Metapolitics, Algorithms and Violence

New Right Activism and Terrorism in the Attention Economy

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN FASCISM AND THE FAR RIGHT

Ico Maly

ROUTLEDGE

‘Maly has emerged in recent years as one of the most intrepid venturers into the dark territories of the digital. In this book, he dissects the dangerous imbrications among digital cultures, algorithmic infrastructures, and the violence of the radical right. This is an urgent warning and a necessary reckoning for everyone who has the future of democracy and humanism at heart.’

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‘In this highly insightful and wide-ranging study, Maly lays out the crucial role that discourse plays in creating the environment that produces far-right violence. Maly’s analysis tracks how social media and digital communications technology, along with the cultural practices that have grown up around them, facilitate the production and circulation of this discourse, and how this interplay of extremist ideologies and digital affordances has led to the evolution of a new form of metapolitics which transforms our understanding of far-right activism. For anyone wishing to understand how extremist ideas achieve such disturbing purchase in contemporary mainstream society, this book is essential reading.’

Philip Seargeant, *Senior Lecturer in Applied Linguistics, Open University, UK*

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METAPOLITICS, ALGORITHMS AND VIOLENCE

Metapolitics, Algorithms and Violence argues that we need a more fine-grained approach to understand contemporary far-right violence – an approach that takes language and cultural production in a digital economy seriously.

This book underlines the importance of socio-political, economic, historical and technological context in understanding the rise of the new right. More concretely, based on a digital ethnographic approach, it argues that we should understand this violence and the contemporary rise of new far-right practices and actors in relation to the theoretical renewal of *'La Nouvelle Droite'* in the 20th century; the 'democratization' of new right metapolitics in the 21st century as a result of the rise of digital media; and the development of a layered, transnational and polycentric new right cultural niche in which far-right activists and terrorists produce identity, discourse, digital cultures and practices.

This work will be an engaging and necessary read for researchers interested in social media, digital culture, far-right politics, extremism and terrorism.

Ico Maly is Associate Professor of Digital Media & Politics and coordinator of the Digital Culture Studies master track at Tilburg University, The Netherlands, editor-in-chief of *Diggit Magazine* and senior fellow at FRAN (Far-right Analysis Network).

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New Right Activism and Terrorism in the Attention Economy

Ico Maly

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements *xii*

Introduction 1
New right metapolitics 4
Metapolitics and violence 6
Metapolitics and digitalization 9
Metapolitics 2.0 10
Metapolitics 2.0, audience labour and uptake 13
About this book 16

1 Ideology and activism in the digital age: theoretical and methodological reflections 27
The algorithmic logic of post-digital societies 27
Algorithmic culture and the attention-based media system 29
Digital media as context 30
Globalization as context 34
Contexts: methodological lessons 38
Digital ethnographic discourse analysis 41
An ethnographic approach to discourse and discourse analysis 41
Context revisited, once more 45
Digital ethnography 48
Long-term digital ethnography 48
Historicities: intertextuality and entextualization 50
The case method and live digital ethnography 52

2 The birth of metapolitics 2.0 65
Metapolitics, the new right and the anti-Enlightenment tradition 66
Metapolitics 1.0: lessons from the left? 66
The new right and the anti-Enlightenment tradition 71
Ethno-differentialism and organic democracy as metapolitics 75
Metapolitics, the interregnum and revolutionary rebirth 79
Guillaume Faye and the birth of metapolitics 2.0 81
Guillaume Faye, the alt-right and metapolitics re-invented 82
The hybrid media system and metapolitics 2.0 84
Long Live the emperor. Trump and alt-right metapolitics 85
Metapolitics 2.0 and the identitarian movement 87
Generation Identity's reconquest and generational populism 88
Defend Europe: metapolitics and digital media 92
Martin Sellner, fashwave and Faye's metapolitics 96
Guillaume Faye and the birth of metapolitics 2.0 100

3 The global new right and the algorithmic activism of Schild & Vrienden 107
Globalization, globalism and the global new right 107
Understanding the globalization of the new right 109
Metapolitics 2.0 and the global new right 111
Arktos and the globalization of anti-globalism 112
The global new right: transporting locality in locality 116
The global new right and Schild & Vrienden's metapolitics 121
Schild & Vrienden and the deglobalization of the global new right 122
The metapragmatics of the Gravensteen activism 126
Virality and populism as a communicative relation 131
Generational populism, new right metapolitics 2.0 and algorithmic activism 134
Schild & Vrienden, new right metapolitics 2.0, and algorithmic populism 137
The global new right 138

4 Metapolitical influencers and far-right culture 146
Far-right micropopulations, style and influencers 147
Alpha males and the metapolitics of style 149
Modest fashion as metapolitics 155
Digital media, digital culture and metapolitical influencers 157
Brittany Pettibone, The Golden One and antifeminism 159
The Golden One and the metapolitical warrior 160
The alpha male and the metapolitical crusader 162
The Golden One, the metapolitical legion and algorithmic knowledge 164
Legio Gloria and the Son of Europe 165
Brittany Pettibone, gender roles and the traditional family 167
The rise of Brittany Pettibone 168
Family and relation advice as metapolitics 171
Metapolitics, trad wives, alpha men and Instagram culture 173

5 Data voids, junk news and metapolitics 2.0 181
Search engines, data voids and metapolitics 2.0 182
Google and algorithmic agency 182
Metapolitics, algorithmic oppression and data voids 185
Metapolitics, junk news and spreadability 186
Data voids and the Groyper war 190
Charlie Kirk's culture war tour 190
Q&A-trolling Charlie Kirk's Culture War 191
Kirk's culture war tour, data voids and metapolitics 194
Covid-19, Junk news and metapolitics 195
Metapolitics, breaking news data voids and the Coronavirus crisis 196
Paul Joseph Watson, bat soup and globalism 198
Junk news and the metapolitics of Covid-19: From Dugin to Feniks Vlaanderen 201
Covid-19 and the Great Reset as mobilizing myths 202
Feniks and the Corona protests 205
Junk news, data voids and metapolitics 208

6 Metapolitical terrorism and digital media 213
The great replacement and the re-emergence of far-right violence 214
Data voids and Dylann Roof's metapolitical terrorism 218
Dylann roof, metapolitics and white nationalist terrorism 218
Synchronizing the history of segregation 221
Racial consciousness, metapolitics and violence 224
Data voids and terrorism as metapolitics 226
Roof, hybrid media salience and (failed) metapolitics 228
Bowl patrol, memes and white terrorist culture 231
Metapolitics 2.0 and Brenton Tarrant's reconquest 235
The great replacement and reconquest 236
Securing uptake for his manifesto 239
White terrorist culture and metapolitics 2.0 242

7 The global new right: between mainstreaming and deplatformization 251
Perpetual change: introducing complexity 251
The new right and the contemporary anti-Enlightenment 254
Deplatforming, deplatformization and hegemony 260
Platform, deplatforming and deplatformization 261
Metapolitics and the digital guardians of hegemony 264
Crises and deplatforming and deplatformization waves 266
The global new right between visibility and invisibility 269
Community rules, metapolitics and mitigating potential deplatforming 270
Freedom of speech, attention and the hypermedia strategy 273
Deplatformization: the case of The Daily Stormer 275
Deplatformed and prosecuted: the transformation of Generation Identitaire 278
The dissolution of Generation Identitaire 280

Thaïs D'Escufon: from spokeswoman to metapolitical influencer 281
Le natifs Paris 283
Metapolitical networks 286
The global new right as a complex system 288

8 Metapolitics, algorithms and violence 295
Jürgen Cönings and the dialectics of metapolitics 296
Metapolitics 2.0 and global digital new right cultures 301
Metapolitics and the anti-Enlightenment tradition 305
Metapolitics as violence: warriors and the cult of violence 309

Epilogue: metapolitics, digital ethnography and democracy 315
Index 321

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and I hope that they consider this book as one of those fruits. Without their work I wouldn't have been able to write this book.

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Even though several case studies have appeared in print or online before, the book in its entirety is new. This newness is first and foremost the result of bringing these cases together, with new ones and thickening the different cases to make a more elaborate and generalizing point about metapolitics and the far-right in contemporary society and especially in relation to digitalization. In this larger endeavour we see the actual value of the case method. We can connect and see in the infinite small details and the connections between the local and the large changes in societies around the world.

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INTRODUCTION

Brenton Tarrant, the Christchurch terrorist, framed his terrorist attack not as an attack on diversity, but as 'an attack in the name of diversity'. In his manifesto, Tarrant explains this commitment to diversity in terms that are reminiscent of the ethno-pluralist differentialism of the French far-right school of thought *La Nouvelle Droite*. 'The attack', he said, 'was to ensure a preservation of beauty, art and tradition. In my mind a rainbow is only beautiful to (sic) due its variety of colours, mix the colours together and you destroy them all and they are gone forever and the end result is far from anything beautiful'. This is not the old Nazi speaking about the supremacy of the white race. On the contrary, he, seemingly paradoxically, is legitimating his racist terrorism in the name of diversity and its associated beauty. This may sound strange for the unacquainted reader, as we tend to associate appraising discourses on diversity with the left. The acceptance of diversity was central in the anti-racist discourse after World War II (Balibar, 1991; Vaarakallio, 2015), and even today these concepts are almost automatically associated with a left-wing point of view. But it was exactly this anti-racist consensus that *La Nouvelle Droite* integrated into their new theories and stretched to its extremes in order to reinvent 'the true right'.

Labels like neo-Nazi or fascist are not the sharpest analytical tools to dissect this discourse. Throughout this book, I will argue that we need a more fine-grained approach that lets us understand contemporary far-right violence in relation to the theoretical renewal of *La Nouvelle Droite* in the 20th century, and the contemporary uptake of its metapolitical battle all around the world. *La Nouvelle Droite* was the name given by the French press to a 'school of thought' called *Groupement de Recherche et D'études pour la Civilisation Européenne*. The group was created in 1968 by far-right

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intellectuals Alain de Benoist, Dominique Venner, Pierre Vial, Pierre Krebs and many others. Following François (2014: 91), I understand *La Nouvelle Droite*, or the French new right, as 'a collection of European-wide think tanks led by GRECE, which is ideologically situated between the "Old Right' and extreme-right and revolutionary right of a pan-European persuasion". *La Nouvelle Droite* exists as a polycentric pan-European network of journals, think tanks, intellectuals and websites. This school of thought is not producing one homogenous body of positions. Depending on the individual thinkers, but also during the five-decade life span of the group, different positions have been taken. Added to this complexity is also the fact that former members of GRECE like Guillaume Faye, Robert Steuckers and Pierre Vial, even if they are highly critical of Alain de Benoist and *La Nouvelle Droite*, still work in line with *La Nouvelle Droite's* ideological tradition. Despite all this complexity and diversity within the school of thought, we can still pinpoint foundational ideological positions, *des idées mères*. This network of revolutionary far-right thinkers (Bar-On, 2013: 2) is known for their 'differentialism', or 'ethno-pluralism', and their 'metapolitical battle': a cultural battle or a battle for ideas that should, in the long term, help the true right to rise again. Even though Brenton Tarrant probably has never read the works of intellectuals like Alain de Benoist or Guillaume Faye, he still is echoing their theories. Already in his classic book *View from the Right*, published in 1977, Alain de Benoist – the number one of *La Nouvelle Droite* – defined the essence of the right 'to view the diversity of the world and by consequence the relative inequalities that are necessarily the product of this, as a positive thing; and the progressive homogenisation of the world, extolled and effect by two-thousand years of egalitarian ideology, as a negative thing' (de Benoist, 2017: 2). This 'right to difference' was a foundational axiom of the 'newness' of the French new right. It was their embrace of (and essentialist vision on) diversity that allowed them to claim a 'differentialist anti-racism' that 'holds that the irreducible plurality of the human species constitutes a veritable treasure'. Differentialist anti-racism makes every effort to restore an affirmative meaning to 'the universal', not in opposition to 'difference', but by starting from the recognition of 'difference' (de Benoist & Champetier, 2000).

It was this differentialist position and their plea for ethno-pluralism that allowed them to dissociate themselves from fascism, Nazism, white supremacy and racism in general. At the same time, it also allowed them to introduce a new racist paradigm. This differentialist racism, as Taguieff called it, shows us how theoretically innovative de Benoist and his comrades were in reworking the ideas of the German conservative revolutionary intellectuals from the 1930s and adopting them for re-emergence in a new package. This new racism reflected the timespace in which it was created: a world which was changing faster and faster as a result of decolonization, globalization, rise in

mobility, new technologies and neoliberalism. As Balibar (1991) has shown, this neo-racism had in the early nineties of the 20th century already escaped the theoretical works of *La Nouvelle Droite* to become a very powerful social phenomenon. Balibar argued that this neo-racism was a meta-racism that cleverly appropriated the post-World War II anti-racist claim that the essence of humankind is to be found in its diversity. In this synthesis, a new racism was created that substituted race for immigration and thus used culture as its main diacritic (Balibar, 1991: 20). This new diacritic reorganized racism to be able to deal with the reversal of population movements, the rise in migration and mobility, the negative connotation racism had acquired and what would in retrospect be called superdiversity (Arnaut e.a., 2016). Just like Balibar, Titley and Lentin (2021) argue that this new racism is still very much a racist ideology that creates 'Others' that are excluded from society. This new cultural racism caused what Appadurai (1996: 12) called the 'substantialization' of culture which brings it 'back into the discursive space of race, the very idea it was originally designed to combat.' The main difference is that as a result of its metapolitical strategy of embracing the notion of anti-racism, differentialism allows it to distance itself from the 'racist' label and all its negative connotations. Lentin has called this 'not-racism' (Lentin, 2018). Lentin (2018: 402) defines not-racism as a rhetorical device born of the primacy placed on distancing oneself from the accusation of racism and a way of controlling the definition of racism. 'Not-racism', says Lentin, 'takes the right to define racism away from those affected by it and, in this way, is a form of racist violence' (Lentin, 2018: 406).

This not-racism, as a dominant form of racism in the West, has its roots in the differentialist logic of *La Nouvelle Droite*. Differentialism, or the new right celebration of diversity, is in effect, a celebration of an 'ethno-pluralist' world constituted of homogeneous communities. It is thus not a coincidence that Lentin's 'not-racism' is suggested to be on par with minority groups' interests in preserving their cultures and traditions, whereas the real function is to shield autochthones in power from 'cultural, social and economic incursion' (Lentin, 2018: 408). *La Nouvelle Droite*'s ethno-pluralism has always been an explicit attack on liberal accounts of multiculturalism and on diversity within one territory in general. It attacks the foundation of all humanisms. Not surprisingly, it generated a new anti-migrant and culturally grounded racism (see Wallerstein & Balibar, 1991; Blommaert & Verschueren, 1992, 1998; Schinkel, 2008). This new racism in the form of anti-Muslim racism or culturalism in general is still very much present today and it serves a nationalistic agenda (Titley & Lentin, 2021: 300). In other words, the differentialist anti-racism of the French new right preconfigured one of the goals of the school of thought: a new world order grounded in homogeneous organic communities. It also took on board the need to 'protect' our people and the fight for its culture and identity and naturalized racism within a diverse

society. Racism (and violence) was now framed as a natural response to the unnatural diversification within one society. This idea, propagated through a complex network of different voices through time, has become part of the mainstream, and it results in the construction and exclusion of the Other and the renewal of what Zeev Sternhell calls the anti-Enlightenment tradition in the form of nationalisms, regionalisms and the embrace of the homogenous cultural communities in general.

Throughout the seventies and the early eighties, *La Nouvelle Droite* had a serious impact on far-right, conservative and liberal parties and eventually also saw the birth of many sister movements throughout Europe (Bar-On, 2012b: 25; Camus, 2019: 75). Not only has its discourse been taken up by right-wing politicians and intellectuals in the whole of Europe since the eighties and nineties of the last century (Bar-On, 2013: 25), this ideology of homogeneity has had a huge impact on the political mainstream (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998) in the context of integration and migration debates (Maly, 2009, 2018b), and especially in the context of anti-Islam discourse (Maly et al., 2007; Lentin, 2018; Titley & Lentin, 2021). More than 40 years after the birth of this school of thought, we see that some of those new right assumptions and key ideas like ethno-pluralism or differential racism are omnipresent among far-right activists of the identitarian movements, far-right politicians (Maly, 2021), the alt-right and even full blow terrorists like Brenton Tarrant. Even worse, we see that they are sometimes in a more 'light' version adopted by mainstream politicians and journalists. They have become hegemonic.

New right metapolitics

To understand the success of ethno-pluralism and the contemporary rise in far-right activists, politicians and even terrorists, we need to understand the concept of metapolitics. Metapolitics is inseparably connected to the project of *La Nouvelle Droite* in France. In the seventies, Alain de Benoist called upon the importance of metapolitics, and Gramsci in particular, for the re-emergence of a 'true right'. He argued that the right should focus on the long term and thus understand that cultural power 'acts upon the implicit values around which the consensus indispensable to the duration of political power crystallizes' (de Benoist, 2017: 7). According to de Benoist and *La Nouvelle Droite*, this cultural battle was crucial for any political success of the right. Their metapolitical project started from the analysis that the left had acquired cultural hegemony and that the only way to counter that power was to start a far-right cultural battle by intellectual means. This (selective and partial) appropriation of Gramsci fused left-wing analysis with right-wing goals and focused first on acquiring cultural hegemony before trying to acquire political power. It is from this insight that *La Nouvelle Droite* was

commonly coined the 'Gramscians of the right' (Seidel, 1986; Spektorowski, 2003; Griffin, 2008; Bar-On, 2013; Maly, 2018). This cultural and intellectual battle was and still is focused on attacking liberal democracy, egalitarianism, socialism, liberal multi-culturalism, cosmopolitanism, human rights, consumerism and materialism in general.

Metapolitics is not a new concept, nor was it exclusively used by far-right activists or intellectuals (see Zienkowski, 2019 for a discussion). Metapolitics, in the context of this book, will be understood from an emic perspective, from how it is used and understood first and foremost by the intellectuals of *La Nouvelle Droite* themselves and how it has been taken up by other far-right actors in the last decades. The adoption of metapolitics by *La Nouvelle Droite's* intellectuals has to be framed in relation to the post-World War II context. In this context, all extremisms and forms of ultra-nationalism were associated with 'war, destruction, genocide, and calculated inhumanity on a horrendous scale' (Griffin, 2000: 165). The old right, and in particular fascism, national socialism and ideologies that resembled those like the conservative revolution or reactionary modernism, were not able to mobilize the masses anymore. The ideologies and political manifestations were deeply unpopular and were pushed to the margins. Metapolitics was the answer of de Benoist and his colleagues to prepare the resurgence of a militant right-wing that rejected liberalism, socialism, capitalism and egalitarianism.

