western world: never has a so-called democratic regime outlawed the country's largest political party.”*

*“Despite the fact that a political party should be fought in the voting booth, the Belgian regime has been harassing the Vlaams Blok with criminal prosecutions for over a decade.”*

*“I thank our one million voters. They deserve a democracy. Belgium does not want to grant them one; we will.”*

Thus in addition to avoidance strategies (where problematic issues are carefully avoided, for example with the redefinition of polemical terms and concepts), reversal strategies can be identified where the role of victim and attacker are reversed.

*“Unequal chances”, “ethnic unemployment”, and the supposed “racism” are only a consequence of a perfectly incoherent immigration policy. It was the case yesterday, it is still the case today. (Vlaams Blok, 2004; pp. 6-7; Appendix 11)*

Reversal strategies can be identified in several documents from the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. For example, the Vlaams Blok was found guilty of racism. However, Frank Vanhecke argues that this decision was itself based on the division between French-speakers and Flemings. For example, it explicitly states that the judges, who condemned the Vlaams Blok, are politically appointed, and are French-speaking:

*“Since 1993 the power to prosecute for discrimination and racism was transferred to a government quango, resorting directly under the Prime Minister, the so-called Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight against Racism (CEOFR). This quango has now been vindicated by the Supreme Court, an institution composed of political appointees, half of them Francophone.”*

If one follows this line of thought, the condemnation of the Vlaams Blok could be interpreted as a political decision based on ethnicity (Flemings vs. Walloons<sup>56</sup>), which would make itself illegal and racist.

*“The Belgian Parliament, where Francophones are overrepresented, changed the Constitution in 1999 in order to limit freedom of expression. It also voted in a series of new laws with the sole purpose of criminalising and bankrupting and de-funding our party [...].”*

van Dijk (1993; 1991) indicates that reversal strategies are typical in anti-anti-racist theories, where those who fight intolerance and discrimination are themselves accused of being intolerant and against ‘freedom of speech’. It is worth reiterating that the editorial begins by stating that the Vlaams Blok is a successful party representing the Flemish voice.

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<sup>56</sup> The inhabitants of Brussels are referred to as the *Brusseleirs* (as used in Brussels dialect), along with the use of Flemish or Flemings, for the inhabitants of Flanders, and Walloons for the inhabitants of Wallonia.

*“The Vlaams Blok was supported by almost 1 million voters in last June's elections. We got 24.1% of the vote in Flanders, where 60% of the Belgian population live. ”*

*“we are the democratic voice of an ever growing number of Flemings [...]”<sup>57</sup>.*

In Frank Vanhecke's editorial, it seems that the roles have been reversed and the Vlaams Blok opposition to the court decision and the institutions which instigated it, is constructed as a legitimate and democratic struggle. This reversal strategy has been identified in several instances in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse.

For example:

*“Have we ever condoned discrimination on the basis of race? No, but that did not matter to the Belgian establishment and its political courts.”*

*“They [the media and political leaders] are co-responsible for the climate of intolerance in which Haider, Le Pen and Dewinter are presented as a threat to democracy and therefore a legitimate target. To prevent further tragedies I call on politicians and journalists to stop demonising the Vlaams Blok.”<sup>58</sup>*

Reversal strategies also involve shifting the focus of attention from one's own questionable acts to the motives of those who disapprove of his or her violations (Sykes and Matza, 1957). Within the Vlaams Blok discourse, condemners are identified and named, mainly traditional parties and the media seen as serving their

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<sup>57</sup> [http://vlaamsblok.be/site\\_engels\\_index.shtml](http://vlaamsblok.be/site_engels_index.shtml)

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.vlaamsblok.be/index.shtml>

interest. For example, in the Frequently Asked Questions section of the Vlaams Blok website<sup>59</sup>, in answer to the question ‘*Is the VB racist?*’ the party replies:

*“The VB is certainly not a racist party; we have been branded [racist] by the traditional parties and their friends from the media, and they blocked us in a political monster trial.”*<sup>60</sup>

The argument here is that it is the political will of the traditional parties to undermine the Vlaams Blok’s credibility and legitimacy that has led to Vlaams Blok being branded racist. In summary, by condemning the condemners, definitions of racism and discrimination are refuted and reframed as being political tools used to limit the Vlaams Blok’s freedom of speech.

### **6.3.3. The linguistic dimension**

The third dimension of discourse-historical analysis focusses on the linguistic means and the forms of realisation, such as lexical units, argumentation schemes and syntactical means expressing the strategies identified in the strategic dimension analysis. The important feature identified here is the choice of words. For example, the heading “*A party unlike any other*” is a recurring feature of the Vlaams Blok’s website. It introduces all the leader’s columns on the Vlaams Blok website (see [www.vlaamsblok.be](http://www.vlaamsblok.be)). According to Teo (2000: 14), the function of headings is to form a “cognitive macro-structure that serves as an important strategic cue to control the way readers process and make sense of the report”. It announces immediately the party’s positioning strategy (stressing its

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<sup>59</sup> <http://vlaamsblok.be/afdrukken/afdrukken.php>

<sup>60</sup> <http://vlaamsblok.be/afdrukken/afdrukken.php>

differentiation from other parties). It states that the party is unique and different from the other mainstream political parties which are consistently depicted by the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang as corrupt and unreliable. The heading therefore embodies a political promise to the reader that the Vlaams Blok is different and will do things differently.

In addition, a repertoire of 'confrontation' has been identified, in the Vlaams Blok's discourse. The words used in the text strengthen the dichotomy between the party and its supporters and their opponents willing to bring it down. It is: a) describing the action of the opponents with words such as: "*forces*", "*endanger*", "*killed*", "*bury*", "*execute*", "*terrorism*", "*non-founded reports*", "*hate*", which could associate the opponent's actions with undemocratic and violent practices; and b) describing actions related to the Vlaams Blok with: "*defend*"; "*fought for*"; "*protect*"; "*the good fight*"; "*bury*" (but only in reaction to the establishment attempt to bury the party), which relates the Vlaams Blok's actions to the concept of self-defence<sup>61</sup>. Other rhetorical devices, such as metaphors and metonyms are also present in the analysed texts. For example, across the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's communication material, the party portrays itself as "*the voice*" of Flemish interests and Flemish citizens: "*we are the democratic voice of an ever growing number of Flemings*"<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>61</sup> For example, in 1991 the theme of the Vlaams Blok's campaign was self-defence and was illustrated by the image of boxing gloves.

<sup>62</sup> [http://vlaamsblok.be/site\\_engels\\_index.shtml](http://vlaamsblok.be/site_engels_index.shtml)

With regard to the syntax and punctuation used in the Vlaams Blok's website, there is a recurrent use of inverted commas around the word '*discrimination*' or '*racism*'. The party questions the definition of the word by the Anti-Discrimination Act:

*"[...] Anti-Racism Act and an Anti-Discrimination Act [which] define "discrimination" so broadly that every individual can be prosecuted on the basis of them. (The text of these infamous bills can be found on our website [www.flemishrepublic.org](http://www.flemishrepublic.org))"*.

The questioning of the significance attached to 'discrimination' is also implied in the next paragraph by Frank Vanhecke:

*"Moreover, according to Belgium's draconian new laws, every member and collaborator of an organisation that propagates "discrimination," can be punished with fines or imprisonment. Furthermore, the onus of proof has been reversed, so that the complainant does not need to prove that the accused "discriminates" or propagates "discrimination," but the latter has to prove that he does not"*.

Every time the word 'discrimination' is used in Frank Vanhecke's editorial, it is in quotation marks. This may imply that the party disagrees with the meaning attached to the word. Definitions of racism and discrimination are refuted and reframed as being political tools used to limit the Vlaams Blok's freedom of speech.

*"The understanding of racism is used today as a term of abuse to seal the mouth of political opponents."<sup>63</sup>*

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<sup>63</sup> <http://vlaamsblok.be/afdrukken/afdrukken.php>

In the party's discourse, racism and xenophobia are clearly reframed, redefined and ultimately dismissed within the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's communication material. This provides a political product which is disassociated from its questionable features, and thus becomes less problematic for voters' consumption, thereby increasing its appeal in the political market.

## **7. Conclusion**

The adopted approach to analysing the texts is critical and interpretative, identifying the dimensions constituting discourse, namely the semantic, the linguistic and the strategic dimensions developed by Wodak and her associates. The critical and discursive approach adopted here necessitated a methodology that would address two issues. First, the requirement of a given philosophical stance towards reality and scholarly research is recognised. Second, the methodology addresses the challenges attached to the analysis of complex, potentially polemical and contested discourse: marketing, political marketing and xenophobic and discriminatory discourse of the Western European extreme right, and arguably the best success story of the extreme right family, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. The preliminary CDA of an online text of the Vlaams Blok, selected for the purposes of illustration has not only demonstrated the richness of the data, but also the relevance of CDA in approaching the particular discourses studied. CDA indeed focusses on the connection between meaning and power, and uncovers taken-for-granted stories and recognises the ideological nature of discourses, even

the most naturalised and invisible ones. For example, CDA, with its outspoken political and emancipatory goals, has already been applied to racist, sexist, or identity-related discourses.

In short, the following chapters include the analysis of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse and marketing. First, chapters 6 and 7 demonstrate that the party produces powerful, convincing arguments by deploying textual strategies generally (Titscher *et al.*, 2000; de Cillia *et al.*, 1999; Wodak *et al.*, 1999) and more specifically by deploying lexical, grammatical, and rhetorical devices (Butt *et al.*, 2004; Tonks, 2002; Jowett and O'Donnell, 2000; Sornig, 1989). In chapter 8, the focus is on the marketing methods and techniques that are deployed with increasing sophistication to build a politically powerful brand. The analysis of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse provides a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of language and discourse in a fusion of politics and marketing.

# **Chapter 6: Discourse-historical analysis of the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang's publications**

## **1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the key findings of the critical discourse analysis of a set of texts produced by the Vlaams Blok and the Vlaams Belang. The chapter aims to analyse the written communication material and to highlight the identification of the rhetorical and other textual strategies. A critical discourse analysis was conducted on a range of publicly available communication of the Vlaams Blok and the Vlaams Belang. The methodological framework proved particularly well-suited to address the complexity and sensitivity/polemical nature of an extreme right party's discourse. As explained and illustrated in the previous chapter on methodology, Wodak's discourse-historical approach provides the structured method to analyse the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang discourse. The discourse-historical approach of critical discourse analysis focusses on three interrelated dimensions of discourse (semantic, strategic and linguistic), and focusses acute attention on the socio-historical context of the production of discourse.

Unless stated otherwise, the combined name *Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang* is used to refer to both the Vlaams Blok and the Vlaams Belang, whenever the argument is valid for both parties. This use also highlights the continuity between both

parties. The Vlaams Belang is the heir of the Vlaams Blok; a notion confirmed by controversial comments by the party leaders, despite the softening of the most radical stances of the Vlaams Blok. The critical analysis of both parties has indeed highlighted a continuity of policies and a continuity of ideology.

This chapter explores the rhetorical strategies of the party, and the way it uses language (vocabulary, grammar, rhetoric) to create persuasive arguments, articulate sound argument strategies, and eventually gain voters' trust. The analysis of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse has three main dimensions (strategic, linguistic and semantic) and this chapter follows the same structure (strategic, linguistic and semantic), presenting the most salient features of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse within its specific context. Quotations taken from the website, newsletters and brochures have been selected for their relevance in order to illustrate the main issues highlighted during the critical discourse analysis of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang communication material.

## **2. Persuasion**

Persuasion can be viewed as a framing concept for marketing (Tonks, 2002; Laufer and Paradeise, 1990). Unsurprisingly, persuasion is also an important concept in politics. Persuasion could be simply defined as a communicative process which aims to influence others. A more complete definition is provided by O'Donnell and Kable (1982: 9) who define persuasion as

“a complex, continuing, interactive process in which a sender and a receiver are linked by symbols, verbal and nonverbal, through which the persuader attempts to influence the persuadee to adopt a change in a given attitude or behaviour because the persuadee has had perceptions enlarged or changed”.

A necessary ‘ingredient’ in persuasion as a kind of cause of behaviour change is that the person persuaded consciously assents to the pressure of the vector of influence (Blair, 2004). In other words, the persuadee is free to resist the persuasion attempt. This definition of persuasion can be applied in the case of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang who play the role of the persuader and communicate with various audiences (e.g. party members, sympathisers, potential voters, the general public, government) via different channels (e.g. the internet, print media and TV). The party attempts to persuade and convince (without coercion) the audience to reinforce or change their points of view, and grant their vote. The desired behaviour pursued by the persuader is the voters’ support at the poll, a change in attitude and opinion, and ultimately a change in behaviour. The active persuader knows that he or she has to appeal to the audience’s needs if he or she wants them to adopt the message (Jowett and O’Donnell, 2000), because an active audience also seeks to have its needs fulfilled by the persuader (Jowett and O’Donnell, 2000). Accordingly, political marketing communications is a complex, continuing process that produces a type of persuasive message, via symbols, verbal and nonverbal devices such as advertisements, websites, colours,

photographs, pictures, myths, metaphors and branded merchandise. The political party engages in a process of persuasion with the electorate, the general public, party members and other parties, etc., in other words, all the relevant audiences.

*Goals of persuasion: response shaping, reinforcing and changing*

According to Jowett and O'Donnell (2000), the goal of persuasion is to make its recipient voluntarily adopt a point of view or behaviour. The goals of both the persuader and persuadee are fulfilled by the process of persuasion (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2000). This sets persuasion apart from propaganda, where only the propagandist<sup>64</sup> benefits from the communication. Jowett and O'Donnell (2000: 28) categorised persuasion's goals as 1) *response shaping*, 2) *response reinforcing* and 3) *response changing*. First, in *response shaping* the persuader teaches the audience how to behave and offers positive reinforcement for that behaviour (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2000). In this scenario, if the audience is rewarded for its positive response, then positive attitudes are developed towards what is learnt (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2000). This would be the case, for example, in situations where the party is aiming its communication at existing members and local political candidates. It could be assumed that in this specific case, the audience

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<sup>64</sup> The goal of persuasion is to make its recipient voluntarily adopt a point of view or a behaviour (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2000). However, a persuader can mislead its audience about its true intention. If the people of the audience are aware that the persuader has a hidden agenda, they can still voluntarily comply with it. When the audience believes the spoken intent of the persuader, and is unaware of his or her true intention, they can be manipulated and it is considered as propaganda. "More commonly however, the propagandist exploits an audience's beliefs or values or group norms in such a way as to fan the fires of prejudice or self-interest" (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2000: 34-35). Both parties (persuader and persuadee) have their needs fulfilled. The audience's needs – the reinforcement of prejudicial or self-serving attitudes – get fulfilled and spoken, but the propagandist's needs, even if fulfilled, are not revealed (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2000: 35).

might already hold favourable attitudes towards the persuader. An example could be found in the internal documents of the organisation (e.g. *Brochure: Political communication techniques – Part 1: The personal campaign of the candidate*), where the party leaders advocate the use of political marketing for the party's local candidates.

Second, in the *response reinforcing* scenario, the audience already has a positive attitude towards the subject. The persuader reminds them about their positive attitude and stimulates them to feel more strongly by demonstrating their attitudes, through specified forms of behaviour (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2000: 29). Examples of such a form of persuasion are the regularly organised conferences and rallies organised by the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. Open to all, from the mildly interested to the enthusiastic party supporters, the aim of such events is to reinforce shared goals and identity. For example, the Vlaams Belang Youth camps (and formerly Vlaams Blok Youth camps), Summer Universities, the semi-annual congress and other thematic conferences (e.g. on immigration, criminality or economics) organised by the party would also fit into this category of response-reinforcing persuasion.

The third case of persuasion identified by Jowett and O'Donnell (2000) is response changing. In *response changing*, the persuader attempts to make people switch from one attitude to another, to change behaviour, or adopt a new behaviour. This is the most difficult kind of persuasion, because people are reluctant to change (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2000: 29). The persuader has to relate the change to

something in which the persuadee already believes referred to as an ‘anchor’. Anchors can be beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, and/or group norms. To be aware of an audience’s anchors, the persuader must know the audience and analyse its needs, desires, beliefs, attitudes and values, along with its concern about the social outcome of the persuasive communication (Jowett and O’Donnell, 2000: 34). The tools of political marketing (market research, segmentation, targeting and branding) are useful here (as discussed in chapter 8). This form of persuasion may well be the one in which Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang engages in the most, since it has to consistently defend itself against political opponents, and attract more voters.

In the case of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, the main focus lies in response changing and response shaping scenarios. These forms of persuasion are potentially targeted at an ‘external’ audience, consisting not only of sympathisers and voters, but also of non-sympathetic readers and opponents’ audiences, i.e. people the party needs to positively influence (which is arguably the most difficult task). The analysed texts therefore fall within this category, and the subsequent discussion is concerned with this type of persuasion and the marketing strategies deployed to achieve response changing and shaping goals.

### **3. Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang: most salient features**

A large corpus of documents edited by the Vlaams Blok and by the Vlaams Belang has been analysed. There are texts and photographs from campaign and thematic

brochures, leaflets, online newsletters, and webpages. Clearly, CDA is a lengthy and detailed procedure. This is why among the common themes identified, the most relevant and salient are presented within each respective dimension of the discourse-historical method of CDA<sup>65</sup>: 1) the semantic dimension, 2) the strategic dimension, and 3) the linguistic dimension. The analysis highlighted the complexity of the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang's discourse, its coherence and cohesion, and its persuasiveness. The CDA of the discourse of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang allows a better understanding as to why this discourse can persuade and attract voters. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang proposes a corpus of well-built arguments, written in accessible language (in French and Dutch). Salient quotations from the Vlaams Blok and the Vlaams Belang have been selected and inserted to illustrate the points being made. These quotations are easily identified in an italicised font and in indented paragraphs. The sources of the quotations are indicated, with reference to the corresponding appendix.

### 3.1. Semantic dimension

In the discourse-historical approach, the first dimension requesting the attention of the critical discourse analyst is the content or *semantic dimension*. The semantic analysis of various texts taken from several sources<sup>66</sup> highlights the recurrence of a few significant themes. Consistent with the party's ideology<sup>67</sup>, the main themes

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<sup>65</sup> A detailed description of CDA steps and processes is provided in chapter 5.

<sup>66</sup> That is, the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang's respective websites, thematic brochures and campaign brochures

<sup>67</sup> The Vlaams Blok's core ideology is underpinned by a platform claiming the independence of Flanders, and by an anti-immigrant stance (Camus, 2003; Faniel, 2003; Swyngedouw, 1998). One theme is also anti-party, i.e. the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang criticises the other political parties as corrupt and unconcerned with citizens' interests.

tackled in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's communication material are the corruption and incompetence of mainstream parties, a tougher approach to crime, the independence of Flanders, and the rejection of immigrants (along with a denunciation of the immigration policies and the failure of the 'imposed' multicultural model of society). These are addressed in relation to democracy, freedom of speech, racism, and the defence of people's interests. These topics allow the party to present its political vision and direct the reader's attention towards a set of selected societal issues, considered as important or relevant by the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang.

Each of these most salient themes is analysed in the following section in its own right and linked to the other themes. One characteristic of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse is its coherence: the developed themes work together, reinforce each other, and generally provide well-constructed arguments and believable stories. Therefore it should come as no surprise that themes within the semantic analysis overlap and are analysed in relation to one another. Each subsequent section includes the analysis and discussion of a single topic. Quotations from different sources (e.g. website, campaign brochure, newsletters) are included and provide an overview of the content of the party's discourse. This is not, however, a content analysis, but rather a thematic synthesis of the party's views and a collection of core topics developed by the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang and their significance and contribution to the overarching Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang discourse. These themes are: democracy, freedom of speech and racism; *vox populi*; selective screening; and reality building.

### **3.1.1. Democracy**

Democracy is a theme frequently developed by the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. The political project of the party is presented as a response to the perceived lack of democratic practices in Belgium, and as an alternative (i.e. honest, uncorrupt, and resolutely democratic). For example, the general theme of the introductory text for a brochure, entitled *Brussels, My City – Facts – Reality* (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2-3; see Appendix 4), is democracy. More specifically the party addresses the many dangers that democracy faces, and the voters' duty to re-instate a cleansed form of democracy (by voting for the Vlaams Blok).

*“The judgement of Ghent’s Court of Appeal, is the nth signal that democracy does not feel well in our country. It is indeed a political trial in its purest form.”* (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2-3)

The author of this text is Frank Vanhecke, president of the former Vlaams Blok, and current president of the Vlaams Belang. With *“the judgement of Ghent’s Court of Appeal”*, the text is referring to the condemnation of the Vlaams Blok by a Belgian court. The rest of the text frames this condemnation as a political set-up against the Vlaams Blok. The other political parties' resolve to fight the Vlaams Blok by any means necessary (i.e. not at the poll) is evidenced by the modification of the Belgian constitution to stop state financial subsidies<sup>68</sup> to the party:

*“All the parties, Flemish and French-speakers (except for the Vlaams Blok, of course), have voted for one modification of the law after another, in order to ban the Vlaams Blok and financially dry it out. The Constitution*

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<sup>68</sup> In Belgium, all political parties belonging to the parliamentary group are financed by the state (see van Biezen, 2003).

*itself was modified for this sole purpose! A people's jury did not inspire confidence in the parties in power. Could you imagine that the Vlaams Blok benefits from too much sympathy or common sense from our people! No. Professional magistrates, who could often be put under political pressures, were imperatively necessary. All year long, one talks about political nominations in the legal world. Do you think that today, all of a sudden, at the opportunity of this trial, eminently political, that political nominations wouldn't play any role???"*(Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2-3; see Appendix 4)

Frank Vanhecke leads the reader to the conclusion that the Vlaams Blok was framed by political collusion: the result was the legal challenge and the subsequent condemnation of the party. According to the Vlaams Blok, such actions (the lawsuit and the condemnation) would not have been possible in a truly democratic country. This is clearly expressed by:

*"These affairs are common currency in banana republics, they don't have their place in democracy"* (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2-3).

The comparison of Belgium with a banana republic (i.e. a politically unstable country that is often a dictatorship) is used several times in the party's public communication material. It seems to express the level of contempt in which the Vlaams Blok holds Belgium and its democratic system.

*"I thank our one million voters. They deserve a democracy. Belgium does not want to grant them one; we will."* (<http://vlaamsblok.be/index.shtml>, as accessed on 17/11/2004; see Appendix 3)

In the campaign brochure entitled '*Touche pas à la démocratie*' (i.e. 'Don't meddle with Democracy' (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2-3), the party highlights the undemocratic practices of the governing parties:

*“These last months, several facts, which are totally unacceptable from a democratic point of view, happened. First, one has accepted the right to vote to foreigners who refuse to get our nationality, for the next commune elections. A large majority of the population is opposed to the foreigners’ right to vote, and nevertheless, it was imposed on us.”* (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2-3, see appendix 5).

The use of ‘*us*’ in this paragraph is significant. The Vlaams Blok explains that, because of the imposed *cordon sanitaire*, no matter how successful the Vlaams Blok is at the polls, the mainstream political parties still refuse to form a governing coalition with an extreme right party. After the 2004 elections, due to the excellent electoral results of the Vlaams Blok, the other parties had to form an awkward coalition with all parties thereby leaving the Vlaams Blok as the sole party in opposition. Therefore, the situation provided grounds for the claim that the only ones opposing the foreigners’ right to vote are the voters and the Vlaams Blok, subsumed in the word ‘*us*’ (which also indicates the solidarity of the Vlaams Blok with people’s interests). A few sentences later, the Vlaams Blok summarises this stance by claiming that:

*“The parties have proved that they were not interested in the people’s opinions”* (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2-3, Appendix 5)

The Vlaams Blok here stresses the importance it grants to voters and their opinions, contrarily to the governing parties. After all, the party’s new name — *Vlaams Belang* — means *Flemish Interest*. The text<sup>69</sup> finally makes an allusion to the

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<sup>69</sup> For full text of the *Cour de Cassation* in French, see <http://www.juridat.be/juris/jucf.htm>. For the text in Dutch, see <http://www.juridat.be/jurispdf/R/C/04/B/RC04B91.pdf>

reason for the ban placed on the Vlaams Blok, by mentioning the need for a debate on immigration within Belgian society. The court found the three associations (see chapter 4, p.83) affiliated to the Vlaams Blok to be guilty of breaching the law against racism. However, the Vlaams Blok appears to be deflecting this issue, by re-contextualising it as a mere debate on immigration.

*“There is no possible democracy without a broad society debate. No debate has any sense without freedom of speech, on as large a scale as possible, including on the theme of immigration”. (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 3)*

In other words, the party explains the situation as a punishment for actually tackling the issue of immigration, rather than a condemnation for racism based on facts.

#### *The ‘70 points programme’ and open discrimination*

The party was condemned for advocating discriminatory policies, such as a separate education system for Muslim children, or a forced repatriation of all immigrants up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation. Those policies are collated in the infamous ‘*Immigration: the Solution. 70 Propositions for the Resolution of the Foreigners’ Issue*’<sup>5</sup>, which was written by Filip Dewinter, in 1992. This pamphlet, summarising the party’s policies on immigration, served as the justification for the creation of the *cordon sanitaire*, which has been effectively isolating and excluding the Vlaams Blok (and the Vlaams Belang) from political power at any level of Belgian politics. The following quotation from Filip Dewinter’s above

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mentioned book (also simply known as the ‘70 points programme’) illustrates the nature of some of those discriminatory policies:

***“The growing number of foreign children in our education system poses a series of problems. The different culture, the uprooting, the backwardness at school, and sometimes the different social class are a danger for the quality of education provided to our own children. When one forces foreign Muslim children to integrate and assimilate in our society, we are breaking, in an authoritarian and artificial way, the link with their own culture. This is why it is necessary to organise a separate and independent education system for foreign Muslim children. This Muslim education is an education system that must be created in parallel with the existing networks [...]”*** (Filip Dewinter, 1992; emphasis added)<sup>70</sup>

The ‘70 points programme’ was adopted shortly after the Vlaams Blok breakthrough in 1991. Although in 2001, the party distanced itself from the ‘70 points programme’, opponents of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang seem dubious about the extent to which the party has actually abandoned the measures advocated in the programme in their propaganda and electoral programmes (Haelsterman, 2001). Haelsterman (2001) notes that the only change is that the ‘problematic’ 70 points programme is no longer on sale, and that the party representatives do not refer to the programme in public anymore. Discussing further whether or not the party has shed the policies advocated in the original publication is beyond the scope of this thesis. The focus is instead on the themes developed and how the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang links those to its political manifesto.

### *Ideology*

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<sup>70</sup> Dewinter, F. (1992), *“Immigratie: de oplossing. 70 voorstellen ter oplossing van het vreemdelingenprobleem.* Brussel: Vlaams Blok. (translation: Immigration: the solution. 70 propositions for the resolution of the foreigners’ issue.)

The party manages to link its core policies suggesting that one solution to what the party refers to as the lack of democracy in Belgium is an independent Flanders which would grant democracy to its people (which, as explained earlier, is a core element of the party's ideological programme). The documents published on the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang's respective websites are consistent with the party's ideology<sup>71</sup>. For example, in an editorial text, '*Today we were executed. But we will rise*'<sup>72</sup> (analysed in chapter 5, see section 6.3, pp.117-124). Frank Vanhecke claims that Flanders does not have the status and position it deserves within Belgium (see Appendix 3).

*"Flanders is the free-market oriented Dutch-speaking and politically marginalised northern part of the country [...]."*  
(<http://vlaamsblok.be/index.shtml>).

*"The Belgian Parliament, where French-speakers are overrepresented [...]"* (<http://vlaamsblok.be/index.shtml>).

The perceived marginalisation of Flanders by a Walloon minority and the actual financial transfer (called the solidarity transfers) from the richer Flanders Region to the less affluent capital of Brussels and region of Wallonia, are a source of bitter argument in Belgian politics.

*"It seems that Flanders must pay more for the unemployed Walloons – and that is only a portion of the annual total of the billions that flow from Flanders to Wallonia. The transfers for the unemployment fund are growing rapidly. In 1990, they were 220 million euros. In 1995, it was already 380 million euros. In 2000 it has reached 480 million euros. In 2003, the Flemings paid 728 millions for the unemployed Walloons, and in*

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<sup>71</sup> Reminder: the VB's core ideology is underpinned by a platform claiming the independence of Flanders, and on an anti-immigrant stance (Camus, 2003; Faniel, 2003; Swyngedouw, 1998)

<sup>72</sup> See <http://vlaamsblok.be/index.shtml><sup>72</sup>

*2004 there a temporary record in the transfers with, please, 840 millions. A reduction is nowhere to be seen, because the unemployed Walloons are never penalised (sanctioned). No problem, we, the Flemings, will pay the bill'* (Vlaams Belang, in [www.vlaamsbelang.be/index.php?p=6&andid=10](http://www.vlaamsbelang.be/index.php?p=6&andid=10), as accessed on the 19/04/2005; see appendix 21; emphasis added)

According to the party, the independence is necessary for Flanders to access prosperity. There are no links (affective, cultural or historical) between Flanders and Wallonia. Accepting this point of view is presented as the only logical decision, since the Vlaams Blok holds that Belgium itself does not have any legitimate foundation as a state:

*Belgium, established in 1830 by French revolutionaries, is an artificial construct [...]*" (see appendix 3).

The argument is similar in the Vlaams Belang's rhetoric:

*"We live in a country where prosperity, employment and even the territory of the Flemish majority are fundamentally harmed by the political aggression of the Walloon minority"* (Vlaams Belang, November 2006: 2, see Appendix 3).

The tone adopted here in addressing the North-South disputes has hardened, and the Vlaams Belang is urging Flemings more than ever to put an end to the French-speakers' hegemony, their unfair 'milking' of Flanders and the general lack of democracy.

*Don't meddle with democracy: Subversion of anti-racism discourse*

The Vlaams Blok links democracy with the right to freedom of speech, and the rejection of accusations of racism. This link is embodied in the heading, or slogan adopted for the brochure Nr 6 (May 2004; see Appendix 7a): “*Touche pas à la démocratie*” (i.e. “*Don't meddle with democracy*”). “*Touche pas à la démocratie*” is an important sentence, not least because it is the first thing the party says before the reader has even opened the brochure. The grammatically correct form of the negative form of the verb should be: “*ne touche pas à la démocratie*” (emphasis added). The closest English equivalent of this ‘incorrect’ grammatical use would be the inelegant: ‘meddle not with democracy’. Since the Vlaams Blok is far too careful and professional to allow such a mistake to creep into its texts, it can be concluded that “*Touche pas à la démocratie*” — a colloquial usage which is more appropriate in spoken language than in written text — might have been intentionally used.

One possible interpretation for this ‘incorrect’ grammatical usage is informed by the anti-racism movement. The phrase: “*Touche pas à*” became famous in the 1980s with the slogan “*Touche pas à mon pote*”<sup>73</sup> of SOS Racisme, a French anti-racism association (translated as “*Don't mess with my mate*”). People used to wear the recognisable hand-shaped pin sporting the slogan (see Appendix 8). The Franco-Belgian border is culturally porous and any major event in France has an

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<sup>73</sup> Translating into: “*don't mess with my mate*”. see <http://www.sos-racisme.org>.

impact in French-speaking Belgium, namely via the French-media widely watched in French-speaking Belgium.

It is interesting to note that the cover page of the Dutch-speaking version of the brochure says “*Logish toch*” (see appendix 7b), which could be translated as: “it’s logical”, or “all the same”. This is another indication that “*Touche pas à la démocratie*” could be interpreted as connecting with existing texts within the anti-racist discourse (evidence of discursive intertextuality), since the French “*Touche pas à la démocratie*” would be understood by French-speakers, more likely to know the “*Touche pas à mon pote*” anti-racist slogan. This subversion of anti-racist language by the Vlaams Blok has to be understood in a discourse which makes the link between freedom of speech and racism and discrimination. The Vlaams Blok, when saying “*don’t meddle with democracy*”, argues for the pre-eminence of democracy (therefore defined by a centrality of the right of free speech), over other concerns (such as for example individuals’ rights and discrimination).

The subversion of the anti-racist discourse is an interesting feature, consistent with the so-called reversal strategy (van Dijk, 1993, 1991), an example of what Strutton *et al.* (1994: 254) described as ‘condemning the condemners’ strategy. This ploy is also evident in the following quotation from the Vlaams Blok’s website:

*“They [the media and political leaders] are co-responsible for the climate of intolerance in which Haider, Le Pen and Dewinter are presented as a threat to democracy and therefore a legitimate target. To prevent further tragedies I call on politicians and journalists to stop demonising the*

*Vlaams Blok.*” (Vlaams Blok’s website: <http://www.vlaamsblok.be/index.shtml>, as accessed in October 2003)

In the previous quotation too, the party adopts a reversal strategy where the condemners become the condemned and where one deflects accusations of misconduct by pointing out that those who would condemn are themselves engaged in similarly disapproved activities. The next section discusses this issue in greater detail.

### ***3.1.2. Freedom of speech and anti-racism***

A salient semantic feature is the link made by the party between democracy, democratic debate and freedom of speech. In the brochure Nr.6 (May 2004: 3, see Appendix 5), the right of ‘freedom of speech’ is mentioned again to justify the party’s stance on immigration and racism. The Vlaams Blok considers that denying freedom of speech is a breach of democratic rules and rights.

*“Other scandal: the condemnation of the Vlaams Blok for “racism”. The free expression of your opinions, in this country, is from now on strangled. The Vlaams Blok is not a racist party, it only defends in a firm and decisive fashion, the rights of the Brusselseirs<sup>74</sup>. It is the reason why the regime has called upon a “tribunal” to put the Vlaams Blok offside”. (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 3)*

*“We want a Brussels where one is still rewarded for one’s work. For a Brussels where one can freely express one’s opinion”. (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 3)*

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<sup>74</sup> The inhabitants of Brussels are referred to as the *Brusseleirs* (as used in Brussels dialect), along with the use of Flemish or Flemings, for the inhabitants of Flanders, and Walloons for the inhabitants of Wallonia.

The party tackles accusations of racism, suggesting that freedom of speech has been “strangled”. ‘Freedom of speech’ was even chosen as the title of a short paragraph (see Appendix 9) included in the brochure *Feiten/Réalités* (Vlaams Blok, May 2004) written by Erick Erens, a deputy for the party. The text concerns the issue of multiculturalism and the alleged difficulties of cohabitation between native Brussels inhabitants and foreigners. The Vlaams Blok chooses here to link the issue of multiculturalism to freedom of speech, actually unambiguously referring to the Vlaams Blok’s freedom of speech. As shown earlier, both topics are intertwined in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang’s discourse.

***“Freedom of speech: Censored***

*Brussels will count soon a majority of inhabitants from foreign origin, due to the lax policies of the traditional parties. Every political commentator can confirm this: the right to vote by foreigners will cause a political earthquake in Brussels”* (‘Brussels a safe city?!’, Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 9, emphasis added, see Appendix 3)

The link between the heading and the content is not straightforward. However, a familiarity with the way the party tackles issues, and with the context of utterance of the previous quotation (campaign brochure for Brussels), directs the reader to the often mentioned freedom of speech and the right and duty to denounce the ills of multiculturalism. The party claims that its freedom to express its views on immigration and the presence of foreigners in Belgium is taken away, and the party’s voice is censored and silenced. What the other parties call racist and xenophobic stances, the Vlaams Blok call the expression of its democratic right to express itself on immigration. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang’s focus on

democracy and freedom of speech (usually, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's freedom of speech), is a key theme developed in the party literature.

### *Vlaams Belang and racism*

After its legal condemnation for racism, the Vlaams Belang has been more cautious, sending coded messages when taking its more xenophobic positions. Racism, anti-racism and freedom of speech, however, remain important themes in the new Vlaams Belang discourse. It is clear that the themes developed by both the Vlaams Blok and the Vlaams Belang have been remarkably consistent. For example, in the very first brochure of the Vlaams Belang for Brussels inhabitants: *Brussel, Bruxelles, Ma Ville, mijn stad* (2004) (i.e. Brussels, My City), of the nine featured articles, only one<sup>75</sup> is not directly linked to immigrants, multiculturalism or Islam. The Vlaams Belang links these three themes, and presents them as highly undesirable. These themes are featured in Table 1.

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<sup>75</sup> The last topic is about drugs (and about the party's view of zero tolerance and thorough approach to crime).

**Table 2- Content of the first brochure of the Vlaams Belang for Brussels, *Brussels, My City*, “The time bomb is ticking...”, (2004).**

<b>Pages</b>	<b>Heading of the article</b>	<b>Content</b>
1-2	<i>Editorial</i>	The dirty and insecure conditions of Brussels, and the incompetence of the regime in maintaining law and order.
4	<i>Islam and freedom of speech</i>	The Danish cartoons crisis and the so-called ‘Clash of civilisations’.
5	<i>Affaire Hariche. Islamic socialism is progressing</i>	The nomination of Hariche, a foreign-born deputy mayor as interim
6-7	<i>The time bomb is ticking</i>	The riots in France and the failure of the multicultural model of society
9	<i>Illegal immigrants and public works.</i>	The employment of illegal immigrants in the construction site for the future ministry building
9	<i>Unemployment</i>	The unemployment figures for Brussels, and the lack of qualified workers.
10	<i>Entrepreneurship is freedom</i>	Problems facing independent entrepreneurs
11	<i>When the CPAS of Brussels is into “plural” culture (!)<sup>76</sup></i>	The creation of a multicultural centre (with a focus on North African countries)
12-13	<i>When blood drips onto the pavement</i>	The ritual sacrifice for the Muslim Eid (Muslim festival)
14-15	<i>Drugs: no, thanks.</i>	The issue of lax policies regarding drugs (cannabis)

<sup>76</sup> The CPAS (*Centre Public d’Action Sociale, Public Centre for Social Action*) is an institution in Brussels that provides social services to the most vulnerable portion of the population. They provide financial support, but also psychological, medical and social support. It is targeted at individuals and families who could not otherwise have access to resources, or are excluded from the social security system. The “plural” culture refers to multiculturalism. This title is of course ironic and critical of the celebration of the multicultural model by institutions such as the CPAS. The Vlaams Belang criticises and mocks the word “plural” since they argue that the only culture celebrated is a North-African one.

This first brochure published by the Vlaams Belang and distributed to Brussels' inhabitants (also called here *Brusseleirs*) features a story about the Socialist Party's questionable nomination of a foreign-born interim mayor, called Hariche, to replace the actual mayor on sick leave (see Appendix 10). The most interesting feature is the heading of the article: "*Affair/File Hariche: the Islamic socialism is progressing*". Reading the article (see Appendix 10) reveals that there is no obvious link between the Socialist Party and Islam. Although the deputy mayor is a woman of Algerian origin, there is nothing to indicate that she is Muslim, or an Islamist. However, the Vlaams Belang makes the link between (foreign/North-African) origin and religion (Islam), and highlights the accession to power (even if temporary) of a Muslim/Islamist foreigner in Brussels, the capital city of Belgium and the capital of Europe. The Vlaams Belang is also attacking the Socialist Party here, by suggesting a supposed link between the Socialist Party and Islamism.

*Any alternative interpretations? The guidance for decoding*

The example above indicates the important role played by titles and headings. Alternative interpretations are avoided providing the impression that there is a *unique* persuasive account of 'what is actually going on' (see Teo, 2002), the description of a *unique* 'reality'. The problem in the nomination of a foreign-born deputy as mayor *ad interim* is not her foreign origin *per se*, but rather her supposed link to Islamism and her collaboration with the Socialist Party and the Islamists (this interpretation is guided by the article's headline "*Islamic socialism is progressing*"). The point has often been made by the Vlaams Blok in the past (see Alves Dos Santos Batista, 2004) and by the Vlaams Belang today that the

mainstream parties in power are accommodating what the party calls their ‘new electorate’:

*The life of many Brussels inhabitants will become unbearable if we do not change the situation. Police do not dare even appear in some neighbourhoods, let alone intervene, for fear of riots. Foreign inhabitants are considered **as votes in the bank**; this is why traditional parties tolerate the situation”. (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 9; emphasis added, see Appendix 9)*

In the Vlaams Blok’s brochure *Brussels, My City* (2004), the party tackles the same theme:

*“The political world is paralysed by a foreign-born community which is growing bigger and bigger, because among other, the establishment of the right to vote to foreigners and the consequences of the “quick acquisition” of Belgian nationality gives **an ever-increasing importance to this particular electoral group**”. (Vlaams Blok, 2004: 7, emphasis added; see Appendix 11)*

Similarly, the same theme is replayed in an article by the Vlaams Belang dedicated to the freedom of entrepreneurship (see Appendix 12):

*“For electoral reasons, those parties holding power do not want to ‘disturb’ their ‘new electorate’. Consequently, there is a series of gross injustices, which put a category of ‘citizens’ above laws at the expense of the others”. (Vlaams Belang, 2004: 10; emphasis added)*

The negative impact of the presence of foreigners is also highlighted on the same page where the party sets out to defend the rights and security of small business owners. The description provided is easily decoded.