Metapolitics can be seen as the result of a 'double critique', as de Benoist called it: 'an ideological critique of the left and a methodological critique of the right' (de Benoist, 2017: 18). This double critique was aimed at a synthesis of left and right: a meta-project. A true synthesis, said de Benoist, 'is a surpassing. It is not a little of this and a little of that, in succession, but this and that, with the same intensity, at the same time' (de Benoist, 2017: 15). From a methodological point of view, *La Nouvelle Droite* embarked on a different path than the national socialists and fascists. Metapolitics meant disregarding key components of modern far-right and fascist politics. They advocated against setting up an electoral party, a paramilitary army or a mass social movement. They purely focused on the production and circulation of their ideas without a connection to a political party or even a movement (Sylvian, 2005: 9). The French new right also had no problem with explicitly denouncing fascism and Nazism (de Benoist in Versluis, 2014: 81; de Benoist, 2017). On the contrary, de Benoist saw denouncing 'the totalitarian temptation' as a precondition to reinvigorate key right-wing values (de Benoist, 1977: 4). Important to stress is that this synthesis was still a synthesis 'from the right', as de Benoist called it. Among scholars of the new right, there is a general consensus that this school of thought is reviving ideas that are common among the so-called conservative revolutionary, reactionary modernist and fascist intellectuals (Griffin, 2000, 2008; Spektorowksi, 2003, 2013; Bar-On, 2013; Maly, 2018). Alain de Benoist and Guillaume Faye not only regularly

quote or use ideas from all these intellectual traditions, they are also openly engaging with them. Alain de Benoist for instance not only wrote the preface of Mohler's book (2018) on the conservative revolution, he is also open about his shared assumptions with conservative revolutionary intellectuals. He clearly takes a revolutionary stance when arguing that there is no contradiction between conservation and revolution (de Benoist, 2018). And a similar point can be made about the number two of the French new right, Guillaume Faye. Even though in his Archeofuturism he explicitly argues that the conservative revolution is not enough, we see that throughout the book he constantly engages with key intellectuals of this intellectual tradition.

The result of this ideological and methodological synthesis should thus be understood in terms of renewal and continuities. Spektorowski (2003: 111–112) described this 'neither right, neither left'-synthesis as a 'neo-fascist third way' that 'pits a right-wing theory of multiculturalism' – the ethno-pluralism described above – against 'a liberal multiculturalism'. *La Nouvelle Droite* not only propagated this neo-racism, its 'differentialism' was inherently connected to a larger worldview that is not only trying to create ethno-homogenous spaces, but also comes with an ideological attack on liberal democracy, Universal Human Rights, liberalism and socialism. This ethno-pluralist world order not only normalizes neo-racism, it also provides a full alternative for an Enlightened democracy. Interestingly, this anti-democratic project is, for metapolitical reasons, presented as in favour of democracy. But just as their differentialist anti-racism is in reality filled with a new meta-racism, we see that their embrace of democracy infuses democracy with an anti-democratic discourse (Maly, 2018b). Whereas democracy within the Enlightenment tradition is understood as a representative democracy grounded in the rule of law, the separation of powers, a constitution and Universal Human Rights (Israel, 2008, 2010), *La Nouvelle Droite* proposes an ethnocratic definition of democracy 'linking ethnic ties to qualitative democratic participation' (Spektorowski, 2003: 112). *La Nouvelle Droite*, its metapolitics and its differentialism are not only at the heart of an intellectual project that reshaped the post-World War II far-right, they are also inseparable.

Metapolitics and violence

Griffin compellingly argued that GRECE's metapolitics succeeded in changing the face of post-war fascism. The metapoliticization of fascism led numerous far-right formations to abandon the party politics and even the arena of activist struggle. They all started to focus on the intellectual battle for 'ideas' (Griffin, 2008: 195) that should, in the long run, contribute to the creation of a new world order. It is also this metapolitization that gave birth to contemporary far-right movements like the identitarians in Europe and the alt-right in the United States (Johnson, 2012; Hawley, 2017; Nagle, 2017;

Maly, 2022b). Even Stormfront has taken over the differentialism that is so emblematic for the metapolitics of *La Nouvelle Droite* (Miller-Idriss, 2017: 136). And it eventually also gave rise to far-right terrorists like Brenton Tarrant. The paradox is clear. *La Nouvelle Droite* embarked on its metapolitical project to distance itself from the methods of the old right. Its violence and genocidal tendencies were explicitly rejected, and the school of thought also explicitly constructed an alternative for far-right activist movements. It also didn't see a need in supporting political parties: metapolitics was first and foremost a collective intellectual exercise in the long term.

Today, 50 years after the erection of GRECE, it seems that this project went full circle and ended up in the rise of the extreme-right and radical right politicians and parties, movements and even in violence again. Auger (2020) even speaks of a fifth global wave of right-wing terror. Between 2014 and 2018, a 320% increase in right-wing-extremist attacks (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2019) occurred. Far-right terrorist attacks in 2020 increased by 250% on a global level, and 89 persons died in a far-right terrorist attack in 2019 (Brzozowski, 2020). As always, global doesn't mean that the rise of far-right violence is the same everywhere. It is clear that some continents, countries and regions have seen a more spectacular rise than others. In Western Europe, we tend to have less violent attacks than in the United States. In the last 30 years, violent far-right attacks with casualties have been declining in Europe. And within Europe, most far-right terrorist attacks and violence occur in Germany, the UK, Greece and Italy (Ravndal, Thorstensen, Jupskås & Macklin, 2021). On average, in Western Europe, we see that 'while 2020 is among the five least deadly years in terms of fatal attacks, it is, with 11 fatalities, among the ten most deadly years in terms of fatalities' (Ravndal, Thorstensen, Jupskås & Macklin, 2021). The latter is the result of the mass-casualty attack of the Hanau shootings, which is in turn a good example of the fifth global wave of right-wing terror, as Auger calls it. Just like Brenton Tarrant in New Zealand and the shooter in Halle, the Hanau shooter prepared messages for uptake. Not only did he set up his own website, with several links to online information and a manifesto, he also prepared several videos posted on his YouTube channel. The manifesto was addressing all Germans, while at least one video was addressing all Americans. In all these messages, he wanted to 'inform' his readers and viewers about the secret services surveilling people, but also about the threat of migrants, and especially Islam. The format of the attack, including the attention to the uptake of the message, in combination with racism, anti-feminism and conspiracy theories, is emblematic of this new far-right format of violence.

Even though the Hanau shooter is not legitimizing his mass murder with a discourse that echoes the theoretical renewal initiated by *La Nouvelle Droite*, it is clear that at least several do, especially the New Zealand and Buffalo shooters, who speak with an identitarian voice. This fact is important, as it

forces us to at least question the strict distinction scholars in far-right terrorism and activism make between violence and metapolitics as methods for far-right activists (Ravndal, 2021). The Great Replacement theory connects the most mediatized far-right killing sprees in 2019 (Crawford & Keen, 2020). The Christchurch terrorist and the attacks in Halle, Pittsburgh, Poway and El Paso were all grounded in the belief that 'white people' were being replaced or occupied. Usually, this conspiracy theory is attributed to Renaud Camus (2018), but the origins of it go back a long way. Guillaume Faye made this argument already at the end of the 20th century in a series of books. A lot of research on the surge of far-right terrorists has started looking into the role of digital media and the distribution of conspiracy theories (Davey & Ebner, 2019; Auger, 2020; Crawford & Keen, 2020; Ebner, 2020; Weimann & Masri, 2020), but they tend to overlook the longer cultural battle from which contemporary far-right digital cultures have grown.

A second problem with the clear distinction between 'metapolitics' and far-right violence as strategies of right-wing revolutionary resistance is the assumption that violence is only physical violence, and terrorism in particular. In this study, violence will be interpreted in a broader manner. Next to terrorism and physical violence, we should focus on what Bourdieu and Passeron called symbolic violence. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990: XV) famously argued that symbolic violence is the effect of a power that 'succeeds in imposing meanings and in imposing them as legitimate in disguising the relations of power which are at the root of this force, add its own force, that is a specifically symbolic force to those relations of power'. Symbolic violence is thus closely connected to the domination of one social group by another through the normalization or naturalization of those unequal power relations. As Wacquant argues, symbolic domination is the result of symbolic power, or

> the capacity to impose and inculcate means of understanding and structuring the world, or symbolic systems, that contribute to the reproduction of the social order by representing economic and political power in disguised forms that endow them with legitimacy and/or taken-for-grantedness – the best warrant for longevity any social order might hope for.
>
> *(Wacquant, 1987: 66)*

Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence resonates with Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony. As is commonly known, hegemony, in Gramsci's work, stood for the 'cultural domination' of one class – the bourgeoisie – over the others: the proletariat. This cultural domination, or symbolic domination in Bourdieu's conceptualization, cannot be dissociated from the hard power of the dominant social group. As Blommaert (2005: 167) stresses, there is no clear distinction to be made between hegemony as a dominant factor of power and force as a determinant factor: the reproduction of dominant

culture is sustained by a coercive and disciplining system of education. Importantly, in the context of this book, metapolitics is all about the construction of narratives that normalize the exclusion of 'the other'.

Metapolitics and digitalization

This metapolitical strategy has been very successful, especially in the digital age. Far-right and extreme-right parties and activist groups are on the rise, not only in Europe and the United States, but globally. Organic and even blood and soil nationalism, radical new right regionalism, anti-feminism, homophobia, racism, and anti-migration rhetoric are moving from the margins to the mainstream (Maly, 2018a; Tufekci, 2018; Fielitz & Thurston, 2019; Russell, 2019). The alt-right in the United States and the identitarians in Europe probably have the most visible activist groups, but they are certainly not the only ones. It is in the margins of that 'new normal' that we see further radicalizations in mainstream discourse, a vibrant field of far-right activists and a peak in far-right terrorism. Several scholars connect the rise of the far-right at least partially to the affordances of digital media. And while some scholars refer to the algorithms in those radicalization processes, most stress the importance of the socio-technical assemblage in the new digital (meta-) political battle (Nagle, 2017; Lewis, 2018; Maly, 2018a, 2019a, 2020a). Mainstream digital media like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are used by radical right and far-right actors in connection to niched websites, boards, crowdfunding platforms, click farms, bot-networks, and alt-tech to engage in a contemporary metapolitical battle. The democratization of recording and the banalization of transmission (Thompson, 2020), in combination with datafication, gamification and programmed sociality, have allowed far-right actors and movements to upscale their reach and work. Even more, as a result of digitalization, we see an enormous diversification of far-right actors: activist movements, meme-pages on Instagram, YouTubers, influencers, trolls, and far-right online encyclopaedias like Metapedia (Arnstad, 2016) create a networked niche within the digital ecosystem in which ideas circulate and are reinforced. These new right actors take up a specific place within and outside the platform ecosystem. This ecosystem is 'a corporate space that in the Western hemisphere is dominated most notably by the Big Five tech companies known by the acronym GAFAM (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft)' (van Dijck, de Winkel, Schäfer, 2021: 4). Most actors, be it politicians, movements, influencers, activists or platforms, at least started within this socio-technical infrastructure, and they relied on those platforms for their first political and metapolitical successes, with some even finding their funding there. Over the last five years, more and more new right actors have struggled to keep themselves integrated into this ecosystem, but the impact of those platforms has been foundational.

The appropriation of digital culture and digital technologies has changed the metapolitics of the far-right. Not only the intellectual but also the activist, the politician and the prosumer are now imagined as part of the new right metapolitical battle (Maly, 2020c). Much has been written about the far-right's adoption of meme culture (Nagle, 2017; Bogaerts & Fielitz, 2019; Maly, 2019a), LARPing (the ironic and metapolitical use Live Action role Playing in order to do or say things that are too outrageous for normies) (Tuters, 2019), harassment (Conversi, 2012), trolling (Hodge & Hallgrimsdottir, 2019), metapolitical intimacy and far-right vloggers' use of the practices of influencer culture for metapolitical goals (Lewis, 2018; Leidig, 2021; Maly, 2020, 2021; Tebaldi, 2022a, 2022b). These new practices are not just new ways of distributing the same ideas; they change the essence of metapolitics. Metapolitics in the digital age is not only about the circulation of ideas but also about digital literacy and digital culture. It is not only an intellectual affair; it has been 'democratized' or networked.

It is exactly this connection between *La Nouvelle Droite*'s metapolitics and its quest for cultural domination, the rise in far-right movements, digital culture, and symbolic and terrorist violence that I want to explore in this book. I will argue that we indeed cannot fully explain this rise and influence of far-right discourses without (1) having detailed attention for the history of new right metapolitics, (2) adopting a perspective on culture in the digital era and (3) considering how the digitalization of the media-landscape has fundamentally altered the reach, scope, uptake and practices of new right 'metapolitics'. It is by adopting this cultural perspective that we can explain why we not only see a fifth global wave of terrorism as Auger (2020) argues, but also see a rise of far-right symbolic violence in the form of racist, antifeminist, anti-left and anti-intellectual discourses and the normalization of these discourses. New right discourses are more and more entering the mainstream, and thus structuring and, more importantly, normalizing power relationships between groups in society. It is not a coincidence that migrants, LGBTQ+, women and leftists are the object of those discourses and attacks. They are the same groups who are the object of those discourses and government policies (Titley & Lentin, 2021).

Metapolitics 2.0

Metapolitics 2.0, as I coin these contemporary forms of metapolitics, is not necessarily about the production of 'original' highbrow intellectual theory, and nor is it about designing a new theoretical synthesis. Metapolitics 2.0 is the synchronization of metapolitics and web 2.0 ideology – or digital utopianism, as Turner coined it – embedded in the mainstream digital media platforms. Web 2.0 echoes a techno-utopian belief grounded in keywords like participation, creativity, openness, connecting, the strength of networks, transparency

and information sharing. Marwick (2013) argues that web 2.0 ideology 'is the child of both Silicon Valley entrepreneurial capitalism and activist subcultures like independent publishing, anti-globalization activism, Burning Man, cyberdelic rave culture and free and open-source software' (Marwick, 2013: 24). Turner (2006) carefully analysed how this ideology grew in a strange coming together of hippie culture, libertarianism and American new right ideologies. Throughout several decades, and with Stewart Brand and the Whole Earth's cybernetic tradition as an important facilitator, this technology-centric ideology gave birth to digital technologies that were steeped into deregulationist politics to digital technologies (Turner, 2006: 222). This media ideology shaped digital media and how we use and think about them. Web 2.0 ideology argues Marwick stresses digital exceptionalism – 'the idea that the internet is different from other forms of communication and therefore not bound by the same legal and market forces' (Marwick, 2013: 25) – and a do-it-yourself spirit that ranges between alternative media activist and entrepreneurial realization. The result of this web 2.0 media ideology was:

1 the construction of new, mostly unregulated media platforms (from blogs to social and user-generated media),
2 promising to empower individuals by giving them the possibility to participate, to have a voice and to be able to connect,
3 attracting financial investment with the promise of rapid returns, and
4 wrapped in a progressive discourse (including the style) that promised to have transformative characteristics.

This Californian ideology, as Barbrook and Cameron (1996) labelled the digital utopianism of web 2.0, gave birth to new constellations of technologies and created a 'climate in which participating in the culture of techno-business, sharing personal information online, and commanding and maintaining a large audience have become modern status symbols' (Marwick, 2013: 76). Web 2.0 was launched as horizontal, democratizing peer-to-peer platforms devoid from hierarchy: it was celebrated by users, platform managers and academics as a new public sphere. But as van Dijck (2013) has carefully described, web 2.0 was from 2005 onwards slowly but surely turned into large for-profit businesses. Digital cultures that were nurtured in this new environment are shaped by the interactions of citizens and communities with these new technological institutions and their values.

These new digital cultures and technologies have given way to a new generation of metapoliticians who produce and (re)produce (snippets of) ideas and propagate them using specific digital practices to new audiences through a network of mainstream or non-mainstream digital media. As these digital media are steeped in this web 2.0 ideology, communication through those media is not entirely free: using those media successfully means integrating in

a 'culture of connectivity'. Van Dijck (2013: 20–21) lists three main characteristics of this culture: (1) sociality is not simply rendered technological: coded structures are alternating the nature of our connections, creations and interactions; (2) it is a culture where the organization of social exchange is staked on neoliberal economic principles: all users are pressured to expand through competition and gain power through alliances; and (3) the culture is part of a longer historical transformation resetting the boundaries between private, corporate and public domains. In practice, this means that metapolitical communication in such a digital environment is not only focused on the transmission of ideas. It is at least as focused on the construction of a brand that has to be positioned in the attention market. Metapolitical influencers like The Golden One or Brittany Pettibone-Sellner, for instance, focus at least as much on the construction of their online identity, or in the case of The Golden One, on nutrition and exercise advice (see Chapter 3), than on metapolitical ideas. Their private life becomes part of this brand, and thus of contemporary metapolitics: they mobilize, like all online influencers, strategic intimacy and strategic authenticity (Marwick & boyd, 2011; Marwick, 2015; Hou, 2018) to bond with their audience. This metapolitical intimacy, or metapolitical seduction, as Tebaldi (2022b) calls it, is very productive: it helps to establish para-social bonds between the influencer and their followers.

Just like contemporary politicians, contemporary metapolitical movements, activists, intellectuals and influencers create 'message' (Lempert & Silverstein, 2012). Message is used here as an analytical term, and refers not only to the 'literal message', but also to the style and identity of the speaker. This identity is constructed as a collage in motion of communicative events – posts, vlogs and blogs – in which the influencer narrates him or herself to their audiences (Lempert & Silverstein, 2012: 16). In the digital realm, this identity in itself becomes a metapolitical asset.

In order to have metapolitical influence in the digital world, it is not enough to produce message. One also needs digital literacy in order to remain integrated into the viral economy and to succeed in generating uptake. Metapolitical activists need to develop specific strategies and make full use of the affordances and algorithms of different media, as well as the specific media logic, to build an audience and/or community, and to make sure that their voice circulates. Furthermore, understanding and adjusting to the culture of specific platforms is equally important in generating metapolitical impact. We thus have to analyse contemporary metapolitical projects not only in relation to online persona but also in relation to context—that is, in the social, political, historical, cultural and digital, algorithmic environment in which they produce their voice. Mainstream digital media not only have a crucial role in the circulation of metapolitical messages, but they also help shape the messages. Metapolitical actors need to make sure that they are and stay integrated into each platform culture by adjusting to the community

rules. This adjusting in itself, I will argue, contributes to the metapolitization of far-right messaging.

The management of visibility, as well as avoiding non-visibility, is a constant worry for all actors in this media system (Bucher, 2018). It is by now a truism that digitalization has fundamentally reshaped and reorganized the fields of media and of (meta)-politics, but it is important to grasp the exact way in which those fields have changed. In his seminal work on the hybrid media system, Chadwick (2017) argues that we now see a 'chaotic transition period' in which 'old media' and 'newer media logics' interact with and are interdependent among each other. The result of the interaction and interdependence of those media logics in the reflexively connected social fields of media and politics is what he labels as the 'hybrid media system' (Chadwick, 2017). The hybrid media system is a system, not just of 'old' and 'new' media, but the result of the interaction and interdependence of different actors. Politicians, influencers, journalists, activists or alternative media try to 'create, tap, or steer information flows in ways that suit their goals and in ways that modify, enable, or disable the agency of others, across and between a range of older and newer media settings' (Chadwick, 2017: Xi). It is in this battle, and thus the use of different technologies and platforms, that the hybrid media system takes shape.

In this highly competitive hybrid media system, legacy media, social media and user-generated content media, just like politicians, activists and prosumers, are trying to get attention for their message. And even more, they will try to redirect the attention others are getting to their own medium. The democratization of content production has not only disrupted the media field, or changed the relations between actors or democratized publishing, it has made attention a scarce good. Attention, and not information, is subsequently one of the main drivers of the hybrid media system and the digital economy (van Dijck, Poell & De Wael, 2018; Venturini, 2019: 128). Attention, data and user valuation have become popular means of monetization for platforms (van Dijck, Poell & De Waal, 2018: 10). This monetization is important for many contemporary metapolitical organizations.

Metapolitics 2.0, audience labour and uptake

In the commercialized, attention-based digital economy, users have a central role: they have attention to give and function as producers of raw data. The front region of the digital infrastructure is organized around keeping those users hooked (Eyal, 2014) so that data can be extracted. Enabling users to become producers is not only a case of democratization, it is first and foremost a key ingredient of the digital economy.