*“More and more, the very nature of our shops is changing and there are other sorts of shops taking their place. This way, neighbourhood by*

*neighbourhood, our traditional shops are replaced by shops of a ‘third kind’” How long is this going to continue? (Vlaams Belang, 2004: 10; emphasis added, Appendix 12)*

This paragraph provides a clue as to who is responsible for the changes in the nature of the shops. The ‘*third kind*’ (between quotes in the original text), refers to the science-fiction genre, where the ‘*rencontres du troisième type*’ (i.e. the encounters of the third kind) refer to interaction or conflict with extraterrestrial civilisations, usually describing the first contact or invasions by alien races. The codes used by the Vlaams Belang are relatively easy to decipher because they use references to popular culture or popular phrases. The notion of invasion is therefore clear, as stressed by the opposition between “*our traditional shops*” and the shops of the third kind which are taking their place. The party might be hinting here that both cannot cohabit with each other: one is preying on the other’s environment. This is nothing new in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang’s rhetoric: for the good of everyone, Flemings and foreigners alike, one should remain in one’s own country. This is disturbingly reminiscent of the Vlaams Blok’s ‘70 points programme’ quotation, which was supposedly discarded by the leaders of the Vlaams Belang.

*“When one forces foreign Muslim children to integrate and assimilate in our society, we are breaking, in an authoritarian and artificial way, the link with their own culture. This is why, it is necessary to organise a separate and independent education system for foreign Muslim children” (Filip Dewinter, 1992)*

Therefore for the good of those children, in order to help them reintegrate their culture of origin, special education must be provided. Once again, the notion of culture, as immutable, sets people apart and prevents them from integrating into the ‘host’ society. The argument was set out by the former Vlaams Blok, and seems still valid for the actual Vlaams Belang.

### ***3.1.3. Vox Populi – the voice of the silent majority***

#### *People’s opinion*

An additional popular theme of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is what can be called the *vox populi*, or the claim that the party represents the silent majority and provides a voice to the ones remaining silent, i.e. ‘we say out loud what you think’ could be the party motto:

*“we are **the democratic voice** of an ever growing number of Flemings”*  
([http://vlaamsblok.be/site\\_engels\\_index.shtml](http://vlaamsblok.be/site_engels_index.shtml), emphasis added)

*“The Vlaams Blok will continue, no matter what, to **say what the silent majority of our country thinks**. For the 13<sup>th</sup> June elections, we ask the Brusseleirs to emit a clear signal: choose freedom of speech, for democracy, for the Vlaams Blok”. (Vlaams Blok, May 2004; Appendix 4. emphasis added)*

The following quotation links the issues of freedom of speech and democracy, but also people’s opinion:

*“Another scandal: the condemnation of the Vlaams Blok for “racism”. The free expression of your opinions, in this country, is from now on strangled. The Vlaams Blok is not a racist party, it only defends in a firm and decisive fashion, the rights of the Brusselseirs. It is the reason why the regime has called upon a “tribunal” to put the Vlaams Blok offside” (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2-3, Appendix 5, emphasis added)*

The advantages of this argument are twofold: 1) the Vlaams Blok presents itself as the people’s party, and 2) it also allows the Vlaams Blok to extrapolate from the content of the silent majority’s thoughts. The previous quotation contains a clear refutation of the accusation of being a racist party, and a justification of the party’s stance of defending voters’ interests. The Vlaams Blok places itself in the vanguard of the defence of Brusselseirs, or more generally the defence of their own people (consistently with the ‘*One’s Own People First*’ leitmotiv). The Vlaams Belang also positions itself as the people’ party:

*“As a popular party we are particularly sensitive to the problems met daily by the independent storekeepers.” (Vlaams Belang; 2004: 10; see Appendix 12)*

This theme may resonate even more with voters after the condemnation of the Vlaams Blok for racism. It seems to be confirming the party’s claims that the opposition is being silenced by any means possible, even by a political trial.

### *People’s party*

The representation of the silent majority goes hand-in-hand, in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang’s discourse, with the denunciation of the lack of respect by

governing parties for voters' opinions and interests. The Vlaams Belang illustrates the incompetence of the governing power:

*“The management by the old parties has made Brussels insecure, dirty and woebegone. With impossible traffic, where the inhabitant feels like foreigner, and has only one solution: to leave, in the same way that most of the companies have done”* (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 22, Appendix 14)

and

*“We blame the old political majorities of our communes for their lack of initiatives in favour of independent workers. We are blaming them for never tackling the real problems”*. (Vlaams Belang, 2004: 10, Appendix 12)

The Vlaams Belang also notes the lack of popular support the traditional parties are getting at the polls, highlighting the fact that the ‘voters know better’:

*“As we already know, less and less voters wish to still vote for the sclerosed traditional parties which refuse to face the truth”* (Vlaams Belang, 2004: 10, Appendix 12).

The document finishes by pointing at what the party itself could do to represent the people fairly and democratically:

*“We want to help and give value to honest storekeepers and chase those who benefit from the laxity and fear of the authorities. Let us show together that it is possible to tackle the real problems, legally, democratically, but with determination and without weakness”* (Vlaams Belang, 2004: 10, Appendix 12).

*“This is why it is very important to also vote here for people who will defend your interests”*. (Vlaams Blok, 12, Appendix 13).

The Vlaams Blok's and the Vlaams Belang's popularity at the polls is a selling point that the party reiterates as often as possible.

Vlaams Blok:

*"The Vlaams Blok was supported by almost 1 million voters in last June's elections. We got 24.1% of the vote in Flanders, where 60% of the Belgian population lives. Voting is compulsory in Belgium and no other party was supported by more people."* <http://vlaamsblok.be/index.shtml>, November 2004; Appendix 3)

Vlaams Belang:

*"Since 8 October, we have become a really popular party, with already many hundreds of local sections and representatives."* (Vlaams Belang, November, 2006: 2; Appendix 3).

In contrast, according to the Vlaams Belang (commenting on the elections of November 2006), the mainstream political parties are only interested in the pursuit of power, *per se*.

*"In fact, what does Verhofstadt want? He wants to stay in power at all costs. In that sense he is not much different from Yves Leterme, who wants to come to power at all costs. The first one has been cheating us for seven years now, the second one might very well start cheating us as of next year"* (Vlaams Belang, November 2006: 2, Appendix 6).

This explains the incredulity of the Vlaams Belang when the voters did not punish the Socialist Party at the polls for the corruption scandals tainting the party in Wallonia.

*"In spite of all the recent corruption scandals, the Walloon voters hardly sanctioned the PS. The reason is that they realise that the skulduggery in Wallonia is financed mainly by the Flemish tax payers. An extra reason, therefore, to bring the flow of billions from Flanders to Wallonia to an end"* (Vlaams Belang, November 2006: 2, Appendix 6)

Beyond the denunciation of the corruption within the Socialist Party, the Vlaams Belang highlights the differences between Walloons and Flemings, calling for a separation from people who keep voting for corrupt parties against all good sense. Accordingly, it is in the Flemings' interests to separate from such lackadaisical people (i.e. Walloons would not pay their bills anyway, claims the Vlaams Belang).

The Vlaams Belang often calls for a referendum, where the people would be able to express their opinion on key issues, such as the independence of Flanders, or the Turkish membership of the EU:

*“The Vlaams Belang parliament members have already introduced twice a proposal to launch a referendum in every European member state about the entrance of Turkey to the EU. To give European citizens the right to express themselves about this fundamental issue is to strengthen the EU’s democratic legitimacy.”* (Vlaams Belang, 2005: 10, Appendix 15).

This is consistent with the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang’s conception of representative democracy. The interesting aspect of this semantic dimension is the ‘selective screening’ and the careful choice of topics and issues to tackle.

#### ***3.1.4. Selective screening of content***

One feature of the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang website is a selection of newsworthy national and international stories grouped in the website rubric *Actualiteit* (i.e. News, in [www.vlaamsblok.be](http://www.vlaamsblok.be)), and *Actueel* (i.e. Current, in [www.vlaamsblok.be](http://www.vlaamsblok.be)). The party often features news linked to dramatic developments in the Belgian political scene (e.g. corruption scandals, attacks

against the Vlaams Blok and on the Vlaams Belang), or mere news in-brief (petty crimes, murders, especially when the perpetrators are foreigners). They also regularly feature international events, particularly stories linked to Islam, terrorism, and the 'War on Terror', etc. These stories from the website are also sent out in the free weekly newsletter to registered subscribers. Monthly magazines published by the Vlaams Blok and the Vlaams Belang also feature a selection of news. For example, the following headlines have been featured in the Vlaams Belang magazine: *Dertiende Overwinning op Rij* (i.e. Thirteenth Victory in a Row, Vlaams Belang, November 2006: 4-5; see Appendix 16):

- *Islamic-TV*
- *CNV- Christian Trade Union*
- *Exit Dedecker*<sup>77</sup>
- *Brainwashing*
- *Infotainer Leterme*
- *Mustapha A.*

In an analysis of these stories, it appears that they reinforce the anti-foreigner stereotypes (e.g. *Mustapha A.* is a recidivist criminal who murdered a jeweller; *Islamic TV*, which is about the lack of integration of foreigners), or they are about anti-parties feelings (e.g. *Christian Union*; *Infotainer Leterme*; and *Exit Dedecker*). The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang always comments on, and interprets news forecasts and by analysing those short sound bites, it appears that the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is merely reiterating its official stances and policies on

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<sup>77</sup> Note: Jean-Marie *Dedecker* is a Flemish politician and a moderate nationalist belonging to the NV-A; Jean-Yves *Leterme* could appointed Belgium's new Prime Minister as soon as a government is formed (in 2007?). At the time of writing, Belgium has been without a government for 96 days.

particular matters. This might be intended to indicate that: 1) the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is right when prophesying crises and problems, and 2) that the party's programme is not only in tune with current society's ills but also has the solutions.

In the Vlaams Belang brochure *Leefbaar Vlaanderen* (i.e. Liveable Flanders; October 2006), the stories featured are linked to themes which enable the Vlaams Belang to present the main points of its political programme. The party's magazines also feature articles from party members, or excerpts from articles or books by different authors whose ideas resonate with the party's policies and positions<sup>78</sup>. The advantage of using articles from different sources (or by merely quoting 'experts') is that they provide credibility and legitimacy to the party's position. The magazine could thus be interpreted as a resonator which amplifies the sound bites of the party's programme.

### *Selective newsworthiness*

The magazine, brochures and newsletter provide a striking illustration of selective screening of newsworthy events around the world. The selected stories help the party illustrate the relevance of its political programme. For example, the so-called Danish cartoons crisis provided the Vlaams Blok with the opportunity to assess and amplify their views about the failure of multiculturalism.

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<sup>78</sup> For example the Vlaams Belang uses quotations from Fallaci, O. (2001), *The Rage and the Pride* (*La Rabbia e l'Orgoglio*, 2001), an inflammatory and polemical book about the (undesirable) presence of Islam in Europe.

*“One preaches for sacrosanct integration, but one encourages diversity and multiculturalism. It is only when we will have the courage to tackle problems from another point of view that solutions will draw in profile. One must recognise the failure of the multicultural myth” (Vlaams Blok, 2004: 6-7; see Appendix 11)*

The 9/11 events also provided fuel to the Vlaams Belang in warning against the next big threat to Western values and democracy: the (Muslim) enemy within. One text in the Vlaams Belang’s *Leefbaar Vlaanderen* brochure (October 2006: 16-17) was titled: “While Europe was sleeping” (from Bruce Bawer, 2006<sup>79</sup>), presents a lengthy article on the clash of civilisations and provides a gloomy depiction of the ‘explosive’ situation in a Western democracy hosting a large population of (Muslim) immigrants. The riots that flared up in France in Autumn 2005 were also constructed by the Vlaams Belang as an example of the problems of immigration, and the lack of integration by immigrant communities. The party attributes the incidents to a nucleus of radicals and fundamentalists.

*“The dynamics triggering violence are the same here as they are in France, and they must be credited to a small nucleus of radicals and fundamentalists.” (Vlaams Blok, 2004: 6-7; see Appendix 11)*

Interestingly, the large scale incidents that happened in France in 2005 provided the Vlaams Belang with the resources to prophesy a similar crisis for Belgium in the near future.

*“The popular saying says: “when it is raining in Paris, you have drops in Brussels” happens to be often accurate. It would be illusory to think that the situation in our ghetto-neighbourhoods of our big cities is less*

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<sup>79</sup> Bawer, B. (2006), *Terwijl Europa Sliep (While Europe was sleeping)*. Amsterdam : Meulenhoff

*explosive than in France. The reality is that the atmosphere is as tense as in France*” (Vlaams Belang, 2004: 7; Appendix 11).

More than one year after the riots in French *banlieux* (i.e. ghettos at the outskirts of big French cities), the Vlaams Belang (November 2006: 4; Appendix 16) kept a watch on the situation and provided the following news update:

*“Kill as many cops as possible.” This message is currently circulating on popular French internet pages. Anti-French sites predict that the hot autumn of 2005 was just a warm-up. So there is going to be trouble, as the toll of last year's heavy riots was heavy. Hundreds of cars were burned, and shops were looted. Damage was estimated at about 200 million euros. Almost 3000 rioters were arrested; about six hundred 'youngsters' were condemned. 375 got effective penalties, 108 minors were sent to detention centres”.* (Vlaams Belang, November 2006: 4-5)

In a recent article (November 2006), the Vlaams Belang also used the heading ‘*Franse Tijdbom*’ (i.e. French time bomb). This was similar to other headers already used at least twice: 1) it was used as the title for a Vlaams Blok colloquium on the problems (and solutions) of immigration ‘*Immigratie: de Demografische Tijdom*’ (i.e. *Immigration, the Demographic Time bomb*; see Fig. 2), and as the general headline of the very first Vlaams Belang brochure for Brussels (Fig.1). In addition, the drawing on an older brochure<sup>80</sup> of the Vlaams Blok (see Fig.3), also refers to a time bomb. The imagery and metaphor deployed highlight the ‘explosive’ nature of current issues (demography and immigration) and the race against time to deal with those issues.

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<sup>80</sup> *Dossier. Vreemdelingen*, undated (i.e. File: Foreigners)



Fig.1 Vlaams Belang  
'Franse tijdbom'



Fig.2 Vlaams Blok *Immigratie: de Demografische Tijdbom*



Fig.3 Vlaams Blok.(undated)  
*Dossier Vreemdelingen*

*Recycling: the continuity between the Vlaams Blok and the Vlaams Belang*

The 'recycling' of headings, key words, slogans and pictures from the Vlaams Blok to the Vlaams Belang might illustrate the assistance the party provides to its readers (especially to the long-term supporters of the party) in decoding their political messages. The Vlaams Belang may seem to have watered down its most controversial rhetoric (Erk, 2005), and shed some of the old policies which caused the former Vlaams Blok so much trouble. However, true to the words<sup>81</sup> of the party leaders that the Vlaams Belang would not be a 'light version'<sup>82</sup> of the Vlaams Blok, and although the rhetoric keeps within the borders of legality, the Vlaams Belang's texts provide sufficient clues for potential voters to decode the underlying meanings. Hence, to the untrained eye, unfamiliar with Belgian politics,

<sup>81</sup> Immediately after the decision of the Cour de Cassation, Filip Dewinter in an interview for the VTM (Flemish TV channel) said: "it is not cosmetic, but manicure: we are sharpening our teeth, sharpening our claws", Annemans also said: "we are not toning down our point of view on immigrants, we are confirming it".

<sup>82</sup> In *Dag Allemaal*, Dewinter stated a few days before the condemnation of the Vlaams Blok for racism: "We don't need a Vlaams Blok Light' or a 'Vlaams Blok Ultra', but a 'Vlaams Blok Plus!' Indeed, our programme is not changing at all."

the Vlaams Belang may appear a nationalist, separatist and conservative party of the right. However, close analysis of the Vlaams Belang's discourse indicates otherwise.

### *The magnifying lens*

This selection and publication by the party of the most salient news items provides a new dimension of reality where all the news is linked to what is going wrong in the world, in Europe and in Belgium. Terrorism, political scandals, crime, death, Islamic threat, unemployment and tax burden are all themes in the party's communication which contribute to create a gloomy depiction of the world. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang plays the role of a lens or magnifying glass, directing the eye towards news, events and facts, exaggerating their importance and significance in people's lives. This re-contextualisation and reframing is apparent for example in the party's discussion of racism, and in what could be called the 'scenario writing' where the testimonies of 'normal' people highlight a number of looming social issues, such as insecurity, fear of crime, public transport problems, the difficulties of independent store-owners, etc., which contribute to the larger story told by the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang to its readers. In the next sections these aspects are examined in more detail.

#### ***3.1.5. Reality construction and semantic manipulation***

In the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse, racism and xenophobia are clearly reframed, redefined and ultimately dismissed as irrelevant. In this way, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang provides a political product which is disassociated from its

questionable features, and thus becomes less problematic for voters' consumption, thereby increasing its appeal in the political market.

The party, as was shown earlier (with *'Touche pas à mon pote'*), subverts anti-racist slogans to reframe the issue of racism within a broader and necessary debate on immigration and democracy. This subversion of the anti-racist discourse is interesting. The questioning of problematic terms and their definition is facilitated using syntax and punctuation, where for example inverted commas are always placed around the word *'discrimination'* or *'racism'* in the party's communication material. In this way, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang questions the definition of words in the *Loi Moureaux*, or Anti-Discrimination Act. Use of the quotation marks might indicate that the party disagrees with the meaning attached to the word. This is also visible in the next quotation of the Vlaams Blok: *"The understanding of racism is used today as a term of abuse to seal the mouth of political opponents."*<sup>83</sup> Definitions of racism and discrimination are therefore refuted and reframed as being political tools used to limit the party's freedom of speech.

*"Opinion makers and professional « anti-racists » should maybe ask themselves whether their exaggerated and unfounded reports about "discrimination" and "racism" – using the words of our friends from De Morgen<sup>84</sup> – do not offer the "soil" in which Muslim fundamentalists' and terrorists' seeds of hatred towards the West will easily root. Don't people claiming themselves to be "anti-racist" voluntarily offer the soil and the*

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<sup>83</sup> <http://vlaamsblok.be/afdrukken/afdrukken.php>

<sup>84</sup> *De Morgen* is a progressive Flemish newspaper which is known for its unsympathetic stance towards the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang.

*arguments terrorist networks need in order to recruit young non-natives in their Holy War against the West?"*

(see <http://www.vlaamsbelang.org/index.php?p=6andid=16>)

If “*racism*” and “*discrimination*” are often placed between quotation marks, the word *anti-racists* is given the same treatment. This seems to be an interesting way of defining and locating the opposition, and delegitimizing their actions. Here the Vlaams Blok links its activities to exaggerated and unfounded reports of racism and discrimination. One could argue that this strategy could have two objectives. First, if the reports are about discrimination faced by immigrants in the areas of education, housing and employment, then it is natural that the Vlaams Blok would reject those accusations on the basis of national preference (hence the use of the word “*exaggerated*”). Second, it also shows that no such things exist (“*unfounded*”), i.e. rejecting the existence of racism or even discrimination. Therefore ‘we’ (i.e. Belgians, Flemings, the voters, the party) are not racist, providing a positive self-portrayal (another rhetorical technique of flattery: showing people in a good light).

Here, the Vlaams Blok is defending Belgian/Flemish institutions against accusations of racism. The argument seems to be that no one likes being called a racist, and the extreme right rejects such accusations. If reports are unfounded, they must have been created by journalists (the irony can be located in the expression “*our friends from De Morgen*”) and other ‘*anti-racists*’. The Vlaams Blok argues that the actions of such people have dramatic consequences because they provide the ammunition for terrorist groups “*in order to recruit young non-*

*natives in their Holy War against the West?*”. These are very serious claims uttered by the party. Using intensity of expression and exaggeration, they serve to shift the focus from ‘unfounded claims’ of racism to the highly serious matter of terrorism. The issue of racism and its responsibility has thus been turned around in what Van Dijk (1993) calls a reversal strategy where there is a moral inversion, i.e. the party is condemning the condemners (following Strutton *et al.*, 1995).

This approach to racism and the condemnation of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang based on the law against racism, is also evident in the first text by Frank Vanhecke and Johan Demol, in a brochure (p.3). In the brochure “*Touche pas à la démocratie*” (June 2004), a similar technique has been identified. The Vlaams Blok puts “*racism*” between quotation marks, and later in the same paragraph, Frank Vanhecke and Johan Demol also put “*tribunal*” between quotation marks:

*“Other scandal: the condemnation of the Vlaams Blok for “racism”. The free expression of your opinions, in this country, is from now on strangled. The Vlaams Blok is not a racist party, it only defends in a firm and decisive fashion, the rights of the Brusselseirs. It is the reason why the regime has called upon a “tribunal” to put the Vlaams Blok offside” (Vlaams Blok, 2004: 3, see Appendix 5)*

This indicates again the semantic manipulation of the two main words of the paragraph: ‘racism’ and ‘tribunal’ (see Appendix 5, paragraph 2, lines 16-19). This is also in line with Jäger’s (2001) research on discourse. Jäger (2001: 35) conceptualises discourse as a regulating body in terms of what can be said in a certain society at a given time, but also what cannot be said, or is not said. In short, the meaning of words (semantic content) is continuously modified, renegotiated to

allow a better portrayal of the party. Rather than racist, the party defines itself as democratic, courageous and nationalistic (putting one's own people's interest first, no matter what).

### 3.2. Strategic dimension

After the consideration of the semantic tactics, it is useful to scrutinise the strategic dimension of language in use. Strategies refer to “more or less accurate and more or less intentional plans of practices adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic aim” (Wodak, 2001: 73). de Cillia *et al.* (1999) identified for example constructive strategies<sup>85</sup>, where persuasive linguistic acts serve to build a particular national identity and establish solidarity and identification with the ‘we-group’, and at the same time distancing and marginalising the group from ‘others’. They also use identity perpetuation and justification strategies which attempt to maintain, support and reproduce national identities, and support continuities (de Cillia *et al.*, 1999). In this scheme, immigrants are constructed as a threat to national identity. Justification and legitimating strategies are used to defend and preserve problematic narratives of controversial events in national history. Transformation strategies are used in order to transform the meaning of a well-established aspect of national identity into another. Dismantling and destructive strategies serve to de-mythologise or demolish existing national identities or elements of them (de Cillia *et al.*, 1999). For example, Jäger (2001) identified *denial strategies* and *relativising strategies*

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<sup>85</sup> Transformation strategies are used in order to transform the meaning of a well-established aspect of national identity into another. Dismantling and destructive strategies serve to de-mythologize or demolish existing national identities or elements of them.

(such as here with the Vlaams Blok's treatment of the thorny issue of racism and discrimination) which would also describe the strategies discussed above at play.

As my research interest also lies in the construction of nationalist identity and the construction of 'we-group' vs. 'they-groups', there is a voluntary choice here not to limit the analysis of the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang's discourse to those strategies, and instead combine them with the analysis of persuasive strategies. Since the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang's discourse could be unambiguously described as extreme rightist (Mudde, 2000), with strong features of xenophobia, discrimination, and nationalist sentiments, the strategies described by Wodak and her team (Wodak, 2001; de Cillia *et al.*, 1999) were identified. As a consequence, several rhetorical devices and narrative strategies can be identified in Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse, which contribute to providing a clear and persuasive narrative for the reader. The main strategies identified are: (de)legitimizing strategies, justification strategies (de Cillia *et al.*, 1999), reversal strategies and avoidance strategies (Jäger, 2001), and what could be labelled, identification strategies.

### ***3.2.1. (De)legitimizing strategies***

What is important to note first is that the different strategies are intertwined and work with each other, reinforcing their effect. Firstly, the Vlaams Blok's political and identity struggle is presented in a typical 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy, as was shown earlier. For instance, in an editorial by Frank Vanhecke (see "*Today we were executed but we will rise*", Appendix 3), the party links Flemish identity to

the party's struggle for political existence. Second, dismantling or de-legitimizing strategies were also identified in the same text where opponents are systematically delegitimated. For example, Frank Vanhecke starts by undermining Belgian identity, by explaining its lack of substance: "*Belgium, established in 1830 by French revolutionaries, is an artificial construct dominated by the Socialist Francophone minority in Wallonia.*" (see Appendix 3); he goes on to argue that anti-democratic attitudes are attached to Belgium because it only serves the interests of a Francophone minority, to the detriment of Flemings.

#### *Delegitimizing opponents*

Delegitimizing strategies appear to be one of the main strategies in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse. These delegitimizing strategies contribute to the representation of an unflattering portrait of political parties, institutions and other political opponents, and a positive portrayal of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. This strategy sets up an 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy regarding a (lack of) respect for democracy and, by association, for the electorate (as for example in Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2-3; see Appendix 4). This tactic is clearly visible, when the party contrasts traditional parties' actions with the people-friendly attitude of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. For example in the following quotation, the party stresses its own political legitimacy by the popular support it gets. In such a context, the party explains that their condemnation for racism is stemming from the party's political opponents, and not from the people.

*“The Constitution itself was modified for this sole purpose! A people’s jury did not inspire confidence to the parties in power. Could you imagine that the Vlaams Blok benefits from too much sympathy or common sense from our people!”* (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2-3)

Therefore, it is the party’s duty to keep fighting for people:

*“The Vlaams Blok will continue, no matter what, to say what the silent majority of our country says”.* (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2-3)

This specific text (see Appendix 4) is very rich with utterances which contribute to the construction of a (de)legitimizing strategy. Another illustration is provided where the ‘democratic’ attitude of the Vlaams Blok is placed in sharp contrast with the practices of others (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2-3; see Appendix 4):

*“All year long, one talks about political nominations in the legal world. Do you think that today, suddenly/all of a sudden, at the opportunity of this trial, eminently political, the political nominations wouldn’t play any role???”*(see Appendix 4)

and, also in:

*“This “ministry of truth”, set up after the electoral victory of the Vlaams Blok, falls under the authority of the Prime Minister Verhofstadt, and is directly financed with federal credits, and credit from the national Lottery. The decision to file suit was taken by a governing board in which, as a matter of course, only the ruling parties are represented.”* (see Appendix 4)

*“This sort of affair is common currency in banana republics, they don’t have their place in democracy”.* (see Appendix 4)

The Vlaams Blok is indicating here that the party does not ‘play dirty’, but respects the democratic process. Frank Vanhecke asks people to express their

opinion at the polls, demonstrating a respect for the rules of the democratic game. Democracy and popular support are ultimately the most potent weapon for the party to establish its political legitimacy. In the words of the Vlaams Blok:

*“For the 13<sup>th</sup> June elections, we ask the Brusselsers to emit a clear signal: choose freedom of speech, for democracy, for the Vlaams Blok”.* (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2-3)

and the Vlaams Belang’s terms:

*“Let us show together that it is possible to tackle the real problems, legally, democratically, but with determination and without weakness”* (Vlaams Belang, 2004: 10; Appendix 12)

This is remarkable in that the extreme right parties are often depicted as being anti-democratic and radical (Mudde, 2000). Clearly, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang shows it belongs to the category of the ‘new wave’ of the extreme right characterised by an acceptance of the parliamentary system and pluralism, in addition to a strong anti-mainstream-party stance (Camus, 2002; Mudde, 2000).

### *Nicknaming*

Nicknaming is also a rhetorical weapon used by the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang to demean its opponents. Nicknames cannot easily be shrugged off by those who have been stigmatised by them because nicknames need not be justified, are difficult to contradict or disprove and hence constitute a powerful rhetorical tool that has not gone unnoticed by the party. For example, Prime Minister Verhofstad is nicknamed Pinocchio by the Vlaams Blok because of the lies he allegedly told

voters regarding unemployment. “*Ministry of truth*” (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2-3; see Appendix 4) is another example of a nickname that is highly ironical.

*“Moreover, it is a governmental institution, the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Fight against Racism that filed suit. This “**ministry of truth**”, set up after the electoral victory of the Vlaams Blok, falls under the authority of the Prime Minister Verhofstadt, and is directly financed with federal credits, and credit from the national Lottery. The decision to file suit was taken by a governing board in which, as a matter of course, only the ruling parties are represented. Isn't independence beautiful...”* (Vlaams Blok, 2004: 2-3; emphasis added; see Appendix 4)

There is of course no such thing as a ministry of truth, and the quotation marks imply exactly the opposite of what the words say. The ‘ministry of truth’ is referring to the Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight against Racism. This is the institution that took legal action against the Vlaams Blok for racism and discrimination. Another possible interpretation is related to a reference to Orwell’s Ministry of Truth in the book *1984*, which is the place where ‘history’ is rewritten as propaganda for public consumption. In this interpretation, it would be easy to suppose that the party is referring to the propaganda created by this ministry of truth, the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Fight against Racism, (which filed suit against the Vlaams Blok for racism) working for the government to demonise the Vlaams Blok.

### ***3.2.2. Legitimizing the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang: the quest for credibility***

The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is trying to establish its legitimacy as a credible political opponent, and more importantly, as an alternative to what the party calls the old sclerotic parties. By pointing the finger at the tensions and crises in society,

while providing ‘solutions’ (such as the ‘70 points programme solution to the immigration problem’), the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang has constructed for itself the role of political underdog and champion of the disgruntled and ‘silent’ majority. According to Coffé (2005b), governing has never been an option for the Vlaams Blok, but today the Vlaams Belang has started to present itself as a potential governing party, especially at the local level in Antwerp. Coffé’s 2005 observations were accurate. In 2006, the party openly presents itself as ready for office and explains the rationale to its voters. The Vlaams Belang is ready for a participation in government, even if it is as a junior partner. Frank Vanhecke alludes to the future ‘opportunities’ for the party:

*“What we have to do is clear. Since 8 October, we have become a real popular party, with already many hundreds of local sections and mandatories. The challenge for 2007 is huge. We do not use a cordon against whoever wants to win right-wing Flemish political power is with us, but at the same time we have to be very conscious of our own strength and of the brilliant opportunities in front of us, in 2007 and even more so in 2009”* (Vlaams Belang, November 2006: 3; emphasis in the original; Appendix 6)

Karim Van Overmeire, a Vlaams Belang senator, is more explicit and explains to the readers that the compromise would be temporarily and strategic, but necessary for the implementation of the party’s programme, for the greater good of Flanders:

*“Our story has a meaning only when we can implement the essence of our programme: independence, a stricter immigration policy, a firm approach to crime. It is clear now that these points of our programme will not be implemented by using more and more decibels to shout original terms of abuse from within the quarantine zone. Contrary to lemmings or howler monkeys, who follow their instinct, man has the possibility of evaluating his situation, considering alternative strategies, and analysing carefully who can be opponents and who can be allies, if need be temporarily. A*

*shrewd Vlaams Belang is of course much more dangerous than a shouting Vlaams Belang in a quarantine zone. It is going to be a **difficult but necessary exercise**. We owe it not only to ourselves, but also to our children and grandchildren”* (Vlaams Belang, November, 2006: 3; Appendix 17; emphasis added)

In order to indicate its readiness for office, the Vlaams Belang had, among other things, to shed some of its most controversial political stances. Many commentators<sup>86</sup> (e.g. Van Overloop, 17/11/2004) and scholars (see for example Erk, 2005) fear that this rebirth is largely a publicity stunt that would allow the party to regain a virginal glow and attract new sections of the population, which might have been put off by the ‘previous’ most radical policies of the Vlaams Blok (such as the educational apartheid or forced repatriation). The Vlaams Belang is certainly popular and is making substantial gains at each election; however, the level of support has not been sufficient – so far – to break the *cordon sanitaire* and allow them to take part in government.

### 3.2.2.1. Eliciting credibility

In a state of continuous electoral campaigning, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang must defend its theses, present its version of reality, and dangle before the voters the promise of a better future under its direction. It is therefore crucial that the party is perceived by people as being credible and able to deliver the promises made. The task is Herculean, as the party must still convince, persuade, or induce a change in the less radical voters’ attitude. Credibility is an important element in

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<sup>86</sup> For example the communist PTB (the Belgian Labour Party), see (article 21/06/2006 in [www.ptb.be/scripts/article.phtml?section=A1AAAABX&obid=27643](http://www.ptb.be/scripts/article.phtml?section=A1AAAABX&obid=27643), as accessed 22/06/2005; also Van Overloop (17/11/2004), see [www.ptb.be/scripts/article.phtml?section=A1AAAABX&obid=25219](http://www.ptb.be/scripts/article.phtml?section=A1AAAABX&obid=25219), as accessed 22/06/2005

the induction of attitude change (McLeod *et al.*, 1968). Credibility reflects the level of trustworthiness attributed to the source of the persuasive communication by the audience (McLeod *et al.*, 1968: 579). To be credible, according to O'Shaughnessy (2003: 304), persuasion must be data-driven and evidence-based, in our scientific, modern society. Propositions, O'Shaughnessy (2003: 304) argues, must not be just asserted but must be "proved". However, Sornig (1989) thinks otherwise, arguing that the verifiable truth of a message is irrelevant and not necessarily what would impress an audience; it is however the *way* things are said, or done, irrespective of the amount of genuine information carried by an utterance.

This is why, Sornig (1989) argues, persuasion must be considered a stylistic procedure, i.e. something that has to do with outward appearance. The assumption that listeners can draw on the speaker's credibility and trustworthiness can therefore only come from the surface of what is said (Sornig, 1989: 96). Drawing on Sornig (1989), it can be assumed that the listener's interpretation of reality can be controlled by the devices of persuasive communication. It is this interpretation of reality by the voters, and the use of persuasive communication by the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang that is at the heart of this research.

#### *3.2.2.2. Third-parties' endorsements*

One technique identified that is prodigally used by the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is quotation from third parties. It is possible to classify such quotations into three broad categories: 1) *testimonials from the 'common man'* usually related to issues in their daily lives; 2) examples from *Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang*

*candidates* which tackle specific themes of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's programme, and 3) *quotations from various experts*: writers, politicians, and even opponents of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. These are used when they confirm the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's points, particularly when they seem to reinforce the objectivity, or 'common senseness' of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's arguments. This is reminiscent of the device of celebrity and experts' endorsements in commercial marketing. According to Sornig (1989: 100), the use of quotational language has a persuasive quality, "especially in the original wording". Indeed it carries conviction, and carries credibility (or "feigns credibility" (Sornig, 1989: 100)) by exploiting the prestige of the person from whom a quotation originated. This persuasive device is often used in the more modern of Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's communication material (brochures, website, etc...bearing the heading: "*So you've heard it from someone else*").

#### *Storytelling and testimonials from the 'common man'*

Storytelling has been identified as a persuasive strategy (van Dijk, 1993), which provides a vivid image of 'facts' and events as being experienced by 'real' people. 'Testimony' is a characteristic of some commercial advertisements (e.g. for mortgages; diet drinks, anti-smoking patches, etc.), where people who the viewer can identify with present their experience and advocate the use of a particular product or service. In the Vlaams Blok's case, it shows that the ills that the party warns about are experienced by normal people, i.e. 'you and me', and forecasts a gloomy future for voters, as stressed in the party representative's comments, supporting and reframing the 'spontaneous' testimonials.

In pages 4 and 5 of the *Feiten/Réalités* brochure (May 2004; see Appendix 8), an elderly lady clutching her bag provides a strong visual image to support the text. The first quotation is supposed to come from her. The lady is remarkably unremarkable. She could be anyone, anyone's friend, anyone's relative. This makes her a symbolic figure representing the old and vulnerable. She is also a victim: "*I have been attacked twice*", she says. Once could be bad luck: in the wrong place at the wrong time; 'twice' denotes a more serious problem. There are no details about the nature of her attacks. Theft? Physical aggression? Assaulted? Insulted and abused? The reader is left to guess. There is also mention of her friend who was violently attacked by a group of youngsters, and ended up in hospital. This frames criminality as violent mugging in the street targeting the most vulnerable. One assumption is that the targets are defined as old women. (She is a woman and her friend is a woman. '*une amie*' is the word used, and words are 'gendered' in French – the assumption is that her friend is also an elderly woman, even if there is no indication of the age of that friend). This interpretation is guided on the page by the picture and the comments. Similarly, in the same brochure (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 9, see Appendix 12), there is another testimonial:

*"I am scared by the violent anti-Israeli demonstrations. All this calls for Jihad and the slogans saying 'Hamas, Hamas, all the Jews in the gas chambers'. Come on, it is incredible. I am asking myself a lot of questions about the right of foreigners to vote. Although the majority of the population is opposed to it, that right was voted for. More than 64,000 non-European foreigners are going to decide on my future. That's unacceptable".* (Vlaams Blok, 2004: 8-9; Appendix 9)

Those testimonials never ‘stand alone’. They provide the material for a party representative to comment on the situation, highlight the key issues (here respectively criminality and foreigners’ right to vote), and provide the party solution (respectively: ‘zero tolerance’ and a watertight immigration policy). For example, the following quotation accompanies the previous ‘testimonial’:

*“The life of many Brussels inhabitants will become unbearable if we do not change the situation. Police do not dare even appear in some neighbourhoods, let alone intervene, for fear of riots. Foreign inhabitants are considered as votes in the bank; this is why traditional parties tolerate the situation. However, radical imams put Allah’s law above ours, and call for homosexuals to be thrown from the top of buildings. The right to vote by foreigners must be abolished. This right to vote, along with the most flexible nationality code in the world, encourages very few foreigners to integrate into society. Whoever wants to acquire citizenship will have to pass a citizenship test.”* (Vlaams Blok, 2004: 8-9; Appendix 9)

The paragraph highlights the seriousness of the Brusseleirs’ situation: *“The life of many Brussels inhabitants will become unbearable if we do not change the situation.”* The use of a strong adjective, such as *“unbearable”*, describes a situation where living with foreigners is not possible. This is however only one scenario presented by the Vlaams Blok: it is set in a plausible future (*“will become”*), which could happen *“if we do not change the situation”*. The party shows that the voters (and the Vlaams Blok) have the capacity to avoid this. *‘We’* is used as a ‘solidarity pronoun’: it could identify the sole Vlaams Blok, or it could represent the Vlaams Blok *and* Brussels’ voters united to prevent this catastrophic scenario (the so-called *“earthquake”*). The technique of juxtaposition can be identified here:

*“However, radical imams put Allah’s law above ours, and call for homosexuals to be thrown from the top of buildings. The right to vote by foreigners must be abolished” (Vlaams Blok, 2004: 8-9; Appendix 9).*

The right to vote for foreigners and Islamic fundamentalists are juxtaposed, and rhetorically linked. The right to vote is linked to the law of Allah (i.e. the imams call for homosexuals to be thrown from the roofs of buildings, which is unquestionably criminal). The situation to be changed is described as one of chaos: no law, riots, a frightened police, calls for murder, and ... foreigners’ right to vote. Using juxtaposition, the right to vote for non-EU foreigners was associated with anti-Semitism through the reference to Hamas and with Nazi ideology (with the reference to “*gas chambers*”). It is interesting to note the link between the legal right to demonstrate in Belgium and the illegal<sup>87</sup> racist/Nazi slogans allegedly shouted during the demonstrations. The party is skilfully arguing that the rights granted by democracy (i.e. the right to demonstrate) are actually used for undemocratic ends (i.e. to spread violence and hatred), making therefore non-EU foreigners guilty of anti-Semitism and unworthy of the rights granted by democracy, namely the right to vote. The Vlaams Blok’s argument is that the situation must be changed: by abolishing the right to vote.