Audience labour (Fisher, 2015) is a crucial ingredient of the attention-based economy and metapolitics 2.0. Clicks, shares, comments, views, posts,

status updates and reach are all data that are measured and organize visibility in the hybrid media system. Only when people interact with the post of an activist it will become visible to others and thus potentially grab their attention and get the message out. Audience labour triggers the algorithms of the platforms that read user engagement as a proxy for popularity and subsequently make the content visible in more places. All media in this hybrid media system are increasingly grounded in an algorithmic logic (Gillespie, 2014). Algorithms – as socio-cultural assemblages – produce normativities, and these normativities co-create new communicative economies. The reason why uptake matters is because it is programmed in the algorithms. The like, the comment, the view, the click and the share function as proxies of attention (van Dijck, 2013). Digital media are not just intermediaries but have algorithmic agency (Tufekci, 2015), which affects the uptake and input of messages. Algorithms affect uptake as they 'select and prioritize content by algorithmically translating user activity into 'most relevant' or 'trending' topics' (Poell & van Dijck, 2014). Digital media (re)shape and re-organize the communicative structure of the 'input'-discourse (Georgakopoulou, Iversen, & Stage, 2020). A tweet has only a limited amount of characters that can be used. A YouTube video should use SEO to be found and so on. The message is not just distributed but also shaped and altered by digital media, or in other words, the digital ecology co-constructs digital cultures. Self-branding, posting pictures of a homely situation or one's food on Instagram are all connected to the specific affordances of specific platforms. And we will see that metapolitical actors adopt such more mainstream digital cultures for metapolitical goals: from meme culture to body culture or DIY culture: it can all become infused with a metapolitical project. Metapolitical messaging in the digital age is not a linear process between sender and receiver, but involves a multitude of human and non-human actors that are all potential senders and receivers, and all have a potential impact on the production and circulation of messages.

As a metapolitical actor in such a hybrid media system, it is thus not enough to produce 'content' to gain visibility; metapoliticians need to build a network that actively interacts with their message. Influence, as Gruzd and Wellman (2014) argue, is now *networked influence*, and this in two ways: 'by occurring in social networks and by propagating through online communication networks'. Having 'influence' in digital media landscapes thus starts with building an audience, a network that interacts with your message. But that is also not enough. Digital media not only affords discourse production, it also directs behaviour: certain digital affordances request, encourage and push users towards 'particular communicative and interactive practices by means of quantified processes' (Georgakopoulou, Iversen & Stage, 2020: 24). Contemporary media savvy politicians, activists and metapoliticians in general don't passively wait for uptake, but facilitate it, 'gamify' it, pay for it,

actively organize it or even make use of influencers, click farms and non-human activity like bots and bot-networks to trigger the algorithms (Bucher, 2018; Maly, 2018a, 2018b; Jacobson, Gruzd, Kumar & Mai, 2019). This uptake is also discursively important as reach, likes and followers are used to stress that those actors actually articulate the voice of the people or their generation (Maly, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019a). Attention-based metapolitics thus means investing in content, in building algorithmic knowledge (Maly, 2018; Varis & Hou, 2019), and in developing an algorithmic imagination (Bucher, 2015).

In the digital ecology, *uptake* of ideas is of crucial importance for any metapolitical project. With uptake, I refer to (1) the fact that within the digital ecology, users are not only consumers but also (re)producers of discourse, the so-called 'prosumers' (Miller, 2011), and (2) that algorithms and the interfaces of digital media play an important role in the dissemination and reproduction of ideas (Maly, 2018, 2020, Blommaert, 2020a). Uptake through human and non-human actors (from bots over the algorithms organizing the communication on a platform) has become a crucial part of any political and metapolitical battle. Note here that seemingly simple 'reproduction' actions like retweeting, reposting, liking and sharing are not just 'copies' of the same discourse, but 're-entextualizations' (Varis & Blommaert, 2014): a share (and sometimes even a like, depending on the algorithms of the platform) is the start of a *new communication* process where the initial message is now part of a new communicative act performed by a new producer who communicates to new addressees in a new type of interaction. Concretely, the metapolitical work of Alain de Benoist or Guillaume Faye is not only found in their books, it is mediatized (and mediated) through different actors and systems of communication. That work is not just copied but acquires a new meaning to new people. All those re-entextualizations not only change the initial meaning of the message but also the uptake. What should be remembered for now is that this new communicative economy creates a polycentric world of communication. Such a world is far more complex than a world dominated by the so-called 'mass media'. The many-to-many communicative logic of mediated online interaction (Thompson, 2020) creates pluriform, transnational and polycentric media networks with many different niches within which audiences subscribe to certain snippets of ideologies. The general changes in the media field have profound effects on the (meta)political field. Metapoliticians do not just need to present themselves in the mainstream media, they (and their team) need to manage their visibility on a broad range of media to draw attention to their message (Lempert & Silverstein, 2012), gain support and engage in a discursive battle to normalize their ideology (Maly, 2016). Especially for outsider parties, politicians and activists that are considered 'extreme' or 'populist', digital media bring new opportunities to have their voice circulating in niched public spheres.

About this book

In the second decade of the 21st century, the new right cultural battle is not only embedded in conferences, essays, journals and books anymore. In the digital age, millions of citizens, activists and even algorithms (re) produce new right metapolitics (Maly, 2018a, 2019a). The transnational uptake of *La Nouvelle Droite's* legacy by alt-right and identitarian movements, activists and new right influencers happens in a post-digital context (Fielitz & Thurston, 2019). Cramer (2014) introduced the concept of post-digital to highlight that the digital revolution has occurred and is now a 'normal' part of societies around the world. This new normality has profoundly affected the flow of ideas, which in turn has fundamental effects on the construction and circulation of (meta)political messages and meanings, and of course also on the study of these meanings (Blommaert, 2020a). This new digital reality is a key ingredient of the metapolitical battle of the new right in the 21st century. When Alain de Benoist and Champetier (2000) stress the importance of metapolitics, they not only stress the importance of culture and ideas in fuelling revolutions, but they also adopt a specific view on the role of intellectuals and the 'masses'. Whereas intellectuals are implicitly understood as authoritative producers of ideas, the masses are imagined as sheep-like individuals taking up the ideas of intellectuals. Not only have intellectuals lost part of their authoritative role in the production of ideas, but also in the attention economy of the post-digital era, the ideas of intellectuals have to compete with many other actors: individuals are not just passive consumers of metapolitical ideas anymore, they (re)produce them as well.

The basic assumption of this book is that we cannot and should not analyse contemporary metapolitics and find reasons for the rise of far-right activism and even violence *in the texts* these new right actors produce. At all costs, we should avoid the fallacy of internalism as Thompson (1990) called it. With this concept, Thompson criticized the widespread idea that the meaning of a text is only to be found in the text itself (and thus not in the attribution of meaning through the uptake and reproduction of texts). He stressed that 'the analysis of ideology in modern societies must give a central role to the nature and impact of mass communication', and argued that cultural experience is profoundly shaped by the diffusion of symbolic forms distributed through mass media (Thompson, 1990: 264). As a result, the study of ideology should – if one wants to avoid the fallacy of internalism – be focused on all three aspects of mass communication: 'the production/transmission, construction, and reception/appropriation of media messages' (Thompson, 1990: 24). If we follow Thompson's argument, we should at least direct some attention to the algorithmic nature of the distribution of discourse and ideology in contemporary societies (Maly, 2021).

On the other side, we should also try to avoid taking easy refuge to *a priori* contextual explanations for this rise (See Blommaert's critique on the use of globalization or power as décor for analysis in Blommaert, 2005). I'm thinking about classic tropes that are common places in media reporting on the rise of the right because 'they capture the voice of the losers of globalization', 'they articulate the feelings of the people' or 'they align with the spirit of time'. Or the even more classic explanation is that their rise is a result of the migration crisis in 2015. All these explanations de-historicize and decontextualize the rise of the far-right. I therefore adopt a more complex, historical, ethnographic discourse analytical perspective that doesn't disregard the agency of far-right actors today and throughout a longer history. Concretely, I will study new right activists and their metapolitical strategies as socio-technological assemblages

1 In which concrete actors use the affordances of digital media, acquire and apply algorithmic knowledge and produce metapolitical messages that are made for uptake in particular socio-cultural, historical and technological timespace or chronotope. Chronotopes invoke a sociolinguistic and ethnographic understanding of the context that takes on board the idea that 'concrete and socioculturally recognizable timespace configurations involve nonrandom modes of social action and lead to specific social effects' (Blommaert, 2020b).
2 In which uptake, in the sense of likes, shares and comments, is important not only for the distribution and circulation of messages but also because they constitute re-entextualizations that give birth to new groups and new forms of metapolitics.
3 In which digital media and their algorithms are analysed as having agency and power. Algorithmic systems help metapolitical actors bring certain ideas and realities into being (Bucher, 2018: 3), and they also direct certain (multimodal) behaviour (Georgakopoulou, Iversen & Stage, 2020).
4 In which contemporary successes cannot be dissociated from their historical trajectory and the discursive battles of the past.

In order to be able to zoom in on the details, the history of contemporary metapolitics, in relation to the context of uptake, I will make use of a case method. The analyses of the cases presented in this book contribute to a theory on how far-right actors are using the affordances of digital media to radicalize their audiences. It also builds a theory of the global new right as a complex system. The analyses and many case studies are part of a long-term digital ethnographic discourse analytical research project dedicated to the study of contemporary new right movements and politicians and their use of digital media (see Maly, 2012, 2016, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022). This project started as an ethnographic and discourse analytical

project (see Maly, 2012, 2015), but increasingly morphed into a more digital direction. Along the way, it became obvious that this research project begged for an interdisciplinary approach blending history, critical algorithm studies, web sciences, fascism and radicalization studies with an ethnographic or multimodal discourse analytical approach.

After explaining my methodology in Chapter 1, I start the second chapter by going back to the roots of new right metapolitics. I introduce metapolitics in the works of Alain de Benoist and *La Nouvelle Droite* and contrast those conceptualizations of metapolitics with the critique of Guillaume Faye, the former number two of *La Nouvelle Droite*. Faye criticizes the 'intellectual conception' of de Benoist's metapolitics in two influential books 'Why we fight' and 'Archeofuturism'. I argue that it is Guillaume Faye's conceptualization of metapolitics that has found uptake in many contemporary far-right movements. The argumentation is grounded in a detailed analysis of the uptake of Faye's ideas by alt-right intellectuals like Greg Johnson (Counter-Currents), Richard Spencer (National Policy Institute) and by Martin Sellner of the identitarian movement Generation Identity. I analyse a series of YouTube videos that Martin Sellner dedicated to Guillaume Faye's book 'Why We Fight'.

In the third chapter, I build further on the idea that contemporary metapolitics is grounded in a digital ecology. I show how this digital ecology not only reshaped metapolitical strategies and practices but also gave birth to a global new right culture. This new right cultural niche is a typical product of globalization processes facilitated by digital media and rising mobility. Contrary to what popular parlance and new right theories on globalization want us to believe, globalization doesn't produce a homogenization of culture, a global mono-culture. In order to analyse and grasp the full meaning of new right metapolitics, we need to adopt a global perspective and overcome 'methodological nationalism'.

By taking on board a sociolinguistic theory of globalization (see Blommaert, 2010), I analyse the Flemish identitarian movement Schild & Vrienden. In this case study, I adopt a perspective that focusses on the mobility of resources and the layeredness of local activism. I show the productiveness and necessity of an ethnographic approach that takes digitalization and globalization as context by analysing the remediatization of a storming of an old castle in Ghent, Belgium, by Schild & Vrienden. In this action, its formatting and the discourse they deployed, we see the synchronization of different discourses and practices from different parts of the world. Even more, I show how activists from all corners of the worldied to push the uploaded video to virality on Facebook. On the basis of this case, I argue that the rising importance of global networks, cellular systems and global cultural and political flows is emblematic of this latest phase of globalization and is largely undertheorized when it comes to new right activism.

In the fourth chapter, I focus on the emergence of a global new right culture and the role of influencers in that emergent culture. New right activists have set up a whole ecology of digital media platforms for metapolitical goals (Lewis, 2018). In doing so, they adapt to the technical requirements of those platforms, they integrate into their cultures and their content is made to fit the content and form requirements of these platforms. As LaViolette (2017: 6) argues, platforms can be seen and analysed as Goffmanian frames that circumscribe 'discourse and becomes crucial for its interpretation'. Contemporary new right culture, style and discourse are created as a socio-technological assemblage. In this chapter, I show that the performance of the new right identity is in itself a metapolitical deed. It is through this careful stylization of hair, body, clothes and language that new right actors address different audiences and introduce far-right ideas. After discussing the emergence of that culture in detail, I zoom in on two metapolitical influencers: the Swedish bodybuilding YouTuber The Golden One and #pizzagate promotor and wife of Martin Sellner, Brittany Pettibone-Sellner. Both represent two sides of a crucial new right metapolitical battlefield, which could be labelled the 'gender war' or the antifeminist battle. This battle aims at restoring the 'natural order' of things by promoting the heteronormative nuclear family and traditional gender roles for men and women as part of a larger metapolitical battle to centre around the construction of homogenous, white and organic communities. Both cases illustrate the importance of brand and integration in the digital mainstream for contemporary metapolitics.

In the fifth chapter, I present three cases that all focus on the use of data voids for metapolitical goals. Data voids are search queries that don't result in much qualitative data. Those voids can easily be used for metapolitical goals. The web can be seen as one giant learning environment (Couldry & Hepp, 2016; DeCook, 2018; Blommaert, 2019b), and the search engine is emblematic of this. Google is a crucial infrastructure in this learning environment. Since 2015, YouTube has had over 1 billion daily users (Moore, 2016: 9). In 2019, 91.8% of the searches worldwide were done through Google, and on mobile phones this increases to 96% of all searches (Moore, 2016: 13). This dominance of Google is the result of an almost hegemonic media ideology (Gershon, 2010): the idea that Google is the best search engine and that it will help us find what we are looking for (Vaidhyanathan, 2011; Moore, 2016: 15). Gershon (2010: 3) defined the term media ideology as 'a set of beliefs about communicative technologies with which users and designers explain perceived media structure and meaning'. Media ideologies thus shape how we look at media and their functions and at least partially determine how we use those media. We could expand this media ideology associated with Google to search engines on other platforms as well. Most people do not realize it anymore, but to 'surf' the web in many cases starts by entering something in a search box. The search has become a normal way of navigating the web. This normality

is as always a site of power, or more concretely, it has powerful effects. As a result of this normality associated with search engines, and the existing media ideologies around search, algorithms of search engines have potentially powerful metapolitical effects. Far-right actors haven't missed this, and they produce data in relation to the search engine algorithms for metapolitical goals. In order to understand how the far-right tries to metapolitically exploit these data voids, I analyse three cases. In the first case, I analyse the so-called Groyper War that was waged during the 2020 Trump election campaign. In the second case, I will show how YouTube conspiracy theory vlogger Paul Watson exploits the coronavirus breaking news data void for his metapolitical agenda. In the third case, I zoom in on the Feniks, a Flemish new right movement that used Covid-19 for metapolitical goals

The sixth chapter zooms in on the link between violence and the discourses of *La Nouvelle Droite*, the *identitarian movements* and the American white nationalist media. I do that by analysing the manifestos of Dylann Roof and Brenton Tarrant from an intertextuality and cultural perspective. 'Intertextuality refers to connections between texts over time as well as synchronically' (Blommaert, 2005: 253). Studying the intertextual connections between texts, and especially between manifestos and the wider new right texts, allows us to analyse the manifestos as social products. Adopting a cultural perspective makes visible that even though Roof and Tarrant have been socialized in quite different far-right niches operating on different scales within the global new right, they both started from a shared hegemonic notion within that niche: the idea that there is an undeclared war going on. That is why they saw their violence as necessary, not only to defend the 'white race', but also to create consciousness about that ongoing war. Both terrorist acts are emblematic of what I call metapolitical terrorism. Their killing sprees were not only executed to install fear, they were instruments in a cultural war to make 'white people' conscience about 'the great replacement' and to spur them to action.

In the last chapter, I look at the impact of states and platforms on the normalization and abnormalization of far-right actors. Or more concretely, I look at the impact of external actors on the visibility and invisibility of the contemporary new right. The role of deplatforming, banning and deplatformization is described from a meta-perspective. I focus on how external actors shape and reshape the global new right. The global new right, I argue, is best understood as a complex system that is perpetually in motion as a result of internal and external forces.

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1

IDEOLOGY AND ACTIVISM IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Theoretical and methodological reflections

Digitalization has affected all fields of society, and thus also the field of (meta) politics. Digital media have become a normal, and to a large extent invisible, part of our world. They are just there, ready to be used. Digital platforms, their algorithms, and the ideologies that are embedded in them are part of the invisible and self-evident systemic core organizing daily life (Maly, 2022a). Just because of this central status in the information environment of contemporary societies, digital media are crucial in any contemporary metapolitical project. It is therefore necessary to examine and study the impact of this digital revolution on metapolitics. Digitalization not only gives birth to new ways of circulating messages, new discourses and new practices, but it also allows activists to easily cross borders, cooperate on a transnational scale, organize manifestations and events and find money to pay for all of that metapolitical and activist action. Digitalization makes clear that globalization is the context in which far-right activists shape modern metapolitical action. It enables what Dugin calls a 'conservative internationalism' (Southern, 2018a: 17, 45). In this chapter, I want to (1) zoom in on the relation between ideology, metapolitics and algorithms, (2) explain what I mean with digitalization and globalization as context, (3) explain my methodological approach and methods and (4) sketch the ethnographic situation of the data analysed in this book.

The algorithmic logic of post-digital societies

Digitalization and algorithmic culture have rapidly reshuffled the media system and the information flows and interactions within that system (Gillespie, 2014; van Dijck, Poell, & De Waal, 2018). Politicians, activists, journalists,

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intellectuals and common citizens politically engage in a very different context than in the 1990s, let alone the 1950s. We now live with an algorithmically powered attention-based hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2017). The different types of media – newspapers, television, radio and social media platforms – do not merely coexist, but form a media system that is constantly changing. That perpetual change is the result of the reciprocal actions and interactions between those different media and their media logics. In that new media system, the distinction between 'old' and 'new' media or digital and non-digital media has almost become non-existent. Tweets become news and the newspaper tweets. Moreover, the newspaper is also more and more algorithmically produced (Bucher, 2018).

All media in this hybrid media system are increasingly grounded in algorithmic logic (Gillespie, 2014): our interactions with algorithms determine which information becomes visible, to whom and on which scale. Algorithms, datafication and the affordances of digital media that allowed for the democratization of transmission, and the banalization of recording (Thompson, 2020), disrupt the status quo. We cannot understand the rise of Trump and Trumpism, or the rise of Generation Identity, Schild & Vrienden or The Golden One without taking this new media environment into account. While we should carefully avoid the trap of technological determinism, we cannot disregard the importance of including this new socio-technological context in our analysis of far-right metapolitics in contemporary societies (see Maly, 2019, 2020 for illustrations). Post-digital societies create new possibilities and constraints for the production and circulation of discourse. New producers and new relationships have been established between the different actors in this media system and they have had fundamental effects on the construction and circulation of (meta)political messages and meanings.

In the last two decades, the digital infrastructure has become an inherent part of the social fabric of society. It is one of the deep, generic drivers of concrete human behaviour in hypermediated societies (Couldry & Hepp, 2016; DeCook, 2018; Blommaert, 2020a). Digital media, and the hybrid media system at large, has a central role in shaping contemporary cultural experiences. They facilitate and encourage the massive production and diffusion of symbolic forms distributed in that hybrid media system. This social structure has such a profound effect through the affordances it provides for humans to act and interact and its agency in the form of algorithms. Following J.B. Thompson's warning to avoid the fallacy of internalism I discussed in the previous chapter, taking the relation between digital media and ideology seriously means that we should not only study the metapolitical texts of new right intellectuals, activists and politicians, but also zoom in on the interdependence of the production, transmission, construction, reception, appropriation and the human and algorithmic interaction facilitating the diffusion and uptake of metapolitical messages. Considering the role of digital media and the algorithmic logic in the hybrid media system, we should at

least direct some attention to the algorithmic nature of the distribution of discourse and ideology in contemporary societies.

Algorithmic culture and the attention-based media system

It is important to note here that algorithms are much more than mere technological instruments. They are socio-technical assemblages. Algorithms only work if they are fed with data. In other words, algorithms should be understood from a relational perspective. Not only do programmers (their values and their companies' goals) matter, but also the interfaces, the data structures, and what people do with algorithms deserve our attention. The idea – so prevalent in public debate – that algorithms just do things and that users do not have an impact is false. It is not YouTube's algorithms that radicalize people, but people using YouTube and its algorithms, in order to radicalize people. The recommended videos on YouTube are the result of the interactions between the recommendation algorithms of YouTube, viewers, and how producers prepare their content for uptake. Not only algorithms matter, it is algorithmic culture that truly matters. People will try to optimize their content, link to each other, have a network of fans which they ask to share content, or even have bots push certain content.

Algorithms and people have agency. It is in the interaction between humans and algorithms that the contemporary production and circulation of ideology – and thus metapolitics – should be understood. When we take the assumption on board that algorithms have agency, then it is important to understand the socio-technical and the economic context in which they are created (Maly, 2022a). The objectives of the platforms are clear. Beneath all the fine talk of big tech boasting about 'connecting the world' and 'doing no evil' lies the quest for profit. Social platforms make profit by commodifying our digitally networked social relationships: our emotions, photos, posts, shares and likes are repackaged into 'tradable commodities' (Zuboff, 2019). Or more concretely, data is used to predict the likelihood that certain audiences will be receptive or give attention to certain messages from companies or politicians. The more data those companies have about their users, the more accurately they think that sellers can target them, and the more profit big tech can extract from that behavioural data. The result is an unbridled surveillance and datafication. Even if users don't post or like and don't leave comments, they still produce data that can be processed and traded.

In order to gather more data on their users, digital media platforms nurture a specific culture in which audience labour takes a central place (Venturini, 2019: 130). We have all become prosumers: we do not only consume information, we also produce it (Miller, 2011). This has crucial consequences: information – including good quality information – is now abundant. It is no longer a scarce commodity. We have ended up in the opposite of an

information economy: an attention economy. In order to convert that attention into profit, attention is codified and categorized. The like, the comment, the view, the click and the share function as proxies of attention (van Dijck, 2013). The digital infrastructures of the attention economy are not only organized to keep the users hooked, but they also facilitate audience labour and thus data production (Eyal, 2014).

This commercial algorithmically programmed attention economy creates a very specific environment in which we develop our social relationships. 'Popularity' has become a crucial factor (van Dijck, 2013). The more followers you have, the more likes your posts generate, the more you contribute to the goals of the platform, the more valuable you are for the platforms, and the more visible you and your discourse becomes. As a result, people increasingly present themselves as public personas in search for an audience. In order to capture the attention of platform users, we see that branding strategies have been democratized (Marwick, 2015). People create their brand in relation to the so-called 'vanity metrics': they monitor the likes, followers and uptake, and use it to gain insight into what works, when, and why (Rogers, 2018). Or in other words, they try to acquire and apply algorithmic knowledge to produce attention-grabbing content (Bucher, 2018; Maly, 2018b, 2020). The influencer or micro-celebrity is a structural ingredient of this new media environment: they help platforms in realizing their goals. These new human practices are best seen as a result of their interaction with the algorithms and values of that platform.

Digital media as context

We can illustrate the importance of the new communicative environment when we zoom in on the emergence of the far-right in the last decades. Although it is certainly not the only factor, the algorithmic hybrid media system is unmistakably an important ingredient in this rise. It has reshaped and re-organized the far-right. The far-right has always used digital media to propagate their ideologies (Winter, 2019), but in the last decades, we see a fundamental change in the form, content and strategies that are being used (Lewis, 2018; DeCook, 2018; Maly, 2018a; Fielitz & Thurston, 2019; Askanius & Keller, 2021; Leidig, 2021; Tebaldi, 2022a, 2022b). The far-right's adoption of meme culture, LARPing, digital harassment, trolling, conspiracy theories, the adoption of influencer culture and even violence for metapolitical goals are all relatively new practices that have contributed not only to the spread of their ideologies, but also to recreation, re-emergence, and the mobilization power of the so-called 'true right' on a global scale.

In post-digital societies, the far-right rarely manifests itself as a hierarchical organization with one stable ideology or a mass party. More commonly it takes the form of a polycentric and layered network of niched ideological groups

(Maly, 2019a). Varis and I have introduced the term 'micro-populations' to describe such social groups (Maly & Varis, 2016). Such micro-populations are the material expression of temporary and emerging micro-hegemonies. The Capitol riots in the United States are a clear example of how digital practices have shaped a wide range of micro-populations that were moulded into a militant offline mass on 6 January 2021. Next to the red and camouflage MAGA caps and Trump hats, one could spot Confederate flags, QAnon t-shirts, Kek and 'three-percenter' flags, Neo-Nazi hoodies, Groypers, 'stop the steal' boards, and of course, the Proud Boys.

All these signs and emblems index different groups that occupy different (4chan, thedonald.win) or sometimes overlapping online spaces (GAB, Parler and MeWe). Trump – with his massive reach in the hybrid media system – was potentially most important, but he was clearly not the only communicator. Key influencers like Nick Fuentes, Dan Bongino, and Gavin McInnes all collaborated in the production and distribution of discourse. In many cases, we see a complex, layered network of influencers that co-constructs a (micro)-ideology. If we zoom in on QAnon, then we see that even that niche is a decentralized and polycentric pyramid-like conspiracy theory that is constantly being produced and reproduced in different niches by different producers. Mom-influencers, yoga communities, 4channers, and MAGA activists all prosume the theory and make it ready for uptake in their niches using different angles and discourse strategies (Maly, 2021). An analysis of the linguistic signs (Blommaert & Maly, 2016) on display during the storming of the Capitol shows us how Trump supporters are a loose, unstable, and temporal coalition of micro-populations (Blommaert, 2020a). The result is not a homogenous mass or a consistent and stable ideology, but a temporal merging of different micro-hegemonies (Blommaert & Varis, 2011).

Blommaert & Varis introduced the concept of micro-hegemonies to explain identity in times of digitalization and superdiversity. They argued that 'the robust hegemonies that appeared to characterize Modernity have been traded for a blending within one individual life-project of several micro-hegemonies valid in specific segments of life and behaviour, and providing the "most logical" solution (or the "truth") within these segments' (2011: 2). Not only individual identities can be described as the blending of different micro-hegemonies. Trying to understand 6 January means understanding how many of those micro-populations merge to become a mass. One key element is understanding that since Election Day, influencers and prosumers in all those different niches started adopting some version of the conspiracy theory that claims that this election was stolen. This particular type of coalition is grounded in a network of social media sites and of course in the digital campaign of Trump itself (Maly, 2020d). These groups were born within mainstream platforms like Twitter, Reddit, YouTube and Facebook before some had to move to more fringe platforms like Gab, Parler and thedonald.

win after being deplatformed. In the months before the riot, all those niched groups used digital media to construct their own normalities, their partisan views of the world. In that world, the election was stolen by the left, the liberals or the deep state. The enemy was accused of manipulating the voting machines, stealing or throwing away ballots, or organizing fraud with mail-in and absentee ballots. The seeds for this myth were planted by Trump even before his election in 2016 – but of course, they resonated with discourses on the deep state that were already popular in many of those niches – and were carefully constructed by many of his performances during and after the elections. These conspiracy theories on the deep state are not new at all; they have a long history in the United States and were always connected to a far-right agenda that framed the 'left', and especially 'the liberals', as the key figures of that deep state (Lowndes, 2008). Trump's electoral loss was read as the deep state taking over population control again. It created a sense of urgency and opposition to the democratic institutions of the United States.

Such conspiracy theories function as contemporary Sorelian myths. The Frenchman George Sorel was a prominent and influential anti-elitist and anti-democratic philosopher within revolutionary syndicalism that had a prominent impact on fascism as an ideology (Sorel, 2014). Sternhell saw in him a key figure in the birth of fascism (Sternhell, Sznajder, & Asheri, 1994). Myth was central to Sorel's thinking about revolution and the overthrow of the bourgeois order. He saw myths as 'groups of ideas' or knowledge-constructs that can direct reality, people and movements. Those ideas didn't need to be rational or true. What was important according to Sorel was that they had affective power. For him, myths had a social function. He saw them as a means to mobilize people.

If we look at the role of conspiracy theories from the perspective of this Sorelian concept of myth, we see how they function as a site of ideology:

1 They contribute to the creation of a feeling of togetherness, a coalition that finds itself in opposition to the order in society.
2 As such, these myths have an agentive function in society.
3 Those myths create a common enemy but also a specific partisan perspective on society and on themselves.

Conspiracy theories like White Genocide, the Great Replacement or Stop the Steal affect the audiences and mould them into one group that opposes the same enemy. All those political conspiracy theories create a world in which the liberal elites are destroying traditional societies, and enable multiculturalism, feminism, and the destruction of Western culture. That is why debunking the myths doesn't work. It didn't matter that Pizzagate was debunked; the general idea – that the liberals are morally rotten – was still seen as true. And it should thus not come as a surprise that this same narrative plays a

crucial role in QAnon theories. Important to note again is that those myths are not only cognitive-ideational phenomena; they are grounded in a material reality – digital media that are being used to (re)produce those myths – which is as important as the affective qualities of those myths in the mobilization of people. And just like digital media allow users to easily transgress borders, so too do conspiracy theories and new right theories. The effect is that digitalization allows for the birth of a transnational contemporary new right.

If we understand ideologies as ideas that penetrate the whole fabric of communities and result in normalized, naturalized patterns of thought and behaviour, then we should realize how important the role of digital media and their algorithms are in the construction of that normality (Blommaert, 2005: 159). The flow of ideas is at least partially organized by those algorithms. Also, the reach of these groups cannot be solely explained by the discourse they produce; all of those influencers and groups deploy 'algorithmic knowledge' to spread their discourse and construct a community around their profiles. Even more, their discourse on 'censorship' from the mass media and mainstream digital media platforms helps them to spread digital knowledge. Far-right influencers constantly stress the importance of getting the news out by sharing and liking. This produces fertile ground to grow a supportive culture. The other side of the coin is that the interaction with the personalization algorithms contributes to the construction of the niched groups circling around specific influencers and pages, whereas the recommendation algorithms help to build a transnational, layered and polycentric network of different micro-populations.

If we want to analyse 'political ideologies' and metapolitics in particular, we must not only focus on the content or the large 'isms', but also on the form, the communication economy, and the uptake. We need to understand how activists adapt to this new communicative economy and understand how they use it in their political struggle. This commercial algorithmically programmed attention economy creates a very specific environment in which activists develop new social relationships, new activist practices and new discourses. These new metapolitical practices are the result of their interaction with the algorithms and values of that platform. Metapolitics 2.0 is grounded in digital media and digital culture and has, in the end, an algorithmic logic. People will try to optimize their content, link to each other, have a network of fans which they ask to share content, or even have bots to push certain content. The algorithmic logic of this attention-based media environment forces us to understand the importance of algorithmic knowledge in the dissemination of far-right ideologies on the rise. Not only the management of visibility but also avoiding non-visibility, as Bucher (2018) stresses, is a constant worry for all actors in this media system, and is thus of crucial importance for all ideological projects. In line with Thompson, Blommaert argued that ideologies need to 'be understood as processes that require material reality

and institutional structures and practices of power and authority' (Blommaert, 2005: 163). Hence, they cannot be understood without looking at how people spread those ideas, who they address, which media they use, and how those media format the discourses. Studying ideologies in the contemporary era means not only looking at the input but also at the uptake. Uptake here refers to

1 the fact that within the digital ecology, users are not only consumers but also (re)producers of discourse, so-called prosumers; and
2 that algorithms and the interfaces of digital media play an important role in the dissemination and reproduction of ideas.

Uptake realizes visibility. Human and non-human actors (from bots to the algorithms organizing the communication on a platform) are a crucial part of any ideological and political battle.

Globalization as context

If we accept the idea that digital infrastructures have become part of 'social structure', and thus function as one of the deep invisible drivers behind actual conduct, we subsequently have to see globalization as context. Taking context seriously in times of digitalization means considering the meaning-making effects of the scales on which those infrastructures operate. Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Instagram, YouTube and even Gab, Parler and DLive are infrastructures of cultural globalization. They take a central place in contemporary culture and thus in meaning-making processes. This does not result in a homogenous culture. Not only the Capitol riots showed the temporal merging of niched groups; we saw the same thing in the 2016 support of Trump and on a global scale: the growth of the contemporary new right. Digital media facilitate local cultural production as well as more globalized cultural niches and complex threads between all those centres of normativity. The national imagined community is replaced by many different imagined communities and imagined worlds operating on different scales and orienting themselves towards different centres of normativity that function as orders of indexicality (see Blommaert, 2005 and 2010 for an in-depth discussion).

Even if certain practices, norms and discourses enjoy global uptake through one of those media, we should always remember that these pieces of culture always are deglobalized: they again become part of the local as people interact with them, adjust them and appropriate them to function in their own lives and concrete contexts. The contemporary far-right is a good example of globalization as 'a complex of processes, evolving and developing at different scale-levels, with differences in scope, speed and intensity' (Blommaert, 2020a: 17). The success of the alt-right in amplifying its message and grabbing

attention of American media first, and later media in the rest of the world, gave far-right actors around the world confidence. Even more, the alt-right became an important normative centre in a global network of far-right movements, individuals and actors. They introduced new metapolitical practices, new norms and discourses that were englobalized and deglobalized again by local actors. The popularization of the (meta)-political meme by the alt-right is a simple but effective example of such cultural processes. Far-right activists were not just using those alt-right memes but were adapting them to fit local situations.

A 'simple' example of these complex processes of globalization can be seen in the meme below (Figure 1.1). The Smug Pepe meme in support of Trump's Border Wall plans to keep Mexican migrants outside of the United States widely circulated during the 2016 campaign of Donald Trump. The meme pictures Trump as a Smug Pepe and was first posted on July 22nd, 2015 by

FIGURE 1.1 Trump-Smug Pepe Border wall meme.

Source: 4chan.

Malaysian artist Maldraw on 4chan's /pol/ board.[1] The sad and angry Mexicans that Trump is holding back at the fence at the US-Mexican border are known as the Feels Guy or Wojak. The Wojak meme is a so-called reaction figure and has been appearing next to Pepe since 2014, normally as the victim of Pepe's mischief. Note here how little intervention is needed to turn Smug Pepe into Trump: his emblematic haircut and a campaign badge is *enough* (Blommaert & Varis, 2011).

This 'simple' example is in reality a highly complex multimodal communicative device reflecting deep social, cultural and communicative traditions that have their origins in very different normative centres of cultural production. The first poster was Malysian. Smug Pepe goes back to the Boy's Club web strip where Pepe first appeared, long before it became a meme first on 4chan and later all over the internet. The format in which Smug Pepe was accompanied by the Feel Guy was now re-entextualized in a clearly political setting. The history of use of the meme sticks to the new political version of the meme and presents Trump as smug and edgy. Not long after that meme was posted, we saw that Pepe came to be appropriated not only in favour of Trump but also as a vehicle to open the Overton window for more far-right ideologies. Pepe, far-right trolls on 4chan claimed, was stolen by normies, and they wanted him back. This narrative around the meme becomes a very important vehicle, not only to draw attention from mainstream media, but also to build an edgy and vibrant far-right culture online (Nagle, 2017; Maly, 2018a).

The metapolitical effect of that culture was amplified by Trump retweeting himself as Pepe and Clinton (Reilly, 2016) holding a press conference on that tweet claiming that it was proof of Trump being far-right and racist. This, of course, just fed the trolls who were very fast to exploit the strategic ambivalence of ironic Pepe memes, pointing out that Pepe was just the 'feel good' frog from the Boy's Club strip. The speech also grabbed the attention of eyeballs around the world and can be seen as the start of polycentric processes of englobalization and deglobalization.

In Figure 1.2 we see how the Smug Trump meme got globalized and deglobalized again. This deglobalization becomes visible in the semiotic rearrangement that makes those memes usable on a local scale. The First thing that we notice is that, in a European context, the Mexican migrants have been replaced by *Feels Guys* in stereotypical Islamic clothing. Note that the woman is not just wearing a headscarf but a Burka and thus functions as an emblem of extremism. This is reminiscent of the far-right discourse on Muslims and Islam as inherently radical and clashing with 'our European values' (Maly, 2007). The memes are not only adjusted to the European context but also to the different national contexts. In the case of Le Pen in France and Wilders in the Netherlands, Smug Pepe could be turned in to the local politicians by replacing one emblematic haircut by another. Whereas in Great Britain and Poland, Pepe was dressed in the colours and patterns of the national flag, and

FIGURE 1.2 Deglobalization of the Smug Trump meme.

Source: compiled by author from different sources (4chan, Facebook, Google images, …).

in Germany, Pepe received the official blue of the far-right political party of the AFD. Globalization is clearly not a homogenizing cultural process. And more importantly, Pepe is not 'decontextualized', nor is 'the iconic image (…) ideologically empty, emerging instead as a symbol of generalized resistance' (Miller-Idriss, 2017: 136). Pepe the Frog is constantly deglobalizated and thus re-contextualized to make it work in this new context. Important to realise, though, is that its original meaning still sticks to the meme. It is the history of Pepe, and its connection to the alt-right and the Webstrip, that makes it not only an 'edgy' and cool meme, but also one in which strategic ambivalence (Maly, 2018a) or 'humorous ambiguity' (Bogerts & Fielitz, 2019) and mischievous ambivalence (Phillips & Milner, 2017) can be exploited. Being mobilized in a new context for new goals means that the memes acquire additional layers of meanings.

If we follow Shifman's definition of a meme 'as a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form and/or stance that were created with awareness of each other and created and shared via the internet by many users', we see how this Smug Trump Pepe becomes an index of a contemporary transnational new right (Shifman, 2014: 7–8). From a metapolitical perspective, all those memes communicate a similar message: they promote an ethnoplural world order made up by homogenous societies. The fence and the different cultural indexes in the form of traditional clothing articulate the neo-racist message. Even more, as we can see in Figure 1.3,

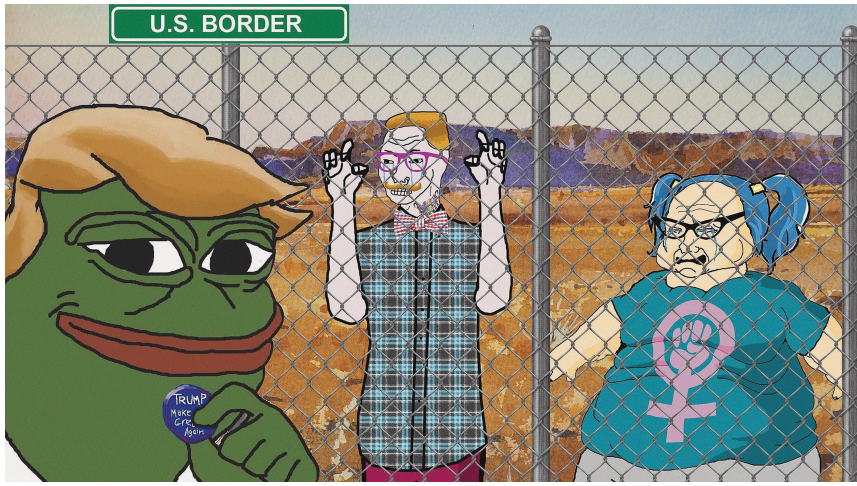

FIGURE 1.3 Smug Trump Pepe vs LGBTQ+ activists.