The scenario vividly created thanks to the two witnesses (the two ladies sharing their own personal experience) and reinforced by the Vlaams Blok representative’s comments is a fairly frightening prospect. It might be intended to generate a range of diverse emotions: anxiety (how to change this before it is too late?), fear (the

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<sup>87</sup> In Belgium, racism and racist comments are liable to prosecution.

lady clearly states that she is scared in the first sentence of her testimonial), indignation (granting democratic rights to unworthy people, and letting those same people determine the future of 'native' (real) Belgians). The use of short quotations and stories from 'normal people' might have been intended to stir various emotions through the reader's identification with the 'normal people', to generate the will to protect oneself and reduce the levels of anxiety. The anxiety-reducing alternative proposed is voting for the Vlaams Blok, which proposes to protect citizens, maintain Flemish identity and put an end to the 'take-over' by dangerous non-EU and mostly Muslim foreigners.

### *Marketing and Emotion*

This presence of emotion in the political message of the party is consistent with trends observed in commercial marketing. In some commercial advertising campaigns, there is an overt aim of arousing emotions rather than communicating more rational attributes (Solomon *et al.*, 2002). Research shows that emotion is central to persuasive communication (O'Shaughnessy, 1996). In addition, studies have shown that emotions are an important factor in the consumers' decision-process (see Grunert, 2000). This is also true in the political context. It is now widely acknowledged that emotions play a significant role in voters' political and economical evaluations (Conover and Feldman, 1986; Abelson *et al.*, 1982, in Rudolph *et al.*, 2000). Research has shown that emotions influence all human behaviour, including political behaviour (Falkowski and Cwalina, 1999). Marcus (2000) demonstrated that people's political behaviour depends on their emotional state. Research has also demonstrated that emotional attitudes towards a party or a

candidate are a good predictor of a voter's decision (Falkowski and Cwalina, 1999; Newman and Seth, 1985; Abelson *et al.*, 1982). Emotions are a key feature in political messages. The example of political advertising is particularly salient here: there is evidence that emotional appeals are dominant in political advertising (Tedesco, 2002). An important component of politicians' discourse is related to the arousal of strong emotions, such as fear, anxiety, and national pride. It appears that the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang might be engaged in such an emotional communication strategy in order to better reach and appeal to the reader. A more 'rational' approach is adopted by using quotations from: 1) the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang representatives; and 2) the experts from various fields, such as politicians, scholars, or writers.

#### *Representatives of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang*

The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang presents its representatives as competent politicians with the expertise and experience to defend voters' interests. For example, Johan Demol is always the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang front man for Brussels. His forte is security issues in Brussels, e.g. granting more funds and powers for the police and a zero tolerance policy against criminals. His profile as a former chief of police provides him with the credibility to talk about the topic.

*"A tough approach to all the forms of criminality. Law must be enforced in all neighbourhoods. No disguising of the criminality figures when elections come near. Police must have the possibility to act more energetically. Justice must return punch for punch. As a former police captain, I know that zero tolerance works. Only a clearly displayed political will can succeed in discouraging criminals. The Vlaams Blok is the only one to*

*have such a political will! People must dare again to go out at night*". (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 4-5, Appendix 18)

The vocabulary and tone used in the previous paragraph, such as "*punch for punch*", "*tough approach*", "*I know that the zero tolerance works*"; fit the image of a former police captain and man of action, highlighting his experience of tackling the issue of criminality. Johan Demol's field experience is allied to the political will necessary to "*discourage criminals*", will that is lacking in other political parties, according to him. The sentence structure of "*Police must have the possibility to act more energetically*" (emphasis added), might suggest that currently the police do not have enough powers. This is a very common message conveyed by the party. This is clear in the sentence: "*As a former chief of police, I know that zero tolerance works*". It highlights Johan Demol's field experience, his knowledge ("*I know*"), and is an endorsement of the zero tolerance policy ("*it works*", i.e. I was successful, as chief of police in dealing with criminality). After the testimony from the vulnerable elderly (see Appendix 18), this energetic speech is designed to be what people want to hear, namely that the Vlaams Blok can make Brussels safe and get rid of the criminals: "*Only a political will clearly displayed will succeed in discouraging criminals. The Vlaams Blok is the only one to have such a political will!*". At the same time it highlights the incompetence of the government and demonstrates the administration's lack of will to tackle crime, and even worse, the lack of recognition of people's fears and concerns: "*Media and the government keep dwelling on that the 'feeling of insecurity' is subjective. People know that it is reality!*". The suggestion is that the government even manipulates figures to boost their popularity before elections: "*No disguising of the criminality*

*figures when elections come near*". This sentence is interesting in that it has no subject. It avoids the party naming those responsible for manipulating the figures, and therefore steers clear of any direct libel. The issue of criminality is an important Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang campaign theme and 'zero tolerance' is often exclusively associated by voters with the party's approach to criminality (Coffé, 2004). It is interesting to note that the Vlaams Blok also includes in its definition of criminality such activities as: vandalism, illegal dumping, squatting and free-roaming gangs of young people (Coffé, 2004).

#### *Expert quotation*

The Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang use a quoting strategy across their propaganda material, websites, campaign leaflets, brochures, magazines and e-newsletter. In the brochure created to present the Vlaams Belang's views on the potential Turkish membership to the EU (see Appendix 15: 5-6), several experts are quoted for views which resonate with the party's. Sornig (1989: 100) notes the persuasive power of the use of quotations with his "*don't argue, quote*". The brochure presents reasons, facts or political experts' opinions justifying why Turkey cannot, and should not, be considered for EU membership. So, in order to support this point of view, the Vlaams Belang collated a collection of quotations from various sources who had voiced negative opinions about Turkish membership of the EU: the quoted experts are French, German and American politicians, an academic labelled as an '*Islam specialist*', and even the Libyan president Kadhafi (see Appendix 15: 5-6). The name of each 'expert' is given

along with the expert's current position, or occupation (e.g. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Former President of France).

*"I'm giving my opinion: It's the end of the EU!" Former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Le Monde, 9 November 2002 (Vlaams Belang, 2005: 6; Appendix 15)*

*"Following the current trends, Europe's population will include Islamist majorities by the end of the 21st century." Islamic specialist Prof. Bernard Lewis, Die Welt, 28 July 2004 (Vlaams Belang, 2005: 6; Appendix 15)*

*"The Muslim world, including extremists like Bin Laden, is delighted by Turkey's entrance to Europe: Turkey is its Trojan horse". Mouammar Kadhafi, Libya's President, La Repubblica, 16 December 2004 (Vlaams Belang, 2005: 6; Appendix 15)*

The testimonial of experts is similar to the celebrity endorsement of advertised products, and the 'they say' advertisements, which usually carry more weight with readers than 'we say' advertising. Audiences tend to give more credibility to third-party endorsers, such as celebrities, consumers or experts (Wang, 2005; Martin *et al.*, 2002) than claims coming directly from advertisers. In this case, the endorsements bring more weight to the Vlaams Belang's arguments against Turkish admission, i.e. opposition is a sensible political argument shared by a panel of experts. In other words, the party shows it is only trying to defend European citizens' interests.

*"If I was a European I would be against Turkey's membership, but I am an American so I am in favour." Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of state, HP/De Tijd, 31 December 2004 (Vlaams Belang, 2005: 6, Appendix 15)*

A whole section ('in the Media') of the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang's respective websites is dedicated to quoting experts, or providing whole interviews or excerpts which reflect, reinforce or justify the party's positions, or simply highlight (sometimes ridicule) political opponents with the publications of their most 'questionable' comments.

### ***3.2.3. Avoidance strategy***

The next strategies featuring in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse are the so-called avoidance strategies (as defined by Jäger, 2001), especially where the party leader reframes their condemnation for racism as merely part of a "*broad society debate. No debate has any sense without freedom of speech, as large as possible, including on the theme of immigration.*" (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2-3; Appendix 4). Therefore the Vlaams Blok's stance is considered as a necessary position in a democratic regime: "*There is no possible democracy without a broad society debate*" (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2-3; Appendix 4). The Vlaams Blok describes its stance on immigration as a necessary one for a healthy, democratic debate within society. This is, the party argues, only possible if there is real freedom of speech, which itself can only be granted by a genuine democracy. The rhetorical power of this argument derives from the fact that it cannot easily be refuted. This is a very clever move to attenuate (and reframe) the accusation of, and condemnation for, racism and discrimination, as part of a wide and necessary debate on immigration.

By putting 'immigration' at the end of the sentence in: "*No debate has any sense without freedom of speech, as large as possible, including on the theme of immigration*" (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2, see Appendix 4), the argument seems to be that no one is actually tackling the issue of immigration. When a party dares to address the issue (here the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang), it should be allowed to express "*what the silent majority of our country say*", accordingly with the right to free speech. Once again, this is a subtle tactic. The possible interpretations of the text are inevitably in favour of the Vlaams Blok: the party presents itself as merely exercising its political right (taking part in a widespread society debate), and duty (by voicing the silent majority's opinion). It is a very well crafted text that seems to preclude any interpretation (e.g. bigotry and racism) that could be damaging to the party's image, credibility and legitimacy, three assets the party leaders work hard to build. This might be a reason why the words 'racism' or 'discrimination' are absent from this text. In itself, the absence of specific words or themes is also very telling. One feature of CDA is its recognition that *absence* may say more than *presence* (Jäger, 2001).

In the brochure *Touche pas à la démocratie* (Vlaams Blok 2004, see Appendix 5), the Vlaams Blok, via Frank Vanhecke and Johan Demol, seems to be pursuing a legitimating/delegitimating strategy. Political opponents are presented in an unfavourable way while, at the same time, the Vlaams Blok and its actions are presented as positive and desirable for voters. One could argue that the market-orientation of the Vlaams Blok is tangible here in the call to the electorate to vote only for those who respond to the concerns of the people. But there is also

evidence of avoidance strategy, where the party is presented as the only party truly committed to democracy. Interestingly, the party ties the issue of racism (and its condemnation) to the right of freedom of speech. It defends itself by explaining that the party was being punished for expressing people's opinions: "*The free expression of your opinions, in this country, is from now on strangled.*" The party positions itself very carefully as the party of the people. In essence the party might be saying: as your party, we say what you think ("*your opinions*"); and if the regime penalises us for saying what you think, you should not vote for them, since they do not respect your point of view ("*the free expression of your opinions [...] I from now on strangled*"). The responsibility for racism (or for the condemnation of racism) is therefore shifted to the voters ("*from now on*", i.e. since the trial). Therefore, the reframing of the issue of racism as a debate about freedom of speech (which is more fluid and subject to discussion) fits the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's strategy when tackling accusations of racism and discrimination. The party invariably uses these words in quotation marks, thereby questioning their accepted meaning, and manipulating the broader issue of the societal 'acceptability' of racism. Jäger (2001) has identified such strategy as the removal of taboos.

#### **3.2.4. Reversal strategies**

In addition to avoidance and legitimating strategies, reversal strategies were also identified. A reversal strategy is encountered when the role of victim and attacker are reversed. Reversal strategies can be identified in several documents from the

Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. For example, the Vlaams Blok was found guilty of racism. However, Frank Vanhecke argues in the editorial *'Today we were executed but we will rise'*<sup>88</sup> (see Appendix 3) that this decision was itself based on the division between French-speakers and Flemings. If one follows this line of thought, the condemnation of the Vlaams Blok could be interpreted as a political decision based on ethnicity (Flemings vs. Walloons), which would make itself condemnable and racist. van Dijk (1993; 1991) identified reversal strategies in the anti-anti-racist discourse he studied. In a reversal strategy, the 'racists' accuse those who fight intolerance and discrimination of being racist, intolerant and opposed to freedom of speech. A similar process is found here; the roles have been reversed and the Vlaams Blok opposition to the court decision and the institutions which instigated it is constructed as a legitimate and democratic struggle. This reversal strategy is used in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse. For example, in the Frequently Asked Questions section of the Vlaams Blok website<sup>89</sup>, to the question *'is the Vlaams Blok racist?'* the party replies:

*"The VB is certainly not a racist party; we have been branded [racist] by the traditional parties and their friends from the media, and they blocked us in a political monster trial"*  
(<http://vlaamsblok.be/afdrukken/afdrukken.php>)

Reversal strategies also involve shifting the focus of attention from one's own questionable acts to the motives of those who disapprove of one's violations (Sykes and Matza, 1957). Within the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse,

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<sup>88</sup> <http://www.vlaamsblok.be/index.shtml>

<sup>89</sup> <http://vlaamsblok.be/afdrukken/afdrukken.php>

condemners are identified and named as the traditional parties and the media, thus serving their interest. The Vlaams Blok argues that it is the traditional parties' will to undermine Vlaams Blok's credibility and legitimacy that has led to Vlaams Blok being branded as racist. In sum, by condemning the condemners, definitions of racism and discrimination are refuted and reframed as being political tools used to limit the party's freedom of speech. In order to defend itself against such accusations, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang adopts another particular rhetorical strategy. It systematically questions the definition of racism and discrimination, its meaning, and puts the word in square brackets. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang provides its own definition of the word *racism* reframing it as a political tool used by its opponents.

### ***3.2.5. Constructive strategies: identification with readers***

The following strategies of identity construction and identification with the readers were also encountered in the texts analysed, but featured less prominently than the previous strategies of (de)legitimizing, avoidance or reversal discussed above. Identification with the reader is an important strategy that fits into the persuasion model of Jowett and Donnell (2000) (see chapter 6, section 2, pp.128-131), as is explained in further detail in this section.

An additional strategy identified by de Cillia *et al.* (1999) is a constructive strategy, where persuasive linguistic acts serve to build a particular national identity and establish solidarity and identification with the 'we-group', and at the same time distancing and marginalising the 'others'. The party uses this strategy to create a

shared fate between the party and the voters; and to identify with their needs and concerns. Identification is an important concept of persuasive communication. According to Jowett and O'Donnell (2000: 34), persuader and persuadee must share common sensations, concepts, images and ideas, even if it is only feigned by the speaker. For the persuader's message to have any resonance with the audience, the themes of the message must not be perceived by the audience as imposed on them, but rather as based on anchors coming from within themselves (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2000: 33). It is one role of persuasive communication and rhetoric (to give the impression to listener that the idea comes from them (see Sornig, 1989). Conviction is the primary aim of persuasion, which depends on the parallelism of presuppositions and expectations, of referential, associative and affective meaning, and consequently is supposed to lead to coordinated, similarly active behaviour. Persuasion is going to be most effective when following similar affective/evaluative motivations, and when it is based upon parallel or coordinated connotations, expectations, preferences and aversions.

In persuasion, the listener adjusts his or her view to that which is being insinuated (Sornig, 1989: 98), he or she always identifies himself or herself to a certain degree with the speaker. This is why, Sornig (1989) argues that persuasion works best among people who speak the same language. People who share similar communicative biographies can achieve understanding and agreement with a minimum of verbal activity (Sornig, 1989: 98). For example, in the short text by Johan Demol, *An Alternative for Brussels!* (Vlaams Blok, *Feiten/Réalités*, May 2004: 22, Appendix 14) the clear aim is the identification of the Vlaams Blok

party (Johan Demol) with Brussels voters. Johan Demol is calling on a shared context with “*us Brusselsers*”. Johan Demol presents himself as one of ‘your own’. He also provides a positive description of the *Brusselsers* and their ‘way of living’: their sparkling lifestyle which is supposedly proper to *Brusselsers* (proper to “*nous autres*”, which could be literally translated as ‘us others’). Johan Demol takes possession of this lifestyle or way of being: it is proper to us (us others). This sets up a clear delineation of the category (“*nous autres les Brusselsers*”) where no other group or community could claim to have a similar lifestyle. Johan Demol has just created a positive stereotype of what the *Brusselsers* are like, which is of course a positive self-description. This process is consistent with what Sornig (1989: 97) has described as mimicry or flattery, where the persuader makes the reader (persuadee) see him/herself from a seemingly more agreeable angle, which Sornig (1989) argues, involves a change of perspective.

The identification is done throughout with the use of pronouns (see linguistic dimension, section 3.3., p. 191), specifically the use of pronouns of solidarity (Brown and Gilman, 1960, in Sornig, 1989). The pronoun of the first person plural (we) is frequently used. It is a kind of ‘we’ with socialising force. Its intention seems to be to create an atmosphere and feeling of shared situational assessment, mutual understanding, and common destiny (Sornig, 1989: 104). The use of ‘us’ is a form of identification by the persuader and the reader/persuadee. For example, it is ‘us’ (i.e. readers and the Vlaams Blok) who are suffering from the foreigners’ vote. The use of pronouns is discussed in more details in section 3.2 dedicated to

the linguistic dimension, where the semantic and the strategic dimensions are further realised.

### ***3.2.6. Discursive strategies: summary***

The strategic dimension analysis above highlighted interesting processes of the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang's discourse. The themes emerging from the analysis are linked to the rejection of the accusation of racism, positive self-portrayal, and the delegitimizing of political opponents. Their claims are remarkable in their consistency and simplicity. Reframing the debate or accusations to ones' advantage, redefining problematic terms, or adopting a reversal strategy where the party is presented as the victim of discrimination, are common features of the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang's discourse. They prove so potent because they present the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang as a victim (a martyr?), and help the party construct itself as a legitimate and worthy opposition party. This is an effective strategy given the damaging effects of the *cordon sanitaire* and 'demonising' of the party by the media and other parties culminating in the banning of the party for racism in November 2004. Many linguistic elements have already been tackled, such as the use of quotation marks in reversal strategies, the use of pronouns for the 'identification with the voter' strategy, and the use of a particular vocabulary in delegitimizing strategies. Discussing those linguistic elements in relation to the semantic and strategic dimensions was necessary in order to allow the discussion about the strategic component of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse. This highlights the tight interconnectedness of

the dimensions. The following linguistic and syntactical dimension discusses in more detail the points already alluded to in the strategic dimension analysis.

### **3.3. Linguistic and syntactical dimensions**

The third dimension of discourse-historical analysis focusses on linguistic means and the forms of realisation, such as lexical units, argumentation schemes and syntactical means which express the strategies identified in the strategic dimension analysis. In other words, the semantic and strategic dimensions are realised thanks to the linguistic means at the disposal of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. This is perhaps the dimension where language is examined at the ‘microscopic’ level (i.e. the constitution of the smallest units of language, the sentence (syntax) and punctuation).

This section focusses on the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang’s use of syntax, grammar and carefully selected repertoire of language to make their stories come to life and achieve their full persuasive potential. The main linguistic and syntactical features presented here are: 1) grammar; 2) syntax and punctuation; 3) the ‘spoken delivery’. The section ends with a discussion of the issues of vagueness, interpretation and decoding of messages.

#### **3.3.1. Persuasive grammar**

Grammar plays an important role in rhetoric and should not be overlooked in the analysis of the linguistic dimension of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang’s discourse. Butt *et al.* (2004) explain that grammar works at an unconscious level,

which imbues it with its particular power (because it lies beneath the threshold of consciousness). The analysis of the fundamentals of grammar is beyond the purpose (or interest) of this thesis. However, salient grammatical elements are presented here, with the nature of the agentive subjects and the dynamism attached to the actors, the form of verbs, the syntax and punctuation.

*The Agent and the Passive voice: dynamism and self-portrayal*

A text taken from a campaign brochure<sup>90</sup> (see Vlaams Blok, 2004: 3; see Appendix 5) provides the illustration for a discussion about the rhetorical use of the passive voice.

*“the foreigners’ right to vote has been accepted”*  
*“It (the foreigners’ right) has been imposed upon us”*  
*“The rules of the democratic game have been changed”*  
*“Freedom of speech is strangled...”* (Vlaams Blok, 2004: 3; see Appendix 5)

A passive voice is encountered when the agent is not directly identified. Interestingly in this text, the passive voice is used in the context of describing the consequences of the Vlaams Blok’s political opponents’ actions. Passive voice provides the anonymity of an executioner’s mask? (as for example in the following sentences ‘mistakes were made’, or ‘rules were broken’) (Sandberg, 2001). However, the sentences (in the active form) following each passive voice, explicitly state who did what. By putting those in a ‘subject’ position in the sentence, i.e. the foreigners’ right to vote; the rules of the democratic game,

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<sup>90</sup> Vlaams Blok’s brochure (2004), *Liste 10 Bruxelles Notre Ville! Touche pas à la démocratie*,

freedom of speech, the party puts them to the fore, making these the first piece of the sentence, and lending them extra significance.

More commonly, the use of the passive voice use, in effect, either camouflaged the author of an action (Sornig, 1989: 102), or diminished the credibility of a statement, such as is achieved by the subjunctive mood, e.g. in reported speech. This passive voice is used in contrast to sentences where the Vlaams Blok is the actor: e.g. *“we want a Brussels where one is still rewarded for one’s supplied work”* (Vlaams Blok, 2004: 3; see Appendix 5). It confers dynamism on to the party’s actions, and decisiveness to its political will. The lack of an identifiable subject (the French third personal undefined pronoun ‘*on*’, i.e. translated in English as ‘*one*’) in both consecutive sentences contrasts quite sharply with the next sentence where the party states:

*“In June 13<sup>th</sup>, it is you who will decide on the election results”* Vlaams Blok, 2004: 3; see Appendix 5.

The effect is a greater emphasis on the voters’ decision: the party addresses them directly with ‘*vous*’ and ‘*déciderez*’, i.e. ‘you will decide’, or ‘you are going to decide’. The next two sentences (which are incidentally the last two sentences of the text) take a more direct tone, with the use of the imperative mode (*“Be vigilant so that the free choice of citizens remains a right and stops being flouted. To stay free, vote for the Vlaams Blok”* Vlaams Blok, 2004: 3; see Appendix 5).

Similarly, the sentence including the voters actions, or line of action are in the active voice, and the 'voters' are the agent of the sentences: "*In June 13<sup>th</sup>, you will go to the voting booth to elect Brussels members of the Flemish Parliament, of the Brussels Regional Council, and of the European Parliament*" (Vlaams Blok, 2004: 3; see Appendix 5. The following sentence puts an extra emphasis, with 'it is you' on voters' active role: "*In June 13<sup>th</sup>, it is you who will decide of the elections results*". Perhaps it is the case, in order to also illustrate the dynamic, active role to be taken by the party representatives (once elected) but also the responsibility of the voters to decide and get them elected. This has the effect of empowering the voter/reader.

#### *Illustration*

A text by Frank Vanhecke and Johan Demol (Vlaams Blok, 2004: 3; Appendix 5) is dissected here. For clarity purposes, the fragments of text are grouped into three tables, according to their agentive subjects, and analysed. The analysis of each table provides interesting findings in terms of the verbs used and their positive/negative connotations. This being a fairly 'heavy' format, these tables are only provided for this page (see Appendix 7) for illustrative purposes.

The text (in Vlaams Blok brochure *Liste 10 Bruxelles Notre Ville! Touche pas a la démocratie*; see Appendix 7) addresses voters in the form of exhortations (through the use of the imperative mode in the last sentences). Voters are agents in these sentences: they have an active role to play to protect democracy. The verbs describing actions to be taken by the voters are all in the future tense of the

indicative mood. The indicative mood is used in factual statements and the future tense is used for actions to be taken in the future. The verbs used are all empowering voters (e.g. “*will go*”, “*will ensure that*”, “*will vote*”, “*will decide*”, and “*will think*”): voters choose, voters decide. However, the Vlaams Blok is also directing those actions (e.g. “*We are hoping that you will think about this when you are in the voting booth, on June, 13<sup>th</sup>*”) which is one of the six sentences highlighted in yellow in the original text). This direction is more visible, with use of the imperative mood by the authors of the text in the last two sentences, where the Vlaams Blok tells the voter to vote for the party (using the present tense of the imperative mood:

*“Be vigilant so that the free choice of citizens remains a right and stops being flouted. To stay free, vote for the Vlaams Blok.”*

**Table 3 – VOTER as actor table (Brochure. *Liste 10 Bruxelles Notre Ville! Touche pas a la démocratie* ; Vlaams Blok, 2004 : 3 ; see Appendix 7)**

Actor	Process	Goal	Line
You (dear voter)	will go to the voting booth	vote for the Brussels members of the Flemish Parliament; Brussels Regional Council and European Parliament	1-3
It's you who	will decide	the result of the elections	23-24
It's you who	ensure that	the free choice of citizens remains right and stop being flouted	23-24
It's you who	vote	for the Vlaams Blok (to stay free)	24-25
You	will think	about it	15
'one'	is rewarded	for one's work	21
One	can express	freely one's opinion	22

In addition, as the next table illustrates, the verbs, referring to the *political parties* as 'actors' (see Table 3), provide a different take than the one for the *voters* as actors (as seen in Table 2). Indeed, the verbs used to describe the other parties' actions are negative, e.g. "*refuse*", "*not interested*", "*did nothing*", "*put the VB<sup>91</sup> offside*". This highlights the negativity and undesirability of voting for such parties. It is highlighted in the third column of the table where the Vlaams Blok explains that the other parties are not interested in people's opinion: "*The parties have proved that they were not interested in the people's opinions*". The governing parties seem to be engaged in undemocratic practices (the rule for aliens' right to

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<sup>91</sup> The party commonly refers to itself with the acronym 'VB'. The usage from the Vlaams Blok (VB) has been carried on by the Vlaams Belang (VB).

vote; sue the Vlaams Blok) and have the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang describe the parties' actions as undesirable, and against voters' best interests. In contrast, the verbs used to describe the actions of the party are all positive, e.g. "*hope*", "*want*", "*defend*" (see Table 4). The text presents the party as a good alternative to the seemingly unconcerned mainstream parties. In a few sentences, where the Vlaams Blok holds the agent role (six in total out of 26), Frank Vanhecke and Johan Demol have actually tackled the main points the party consistently develops in its political communication (see Appendix 5): freedom of speech, security, being boss in one's own land, and democracy.

**Table 4 – POLITICAL PARTIES/'THEY' as actors (Brochure. *Liste 10 Bruxelles Notre Ville! Touche pas a la démocratie*; Vlaams Blok, 2004: 3; see Appendix 7)**

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Process</b>	<b>Goal</b>	<b>Line</b>
All the French-speaking parties	were in favour of	granting foreigners the right to vote. Note: these foreigners are described as 'who refuse to get our nationality'	8-9
The VLD (Prime Minister Verhofstadt's party)	did nothing	to stop/prevent this coup.	10-11
The parties	have proved that	not interested in people's opinion	11-12
They	are not interested in people's opinions	in people's opinions	11-12
They	refused	a referendum on the question of the aliens' right to vote	12-13
The regime	called	a tribunal to rule out the Vlaams Blok (doing something to the Vlaams Blok)	19
"tribunal"	Put	the Vlaams Blok offside	18

**Table 5 – THE VLAAMS BLOK as actor (Brochure. *Liste 10 Bruxelles Notre Ville! Touche pas a la démocratie* ; Vlaams Blok, 2004 : 3 ; see Appendix 7)**

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Process</b>	<b>Goal</b>	<b>Line</b>
We	are hoping	that the voter will remember the parties' lack of concern in their opinion	14-15
The Vlaams Blok	is not	a racist party (denegation against this accusation/condemnation)	17-18
It	Only defends	The rights of the Brusseleirs	18
We	Will continue	Our fight without bending	20
We	Want	A Brussels where one is rewarded for one's work	21

Verbs are important as pivots in sentences. They tell the reader about the subject of the sentence. The verb phrase, or predicate, expresses an action, an event, or a state of being. Accordingly, sentences either move or stand still (Sandberg, 2001). The previous section highlights the importance of the chosen verbs to attach positive or negative connotations to the actions of different actors, according to the aim of the party. The party portrays those actors positively for the actions undertaken by the Vlaams Blok, negatively when verbs are used to signify the actions of the Vlaams Blok's political opponents. To link this to the previous strategic dimension, the verbs have a role to play in constructing the legitimating strategies, for example, or in building a positive/negative portrayal.

### ***3.3.2. Syntax and punctuation***

Concerning the syntax and punctuation used in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's website, there is a recurrent use of inverted commas around the word

‘discrimination’ and ‘racism’ (and the words linked to those words, such as ‘anti-racism’, ‘xenophobia’, ‘islamophobia’ among others). As discussed in the semantic dimension, definitions of ‘racism’ and ‘discrimination’ are refuted and reframed as being political tools used to limit Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang’s freedom of speech.

The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang seems very fond of quotation marks. For example in Brochure 6 (*Feiten/Réalités*, May 2004, Appendix 18) the phrase “*sentiment d’insécurité*”, i.e. feeling of insecurity, is placed between quotation marks. It might imply that the Vlaams Blok does not consider it as being a mere ‘feeling’, but as a reality endured by people. This insecure feeling is a common point where the traditional parties and the Vlaams Blok contradict each other. The figures relating to crimes clearly record a fall in cases, but the feeling of insecurity might be heightened (among the elderly) by the presence of youngsters of foreign origin. For the Vlaams Blok, it is important to record those feelings and frame them as being ‘real’. In this specific case, if insecurity is defined and somehow lessened in importance as a subjective feeling by the media and the government, the Vlaams Blok presents those feelings as believable, and actually real. Johan Demol refers to the crime statistics as ‘*travestissement*’ or travesties of figures.

As discussed earlier, the use of quotation marks (see section 3.1.5., p. 161, for the discussion on semantic manipulation of the terms racism and discrimination) indicates the party ‘negotiation’ of accepted terms and questions their semantic

content. In the following quotation, the Vlaams Blok puts the three following words between quotation marks: *'disturb'*, *'new electorate'*, *'citizens'*.

*"For low electoral reasons, those parties holding power do not want to 'disturb' their 'new electorate'. Consequently, there is a series of gross injustice, which put a category of 'citizens' above laws at the expenses of the others".* (emphasis added; Vlaams Belang, 2004: 10, see Appendix 12)

The decoding is fairly easy. Throughout the year (and in the brochure), the party has been opposing the right to vote for foreigners, and has opposed the *'Belg snel wet'* (Quick Citizenship Act) which facilitates and speeds up access to Belgian citizenship. Naturalised foreign-born Belgians, in addition to the long-term foreign residents, are called in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse, the *"new electorate"*. Following the Vlaams Belang, the new-ness of this particular electorate highlights the changing nature of politics. The Vlaams Belang argues that the mainstream parties, *"for electoral reasons"*, do not hesitate to alienate a part of the population (the former electorate, i.e. to be understood as the *'real' Belgian?*), and to allow *"a series of gross injustices"* to please the new electorate (to the detriment of the previous electorate). This new electorate is also referred to by the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang as *"a category of 'citizens'"*. The quotation around the word citizens between quotation marks is particularly significant. The Vlaams Belang does not consider this *"new electorate"* as proper *'citizens'*, otherwise the party would not be questioning their Belgian citizenship and attracting the attention of the readers to the matter with the use of quotation marks. This is consistent with the broad discourse of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang used in constructing foreigners as living off the generosity of Belgian institutions.

and benefiting from rights, but no responsibilities, therefore not qualifying for full citizenship. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang often laments the fact that Belgium has the most flexible nationality granting laws in the world (and proposes to ‘review’ (i.e. revoke) the naturalisation of ‘new Belgians’ up to the third generation).

An effect of punctuation also requiring analysis is the *nature* of the speech. The most salient example here is the ‘spoken’ delivery, i.e. written texts that ‘read’ like transcriptions of spoken speeches.

### ***3.3.3. Spoken delivery***

The use of parentheses is fairly common in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang’s discourse. For example, in a Vlaams Blok publication (May 2004: 2-3), the use of parentheses in the following paragraph is examined:

*“All the parties, Flemish and French-speakers (except for the Vlaams Blok, of course), have voted for one modification of the law after another, in order to ban the Vlaams Blok and financially dry it out.”(Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2-3, Appendix 4)*

The parentheses contribute to the impression that Frank Vanhecke is directly addressing the reader by stating the ‘obvious’ i.e. that the party has not condoned any changes in the law. This interpretation is reinforced by the presence of irony, and the rhetorical question (and answer) from Frank Vanhecke expressed in the second paragraph:

*“Could you imagine that the Vlaams Blok benefits from too much sympathy or common sense from our people! No, professional magistrates, who could often be put under political pressures, were imperatively necessary”.* (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2-3, Appendix 4)

The persuasive use of language does not so much appeal to reason but to the recipients’ expectations and emotions (see section 3.2.2, p. 170). So its purpose is not so much to inform, but to make people believe, and, in the end, to act upon their beliefs (in this instance to vote for Vlaams Blok). In the brochure *Feiten/Réalités* (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 4; Appendix 18), the sentence starts by “*indeed*”, as if prompted by a question which could have been: “Is Brussels a safe city? Don’t you feel unsafe in Brussels?”.<sup>92</sup> The text is written as a transcription of spoken language. The indignation of the lady is palpable with: “*What are they talking about, they are living on an other planet those people?*”. It is grammatically incorrect in the written language, but quite common in spoken delivery: ‘*ces gens-là*’ (meaning literally ‘those people there’). In Flemish the lady says ‘*wablief*’, a Flemish colloquial phrase loosely meaning ‘well, please’. In both Dutch and French, the translation captures the indignation of the woman about not being believed when expressing her feelings of insecurity.

In the text, “*Could you imagine...? No, ...*” Frank Vanhecke asks (Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2-3, Appendix 4) the questions, and provides the answers himself. It is a powerful rhetorical device: the party leader expresses strong emotions in the text. His indignation is clear in “*do you think that today, suddenly/all of a sudden, at*

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<sup>92</sup> See Appendix 18, there is, vertically next to Johan Demol’s picture, the question: “*Brussels a safe city?!*”

*the opportunity of this trial, eminently political, the political nominations wouldn't play any role???*"(Vlaams Blok, May 2004: 2-3; see Appendix 4) the three question marks at the end of the paragraph highlight the 'spoken delivery'. This is used more commonly in cartoons, e-mails or instant messaging, than in a written text to indicate extreme surprise (or here indignation). This suggests that the text is in the form of 'spoken delivery'. The text also has irony in Frank Vanhecke's words: "*Isn't independence beautiful...*" (or literal translation: "*It's beautiful, independence...*"), when talking about the organisation that instigated legal action against the Vlaams Blok, and alluding to its close links with the Prime Minister (Vlaams Belang, May 2004: 2). With punctuation, and some grammatical construction, more appropriate to spoken language, the party seems to be reducing the distance between the politicians and the readers. The rhetorical questions provide a quasi-conversation (questions and answers) between the readers and the party representatives which might also be intended to reduce the distance between the voters and the party, and provide an impression of straightforwardness and unceremonious exchange.

#### ***3.3.4. The effect of the syntactical construction, and level of language***

First of all, the most salient feature here is the statement of 'facts'. Using the indicative mood, carefully chosen headings which direct the interpretation and the understanding, and the choice of specific words (negative and positive connotations, according to the recipient they relate to), seem to allow no room for alternative interpretations. These assertions, often without justification or proof, are amongst the most direct ways of handling the interlocutor's views and attitudes

(LeBon, 1968, in Sornig, 1989: 99). The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang assertively tells stories, re-tells them, guides the interpretation, by not leaving any place for doubts, or multiple meanings and ultimately constructs its particular dimension of reality. Assertions are indeed an interpretation of reality, i.e. of a reality as it appears to the speaker (Sornig, 1989: 99), because assertions are also attempts to alter the recipient's perspective. This is after all why the speaker's perspective is being verbalised in the first place (Sornig, 1989). This view is in line with the belief that not only can language be ideologically used, but that the very use of language is ideological (Butt *et al.*, 2004). "Ideology in language follows from the fact that we can construct multiple versions of the 'same' physical, biological, social and semiotic events" (Butt *et al.*, 2004: 267).

This is why the range of possible alternative interpretations in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse is reduced to a minimum by its headlines, and by using slogans, sound bites, or pictures that had been used in past publications. In addition, by directly linking the statements with the party stances and policies, it provides a directness and straight talk (uncommon in politics?), and is unapologetic in expressing its views. The style is simple, straightforward (indicative mood, imperative, using statements of facts), depicting a world as essentially black and white, and suggesting that it can provide clean-cut solutions. If the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang provides this form of no-nonsense communication, the most controversial policies and programmes are still veiled and reformulated to avoid frontal confrontation with the targeted actors, or with the legal system. This is one reason why critical discourse analysis requires a

knowledge and analysis of the context in which the utterances were created. This leads to the next section on the process of decoding the language of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang.

*Elliptic language: Obscuring meaning. How to decode?*

In human communication, every message has to be decoded, i.e. the recipient is expected to take it upon himself or herself to decipher the message, to complete what is left unsaid, to bring light into obscurities and verbalise the implicit (Sornig, 1989). The reader or listener is not a passive consumer of the content of the media text (Watson and Bargiela, 1998). The reader is asked to understand the message by decoding the different layers of meaning. The encoding process must of course take into account the life experience and profile of the recipient, to ensure a successful decoding. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, probably better than any other political party, demonstrates an intimate knowledge of its voters, their expectations and anxieties (through market research?). It is of course possible that the reader or listener does not 'catch' the hidden meaning. One possible consequence of the use of rhetorical grammar, and the use of the passive voice for example is the obscuring of meaning. Holly (1989: 124) argues that "there is [...] a risk that the message cannot be understood because it is too vague, but in the long run, repetition and variation of forms will compensate for the occasional failure".

According to Sornig (1989: 102), elliptic language forces the recipients to complete the utterance and through this mental activity where they busy

themselves with what somebody else may have meant, the recipients are lured into identifying themselves to a degree with the speaker. This is, Sornig (1989:102) argues, simply a consequence of the incompleteness and vagueness of statements whose comprehension and acceptance is liable to misunderstanding and depends on the recipient's conscious and voluntary cooperation. One consequence of the indirectness of any linguistic (and semiotic) interaction is that anybody who is able to decipher a message content and purpose which are not manifest, has proved by accomplishing this task that he or she belongs to those who can receive and process messages without having to be told everything explicitly.

### *Vagueness*

Vagueness appears to be a consistent characteristic of the Vlaams Belang discourse. The first assumption of many commentators (see Erk, 2005) is that disguising and obscuring meaning is necessary for the Vlaams Belang to avoid legal harassment but leaves enough clues for the reader to understand the underlying message. For example, in the brochure dedicated to the Turkish admission to the EU (see Appendix 15), there is an interesting contrast in the brochure between precise sources, figures and facts (see for example pp.3-6 in Appendix 15) and the relative vagueness of other arguments (see Appendix 15, pp.7- 8), where the party does not provide the source of the "*phoney arguments*" in favour of Turkish EU membership. On page 8 of the same brochure (in the 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph), the party refers to "*a recent study*" to substantiate its claim that Turkey is not really a secular state. "*A recent study*" does not say much about the source, the date, the type of study. Does this study actually exist? This might be another

example of so-called 'common knowledge' used ostensibly to provide more weight to the argument.

According to Holly (1989), the repetition and variation of forms is also supposed to compensate for the 'missed' meaning (Holly, 1989). This might be an explanation as why elements directly taken from the Vlaams Blok's brochures can be found in the Vlaams Belang's literature. The obvious reason is that both parties are actually the same party, therefore a recycling of texts and photos is almost inevitable. It would also not be far-fetched to assume that these 'borrowings' are voluntary, in that they provide a common universe of symbols and meanings that guide the understanding of the reader (see the repetition of similar headlines, Figs. 1, 2 and 3).

#### **4. Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the most salient elements of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse. The discursive analysis of the party has highlighted the persuasion of the party discourse. For many years, especially since the theme of immigration has come to the fore, the party has been consistently increasing its electoral base. Discourse-historical's semantic, strategic and linguistic dimensions have highlighted important elements and processes present in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang literature and have contributed to its articulation and persuasion.

Core themes are developed by the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang and provide a consistent picture of Belgian society and Belgian politics, Flanders and democracy. The semantic analytical dimension of several documents from the Vlaams Blok and from the Vlaams Belang, has shown a careful selection of themes which has allowed the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang to focus readers' attention on newsworthy events. This way, the party can repeat and reinforce its "vision" and political direction. It is worth noting that there is a remarkable consistency between the respective *semantic dimensions* of the Vlaams Blok and the Vlaams Belang literature. The party systematically presents itself as the defender of democracy. The exaggerated (hyperbolic) claims in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang communications (with some melodramatic comments from the party leaders) regarding democracy, and their constant mocking and denunciation of other parties is another example of the focussing and magnifying processes at play here. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang show the readers where to look and, using a linguistic and rhetorical distorting lens, attempts to modify their perspective.

Issues related to branding, positioning and segmentation that would inform the terms used above are provided in chapter 8 (see p.281) which explores in further detail the marketing of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. First, the analysis of the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang's discourse is continued in the following chapter which focusses on the images produced by the party. The conceptualisation of images as texts justifies the analysis of those images which deserve interest in their own right as part of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse.

# **Chapter 7: Images as texts: a visual analysis of the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang**

## **1. Introduction – relevance of the visual**

The aim of this chapter is to enhance the CDA of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse by undertaking an analysis of the visual elements included in the party's communication material. CDA is particularly useful for analysing phenomena such as communication patterns in public institutions, media discourse, and the constitution of individual and group identity (Anthonissen, 2003). It reveals how language is used to convey power and status in contemporary social interaction (Anthonissen, 2003: 300). Most work done with a CDA approach has focussed on the spoken and written word. However a CDA of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse focussing solely on the verbal and textual arguments would be incomplete. Indeed, if one accepts that language is only one variety of semiotic modes available to people in creating meaning (Anthonissen, 2003), then visual elements should also be included in the analysis. Visual elements, i.e. photographs, images and figures are actually a major part of the rhetorical environment according to Foss (2004). Many authors have also recognised that the visual has often been forgotten, with images located in a secondary and subordinate relationship to written and verbal text. Thus the impact of the visual in the world has been largely ignored (Foss, 2004; Helmers and Hill,

2004; Stafford, 1997; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). Ignoring this aspect in my analysis of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang discourse would mean that a major factor in the way the party communicates and creates meaning would have been ignored. Hence this chapter is based on the premise that a consideration of images as texts is an interesting and necessary approach that recognises the multidimensionality of discourse.

Several photographs published by the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang are analysed in detail and discussed in relation to relevant strands of literature. An appraisal of the theory of visual persuasion opens this chapter and anchors the analysis of the visual elements in the same way that the verbal elements were considered in the previous chapter. The CDA methodology is structurally adapted to the particular nature of the visual elements of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse: the '*semantic dimension*' encompasses the description of the photograph, the subjects, the action; the '*linguistic dimension*' becomes the '*communicative dimension*' and tackles a focus on the photographic conventions (e.g. focus, type and style of photography), and the '*strategic dimension*' focusses on the persuasion of the visual arguments and the way viewers' reading is guided towards a 'most preferred' interpretation.

The chapter starts with an appraisal of the centrality of the image for marketing and politics. The particular conceptualisation of images as texts in this research is discussed in relation to persuasion and rhetoric. This theoretical discussion is

followed by the empirical critical 'reading' of a selection of photographs taken from various publications of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang.

## **2. The centrality of image**

### *Marketing and image*

Image, its production and consumption, is claiming centre-stage in our consumer culture (Schroeder, 2002). For example, brands are developed based on images, products are advertised via images, and corporate image is critical for management success (Schroeder, 2002). Brands and brand management have become cornerstones of accomplishment in attracting and maintaining a profitable customer base. Products often compete on image, driven by marketing strategy to differentiate themselves via marketing communication and competitive advantage (Schroeder, 2002: 23). In essence, marketing is fundamentally about image management: "in marketing practice that is most likely to succeed in contemporary society, image is primary and the product is treated as merely a variable that attempts to represent the image" (Firat *et al.*, 1995: 46). In fact, images constitute a large proportion of corporate communications about products and services, economic performance, and organisational identity (Borgerson and Schroeder, 2005). The task of managers has shifted from the production of goods to the production of images; and this shift from product to image profoundly affects product development and marketing communications (Schroeder, 2002). Image has become the starting point for market communications, i.e. an image is created and the development of the associated product follows (Schroeder, 2002).

### *A critical stance on image: the issue of power and representation*

Marketing scholars have analysed image, but they mainly focus on advertising. However, this is a rather limited focus considering the much wider relevance of image for marketing, for example, in commercial settings where images are central to corporate communications about products and services, economic performance, and organisational identity. Indeed, marketing images have the power to influence how people perceive their world and respond to it (Borgerson and Schroeder, 2005). Hence, marketing images contribute to the 'reality' into which consumers are socialised (Borgerson and Schroeder, 2005). This is of particular concern when one considers for example the sexist use of images objectifying women, or the xenophobic use of images to construct and emphasise the differences of 'others' as problematic and incompatible. The centrality of image in modern politics is also widely recognised. Political parties and candidates are often referred to as 'packaged' (Franklin, 2004), and the careful construction of their image is crucial for success. Political image refers to a carefully constructed condensation of all the attributes a candidate (or a party) wants to convey to the voters into easily rendered visual and verbal symbols (Strachan and Kendall, 2004: 135). Political images are symbolic devices which can be constructed with both visual and verbal messages (Strachan and Kendall, 2004: 136).

### *An approach to the analysis of images*

In this thesis images are considered as cultural texts, and not merely as accurate or true strategic pictures that transparently record faces, families, events, products and services (Mick *et al.*, 2004; Schroeder, 2002; Scott, 1994; Borgerson and

Schroeder, 2005). The stance adopted here is that photographs (the format of images focussed upon in the research) are selectively edited and culturally produced images, which exist within shifting planes of meaning and significance (Borgerson and Schroeder, 2005). The starting point of visual analysis is the recognition that “images show us a world, but not *the* world [...] When we look at images, whether photographs, films, videos, or paintings, what we see is the product of human consciousness, itself part and parcel of culture and history” (Leppert, 1997: 3; emphasis in the original; in Schroeder, 2002: 19).

Asking *how* images work, *how* they persuade is not the question addressed here, because tackling those questions would enquire into people’s beliefs, attitudes, and opinions, and how they respond to images, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather it is the structure and the use of the image that is explored, by adopting the same principles that direct CDA. Images have been analysed not as evidence of the who, where and what of reality, but as evidence of how their maker(s) have (re)constructed reality, as evidence of bias and ideologically coloured interpretation (van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001). Images are worth searching to uncover the story (stories) provided by those visual elements in their own right. Second, as was shown by Anthonissen (2003), in situations of censorship<sup>93</sup>, information in the conventional form may result in criminal liability, so images can be used to bypass censorship. It could be argued that the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams

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<sup>93</sup> Censorship occurs when a government, or a strong institution lays down rigid rules for conducting public discourse, and these rules are not readily accepted (broadly following Anthonissen, 2003).

Belang is in a situation of quarantine and has its discourse restricted by censorship (concerning its outspoken racist and xenophobic stances). The other political parties and the media have quarantined the Vlaams Blok behind the *cordon sanitaire* for its outspoken xenophobia and discriminatory policies. Moreover, racism is liable to prosecution in Belgium, and the Vlaams Blok has already suffered the consequences for its racist discourse, with its condemnation in court and subsequent decision to disband. The Vlaams Belang is today under close scrutiny and provides a good illustration of self-censorship not only to avoid liability, but also to appeal to a much wider electoral base. This is an additional justification as to why images must be considered as worthy of analysis as are words in this research. Anthonissen (2003: 299) has argued that where censorship prevails, semiotic modes other than language emerge and have to be investigated.

### **3. Text and image. Persuasion and rhetoric<sup>94</sup>**

#### **3.1. Text and image**

Images are approached in this research as texts. It is a similar approach to that of Barthes (1974: 55) who argues that there is no difference between literature and painting, for example, in order to “affirm more powerfully the plurality of ‘texts’”. because, as Helmers and Hill (2004) explain, paint and words refer not to an external reality, but to one code or another. Reality, Helmers and Hill (2004) added, is always framed by codes that determine what the writer and painter looks

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<sup>94</sup> Rhetoric is the use of the best means available to make the logic of the argument persuasive to its audience.

at and what mode of representation they select to describe the reality that they believe is worthy of vision and representation.

Images and texts can work together to reinforce a vision of reality. The tight relationship between image and text has been noted by Barthes (1977) as existing in two categories: 1) where the verbal text extends the meaning of the image (or vice-versa), and 2) where the verbal text elaborates the meaning of the image (or vice-versa), giving an illustration or a more precise restatement. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) note that the visual component of a text is an independently organized and structured message, connected to the written component, but not necessarily dependent on it. Images may be analysed without any recourse to the verbal or written information which may accompany them, indeed the images might have been designed to be self-sufficient. Images are not merely 'nonverbal' information that convey more or less the same message that the text might impart (Scott, 1994). Images constitute a system of representations – a visual language that is both engaging and deceptive (Schroeder, 2002).

However, textual analysis can show what representations include and exclude, what they make salient, and what differences they construct between people, places and things (van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001: 7). Therefore, visual analysis may also include the accompanying text, or even regard word and image as indivisible units of analysis (such as in social semiotic analysis of layout, where the written serves as a secondary source of information to anchor who and what is depicted and what is symbolised) (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001: 7). Analyzing

one without the other would provide an incomplete story. Hence in this thesis both the visual and the verbal are considered as the mixed fabric constituting the discourse of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang.

### **3.2. Persuasion and visual arguments**

Persuasion, or rhetorical persuasion, is defined as causing someone to believe by means of speech (Reboul: 1991). This is typical of the view that the use of language is paramount in rhetoric, or at least envisages speech as essential to rhetoric (Blair, 2004: 42). Foss *et al.* (1985: 11) argue for a broader definition and have defined rhetoric as “the uniquely human ability to use symbols to communicate with one another”. This definition logically includes the verbal, but also the visual.

The advantage of visual arguments over print or spoken arguments lies in their evocative power and the sense of realism they convey (Blair, 2004: 51). For example, visual images can be used to convey a narrative in a short time (e.g. a TV commercial). To be effective, the properties of a visual argument must resonate with the audience on the specific occasion and in the particular circumstances. The visual symbolism must register immediately whether consciously or not (Blair, 2004). The visual rhetorician must know and relate not only to the beliefs and attitudes of the intended audience but also to the visual imagery that is meaningful to it. The persuader must also be sensitive to the surrounding argumentative “space” (Blair, 2004: 52), or context, of the audience. because so much remains

tacit or unexpressed. In other words, visual arguments are arguments with gaps to be filled in by the participation of the audience (Blair, 2004: 52).

Another important question concerns what historical and cultural modes of visual understanding the audience brings to the situation. Actually, the arguer draws the viewer in to participate in completing the argument and the viewer becomes its own persuader. Visual arguments are distinguished by their rhetorical power, or potential for a rhetorical power greater than that of purely verbal arguments (Blair, 2004: 52). Blair (2004) argues that the visual element in arguments is most significantly a *rhetorical* dimension, rather than *logical* or *dialectal*. Indeed, the dialectal dimension stipulates that there is a process of interaction in the arguments between the arguer and the interlocutors who raise questions or objections (Blair, 2004). Images lack this dialectal aspect. The visual makes an argument in the sense of adducing a few reasons in a forceful way. It does not permit complexity of dialectal moves such as the raising of objections in order to refute or otherwise answer them ((Blair, 2004). For example, pictures, especially films, are well-suited to telling stories. They provide an excellent medium for visual arguments by means of narrative construction. People do not just imagine the narrative; they 'see' it unfolding before their eyes (Blair, 2004). Blair (2004) argues that seeing is believing, even if it is invented, exaggerated, or plain lies. The visual brings to arguments another dimension: it adds drama and force. The visual has an immediacy, a verisimilitude, and a concreteness that help influence acceptance, which is not available to the verbal (Blair, 2004). Blair (2004) explains that the visual excels in the rhetorical dimension, because visual arguments tend to be one-

sided (the complications of the dialectical perspectives are not easily conveyed visually), presenting the case for, or the case against, but not together. Political cartoons for example are used to make a visual argument. Cartoons are distinctive because they permit explicitness (with labelling) and precision of meaning (distinctive visual traits and caricatures of well-known faces) found in few other visual genres (Blair, 2004: 55)

Clearly then, an appropriate method of analysis is crucial and dependent on the nature of the project, on the visual material to be investigated and on the goals of the research project (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001). Political images are constructs and any analysis must reveal these constructs (following Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001). According to Van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001: 5), studies aiming to change the practices of representation (e.g. the explicit political stance of critical discourse analysts; see section 4.4.2.) often choose a detailed and explicit method of analyzing construction and its effects, so as to avoid the idea that it is all in the eye of the beholder.

#### **4. Image analysis**

##### **4.1. 'Reading' images**

Image interpretation is never complete or closed (Schroeder, 2002). Interpretations are subject to change, to debate and contestation. Images function within culture, and their interpretive meanings are subject to change (Schroeder, 2002: 5). In this argument, culture is conceptualized, following Schroeder (2002: 6), as a primary or constitutive process, as important as the economic or material base in shaping

social subjects and historical events – not merely a reflection of the world after the event.

The overwhelming number, variety, and presence of visual elements assaulting our eyes interfere with the ability to carefully scrutinize and reflect upon individual images, and lulls viewers into believing that seeing is understanding (Schroeder, 2002). Photographs appear as if they just are merely visual records of what has happened, who was there, how they appear, where and when it happened (Schroeder, 2002). The resemblance between a visual representation and the subject is one way that photographs tie subject matter to symbolic meaning. For example, advertisements often use ‘typical’ people in advertisements for their resemblance to targeted consumers (Schroeder, 2002). Photography’s power derives from its ability to seemingly represent the ‘real’ as it is (Schroeder, 2002), and to be considered as a historical record of reality (Szarokowski, 1989; in Schroeder, 2002: 53). Blair (2004: 51) explains that ‘reality’ is actually a selected perspective presented in a highly structured or filtered way. Photographs are indeed selectively edited and culturally produced images that exist within shifting planes of meaning and significance (Borgerson and Schroeder, 2005).

It is also important to recognise the subjectivity of visual representation in studying the commercial landscape (Borgerson and Schroeder, 2005). in particular, in this case, marketing communications in a political context. Marketing images contribute to the ‘reality’ into which contemporary consumers are socialised and often evade notions of creative interpretation and critical resistance (Borgerson

and Schroeder, 2005: 7). The persuasive power of marketing images depends largely upon the representational conventions of photographic reproduction: advertising, corporate reports, packaging, product catalogues, promotional materials. Attaching meaning to marketing interventions is not understood here as a one way process (i.e. from the marketer to a passive consumer). The viewers generate their own meanings and they bring their own cognitive, social and cultural lenses to whatever they see. Accepting the existence of potentially multiple meanings does not mean that images can mean absolutely anything to anyone, or “float”, as post-structural thinking holds (Bailey and Hall, 1992). Schroeder (2002) argues that meaning does not “float” because the historical and political processes that also generate meaning are not eliminated. Therefore the interpretive work of the researcher does not imply fixing a particular meaning in time. Photographs, like any other text, are polysemic. It follows that any interpretation the viewer makes will not exhaust the significance that might be attributed to the image (Ball and Smith, 1992: 18). Any interpretation of photographs is not trying to identify precisely what images mean, but rather to open up possibilities of meaning (Schroeder, 2002: 49). Therefore, interpreting a photograph is acknowledging its representational power, both as an artefact and as a bearer of meaning, reflecting broad societal, cultural, and ideological codes (Schroeder, 1998).

#### **4.2. An analytical approach to the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang’s images**

Description of the nature of visual rhetoric involves paying attention to: 1) the presented elements (i.e. the *semantic dimension*); and 2) the suggested elements

(i.e. the *strategic dimension*). Identification of the presented elements of an artefact involves describing its main features (space, medium, colour, etc.) (Foss, 2004). This step of identification is referred to here as the *communicative dimension* (the equivalent of the CDA's *linguistic dimension*). Identification of the suggested elements is a process of discovering the concepts, ideas, themes and allusions that a viewer is likely to infer from the presented elements (Foss, 2004: 307). Analysis of the presented and suggested elements engenders an understanding of the primary communicative elements of an image and, consequently, of the meanings an image is likely to have for audiences (Foss, 2004: 307).

#### *The semantic dimension*

The semantic dimension in a discourse-historical approach is linked to the content of the discourse under investigation (see section 4.5.1.1.). Similarly, the semantic dimension of the visual elements of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse tackles the 'content' of the photographs and provides the basis for their interpretation. The interpretation of a work of art, photograph, or advertisement, begins with its description. A useful starting point for a descriptive analysis is to identify and describe persons, objects, places or events in a photograph (Barrett, 2005). Schroeder (2002, 2006) recommends that the basic features of image must be described, along with the characteristics contained within it, such as composition, colour, tone and contrast (that are included here in the *communicative dimension*). Visual interpretation is thus not a matter of "getting it right", rather it is an exercise in coaxing culturally and historically situated

meanings from images. Decoding images begins with a personal understanding of symbols, conventions, and stereotypes (Schroeder, 2002). First, it involves drawing on one's knowledge, then making connections with a broader set of concerns (Schroeder, 2002), because images need to make clear associations in order to get their message across (Schroeder, 2002: 39).

### *The communicative dimension*

The communicative dimension is the 'parallel' dimension to the discourse-historical linguistic dimension which encompasses the lexical units, argumentation schemes and syntactical. For the visual analysis, interpretive tools include information both internal and external to the object, such as context, comparisons, denotation, and connotation. The basic interpretive techniques are subject matter (e.g. group, models), form (e.g. fold-out ad), medium (e.g. black and white photographs), style<sup>95</sup> (e.g. harsh, realistic), genre (refers to a type or category of art, e.g. group portrait) and contextual issues (e.g. the purpose of the picture and how it is presented, encompassing concerns external to the photograph or advertisement) (Schroeder, 2002: 119). Comparisons constitute a part of the contextualising interpretive process (Barnet, 1997). Comparisons can be made to other photographers' work, other work by the same photographer, other images that seem connected, as well as cultural products such as other advertisements, novels or films.

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<sup>95</sup> Style: indicates a resemblance among diverse art objects from an artist, movement, time period, or geographic location and is recognised by a characteristic handling of subject matter and formal elements" (Barrett, 1996: 31-2; in Schroeder, 2002).

### *The strategic dimension*

In Wodak's discourse historical approach, the strategic dimension refers to "more or less accurate and more or less intentional plans of practices adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic aim" (Wodak, 2001: 73). In the previous chapter, several rhetorical devices and narrative strategies that contribute to providing a clear and persuasive narrative were identified in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse. For example, the party's political and identity struggle is presented in a typical 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy. Similar patterns are identified in the visual representations in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang publications.

### *Summary*

The rhetorical power of images has been established in an earlier discussion. It is nevertheless important to make clear that visual images are not mere substitutes for verbal language. Images do not necessarily speak for themselves, rather as noted by Leppert (1997), they make visible a realm of possibilities and potential meanings, many of which are difficult to articulate:

"To talk about an image is not to decode it, and having once broken its code, to have done with it, the final meaning having been established and reduced to words. To talk about an image is, in the end, an attempt to relate oneself to it and to the sight it represents" (Leppert, 1997: 7-8, in Schroeder, 2002: 6).

The three dimensions are interrelated, and as such discussed without explicitly making a distinction between them (unless significant), in order to shorten a long and potentially descriptive process. Rather, the most significant elements are highlighted and discussed. The following analysis is divided into three sections. The first section of the analysis deals with a portrait, and group photographs. This is followed by a deeper analysis of the way that 'others' are depicted across the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's communication material. The analysis focusses on highlighted 'differences' to be noticed in the 'others', which reinforce the stereotypes that constitute the business of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. Thirdly, a focus on identity construction is provided through the analysis of a Vlaams Belang brochure which deals with the Turkish admission to the European Union.

## **5. A visual analysis of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's material**

### **5.1. The portrait**

Portraits are the most straightforward representations of identity (Schroeder, 2002). However, the superficiality of most portraits must be recognised: the subjects are usually smiling, touched up, well lit, and posing. They denote the gap between the way people are and the way they would like to appear. The ideology of portrait (Schroeder, 2002: 55) is about how one should be, and how one wants to be perceived.

The portrait analysed to illustrate this point is a joint picture of both Frank Vanhecke and Johan Demol, wearing suits and ties, smiling and looking directly towards the lens, and seemingly towards the reader of the brochure (see Fig.1). On the right vertical there is a frame saying “*Pour les Bruxellois*”, i.e. “for the *Brusseleirs*<sup>96</sup>”.



**Fig.1 Vlaams Blok, Campaign brochure, June 2004: 1**  
Frank Vanhecke (left) and Johan Demol (right)

The size of the portrait is unusual enough to be mentioned here: the photograph of both men, shoulder to shoulder, occupies the whole page and is situated on the cover page, across the ‘editorial’ supposedly written by both politicians (see text in Appendix 5). It is a long way from the stereotypical representation of the extreme

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<sup>96</sup> The inhabitants of Brussels are referred to as the *Brusseleirs* (as used in Brussels’ old dialect), along with the use of *Flemish* or *Flemings* for the inhabitants of Flanders, and *Walloons* for the inhabitants of Wallonia.

right as thuggish, with faces deformed by hate (see photograph<sup>97</sup> in Appendix 19, of Filip Dewinter, a top member of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, in a violent street action). Quite the contrary here, the politicians smile and look directly at the viewer. It is a cliché that the eyes are considered as the windows on the soul. Here Johan and Frank are attempting to bare their souls, looking straight at the camera, and inviting the viewers to trust them. And why shouldn't they? Their apparently frank and direct look, friendly smile and clean cut appearance oozes friendliness and honesty. The camera position places the viewer on a level with both men. The viewer is face-to-face with Frank Vanhecke and Johan Demol, who hold the gaze and 'look back'. Providing the photograph of the authors of the texts might have been intended to personalize the delivery of the party policy and give them a human face (in contrast to the party manifesto, dry and impersonal). The portraits seem to elicit credibility: they talk the talk and look the part.

Similar interpretive processes can be used for the analysis of the group photographs of the party's representatives. The photographs of the 'employees' and members of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, represent an element of the corporate identity.

## **5.2. Group photographs – the corporate identity**

Corporate brand is closely linked to corporate identity (which represents the corporate brand). The corporate identity is the "ethos, aims and values of an

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<sup>97</sup> See Geerts, N. (2004), <http://www.resistances.be/rin/119.htm>, as accessed on 28/07/2007. photograph available in Appendix 19

organisation, presenting a sense of individuality, which helps to differentiate it from its competitors” (Jobber, 2004: 299). The concept of corporate identity, which is, according to Gioia *et al.*, (2004), a form of projected image, relates to the question of how the central idea of an organisation is presented to its various constituencies to achieve the corporation’s strategic goals (Olins, 2002). According to Jobber (2004), a key element of corporate identity is its visual cohesion, which ensures that all corporate communications are consistent with each other, and results in a corporate image in line with the organisation’s defining values and character.

Corporate or organisational image is the way that organisation members believe others view the organisation (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991); or the way the organisational elites would like outsiders to see the organisation. This is known as the organisational reputation. Organisational reputation refers to outsiders’ beliefs about what distinguishes an organisation (Bhattacharya and Elsbach, 2002; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991). Corporate identity and communication rely on photography’s representational power to create salient, and strategic images (Schroeder, 2002: 162).

For example, it is quite common for existing companies to undertake ‘re-imaging’ by changing the nature of their activities and/or via their communications to make their activities/image more “what the customer expects”, such as more ethically or technologically oriented (Muzellec, 2006). The objective of such re-imaging is to reduce the discrepancy between the perception of the outsiders and how the

insiders to the organisation “see themselves” (Gioia *et al.*, 2004). There are other options available to the elite of the organisation. The first option would be to do nothing if the discrepancies are not considered significant. The second option would be to highlight and emphasise the socially desirable aspects of the organisation’s identity (and thus attempt to manipulate outsiders’ perceptions). In short, the organisation’s managers could either change the way the outsiders perceive the organisation, or change the way the members of the organisation see themselves (Gioia *et al.*, 2004). In the case of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, there is some evidence that the party leaders chose to change the way people perceive the organisation, rather than changing the organisation itself, by changing the external perception of the party. For example, Filip Dewinter showed that the party leaders had no intention of changing the essence of the Vlaams Blok, when creating the Vlaams Belang:

*“We don’t need a ‘Vlaams Blok Light’ or a ‘Vlaams Blok Ultra’, but a ‘Vlaams Blok Plus!’. Indeed, our programme is not changing at all.” (Filip Dewinter in TV programme *Dag Allemaal* 3)*

However, the party has been placed (partially by legislation) in the position of having to undertake a change in image: e.g. by reviewing their policy on immigration (e.g. the official discarding of the ‘70 propositions plan’ to solve the problem of immigration), in order to appear to move from the extreme right to the conservative right. The necessary changes have been defined for public consumption as ‘obligatory’, but the comments made by the party leaders seem to reassure their followers that nothing has really changed. The organisation stayed

identical (same leaders, same structure, similar discourse), while the ‘softening’ of the image is changing people’s perceptions of the Vlaams Blok, from an extreme right party to the Vlaams Belang, a right-wing conservative party.

*Group photographs: the unity of the party*

This strategy might work. For illustration, one can note that there are many breaches to the *cordon sanitaire* in the Flemish media and that a majority of Flemings are in favour of removing the quarantine against the party. These might be indications that in Flanders, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is becoming a party like any other. The three following photographs (see Figs. 2, 3 & 4) are examined and discussed in relation to issues of representation and contribution to the corporate/organisational image of the party.



Fig. 2 Vlaams Blok  
Campaign brochure, June 2004: Cover page



**Fig. 3 Vlaams Belang**  
Political Programme brochure “De Kracht van een Overtuiging”<sup>98</sup>, undated.: 10



**Vos députés V.B. à Bruxelles** (de gauche à droite):  
*Monique Moens, Jos Van Assche, Greet Van Linter, Erland Pison, Dominiek Lootens, Johan Demol, Valérie Seyns, Erik Arckens, Frédéric Erens*

**Fig.4 Vlaams Belang**  
Group photograph in leaflet “*Turkije in Europa? Neen!*”<sup>99</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Translation: The Strength of a Conviction

<sup>99</sup> ‘*Turkije in Europa? Neen*’ means ‘Turkey in Europe? No’

All these group photographs represent a collection of different people. The third photograph could easily be interpreted as a family photograph (see Fig. 4), with the two women seated in mirrored positions, and a range of different age groups (with what looks like the oldest man, at the left, with his hand (protectively?) placed on the shoulder of one of the female representatives. They all are dressed up, made up, and smiling, gazing at the viewer (the lens of the camera). It is important to remember that these groups are staged and these people gathered for the purpose of the photograph. This is hardly a chance shot (see the table in the middle, or the twin chairs where the two women are seated). These posed and 'unnatural' photographs contrast sharply with another type of photograph deployed in brochures by the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang which could be classified as belonging to the genre of 'photojournalism' or narrative image (Lister and Wells, 2001). Such contrasting photographs representing 'foreigners' in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's literature all belong to this category. The point of photojournalism is to find 'telling' photos, providing the opportunity for interpretive commentary (Lister and Wells, 2001). Interestingly, few of these photos have any commentary accompanying them, but rather general 'stories' or political speeches from the party representatives about a related topic (e.g. demonstrating people and the freedom of speech in Islam, see Fig. 5 for example).

*Favourable self-representation: the issue of power*

The issue of power and the representation of reality are important here. The rhetorical power of these photographs is tangible. Schroeder (2002) argues that photographs cannot be held as untrue – at least they have not been edited and

modified – thereby removing the responsibility of the marketer. Indeed, when one asserts or makes a claim<sup>100</sup>, one takes responsibility for its truth and may legitimately be asked to produce evidence for the claims made (Blair, 2004). But images (photographs, cinematic or video images, paintings) do not seem, on the face of it, to be capable of being true or false (i.e. to have truth value) (Blair, 2004: 44). Indeed, Blair (2004) argued that the images can be funny, clever, beautiful, but to call them true or false seems to be, at best, using a metaphor, and at worst, just inappropriate<sup>101</sup>.

In addition, photographs (especially in the genre of photojournalism) bear a strong resemblance to ‘reality’ (Schroeder, 2002). In other words, photographs hold a mimetic capacity for things in the real world (Lister and Wells, 2001). In this view, a photograph is a ‘trace’ or imprint of the real (Sontag, 1978), “because it can borrow and carry all of the sign systems and codes (dress, style, architecture, objects, body language, etc.) which together with speech, the written word, sound and smell, make the world meaningful” (Lister and Wells, 2001: 77). It would therefore be unwise to forget that photographs have been taken, selected and edited by individuals for specific purposes. The role of the researcher is to question the purposes and understand the context and circumstances of the production of those photographs. Who represents who and for what purpose?

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<sup>100</sup> For example, claims such as “my products make you lose weight in 2 weeks” (see e.g. [http://www.fitwise.com/2\\_Week\\_Diet.asp](http://www.fitwise.com/2_Week_Diet.asp)), or “The statistics are clear, he said, foreigners are four times more likely to commit crimes than Swiss nationals” uttered by Dr Schlüter, of the Swiss People’s Party (in <http://gnolu.romandie.com/post/2197/81868>) call for evidence to ‘prove’ their truthfulness.

<sup>101</sup> For example, in the Marlboro advertisement with the cowboy, there is no verbal claim about the ‘coolness’ of smoking. One cannot take the photograph of the cowboy as untrue, because the meaning conveyed is not propositional.

Analysing the photographs representing ‘foreigners’ can provide some elements of an answer.

### **5.3. Representation of the ‘foreigners’**

In images from the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang literature, ‘foreigners’ are represented as a mass of people (groups or a crowd demonstrating for example), immigrants, Muslims. Their consistent representation as congregating in large groups has the effect of negating their individuality (see for example, photographs 7 and 8). This might be the visual equivalent of the verbal depiction of general(isable) features and stereotypes thus merging them into a coherent group, characterized by uniform physical characteristics and deviant behaviours. This illustrates the power differential between outsiders (the foreigners) and the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang representatives. The power of the party is evident in the reification of foreigners and the facilitation of the gaze of the viewers and their ‘disidentification’ from the objects of the gaze. Bhattacharya and Elsbach (2002: 33) have pointed out that disidentification is a way for people to preserve and enhance their self-concepts. Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001) refer to a large amount of research (Dutton *et al.*, 1994; Hogg and Abrams, 1988) which shows that at the individual level the identification with a favourable perceived social group enhances a person’s self esteem; self distinctiveness and self-continuity. The way the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang presents itself seems to favour this positive self-identification with the organisation, in contrast with the disidentification with the foreigners, who are negatively represented.

The photographs representing foreigners purport to show them as they 'truly' are and as they 'truly' behave, because photographs arguably have the appearance of reality, and are often treated as 'evidence' of past events, as if they are the source of objective and disinterested facts (Lister and Wells, 2001). An interesting feature is that the subjects never seem to be aware that their photograph is being taken. No poses, no make up, no big smiles (as in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang portrait and group photographs), and hence the classification of these photographs as 'photojournalism'. These images are made to report on events (Lister and Wells, 2001), and they are characterized by the lack of apparent artifice or display of pictorial convention (set up, lighting). It is important because, as Lister and Wells (2001: 78) note, "the invisibility of convention seems to speak of photography's power to provide direct evidence of event". As a consequence, in its communication material, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang holds the power to represent the others the way it wants, with the appearance of straightness, reality, and absence of theatricality (that is present in other kinds of photography such as advertising, art, or fashion (Lister and Wells, 2001)).

In the same way that the foreigners do not have a voice in the party's discourse, they do not have a 'face' in the party's visual communication. In this scenario, foreigners are 'they', anonymous and de-individualised, stripped of what makes them unique individuals by their representation as a group. In contrast, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang representatives are all unique individuals, with their names and positions clearly tagged (see photographs in Fig. 3 and 4). The notion of distance with the subject of the photographs is also important. For example, in the

photograph (see Fig. 5) below, the demonstrators are shot from a distance, while there is a superimposed portrait of Valerie Seyns, a Vlaams Belang Brussels deputy, in close-up and facing the viewer. The focus and distance (portrait vs. photojournalistic photograph; distant vs. close-up) contribute to this ‘anonymity’ of the foreigners and the disidentification of the viewer with the demonstrators, and a potential identification (sympathy?) with the party representatives.



**Fig.5 Vlaams Belang**  
**Magazine 1: Brussels, My City Magazine, 2004: 4**

In the following photograph, also representing a group demonstrating – in this case, Vlaams Belang members – there is a different way of representing a group, as party members.



**Fig.6 Vlaams Belang-  
In Political Programme brochure “De Kracht van een Overtuiging”<sup>102</sup>, undated.: 28 and  
also on cover page of the presentation brochure of Vlaams Belang Youth, Choose  
Flanders!<sup>103</sup>**

The difference between the demonstrations, and the ones with immigrants and other opponents to the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, is their orderliness. In the photograph in Fig. 6, for example, the subjects are looking directly at the camera, in line, orderly and walking behind a banner. This is in strong contrast to the chaos, police presence, the green flag with Arabic letters, the racist chanting (as was described by a witness, see Appendix 12), the mostly non-white presence, and the veiled women. But once again, with the party demonstrators looking directly at the camera, it also shows the people’s awareness of the presence of the camera, which is not the case in the photographs of the ‘others’ demonstrations. The following group photograph of the Vlaams Belang political bureau is also staged and its analysis also highlights the issues of individuality and gaze.

<sup>102</sup> Translation: The Strength of a Conviction

<sup>103</sup> Vlaams Belang Jongeren, Kiezen voor Vlaanderen!, Voorsetlingsbrichure Vlaams Belang Jongeren

*The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang representatives as a team of professionals*



**Fig.7 Vlaams Belang (Political Bureau)**  
 “De Kracht van een Overtuiging”<sup>104</sup>, undated.: 7

The party representatives belong to a team (see Fig.7), not a herd or amorphous mass of unidentified elements. For example, from above, we know that No.1 is “Frank Vanhecke, Voorzitter (i.e. Frank Vanhecke, President); No.11 is “Philip Claeys, Hoodredacteur Vlaams Belang Magazine” (i.e. “Philip Claeys, Chief Editor of the Vlaams Belang Magazine”). The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang’s members face the viewers; hold their gaze, as opposed to the ‘others’ who are apparently unaware that they are the subject of the gaze. The viewers look at images of people (in the case of the foreigners demonstrating) who appear unaware of the presence of the camera and, by extension, the possibility of becoming the object of someone else’s look. Thus, the viewer exercises a controlling gaze (Lister and Wells, 2001: 84). Gaze is an important element in photographic analysis (Lister and Wells, 2001). According to Schroeder (2002), the gaze implies a psychological relationship of power, in which the gazer is

<sup>104</sup> Translation: The Strength of a Conviction

superior to the object of the gaze. Social positions and power relations must be considered in the analysis of the gaze (Lister and Wells, 2001). There is a difference of status between the one who gazes and the subject, e.g. the 'voyeurist' tourist gaze, the way men often look at women, and royalty gazing upon their subjects (Schroeder 2002; Lister and Wells, 2001).

### ***5.3.1. Identity Construction and Gaze***

Photographs have the power to construct identity. They construct the identity of both the viewers and the subjects photographed, without leaving them the option of negotiating their own identity. The people gazed upon are here significantly 'different'; they are supposed to represent what the viewer is not, in order not to threaten the viewer's identity. The 'foreign subjects' do not face the viewer directly, and for some their facial features are barely apparent. The absence of 'face' also contributes to their de-humanisation, and to the process of reification: which might help the viewers' identity construction and completely distance them from the object of their gaze. The discourse offered has to be decoded. But there is, as pointed out by Watson and Bargiela (1998), a forceful potential in the narrative for what they called the 'shaping of the receiver's subjectivity' and stance towards particular issue. The reader is invited to take an active decoder role, by helping the identification with subjects' position within the text (Hay, 1996; in Watson and Bargiela, 1998). In this case, it is the non-identification with the subjects that is aimed at: the viewer is a mere onlooker watching people/events from a distant location, with "the reassurance of otherness" (Lister and Wells, 2001: 86).

Bailey and Hall (1992: 21) argue that within post-structuralist thinking, identity is unfixed (identities are floating, meaning is not fixed and universally true at all times, for all people), and can only be articulated as a set of representations (Schroeder, 2002). In addition, Schroeder (2002) holds, there are systems of meaning and representational practices that do indeed anchor and fix images. This is why the notion of representation is important (Bailey and Hall, 1992). Images offer viewers an identity, through the meaning-giving process (Lister and Wells, 2001).



**Fig. 8 Vlaams Blok**  
**Brochure 6: Feiten/Réalités, May 2004: 8**  
(for the translation of the text on the right, see Appendix 9)

Foreigners are, in fact, constructed and packaged for the viewers' consumption. Every representation of identity has the potential to construct the way society represents those categories. For example, in the next photograph there is a crowd in a demonstration, with several women in the forefront. All except one are covered with Islamic dress (long dress and headscarves). The second woman from the left at the bottom of the photograph even wears the recognizable (for Belgians)

Moroccan *djellaba* (a loose outer robe). These representations are recognisable for a viewer from Brussels, and represent nevertheless a stereotype of immigrant women (many wear the western dress, but not a single one has been photographed by the party photographer).



**Fig.9 Vlaams Belang**  
**Magazine 1: Brussels, My City Magazine, 2004: 5**

If one accepts that representation constructs reality, then the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's representations are particularly problematic. They create a dichotomy within society, and this division might breed conflict. In the case of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse difference is not celebrated, it is presented as deviant and threatening.

### ***5.3.2. The exception: lone man in a street***

In most of the photographs in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's communication material, foreigners were photographed in groups, part of a multitude (substantiating the claim that they are swamping the country, see above

photographs, and also the ‘people-praying-in-the-street’ photographs, see Fig. 16 and 17). This makes the following picture (see Fig.10) interesting: why is this man singled out? The photograph represents a man walking in a street, presumably in Brussels (Molenbeek is a commune of Brussels) if one reads the graffiti on the wall (translated as ‘*Molenbeek<sup>105</sup> wishes you a good Ramadan*’). There is a flag of Palestine tagged on the wall too and the street is dirty. Why is this man photographed alone? This photograph is significant enough because, in addition to being in a Vlaams Blok brochure (Brochure 6: *Feiten/Réalités*, May 2004: 9), it is the cover photograph (see Fig. 11) of a Vlaams Belang magazine (May 2005) titled “*Staat in the Stad*”, i.e. “State in the City”.



**Fig. 10 Vlaams Blok**  
**Brochure 6: *Feiten/Réalités*, May 2004: 9**

<sup>105</sup> Molenbeek is a commune of Brussels with a relatively high concentration of immigrants.



**Fig.11 Vlaams Belang  
Magazine 5: 02/05/2005: cover page**

The graffiti on the wall could be read as a speech bubble in a comic, expressing the man's message to the reader. The wall and the street could also be interpreted as actors, subjects in this scenario, as is the man (who is faceless, once again), objectified, rendered as a symbol: he is also a feature of the street. 'Foreigners have claimed our street' could be the underlying message in this photograph. 'State in the City' is the title of the brochure whose cover page represents the above mentioned photograph (see Fig.11). The flag is a potent symbol of appropriation and the image of the coloniser planting his country's flag on claimed territories is a recognizable one. In this case, the street has been claimed as Palestinian/Arabic; it is dark, dirty, highlighting the consequences of such appropriation. In addition, the message is wishing Molenbeek (not the Muslim Molenbeek inhabitants, but the whole of Molenbeek), a good Ramadan (the Muslim holy month). This could be an indication that the commune is already 'lost to us'. The text (see Appendix 9) accompanying the photograph confirms (and

guides) this interpretation, as it claims that Brussels will soon have a majority of foreigners, and there are already neighbourhoods where it does not dare intervene. In short, this photograph could be seen as representing a window on the future of Brussels, if things do not change (i.e. if the party does not reach power).