Source: 4chan.

the same form and stance can be easily adapted to other far-right metapolitical messages. Together those memes preconfigure a new ethno-differentialist world order grounded in ethnically and cultural homogenous societies that target the cause of decadence and decline: the left. Important to notice is that the activists always do this from a local position. The Nordic Resistance Movement in Sweden can for instance use Skurt – a frog-like hand puppet from a children's Swedish TV show – for metapolitical goals (Askanius & Keller, 2021). Even though Pepe is not mentioned or used here, being a frog, Skurt imports the edgy meaning of Pepe in Sweden. Activists thus use and abuse the resources circulating in niches and different scales and adapt them for local metapolitical use.

Contexts: methodological lessons

What to take away from this? The first point to take home is that we have to abandon methodological nationalism in the study of the contemporary new right. If one would only look and analyse those memes from a methodological nationalistic perspective, one would miss the layered meaning of those memes. The memes, even though local, orient themselves to different centres operating on different scales and their meaning cannot be reduced from the meaning they are attributed in a local context. Pepe in itself has become emblematic of the contemporary metapolitical strategies. Cultural practices of new right actors cannot be seen as just local activism, they are like most contemporary cultural practices polycentric, orienting towards multiple evaluative centres on different scales. The memes as metapolitical devices not only

index a transnational far-right meme culture or meme culture in general, they exist in the combination of many different normative centres – from the alt-right, *La Nouvelle Droite*, Chan-culture and centres operating on the local scales. As Blommaert and De Fina (2017) argue, those polycentric cultural practices orient towards multiple evaluative centres and are being enabled and sanctioned by ever-changing timespace or chronotopic configurations. Chronotope, as a 'new' word for context, invites us, argued Blommaert (2020b) 'to critically check the ways in which we use the term "context" in a wide range of disciplines within the study of language in society'. The word is of course from Bakhtin, who introduced it to refer to 'the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships' (Bakhtin, 1981: 84). Bakhtin's notion of chronotope has been picked up in quite some sociolinguistic research (see Kroon & Swanenberg, 2020 for an overview) as an invitation 'to extract and connect multiple social meanings and agencies represented in a story, but also more generally, as cultural chronotopes, i.e "depiction(s) of place-time-and-personhood to which social interactants orient when they engage each other through discursive signs of any kind"' (Agha, 2007: 320) (Kroon & Swanenberg, 2020: 3). Chronotopes is in this sense an invitation to see the context in a very specific way. Blommaert (2020b) highlights four characteristics of this chronotopic interpretation of context:

- A view of context as a specific set of features both affecting and producing specific modes of social action;
- In which such features have very clear and empirically demonstrable timespace characteristics – the actual timespace constellation is the determining feature for understanding the actual text-context patterns we observe;
- In which some of these features can be carried over, so to speak, into different timespace constellations while others are non-exportable;
- And in which a precise understanding of timespace configurations is essential to account for a great deal of the sociocultural work performed in interaction.

Chronotopes invoke a sociolinguistic and ethnographic understanding of context. 'The notion of chronotope invites us', says Blommaert (2020b),

> To treat aspects of context often dismissed or summarily taken into account in branches of scholarship, and to treat them with utmost precision as non-random elements of social situations that may account for much of how people make sense of social structure in actual moments of social action.

Context cannot and should not be narrowed down to the immediate setting of the communicative act; it should also take into account the larger 'social

situation', as Goffman called it. The latter cannot be invoked as a 'passe partoe', a ready-made a priori context, but should be analysed in the actual communicative act. Context is thus not just something that influences communication, communication also creates context by using certain resources in specific ways. Discourse analysis should thus not stick to analysing discourses as examples of certain larger evolutions: they should analyse them as making structure, making context.

Human creativity and meaning-making doesn't happen in a vacuum, in the abstract or in local situations only. The social situation provides scripts to make sense in a specific situation; at the same time – by choosing certain scripts above others, humans construct that social situation. As we have seen above with the small example of the meme, it is important to realize that the social situation cannot be understood as something local or stable: our object of research is language-in-motion (Kroon & Swanenberg, 2020: 2). If we try to understand how people create meaning in relation to social structure, or in other words how they contextualize their meaning-making, we should not a priori exclude the notion that this context is at least *in potential* global. The meme in many cases only 'works' on a local scale because it has historicities in other parts of the world, in other niches. Activists knowingly play, use and abuse those meanings to generate local and translocal effects. The main argument, of course, is that globalization is relevant in our understanding of local politics and political activism and thus should be part of our analysis. Post-digital societies create new possibilities and constraints for the production and circulation of discourse. New producers and new relationships have been established between the different actors in this media system and they have had fundamental effects on the construction and circulation of (meta)political messages and meanings. The new communicative economy creates a polycentric and translocal world of communication (Blommaert, 2010). Such a world is far more complex than a world dominated by the so-called 'national mass media'. Analysing discourse in such a context cannot be limited to the 'content', but should also take the systems of communication, the layered transnational context, the different actors and the historicities and trajectories of cultural material into account. This post-digital world creates enormous challenges for scholars of ideology, politics and the far-right in particular; it forces us to update our toolkit. Not only does the world force us to take a more interdisciplinary approach to our research. Engaging with contextualization processes is a *conditio sine qua none*. The good news is that it may help us to develop more fine-grained analysis that considers the full context, including the socio-technical context. In summary, the new post-digital society forces us to take a more ethnographic stance as the foundation of more interdisciplinary approaches (Arnaut et al., 2016).

Digital ethnographic discourse analysis

The different case studies that I present in this book are part of a long-term digital ethnographic discourse analytical research project dedicated to the study of the new right movements and politicians and their use of digital media (see Maly, 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2019, 2020, 2021). I entered this field as an outsider and gradually learned the language, the memes, the cultural practices, the theoretical founding works and the different hubs that rose to power and influenced the whole network. I also entered that field as a cultural scientist with a very specific set of lenses and methodologies to analyse those groups, their discourses and ideologies. This approach is grounded in a long history of ethnographic focus on discourse (Hymes, 1996; Scollon & Scollon, 2003) and more recent digital ethnographic work (See Varis, 2016; Varis & Hou, 2019; Blommaert & Dong, 2020; Maly, 2022). I adapted this digital ethnographic approach to analyse far-right activism in a digital context. In the next sections of this chapter, I want to introduce this digital ethnographic approach to discourse analysis. I will start abstractly and work towards more concrete methods and situating the data ethnographically.

An ethnographic approach to discourse and discourse analysis

Discourse analysis has always been a very broad field of research where many different approaches are used to study 'discourse'. And even discourse itself means several different things to different scholars working in different disciplines. In general, introductory books to discourse make a distinction between discourse as language above the sentence, discourse as language in use and discourse as a form of social practice (see Schiffrin, 1994; Cameron, 2001; Cameron & Panovic, 2014). The more linguistic approaches to discourse have through time been expanded to include a more activity-related understanding of discourse (see Blommaert, 2005 for a useful oversight). I firmly position myself in this latest tradition. And I especially side with those who see the need to also expand that focus on discourse to include non-linguistic conceptions of discourse (Jaworski & Coupland, 1999). Discourse to me is inherently multimodal. Meaning, especially in a digital environment, is usually realized through more than one semiotic mode (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 183). This multimodal approach to discourse, especially in post-digital societies, where 'not only boundaries between more speech-like and more writing-like forms of the language are undergoing rapid unravelling (and) other forms of communication are making increasing and massive inroads into the domain of communication' (Kress, 1997: 2), is crucial to make sense of meaning-making in digital and globalized contexts.

Memes, but also YouTube videos, may be the best arguments for such a multimodal approach to discourse. We can only uncover the full meaning of memes, but also of digital influencer practices and algorithmic activism, in

relation to the different modes of communication, and of course also in relation to the uptake of content. An approach to discourse that only looks at linguistic modes of communication, that doesn't take actions in focus (sharing for instance) and doesn't take context, including technologies or globalization as context, seriously, will always be narrowing the scope and lose sight of important evolutions that change the meaning. In line with Jan Blommaert (2005), I see discourse as 'all forms of meaningful semiotic human activity seen in connection with social, cultural and historical patterns and developments of use'. Such an ethnographic perspective on discourse sees discourse as intrinsically tied to context and human behaviour. But I think we need to even expand this definition (see Maly, 2022 for a more in-depth argument): in post-digital societies; we also need to include 'non-human' activity. As a lot of our communication is now mediated in one way or another, it is important to take on board the role of non-human activity in meaning-making processes. Features of digital media and the algorithms of digital media are, as we have seen in this chapter, an essential part of many mediatized interactions and are thus also intrinsically part of the meaning-making processes. To be able to say something about the political impact of memes, we have to realize that this meaning is at least partially connected to the spread of memes in the digital economy and the hybrid media system in general. Pepe acquired its full political potential because it was spread not only by trolls and anons on 4Chan, but also by the presidential candidates and by mass media. Meaning-making in a digital context is inherently connected to the popularity principle (van Dijck, 2013) that is engrained in the algorithms of the platforms (Maly, 2021) and in the attention economy in general (Venturini, 2019).

A digital ethnographic approach to discourse analysis allows researchers to include all those aspects of meaning-making. This approach is first and foremost grounded in ethnography and thus has its roots in anthropology (Blommaert & Dong, 2020). Ethnography is 'continuous with ordinary life', said Hymes (1996: 13). By this he meant that ethnographers seek to find out knowledge that others already have. 'Ethnography typically looks for the meaning and rationality in practices that seem strange from afar or at first' (Rampton, Maybin & Celia Roberts, 2014). Ethnographers are thus looking to learn the meanings, norms and patterns of a way of life. This book is an example of that approach, in which I used ethnography to understand the language and knowledge that new right groups share. I entered that field in 2015 when I prepared for my Digital Media and Politics classes. In search for a topic that a very international student population had at least some information about, I started looking at the US elections, and eventually the Trump campaign in particular. The United States was my first focus, and the killing spree of Dylann Roof made me aware of far-right sites like Council of Conservative Citizens, American Renaissance, InfoWars and the Alternative Right. The first steps in that field in 2015 were overwhelming. Most sites like

the Right Stuff or the Daily Stormer and their memes were incomprehensible when I first started to follow them. They were written in English, but in an English that rarely made sense to me at that time. I had to learn what red pilling, black pilling, cucks and normies actually were. But also what a word like identity or community actually means in their discourses. At the time, there were no dictionaries to do that, I had to learn it the hard way, by observing how people used the words in context. This is where my ethnographic background and my previous work on Flemish nationalism paid off. Even though I at first did not understand certain particular words, my work on the anti-Enlightenment tradition allowed me to historicize these particular narratives. Learning the language is a *condition sine qua non* in ethnographic research. The sites where my fieldwork took place may not resemble the fields where Malinowski and Boas were active, the general principle of ethnography as deep immersion in the cultural life of specific groups is the same. Ethnography allows researchers to come to 'grips with local meanings and emergent configurations' (Hymes, 1996: XI). To a certain extent this approach is similar to Griffin's empathetic approach to study fascism. In this approach, he attempts 'to understand the movement on its own terms', 'to grasp how people saw' the world and address '[their] perceptions of life and their hopes for the future' (Griffin, 2001). In an ethnographic approach, this would mean that the ethnographer tries to uncover the knowledge that members of a group seem to 'expect', find 'natural' or 'normal'. Each of us, said Hymes (1996: XI), 'speaks (and writes) in a context of understandings and taken-for-granted conventions, a network of implication and form. And it matters to do these right, observation, asking, comparison, are needed, in short ethnography'. From such an ethnographic perspective, understanding life on their own terms would not necessarily mean 'asking for knowledge'. On the contrary, the type of knowledge ethnographers are interested in doesn't situate itself on the explicit level. Social structure and culture function mostly as implicit knowledge. It is to be found in the presuppositions that members of a group seem to share. Understanding and being able to theoretically describe the logic of those groups in relation to the context is probably the most central ethnographic quest.

Observation and participation together with interviews and fieldwork have traditionally been associated with 'doing ethnography', but those methods alone don't make research ethnographic. In an ethnographic approach, interviews do not necessarily result in knowledge, but in data that needs to be analysed. The reasons for this are multiple. First, one cannot expect that people are conscience about everything that drives them in life and organizes their behaviour and discourse. 'People are not cultural or linguistic catalogues, and most of what we see as their cultural and social behaviour is performed without reflecting on it and without an active awareness that this is actually something they do' (Blommaert & Dong, 2020: 3). The interview

from an ethnographic perspective is not a reflection of what is out there, but can only be studied as 'an interpretation which is jointly produced by interviewer and respondent' (Briggs, 1986: 3). Second, especially in the context of politics, we should understand that interviews for politicians or activists are the essence of their political or metapolitical battle. We cannot expect them to allow us in their kitchen and read the recipes. We can only analyse what has been put out there, and even when politicians or activists explicitly talk about their goals, plans and recipes, we should not treat that as knowledge but as data that needs to be analysed.

Ethnographic knowledge is thus always inter-subjective knowledge. It is the result of a process and is co-constructed by all participants in that process. The ethnographer is an essential part of the knowledge production. The biases and preferences but also knowledge of the ethnographer all affect the research he or she is doing. From the focus to the data collection, the coding and the highlighting are all testimonies of the presence of the ethnographer in the construction of knowledge. It is the ethnographer as a person who goes in the field and is thus part of the interview, part of the observation and thus also very much an inherent part of the process of knowledge making. Self-reflection and awareness of one's own biases is of the utmost importance, as is being meticulous in analysing one's role in the knowledge making process. The struggle to understand words, the first shock when registering certain outrageous talk, is all part of the 'learning process'. It is as a human that one becomes acquainted with new normativities. Ethnography is

> Open-ended, subject to self-correction during the process of inquiry itself. All this is not to say that ethnography is open- minded to the extent of being empty-minded, that ignorance and naivete are wanted. The more the ethnographer knows on entering the field, the better the result is likely to be.
>
> *(Hymes, 1996: 7)*

Two lessons follow from this:

1. First, ethnography starts long before entering the field with the gathering of knowledge but also with the socialization of the researcher. In this pre-fieldwork phase, the researcher gathers as much information as possible on the field and the larger context. The better one is prepared, the better the end result will be.
2. Second, researchers should be prepared to reconsider their initial framework. Ethnographic research is dialectical, based on a feedback loop or an interactive-adaptive method usually referred to as ethnographic monitoring (Van der Aa & Blommaert, 2015). Self-reflection is a key ingredient of good ethnographic work (Pink et al., 2016).

Ethnography in this anthropological tradition is clearly more than fieldwork or a complex of fieldwork techniques: it is part of a total programme of scientific description and interpretation, comprising not only technical and methodical aspects but also a specific epistemology and ontology (Hymes, 1996; Varis 2016; Blommaert & Dong, 2020). Central is humanism. Ethnography starts from a perspective on man as a social being, a being that uses and invests in language. Even more, it is through language that people make culture, communities and societies, and are at the same time made by those communities and cultures. This anthropological view on humankind almost necessarily captures language in a *functionalist epistemology*: language is the thing that people use to become social beings (Blommaert & Dong, 2020: 7). This functionalist background has fundamental ontological consequences on how ethnographers see language. Language is first and foremost understood in terms of 'communication', the language that people use makes them into social beings. Language is understood as one of the main tools by which people make sense of the world around them and construct that world around them. Language is the architecture of society. If an ethnographic approach is grounded in accurate knowledge of the meanings of behaviours, discourses and institutions to those who participate in the groups that are studied, it means almost necessarily that *language-use-in-society* is at heart of the matter. Language, and more specifically discourse as I described it above, is the way in for ethnographers. It is in and through language that normality and thus also culture and society is constructed on a daily basis. As I highlighted above, digitalization has allowed users to use resources from different corners of the world, to make sense locally and maybe also translocally. That is why the idea of studying 'language in society' is so complex in a post-digital society; it forces us to take globalization as context. Adopting a chronotopic perspective on context also means that the emphasis in this approach is on the relation between language and culture, and this starts with data: the things actually people do in society, how they use language to make sense and use language and knowledge of norms to keep themselves afloat in that society.

Context revisited, once more

Language in the abstract is not important in this ethnographic approach, but language as it is used by people (and machines). Language is a tool by which people can stay integrated or create a group. This ontology sees language use, or in Hymes' words, communicative competence, as socially consequential for humans (Blommaert, 2018a: 4). If one does not know how to communicate in a certain situation, one has a high chance of not being accepted in that group, of becoming or being seen and treated as an outsider (Becker, 1963). Knowledge of norms, including norms about language use in the broadest sense of the word (such as posting the right memes, websites,

and using the right words), is thus always connected to power, and breaking rules has powerful effects. Language in this sense is the glue of social groups. A good example would be the function of neo-racism in the construction of communities of new racists.

This sociocultural view also means that language, from an ethnographic perspective, can never be 'context-less.' As we have seen when we discussed chronotopes, context is not something 'outside' language; it is an inherent part of language and meaning-making (Gumperz, 1982). Context is not the stable *a priori* world that we can use as a pre-defined décor in which we place our object of analysis. On the contrary, context is dynamic, unstable and constantly made and remade in and through language (see Blommaert, 2018a for more information). Context is intrinsically connected and interwoven in our data. Ethnography belongs to the paradigm of 'conjectural' sciences, in which small indices of phenomena are seen and analysed as instances of their structural characteristics (Diggit, 2020).

Contextualization has always been a central aspect of ethnographic research, but in the context of contemporary societies, ethnographers are confronted by 'new types of issues related to contextualisation' (Varis, 2016). The technological properties of the online world (persistence, searchability, replicability, scalability, algorithmically constructed reality) shape online interactions (boyd, 2014) and are part of contemporary meaning-making processes. Digital media are, as I have argued above, not just intermediaries, but mediators. They (partially) shape or direct the performance of social acts (van Dijck, 2013: 29) as people adapt their behaviour and communication to keep integrated into this new context. Digital media not only affords discourse production, but it also directs discursive behaviour: certain digital affordances request, encourage and push users towards 'particular communicative and interactive practices by means of quantified processes' (Georgakopoulou, Iversen & Stage, 2020: 24). Digital media and especially the algorithms, or at least our imagination of what algorithms do, is an inherent part of 'meaning making'. Liking, retweeting, sharing, and editing are now not only enabling but also shaping (new forms of political) communication (Maly, 2018a, 2018d, 2018e), offline social action (Blommaert & Maly, 2019), political organizing (Gerbaudo, 2014), and affective attachment (Papacharissi, 2015). Digital media force everyone who studies (meta)political discourse (online) 'to rethink our very definitions of terms such as text, context, interaction and power' (Jones et al., 2015: 5) and their methodological approaches (Crosset, Tanner, & Campana, 2019; Maly, 2022a).

If we include digital media as actors and context, then we also understand that communicative competence is not only about linguistic or even semiotic practices, it also includes algorithmic imagination (Bucher, 2018) or algorithmic knowledge (Maly, 2018, 2019) and stylization of the post in relation to algorithmic circulation (Glotfelter, 2019), and thus algorithmic audiences

(Gallagher, 2017). Brenton Tarrant not only used different linguistic and semiotic means and modes to communicate his message to politicians, mass media and online anons, but he also imagined different roles of those audiences to give meaning to his act. Even more, he also was very much conscious about the role of media themselves. The fact that he uploaded his manifesto on different servers shows that he didn't conceive digital media as neutral intermediaries. He considered the possible algorithmic or human interventions that could have halted the uptake of his message. The same digital literacy speaks from his call to the anons to repackage his message in memes. Contemporary digital political activism is thus also about 'digital literacies and strategies to determine how algorithms work in different environments (...) and making pragmatic inferences regarding their workings' (Varis & Hou, 2019). Consequently, digital activist practices should be studied as sociotechnical assemblages (Chadwick, 2017: 110–111) or assemblages of actions, discourse, and tools 'associated with digital technologies, which have come to be recognized by specific groups of people as ways of attaining particular (. . .) goals' (Jones et al., 2015: 3).

Once we take on board the ethnographic notion of contextualization and accept the idea that discourse is contextualized language, 'we shall', as Blommaert argued decades ago, 'be forced to deploy concepts of considerable elasticity, adaptable to new data and new forms of analysis which will be forced upon us' (Blommaert, 2005: 235). Contextualization in a post-digital society proves Blommaert's point. Context today refers not only to 'specific historical contexts and processes within which, and by means of which they (symbolic forms) are produced, transmitted and received' (Thompson, 1990: 145), but also to the technologies in themselves (Varis & Hou, 2019). In light of the affordances of social media, user-generated platforms and web 2.0 in general, the focus on reception, reproduction and on the affordances of digital media is more important than ever. Digital affordances not only refer to the technical capabilities of a platform but also to the action-taking possibilities and meaning-making opportunities (Vatrapu, 2009; boyd, 2014) that they enable. If we take the digital context into account, we realize that contemporary digital activism is not only about producing discourse in the (passive) hope that it will circulate and get picked up. It is also very much about actively organizing uptake within the digital environments. Activists and politicians have always invested in 'uptake', but that has been limited to the stylization of their message in the hope mass media would reproduce it (see, for instance, Silverstein's 2003 discussion of the Gettysburg Address and the communication of George Bush, Jr.). Today, political communication is as much about talking to humans as it is about talking to, understanding, and using algorithms of particular interfaces to construct messages. It is about preparing discourse in relation to 'algorithmic circulation' (Glotfelter, 2019) and 'algorithmic audiences' (Gallagher, 2017) in order to reach their communication goals.

Context and contextualization, in post-digital societies, benefit from a focus on participants, actions and the situated and evolving effects of those interactions (Blommaert, Smits, & Yacoubi 2020). Context is created in those interactions between people and machines. It is again important to stress here that in those small interactions, we can see the big structural changes in society. As we have seen in the example of the meme (and will see throughout the different cases in this book): the global is very much present in the local. In the hope of overcoming some of these challenges, and contributing to the development of new ethnographic methods and practices, I combine two research approaches here: long-term digital ethnography and ethnographic case studies.

Digital ethnography

This project is first and foremost a long-term digital ethnographic project; the foundation is made up of the daily observation of many different online new right media across different platforms over the last seven years. This book and the many articles that were published in this project were based on very concrete cases (think of the killing spree of Dylann Roof and Brenton Tarrant or the Gravensteen protest of Schild & Vrienden), but those cases were accompanied or are embedded in that long-term digital ethnographic project.

Long-term digital ethnography

For over seven years, I observed the global new right as if I was a far-right militant myself. I followed key far-right figures, movements, politicians and intellectuals on a very broad range of media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Telegram, Gab and Parler. I subscribed to newsletters, checked the websites of those organizations and read the books of their intellectuals. When some of them shared a post from another profile or organization, I started following and read up on that profile too. This type of passive participant observation is of course different from more traditional fieldwork.

1 First of all, contrary to traditional ethnography, in this digital project participation is 'passive' and digital. Concretely, it means that my participation was mostly not visible to the other members. Only admins of pages could see my subscription.
2 Second, as a researcher of the far-right, it is important not to contribute to racism, incitements to violence and contribution to the project. Therefore I choose to never be active in chat groups. I didn't post on their walls, nor did I ever share messages of those actors or pages. I tried, at all costs, to keep my interaction to an absolute minimum in order not to enhance their reach. The participation was at best limited to 'algorithmic defined reach' of posts.

3 Third, and contrary to other scholars of the far-right (see for instance Tebaldi, 2022a), I did subscribe to channels and newsletters, and bought books. Ethically, this was a difficult decision as subscriptions contribute to the spread and monetization that allows for this metapolitical activist success. This was a catch-22 situation, but considering my focus on contemporary metapolitical projects as socio-technical assemblages, I was forced to understand the impact of their interactions with digital media and thus be confronted with how my subscription reshaped the digital ecology in which I was doing research.
4 Fourth, and contrary to classic ethnographic participant observation, I never aspired nor considered acting as a normal member of the group. This has the effect that I only analysed public data that was produced for uptake and circulation. Especially from the perspective of my focus on metapolitics, this didn't cause any problems. My interest was first and foremost on the circulation and effects of that ideological battle and I didn't focus on the intentions. The only exceptions to that rule were when mass media asked me to analyse data that they collected. This data was used in most part for triangulation.

The immersion in the transnational new right network let me understand it as a *consumer* of metapolitical messages. This meant that I had to understand it as a global network: the memes that I saw being used in the United States very soon arrived in Flanders where they were adapted for local use. I also saw that Flemish activists liked activists in Sweden and the United States and vice versa. As a result of such network effects, I also learned to know new influencers and sites that I then also started to follow. This digital snowball method allowed me and forced me to abandon any methodological nationalism. Restricting myself to a local, national context would have meant that I would deliberately change the layered and transnational meaning of actions and discourses and actively disregard the global dimension, and thus their history of use and abuse. It was this participant observation that also allowed me to understand the differences and similarities between the alt-right and alt-light, the American and the European new right, but also why neo-Nazi is maybe not the most precise term to describe the metapolitization of the far-right.

During this daily long-term observation, I thus behaved as a regular user grounded in Flanders, Belgium. It is from this very specific place in the world that I observed this global network of far-right movements, intellectuals, websites, publishers and think tanks taking shape. In practice, this means that I tried to keep updated on the actions and posts of local movements like Schild and Vrienden, and follow more globally relevant influencers and movements. In the United States, I started following alt-light media like Breitbart and Milo, but from June 2015 onwards I emerged myself in different alt-right

groups and pages. Day by day, I followed more and more figures on social media, reading the materials of key organizations like Counter-Currents, american Renaissance, the National Policy Institute, The Daily Stormer and the Right Stuff. As a result of rapid changes in this field, following those big actors meant multiple journeys across different media through time. To give some examples: whereas in 2017 altright.com was a vibrant and constantly updated platform, it is now a deserted site only interesting as a look into the history of the alt-right. At one time, the Instagram account of Schild & Vrienden had a huge following of around 50,000 followers, but after the movement was deleted, the backup account only managed to gather around 3,500 followers and is mostly inactive. The Telegram page of the group is now the heart of the activity and of course the YouTube channel Kies Dries. At the same time, we see that certain platforms are stable producers of metapolitical content. Think about Counter-Currents, American Renaissance and Brittany Pettibone on YouTube. Others, like the Golden One, are constantly and cleverly navigating between different platforms, adjusting content in order to stay integrated into the digital ecology of mainstream platforms.

Historicities: intertextuality and entextualization

Analysing discourse cannot be limited to a focus on the actions or the relation to the platforms they use: in the fields of politics, actions can only be understood in their historic context. Understanding relations between groups, intellectuals and activists through time is of great importance. It allows us to be far more precise in assessing the positions and meanings of discourse, and it also allows us to uncover more hidden layers of meaning. Memes or vlogs may be new formats, and new contexts all play a role in meaning-making, but at the same time, intertextuality gives depth to our analysis. Intertextuality refers to the fact that all communication has a history and this history sticks to the utterance (Blommaert, 2005). It is the concept of intertextuality that allows us to interpret contemporary discourse in a long tradition of speaking. In research on metapolitics, and politics and ideology in general, a focus on intertextuality is of crucial importance. In contemporary discourse, we can see not only the local and the global but also different historicities: *the longue durée*, or the structural time, the conjunctural time and the short or eventual time (Braudel, 1980) are fused in one. Contemporary new right discourses are not entirely new, they are synchronizations of different historicities in one. It thus is important to analyse how contemporary discourse exists in the synchronization of different voices from different historicities.

When we discuss metapolitics, we cannot discuss the structural time of what Sternhell (2010) calls the anti-Enlightenment tradition: the two-century long intellectual, cultural and political movement starting with Vico

Giambattista, Edmund Burke and Johann Gottfried Herder fighting for a second modernity and against the legacy of the French Enlightenment, rationalism, democracy, individualism and universal rights. This anti-Enlightenment tradition became the 'dominant ideology' – in the form of the so-called conservative revolution – during the Weimar Republic (Sternhell, 2010: 316). *La Nouvelle Droite* is not only influenced by the intellectual tradition of the conservative revolution and traditionalists like Julius Evola, and especially Guillaume Faye, for instance, takes on board key ideas of the technology embracing intellectuals within the conservative revolution, labelled by Jeffrey Herf as reactionary modernism (Herf, 1984). *La Nouvelle Droite,* Faye and De Benoist in particular have had a huge impact on contemporary far-right political discourse (Griffin, 2008; Bar-On, 2013). *La Nouvelle Droite* became a pan-European phenomenon with local and more transnationally operating intellectuals like Robert Steuckers, Pierre Krebs, Marco Tarchi, and Tomislav Sunic, who influenced local activists, intellectuals and politicians. *La Nouvelle Droite* was 'at the very least a European school of thought' and 'its influence in Germany and Italy is at least equal to that which it has had in France' (Camus & Lebourg, 2017: 125). This European new right manifested itself in journals, magazines and websites directed at many different national audiences (Tekos in Belgium, Tragressioni & Futuro Presente in Italy, Junge Freiheit in Germany, Zur Zeit in Austria, Disenso in Argentina, Maiastra in Romania, Hersperides in Spain). All these centres of metapolitical production were influenced not only by the local context but also have had translocal impact. This metapolitical impact was not limited to the contemporary time, it has created a lasting network of actors, centres of metapolitical production and of course also a long-term impact. This is the conjunctural time that speaks through contemporary metapolitics.

Intertextuality in the contemporary time allows me to focus on the explicit and implicit intertextuality between Herder, Burke, Spengler, Evola, Schmitt, Alain de Benoist, and Guillaume Faye's work and the discourse of contemporary alt-right and identitarian activists, and different influencers, activists and terrorists around the world. It is in this intertextuality that we see not only the global new right emerging as a polycentric, transnational niche but also see how the global new right manifests itself locally. Taking intertextuality and thus the histories of texts seriously is the best remedy against methodological nationalism. A focus on intertextuality forces researchers to take context seriously and thus to see how context functions as a resource to be deployed in metapolitical battles. This brings me to the importance of entextualization. With entextualization, following Blommaert (2005) and Silverstein and Urban (1996), I refer to the processes of decontextualization and recontextualization of discourses. Following Jones, social media platforms are 'technologies of entextualisation' (Jones, 2015: 35). I understand technologies of entextualization as technologies that facilitate the process of turning

actions into 'text' and at the same time also facilitate the recontextualizing of those actions. Interestingly, the algorithmic nature of social media platforms means that not only humans entextualize but also algorithms. Through datafication and algorithms, the platforms themselves turn activities into 'text' that is presented to users of the platform (Maly, 2022a). Re-entextualization and technologies of re-entextualization are crucial to understanding, for instance, the uptake of Faye's work, the meme culture of the Alt-right and the highly mediatized actions of the French Identitarians. Uptake through digital media generates (new) meanings in new contexts. The importance of a focus on re-entextualization is for instance illustrated in the uptake of Faye's conceptualization of metapolitics in the United States, where the activists seem to read over his anti-Americanism. But even more, the *re-entextualization* of his ideas happened within a digital culture, that is a socio-technical culture, where the technical affordances ask for audience labour (in terms of influencer culture and share, likes and comments) to let ideas circulate. It is at this point that an action-centred case study method comes in handy.

The case method and live digital ethnography

In an ethnographic approach, a case method is understood as 'a methodology in which one uses case analyses to demonstrate theory' (Blommaert & Dong, 2020). A case study is thus not just a description of an event or an incident, it is used to make one or more theoretical claims. The case is theorized into 'a case of something'. An ethnographic case is used because it is theoretically 'telling' (Rampton, Maybin & Roberts, 2014). Rather than presenting typical cases, ethnographers use 'the particular circumstances surrounding a case… to make previously obscure theoretical relationships suddenly apparent' (Mitchell 1984: 239 quoted in Rampton, Maybin & Roberts, 2014). The case allows ethnographers to not only go into the details but also to show how the local and the big are connected, how structures influence meaning and how the case deepens theoretical understanding.

In a case study approach, researchers can focus on the details of the actions and their effects in their social, economic, political and technological context. 'It allows us to look not only how discursive events are staged and recorded IRL with the deliberate purpose of online dissemination' (Önnerfors, 2021: 179), but also at the uptake and interactions it generates online and offline. Thompson (2020) directs our attention to the fact that communication and thus inter*action* within the hybrid media system 'is dialogical in character; and unlike mediated interaction (e.g. telephone conversations), it is oriented towards a multiplicity of other recipients – it is many-to-many rather than one-to-one.' While in theory, it is correct that the affordances of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and TikTok allow for interaction with a multiplicity of other recipients, in practice this is far from evident. Reaching a multiplicity of users requires careful algorithmic

work (Maly, 2018a, 2018b, 2019, 2020, 2021). As I argued in previous work (see Maly, 2022a for an in-depth methodological discussion), on the public pages (even those with strict privacy settings) there is no linear communication between sender and receivers, only indirect communication in an algorithmic and datafied environment. All online interaction on the walls and newsfeeds of social media platforms is turned into online quantified data, and on the basis of the current and previous interactions, algorithms will decide what becomes visible to whom, when, where, how and for how long or how many times. Some media will even make strong suggestions on what to post or write. Take the example of Facebook suggesting commemorative posts to users, or actively adding emoticons to certain words like 'congrats' in comments. These are all indexes of the agency of algorithms and of the fact that each public social media post first interacts with the algorithms and databases of the platform, and thus with non-human receivers, before 'humans' can interact with them (see Figure 1.4). It is those algorithms – on the basis of different goals, norms, and ideologies that are programmed in them – and the database those algorithms use, that decide what is worthy to be visible in

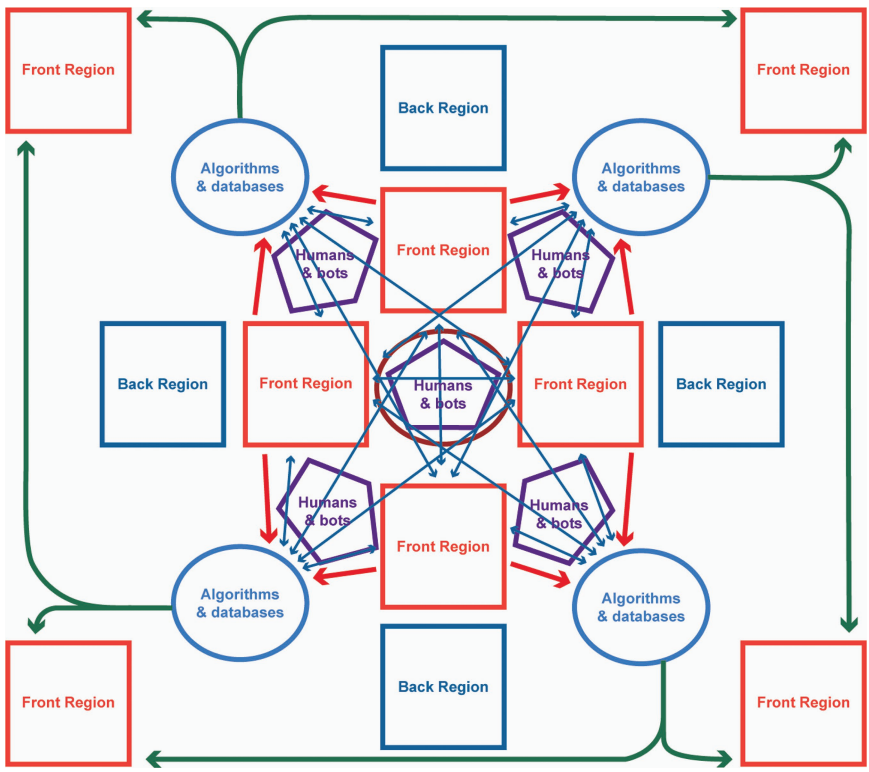

FIGURE 1.4 Mediated online interaction.

Source: Ico Maly (2022a).

the timelines of others. It is thus only after the algorithmic intervention that other humans will be able to see and interact with the post. Algorithms and databases are an essential part of mediated online interaction.

Interactions matter. They are not only part of the context, but they also contribute to the uptake of messages. These interactions are mediated and datafied in relation to algorithms. Interactions in terms of upvoting, liking, sharing and commenting thus not only directly contribute to meaning production, but they also do it indirectly by triggering algorithms who help push it throughout the media system where it reaches new audiences stretched over time and space (Maly, 2018, 2022a, Maly & Beekmans, 2018; Blommaert, 2020a;). These interactions create visibility and attribute meaning as dominant through media ideologies that tend to equate popularity with important, relevant signs of the people. Detailed and fine-grained attention to these processes allows us to avoid the fallacy of internalism. This fallacy is quite common in far-right online research that seems to suggest that uptake is an effect of the input text (Önnerfors, 2021).

In this book, I use two types of case studies in the hope of contributing to the existing methodologies and focus on the role of this socio-technical assemblage in meaning-making. The first type focusses on digital practices and cultures of one actor or a group of actors. The focus is on how far-right influencers try to integrate themselves and stay integrated in digital environments. The second type of case study focusses on events in real-time. These last case studies zoom in on how activists and movements use different media and their speed of interaction to steer the information flows.

The long-term case studies – like the analysis of Brittany Pettibone, The Golden One and Generation Identity – allow me to show how such metapolitical influencers use digital platforms for metapolitical battles. The cases that I analyse in this book are chosen from a theoretical perspective. They allow me to highlight not only the intertextual tradition in which their discourses fit but also the practices and cultures they adopt in service of their metapolitical battle. These types of case studies were long-term data-driven ethnographic studies. The focus was limited to the influencers and their media use from a perspective that saw their activities as socio-technical assemblages. The limited scope of the field allowed me to go in-depth, and to collect as much information as possible. The case on Pettibone for instance is based on data collection through long-term observation between 2017 and 2020 of Pettibone's YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram accounts and her book 'What Makes Us Girls'. The case on The Golden One also started with an observation. Close observations started in 2018 when I saw that many of the Flemish identitarians started to follow him. These observations were accompanied by the use of the digital archives of Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram and digital tools like Social Blade, TwitterTrails, and the Wayback machine. My analysis not only focuses on the discourse but also on the interaction

between metapolitical influencer practices, digital technologies, and digital culture in order to generate uptake.