#### **5.4. A perfect place, in a perfect world: the Vlaams Blok's Brussels**

On the same theme of the future of Brussels, there are two photographs of *les Galeries Royales Saint-Hubert* (see Fig. 12), and Brussels' *Grand Place* (see Fig. 13). Interestingly, there is not a single 'brown face' in those photographs taken on a sunny day in the old picturesque tourist area of Brussels. In the picture (Fig. 13), there is, in the background, a flower market, old restaurants and buildings, which are recognisable trademarks of Brussels Grand Place (town square). In the foreground, there is an elderly couple taking a walk, others seems to be buying flowers. In Fig. 12, there are people on a cafe terrace having drinks and a couple of elderly passers-by enjoying an ice-cream. This scene contrasts sharply with the photographs illustrating '*Multicultural Brussels?!*' which represent 'foreigners' (women with headscarves and bearded men; crowds demonstrating, see Fig. 5 for example). The sign-board of Brussels Great Mosque is clearly visible in the top right-hand corner (see Fig. 8). Mosques being unambiguously a place of worship for Muslims, multiculturalism is linked to the open, visible presence of Islam in Belgium. Islam is one of the three religions recognised by the Belgian state, and to the stereotypical images of Muslims as being dark-skinned bearded men, and/or veiled women.

Een alternatief voor Brussel!



**Fig.12 Vlaams Blok**  
**Brochure 6: Feiten/Réalités, May 2004: 22**



**Fig.13 Vlaams Blok**  
**Brochure 6: Feiten/Réalités, May 2004: 23**

The two previous photographs (see Fig. 12 and 13) have been included in a Vlaams Blok brochure (May 2004) and represent the 'alternative for Brussels' (as says the vertical caption, page 22, see Fig. 12: '*Een Alternatief voor Brussels*'). The two photographs would not be out of place in a tourist brochure marketing the charms of Brussels. The frame of the photograph is 'panoramic', and in contrast

with the style and frame of the other photographs (especially the ones representing the dereliction and dirtiness of Brussels, see for example Fig. 10 and 11). They are in soft focus, following the convention of the representation of dreams in photographs and movies. This represents the promise of the party: Brussels as it should be, the Brussels of “our dreams”. This is also a photograph of Brussels as it was at the exact second when the pictures were taken. This dreamlike Brussels therefore ‘existed’. This brings in the concept of nostalgia, and the glorification of a mythical past that could be reproduced again if the right conditions are created (i.e. the party in power; foreigners sent back to their home countries). There are no coloured faces in the picture – which is an aberration, since both pictures have been taken in two highly touristic areas of Brussels. This highlights once again the role (and power) of the photographer in choosing the right place, time, subject and scene. Photographs serve as a screen onto which consumers project their own wishes, desires, identity and values. This is also true for the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. The photographs might well be interpreted as expressing the essence of the party, i.e. ethnic homogeneity, order, and ‘what we are not’ (immigrants, Muslims, disorderly).

### **5.5. Othering – the issue of identity and the Turkish question**

This section provides a visual analysis of a Vlaams Belang brochure which documents what could be called the visual construction of difference. This brochure<sup>106</sup> (see Appendix 15) has been selected for its identity-related and

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<sup>106</sup> Find the brochure at: <http://www.vlaamsbelang.org/index.php?p=24&id=2>, or for the PDF format of the brochure: [http://www.vlaamsbelang.org/files/brochure\\_turkije.pdf](http://www.vlaamsbelang.org/files/brochure_turkije.pdf)

emotional content. It presents the arguments of the Vlaams Belang against Turkish admission to the EU. The most interesting feature is that the arguments set out by the party are not just verbal but also visual, as is demonstrated in the following section. The focus is on identity issues linked to the highly sensitive topic of EU enlargement. This is a key political factor for not only the extreme right party and its sympathisers, but also for large portions of the Belgian and European populations.

### *5.5.1. Context*

Turkey first applied to join the EEC in 1959. In 2005, European and Turkish leaders officially commenced EU membership talks. Although political elites in most European countries have applied pressure to facilitate the Turkish negotiations, the opinion of their electorates is clearly unfavourable to such enlargement. Across Europe the support for Turkey's admission is not overwhelming. According to a Eurobarometer<sup>107</sup> poll (May/June 2005), the average support of European citizens for Turkish admission is a little above 35%<sup>108</sup>. The problems predicted as arising from Turkish membership can be categorised as economic and cultural. First, Turkey has a population of 70 million and the likely increased arrival of cheap labour in the most developed countries of the EU is worrying many (especially when one takes into account the fact that EU countries are still trying to deal with the arrival of highly skilled and cheap labour

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<sup>107</sup> A survey that measures public opinion in the European Union

<sup>108</sup> With the lowest level of support in Austria (10%) and the highest in Hungary (just over 51%) (Eurobarometer poll (May/June 2005)).

from the new Eastern European members). In addition, the so-called cost of admission of new countries (e.g. agricultural subsidies) is forecast to be phenomenally high for Turkey should it achieve membership. Second, in Western Europe (mainly Germany, Austria, and France), European identity is tightly linked to Christianity and, although Turkey is nominally a secular state, its population is mainly Muslim. There is also the fear of a ‘clash of civilisations’ between the West and Islam arising from a supposedly insurmountable clash of values (recently highlighted by some commentators after the Danish “cartoons crisis”). The negotiations for Turkish admission are considered important and relevant enough for the Vlaams Belang to produce a brochure, posters, leaflets, an online ‘Dossier’ file (see [www.vlaamsbelang.org](http://www.vlaamsbelang.org)), and even a book, *Turkey: een Brug te Ver*” (i.e. “Turkey: a Bridge Too Far”) written by Philip Claeys and Koen Dillen, who are both Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang representatives at the EP and co-authors of the brochure analysed in the next section. Party members present their arguments against Turkey’s admission consistently across the range of its different communication material. The next section is dedicated to the analysis of a particular Vlaams Belang brochure which has been distributed at a national level (in the three regions: Wallonia, Flanders and Brussels, in French and Dutch), and is also available on the Vlaams Belang’s website.

This brochure is, interestingly, not blatantly xenophobic or discriminatory (since the party has watered down the former Vlaams Blok’s inflammatory discourse). However, the most interesting aspect is what is *not* said. After the condemnation of the Vlaams Blok for racism, the Vlaams Belang is under close watch by

opponents, and is now choosing its words carefully. Pictures, unlike textual or verbal statements, cannot be described as untrue. Because images cannot be empirically verified, or labelled true or false (Borgerson and Schroeder, 2005), the party can use pictures to provide (and support) its arguments against Turkish membership.

### 5.5.2. *The Visual Construction of Difference*

The brochure in question includes two images (drawings) and seven photographs. The analysis is focussed mainly on the pictures, emphasising the form of politics of identity noted earlier in the discourse analysis of the brochure.



Fig.14 Turkish flag



Fig. 15 Vlaams Belang  
Turkey: not a European Nation  
(cover page)

The cover page (see Fig.15) contains the heading: *Turkey: geen Europese Natie* (i.e. 'Turkey: not a European Nation') and a European flag, with one of the stars replaced by the crescent and star of the Turkish flag. The brochure thus begins with a strong visual image to support the 'caption', indicating that Turkey is not European. This visual element is reinforced by the first page of the brochure, representing people praying in a street (see Fig. 16).



**Fig. 16 Vlaams Belang  
Turkey: not a European Nation, undated, page 1**

This first picture, which is literally the first message of the party after the cover page, provides a powerful visual message. It shows people praying in a street. The position of people in the prayer (bowing low) is significant: they do not pray like ‘us-Christians’, which emphasises the religious difference. In addition, the synchronised positions of the worshippers show a form of order that could remind one of military parades: they are a little army already living in our country (this interpretation is guided by a former comparison in a Vlaams Blok newsletter distributed in 2004, where gangs of African youngsters were described as a ‘little army’). The faces of the people are not visible, but rather embarrassingly their rears (interpretable as insulting the reader?).

In marketing, pictures are carefully constructed for rhetorical effect. The form of the photographs refers to how the subject matter is represented (Schroeder, 2006). This particular picture shows a sea of people. It reinforces stereotypes: ‘they’ invade the streets, ‘they’ are blocking the traffic (by praying on the road), which could also refer to the following quotations from the brochure (see Appendix 14):

*“uncontrollable and unbridled immigration”, “militant and intolerant Islam”, Turkey wanting Europe to “become a Muslim club”.*

The fact that no written comment accompanies the picture is an indication that the pictures speak for themselves, are telling a story and might support the written content of the brochure. In contemporary marketing communications, images claim centre stage, says Schroeder (2005). It seems that it is the case in this brochure. The absence of direct captions to the picture leaves room for interpretation and guess work about the location of where the photograph was taken. This vagueness reinforces the rhetorical power of the picture. The street represented in the photograph could be in Flanders, Belgium, or anywhere in Europe. This might be taken as implying that the situation is identical across Europe, in any city, in any country. Similarly the reader is left to guess when the picture might have been taken. It does not provide any clues as to why people were praying in the street. Is it for a Muslim festival when common prayer is the most popular and brings the biggest attendance (and because of the lack of space, some mosques cannot accommodate everybody)? Or is it for the weekly Friday prayer? Or is it a scene that could be witnessed daily? The choice of taking a picture at this particular place seems no accident. *‘Bazaar Mecca’*, the name of a shop in that street, embodies this idea of bazaar (*‘bazar’* is used in Belgian/Brussels slang to describe disorder) and *Mecca*, the Islamic holy city in Saudi Arabia where millions of Muslim pilgrims gather every year for the Haj, which might imply that little *Meccas* already exist in Europe. But it also carries the image of a particularly

conservative and rigid form of Islam, especially for women in Saudi Arabia, all of which, it is implied, are being imported to 'our streets'.

It is interesting to note that a similar photograph (see Fig.17) was used for the cover of a brochure from the Vlaams Blok on the theme of immigration, *Stop Immigratie!* (i.e. Stop Immigration!). According to Helmers and Hill (2004), one of the ways to communicate with people is through intertextuality, the recognition and referring of images from one scene to another. The viewer is active in the process of constructing a reference (Helmers and Hill, 2004: 5). In this case, it is via an already 'known' or 'seen' picture<sup>109</sup>.



**Fig.17 Vlaams Blok  
Stop Immigration, undated**

This illustrates well that pictures say more than words: they link the Vlaams Belang's discourse in the brochure on Turkey to the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang

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<sup>109</sup> I am not arguing that all viewers have seen both photographs, but rather trying to illustrate the existing intertextuality. The Vlaams Belang's discourse feeds on the Vlaams Blok discourse and imagery.

core ideology of anti-immigration and Islamophobia<sup>110</sup>, where Filip Dewinter, quoted in Jewish Week – 28/10/05 said: ““Xenophobia” is not the word I would use. If it absolutely must be a “phobia” let it be “Islamophobia””).

### 5.5.3. The representation of women in the brochure

The following picture (see Fig. 20 below) represents five people presumably outside a mosque in Turkey: four women and one man. All women are wearing western clothes, but they are also all wearing the Islamic headscarf. They have their back to the viewer, unaware that their photograph is being taken, and they seem to be waiting outside a closed door. This again has a strong visual impact. In the context of the brochure the/a story being told by the Vlaams Belang, is that Turkey (Turks) is waiting for the doors of the EU to open (e.g. “Europe’s door will then be open to uncontrollable and unbridled immigration”).



**Fig. 18 Vlaams Belang  
Turkey: not a European Nation, 2005: 9**



**Fig. 19 Vlaams Belang  
‘Turkey in Europe: No!’, 2005: 9**



**Fig.20 Vlaams Belang  
Turkey in Europe: No, 2005: 9**

<sup>110</sup> See <http://www.filipdewinter.org/page.php?linkID=238>

The two following photographs (see Fig. 19 and 20) represent women wearing headscarves, and a man wearing a long coat, and a cap. It seems that both pictures might have been taken in a European country (clue: the arches). This time, the arched doors are open, and the people are facing the reader and moving away from the doors, maybe implying the way that some of them have already found a path and gained admission. In Fig. 20, a group of women (all wearing headscarves and long coats), are standing in the street (outside what appears to be the same arch) apparently waiting for someone, maybe implying that more are still to come.

Representational choices revolve around issues of exclusion of certain identity groups, portrayed social roles, stereotypical depictions, and categorization into types. These representational variables often combine to produce epistemically closed portrayals (Borgerson and Schroeder, 2005). Van Leeuwen (2000: 314) identified several strategies of visual racism. Visual racism involves issues of “othering”, exclusion and stereotyping (including not just negative cultural depictions, but also, as Borgerson and Schroeder (2005) explain, showing certain people as homogenous groups without distinguishing individual characteristics and differences). In the brochure, Turks are depicted as different: a bearded man is wearing a long coat and a cap, and women are wearing headscarves, if not a full veil covering the whole body and leaving only the eyes visible. In the three pictures where women are represented, they are all wearing the Islamic headscarf. In the picture with all male subjects, they are shown praying. It might have been otherwise difficult to portray Muslim men by appearance alone; therefore they had to be represented in an act of worship directly recognisable as Islamic. This

highlights the visibility of Muslim people, and Muslim women in particular. The party has produced here a representation of a group to be consumed by readers. The images reproduce cultural differences (e.g. different prayers and different dress). It is interesting to reflect on the role of the photographs in this brochure. Are the photographs the ‘supporting act’ of the text, or do they stand alone, able to put across the Vlaams Belang’s point of view? The images in the brochure show pictures of people from marginalised minorities. These images reproduce cultural differences (e.g. they don’t pray like us and they impose their different ways on us). It is plain that all Muslims are not fanatics, but by showing random Muslim people a link is created to the current discourse on a threatening Islam gaining ground across the world, and specifically in Europe

#### ***5.5.4. Is it all about Islam?***

By linking Turkey with an Islamic identity via the pictures the Vlaams Belang seems to be highlighting its core objection to Turkish membership of the EU, i.e. Islam and the cultural/religious differences which (in the Vlaams Belang’s argument) do not have a place within Europe. Even if the text had constructed other arguments of a political and socio-economic nature, it seems that the story indicated by the visual cues of the brochure points to another issue, deemed important by the Vlaams Belang, the issue of the ‘Islamic threat’. Filip Dewinter (28/10/05, in Jewish Week) shared his view: “*Yes, we’re afraid of Islam. The Islamisation of Europe is a frightening thing*”. The map of Europe (see Fig.21) in the brochure provides support for this view.



**Fig.21. Vlaams Belang  
Turkey: not a European Nation, 2005: 11**

Half of the page represents a map of Europe, where some of the crescents of the Turkish flag (the crescent is also the symbol of Islam) are spreading across Europe. The countries of the EU have a yellow star and are coloured blue (reminiscent of the European flag). The Turkish flag might also have had a star, but it is the crescents that are spreading, highlighting the infiltration (invasion) of the Islamic symbol, the real threat for the Vlaams Belang. The underlying message could be interpreted as one where the party is rejecting Islam, via opposition to Turkish membership.

The textual analysis of the brochure shows that the content is interestingly 'unpolemical'. The Vlaams Belang has watered down the former Vlaams Blok's inflammatory discourse, and actually provides in the brochure arguments and theses defended by many mainstream politicians across Europe. The photos are *a priori* unproblematic too. However, what is most interesting is what is *not* said. Keeping that in mind, the visual elements of the brochure might 'tell more stories' than the text.

## 6. Conclusion

This chapter has provided the synthesis of the visual analysis of a selection of images (mainly photographs) from the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's publications. The analysis in this chapter has focussed first on the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's use of the two most significant 'people' photographs: the individual portraits of the leaders and the group images of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's hierarchy. These representations contribute to the image of the party as constituted by individuals 'like you and I' and of the party as a tight group, as a team of competent individuals. This was contrasted with the representation of the 'others'. The contrast is at its most vivid when comparing 'undesirable' others (immigrants and Muslims), represented as a group, unorganized and with deviant behaviour (e.g. praying in the streets, demonstrating, wearing different clothing), with the orderly and clean cut members and supporters of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. One could easily infer that the visual imagery of the party, mirroring the textual elements analysed in the previous chapter, constructs a world where multiculturalism is absent. The photographs never depict foreigners and Flemings in the same frame. What must be read in photographs is as much presence as absence. The absence of the members of one group (foreigners) in images representing the other (native Belgians) is significant: they belong to two separate worlds represented in the party's visual communication. The only photograph where a 'white' presence was noted in 'other' pictures was in a demonstration, and it was a policeman (i.e. the need to police 'them', to control 'them', see photograph 4). This representation is consistent with the party's underlying

discourse which states that multiculturalism is a failure and undesirable (see previous chapter).

The CDA of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's brochures has highlighted dimensions of the party's discourse, along with the visual representation of 'others'. The visual and textual together provide an opportunity for the party to present itself in a favourable way (i.e. the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is the only party defending people's interests). This chapter has illustrated how visual arguments come to support the description of, and the arguments of, the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang, for example in favour of a divided world – the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang world – where differences are problematic, undesirable, sources of conflict, chaos and disorder. Images worked as support for the verbal, but also transcend the verbal meaning. They allow the bypassing of censorship. This well-crafted and persuasive discourse and its representation, is gaining acceptance through an almost imperceptible adoption in mainstream political discourse, with potentially damaging effects on the international scene (e.g. immigration is a key theme, and even has its own conference). Images, as was pointed out at the start of this chapter, are important in marketing and branding. The centrality of the image for marketing and politics, briefly tackled in this chapter, is explored in further detail in the next chapter in relation to marketing strategy, branding and the identity-building enterprise of the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang. Having tackled the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang's discourse (textual, in chapter 5) and visual (chapter 6) and demonstrated: 1) the persuasiveness of the discourse, its complexity and internal coherence; 2) the

appropriateness of CDA to analyse populist and marketing discourse at the micro-level was demonstrated. Marketing and branding are the objects of the next chapter, which attempts to understand how the party attempts to control its 'side' of the equation (i.e. its persuasiveness and marketing techniques).

## **Chapter 8: The Marketing Strategy of the Vlaams Blok and the Vlaams Belang**

### **1. Introduction – The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang and marketing**

This thesis started with the premise that political parties and politicians use marketing to achieve their political goals and connect with voters but, in doing so, appear to borrow marketing tools and concepts in an *ad hoc* and instrumental fashion. As marketing is increasingly adopted by political parties (O’Shaughnessy, 1990), it is moving beyond influencing only tactical matters of communication and presentation, towards playing a significant role in policy formulation and long-term direction (Butler and Collins, 1996). After the discourse-historical analysis which focussed on the linguistic, semantic and strategic elements of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang’s discourse, this chapter moves on to the next level of analysis with the exploration of the marketing orientation of the Vlaams Blok and the Vlaams Belang, and more specifically aims to highlight the marketing strategy of the party as observed/extrapolated from the party’s behaviour in Belgium’s political market. The relevance of image in marketing, in branding literature, but also in politics prompts the enquiry into those fields. The question of whether or not the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang uses marketing to enhance its political effectiveness was assumed from: 1) from the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang leaders’ stance on this issue: and 2) the observation of the party’s behaviour.

### *The position the party leaders on political marketing*

Since 1991, the party has employed the service of professionals to develop its advertising campaigns and create memorable slogans <sup>111</sup> associated with recognisable symbols (Bossemans, 2001; Vander Velpen, 1992). Officially, the party has never worked with any advertising agency, except for the purchase of advertising space and boards. In 2004, Filip Dewinter finally admitted that:

*“I am the head of a campaign group of 13 people. Among them, there are three employees of well-known advertising agencies, who are members of our party, and have helped for free to set up campaigns. Who they are, I can't say. It would cost them their jobs”* (in *Het Belang van Limburg*<sup>112</sup>, 17/03/2004: 4)

Throughout the last few years' campaigns, the party leaders have adopted an ambiguous position on the issue of marketing. Although party leaders have *internally* advocated the use of political marketing to their local candidates, they have *publicly* adopted an attitude of distaste for the use of 'spin doctors' by other political parties. Nevertheless, their adherence to marketing is assumed in this thesis, based on the following quotation by Filip Dewinter <sup>113</sup>, which unambiguously illustrates the Vlaams Blok's active marketing orientation:

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<sup>111</sup> There were for example: in 1991, boxing gloves and a “*Self-defence*” slogan; or in 1999, a family and “*Boss in one's land*”, a broom and “*Grote Kuis*”, i.e. “*Big Cleaning up*”; in 1999, a family and “*Baas in eigen land*”, i.e. “*Boss in one's land*”; a kid pointing a finger and “*Thuis zijn*”, i.e. “*at home*”. These slogans have always been used in combination to the well-known party slogan “*Eigen Volk Eerst*”, i.e. “*One's own people first*”.

<sup>112</sup> Local Flemish newspaper (in the Flemish province of Limburg)

<sup>113</sup> Brochure: *Politieke Communicatie-Technieken, Deel 1. De persoonlijke campagne van de kandidaat. Vlaams Blok Publications.* (Translation: Political communication techniques – Part 1: The personal campaign of the candidate)

*“Marketing comes from the study of the needs of consumers, and from this follows the production of resources which could satisfy those needs. A company must study first the needs of its consumers and adapt its production according to those needs. Political marketing broadly follows the same line of thought.”*

Filip Dewinter justifies the utilisation of marketing strategy by explaining that:

*“Political marketing is a global project with which the candidate can organize well his or her political activities. The VB is choosing without a doubt an anti-demagogic practice, with which we have so often tried to be the voice of the people”.*

Filip Dewinter simultaneously stresses here the importance of marketing as political instrument, and rejects the accusation of manipulation, spin and demagogic practices that could be associated with the use of marketing in politics (see Baines and Egan 2001; Scammell, 1995, Newman, 1994; Sabato, 1981). There is also considerable evidence (see Bosseman<sup>114</sup>, 2001) supporting the observation that the party does use marketing, or at least marketing communication techniques (as in Bosseman’s (2001) research), to enhance its political appeal.

#### *Observation of the party’s behaviour*

After the previous chapters’ emphasis on the discourse-historical analysis of discourse and on persuasion (chapters 6 and 7), this chapter offers some explanations about what could be called a different characterisation of persuasion which would focus on marketing. Since persuasion lies at the heart of marketing,

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<sup>114</sup> Bosseman (2001) examined the evolution of the Vlaams Blok’s positioning, targeting and messages from 1977 to 2000.

an analysis of the party behaviour, more specifically on marketing positioning, segmentation and targeting, and branding provides an additional understanding of the party's discourse of persuasiveness. Branding and positioning are often discussed with reference to one another and they represent the main focus of the following pages. First, the relevance of branding to political parties is critically assessed. Second, an overview of useful concepts from consumer marketing and service marketing is provided. This is followed by the assessment of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's marketing strategy and behaviour in the political market

## **2. Branding and politics**

White and de Chernatony (2001) argue that success in an overcrowded market depends on effective brand differentiation. Noble (2006) supports this and argues that a product or service must be differentiated from similar offerings on the market. Brand differentiation is based on the identification, internalisation and communication of unique brand values to consumers (White and de Chernatony, 2001). Powerful brands communicate their values through every point of contact they have with consumers (Cleaver, 1999). In commercial marketing, managers interpret brands as positioning devices, i.e. something that customers will instantly associate with particular functional benefits (de Chernatony and McDonald, 1992). However, customers may interpret a brand differently from what is intended by the managers. An organisation needs to 'fine-tune' the brand until there is a better alignment of the intended positioning and the resultant consumers' positioning, by

focussing on functional benefits that are valued by the consumers, rather than those valued by the managers (de Chernatony and McDonald, 1992).

Similarly for political brands, Schneider (2004) argues that political brands should create a large a differentiation as possible from the products of competitors. Significantly, in political branding, long-term positioning strategy for the leader and party are very important because brands in politics take time to establish but can collapse very quickly (Harris and Lock, 2001: 953). In the previous paragraphs the existence of political brands is assumed and seems unquestioned. However, this is yet another point of contention in political marketing literature, which deserves addressing.

### **2.1. Political brands: do they actually ‘exist’?**

Branding has been established as an important strategic activity of corporations, but it is also increasingly relevant to the management of political parties. There is however, a lack of discussion on branding in political literature (Needham, 2006). Schneider (2004) also notes that the political marketing literature has not considered branding as much as it should have done, even if “there are numerous indicators not only for the existence of political brands, but also for their relevance to party and voter perspectives” (Schneider, 2004: 43). When the intangible aspects of political appeal are tackled, a rather narrow focus is put on image and reputation (Needham, 2006). The brand is equated with party name, and used as a descriptive term rather than as an explanatory variable with strategic implications (Smith, 2001; Lock and Harris, 1996; Scammell, 1991). These narrow perspectives

overlook the fact that brand building and brand management are, as argued by Smith (2001), fundamental tasks in the strategic management of political parties (Kotler and Kotler, 1999; Schweiger and Adami, 1999; Kavanagh, 1995). Following this line of thought, Needham (2006) advocates a broader consideration of branding to improve the understanding of political decision-making and repeat purchase at election time. For example, according to Swyngedouw *et al.* (2004), the Vlaams Blok has the most loyal electorate in Flanders and, more generally, Rensmann (2003) notes that most extreme right parties have doubled their electoral turnout over the last two decades turning *new* voters into *loyal* voters. A branding perspective might explain these high levels of political loyalty, since consumer loyalty development is a key issue in brand building.

#### *Brand as an explanatory variable for voters' behaviour*

Needham (2006) also adopts the view that brand-based analyses of politics help explain how voters make decisions in an environment of informational complexity. Brands enable people to routinely decide in the vast array of available choices, instead of repeating a complex decision making process (Maathuis *et al.*, 2004). This is also true in the political arena, and particularly true during political campaigns and at election time, when voters are overwhelmed by political messages. As a way of coping with the flood of information, consumers build over time a pool of brand alternatives, and brands have been seen as playing an important role in creating customer value (Keller, 1998; 1993, in Smith, 2001). In politics, the value-generation dimension of brands leads to the provision of value for the voter in the form of greater loyalty to a party and competitive advantage

(Smith, 2001: 991). This greater loyalty is supposed to lead to increased partisanship amongst the electorate. Image, however, provides value to the customer by enhancing the interpretation and the processing of information about the party and increasing confidence in their voting decision (Aaker, 1991).

### *Image*

Some commentators have noted that, in politics, image seems more important than issues. For example, in Smith's (2001) analysis of voting behaviour for the 2001 British General Election, there was evidence that image is a greater determinant than the parties' policies. If voters do not know what the issues are, the projected image of the party or leader acts as a facilitator in the choice between different alternatives. According to Kotler and Kotler (1999), political candidates must build an appealing image and appealing messages, in addition to increasing visibility. For electoral success, the candidate or political party must be positioned in relation to their opponents and then build an image, a campaign concept and a set of policies. Therefore, images, but also issues of branding and positioning, assume a central role in this chapter. In addition, the stance taken here *vis-à-vis* the debate about the relevance of marketing in politics is that marketing orientation, strategies and techniques have considerable relevance to the understanding of contemporary political parties' behaviour and actions.

### *Identified objections*

This view is not unproblematic. For example, Newman (1994) and Luck (1969, in Smith, 2001) oppose the view that political candidates and political parties are

brands. In their view, parties could not be considered as brands because they are not remotely susceptible to advertising in the way commercial brands are (supposedly advertising has no effect on the outcome of an election). According to Smith (2001), politicians cannot use television, radio or advertising to enhance positive or offset negative image dimensions as and when they would like. Even if political parties do adopt the 'manifestations' of brands such as logo, corporate looks, music and strap lines, they are not brands (Smith, 2001). These arguments rejecting the existence (or relevance) of political brands seem relatively weak and could not be used to dismiss the examination of branding relevance in political contexts. According to Kotler and Kotler (1999), marketing strategy is at the heart of electoral success: "political targets justify brand marketing in a political environment without any doubt" (Schweiger and Adami, 1999). Schweiger and Adami (1999) are not alone here. According to White and de Chernatony (2001), a political party, despite the difficulty of defining its marketplace, can consider itself as a brand. Schneider (2004: 41) also argues that "political parties and their key representatives presumably fulfil the main criteria of impact-oriented brand as a firmly anchored, consistent perceptual image in the mind of voters". Schneider (2004) argues that political brands hold an important place in the voters' decision process. In short, the existence of political branding is assumed in this research, and with this assumption, a careful acceptance of relevant concepts from consumer branding literature is useful to illuminate the enquiry.

## **2.2. Commercial brands: useful theoretical concepts**

Having accepted the existence of branding, it is necessary to determine what is meant by the concept of branding in this thesis. There is an extant strand of branding literature (see Noble, 2006; Jobber, 2004; de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998; Chernatony and McDonald, 1992, among others) containing a wealth of theories, concepts and definitions for branding in a *commercial* context. This needs to be explored further for its potential explanatory power for political branding. In order to resolve the tension identified in the previous section (between political brands and consumer brands), it is important to explore the commercial brand literature to seek useful concepts with the potential to explain processes and behaviours observed in the political marketplace.

'Brand' is an important concept in marketing literature and in issues related to marketing management. In the marketplace, brands are very potent. They can evoke strong emotions and command high levels of loyalty (Noble, 2006). For example, the Harley Davidson brand enjoys a real cult following across the world, with many aficionados even having their limbs tattooed with the brand logo.

Brand is defined here as a "distinctive product offering created by the use of a name, symbol, design, packaging, or some combination of these intended to differentiate it from its competitors" (Jobber, 2004: 299). In other words, a brand is a multidimensional construct, involving the blending of functional and emotional values which (should) appear relevant to consumers in terms of performance and psychosocial needs (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998).

One of the goals of brand management is indeed to make a brand unique in dimensions that are both relevant and desired by consumers (de Chernatony and McDonald, 1992).

Based on a review of literature and interviews with brand consultants, de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley (1998) provided a variety of interpretations of brands. They classified those interpretations in three categories: 1) an input-based perspective<sup>115</sup> (i.e. the way managers direct resources to influence consumers); 2) an output-based perspective (i.e. the consumers' interpretations); and 3) a time-based perspective (i.e. brand as dynamic entities evolving to meet environmental situations) (de Chernatony and McDonald, 1992: 52). de Chernatony and McDonald (1992) argue that unless both input and output perspectives of brands are sustained, the outcomes are likely to be an unbalanced strategy and a weak brand. In this view, consumers are conceived as actors in the branding process, and brand management should be about minimising the gap between the 'intended' brand delivered by managers, and the consumers' perceptions of the brand. This section of the thesis focusses on the organisation's perspective, or 'intended' brand<sup>116</sup>.

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<sup>115</sup> Different interpretations of 'brand' are: in the input perspective: logo; legal instrument; company; shorthand; risk reducer; positioning; personality; cluster of values; vision; adding value; identity. In the output perspective: image; relationship. In the time perspective: evolving entry (de Chernatony and McDonald (1992: 19)).

<sup>116</sup> The study of the 'output perspective' (i.e. the consumers' or voters' perceptions) of the brand is interesting and should provide a holistic understanding of a particular political brand. However, the access to extreme right voters and sympathisers is extremely difficult, which would inform the 'output' perspective of brand, is impossible for most researchers (Mudde, forthcoming; Art, 2006), let alone a Muslim woman.

### *Service brands*

In chapter 3 (see p. 48), political parties were conceptualised as service providers. Newman (1994) has argued strongly for this perspective noting that political marketing shares similarities with specialised services (see Marland (2003) and Kotler (1975)). Therefore, in order to narrow down the analysis of branding literature, the focus here is on service branding. If de Chernatony (2001) argues that there is no need to develop a different theory for services branding, he nevertheless calls for the adjustment of existing goods branding theories to the case of services (de Chernatony 2001). From the case studies conducted by de Chernatony (2001), it appears that branding is even more important for services, because consumers have no tangible attributes with which to assess the brand. In addition, it is more difficult to communicate the values of a services brand (perhaps not as much for political brands, because voters expect political parties to stand for a set of values). The basis of a strong service brand is a clear competitive position derived from the corporate strategy. This entails that every member of the whole organisation cooperates in delivering the brand's promise and communicating the brand's positioning and benefits (de Chernatony, 2001).

de Chernatony provides a description of the process of building, developing and maintaining service brands (de Chernatony, 2001). From the identification of external opportunities through market research, to the operationalisation of the brand through communication and delivery of the service, de Chernatony (2001)

tackles all the steps<sup>117</sup> of the process. The steps of the “definition of the brand” and “positioning and differentiation” are examined here in further detail, because they are the ones with an observable and public manifestation for the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. When de Chernatony (2001: 217) talks about the “definition of the brand”, he refers to the development of the brand concept. This involves the use of “creative judgement, *visual representation* and *language*” (de Chernatony 2001: 218; emphasis added).

The positioning and differentiation of the brand are discussed later in this chapter. Language was covered in detail in chapter 6; while visual representation was discussed in chapter 7. These dimensions of positioning, differentiation, language and visual representation are particularly important functions of the brand, because it is necessary to ensure that the brand appears unique to the consumer. Regarding the “operationalisation”, de Chernatony (2001: 217) notes the importance of a consistent message across all media and of a service delivery process that matches or exceeds the brand promise (de Chernatony 2001: 219). ‘Positioning and differentiation’ are the focus of the next section. The relevant theory is discussed and helps understand the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang brand positions in the Belgian political market.

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<sup>117</sup> The steps are: the identification of external opportunities, the identification of internal capabilities, the definition of the brand, the assessment of the feasibility of the brand, the development of internal commitment, the positioning and differentiation of the service brand, the structuring of organisational resources, market testing and finally, the operationalisation (see de Chernatony 2001: 217-219).

### 3. Political Marketing Strategy

The discussion on political marketing in chapter 3 reached the conclusion that consumer marketing might provide a perspective on, and an understanding of, observable processes in the political arena. For example, Scammell (1999) described political marketing's enterprise and claims as new ways of understanding modern politics.

“[political marketing] shares with political science a desire to understand underlying processes, and therefore to create explanatory models of party and voter behaviour. It shares with political communications the key continuing interest in *persuasion*” (Scammell, 1999: 719, emphasis added).

Positioning, an important concept in marketing, arises from the desire of marketers to build a competitive advantage (Smith, 2005). Aaker and Shansby (1982: 56) explain positioning as follows: “a product or organisation has many associations which combine to form a total impression. The positioning decision often means selecting those associations to be built upon and emphasised and those associations to be removed or de-emphasised”. The way a brand is positioned against another helps to clarify in the customer's mind how that brand is different and, critically, better (Smith, 2005). In this way it aids the communication of differential advantage in a highly competitive and ‘noisy’ marketplace (Smith, 2005).

The marketing analysis is based on the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's communication materials, such as brochures, leaflets and its website. The advantage of this is that they represent and express the positions collectively and publicly adopted by the party. They also facilitate a greater depth of analysis of the texts created by the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang, and allow the researcher to make inferences as to the nature of the marketing strategy of the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang.

### **3.1. The strategic behaviour of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang in the political market**

In this chapter, political parties are treated as analogous to commercial organisations in the marketplace (following Butler and Collins, 1996). Having taken this approach<sup>118</sup>, the marketing literature permits the use of a wide array of models and concepts (Butler and Collins, 1996). Political parties and commercial profit-oriented organisations clearly have different understandings of strategy (Butler and Collins, 1996). However, commercial, not-for-profit and public sector organisations require a strategic overview of their industry or market (Lovelock and Weinberg, 1990; Kotler, 1979).

In order to understand the strategic choices made by the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang in the political market, a well-recognised marketing framework is applied, namely the typology of competitive positioning – market leader, challenger,

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<sup>118</sup> This approach is adopted for pragmatic reasons – consumer marketing strategy literature is rich and well-developed (see for example Porter, 1980; Kotler 1994); and line with the discussion in chapter 2 about political marketing and consumer marketing theories (see p.43)

follower and nicher (Butler and Collins, 1996: 33). Although the relative electoral strengths of political parties can be estimated using opinion poll data, the real test of market position is conclusively determined by periodic elections (Butler and Collins, 1996). Thus it is important to recognise that the analysis they provide is a collection of ‘snapshots’ of the Belgian political market at specific times.

### ***3.1.1. Market positioning***

Butler and Collins (1996), Kotler (1994) and Porter’s (1980) broad framework of four positions – market leader, challenger, follower, nicher – is used and helps to frame the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang’s position and the evolution of its strategy. Market share is the determinant of competitive position in this analysis (Butler and Collins, 1996). The electoral results at the poll are taken as the value for the market share.

#### *Market leader*

Notwithstanding questions of industry impact, profitability, reputation and the like, the *market leader* is the player with the largest share of the market (Butler and Collins, 1996). This position provides an orientation point within the industry and market. Most commonly, the leader is subject to continual attack, from different competitors with different strategies (Butler and Collins, 1996). The market leader often adopts a defensive strategy aimed at reinforcing its existing image (Butler and Collins, 1996). In our specific case, the political market leader position in the Flemish Region alternates between the SP.A/Spirit (the Socialists) and the Liberals

(the VLD<sup>119</sup>). However, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang could be the largest party in Flanders and, the largest Flemish party in Brussels, and could claim the crown of market leader. For example, in the Brussels' market, Delwit (2003) claimed that the Vlaams Blok has become the first Flemish party in Brussels, and the statistics have proved him right. As shown in chapter 4, (section 2.3.2, p.69), the party also enjoys a comfortable position in Antwerp where the Vlaams Belang narrowly lost the mayoral seat in June 2006 to the Socialist SP.A-Spirit (which won 35.3%, and became the first party in the city). The Vlaams Belang registered 33.5% of the votes in Flanders for these 2006 local elections and consolidated its strong position across Flanders, making it a serious challenger.

However, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's quarantined position implies that the party cannot gain access to power. Even if the party has become the largest party, its score is not sufficient to make it an inevitable<sup>120</sup> governing member. So far, the other parties have formed awkward coalitions (liberal, Christian-Democrats Socialists and ecologists) to leave the Vlaams Blok in opposition. The market leader position is nevertheless claimed by the party. The party presents itself to its readers as the actual market leader, the biggest party in the country:

*"What happened in Brussels today is unique in the western world: never has a so-called democratic regime outlawed the country's largest political party."*(Vlaams Blok, <http://vlaamsblok.be/index.shtml>, emphasis added; Appendix 3)

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<sup>119</sup> The VLD is the party of Guy Verhofstad, who was Prime Minister from 1999 until 2007.

<sup>120</sup> The Vlaams Belang must score an absolute majority (around 40-45%), which would create a situation where the other parties would not be able to form local government without the extreme right party.

However, as explained earlier, the particular quarantined position of the party implies that the party which behaved at its origin as a *nicher*, is today a serious challenger (regardless of the actual scores at the poll).

### *Niche*

The critical success factor for the '*nicher*' is in carefully defining and successfully targeting a market segment where it specialises in serving the needs of its customers (Butler and Collins, 1996). Long-term, strong relationships are central to this approach (Butler and Collins, 1996). It is not uncommon for organisations to engage in multiple niching, but in the political marketing context this raises the problems of underpositioning, whereby a party could be perceived as not taking a strong, defining stance on any important issue (Butler and Collins, 1996). For example, the positions of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang on the centrality of the defence of Flemish interest and the plans for Brussels' large majority of French-speakers<sup>121</sup>, is an example of seemingly contradictory positions for its respective target segments. If the party publishes nationwide (i.e. Flanders and Brussels) brochures, leaflets, website and magazines, there are also regionally-focussed publications, such as campaign brochures and local newsletters. An examination of those artefacts shows that the party glosses over some thorny issues concerning Brussels when addressing Brussels voters. This is normal, since voters in different special interest segments may be significantly, if not fundamentally, opposed to each other on basic principles (Butler and Collins, 1996). The Vlaams Blok is not

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<sup>121</sup> They would be given 30 years to 'dutch-isation' themselves.

the only 'niche' in Belgium. A particular form of niche strategy based on language is followed by Belgian parties which only target one linguistic group. According to Butler and Collins (1996), there is a danger for niche parties when they try to broaden their appeal. They might lose their particular focus (which attracted voters at the start, e.g. the extreme right's stance on immigration), be drawn into too wide a portfolio of policies and lose votes to more focussed opponents for the niche support (Butler and Collins, 1996). The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, however, has successfully moved from a 'niche' position to the challenger position.

#### *From Niche to Challenge*

The implication of the particularity of Belgium and its linguistically divided political market, is that the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is competing in different markets (Flanders and Brussels), and holding different positions. If the Vlaams Blok started off as a 'niche', with rather limited appeal, its situation changed dramatically with a string of electoral successes from the 1990s onwards. The Vlaams Blok started with 1.8% of the vote at the 1978 elections but moved to 10.4% in November 1992, and 12.3% in the elections of 21<sup>st</sup> May 1995.

The Vlaams Belang was the second most popular party in the 2004 regional elections, with 24% of the vote. Polls in 2007 showed the Vlaams Belang as the second or third most popular political party in Flanders, after the Christian Democrats (at about 30%), about level with the Socialists (at about 20%), and ahead of the Liberals. In the June 2006 local elections, the party scored above 30%

in Antwerp. The Vlaams Belang has now reached the first or second position in many Flemish towns, such as Schoten (34.7%), Starboek (32%), and Borsbeek (28.7%) on the periphery of Antwerp. The party has become a powerful challenger that could have participated in government if it had not been effectively quarantined by the *cordon sanitaire*. In 2000, the Vlaams Blok won 14.2% of the votes in Flanders, and in 2006 the result across Flanders reached 21.5%.

The situation is different in Brussels' political market. In 1995, the Vlaams Blok was the second Flemish party in the capital, with 3% of the votes. The potential for an extreme right vote was much higher, since at the same election the French-speaking extreme-right party, the Front National, scored 7.5 % of the votes. Therefore, unsatisfied with its Brussels results, the Vlaams Blok started an offensive targeting French-speakers who were sympathetic to the party's policies (i.e. the Front National voters) through, for example, the *Open letters to the Brusselseirs* (see next section, p.281, for a discussion of the party positioning in Brussels).

Just as companies evolve, so do parties (Butler and Collins, 1996). The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is a 'niche' that has managed to broaden its appeal and develop its niche. But it is now a more ambitious party reaching out for targets outside of its traditional niche. As the Vlaams Belang, the party is now attempting to appeal to a broader and more mainstream audience, behaving as a right-wing conservative challenger, willing to take up a place in a governing coalition. This is illustrated by the following quotation which indicates that the Vlaams Belang sees

itself as a viable challenger, by identifying the Socialist party, the strongest party in Wallonia as the ‘target’ to beat:

*“In my view, the main political opponent is the Parti Socialiste, the clearest symbol of Walloon State power over Flanders. We must make clear during the campaign that neither Verhofstadt nor Leterme have the will or the courage to confront the Parti Socialiste.”* (Vlaams Belang, November 2006: 7, see Appendix 20)

More importantly, beyond the rhetorical statement (by identifying Wallonia’s most powerful political party as the main opponent), the Vlaams Belang has actually identified its real political opponents: as the SPA.Spirit (Leterme’s<sup>122</sup> Flemish socialist party), and the VLD (Verhofstadt<sup>123</sup>’s Liberal party). The Vlaams Belang now considers its competition is represented by the two most prominent Flemish parties. In view of the election results, this is a legitimate diagnosis of the political market. The Vlaams Belang is not a minor party in Flanders anymore. In 1991, the Vlaams Blok was the fourth biggest party in Flanders (Bosseman, 2001). It is now one of the biggest parties in Antwerp, where one in four voters chose the extreme right party. The Vlaams Blok won the second largest number of votes in the regional elections in Flanders in 2004, becoming the second largest party in the Flemish Parliament. At the last city council elections, the Vlaams Belang gathered 33.51 % of the votes in Antwerp<sup>124</sup>. The Vlaams Belang for the first time stagnated in Antwerp; and did not win the mayoral seat as was predicted. The sitting

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<sup>122</sup> Leterme might become Prime Minister after 2007’s Belgian general elections

<sup>123</sup> Guy Verhofstadt was Belgium’s Prime Minister from 1999 till 2007.

<sup>124</sup> This is a slight rise compared to the 32.95 % won in 2000. However, one should note that the Flemish socialist party, the SPA (the actual burgomaster of Antwerp Patrick Janssens belongs to this party), and is ahead of the Vlaams Belang – which was at that time the first party in the city – with 35.28 % of the votes, which is a strong rise from their 20% gathered in 2000 (AFP)

Socialist Mayor Janssens won against Filip Dewinter, but commentators suggest it was by ‘cannibalising’ votes from his coalition partners. However, the Vlaams Belang should not be seen as having ‘lost’ the elections. Compared to 2004, the position of the Vlaams Belang has improved across Flanders (reaching 21.5% in 2007), and the party has experienced major breakthroughs in several localities in Flanders.

### *The challenger’s behaviour*

The role of the challenger in competitive terms is to depose the leader (Butler and Collins, 1996). The challenger may not necessarily be the next biggest shareholder in the marketplace, and, indeed, there may be several challengers at any one time (Butler and Collins, 1996). The distinctive feature of the challenger is that it pursues an active strategy of becoming the market leader (Butler and Collins, 1996). Challengers attack; their basic strategic objective requires an aggressive approach. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang has adopted the appropriate strategy. The party targets the leaders’ traditional voters, and adopts an aggressive communication strategy, continuously denouncing scandals, incompetence, corruption and patronage; and ridiculing the other party’s leaders (for example, Verhofstadt is often caricatured in the party website, and is also nicknamed Pinocchio). The following quotation by Frank Vanhecke also seems to indicate that the Vlaams Blok is not considered as a marginal party, but as a party expressing the position of the majority of the Flemings – not a minority (or a niche):

*"The core of our programme consists of our positions, which are **majority positions in Flanders**. We must go on formulating them calmly and clearly, and we must go on profiling ourselves just as calmly and clearly as reasonable people who want the best **for all Flemish people**." (Vlaams Blok, November, 2006: 7; emphasis added; Appendix 20)*

The electoral system represents a critical factor for a challenger strategy (Butler and Collins, 1996). The more proportionally representative the system, the less are the rewards of an aggressive stance (Butler and Collins, 1996). Those jurisdictions which use the first-past-the-post system, on the other hand, can reward a party holding a slight lead in votes with a disproportionate bonus in terms of seats in the legislature (Butler and Collins, 1996). Belgium is characterised by a proportional system, but the aggressivity of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is understandable from a differentiation point of view. From the start, the party set out to establish its difference. In order to make itself heard in a crowded marketplace the party has been vocal in denouncing other parties and the ills of society. Wienen (2001), the party's spokesman explained the evolution of the party's tactics as starting with tough, polarised campaigns, but evolving towards softer broader advertising campaigns, as the party seeks to broaden its appeal beyond its initial niche.

### **3.2. Segmentation and positioning of a political brand**

Market segmentation and targeting are used to identify the groups of customers to whom the marketer wants to direct the products and promotional campaign (Newman, 2001). Market segmentation has been used by political parties to select the segments of population they wish to target in their appeals (Baines, 1999). Once voter segments have been identified, the candidate or party positions itself in

the political marketplace (Newman, 2001). Positioning has, in fact, long been recognised as playing an important role in politics (Mauser 1983). According to Trout and Sivkin (1996: 79), “all politics is perception, posturing and positioning”. Parties position themselves in comparison to their opponents (Smith, 2005). The positioning process begins by the assessment of both the party’s and the opponents’ respective strengths and weaknesses (Newman, 2001). For example, Tony Blair wanted a stronger Conservative opponent in 2001 to allow the New Labour agenda to be seen more clearly by comparison (Smith, 2005).

#### *Belgian political market*

Belgium is characterised by a fragmented political market. There is a dichotomy between the French-speaking and the Dutch-speaking parties. Voters vote, usually in their main language, for town council elections, and for the government of their respective region (Flemish Region, Walloon Region and the Brussels-Capital Region). The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang competes in the Flemish Region, and in Brussels’ Region markets. In order to attract both French-speaking Brusseleirs and Dutch-speakers the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang has designed and distributed magazines specifically targeted at the Brussels audience, with the focus on key issues for the Brussels-Capital Region, such as taxation, the important concentration of foreigners in Brussels, criminality, and so on. The ‘face’ of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang in Brussels is Johan Demol, a French-speaking Brussels resident and a former head of police. The brochures specially designed for Brussels are bilingual, available in both French and Dutch. In the brochure “*Immigration... Open your eyes!*”, the party presents its project for an independent

Flanders with Brussels as capital. In this piece, the Vlaams Blok adopts a reassuring tone, by saying that Brussels would be granted a bilingual status in the new state. The party has developed campaigns and communication materials specifically designed for Brussels alongside national documentation (also available on the website), denoting a careful segmentation of the national political market. It is important to note that the Flemish nationalist themes are not tackled in the brochures of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang distributed in Brussels. This theme is reserved for brochures destined for Flemish audiences in Flanders, where Flanders is presented as a 'milk-cow' feeding Wallonia (Ceuppens, 2001), through the solidarity transfer from the richer Flanders to the poorer Wallonia and Brussels. The financial transfers from Flanders to Brussels are not mentioned either. This indicates careful targeting and a consistent positioning of the party, furthering its interests. The party positions itself accordingly to the market (Flanders, Flemish towns, Brussels) in which it is competing.

### ***3.2.1. The evolution of the positioning of the Vlaams Blok: the timeline***

Since its inception, the Vlaams Blok has positioned itself as a nationalist, solidarist<sup>125</sup> party of the right. This positioning is translated through the themes adopted by the party: Flemish independence; a free market; a reduction of taxes; a limitation on social security; the repatriation of guest workers; zero tolerance of criminality and a total and unconditional amnesty for WWII collaborators (Vos, 1992, in Bosseman, 2001). The party started its political career as a protest and

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<sup>125</sup> 'Solidarism' is a system where the economy should be aimed at maintaining the welfare of the whole nation and where national solidarity replaces class struggle (Mudde, 2000: 189). (See chapter 1, section 1.3.2.2)

opposition party, denouncing the ills of society. Karel Dillen, the Vlaams Blok president, in 1991 (restating the points he made in 1981) said:

*“We refuse any Flemish concession. We refuse to put water in our wine. We refuse to sell our programme for a ministry portfolio. We refuse to sell our principles for anything. Do you want a real opposition on each point? Vote for the Vlaams Blok.”* (Spruyt, 2000, in Bosseman, 2001)

True to these words, the Vlaams Blok refused a ministerial portfolio in 1991. It was entitled to this portfolio because of its 10.3% of the Flemish votes (Bosseman, 2001). This attitude reinforced the party’s positioning as uncompromising, non-conformist and radical (Spruyt, 2000). The Vlaams Blok had already taken on the image of the ‘rebel’ in 1979, when the sub-heading of *De Vlaams Nationalist* (i.e. the Flemish Nationalist) is: *“Therefore, we are standing here as REBEL”*. In 2000, some 20 years later, the profile is similar:

*“a party unlike any other. The Vlaams Blok is indeed not a compromising party, but a programme party faithful to its principles and programme, [...], for the Flemish people and the European peoples. A party rooted in a great past, but resolutely turned towards the future”*. (Frank Vanhecke, at [www.vlaamsblok.be](http://www.vlaamsblok.be))

With successes at the polls, the party should have been included in governing coalitions. In 1995, the Vlaams Blok wished to participate in a right-wing, anti-socialist coalition, but the *cordon sanitaire* excluded the party. The other parties were forced into what Gerolf Annemans – a prominent Vlaams Blok member – called a *“monster coalition of six different parties”* (in Spruyt, 2000). The party wanted to project the image of not shying away from its responsibilities (i.e.

representing the people and governing) but it was excluded from power by the other parties. Adopting the underdog position could be seen as a very astute strategy, locating the Vlaams Blok as the *de facto* opposition party. The scenario was repeated in 2000 at the elections for the Antwerp city council. Although the Vlaams Blok gained one-third of the votes, the liberal VLD (the other winner of the election) refused to share power with the extreme right.

In 1997, the party decided to revamp its programme and become a '*fastoen partij*', i.e. a respectable and legitimate party (Spruyt, 2000). Applying communication strategies, the expression of the Vlaams Blok discourse was softened, without modifying the essence of its content (Spruyt, 2000). Respectability was achieved by an acceptance of parliamentary democracy, visible in the Vlaams Blok's 1996 campaign, and by the removal of ethno-racial wording in their immigration policies (Spruyt, 2000). General acceptability was also achieved via the adoption of populist rhetoric such as: "*We zeggen wat u denkt!*" (i.e. "We say what you think"), and the use of "*Partij van het Volk*" (i.e. "Party of the People") (Spruyt, 2000). In this way the Vlaams Blok transformed itself from a radical party, into a potential governing party (Spruyt, 2000). Previously the Vlaams Blok had claimed that it was uncompromising, implying an 'all or nothing' attitude. However, the most recent stance adopted by the Vlaams Belang is that (temporary) compromise is necessary for the well-being of Flanders and its future (see Appendix 17). The positioning of the Vlaams Belang is explored further in the next section.

### ***3.2.2. Positioning of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's brand***

When the Vlaams Belang was created, it left no doubt among observers that it would capitalise on the strengths of the Vlaams Blok. The party leaders made clear that the new party is not a toned-down version of the late Vlaams Blok. In an interview for the VTM (Flemish TV), immediately after the condemnation of the Vlaams Blok for racism, Filip Dewinter said about the creation of the Vlaams Belang: *“This is not cosmetic, but manicure: we are sharpening teeth, sharpening claws. Every Muslim woman wearing the headscarf signs her return warrant.”* He also added: *“we don't need a Vlaams Blok Light' or a 'Vlaams Blok Ultra', but a 'Vlaams Blok Plus!’ Indeed, our programme is not changing at all.”* (Filip Dewinter in TV programme *Dag Allemaal*<sup>3</sup>). These last comments are quite revealing: they confirm comments made by observers who argued that the changes made within the new party would only be cosmetic. The essence of the Vlaams Blok has definitely not disappeared (see chapters 6 and 7). This is an understandable and very pragmatic choice. The Vlaams Blok had managed to build a strong brand with a significantly loyal following. At every election, the market share of the Vlaams Belang increases, which indicates that the party has managed to communicate its brand's values and that it actually benefits from a high level of notoriety.

#### *Key positioning themes (1): Independence of Flanders and immigration*

The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang has managed to develop a very clear position, which might indicate a carefully thought-out strategy, or at the very least, an intuitive political conviction and direction. However, it also seems that the party

has adopted an opportunistic (pragmatic) approach to politics. The independence of Flanders was the original founding principle underlying the Vlaams Blok's creation, but the anti-immigrant/anti-immigration position has become the most salient theme and the most effective vote gatherer for the party. In the 1990s Karel Dillen, the Vlaams Blok's founding father, revitalised the party by recruiting promising young individuals, among whom was Filip Dewinter (Faniel, 2003; Swyngedouw, 1998). Filip Dewinter is a skilled manager and astute politician, who was the artisan of the re-organisation of the Vlaams Blok into a modern successful political party (Camus, 2003; Faniel, 2003; Swyngedouw, 1998). He was the first to recognise the electoral potential of an anti-immigrant stance<sup>126</sup>, inspired by the success of the French Front National (e.g. '*Les Français d'abord*', i.e. 'The French first', which inspired the party's '*Eigen Volk Eerst*', i.e. 'Our own people first') (Coffé, 2004). In 1987, the party conducted a fierce anti-immigrant campaign in the parliamentary elections, which got them two seats in Parliament and one seat in the Belgian Senate. In 1991, at what is still known in Belgium as Black Sunday, 10.3% of Flemish voters, and 25% of voters in Antwerp supported the Vlaams Blok party (Coffé, 2004).

*Key themes for positioning (2): The unique selling proposition*

The pragmatism of the party leaders is also evident in their recruitment of communication professionals (Bossemans, 2001; Vander Velpen, 1992). The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang was rewarded for its consistent positioning and clear, recognisable communications: the party has been winning votes at every single

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<sup>126</sup> Dewinter's ideological input is limited to the immigration theme (Mudde, 2004).

election (13 victories as in October 2006). In less than 30 years, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang has become the most popular party in Flanders. No Belgian citizen could currently ignore or confuse the party's core themes with those of the other political parties. The main themes of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang have even become the party's *chasse gardée* (in other words, the party can claim an almost exclusive 'ownership' of these themes (Coffé, 2004)), or the *Unique Selling Proposition* (Olins, 2000) of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang brand. In other words, any other party calling for a clampdown on immigration or a tougher stance on crime would merely look like an imitation of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. According to Keller (2003), good positioning of a brand requires the establishment of important points of difference (POD) over the competition at the same time as turning policies where disadvantaged into points of parity (POP), such as the economy where the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang advocates liberal policies. In the light of this argument the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's decision to concentrate on asylum and immigration becomes more understandable. The stance on immigration became their distinguishable POD at the start of the 1987 campaign. The party was successful in raising the perceived importance of immigration during the 1987 elections and since then. Butler and Collins (1996) also argue that anticipating the preferences of the electorate can be useful for challengers. If a policy can be 'branded' before its appeal is widely recognised, a party can steal a march on its opponents (Butler and Collins, 1996). Butler and Collins (1996) also note that the difficulty with this strategy, however, is retaining ownership of the idea once it is popular. The Vlaams Blok has clearly managed to claim ownership of some key issues (Coffé, 2004) and, in doing so, developed

other PODs on crime, immigration, Flemish autonomy and, more recently, independence. In short, the Vlaams Belang does not neglect those important PODs developed by the former Vlaams Blok and still capitalises on those related issues. Other political parties have fairly unsuccessfully attempted to recover the voters they have lost to the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, by hardening their own discourse and policies on immigration or Flemish nationalism. This arguably could well have contributed to the further legitimating of Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang policies among the electorate.

*'A party unlike any other'*

As the other Flemish political parties seem to be copying some aspects of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's programme (in an attempt to recapture part of the electorate lost to the extreme right), the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang in contrast, has been trying to convey since its inception an image and a positioning of difference from, and alternative to, the mainstream. For example, the title of Franck Vanhecke's column on the Vlaams Blok's website<sup>127</sup> is "*A Party Unlike Any Other*". The party has tried to differentiate itself and develop a clear and unique position in the minds of voters.

According to Palmer (2002), one dimension where political marketing has replaced traditional forms of policy development is in the use of survey devices and focus groups to find out how the electorate responds to various issues and to devise policies that would fit the "existing patterns of evaluation" (Palmer, 2002:

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<sup>127</sup> <http://www.vlaamsblok.be>

353). In other words, the political marketer tries to find out who is persuadable, and on what grounds (Maarek, 1995). As Baines, (1999: 407) has pointed out, "all political strategy derives from understanding the motives underlying the target groups' past voting behaviour and that strategy must be competitive because there is only a limited range of options for the voter". O'Shaughnessy (1990: 134) has shown that American political consultants make an issue salient, if they identify it as a weak spot in the opponent's programme. This might explain why the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is focussing heavily on the issue of the division of the Brussel-Halle-Vilvoorde (BHV) electoral constituency. The BHV-file symbolically represents the struggle between the two main linguistic communities in Belgium. Mainstream parties have failed to reach an argument about this difficult issue. Flemish parties decided to let the issue remain vague for a while because of its potential to bring down the government. The party has been extremely vocal about what they refer to as this 'new treason' to the Flemish cause, using it as a symbol of the untrustworthiness and inability of mainstream parties to make difficult decisions in the interests of the Flemish people. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang also uses the issue as another reason why French and Flemish-speakers cannot coexist in a united country. This therefore presents another opportunity for the party to express its difference and to set out its differentiation strategy (i.e. remaining intractable on the topic of Flemish interest, taking a position against French-speakers, other political parties and foreigners).

### *Targeted positioning*

From one election to the next, from one region to another, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's focus has been on one particular theme, while the other themes are downplayed. For example, the 1987 campaign was fiercely anti-immigrant (Coffé, 2005b). In Brussels the party downplays Flemish nationalism and secessionism, when focussing on the French-speaking voters. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang also appeals to Brussels' voters with its strongest themes, i.e. immigration and criminality. The topics of independence of Flanders and the annexation of Brussels (and its consequent mandatory "Dutch-isation" – i.e. making Dutch the only official language) are carefully avoided in the party's communication material for Brussels. Targeting the French-speaking population of Brussels is a strategic decision to win enough votes to allow the party to gain a majority in the Flemish constituent of the Brussels Parliament. If this scenario happens, the party would become an essential part of the Flemish constituent of the Brussels government and could consequently claim three ministerial portfolios<sup>128</sup>.

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<sup>128</sup> The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang leaders do not hide their ambition to make the Brussels institutions collapse (by stopping its functioning, through the impossibility for governing parties to vote for decisions). This could be possible because of the Belgian model and the system of the double majority in Brussels. In the Brussels government different ministers (chosen by the majority of their respective linguistic groups) have also to be accepted by the majority of the 89 Brussels MPs. It is certain that French-speaking political parties would never accept a Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang minister, and consequently the institutions would be unable to function and this would effectively fragment the Belgian state. This political crisis is not unlikely, and the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang would only need 10,000 more votes reach its objective. This scenario did not happen in the June 2004 elections where the Vlaams Belang progressed slightly (from 32 to 34 %), but did not score the hoped for 50% of the Flemish votes in Brussels.

This strategic positioning could be attributed to a strong, coherent and consistent communication strategy. The clear evidence is that the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's communication material is proving successful in persuading and retaining voters. The analysis of a few selected texts from the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang have provided examples of their persuasive discourse, and rhetorical strategies (see chapter 6) and arguments and these have been reinforced with evocative photographs (see chapter 7). There is also evidence here of careful orchestration of the brochures, speeches, and website so that all are 'in tune' and sending the same message, that the party's main concern is with the voters' interests.

### ***3.2.3. Evolution of the positioning: the case of the Vlaams Belang***

#### *Positioning*

Currently, the Vlaams Belang is portrayed as, and benefits from, a positioning as an opposition party, denouncing the ills of Belgian society and the wrong-doing of the governing parties. The party is preparing itself for government, and says so:

*“Electoral victories are not an objective per se. [...] Our story has a meaning only when we can implement the essence of our programme: independence, a stricter immigration policy, a tough approach to crime. It is clear now that these points of our programme will not be implemented by using more and more decibels to shout original terms of abuse from within the quarantine zone. Contrary to lemmings or howler monkeys, who follow their instinct, man has the possibility of evaluating his situation, considering alternative strategies, and analysing carefully who can be opponents and who can be allies, if need be temporarily.” (Vlaams Belang, November 2006: 3; see Appendix 14)*

The Vlaams Belang presents itself here as uncompromising and honest, but willing today – in the interests of the Flemish people – to ‘compromise’ itself by taking part in power. It is therefore positioning itself as a governing party in waiting:

*“The Danish example proves that other scenarios are possible, other than quarantine zones [...] A shrewd Vlaams Belang is of course much more dangerous than a shouting Vlaams Belang in a quarantine zone. It is going to be a difficult but necessary exercise. We owe it not only to ourselves, but also to our children and grandchildren” (Vlaams Belang, November 2006: 3, see Appendix 14)*

The Vlaams Belang seems to be following in the footsteps of the Vlaams Blok by using strong communications, integrated marketing and precise targeting. Ostensibly the Vlaams Belang positioning is different to the Vlaams Blok, but it is rather ambiguous, sharing some common elements with the Vlaams Blok, but also some differences, at least in the public eye.

The Vlaams Belang is facing a delicate situation in terms of preserving its ‘unique selling points’ and its loyal following (the Vlaams Blok’s). The party is today adopting a somewhat paradoxical strategy: a ‘softening’ of problematic policies (linked to immigrants and their rights), with a reassessment of the former party’s heritage. However, this is paradoxical only in appearance, if one accepts the notion of segmentation of the electoral market by the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. The party seeks to gain a wide appeal, by stressing its Flemish nationalist and anti-establishment policies, and wishes to retain the large anti-immigrant electoral base. The outcome of such a strategy is the creation of polemics in the media (e.g. the statement that every woman wearing the headscarf should be sent away, or the

statement made by Filip Dewinter about his Islamophobia), while the party political programme retains its newly acquired right-wing conservative flavour.

### *Segmentation*

The segmentation adopted by the Vlaams Belang is interesting, and is especially apparent when comparing texts (the so-called *Open Letters to the Brusselseirs*) addressed to Brussels inhabitants and texts targeted at the general public. The Vlaams Belang, as a Flemish nationalist and secessionist party, is putting in extra effort to win Brussels, set to become the future capital of the Republic of Flanders. The issue of language, which has enormous significance in Belgium, is completely avoided in the party material targeted at the Brussels' inhabitants. This indicates a careful segmentation of the political market, precise targeting and prudent choice of an appropriate message for each audience. For example, in Brussels campaign brochures, the Vlaams Belang carefully downplays the planned future of Brussels. Brusselseirs are French-speaking, in an overwhelming majority (90% of the total population of Brussels), and feel neither Flemish nor Walloon, and assert an identity of their own (see Appendix 11), even if, historically, they are Flemings who were francophonised.

## 5. Conclusion

### *Marketing-orientation*

The adoption of marketing discourse is not initially obvious in the communications of the Vlaams Belang. However, a market-orientation is identifiable (from chapter 6 and 7) and manifests itself in rather subtle ways, such as careful segmentation and well-targeted segments (e.g. the respective messages for Flanders and Brussels have different focus), and consistent positioning. The new Vlaams Belang has pragmatically adopted an anti-immigration stance (electorally rewarding), and kept their original ideological core of Flemish nationalism (its origin and identity base). They have understood voters and also attempted to manipulate their perception via, for example, raising the profile of the immigration theme from 1987 election campaign onwards.

Coffé (2004) has shown that criminality and immigration, and to a lesser extent Flemish nationalism have become the 'unique selling points' of the party. The voters recall these two themes when asked to justify their choice of the extreme right party (Coffé, 2004). This is evidence that the party has developed a clearly defined positioning in the mind of voters. For a party that claims to 'hate' spin, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang seems to be highly effective in spinning their own position and image. A market(ing) orientation exudes from every pore of the party's communications material. The constant call for a 'referendum', to listen to the people, to voice people's concerns, and to follow their opinion seems 'suspiciously' consistent with a party following a political marketing concept (see

discussion on political marketing, chapter 3). The next chapter is dedicated to the discussion of the main themes of the thesis, and overarching issues such as marketing and representation, identity-related issues and the construction of a particular 'reality' by the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang.

# **Chapter 9: Discussion**

## **1. Introduction**

This chapter aims to discuss the main findings and observations from the empirical analysis (chapters 6, 7 and 8) in relation to the presented literature review chapters (chapters 2 and 3), and embed the issues in broader debates, such as marketing representation, identity construction and the ‘creation of reality’. First, the research questions defined at the start of the thesis are reiterated and specifically addressed in respective sections. As a reminder, the focus of interest of this research lies in the way the party uses modern marketing tactics and strategies to articulate a persuasive discourse and communicate with voters.

## **2. Research Questions**

The research questions addressed in this thesis link the previous three topics (marketing, extreme right politics and Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang): 1) How does the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang market itself, i.e. what are the marketing strategies and techniques used (addressed in chapter 7)? 2) How does the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang manufacture its trademark discriminatory discourse in a persuasive way that has gained acceptance and legitimacy in the Belgian political scene (in chapters 5 and 6)? In short, the research aim was to address questions related to the way the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang mobilise marketing and

political persuasion to gain popular support (at the polls) and acceptance (with neutralisation of the most problematic issues of the essentially exclusionary and xenophobic discourse). The following sections discuss how the thesis addressed the research questions. First, marketing-related questions are tackled; the following section addresses reality construction and identity issues. CDA has proved its usefulness in addressing the analysis of complex, potentially polemical and contested discourses: marketing; political marketing; and the xenophobic discourse of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang.

### **3. How does the party market itself?**

#### **3.1. The marketing of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang**

The ability to connect with voters is a key issue for political parties and it seems sensible to consider that marketing discourse is mainly used strategically by parties to make their speech ‘voter-friendly’, and in this way to encourage the consumption of their political ‘product’ (see chapter 3). There were no blatant utterances of marketing rhetoric in the discourse of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, as far as the analysed texts were concerned. However, a so-called ‘market-orientation’ could be highlighted, from careful segmentation and targeting (e.g. the respective messages for Flanders and Brussels have different focuses) and consistent positioning (see chapter 8). The party avoids the pitfalls of an

ineffectively marketing-oriented party<sup>129</sup>. For example, the constant call from the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang for a referendum, to listen to the people, to be the voice of the silent majority, and to follow their opinion seems ‘suspiciously’ consistent with a party following a political marketing concept (see chapter 3).

In addition, the Vlaams Belang is adopting an extremely careful management of its image. Research has shown that image is more important sometimes than policies in influencing voters’ perceptions and ultimately their voting behaviour (see Smith, 2001). Image centrally involves reputation, trustworthiness and credibility (Scammell, 1995). The Vlaams Belang has developed and nurtured its image of respectability and credibility, through a sound marketing strategy. In addition, the Vlaams Belang’s consistency and never faltering conviction for its ideology has allowed it to position itself consistently over time, making necessary adjustments ‘as it goes’ (e.g. officially discarding the ‘70 point programme’; softening its communication campaigns and making them more sophisticated, and so on).

An important point here is the absence of any direct clear reference to marketing, or marketing rhetoric in the party’s public discourse. In contrast, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang adopts and encourages the adoption of marketing by its candidates in *internal* documents. This raises important questions about whether the use of marketing in politics is considered as ‘legitimate’ and acceptable by the general public, or at least by the people the party seeks to attract. The Vlaams

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<sup>129</sup> Such as blindly following voters’ needs and wants, without a core ideology and direction. See chapter 2 – discussion of political marketing.

Blok/Vlaams Belang adopts a different approach when dealing with political marketing. On numerous previous occasions, the party leaders have fiercely denounced the use of marketing and criticised the ‘spin doctors’ appointed by Belgian mainstream political parties. It is perhaps an indication that today political marketing is still perceived as a tool for mass manipulation, regardless of its claims of customer sovereignty and empowerment. In the political field, marketing discourse and ideology has not yet reached the full naturalisation<sup>130</sup> that already makes marketing transparent and unquestioned in other aspects of modern societies. This provides a lead for further research in the area of political communication, and critical marketing. Nonetheless, I have shown that the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang (quarantined by a *cordon sanitaire*) is engaged today in a political fight to establish its legitimacy as a key player in Belgian politics. The party does use using modern marketing techniques and is, for example, one of the very first parties to develop its website. The constant success it experiences at the polls is an indication that the party has managed to ‘reach’ the voters and gain their support.

### **3.2. Evidence of a political marketing discourse**

Marketing discourse contributes to the way people view and understand the world (see chapter 3). It is “part of the process whereby a particular form of society is constructed, one in which human beings are treated as things, where identity is reduced to ownership of commodities and all social relations are conceived in

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<sup>130</sup> Here, naturalisation refers to the ‘invisibility’ that marketing could gain thanks to ideologies which naturalise the world views defended in discourse and make them unquestioned.

market terms” (Morgan, 1992: 154). Marketing builds a context where social agents live and interact, and is used as a resource by the same agents to make sense of their social context. It is a discourse through which social actors (i.e., organisations, consumers, and institutions) understand and attempt to control those social processes (Morgan, 1992: 137). Similarly, political marketing has pervaded many areas from political parties, governments, single-issue groups and lobbying organisations (Harris, 2001; Harris *et al.*, 1999; Nimmo, 1999;). Authors believe that those organisations *think* in marketing terms, and more importantly *believe* that they *do* marketing management and attempt to integrate the use of marketing instruments in a coherent marketing strategy (Dermoddy and Scullion, 2001; Newsman, 1994). Whether or not they actually do is another matter. It is at least evidence that marketing ‘thinking’ and marketing discourse is pervading areas beyond business contexts; even if that only means that some leading parties have adopted a simplistic and populist ‘follower’ mentality (Henneberg, 2005). The issue with an uncritical adoption of political marketing (or the so-called ‘follower mentality’) is that it is contributing to the disenchantment of the electorate and resulting in cynicism regarding politics in general (Henneberg, 2005). Political actors as well as political communicators (and to some extent also the electorate) believe that marketing has become an essential part of political management in many situations. In addition, the belief has also entered the mainstream through endless discussions and analysis of spin in the media (Harris, 2001).

### 3.3. Marketing as metaphor

Marketing could simply be seen as a 'metaphor' or a way to make sense of the world and, in particular, of the phenomenon observed. Bowler and Farrell (1992; in Scammell, 1999: 720) note that marketing lends a vocabulary and a typology of actions to the study of campaigns. Seeing marketing strategies and methods everywhere might simply be a consequence of my professional bias. An interesting discussion about the contemporary extreme right between a historian specialising in Austria, a Germanist, and myself brought this to the fore. Where the historian could relate and draw comparisons with past events, the Germanist adopted a 'cultural' perspective to explain the success and leadership of extreme right parties. In contrast, I adopted a more pragmatic, managerial approach. None of the explanations or interpretations seemed more prominent or more worthy than the others, but the discussion highlighted the importance of the researcher's frame of mind while looking at specific social processes. In this case, I adopted a perspective unambiguously rooted in a managerial tradition, and shaped by a marketing view of the world. Political marketing is clearly located within the managerial school of thought (explicitly driven by economic values, see Savigny (2004)). This is evidenced by the focus on the marketing concept, the marketing mix, and market segmentation. The adoption in political marketing literature of the assumptions of the managerial school is explicitly driven by economic assumptions (Savigny, 2004: 28; Sheth *et al.*, 1988).

#### **4. How does the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang manufacture its persuasive discourse?**

##### **4.1. Texts and images: a coherent narrative**

CDA has been used to tackle the material from the Vlaams Belang and the Vlaams Blok. With some adaptations (e.g. 'linguistic dimension' becomes 'communication dimension', see p.223); Wodak's discourse-historical approach has helped the analysis and interpretation of the visual elements included in the party's communication material. The joint analysis has helped uncover how texts and images are used to construct the concept of identity. The party has appeared to express its views in a straightforward fashion. For example, the analysis of the brochure presenting the Vlaams Belang's theses against Turkish admission to the EU has highlighted the necessity of analysing both the textual and the visual elements of the party's discourse in an attempt to deconstruct its strategic use of language and imagery.

##### **4.2. Persuasion**

The discursive analysis has highlighted the persuasion of the party discourse. For many years, especially since the immigration theme has come to the fore, the party has been consistently increasing its electoral base. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang has managed to reinforce its position beyond its Antwerp stronghold and to gain one-fifth of the Flemish vote in Flanders (Art, 2006). The embedded Flemish nationalist sub-culture accounts in large part for the success of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang in Flanders. The situation in Brussels, with its 90% of

Francophones, is particular and could be attributed to a great extent to the persuasiveness of the party's discourse. The party has become the first Flemish party in Brussels where it has managed to persuade French-speaking voters to choose a party which has put the 'interests' of the Flemings, Flanders and Dutch-language at the core of its identity construction (see chapter 4). The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's core themes provide a consistent picture of Belgian society and Belgian politics, Flanders and democracy. The semantic analytical dimension of several documents from the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang has shown that a careful selection of themes has allowed the party to focus readers' attention on newsworthy events which allow the party to repeat and reinforce its 'vision' and political direction. I argued earlier (see chapter 6, section 3.1.4., p.155) that the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang show the readers where to look and using a linguistic and rhetorical distorting lens, attempts to modify their perspective.

A discursive approach to research focusses on the effects of representation, and its consequences and political ramifications (Hall, 1997, in Schroeder, 2002). The CDA of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's brochures has highlighted dimensions of the party's discourse, along with the visual representation of 'others'. The visual and the verbal elements of discourse provide an opportunity for the party to present itself in a favourable way (e.g. the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is the only party defending people's interests). This well-crafted and persuasive discourse and its representations is gaining acceptance by its almost unnoticed adoption in

mainstream political discourse, with potential damaging effects on the international scene<sup>131</sup>.

The pervasiveness of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse and its increasing respectability (and legitimacy) is worth discussing with regard to other political actors' behaviour. For example, today the *cordon sanitaire*, as a strategy to fight exclusionist and xenophobic discourse seems rather obsolete in the current climate. Many themes developed by the Vlaams Blok are now exploited by other politicians from the mainstream political parties (Van Der Brink, 2000; Faniel, 2003). Indeed, through the medium of language, the Vlaams Blok's discourse has become powerful enough to influence the main political agenda in Belgium. The separation of Flanders from Wallonia is no longer a taboo, voiced only by the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, but is echoed by other more mainstream parties. For instance, Jeanine Le Duc, the president of the Flemish liberal party (VLD)<sup>132</sup>, expressed racist comments in Parliament, and no one protested<sup>133</sup>. In other words, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's theses and favourite themes have become more and more widespread in mainstream politics. There are two possible explanations for this: 1) either the issues debated by the extreme right have become less taboo, and therefore more acceptable in open discussions; or 2) in an attempt to recover the voters lost to the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, mainstream parties have

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<sup>131</sup> For example, immigration has become a key theme in EU politics, and even has its own thematic conference.

<sup>132</sup> The VLD is the main party constituting the governing coalition with the Liberals, Socialists and ecologists.

<sup>133</sup> Eric Corijn, sociologist and philosopher, co-founder of the "Charte 91" a movement against the VB (in Van Der Brink, 2003)

attempted to adopt a similar discourse, if not similar policies to the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. Of course, both of these hypotheses could be simultaneously valid.

The pervasion of the party's discourse into the mainstream is important, since as was shown earlier (see chapter 4), voters cast an ideological vote for the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. Coffé (2004) demonstrated that a majority of the Vlaams Blok (Vlaams Belang)'s electorate agrees with the party's position on immigration issues. Besides immigration, criminality is also an important theme motivating the vote for the extreme right party. The vote for the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is thus ideological, which might explain why other parties have attempted to regain votes by competing within the same ideological space. This is a potentially perverse strategy because it provides a strong legitimacy and acceptability of the extreme right party policies, but does not guarantee votes for the other parties (which might be perceived as pale copies).

#### **4.3. Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang and reality construction**

A visual analysis of the photographs in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's publications has highlighted the issue of how marketing images co-construct identity. Images are a powerful medium in shaping people's understanding of the world, including the identities of its people and places (Borgerson and Schroeder, 2005). According to Borgerson and Schroeder (2005), marketing representations have the power to make people believe that they know something they have no experience of, and the power to influence the experiences they have in the future.

Representational practices have an impact on the way people perceive and interact with other people. An outcome of representational practice is that people's perceptions, even 'misinformed perceptions', often have the 'weight of established facts' (Gordon, 1995: 203). What individuals think they know about others from representations of identity can affect how they see, treat and understand other human beings (e.g. in the context of racism and sexism (Borgerson and Schroeder, 2005)).

Representational conventions in marketing communications draw upon these meaning systems, which may reinforce and reproduce damaging images of identity. Typified representations of identity increase the probability of human subjects interpreting what they experience or have represented to them as (stereo)typical. They might increase the illusion that the readers are of 'one kind', the European, the Westerner, contrasting with the others (mainly Muslim). For example, in the Vlaams Belang brochure '*Turkey in Europe: No!*', it was noticed that no comment accompanies the photographs and drawings. Pictures, unlike textual or verbal statements, cannot be held untrue. The example provided by Borgerson and Schroeder (2005) of the Marlboro cowboy, where there are no text-based claims, highlights that advertisers cannot be held accountable for false or misleading claims. Similarly, the party cannot be accountable for xenophobic or Islamophobic claims by producing images. Images provide resources for, and hence shape, our understanding of the world, including the identities of its people and places (Borgerson and Schroeder, 2005). Scott and Batra (2003) argue that marketing is a representational system that produces meaning outside the realm of the promoted

product or service, and photography, which was granted particular attention here. is according to Schroeder (2002), the most pervasive form of communication in the world

It is important to restate the importance of recognising that an image differs from the 'objective reality' it is assumed to illuminate. Image is a representation of an object. The relationship between image and reality is ambiguous (Alvesson, 1990). According to Berg and Gagliardo (1986, in Alvesson (1990: 377)), there is even a need for falsification, i.e. showing the organisation as other than it is. An image is indeed created, according to Boorstin (1961, in Alvesson, 1990: 377; emphasis added), to present and make a certain kind of *believable* impression. This is not to say that they are untrue or false, but rather for some ambiguous representation of 'reality'. The objective being to draw a favourable and appealing image of the organisation for its various publics (employees included) (Alvesson, 1990). This is done by highlighting good points of the organisation, and deflecting the attention from the bad or weak ones. Ultimately, the goal of image management is to control other people's definition of reality.