The second type of case study can be labelled as 'live ethnography.' Chadwick (2017: 71) introduces this methodological approach to describe 'close, real-time, observation and logging of a wide range of newspaper, broadcast and online material, including citizen opinion expressed and coordinated through online social network sites'. This 'live ethnography' builds further on the notion of 'live research' from Elmer (2013: 21), who stresses the need for such a 'research paradigm' in order to 'take into consideration the speed of communication'. This focus on speed is connected to the affordances of digital media that allow actors to quickly intervene in the public debate and have an impact on the information cycles. These affordances, as Chadwick (2017) has argued, have created a shift in mediated temporalities and enabled a move from the news cycle paradigm to a digital media-enabled 'political information' cycle. The reason why I have adopted this approach is to try to understand how activists try to 'game' algorithms of platforms in order to gain visibility. Time is a crucial element in order to achieve visibility. The speed of interaction and the forms of interaction can thus be analysed from an algorithmic knowledge perspective.

The case of Schild & Vrienden is an example of such a live ethnography. It was based on two days (March 8 & 9, 2019) of intensive observation of activist interaction on the second post of the video of the intervention of Schild & Vrienden at the Gravensteen Castle on their Facebook page. I monitored, collected, and eventually analysed likes, interactions and shares from a perspective of (media-) ideologies and digital literacy of the activists, and thus as an inherent ingredient of their metapolitical activism. Speed is important here, as it is the speed of interacting and sharing that triggers the Facebook algorithms and helps in constructing 'virality' (Maly & Beekmans, 2018). My approach to digital 'live ethnography' differs from Chadwick (2017) and Elmer (2013) as it is grounded in a different notion of 'context'. Elmer's live research for instance is based first and foremost on a quantitative notion of context that equals 'the context of a tweet' with the time it was posted (Elmer, 2013: 23). I understand, as already indicated above, the context in a digital ethnographic tradition. As a result of this approach, I do not use digital extraction tools but engage in the centuries-old ethnographic notion of observation in combination with screenshotting and 'following the social' (Latour, quoted in Crosset, Tanner, & Campana, 2019: 3). The result was a substantial collection of 289 screenshots that not only carefully mapped the rise in likes, shares and comments, but also mapped the different users interacting with the post, their comments and strategies that completely decontextualize data (see Crosset, Tanner, & Campana, 2019 for such an approach).

The analysis of the Groyper Trolls is another example of such a live ethnographic approach. This case study was the result of my long-term ethnographic engagement with different far-right groups in the United States. Nick Fuentes's YouTube show 'America First' had been popping up regularly on my radar in the months before the actual show I analyse in this book. One night, as a result of following him on Twitter, I was notified on 30 October 2019 that he would be streaming his live reaction to Charlie Kirk's tour stop-in on DLive. In particular, the reaction to the post from Digital 5.1 Groyper claiming, 'we are coming big boy', triggered my attention. Once logged in, I noticed the substantial uptake of Fuentes' message, and of course, Fuentes' excitement about what was about to happen, was the signal to drop everything and start following the stream, what happened on Twitter and on YouTube, and collect data in the form of screenshots.

This last case makes obvious that the digital ethnographer is confronted with the fact that the ethnographic field in the 21st century is a highly stretchable concept as it is in essence a polycentric, transnational, and layered field (Blommaert, 2010; Maly & Varis, 2016) spanning large distances and timezones. Following Fuentes and his Groypers from Flanders meant night work. Continuous real-time observation of local activism may, 'as a result of the disembodied translocal nature of digital environments (…) be impossible simply for practical reasons' (Varis & Hou, 2019: 14). Also, the field is so vast and it changes so rapidly, that it is impossible for one ethnographer to be on top of everything. And of course, we should realize that digital technologies enable multi-situated use of communicative tools that are more or less accessible to the ethnographer. What happens in the front and the back region is not necessarily all 'observable'. It was implicitly clear that the offline interventions of the Groyper trolls were planned before the show through means not accessible to me. It is also known that Schild & Vrienden organized itself in different closed Facebook and Discord groups (Pano, 2018), and I didn't have access to these groups. Data collection was thus partial, but as Blommaert and Dong (2020) stress, this has probably always been the case, also in the observation of offline activism.

I try to address those issues in three ways. First of all, I use the affordances of digital media (like time stamps, seeing when one has edited, analysing comments…) to partially remedy these shortcomings. Second, I only focus on publicly available data. What is analysed is the 'front region', or in other words, the activism that was prepared for uptake and visibility: the activism that was stylized, planned, formatted, and discursively constructed as 'ready for impact'. In that public communication, I had detailed attention to indexes of publicly organizing of uptake. The post above from the Groyper of course indexes the organization of uptake and activism. Third, and this is where the long-term digital ethnography pays off, the digital data produced by activists of Schild & Vrienden or the Groypers, was complemented

with the observations I made in the last years. My data, even in cases of live ethnography, is thus not only limited to the short time frame of the live ethnography, but also includes publicly accessible posts during the last years, broader cultural content, fieldnotes, interviews, and mass media attention to the movement.

It should be clear that my approach yields a different type of data than a big data approach (See for instance Rogers, 2018, 2021). Big data approaches allow us to see networks, connections between members and large-scale evolutions. An ethnographic approach focusses on the meaning and the depth of the networks by analysing how people network, and how ideas travel and morph through networks. The difference between such big data approaches and an ethnographic approach starts at the beginning of the research project. Whereas big data research, or multimethod research, usually starts by decontextualizing data through technological means, an ethnographic approach tries to capture the meaning-making process in context. Of course, screenshots also decontextualize data, but they are still a very rich way of capturing data: We can capture the interface, the order or interactions, the images, gifs and videos, the interactions themselves, the timestamps and so on. Even more, just like in traditional ethnography, screenshotting is done together with the practice of taking field notes and following the action on multiple platforms. As a result of this method, data can be analysed as ethnographic data (see Blommaert, 2018a: 113–119, for a useful discussion): as linguistic utterances in a certain social, technological, historical, and political context. This political communication is analysed on three axes: the past (or more concretely the modes of production, available resources and goals, media ideologies, and digital literacy), the now (the placement of the message in certain digital environments and how that message interacts with messages of others), and the future (how one designs the message for uptake) (Blommaert & Maly, 2016). By analysing the posts and the interactions on these axes, the ethnographer can acquire insights into their competences, resources, and (media) ideologies, how they want to be perceived, and how they envision their audiences. Analysing these data as 'ethnographic data' also means that I analyse one case of far-right metapolitics in its historical context, and thus vis-à-vis other producers of discourse.

The case studies can thus not be dissociated from the long-term ethnographic focus and are used as digital 'ethnographic key incidents' (Kroon & Sturm, 2007: 100–101). The ethnographic key incident approach involves the analysis of all kinds of qualitative data (fieldnotes, observations, and in this case also screenshots) and analysing them as texts-in-context and thus 'linking them to other incidents, phenomena, and theoretical constructs and writing it up so that others see the generic in the particular, the universal in the concrete, the relation between the part and the whole' (Erickson, 1977, as cited in Wilcox, 1980: 9). It is this long-term digital ethnographic research

and its 'trans-local' aspect that allows me to contextualize the data in its broader historical, societal, political, and technological context and thus to provide a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973), that is, to describe and analyse the activism as a political-techno-cultural and historical phenomenon.

This case study approach allows me to go deep into one case and highlight the different scales and dimensions of sociocultural processes of contemporary political local and digital activism. What is lost in 'completeness' of data collection is won in the contextual richness of the data. Both types of case studies complement each other and are connected to long-term digital ethnographic observations and other historical data on new right movements in Flanders and the world. I have already sketched one reason for this broad range of data above, namely the importance of understanding language in its historical, social, and technological context. Another reason is that in a hybrid media system, we should understand the dialectical relation between digital-niched media and mainstream media. Meaning is to be found in this complex discursive interdependence between different actors, media and mediators. The ethnographic notion of context that I introduced above has a profound effect on my ethnographic approach and on the data themselves. It is here that we see the importance of the ontology and epistemology of ethnography in the study of contemporary activism that 'situates language in a web of relations of power, a dynamics of availability and accessibility, a situatedness of single acts vis-à-vis larger social and historical patterns' (Blommaert, 2018a: 5).

Note

1 https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/pepe-the-frog

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2

THE BIRTH OF METAPOLITICS 2.0

Metapolitics is back. In the 21st century, the concept of metapolitics has been taken up by new right and identitarian movements and activists in the United States and Europe (Hawley, 2017; Maly, 2018a, 2019a; Zienkowski, 2019; Tebaldi, 2022a). Several key figures (Kirkpatrick 2014; Friberg, 2015, 2017; Spencer, 2017b) of the alt-right in the United States and the identitarian movements in Europe (Sellner, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d; The Golden One, 2019) argue that metapolitics is at the heart of their battle for the construction of a future society. Their metapolitics is on the one hand inspired by *La Nouvelle Droite*, and on the other hand, it is clearly very different. Alain de Benoist and even Guillaume Faye would struggle grasping the metapolitical role of Pepe the Frog, Groyper riots or the performances of The Golden One. The contemporary metapolitical battle occurs in a post-digital world (Cramer, 2014), and this new world shapes contemporary metapolitics. In this chapter, I want to focus not only on the historical concept of metapolitics, but also show how a new, post-digital metapolitics has been created: a metapolitics 2.0.

I will first discuss the ideological dimensions of metapolitics. Metapolitics isn't about a generic cultural battle of ideas, it is very much about the ideas themselves. Metapolitics cannot be discussed without highlighting the ideas that new right intellectuals and activists want to normalize. New right metapolitics is about the re-invention of an old ideological tradition. I will argue that the French new right and the contemporary re-emergence of the global new right is the post-WWII manifestation of the anti-Enlightenment tradition (Sternhell, 2010). After this historical detour, I will zoom in on how Guillaume Faye's critique of *La Nouvelle Droite* has not only redefined

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metapolitics but also allowed its radical uptake by identitarians and the alt-right in the United States.

Metapolitics, the new right and the anti-Enlightenment tradition

The idea of right-wing metapolitics, as we saw in the introduction, goes back to the 20th century, to GRECE (*Groupement de Recherche et d'Etudes pour la Civilisation Européenne*), the 'school of thought' led by Alain de Benoist and better known as *La Nouvelle Droite* (Bar-On, 2007, 2013). In his influential and praised work, view from the right, Alain de Benoist saw metapolitics as part of a project to reinvigorate 'the right', the true right. Already in the introduction, de Benoist argued that

> One of the tragedies of the right (…) is its inability to comprehend the necessity of the long term. (…) it has not grasped the significance of Gramsci. It has not seen how cultural power threatens the apparatus of the state.
>
> *(de Benoist, 2017: 7)*

If the right, after the collapse of fascism, wants to be of significance again, it should according to him focus on 'creating the general climate' metapolitically (de Benoist, 2017: 7).

Metapolitics 1.0: lessons from the left?

GRECE's first official seminar in November 1968 focused on the question, 'What is metapolitics?' (Bar-On, 2007: 35). Even though most seem to focus on Gramsci's legacy in this new right metapolitics, it is interesting to note that Gramsci himself never used the term 'metapolitics'. According to Viereck, the term was first used by Constantin Frantz, a prominent German nationalist, in a letter to Richard Wagner where he suggested to Wagner that 'To be genuinely German, politics must soar to metapolitics.[1] The latter is to commonplace pedestrian politics as metaphysics is to physics' (Viereck, 1941). Viereck found in this concept a useful analytical tool to explain how Wagner's music and ideological evolution contributed to 'Germany deliberately' turning 'her back on western civilization' (Viereck, 1941: 4). Metapolitics, according to Viereck, was the result 'from intertwining of four distinct strands (…) romanticism, the "science" of racism, a vague economic socialism, protesting sometimes demagogically and sometimes sincerely against capitalist materialism and the alleged supernatural and unconscious forces of Volk collectivity' (Viereck, 1941: 4). Considering the so-called influence of the New Left on *La Nouvelle Droite* (Bar-On, 2007: 57–76), it is relevant to note that Wagner's metapolitics also claimed a vague economic socialism and fought capitalist materialism. At the heart of this metapolitics was a cultural battle

through Wagner's music and politics. Wagner's music and politics, according to Viereck, were emblematic for Frantz's metapolitics. Over time, when Wagner disconnected from his French period and tried to become, as Thomas Mann sceptically claimed, 'the mouthpiece of the Volk organism' (Viereck, 1941: 98), culture became politics, and Wagner's oeuvre became, as Viereck compellingly argues, the lenses through which Hitler looked at the world.

This Wagnerian metapolitics, just like the reactionary modernists that Herf (1984) describes, is 'Janus-Faced. Simultaneously it looks back to romanticism, and ahead to a machine age of wage slaves and unemployed' (Viereck, 1941: 123). Viereck's analysis of this early manifestation of metapolitics is remarkable for the parallels it shows with later work on the conservative revolution (Mohler & Weissmann, 2018; Bures, 2020), and more importantly because of the similarities with *La Nouvelle Droite*'s metapolitical battle. The works of conservative revolutionary and reactionary modernist writers, as well as the books on those traditions (like the works of Mohler, PhD) were widely read by members of *La Nouvelle Droite*, including de Benoist. It is no coincidence that *La Nouvelle Droite*'s metapolitics was first and foremost directed to an intellectual elite and not a broad audience, as it follows the tradition of the conservative revolutionary intellectuals. The conservative revolution, says Bures (2020: 2), has 'suspicion not only of political, but of all conceptual language', it favoured 'the rebellion of blood and soul against intellect and doctrine', but those intellectuals who favoured the rebellion of blood and soul did this paradoxically with complex, abstract writing that tried to capture the metaphysics of man. Interestingly, this complex writing – 'fake intellectualism', in the words of Guillaume Faye – is also characteristic of many *La Nouvelle Droite* writings. These similarities between Wagner's metapolitics, conservative revolutionary tradition and *La Nouvelle Droite* are found in form, content and strategy.

It is also interesting to see that the French new right's claim on Gramsci has far more in common with metapolitics as defined by Viereck and Constantin Frantz than with Gramsci. *La Nouvelle Droite* only followed Gramsci's insights into the political importance of ideas and culture but disregarded the relation between ideas and the material conditions, between class, intellectuals and political formations. In other words, it adopted a metapolitics that focused on the production and normalization of conservative revolutionary ideas. This metapolitics was seen as necessary to reconstruct a new revolutionary right ideology in which revolutionary ideas of Julius Evola, Oswald Spengler, Carl Schmitt and many more anti-Enlightenment thinkers found a new place. *La Nouvelle Droite's* metapolitics was in that sense closer to Charles Maurras's mantra that 'it was necessary to first "monarchize" the nation before considering the restoration of the monarch' (Duranton-Crabol, 1988, 141 in Bar-On, 2007: 35) than that it was truly adopting Gramsci's insights in hegemony and the role of organic intellectuals. A return of the

right to political respectability, especially after the horror of World War II, meant 'questioning of these traditional methods used by the revolutionary right to attain and maintain power' (Bar-On, 2007: 30) such as intimidation, violence and the cult of the leader. *La Nouvelle Droite*'s metapolitical project took the form of metaphysics. Alain de Benoist's seminal work *Vue du Droite* had the explicit aim to define the nature of man and especially of communities. The claim on Gramsci, in this sense, can be seen as mainly contributing to the 'meta' in metapolitics. It was part of this discursive battle that tried to normalize an anti-Enlightenment organicism by portraying it as 'neither right, nor left'. This 'Gramscianism of the right' (Seidel, 1986: 108) was more than a mere strategy or a politically correct manifestation of the right (Bar-On, 2012: 5). Metapolitics was deeply connected to the rehabilitation and renewal of radical right-wing ideas: It served the goal not only to legitimate and repackage old ideas but also to renew the tradition of a revolutionary right by taking on board new ideas, insights, practices and discourses. Bar-On, in his seminal work 'Where Have All the Fascists Gone' (Bar-On, 2007) even goes so far as to argue that *La Nouvelle Droite* was not only new in form and practices but also in the adoption of left-wing ideas. Bar-On (2007: 56–76) sees in *La Nouvelle Droite*'s adoption of post-materialist values, its criticism of capitalism and the short-lived celebration of the Soviet Union's revolutionary fervour or its praise for the radicalness and revolutionary atmosphere during May 1968, proof that *La Nouvelle Droite* is the result of a left-right synthesis. He in that sense gives legitimacy to de Benoist's claim that the French new right is an heir of the New Left. 'By the late 1980s and 1990s', says Bar-On (2007: 76), 'the main ENR (European new right) intellectuals had become impregnated with a decidedly New Left-like critique of liberal democracy, capitalist modernity and Western notions of "progress"'. This framing of *La Nouvelle Droite* contributes to its metapolitical project. It frames the effort of de Benoist and his comrades as realizing a meta-ideology bringing together left and right. What's missing in Bar-On's analysis is that de Benoist's metapolitics was, as we have seen, grounded 'in an ideological critique of the left and a methodological critique of the right' (de Benoist, 2017: 18). It was first and foremost a way to rethink the strategies of the true right to rearticulate the conservative revolutionary right theory made for uptake in a new post-World War II context. They faced the challenge to re-introduce the archaic values, to use the discourse of Guillaume Faye, into the 20th century by adopting the methods of the left. Any metapolitical action attempts, according to de Benoist, 'beyond political divisions and through a new synthesis, to renew a transversal mode of thought and, ultimately, to study all areas of knowledge in order to propose a coherent worldview' (de Benoist & Champetier, 2000). The crux is that this synthesis didn't change the core elements of what Zeev Sternhell (2010) has called the anti-Enlightenment tradition. *La Nouvelle Droite's* metapolitics is still a battle against 'Enlightenment'

and thus 'civilization in the sense of the Enlightenment tradition', and for 'Kultur' and 'Folk' in the tradition of the conservative revolution.

It is thus important to understand in detail what elements of the left are promoted and praised by *La Nouvelle Droite* and what elements are absent. Once we do that, it becomes clear that Marxism, and thus class analysis is still very much criticized. Even in the Manifesto for a European Renaissance from de Benoist and Champetier (2000), seen by Bar-On (2007) as the most open to left, it is clear that they see not only liberalism but also Marxism as their principal enemy. In the chapter 'Liberalism: The Main Enemy', Marxist socialism is framed as a branch of the same Enlightenment tree and thus as an enemy. 'In almost all respects, liberalism has only realized more effectively certain objectives it shares with Marxism: the eradication of collective identities and traditional cultures, the disenchantment of the world, and the universalization of the system of production' (de Benoist & Champetier, 2012, 14). The reach-out to the Soviet Union in 1980 should thus not be seen as praising or embracing the left as Bar-On (2007: 48) seems to suggest, but as a metapolitical deed. Just like they claim to be anti-racists to redefine what anti-racism is, so too can we understand their short-lived praise for the Soviet Union. They don't praise Marxist theories, but the 'Russian'-ness of the Soviet Union, its collectivism, unity of hopes and unity of purpose (Bar-On, 2007: 48). In other words, they neither praised nor embraced the Marxian left here but selected and framed – re-entextualized – certain practices and discourses as left, exactly those topics that were always embraced by anti-Enlightenment thinkers.