The rather straightforward approach to image in the thesis should not hide the fact that the concept of image seems to be a particularly elusive. Alvesson (1990) also notes that image may also be something existing somewhere in between the communicator and the audience. According to Alvesson (1990), the more ambiguity characterising the nature of the business and products of an organisation, the greater is the significance of its image. This approach fits perfectly with the

ambiguous ‘business’ of politics and the discourse of the extreme right. The unacceptability of straightforward racist and discriminatory discourses imposes an environment where direct references to the inequality of races, ethnic violence, anti-Semitism, among others are criminal and undesirable. To gain acceptability and political legitimacy, parties and groups which are not unsympathetic to the views mentioned above must adopt a discourse and construct an external image of respectability and leave enough room for ambiguity to avoid prosecution, and yet still attract like-minded individuals.

#### **4.4. Identity construction**

Identity issues emerged during the CDA of the textual features, but also (perhaps mainly) from the visual arguments *constructed* by the Vlaams Blok and the Vlaams Belang. ‘*Constructed*’ because photographs are subjective, transient images made by a particular person with special equipment at a specific moment in time (Schroeder, 2002: 45).

“Photography and photographs have exerted a profound, foundational influence of conceptions of identity and physical appearance, appearance and reality, and vision and evidence. It is now impossible to disentangle photograph from identity; photography shapes how we think of ourselves, how we age, photographs represent who we are” (Schroeder, 2002: 45).

The way 'people' are portrayed through photographs in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's brochures is particularly interesting. There is a clear distinction between the individual portraits and staged group photographs of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang representatives, and the 'photo-journalism' genre of the subjects (immigrants/foreigners) in other photographs. The tensions between the two provide the ground for arguing that photographs are not merely support for an 'objective' reality, but a medium for the political message of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, in addition to being an expression of the party's power. This is particularly potent when contrasted with the way the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang visually represents itself as a people's party, through the portraits and group photographs.

#### ***4.4.1. Identities: the construction of closed categories***

The analysis of the brochure presenting the Vlaams Belang's theses against Turkish admission to the EU provided a striking example of identity construction. The discourse-historical analysis highlighted the way the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's texts and images have been used to construct the concept of identity. For example, Turkey's lack of democracy, the poverty of the country, the potential for massive immigration and its Islamic identity are all arguments against Turkish membership. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang appeals to 'a European people', constructs a European identity and calls for a form of 'European nationalism'. The 'us-group' is therefore defined by the party's rhetoric as the European, Christian nations, and the 'out-group' as Islamic countries and/or non-European nations.

According to Rosoux (2001), identities are created in a process of convergence (what the members have in common) and differentiation (what differentiates them from other groups). Accordingly, identities cannot be separated from the concept of otherness (Rosoux, 2001: 178). However, it is important to note that that process of differentiation is not necessarily violent or aggressive and it does not have to be the result of opposition (Rosoux, 2001). However, it appears that the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang needs to exacerbate the differences between ‘us’ and the ‘others’ and present the two groups as incompatible, making inclusion or even co-existence undesirable. In other words, the party imagines a European people sharing common history and ancestry stressing the political, cultural, historical and religious differences between Turkey and the rest of Europe as too significant to be ignored. The party has warned that if Turkey was to enter the EU, it is the future of the EU itself that could be endangered.

*“If Turkey Enters the EU... [...] EU external borders will then be extended to countries like Iran, Iraq and Syria. The Middle East inferno will then literally be at Europe’s door. [...] Europe’s door will then be open to uncontrollable and unbridled immigration. And then will come the threat of a dangerous confrontation with a militant and intolerant Islam. And then there will begin an economic drain. And the EU will then become unmanageable”.* (Vlaams Belang, 2005: see p.3 of Appendix 15)

#### **4.5. Selective newsworthiness**

An additional occurrence of distorted representation of ‘reality’ is the selection of what is worth talking about. The party selects the newsworthy events worth talking about. Those events are discussed with reference to the party’s electoral themes.

Hence stories featuring the criminality and deviance of foreigners are used to highlight the failure of multiculturalism; scandals and embezzlements show the corruption and self-interest of the governing parties. Attacks against the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang are framed as an infringement of its freedom of speech, evidence of politically correct speeches, and in general, illustrate the lack of democratic practices in Belgium (see chapter 6, p. 135). The resulting picture is a gloomy, threatening world, where the only ray of hope comes from the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. The party is, in its own words, the voice of the silent majority. In addition to allowing the expression of whatever the party deems beneficial (on the basis that the people think that way but do not dare say it out loud), it also provides the justification and popular legitimacy to its theses, even the most questionable ones. This popular support is a common feature of the party discourse. In addition to presenting itself as the silent majority, the party also highlights its popular legitimacy by reminding people of its election results as often as possible.

## **5. Reality construction and legitimacy- a repackaged offering**

### **5.1. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse and its effect on Belgian society**

Reality arises from the shared perceptions created when people communicate with each other. How people act and react in society hinges primarily on how they perceive and conceptualise their society based on their communications with

others (Graber and Smith, 2005). Representations are part of the lived experience: they construct reality (Schroeder, 2002: 64). A significant finding of the research (through visual analysis) is the way people are represented in the party's publications (see chapter 7). The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang representations contribute to the image of the party as constituted by individuals 'like you and I' and the party as a tight group, as a team of competent individuals. This was contrasted with the representation of the 'others'. The contrast is at its most vivid when comparing 'undesirable' others (immigrants and Muslims), represented as a group, disorganised and exhibiting deviant behaviour (e.g. praying in the streets, demonstrating, wearing different clothing), with the orderly and clean cut members and supporters of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. One could easily infer that the visual imagery of the party, mirroring the textual elements, constructs a world where multiculturalism is absent. For example, it was noted that the photographs never depict foreigners and Flemings in the same frame (see chapter 7). What must be read in photographs is as much absence as presence.

Presence is the extent to which an object or concept is foremost in the consciousness of the audience members (Hill, 2004). The persuader attempts to increase the presence of elements in the rhetorical situation that are favourable to their claim because they know that elements with an enhanced presence will have a greater influence over the audience's attitude and beliefs. The persuader attempts thus to make those elements important enough, present enough to crowd out from the viewer's mind, regardless of the logical force or relevance of other considerations (Hill, 2004). The persuader then hopes that the process will prompt

the audience to accept his or her claims based on one or two examples of powerful, vivid evidence (e.g. foreigners swamping the country, and having their own way). At the same time, the persuader hopes the audience will stop to think about issues such as the relevance or actual importance of the evidence ((Hill, 2004) (e.g. the percentage of foreigners in Belgium, including citizens of other EU member states is around 10%). The phenomenon of presence is inherently linked to visual perception, for example the image of one starving child is more present than the statistical evidence of a million children starving and suffering (Perelma, and Olbrecht-Tyteca, 1971; in Hill, 2004: 29). In the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's publications, the absence of the members of one group (foreigners) in images representing the other (native Belgians) is significant: they belong to two separate worlds represented in the party's visual communication. This representation is consistent with the party's underlying discourse which states that multiculturalism is a failure and undesirable.

## **5.2. Treatment of the problematic features of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang discourse**

The most problematic issues in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse, such as discrimination, xenophobia, or racism, are treated in a way that would dissolve their damaging effects for the party. Words are redefined, reframed (e.g. avoidance strategy), and the accusations from the anti-racists and other political opponents are turned against them (e.g. reversal strategy, see chapter 5, p. 120 and chapter 6, p.185). The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang tells the reader stories, guides their interpretation of those stories (e.g. the use of the indicative mood indicates

assertions, facts; the use of headings provides the key for the 'preferred' interpretation of texts). The result is that the political offering has been 'sanitised', repackaged and relabelled from the rather unpalatable 'extreme right' to the more acceptable 'nationalist and conservative'. This is especially the case with the re-branding from Vlaams Blok to Vlaams Belang. If the offering has been described as similar, the nature of language seems to have changed, leaving the centre-stage to vagueness, innuendo and coded utterances. Although this is perhaps in order to avoid further legal prosecution, it might also be intended to continue to appeal to the loyal voters of the former Vlaams Blok, while (publicly) discarding the same policies and rhetoric that might have appealed to the anti-immigrant voters in the first place.

## **6. Conclusion**

This chapter synthesises the main findings of the thesis, specifically addresses the research questions, and discusses key themes, such as persuasion, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's marketing orientation and the issue of reality construction and identity-related matters. The use of CDA and the discourse-historical approach have allowed a rigorous, in-depth analysis of language use and its underpinning processes. Given the importance of these processes and the socio-historical context, it was important to broaden the textual and visual analysis to the analysis of the party's marketing more generally. Indeed, the potential market-orientation and marketing instrumentalism of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang have also been

explored in order to address the research questions on the marketing strategies and techniques used by the party. The research highlights the pervasiveness of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang discourse in Belgian politics and its capacity to bend the political agenda to make their preferred issues salient.

Discourse analysis enables an exploration of the relationships between texts, discourses and context (Phillips and Hardy, 2002; Fairclough, 1992). Moreover, through the analysis of the historical and social context, CDA facilitates an understanding of the way that meanings and a broader reality are constructed (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). The analysis reveals that the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang has reframed key issues, created a particularly closed definition of national identity (see chapters 6 and 7) and positioned it in contrast to the supposed failure of the multicultural model.

Finally, although the relevance of marketing to politics has been widely debated and is still an object of contention, the preceding demonstrates that marketing techniques and methods are being used by the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang to 'sell' their policies, their candidates and their party to voters. The importance of these findings and observations are brought together in the next, and concluding, chapter. The main contributions of the research and its limitations are also considered in the final chapter.

# **Chapter 10: Conclusion**

## **1. Introduction**

This chapter represents the general conclusion of this thesis. First, I provide a brief summary of the thesis highlighting the key themes and findings. This is followed by a section dedicated to the contributions of the research. These are divided into methodological and thematic contributions. The chapter then tackles the limitations of the thesis and provides suggestions for future research. The chapter, and the thesis, finish with a brief reflexive 'introspection' focussing on how I coped with a distorted image of me, my nationality, my identity and my 'group' for four years.

## **2. Summary of the thesis**

My thesis addresses a contemporary societal issue with a novel approach: a critical discursive analysis of the marketing of an extreme right party. My research originally stemmed from the observation that the extreme right parties seem to speak 'the people's language', and to articulate citizens' concerns. The extreme right political parties' emergence and re-emergence through the years are a recurrent feature in Western European politics. The extreme right is a popular

phenomenon of study and the extant research on the topic demonstrates the fascination and concern with their growing success across Western Europe. The ideology of the extreme right family, with its elements of authoritarianism, xenophobia, anti-establishment are framed as threats by liberal democrats. In the case of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, many fear the accession to power of a political party that claims incompatibility between cultures (the notion of cultural difference and cultural distinctiveness has replaced racism in many modern extreme right parties), the undesirability of differences (religious (e.g. Islam, Judaism), sexual (e.g. homosexuality), and cultural (e.g. North vs. South)), and plain discrimination (through the national preference policies) in terms of employment, housing and social benefits. The extreme right literature review (see chapter 3) highlighted a lack of research on extreme right communications and on any research using a business or managerial approach. This gap suggested the possible fruitfulness of an enquiry into the marketing and communication processes of the extreme right. This approach is of course not without problems. The relevance of managerial concepts to politics has been critically questioned in the thesis (see chapter 3). Nevertheless the premises that marketing communications could provide interesting insights led to a wider consideration of issues of language and discourse. A discursive approach has provided a stronger anchorage for the analysis of the extreme right, which has transcended the rather contested marketing and managerialist approach to politics.

The variety and the diversity of the political parties regrouped under the label 'extreme right' make the study of the 'extreme right' particularly complex (see

chapter 2). There are no two identical extreme right parties and attempting to analyse *the* extreme right is simply a task beyond the scope of a doctoral research project. Anastasakis (2000) has highlighted the lack of a pan-regional study of the extreme right which is essentially due, he argues, to the differences between political systems and to the diverse nature of the extreme right parties. This is why a single extreme right party, the Flemish Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang has been selected for the purposes of this research (see chapter 4). The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is one of the most successful, articulated and well organised extreme right parties in Western Europe (Carter, 2005; Coffé, 2005a). In addition to its interesting profile, the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang uses political marketing strategies and techniques to enhance this profile and the party provides an interesting case and rich set of data for my research. The analysis of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discourse highlighted interesting insights as to how a political party can successfully apply marketing strategies and deploy a persuasive toolkit to attract voters.

### **3. Contributions of the research**

The contributions of the research could be summarised and classified in three categories: 1) practical applications; 2) methodological contributions and 3) a theoretical/epistemological contribution.

### **3.1. Practical applications**

I have aimed to set the stage for marketing scholars to enhance the understanding of how marketing methods are deployed with increasing sophistication outside the traditional commercial domain of marketing, and to consider the consequences of the application of a marketing discourse in the civic sphere. Even if my research did not have any straightforward managerial applications, its goal is in line with the emancipatory goals of the critical discourse analysis tradition of research. The results of my research are important to increase the awareness of the public to the discursive production of a particular ‘reality’ where ‘the foreigner’ is depicted as a threat to society. By showing how an extreme right party produces powerfully convincing arguments (and consequently gets a substantial proportion of votes), my work aims to highlight particular persuasive schemes, especially the ‘common sense’ arguments and the taken-for-granted assumptions against the ‘other’. I expect that, by highlighting these persuasive and marketing techniques, voters will be able to critically assess extreme right political communications and be able to resist pernicious discriminatory arguments.

The emancipatory claims of critical discourse analysis put the critical discourse analyst in a privileged position. By claiming emancipatory and educational purposes, I – as a critical discourse analyst – implicitly imply that I know best, that I have been able to uncover hidden meanings (i.e. hidden to the simple mortal’s eye) and naturalised ideologies. I make my findings available to the public, in order to rectify wrong-doings, discrimination, and injustice in the world (as posited by CDA principles, see chapter 5, p.99). Putting oneself in such a

privileged position, pretending to be able to do all of that is incredibly arrogant, if not completely deluded. It is therefore crucial that one shows reflexivity. The analysis I provide is nothing but one interpretation: the researcher is himself/herself part of society, influenced by it, socially constructed by the discourses he or she seeks to deconstruct.

### **3.2. Methodological contribution: application of CDA**

This research makes the novel contribution of applying critical discourse analysis to political marketing. The potential of CDA to marketing is considerable. For example, Fairclough (1995) has applied CDA to the marketisation of British universities (see also Lowrie, 2006). The interest in methodological issues is high. Two papers<sup>134</sup>, on CDA and political marketing, that I have written with the collaboration of my supervisors have been accepted for publication in a generalist marketing management journal (the journal of marketing management), and the second as a book chapter on current trends and issues in the discipline of political marketing. This highlights the potential contributions of CDA in areas outside of its traditional playing field (such as racism and anti-Semitism, media discourse, identity and gender issues)

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<sup>134</sup> Moufahim, M & Humphreys, M. (forthcoming), "Marketing and Identity. The Vlaams Belang against Turkish Admission to the EU", in *Cultural Issues and Current Trends*. Haworth Press  
Moufahim, M (2006), Humphreys, M., Mitussis, D. & Fitchett, J. "Interpreting Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Marketing of an Extreme Right Party", *Journal of Marketing Management*,

### **3.3. The theoretical insight for understanding the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang's success**

#### *Critical political marketing*

A final contribution of the research comes from the premises of a development of a *critical* political marketing agenda. Critical marketing points of view were taken in this research, which provide an approach to the study of marketing in a political context focussing on ideology and critique of academic discourses. For example, marketing practice and consumer culture are understood as forms of domination (see Denegri-Knott *et al.*, 2006; Jacobson and Mazur, 1995). The critical position recognises that marketing is a powerful economic, social, and cultural institution designed to control consumers (Denegri-Knott *et al.*, 2006: 951). This is, I argue also the case in political marketing. Political marketing tends to assertively claim its self-importance (quite naturally, I also argue, for a discipline battling to install its legitimacy). Approaching the issues of marketing discourse (power and dominance) and the pervasiveness and acceptance of political marketing as a practice, and a self-justifying political marketing discourse (e.g. political marketing is self-proclaimed as a democracy enhancer<sup>135</sup> (see Kotler and Kotler 1999)). In addition, as a premise to critical enquiry, it is important to recognise that marketing is not a neutral aspect of politics; and that ethical considerations have to be an integral part of any political marketing theory (Henneberg, 2004).

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<sup>135</sup> By providing the consumer with a product they want, the political process is presented as responsive to consumer demand, which in turn is assumed to make politicians more accountable (Savigny, 2004: 33)

#### **4. Limitations of the research**

There are a few limitations to the research that should be taken into account. They could be broadly classified into practical applications, methodological issues and assumption made.

##### **4.1. Methodological limitation: content analysis**

As explained in much detail throughout the thesis, CDA was an appropriate and relevant methodology which provided the tools for an in-depth enquiry into the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's discursive practices. However, an approach combining CDA and content analysis could have provided a different set of findings and consequently a more complete understanding of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. For example, in chapter 6, legitimating strategies were described as the most prominent and common in the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's publications. It is true for the texts selected and analysed. A content analysis accounting for a larger set of texts could provide interesting elements. A systematic treatment of given words, such as 'foreigners', 'racism', 'Islam', 'Muslim', 'crime', would allow the analysis of the context and the circumstances of utterances. I suspect, after four years of reading, scrutinising and analysing the Vlaams Blok and Vlaams Belang's publications, that there is a recurrent structure, or a 'template' for their electoral brochures. For example, the editorials written by Frank Vanhecke, the President of the Vlaams Belang, have their own style (mostly reading like the transcription of speech) but leaving a (calculated?) impression of improvisation and spontaneity. A content analysis could explore those 'suspicions'

and highlight, for example, systematic elements in Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang discourse.

#### **4.2. The marketing mindset**

The second limitation is the assumption made from the start that there is a straightforward relation between the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang's communication and its electoral success. The reality is of course not that simple. This assumption leaves aside many other explanatory variables, such as the characteristics of the electorate, the national and international political context, economic conjecture, the role of media, 'race relations', and other essentially individual characteristics of the voters.

In providing details of the Belgian context, the circumstances of the creation of texts and publication, and by openly acknowledging my personal input in the interpretation, the potential problems linked to this 'simplifying' assumption are somewhat reduced. For example, the assumption that I am observing marketing behaviours probably comes from a marketing mindset originating from a university marketing education. In addition, focussing solely on the organisational aspects is perhaps uni-dimensional and would not account much for any theory development, even if there are here no claims of generalisability from the single case study provided. Instead my interpretive position is acknowledged and presented as a strength rather than a weakness. It provides a rich, in-depth analysis from an academic perspective, but also from a female trilingual Muslim Brussels of foreign descent, who has lived in Belgium, Morocco, Britain and China. These

'biographical' details also situate the interpretation provided. From these details emerges another criticism about the outspoken political stance of the researcher. However, with such a background how could I be objective? I am not, and I cannot be. Critical discourse analysts hold that high quality academic research can/should be political too.

### **4.3. Political marketing**

A theoretical limitation of the research stems from the theoretical background in which it is *de facto* embedded. The rather weak managerial theories of marketing could even be considered as potentially detrimental for the validity and credibility of my research. Henneberg (2004) analyses the core of political marketing and identified two stances: a narrow position focussing on understanding marketing activities in politics and a wider position concerned with a more holistic attempt to achieve a breadth of knowledge in politics. From there, Henneberg (2004) identifies the current limitations of political marketing theory as coming from the focus on the narrow interpretation of political marketing theory. The current knowledge in political marketing comes from the areas of campaign management, political marketing strategies and comparative political marketing (Newman, 1994a, Scammell, 1995; Butler and Collins, 1999; Baines and Egan, 2001). The managerial focus is only one element of political marketing theory that was granted disproportionate academic attention. Henneberg (2004) notes that the essence of political marketing remains opaque and that crucial elements are still ill-defined in marketing terms, e.g. the exchange process, the 'political product', the 'political market'.

Henneberg (2004) calls for a research agenda focussing on the ethical dimensions of political marketing, on the underlying exchange mechanisms and the interaction of marketing activities with the political system. He prescribes the development of a theory of political marketing management (Henneberg, 2004; Henneberg 2002) where a descriptive understanding of political marketing management would be integrated to a prescriptive theory (i.e. that would help political actors apply political marketing management techniques effectively and efficiently. As a response to this limitation, I should say that my research does indeed subscribe to an interpretation of political marketing theory as being concerned with understanding existing marketing activities in politics, and provides only a descriptive approach (see for example chapter 8, pp.273-294). However, my research suggests the potential fruitful contributions of a critical political marketing agenda and provides a novel methodological approach to the study of political marketing. In addition, the development of a critical political marketing agenda (as suggested in 'contributions of the research, see p.321) is in line with Henneberg's (2002) above-mentioned prescriptions.

## **5. Suggestions for further research**

### **5.1. Critical discourse analysis methodology**

#### *Marketing and extreme right: an extended research*

This research has highlighted the potential of critical discourse analysis to analyse marketing and discourse. Further research should aim at providing a broader

understanding of marketing and extreme right discourses. Other subjects, such as media discourse and institutional discourse, would provide the basis for the analysis of the social context of the production and reproduction of discriminatory discourses (which have already been significantly researched, see chapter 5, p.100). A similar approach could be undertaken to analyse marketing discourse and its pervasiveness in socio-political contexts.

In addition, Henneberg (2004) proposes to adopt an epistemological view of political marketing as a 'research lens', a meta-theoretical vehicle for making sense of the political processes. I have a-called it the *political marketing as metaphor* approach (see chapter 5, p.90) for understanding political processes and behaviours. Exploring this issue in its own right would provide insights for theoretical developments much needed to inform contemporary political practice (i.e. moving from a descriptive focus to a prescriptive approach and theory development).

## **5.2. Web-based data**

In my research, online documents were only one variety of texts among a wide range of texts. A website-only based analysis (content analysis, design analysis, critical discourse analysis) could explore the potential of the internet for radical politics and extend the actual understanding of online based political practices (e.g. fund-raising, political candidates' blogs, etc.).

### **5.3. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang**

Direct access to the party should be sought by researchers who would not be handicapped as I was by my ethnic origins and religious faith. However, because the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang has been notoriously secretive about its internal organisation (Art, 2006), prominent scholars (such as Cas Mudde) studying the extreme right have also little insight into what goes on inside the Vlaams Blok (Art, 2006). Experts in the field still have virtually no knowledge of the organisational features of Belgian extreme right parties (the Front National and the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang) (Mudde, forthcoming). However, the Vlaams Belang is seeking respectability and acceptance and this might provide an opportunity to know the party better. Being provided with a voice, via academic research, could represent an attractive opportunity to the party leaders. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is one of the best organised extreme right European parties (Carter 2005; Coffé, 2005a). Research could focus on the managerial and marketing conduct of the party. In addition, an analysis of the evolution of the party from extreme right to conservative right would be a fascinating subject in terms of organisational cultural change.

The identification of Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang supporters and their in-depth interview could provide insights in terms of some of the concepts covered in the thesis, such as image perception, photograph interpretation, research linked to persuasion (adoption and rejection of persuasive messages) and branding. Contrasting the data from opponents and party sympathisers', interviews would

prove invaluable to get a grasp of the political branding phenomenon and notion of perception of images.

## **6. Final words: a reflexive comment**

In a heated debate with my father about Belgian politics and the reasons of the extreme right success, he asked me: “If you were a Belgian, wouldn’t you vote for the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang? I would”. This is a thought-provoking question for several reasons. First of all, I have always considered myself as a Belgian and the question starts with the implication that I am not. Second, by adding “*wouldn’t you vote...*”, the question states that if I were indeed a Belgian, voting for the extreme right would be an option. Third, by the answer ‘I would’, my father wanted to show that he certainly understands why a native Belgian would (and, as a first generation immigrant, why he would not). Another simpler explanation is that I am as stubborn as he is, and probably out of frustration that I would not accept his points (that I rather viciously branded as racist), he concluded by this polemical question and answer to ‘get back at me’!

The point raised is important. Choosing to study the extreme right brought to the fore a few issues linked to identity. The plural identities I endorse were threatened by the content of the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang’s discourse that I had to digest for four years. The Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang defends a closed definition of identity: to belong to the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang’s ‘own people’, you must

fulfil specific characteristics of ethnic origin, culture and faith. I fulfil none. I am a French-speaking Belgian from (Muslim) Moroccan descent. Belgium is not recognised by the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang. Flemish (Dutch) is the language of the future Republic of Flanders, and Islam is certainly not tolerated by the party (based on the declaration of the Vlaams Belang leaders, I should even be deported, since I wear an Islamic headscarf , see p.84).

Therefore, detaching myself from the content of the party's rhetoric was sometimes difficult. However, I have in the process developed a strong sense of justice, and cultural and self-awareness. I am very careful with the xenophobic, exclusionary potential of everyday utterances one might unconsciously make, in the appraisal of people, behaviours and cultural practices<sup>136</sup>. The experience of studying the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang has also unexpectedly reinforced my European identity and my sense of being Belgian. As a Belgian, I can say that I would never vote for the Vlaams Belang. I acknowledge the professionalism of the party and their electoral force, I admire its persuasiveness, the articulation of its discourse and its sophisticated political marketing. I fear, however, the pervasiveness of their arguments, the growing acceptance of the Vlaams Belang's 'reality' which creates a confrontational and divided society. As an academic, I cannot vote for the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang either, because I understand how the party persuades, manipulates and divides. Their discourse has become transparent to the critical discourse analyst I have become.

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<sup>136</sup> This is especially true since I have started living in China, a country and a culture at odds with everything I have known or experienced so far.

## **Afterword: the Vlaams Belang and I**

On August 31<sup>st</sup> 2007 I finally had my first ‘real’ encounter with the Vlaams Belang. The party organised an international press conference on the theme of Flanders’ imminent independence. The speeches by Filip Dewinter and two other politicians were given in Dutch for a press that mainly came from Flanders, France and Japan. Non-Dutch speakers in the audience were provided with a document in English (but not French). What Dewinter said, advocating, for example, the “*euthanasia of Belgium*” supported my observations and conclusions about the party’s discourse. Listening to the ‘spoken discourse’ as it was uttered was a great and exciting way to get closure after four years of my research project. It was amazing to hear, in spoken form, the key words, arguments and strategies that I have identified, analysed and that have consumed my academic life these last four years.

Filip Dewinter has often been described as charismatic, and I could see why. The man is clearly a professional communicator. He has the convincing speech of a man driven by conviction (for example, he never consulted his notes, unlike the two other politicians present). I can understand why people are seduced by his demeanour and discourse. I, unsurprisingly perhaps, did not fall for it. A strong feeling of uneasiness enveloped me during the conference, and I was happy to leave as soon as it was over. It is significant that my presence in the room did not go unnoticed, not-the-least by Filip Dewinter himself who stared at me for what felt like interminable minutes. My presence maybe surprised him, and perhaps caused him some discomfort too. I, or what I represent, certainly does not have a

place in the scenario the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang is setting out for what they are calling the “New Republic of Flanders” - I knew it, and they knew it.

## APPENDICES

**Appendix 1** – Extreme Right Glossary

**Appendix 2** – Map of Belgium ([http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/be\(r\).html](http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/be(r).html), as accessed on 11/08/2007)

**Appendix 3** – Vlaams Blok – Frank Vanhecke’s editorial (<http://vlaamsblok.be/index.shtml>, as accessed in November 2004)

**Appendix 4** – Vlaams Blok Brochure No. 6 – Brussels, my City – Facts – Reality May 2004 – pp. 2-3

**Appendix 5** – Vlaams Blok Brochure – Liste 10 *Bruxelles Notre Ville! Touche pas à la démocratie*, p.3 (translation: Brussels Our City! Don’t meddle with Democracy)

**Appendix 6** – Vlaams Belang Magazine Nr. 1, *Dertiende Overwinning op rij*, Nov. 2006, p.2

**Appendix 7** – Cover page of the campaign brochure: Bruxelles, notre ville! ‘Touche pas à la démocratie’

**Appendix 8** – The hand-shaped logo of SOS Racisme

**Appendix 9** – Vlaams Blok Brochure 6: *Feiten/Réalités*, Multicultural Brussels?! May 2004, pp. 8-9

**Appendix 10** – Vlaams Belang Brussel’s newsletter Nr.1, *Bruxelles, Ma Ville, mijn stad*, (2004), p.5 (translation: Brussels, My city)

**Appendix 11** – Vlaams Blok’s (2004) brochure *Bruxelles/Brussel, Mijn stad, ma ville, Le compte à rebours*, pp. 6-7 (translation: “Brussels, My City, the countdown”)

**Appendix 12** – Vlaams Belang Brussel’s newsletter Nr.1, *Bruxelles, Ma Ville, mijn stad*, (2004), p.10 (translation: Brussels, My city)

**Appendix 13** – Vlaams Blok Brochure – Liste 10 *Bruxelles Notre Ville! Touche pas à la démocratie*, p.3 (translation: Brussels Our City! Don’t meddle with Democracy)

**Appendix 14** – Vlaams Blok Brochure 6: *Feiten/Réalités*, An Alternative for Brussels! May 2004, pp. 22-23

**Appendix 15** – Vlaams Belang (2005) “*Turkey: not a European Nation*”

**Appendix 16** – Vlaams Belang Magazine Nr. 1, *Dertiende Overwinning op rij*, Nov. 2006, pp. 4-5 (translation: Brussels, My city)

**Appendix 17** – Vlaams Belang Magazine Nr. 1, *Dertiende Overwinning op rij*, Nov. 2006, p. 3 (translation, Thirteenth victory in a row)

**Appendix 18** – Vlaams Blok Brochure 6: *Feiten/Réalités*, An Alternative for Brussels! May 2004, pp. 4-5

**Appendix 19** – Filip Dewinter (<http://www.resistances.be/dewinter.html>)

**Appendix 20** – Vlaams Belang Magazine Nr. 1, *Dertiende Overwinning op rij*, Nov.2006, p. 6-7

**Appendix 21** – Vlaams Belang, in:

[www.vlaamsbelang.be/index.php?p=6&id=10](http://www.vlaamsbelang.be/index.php?p=6&id=10), as accessed 19/04/2005

## Appendix 1 – Extreme Right Glossary

*Fascism*: The term originally refers to the movement led by Benito Mussolini in Italy from 1922 to 1943 (McLean and McMillan, 2003). It also designates a right-wing totalitarian ideology and philosophy of government that glorifies the state and nation, and assigns to the state control over every aspect of national life. It is by essence opposed to democracy and liberalism (McLean and McMillan, 2003). A fascist regime is supposed to control most industrial and economic activities and usually try to achieve popularity by a strongly nationalistic appeal, often mixed with racism. The most common assumption about the modern extreme right parties is that they are all fascist parties, or at least “in-the-closet” fascists. However, according to experts in the field, most of contemporary extreme right parties have very little do to with fascism (Hainsworth, 2000; Mudde, 2000; Ignazi, 1997, among others) and are actually the product of contemporary modern societies.

*Populism*. Populism is defined by Davies and Lynch (2002: 332) as being “an approach to politics that appeals to the man or woman in the street and casts them in a favourable light relative to wealthy, educated and influential elites”. The term is defined by Betz (1998: 4), as a structure of argumentation, a political style and an ideology. The main elements of populism are the belief that there are always simple solutions even for the most complex issues of the modern world (Betz, 1998). Populist parties claim to speak for the common people and they usually define enemies and target popular resentment against them: resident foreign population, established political parties, immigrants, refugees, are usually the favourite targets of populist parties (Betz, 1998), because the populist style is about “the constant search to exploit and cultivate resentment” (Immerfall, 1998: 27).

The populist approach to politics is widely used by extreme right parties’ leaders. For instance, the French Front National’s Jean-Marie Le Pen experienced “cold and hunger”, and said once: “the miners, the metal workers, the workers in all these industries ruined by Euro-globalisation, the farmers forced into bankruptcy...I have always fought for the people pushed out of the edge” (in Lloyd, 29/04/2002). Similarly, the Swiss extreme right leader, Christophe Blocher, uses the fact that he is the son of a poor pastor (although, he is today a billionaire managing a multinational company).

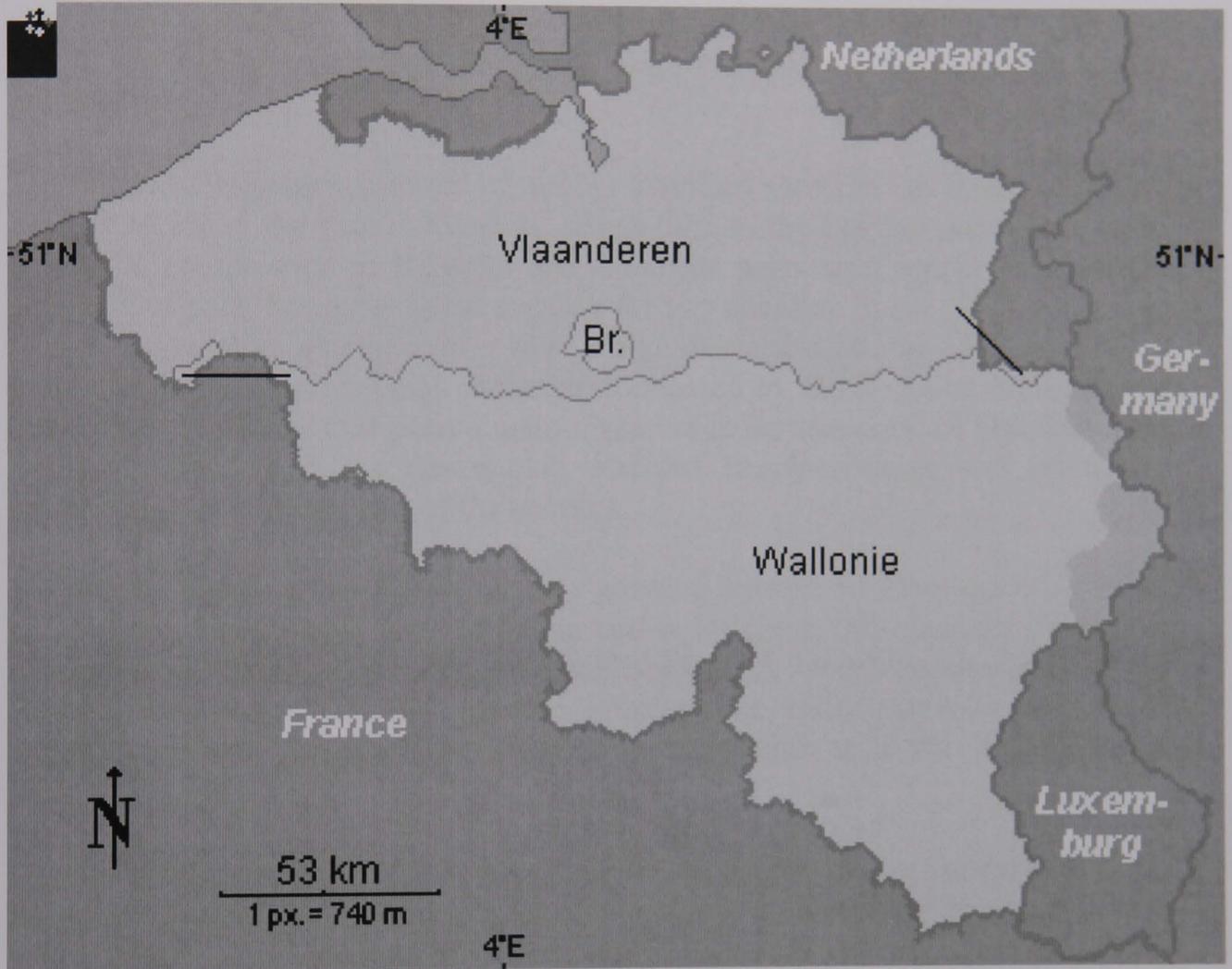
The term “populism” is thus used to describe a political style, instead of a specific ideology and it does not differ from the definitions of right-wing extremism (Mudde, 2000: 13) hence most extreme right parties are populist parties. However, “populism” is also used by some authors to clearly distinguish between far right parties, where the populist ones are the more moderate (Mudde, 2000; Backes, 1991; Betz, 1994). Immerfall (1998) rejected the term *extreme right* to describe the contemporary western European phenomenon and argued that the correct label for the phenomenon is *neo-populism*. Immerfall (1998) also described parties as radical right-wing parties.

*Right-wing radicalism.* The term is used interchangeably with right-wing extremism. There is however a slight difference between the two terms: “radicalism” means *hostility* to the constitution whereas extremism is used for groups *opposed* to the constitution, which means that extremist parties are watched by the state and can be banned (Mudde, 2000).

*Radical right:* is a “loose term used to describe right-wing trends that go beyond mainstream conservatism and imply a desire for far-reaching change [...] When looking at the political spectrum as a whole, the radical right is largely synonymous with the extreme right but excludes hardline traditionalists or conservatives who simply want to maintain the status quo” (Davies and Lynch, 2000: 335).

*Welfare chauvinism:* “the fruits of the national economy should come first and foremost (if not exclusively) to the benefit of their own people” (Mudde, 2000: 175). In addition to granting political, economic and social rights only to nationals, it entails that the state should protect some sectors against foreign competition. In this view, the Maastricht Treaty is a threat to the national economy (Mudde, 2000).

Appendix 2- Map of Belgium ([http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/be\(r.html](http://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/be(r.html), as accessed on 11/08/2007)



**Appendix 3- Vlaams Blok- Frank Vanhecke's editorial (<http://vlaamsblok.be/index.shtml>), as accessed in November 2004)**

**TODAY WE WERE EXECUTED. BUT WE WILL RISE**

Today (9 November), our party, the Vlaams Blok, has been condemned to death. This afternoon, the Belgian Supreme Court upheld the verdict, issued by the Court of Appeal in Ghent on 21 April, which declared the Vlaams Blok a criminal organisation. In order to preserve our party members from prosecution, we are now forced to disband. What happened in Brussels today is unique in the Western world: never has a so-called democratic regime outlawed the country's largest political party.

The Vlaams Blok was supported by almost 1 million voters in last June's elections. We got 24.1% of the vote in Flanders, where 60% of the Belgian population lives. Voting is compulsory in Belgium and no other party was supported by more people. Our party has grown continuously for two decades. Since 1987, it has won twelve consecutive elections in a row. Belgium, established in 1830 by French revolutionaries, is an artificial construct dominated by the Socialist Francophone minority in Wallonia. Our party's main objective is the secession of Flanders from Belgium. Flanders is the free-market oriented Dutch-speaking and politically minorised (*sic*) northern part of the country.

We are the democratic voice of an ever growing number of Flemings who, in an entirely non-violent way, want to put an end to Belgium. Our electoral strength is causing panic amongst the Belgian establishment. A recent opinion poll of the Brussels newspaper *Le Soir* and the Francophone state television *RTBF* (24 October) indicates that the Vlaams Blok currently stands at 26.9% of the Flemish vote.

Despite the fact that a political party should be fought in the voting booth, the Belgian regime has been harassing the Vlaams Blok with criminal prosecutions for over a decade. The Belgian Parliament, where Francophones are overrepresented, changed the Constitution in 1999 in order to limit freedom of expression. It also voted a series of new laws with the sole purpose of criminalising and de-funding our party, including an Anti-Racism Act and an Anti-Discrimination Act which define "discrimination" so broadly that every individual can be prosecuted on the basis of them. (The text of these infamous bills can be found on our website [www.flemishrepublic.org](http://www.flemishrepublic.org)).

Moreover, according to Belgium's draconian new laws, every member and collaborator of an organisation that propagates "discrimination," can be punished with fines or imprisonment. Furthermore, the onus of proof has been reversed, so that the complainant does not need to prove that the accused "discriminates" or propagates "discrimination," but the latter has to prove that he does not. Since 1993 the power to prosecute for discrimination and racism was transferred to a government quango, resorting directly under the Prime Minister, the so-called

Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight against Racism (CEOFR). This quango has now been vindicated by the Supreme Court, an institution composed of political appointees, half of them French-speakers.

Have we ever condoned discrimination on the basis of race? No, but that did not matter to the Belgian establishment and its political courts. We were condemned on the basis of a selection of excerpts from texts provided by the CEOFR. These excerpts were taken from an anthology of no more than 16 texts published by local Vlaams Blok chapters between 1996 and 2000. According to the court what we wrote was not necessarily untrue, but our "intentions" were of a criminal nature. The Ghent ruling, today reaffirmed by the Supreme Court, stated that our texts (though some were mere quotes of official statistics on crime rates and social welfare expenditure and another was an article written by a female Turkish-born Vlaams Blok member about the position of women in fundamentalist Muslim societies) were published with "an intention to contribute to a campaign of hatred." Such a *procès d'intention* (a conviction based on speculation about our supposed motives) is a real disgrace, and the fact that the Belgian judiciary had to resort to this proves that no other reasons for convicting us could be found. We have never propagated, advocated or practised any discrimination. Never.

The consequences of the conviction are, however, serious. According to the law, every member of our party or everyone who has ever cooperated with it, even if he has not committed any crimes himself, becomes a criminal by the mere fact of his membership of or his cooperation with our party. The Ghent verdict literally stated: "Rendering punishable every person who belongs to or cooperates with a group or society [...] serves as an efficient means to suppress such groups or societies, as the lawmaker intended. Rendering punishable the members or collaborators of the group or society inherently jeopardizes the continued existence or functioning of the group or society [...]."

Indeed, the reaffirmation of the Ghent verdict by the Supreme Court forces us to disband our party in order not to endanger its members and collaborators. Therefore, a party congress next Sunday will convene to officially disband the party. We will, however, put to the congress the establishment of a new party to defend the political priorities that the Vlaams Blok has always fought for: an independent and democratic Republic of Flanders; the traditional moral values of Western civilisation; and the right of the Flemings to protect their national identity and their Dutch language and culture.

I thank those who founded our party in 1977 and all who have supported it in the past 27 years. They have fought the good fight. I thank our one million voters. They deserve a democracy. Belgium does not want to grant them one; we will. Today, our party has been killed, not by the electorate but by the judges. We will establish a new party. This one Belgium will not be able to bury; it will bury Belgium.

Frank Vanhecke, MEP  
Vlaams Blok Party Leader

**Appendix 4 – Vlaams Blok Brochure No. 6 – Brussels, my City – Facts-Reality May 2004 – pp. 2-3**

Re-establish Democracy!

The judgement of Ghent's Court of Appeal (Supreme Court), is the nth signal that democracy does not feel well in our country. It is indeed a political trial in its purest form.

All the parties, Flemish and French-speakers (except for the Vlaams Blok, of course), have voted for one modification of the law after another, in order to ban the Vlaams Blok and financially dry it out. The Constitution itself was modified for this sole purpose! A people's jury did not inspire confidence to the parties in power. Could you imagine that the Vlaams Blok benefits from too much sympathy or common sense from our people! No, professional magistrates, who could often be put under political pressures, were imperatively necessary. All years long, one talks about political nominations in the legal world. Do you think that today, all of a sudden, at the opportunity of this trial, eminently political, the political nominations wouldn't play any role???

Moreover, {literal translation: this trial was filed by a governmental institution} it is a governmental institution, the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Fight against Racism that filed suit. This "ministry of truth", set up after the electoral victory of the Vlaams Blok, falls under the authority of Prime Minister Verhofstadt, and is directly financed with federal credits, and credit from the National Lottery. The decision to file suit was taken by a governing board in which, as a matter of course, only the ruling parties are represented. Isn't independence beautiful... {Literally: It's beautiful, independence...}

This sort of affair is common currency in banana republics; they don't have their place in democracy.

There is no possible democracy without a broad society debate. No debate has any sense without freedom of speech, as large as possible, including the theme of immigration.

The Vlaams Blok will continue, no matter what, to say what the silent majority of our country says. For the 13<sup>th</sup> June elections, we ask the Brusseleirs to emit a clear signal: choose freedom of speech, for democracy, for the Vlaams Blok.

Frank Vanhecke  
President Vlaams Blok  
Senator

**Appendix 5 – Vlaams Blok Brochure<sup>137</sup> – Liste 10 *Bruxelles Notre Ville! Touche pas à la démocratie*, p.3** (translation : Brussels Our City! Don't meddle with Democracy)

Dear voter,

On June 13<sup>th</sup>, you will go to the voting booth to elect the Brusseleir members of the Flemish Parliament, of Brussels Regional Council, and of the European Parliament. These elections are not like any other. These last months, several facts, which are totally unacceptable from a democratic point of view, happened. First, one has accepted the right to vote for foreigners who refuse to take our nationality, for the next commune elections. A large majority of the population is opposed to the foreigners' right to vote, and nevertheless, it was imposed on us. All the francophone parties (MR, PS, CDH) were in favour of this right to vote, resulting in that the sole collaboration of the Flemish socialist SPA was sufficient to form a majority in the Parliament. The VLD has done nothing to stop this coup. The parties have proved that they were not interested in the people's opinions. They refused a referendum to be held on the question of the foreigners' right to vote. The rules of the democratic games have been changed without allowing the population to express itself according to democratic criteria. We are hoping that you will think about this when you are in the voting booth on June, 13<sup>th</sup>.

Another scandal: the condemnation of the Vlaams Blok for "racism". The free expression of your opinions, in this country, is from now on strangled. The Vlaams Blok is not a racist party, it only defends in a firm and decisive fashion the rights of the Brusseleirs. It is the reason why the regime has called upon a "tribunal" to put the Vlaams Blok offside.

But we will continue our fight without bending, in order for Brussels to live in safety, so that you can still feel at home in Brussels. We want a Brussels where one is still rewarded for one's work. For a Brussels where one can express freely one's opinion. On June 13<sup>th</sup>, it's you who will determine the outcome of the elections. Be vigilant so that the free choice of citizens remains a right and stops being flouted. To stay free, vote for the Vlaams Blok.

Johan Demol

Top of the list Brussels – Capital Regional Council  
Parliament

Top of list Flemish Council

Frank Vanhecke

Top of list European

(Vertical) Vlaams Blok the Unique Opposition

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<sup>137</sup> Brochure campaign (for 13th June 2004; Region councils, parliaments, and European parliament).

**Appendix 6 – Vlaams Belang Magazine Nr. 1, *Dertiende Overwinning op rij*, Nov. 2006, p.2**

On the way to right-wing, Flemish political power

'Purple is alive', 'Purple is there again', 'Purple is doing it again', said the press with one voice after the so-called policy declaration of Guy Verhofstadt in the Chamber.

Oh boy, oh boy, what a circus! The VLD of Guy Verhofstadt was sanctioned severely by the electorate during the municipal elections, there is yet another series of taxes coming thanks to the champions of virtual 'tax reduction', and the budget is such a complex-less humbug, that we feel vicarious shame, but nevertheless, the press applauds unisono. The press (few exceptions confirm the rule), as a feel-good machine at the service of the Belgian establishment. Why does the VLD still need Noël Slangen? (By the way, did it strike you too that nobody reminds us of the judicial adventures of Mr Slangen and the clever arguments with which he managed to avoid sanctions? Whoever accepts lessons in ethics from a man like him is just out of his mind.)

In fact, what does Verhofstadt want? He wants to stay in power at all cost. In that sense he is not much different from Yves Leterme, who wants to come to power at all costs. The first one has been cheating us for seven years now, the second one might very well start cheating us as of next year.

Because that is, of course, the heart of the matter. As Filip Dewinter said rightly: whether 2007 brings us "Guy Leterme" or "Yves Verhofstadt", it does not change much. It is all the same, because as long as they keep the *cordon sanitaire* in place, they are *de facto* the accomplices or the Stockholm-syndrome stricken hostages of the Parti Socialiste. Indeed Leterme has been using a typical "tsjeven" trick for months now, giving a double message. He has one story for the Flemish public, and another story for the Walloon public. For the Flemish, one can from time to time hear some bold pro-Flemish talk, but at the same time he says to the French-speaking public "do not be afraid", and sends the ACW to make clear that there will definitely not be a scission of social security. And the N-VA watches all this without reacting, just like in the dossier Brussel-Halle-Vilvoorde ("we do not enter a government as long as the scission is not a fact"), gets rewarded for its services and keeps attacking the only trustworthy Flemish nationalist party of this country.

This is the political situation in Flanders in 2006. We live in a country where prosperity, employment and even the territory of the Flemish majority are fundamentally harmed by the political aggression of the Walloon minority, and in spite of that, there is not one single brave politician in the "traditional" parties to break the cordon, which 1 out of 4 Flemish voters rejected. There is not even one single politician who dares condemn the fact that Vlaams Belang is currently being judged by French speaking judges, in a judicial procedure which is partly conducted in French – in the year 2006. Yes, you are reading what you see.

What we have to do is clear. Since 8 October, we have become a real popular party, with already many hundreds of local sections and mandataries. The challenge for 2007 is huge. We do not use a cordon against whoever wants to win right-wing Flemish political power is with us, but at the same time we have to be very conscious of our own strength and of the brilliant opportunities in front of us, in 2007 and even more so in 2009.

Frank Vanhecke  
National President

Appendix 7

A- Cover page of the campaign brochure: **Bruxelles, notre ville!** 'Touche pas à la démocratie' (translation: Brussels, our city! Don't meddle with democracy)-**FRENCH**



(Vlaams Blok, May 2004)

B- Cover page of the same brochure in Dutch, **Brussel, onze stad!** Logisch toch. (translation: Brussels, our city! All the same) **DUTCH**



(Vlaams Blok, May 2004)

## Appendix 8- The Hand-shaped logo of SOS Racisme



logo of SOS Racism,  
<http://www.sos-racisme.org/>

**Appendix 9- Vlaams Blok Brochure 6: *Feiten/Réalités*, Multicultural Brussels?! May 2004, pp. 8-9**

“I am scared by the violent anti-Israeli demonstrations. All this calls for Jihad and the slogans saying ‘ Hamas, Hamas, all the Jews in the gas chambers’. Come on, it is incredible. I am asking myself a lot of questions about foreigners’ right to vote. Although the majority of the population is opposed to it, that right was voted for. More than 64,000 non-European foreigners are going to decide on my future. That’s unacceptable”.

“Freedom of speech: Censored”

Brussels will count soon a majority of inhabitants from foreign origin, due to the lax policies of the traditional parties. Every political commentator can confirm this: the right to vote by foreigners will cause a political earthquake in Brussels.

Frederic Erens, National President of the VB Youth, Uccle {note: Uccle is one the 19 municipalities of Brussels}

“The life of many Brussels inhabitants will become unbearable if we do not change the situation. Police do not dare even appear in some neighbourhoods, let alone intervene, for fear of riots. Foreign inhabitants are considered as votes in the bank; this is why traditional parties tolerate the situation. However, radical imams put Allah’s law above ours, and call for homosexuals to be thrown from the top of buildings. The right to vote by foreigners must be abolished. This right to vote, along with the most flexible nationality code in the world, encourages very few foreigners to integrate into society. Whoever wants to acquire citizenship will have to pass a citizenship test.”

**Appendix 10- Vlaams Belang Brussel's newsletter Nr.1, *Bruxelles, Ma Ville, mijn stad*, (2004), p.5 (translation: Brussels, My city)**

Affair/File Hariche: the Islamic socialism is progressing

What the SP {Socialist Party} is wheeling and conspiring is from now clear: in mid-December, Thielemans underwent a surgical operation, following which he had been replaced for one month. In principle, the substitute must be the first or second deputy mayor; in this case everybody was astounded to see that the choice was set on the seventh deputy mayor, of Algerian origin, Faouzia Hariche. Hariche is perfectly bilingual: French and Arabic. She does not speak a word of Dutch. The real Brusseleirs do not find it funny. From Brussels civil servant, one demands that, quite rightly, that they are bilingual. However, someone completely ignoring Dutch can become the mayor *ad interim*.

Even more, the first city of the country has had for one month a mayor of foreign origin. In the past, we have noticed that the deputy mayor did not shine by her competence. Why getting stressed? The journalist Derk Jan Eppink has literally written: "With Hariche as first foreign-born mayor of the capital of Belgium, of Flanders and of Europe, the SP plays the North African card. The respect of the basic rules is accessory. What matters is power." (Knack, 11/1/2006)

In addition, a little while ago, Hariche nominated her husband Mohamed Laghmiche, director of the non-for-profit association "Jeunesse a Bruxelles" (Youth In Brussels) of which she is president. She granted them a subsidy of 117,000 euros. Mrs Hariche is certainly well integrated in the culture of the SP.

Erik Arckens

**Appendix 11 – Vlaams Blok’s (2004) brochure *Bruxelles/Brussel, Mijn stad, ma ville, Le compte à rebours*, pp. 6-7 ( translation: “Brussels. My City. the countdown”)**

### The Count Down

The final toll of the uprising in Paris and other French cities is sadly heavy: at least ten dead, dozens of wounded, and tens of thousands of burnt cars. The damages remain limited in our country, for the moment. A few similar facts have been observed in Brussels, Liege, Antwerp, Ghent, Malines (Mechelen) and Lokeren...

The popular saying says: “when it is raining in Paris, you have drops in Brussels” happens to be often accurate. It would be illusory to think that the situation in our ghetto-neighbourhoods of our big cities is less explosive than in France. The reality is that the atmosphere is as tense as in France. The dynamics triggering violence are the same here as they are in France, and they must be credited to a small nucleus of radicals and fundamentalists.

The authorities are trying to minimise and justify incidents instead of taking appropriate measures. The government must draw the conclusions that emerged after the riots and fires. “Unequal chances”, “ethnic unemployment”, and the supposed “racism” are only a consequence of a perfectly incoherent immigration policy. It was the case yesterday, it is still the case today.

We have often given the impression that the “more one throws Molotov cocktails, the more one receives subsidies”. The political world is paralysed by a foreign-born community which is growing bigger and bigger, because among other things, the establishment of the right to vote to foreigners and the consequences of the “quick acquisition” of Belgian nationality gives an ever-increasing importance to this particular electoral group”. Authorities desperately try to be easy with the goat and the cabbage {French phrase, difficult to render in English}. The philosophy is to provide subvention to Islam as a vector for integration, whereas this policy produces the opposite effect.

One wants to create a targeted employment to the foreign-born, but one remains paralysed when it comes to the massive arrival of illegal immigrants. Even better: they are regularised! “One preaches for sacrosanct integration, but one encourages diversity and multiculturalism. It is only when we have the courage to tackle problems from another point of view that solutions will draw in profile. One must recognise the failure of the multicultural myth”. One should dare debate on immigration and integration, honestly, and without politically correct taboos. It is the *sine que non* condition to end the whorl of tension, confrontation and violence that our society faces.

Frederic Erens  
Brussels MP

**Appendix 12- Vlaams Belang Brussel's newsletter Nr.1, *Bruxelles, Ma Ville, mijn stad*, (2004), p.10 (translation: Brussels, My city)**

Entrepreneurship, it's freedom

As a popular party we are particularly sensitive to the problems met daily by the independent storekeepers. The Vlaams Belang organised a few weeks ago, a congress under this theme. The Vlaams Blok resolutely opts for the entrepreneurship and the respect of labour/work.

We blame the old political majorities of our communes for their lack of initiatives in favour of independent workers. We are blaming them to have never tackled the real problems.

As we already know, less and less voters wish to still vote for the sclerosed traditional parties which refuse to face the truth.

For low electoral reasons, those parties holding power do not want to 'disturb' their 'new electorate'. Consequently, there is a series of gross injustices, which put a category of 'citizens' above laws at the expenses of the others.

Who knows the life of an independent worker, knows the work to knock down and the long hours, just to keep your head above water.

To do business without risking one's life is finally/really the least the independent can demand from a power that does not hesitate to fiscally choke them.

Of course, to organise activities is a bonus for our storekeeper and efforts must go on, but only a secure (securised) commune would be able to favour/promote the commercial activities and to attract new businesses/stores.

More and more, the very nature of our shops change and there are other sorts of shops taking their place. This way, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, our traditional shops are disappearing. How long is this going to last?

We want to help and give value to honest storekeepers and chase those who benefit from the laxity and fear of the authorities.

Let us show together that it is possible to tackle the real problems, legally, democratically, but with determination and without weakness.

**Appendix 13 – Vlaams Blok Brochure<sup>138</sup> – Liste 10 *Bruxelles Notre Ville! Touche pas à la démocratie*, p.3** (translation: Brussels Our City! Don't meddle with Democracy)

On June, 13<sup>th</sup>, you will be able to kill two birds with one stone. When you will vote for a list of Dutch-speaking linguistic groups (such as for example, the Vlaams Blok), you will be able to choose six representatives for the Flemish Council, which has its headquarters in Brussels, next to the Chamber of Representatives, and the Senate. Your elected representatives will defend the interests of the Brusseleirs in files, such as well-being, health, assistance to the elderly and to the handicapped, along with the Dutch-speaking education. But they will also have their say in the files that Brussels and Flanders have in common such as the Ring {name of the motorway circling Brussels}, the airport, employment, etc.

This is why it is very important to also vote here for people who will defend your interests.

Every Brussels inhabitant, Dutch-speaker or Francophone, who votes for the Vlaams Blok, has it in his/her interests to cast his/her vote for this list. Johan Demol will lead it and his colleague, the former delegate Erik Arckens, will bring his knowledge learnt in the amphitheatre of the Brussels Parliament, to the Flemish Council. The other candidates are notably the city councillor Monique Moens, and the entrepreneur Rolando Assys. The first substitute is Greet Van Linter.

(Frame) Your Brussels' candidates for the Flemish Council: Erick Arckens (2<sup>nd</sup> candidate), Monique Moens (3<sup>rd</sup> candidate and 4<sup>th</sup> substitute), Greet Van Linter (1<sup>st</sup> substitute), Rolando Assys (last of the list and 2<sup>nd</sup> substitute) and Johan Demol (head of the list).

(Vertical): Vlaams Blok the Unique Opposition

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<sup>138</sup> Campaign brochure<sup>138</sup> – Brussels Our City ! List 10. Vlaams Blok. Don't meddle with Democracy

**Appendix 14 – Vlaams Blok Brochure 6: *Feiten/Réalités*, An Alternative for Brussels! May 2004, pp. 22-23**

Johan Demol – More than ever!

The management by the old parties has made Brussels insecure, dirty, woebegone. With impossible traffic, where the inhabitant feels like a foreigner, and has only one solution: to leave, in the same way that most of the companies have done.

Apart from a city re-planning here and there, of a pavement or a square, which are six months late, as dirty and degraded as they were before, our politicians do not do anything to improve the situation.

To make Brussels streets safe and give again to the Brusseleirs an agreeable life environment remains our main concern. With the Vlaams Blok, we will be able to live again in our city in the sparkling way which is proper to us Brusseleirs.

## Appendix 15 (1/5) – Vlaams Belang (2005) , “*Turkey in Europe: No!*”

*Cover page*

Turkey: not a European Nation

*Page 1*

Photo of men praying in the street

*Page*

Turkey does not belong to the European Union

Incredible but true: the negotiations about Turkey’s admission to the European Union will start in October. For the first time in history, a non-European country will enter the EU. However, the article 49 of the Treaty about the European Union, mentions that only European countries may request to enter the EU. The European Constitution does not foresee at all the entrance of any non-European country.

Turkey is not a common candidate country. It is also a country which, as it effectively will enter the EU, will have the biggest and also the poorest population. Former EU-agriculture commissioner Franz Fischler assessed that all the agricultural subsidies to Turkey alone may reach 11 billion euro a year. But only 35% of Turkey’s working population work in agriculture. According to a European Commission’s assessment, the total annual cost of Turkey’s membership may reach more than 28 billion euro. No one knows who is going to pay for this, or with what money.

Each candidate country must satisfy the so-called “Copenhagen criteria”. Turkey, apparently not. Human rights are constantly violated. As for economy, Turkey does not fulfil at all the conditions either.

To let Turkey enter the EU would be a historical mistake. In the European Parliament, the Vlaams Belang representatives will continue resisting these undemocratic schemes, which does absolutely not serve EU citizens’ interests.

(at the bottom: Photographs of Koen Dillen/FV and Philip Claeys, VB members of the EP)

*Page 3- The Risks.*

If Turkey Enters the EU...

- ✓ it will be the biggest member state at every EU-meeting and will send the largest delegation to the EU Parliament.
- ✓ And then, Turkey will then become the strongest military force in the EU with an army of more than 600.000 men.
- ✓ And then, EU external borders will then be extended to countries like Iran, Iraq and Syria. The Middle East inferno will then literally be at Europe’s door.
- ✓ And then, we would have no grounds to refuse candidates like Morocco, Algeria or Tunisia.

- ✓ And then Europe's door will then be open to uncontrollable and unbridled immigration.
- ✓ And then will come the threat of a dangerous confrontation with a militant and intolerant Islam.
- ✓ And then, there will begin an economic drain.
- ✓ And the EU will then become unmanageable.

## Appendix 15 (2/5) – Vlaams Belang (2005) , “*Turkey in Europe: No!*”

*Page 4* The borders will be extended...

In the Turkish case, the remoteness will not only be geographical. The beginning of the negotiation about Turkey’s entrance in the EU announces a new era.

It is totally new that a country where human rights are clearly violated on a large scale will be allowed within the EU. The European Commission was already happy when the innumerable tortures stopped occurring systematically. In the same time, several European countries (among which Belgium) are still welcoming and acknowledging political refugees from Turkey.

It is also hushed up that this candidate state military occupies the territory of an effective member. A Turkish troop of more than 30,000 soldiers has been occupying Northern Cyprus since 1974. The EU doesn’t see any problem to negotiate about Turkey’s membership. Incredible...

As well as the fact that Turkey is refusing to recognize one of the current European member, namely Cyprus. Cypriot boats are not allowed to moor in Turkish ports. This is also “acceptable” by the European Commission and the government leaders.

It seems that Turkey may do whatever it wants, and has to enter the EU at whatever cost.

*Page 5* –You have heard about it somewhere else...

“I have always been enthusiast about Europe. The thoughtlessness with which we deal with this entity today makes me sad. Has one of the 25 government leaders already once really thought about the possible consequences of Turkey’s adherence to the EU? Has someone weighed if we are really ready to provide enough financial efforts to lift up Turkish people’s purchasing power, which is even lower than in the countries that recently entered the EU? How are they going to keep the institutions in balance with the entrance of a country of 70 million inhabitants? A new member as large as Germany? Have they studied this?”

State Secretary Willy Claes in *De Morgen*, 31 December 2004

“We also minimize the fact that the largest part of Turkey is not European. What are we going to say when Morocco wants to enter the EU? [...] It is a death sentence for the EU policy.”

Former SP-chairman European Commissioner Karel Van Miert in *De Morgen*, 21 December 2004

“I’m giving my opinion: It’s the end of the EU!” Former French President Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, *Le Monde*, 9 November 2002

**Appendix 15 (3/5) – Vlaams Belang (2005) , “*Turkey in Europe: No!*”**

*Page 6*

“If I was a European I would be against Turkey’s membership. but I am an American so I am in favour.”

Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of State, *HP/De Tijd*, 31 December 2004

“When listening to the current states’ leaders, it seems that everything is pleading against the fact that Turkey would be included in a treaty aiming at the implementation of a common international policy, “

Former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, ‘*Späth am Abend*’, 1 April 2001

“Following the current trends, Europe’s population will include Islamist majorities by the end of the 21st century.”

Islamic specialist Prof. Bernard Lewis, *Die Welt*, 28 July 2004

“The Muslim world, including extremists like Bin Laden, is delighted by Turkey’s entrance in Europe: Turkey is its Trojan horse”.

Mouammar Kadhafi, Libya’s President, *La Repubblica*, 16 December 2004

*Page 7*

Phoney Pro Arguments

*“Europe is not a Christian club, so Turkey must be given a chance.*

Christianity is one of the pillars of our European civilization, as well as among other things Greece and Rome, and the Enlightenment. However, there is a separation between the church and the state, and all the other religions may exist here. On the other hand, Islam has nothing to do with that. And why do the Turks demand that Europe does not remain a Christian club, while it wants it to be a Muslim club?

*“We have a part of history in common with Turkey”.*

It’s all about conflicts and military occupation of parts of Europe by the Turks. It was for example the invasion of Constantinople (today’s Istanbul) in 1453, the battle of Lepanto in 1571, the Vienna Pact in 1526 and 1683. In 1974, the Turks invaded Northern Cyprus. This military occupation is still going on today.

*“Turkey’s entrance gives us a larger internal market, and consequently a higher economic growth”.*

It’s nonsense. There is already a border-union between Turkey and Europe. Business relations between the two entities can easily occur in the current situation. Therefore Turkey’s entrance wouldn’t bring any added value.

*“When Spain and Portugal entered the EEC it was also said that massive immigration would follow”.*

It's cock and bull. There has been at most a discussion over some practical aspects, but no one in Europe had significant objections. The Spanish and Portuguese guest-workers who came in the 1960s and 1970s integrated themselves without trouble and sometimes were even assimilated. They were Europeans too.

**Appendix 15 (4/5) – Vlaams Belang (2005) , “Turkey in Europe: No!”**

*Page 8*

*“We must help Turkey to become a democracy.”*

We are already doing that through the billions going each year to Turkey and other countries around the Mediterranean. Europe wants to implement a neighbourhood policy, because we have no interest in being surrounded by unstable, poor and less developed regions. We also have to help Nigeria to become a democracy, and Iran, and Rwanda, etc. But those countries do not have to enter the EU. Why should Turkey and not Iraq?

*“Once in the EU Turkey will become a real democracy”.*

Not so sure. The only opposition power against Prime Minister Erdogan’s Islamists is the army. Once in the EU, the position of the Turkish army will inevitably be undermined. The Islamists use the Turkish EU membership in order to counter the army and to take control. It won’t be much about democracy anymore.

*“We have made some promises to Turkey, and we can’t take them back”.*

Who are ‘we’? No one has ever asked people’s opinion. There has never been any discussion about Europe’s borders. The decision to recognize Turkey as candidate-state has not been made democratically. The “promise” dates back to 1963 and says that Turkey may once enter the EEC. Meanwhile a political EU is born. We can’t compare apples with lemons.

*“Turkey is a secular state”.*

Officially there is a separation between the church (sic) and the state in Turkey. But in the practice, it is quite different. People belonging to a religious minority are discriminated against. A recent study has shown massive violence against women, forced marriages,... mostly in the countryside.

*Page 9*

**A REFERENDUM FOR TURKEY’S ADMISSION, NOW!**

Referenda will be organised in several EU member states about the European Constitution. People have justly been involved in an important decision like the introduction of a common constitution. The possible entrance of Turkey in the EU is even more serious and determinant for Europe’s future than the Constitution. However, there is no talk about a public debate on a substantial question like the possible membership of Turkey, and even less of the possibility of giving people an opportunity to express themselves about it.

The Turkish question shows off the “often undemocratic” European decision making. Almost every opinion poll about Turkey’s membership shows that a large majority of the population is against. In countries like France or Austria this

majority sometimes represent more than 75%. But the European Commission and the European Council do not take that into account.

**Appendix 15 (5/5) – Vlaams Belang (2005) , “*Turkey in Europe: No!*”**

*Page 10*

A Europe going on taking decisions against the will of its people is doomed to failure.

The *Vlaams Belang* parliament members have already twice introduced a proposal to launch a referendum in every European member state about the entrance of Turkey into the EU. To give European citizens the right to express themselves about this fundamental issue is to strengthen the EU’s democratic legitimacy.

Turkey is an ally and a friend.

We can have a privileged partnership with Turkey.

But Turkey is not a European country!

”A referendum about such a theme would open a debate with sordid arguments about namely, Islam, which will only serve right-wing parties. Our Western democracies do not have enough means to control and to manage a public debate about such subjects.”

Louis Michel in *De Standaard*, 4 September 2000

NOW!

*Page 11*

Names and contact details of the three European representatives: Frank Vanhecke, Philip Claeys, and Koen Dillen. Bottom: Party logo, and the European flag.

**Appendix 16 – Vlaams Belang Magazine Nr. 1, *Dertiende Overninning op rij*, Nov. 2006, pp. 4-5 (translation: Brussels. My city)**

Exit Dedecker

"The next one to be thrown out is Jean-Marie", predicted Hugo Coveliers one year ago. And when asked when that would happen, the dry but prophetic answer was: "On 9 October 2006." Coveliers got it wrong only by 2 days... The former judo trainer was very popular with the right-wing VLD voters, but increasingly less so with the VLD's top officials, who took a clear left-wing direction, and attached much more importance to their own power and career than to the political principles of party interest. In order not to push all right-wing voters to Vlaams Belang, Dedecker was kept in for a short time for reasons of political calculation.

Brainwashing

Scientists have found out that magnetic stimulation of the brain could be used to steer or adjust people's thinking or behaviour. "Real manipulation of thought is not for now, but research is progressing very fast", says the philosopher Jan Verplaetse in *De Morgen* (10.20.2006). "I predict that within half a year, it will become possible to, for example, let a member of VB {Vlaams Belang} feel 'warm empathy' for immigrants. Imagine what this would mean for the polls." Brainwashing as the final means to convert those 'sour' and 'intolerant' Flemish people to multicultural belief. In certain left-wing circles, nostalgia for the Gulag is clearly very strong.

Infotainer Leterme

Figures published by the public broadcaster VRT show that Yves Leterme was invited to so-called infotainment programmes 19 times, Patrick Janssen 15 times, Guy Verhofstadt 14 times, Bert Anciaux 12 times and Jean-Luc Dehaene 10 times... Was it not Leterme himself who pleaded for restriction, and who felt that politicians should use their time for politics? The fact that he was nearly the most frequently invited circus artist on the screen is tarnishing the image the Flemish Minister-President had built up carefully.

**Appendix 17 – Vlaams Belang Magazine Nr. 1, *Dertiende Overwinning op rij*, Nov. 2006, p. 3 (translation, Thirteenth victory in a row)**

*Open Forum*

This month our guest commentator is Karim Van Overmeire, Flemish MP and Senator for the Flemish Community

Winning the elections is not an objective *per se*

On 8 October, Vlaams Belang became the main party in Aalst. We won nine percent. For the provincial elections, our results even improved by 11 percent. As a result, we got even better results in our canton than at the latest elections for the Flemish Parliament. We obtained particularly good results not only in Aalst, but in the whole eastern part of East-Flanders. The Dender valley and the Waasland are definitely one of the potential new poles of growth for our party.

Stagnation in a few towns brought many of our opponents to the verge of delirium. But it seems premature to me to claim that Vlaams Belang has been definitively brought to a halt in the communes of Brussels, in Antwerp, Ghent and Mechelen. Further progress is still possible. Everything depends on rapidly changing external circumstances, on the team and on the power of the campaign.

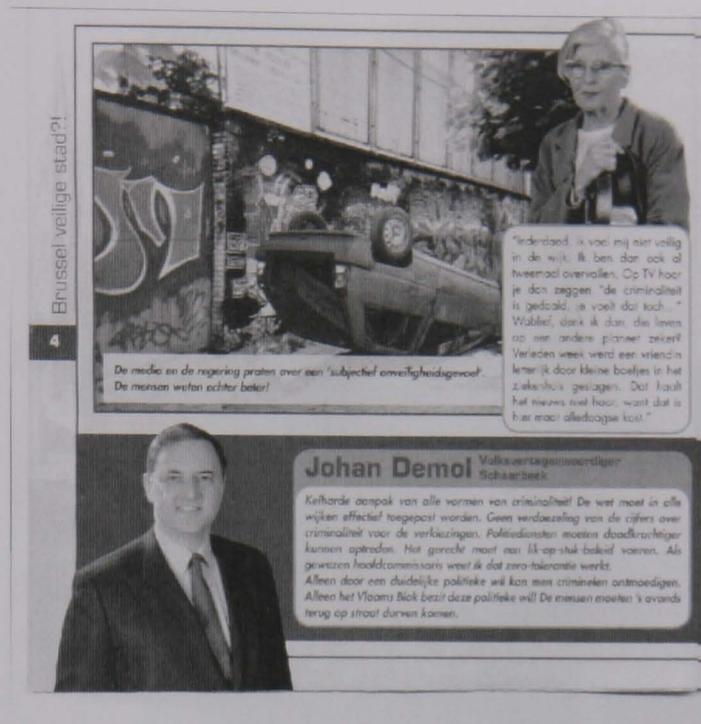
Demographic changes are a sword of Damocles hanging over our party, but hanging over the whole nation as well. Among the Flemish people, the birth rate is simply too low, and the white rush from the cities appears to be difficult to stop. Immigration is massive already, and if policy remains unchanged, it can only increase. We are quickly moving to a country where only the countryside is still mainly Flemish, and where the cities are a sum of ethnic ghettos. How can we avoid this?

This brings us to the question what we are doing. The evolution from a Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang consisting of a handful of anti-Egmonters into a political formation with one million voters, is undoubtedly the most spectacular party-political change since the Second World War. But it is pretty naive to think that an increasing number of voters means increasing political power and, hence, more chances to see our programme being implemented. Alas, things are not of that mathematical simplicity.

Electoral victories are not an objective *per se*. The whole Vlaams Belang story can never be meant to let a maximum of MPs accumulate a maximum of pension rights. Our story has meaning only when we can implement the essence of our programme: independence, a stricter immigration policy, a firm approach to crime. It is clear now that these points of our programme will not be implemented by using more and more decibels to shout original terms of abuse from within the quarantine zone. Contrary to lemmings or howling monkeys, who follow their

instinct, man has the possibility of evaluating his situation, considering alternative strategies, and analysing carefully who can be opponents and who can be allies, if need be temporarily. The Danish example proves that other scenarios are possible, other than quarantine zones or Volksunie-type treason. A shrewd Vlaams Belang is of course much more dangerous than a shouting Vlaams Belang in a quarantine zone. It is going to be a difficult but necessary exercise. We owe it not only to ourselves, but also to our children and grandchildren.

**Appendix 18 – Vlaams Blok Brochure 6: *Feiten/Réalités*, An Alternative for Brussels! May 2004, pp. 4-5**



(elderly says: ) “Indeed, I don’t feel safe in the neighbourhood. I have been assaulted twice. On TV, we hear saying that “criminality has reduced; you do feel it, honestly...”

What are they talking about, they are living in an other planet those people? Last week, a (female) friend has been clobbered by a gang of little thugs and has been hospitalized. This doesn’t make the headlines; it is our daily fate/daily life/routine”

(under the photo) Media and the government keep dwelling on that the “feeling of insecurity” is subjective. People know that it is reality! (*bold in the text*)

Johan Demol Deputy for Schaerbeek<sup>139</sup>

A tough approach to all the forms of criminality. The law must be enforced in all neighbourhoods. No disguising of the criminality figures when elections come near. Police must have the possibility to act more energetically. Justice must return punch by punch. As a former chief superintendent, I know that the zero tolerance works. Only a clearly displayed political will can succeed in discouraging criminals. The Vlaams Blok is the only one to have such a political will! People must dare again to go out at night.

<sup>139</sup> Schaerbeek is one the nine communes of Brussels.

(Vertical) Brussels a safe city?!

Appendix 19 – Filip Dewinter (<http://www.resistances.be/dewinter.html>)



**Appendix 20 – Vlaams Belang Magazine Nr. 1, *Dertiende Overwinning op rij*, Nov. 2006, p. 6-7 (translation, Thirteenth victory in a row)**

## INTERVIEW

Frank Vanhecke

"We quietly pursue on the path we have been following for years now."

A person staying abroad and following the Belgian media over the last few weeks would have got the impression that Vlaams Belang lost the municipal elections.

I would not attach too much importance to that, we have got used to the fact that people try and minimize the growing political force of Vlaams Belang. The facts and figures are what they are. I estimate that we will have about 1300 to 1500 elected mandataries once the OCMW and police councils have been established. This has never happened to a Flemish nationalist activist party before. And it may sound like a cliché, but it is the simple truth: those many hundreds of mandataries and sections constitute a formidable backbone and an enormous strength. By the way, I have the impression that the Flemish people know very well that we are the great winners of 8 October.

It has become almost certain that the cordon will not be broken anywhere. "The beginning of the end", wrote a political commentator. Do you agree?

That is also something we have heard a lot, isn't it? "The beginning of the end", "The ceiling has been reached", "The masks are falling", and my personal favourite "the brown mushroom is collapsing like a pudding", an image as absurd as its content. We never had any illusions about breaking the cordon at the present elections. As soon as the "fatwas" of all political party headquarters and even of the Flemish minister-president were spoken, we knew how matters stood. The cordon is a problem for us, but it is just as much a problem for our opponents and competitors. It is unpopular, and it leads to the fact that the right-wing majority cannot govern in many municipalities and in Flanders in general. So we should not lock ourselves up in any form of self-satisfaction, we must go on establishing contacts and building bridges towards all those who are willing to share part of the road with us. The only thing we must not do is renounce our principles. That would maybe mean the end of the cordon, but it would also be the end of Vlaams Belang.

Some people say that the progress of Vlaams Belang in the big cities is being "slowed down" by the legion of foreign voters which was created by SP.A and VLD. Is that analysis right?

It is true that we progress only slightly in Antwerp and Mechelen, and even regress slightly in Ghent. Those who exult at that forget that in those cities, and especially in Antwerp, we stabilise on very high levels. When, for example, Bart De Wever

imagines he is the general of Stalingrad, somebody should remind him that the man of the "18,000 home visits" hardly got 4,000 votes, and that Filip Dewinter got almost 63,000 votes. Some modesty would be advisable in such circumstances. Of course it is a fact that over the past five years our nationality just fell into the lap of about 250,000 foreigners, which means that indeed a formidable "electoral foreign legion" was created for the left wing – a phenomenon which we could observe earlier at the recent elections in Rotterdam and Amsterdam as well. Added to the exodus of autochthonous people from the cities, and the arrival of an important number of new foreigners in the city centres, and on top of that the right for foreigners to vote, the picture is complete. This is a very worrying evolution, not only for Vlaams Belang, but even for society as a whole and for the preservation of the freedoms, values and norms of our Flemish and European society. It is not too late yet, but in our big cities it is five to twelve. It is high time that more people from foreign origin who are indeed ready to integrate and assimilate in our Flemish society let their voices be heard.

Does Vlaams Belang have to further adapt its strategy?

We quietly pursue on the road we have been following for years now. The core of our programme consists of our positions, which are majority positions in Flanders. We must go on formulating them calmly and clearly, and we must go on profiling ourselves just as calmly and clearly as reasonable people who want the best for all Flemish people and who care for the future of our people. In that sense the importance of our renewed and strongly increased presence cannot be stressed enough. Every local mandatory can become an ambassador of our party and of our ideas – and should behave consequently.

In the meantime the procedure in the Council of State has been started up to deprive Vlaams Belang of party financing. What if we lose?

That procedure is a shame. The Flemish nationalist party stands in front of a college of purely politically appointed judges, half of whom are French speaking. The procedure is partly conducted in French, and nobody protests against that. It is a procedure which is tailor-made in order to condemn us, so we do not have any illusions. If we lose, things will be difficult, but difficult does not mean impossible. I dare foretell that our militants will be more motivated than ever to help. We will survive all of that.

What about 2007, with elections for the Chamber and the Senate? Who is going to be the main political opponent?

In my view the main political opponent is the Parti Socialiste, the clearest symbol of Walloon state power over Flanders. We must make clear during the campaign that neither Verhofstadt nor Leterme have the will or the courage to confront the Parti Socialiste. They are much too good as Belgians, much too tied hand and foot to Belgian establishment. There is only one trustworthy-Flemish part and that is us. This is the message we have to bring in 2007.

**Appendix 21- Vlaams Belang, in [www.vlaamsbelang.be/index.php?p=6andid=10](http://www.vlaamsbelang.be/index.php?p=6andid=10), as accessed on the 19/04/2005**

“It seems that Flanders must pay more for the unemployed Walloons – and that is only a portion of the annual total of the billions that flow from Flanders to Wallonia. The transfers for the unemployment fund are growing rapidly. In 1990, they were 220 million euros. In 1995, it was already 380 million euros. In 2000 it has reached 480 million euros. In 2003, the Flemings paid 728 millions for the unemployed Walloons, and in 2004 there was a temporary record in the transfers with, please, 840 millions. A reduction is nowhere to be seen, because the unemployed Walloons are never penalised (sanctioned). No problem, we, the Flemings, will pay the bill” (Vlaams Belang)

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