The same metapolitical move is visible in *La Nouvelle Droite's* embrace of the 'revolutionaries of May 68'. It is no coincidence that new right intellectuals praise the metapolitics of May 1968 or the 'revolutionary' potential of the students of the sixties. Just like Georges Sorel emptied socialism of its Marxism, its class war, and narrowed it down to 'revolution' (Sternhell, 1994: 47), we see that *La Nouvelle Droite* praises the revolutionary potential, and thus the mythical force of May 1968. Sorel's anti-materialistic revision of socialism echoes in *La Nouvelle Droite's* praise of May 1968. In the book *Le Mai 68 de La Nouvelle Droite* (SN, 1998), key figures *of La Nouvelle Droite* not only commemorate the revolts of May 68, but they also seem to praise it. According to Bar-On, this book makes clear that 'the members or sympathizers of GRECE and *La Nouvelle Droite* were deeply affected by the events of May 1968 and the revolutionary, anti-capitalist, anti-materialist ideals of the New Left' (Bar-On, 2007: 71). But again, just like Sorel's praise of Marxist revolution replaced class with the nation, *La Nouvelle Droite* uses the student revolts to articulate a national perspective on the revolt. As Spektorowski (2003: 116) rightly argues, 'against globalism, capitalism and the total free market', de Benoist and his comrades 'proposed a communitarian type of capitalism'. Interestingly, in the light of the contemporary legacy of

La Nouvelle Droite, its embrace of May 68 is constantly used as a criticism of the former radical generation. The generation of 1968 is being framed as a generation of traitors, as the generation that sold out their 'anti-materialistic values' now responsible for neoliberalism globalization. This motive, as we shall see, is eagerly picked by movements like Generation Identitaire, the alt-right and Schild & Vrienden. Important at this point, is the explicit intertextuality with the anti-Enlightenment tradition. Anti-materialism is not a 'left-wing' value. On the contrary, Marxist and democratic socialists are materialistic thinkers: they focus on the distribution of wealth in society. 'Within the anti-Enlightenment tradition "materialism" – that is, liberalism, democracy, socialism – became the code word par excellence for evil' (Sternhell, 2010: 48). It was the dematerialization of socialism and Marxism by George Sorel and Hendrik De Mann (Sternhell, 1986) that started the move to the right, to fascism.

This praise of 'the left' is thus not exactly what it looks like on a superficial level. The metapoliticians of the French right-wing school of thought learned from the methods of the left, and cherry-picked and decontextualized certain issues addressed by the left and re-entextualized them in a contemporary conservative revolutionary discourse. These entextualization practices are at the heart of what metapolitics is all about. When Bar-On (2007: 58) argues that the following New Left themes 'the critique of modernity, liberalism and global capitalism; the valorization of regionalism, federalism and local communities; the quality of life and ecological concerns; feminist themes; the critique of the liberal and socialist "New Class"; pro-Third World Solidarity; the incessant attacks on capitalist materialism, technological utopianism and bureaucratic gigantism; and the call for more humane, spiritual and free-thinking European societies that are not governed by a political correctness "thought police", are adopted by *La Nouvelle Droite*, he is missing the fact that the way those criticisms are defined is not 'left-wing', but reinforce the key ingredients of the anti-Enlightenment tradition. In new right discourse, capitalism is never discussed in a Marxist materialist analysis, it is criticized because it destroys organic groups and their language and culture. What is celebrated in the revolts of 1968 is not the materialistic analysis of imperialism or the fight for human socialism, but its anti-materialism and regionalism. When feminism is embraced, de Benoist and Champetier (2012: 36) rapidly distance themselves from the 'universalist feminists' that 'claim that masculine and feminine genders stem from a social construct ('One is not born a woman, one becomes a woman'). At the same time, this embrace of feminism and the claim to fight sexism bring in a traditionalist conceptualization of sexes and gender. Under the banner of differentialist feminism, the traditionalist conception of gender as rooted in biology is reintroduced. And when post-colonialism was praised, in reality, they praised the right to the differences of people. The same is true when they embrace anti-racism

or democracy: words and topics are put in a new text, and this changes the meaning of those words. Metapolitics recontextualizes 'progressive' and left-wing talking heads by integrating them into an old right discourse.

The reintroduction of these old, archaic values is indeed not identical to how it would have been defined by conservative revolutionary thinkers, fascists and traditionalists in the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The ideological and strategic innovation of *La Nouvelle Droite* was very real. This newness of course should not blind us from the fact that on a deeper level, the theoreticians of *La Nouvelle Droite* do reproduce several crucial assumptions of the 'old right'. The history of fascism has taught us that a synthesis under the banner of neither right, nor left (Sternhell, 1986) label does not necessarily mean that the synthesis is less right wing or less radical (Sternhell, 1986). It does force us to understand *La Nouvelle Droite's* legacy not in terms of a superficial assessment of the school but to dig deeper in search of complexity of this new ideology. And to do that, it is important to go back to its ideological roots.

The new right and the anti-Enlightenment tradition

The ideological coherence between all the *Nouvelle Droite* intellectuals is the result of the influence of the intellectuals of 'the conservative revolution' (Griffin, 2008; Mohler & Weissmann, 2018), reactionary modernists like Spengler, the traditionalism of Julius Evola and René Guénon (François, 2014: 88), and of course also the works of Nietzsche. These influences also explain the diversity in the different discourses of the different intellectuals. Some like Faye, even though also heavily influenced by the traditionalism of Evola, are leaning more on the tradition of reactionary modernism (Herf, 1984). The reactionary modernist intellectuals embraced technology and technological progress as vital for the survival and rebirth of the community. It is the modern twist of the conservative revolution – the revolutionary aspect – and reactionary modernism in particular that new right thinkers like de Benoist and Faye found so interesting. 'The conservative revolution', said de Benoist, 'is basically a conservativism turned to the future, and not a restoration' (de Benoist, 2017: XXVII). Maybe even more than de Benoist and Dugin, Faye explicitly speaks in the tradition of reactionary modernism. 'The conservative Revolution (…) is not enough', says Faye (2010: 14). 'We need to become archeofuturists' (Faye, 2010: 15). Faye, and *La Nouvelle Droite* in general, don't just retake the conservative revolutionary dogmas but blend modern, conservative revolutionary, pro-technology (Spektorowski, 2003) and post-modern thought in their work (Bar-On, 2013: 73).

What *La Nouvelle Droite* and contemporary new right intellectuals share is their rejection of 'progressivism', in the sense of Enlightenment modernism. They see Enlightenment modernism as a period of decadence and decline.

Egalitarianism, says de Benoist (2017: 9), 'the denier and reducer of the world's diversity', is the principal enemy. Egalitarianism is seen by *La Nouvelle Droite* as what connects liberalism and communism on a deeper level. It is this egalitarianism and its materialistic values that, according to this school of thought, causes the crisis of modernity (See Sunic, 2011). 'The cycle of egalitarian madness', says Pierre Krebs (2012:19) 'consequently ends exactly where it started: from the political eradication of values of the demos'. Egalitarianism is seen as an attack on the organic people, the diversity that characterizes humanity.

> To counter this globalist and universalist trend, spearheaded by America and the Soviet Union, the new right urges all nations, and particularly European nations, to disengage themselves, culturally and politically, from both superpowers, and from both liberalism and Marxism, and join in the common fight for the cause of the peoples.
>
> *(Sunic, 2011: 160)*

This fight against egalitarianism is a fight for a European Renaissance (de Benoist & Champetier, 2000; Faye, 2010; Krebs 2012) through metapolitics. This renaissance will start, according to Krebs (2012: 30), 'the moment that they (Europeans) cease to perceive the egalitarian raciophobic society as an inevitable destiny, and finally begin to feel it as a necessary challenge'.

The fight against Enlightenment modernity is shared by all members of *La Nouvelle Droite*, and by those influenced by this school of thought like Dugin (Southern, 2018a). Important to stress is that this fight against liberalism, capitalism and all materialistic ideologies is not necessarily a fight against the use of technologies. The work of Faye is a textbook example of this post-modern bricolage. Faye's Archeofuturism envisages the construction of 'a future society that combines techno-scientific progress with a return to the traditional answers that stretch back into the mists of time, (Faye, 2010: 45 & 73). Archeofuturism is Faye's attempt to actualize the ideas of the conservative revolution (Faye, 2010: 14) while the reactionary modernists of Weimar guided him. Ideological storms are needed, says Faye, to let the new be born. 'The world needs radical and revolutionary thought to realize a rebirth' (Faye, 2010: 53). This archeofuturistic project is directed to the future; it doesn't want to go back to an ancient time. Archeofuturism is defined as the selecting of the old values and traditions in function of a new future. Faye therefore pleads for a 'vitalistic constructionism' that is actually creating a new future grounded in old values. Even a traditionalist philosopher like Dugin, following Evola, argues that going back to tradition is not going back to the past, but to eternity: tradition is past, present and future (Southern, 2018a). Dugin sees Russia as 'the most important pole of the great awakening' (Dugin, 2021: 39).

Despite their claim to produce a 'new right', the intellectual tradition in which *La Nouvelle Droite* speaks, especially on a deeper level, is obvious. Alain de Benoist, Dominique Venner, Pierre Krebs and Guillaume Faye find inspiration in key thinkers of the Weimar Republic, and the conservative revolution in general, and more traditionalist-inspired thinkers. Julius Evola, Oswald Spengler, Charles Maurras, Carl Schmitt, Ernest Jünger and even Joseph De Maistre and Charles Maurras are regularly cited or echoed. From this intertextual perspective, *La Nouvelle Droite* is best understood as the post-World War II articulation of the anti-Enlightenment tradition, or in discourse analytical terms: a recontextualization of the anti-Enlightenment tradition to make it relevant in an entirely new context. Sternhell traces this anti-Enlightenment tradition back to Vico Giambattista, Edmund Burke and Gottfried Herder. Burke and Herder, as he compellingly argues, were not just reacting against the French Revolution, they were the start of a new political tradition. A political tradition that stood for the opposite of the Enlightenment project. A tradition that revolted against rationalism, the materialism of liberalism, and later Marxism, the autonomy of the individual, and all that unites people: their condition as rational beings with natural rights. The ideas of these anti-Enlightenment thinkers have undoubtedly influenced the metapolitical project of GRECE. With them, they share their battle against liberalism, socialism, representative democracy, the Enlightenment, Jacobinism and the idea of universal human rights (Faye, 2010, 2011; de Benoist, 2011).

La Nouvelle Droite's project is not a counter-revolution. Just like the anti-Enlightenment tradition was an intellectual revolution for a second modernity, so is de Benoist's project. The anti-Enlightenment tradition took the form of a two-century long revolutionary and intellectual movement built on anti-rationalism, organicism and the attack on 'humanism, the much derided universal values and finally democracy' (Sternhell, 2010: 16). The idea that man is free, can be emancipated and has unalienable universal rights is what anti-Enlightenment thinkers have attacked for centuries. They saw the Enlightenment tradition, just like *La Nouvelle Droite*, as an attack on the natural order of things. Vico Giambattista, Edmund Burke and Gottfried Herder, Hippolyte Taine, Ernest Renan, Charles Maurras, Oswald Spengler, Friedrich Meinecke, and in their footsteps also Faye, de Benoist and Krebs; the ideological consistency in their attacks has been remarkable. All see the values of the French Revolution as the start of all evil decline and decadence. Key ideas of that intellectual movement are the primacy of the group, relativism, organic nationalism, anti-materialism, anti-rationalism (for the masses), anti-utopianism, and finally the battle against equality, democracy and universal rights (Maly, 2012, 2018a). The intellectual fundament of the anti-Enlightenment tradition is its stress on the particular group and on everything that divides the human race and isolates them: race, religion and the nation (Sternhell,

2010: 9). They fought to uproot 'the idea of the all-powerfulness of the individual, reconstituting organic communities and ending the farce of universal suffrage and equality' (Sternhell, 2010: 15).

The ethno-pluralism that is usually considered as the great renewal of *La Nouvelle Droite* has its roots in the primacy of 'the organic group' so dominant in the anti-Enlightenment tradition. 'Organicism', says Sternhell, 'that supreme form of subordination of the individual to the collectivity' is 'one of the great "leading ideas" of anti-Enlightenment thought' (Sternhell, 2010: 202). According to anti-Enlightenment thinkers such as Herder, Taine and Spengler,

> Society was an organism, a 'living body' formed in the course of the centuries by innumerable generations that succeeded one another. (…) Each individual in this community is like a cell in an organized body and the cell only comes into being, subsists, develops and attains its personal ends through the health of the whole body.
>
> *(Sternhell, 2010: 202)*

In this vision of society, no individual was born free, and no individual had the freedom to engage in a social contract with others. There was no social contract, but a historical contract. People were subjected to a whole tradition; they were born with a debt *vis à vis* their ancestors.

Just as within the anti-Enlightenment tradition, the thinkers of *La Nouvelle Droite* imagine and actively construct a world divided into different organic people, each with their own language, culture, habits and territory. They may have traded integral nationalism with the notion of European civilization and regional communities, but the main assumptions are still the same. Pluralism is clearly not a new invention. Pluralism as a worldview was already coined by Herder – one of the foundational thinkers of the anti-Enlightenment tradition – who argued that each organic group has its own history of change 'in accordance with the place, the time and the inner character: each bears within itself the harmony of its perfection' (Herder in Sternhell, 2010: 200). In Herder's view, societies are moulded by history and are characterized by internal inequality. The leaders are pictured as the head of society, the working classes are the arms and legs. Each class has its own role and function. Nations can only thrive if each member takes up its role, and helps to push the nation to glory. It is this inequality and the role of the philosopher kings and warriors that is also praised by *La Nouvelle Droite* as crucial to lead the group to greatness.

This pluralism of unique organic nations and their collective greatness is threatened, anti-Enlightenment thinkers argue, by the universalism of the Enlightenment. Herder (Evrigenis & Pellerin, 2004: 64) for instance sarcastically writes that 'All the rulers of Europe are speaking French already and

soon we will all be doing so'. The parallel between the anti-Americanism and attack on cultural globalization by Alain de Benoist and Guillaume Faye is obvious. Just like they attack Hollywoodization and McDonaldization, Herder mocks the impact of the French Revolution and criticizes the Enlightenment not only as a process of globalization and homogenization but also as a period of decline, decadence and destruction of all that is good. And just like them, Herder defends (and at the same time constructs through his writing) a pluralist world, a world divided into culturally determined and incompatible groups. Note here that Herder's pluralism, how idealistically it may sound if one reads back his words from the humanist relativism of Boas, is in reality a full frontal but refined attack on Enlightenment thought (Maly, 2012). Not mankind, or the individual, is what matters to Herder, but the organic group. And this position clearly echoes in *La Nouvelle Droite's* fight for 'a rights of people' to replace the damned universal rights (de Benoist & Champetier, 2000; Sunic, 2011). With this plea, they echo Edmund Burke, who already in the 19th century claimed that 'the pretended rights of man, which have made this havoc, cannot be the rights of the people. For to be a people, and to have these rights are things incompatible, (Sternhell, 2010: 193). This idea of pluralism is fundamental to the anti-Enlightenment tradition and its attack against democracy and universal human rights. This exact conceptualization is also at the heart of new right metapolitics. 'The plurality and variety of races, ethnic groups, languages, customs, even religions has characterized the development of humanity since the very beginning', argue de Benoist and Champetier (2000: 28). The only difference seems to be that Herder's nationalism has been replaced by smaller organic groups and civilizational cooperation. The net result of *La Nouvelle Droite's* pluralism is the same: an attack on democracy, equality and the Enlightenment in general.

Ethno-differentialism and organic democracy as metapolitics

This new take on Herder's organist pluralism is at the heart of the metapolitical project of *La Nouvelle Droite*. As we have seen in the introduction, de Benoist (2017: 2) defines the preservation of 'the diversity of the world, and by consequence the relative inequalities that are necessarily the product of this' as the essence of the right. The true right in his vision understands that its 'principle enemy' is 'egalitarianism' (de Benoist, 2017: 9). The French new right opposes such 'homogenising universalism' and advocates a system that 'transmits at least as much diversity as it has received. The true wealth of the world is first and foremost the diversity of its cultures and peoples' (de Benoist & Champetier, 2000: 28). Herder's pluralism in this new right metapolitical discourse now goes under the name of 'ethno-differentialism', 'ethno-pluralism' or even 'differential anti-racism' (de Benoist & Champetier, 2000). Against the anti-racism of the left – labelled by de Benoit and Champetier as

a universal anti-racism that denies cultural differences and the existence of races –, de Benoist and Champetier call themselves differential anti-racists. 'Differentialist anti-racism, to which the new right subscribes, holds that the irreducible plurality of the human species constitutes a veritable treasure' (de Benoist & Champetier, 2000).

It is these organic groups with their own unique culture that are put central to the anti-Enlightenment tradition, including in contemporary manifestations of that tradition. In this tradition, man only fully becomes human as part of a group. Echoing Herder, Faye argues in his metapolitical dictionary that a people is 'an organic community embracing a transcendent body made up of ancestors, the living and their heirs. (…) belonging to a specific people (…) distinguishes a man and makes him human'. (Faye, 2011: 211). 'Man', argue de Benoist and Champetier (2000: 18), 'as such does not exist, because his membership within humanity is always mediated by a particular cultural belonging'. Note that this organicism is the foundation of their fight against globalization. The greatness of the nation, the race, the organic groups or the culture is what matters, not man or mankind. Man cannot be just an individual with rights or a member of a transnational community, but he or she is always the first and the last member of a local group, and that is the reason that 'humanity is irreducibly plural: diversity is part of its very essence' (de Benoist & Champetier, 2000: 19). Diversity is thus always group diversity. Just like in the anti-Enlightenment tradition, men and women are only measly cells in the body of the organic community and should be treated as such. People, nations, tribes and races are described and understood in terms of organisms in their own right. Here again, we hear a classic anti-Enlightenment echo: 'A culture is born', argued Spengler,

> In the moment when a great soul wakens out of the proto-spirituality of the ever-childish humanity, and detaches itself, a form from the formless, (…) and it dies when this soul has actualized the full sum of its possibilities in the shape of people, languages, dogmas, arts, states, sciences and reverts into the proto-soul.
>
> *(Spengler, 2006: 73)*

Humanity and man are 'childish', the individual produces nothing. It is the organic group that gives birth to real knowledge, real values, language and art. Nations and cultures are living entities characterized by 'a spirit'.

This organicism starts with Herder but clearly echoes throughout the centuries. When Spengler argues that 'Every culture passes through the age-phases of the individual man. Each has its childhood, youth, manhood and old age' (Spengler, 2006: 74), we hear an echo of Herder. Krebs reproduces this when he claims that Europe is now 'in the midnight of its decline, when

it fades away behind a society which submits to its history instead of letting itself be borne' (Krebs, 2012: 31). And finally, Herder's pluralism or de Benoist 'ethno-differentialism' also echo in alt-right figure Richard Spencer's discourse on 'ethno-states' and his defense of Israel as a Jewish ethno-state (Haaretz, 2018). This organic 'pluralism' wrapped in the credo 'right to difference' has become the quintessential trademark of the new right. Here we see the power and relevance of new right 'metapolitics'. It takes old ideas – Herder's organic pluralism in this case – and repackages it to make possible a new right project that 'rejects' racism and replaces the nationalism of the nation-state with

> A multipolar world of emerging civilizations (…) these civilizations will not supplant the ancient local, tribal, provincial or national roots, but will be constituted as the ultimate collective form with which individuals are able to identify in addition to their common humanity.
>
> *(De Benoist & Champetier, 2000: 29)*

This right to difference and the idea of common humanity seemingly places the new right in the centre of the political field. It sounds acceptable, but just like in Herder's writings, it is a key fundament in the attack on the Enlightenment tradition. 'It was Herder', argues Sternhell (2010: 21),

> Who gave Europe a view of history consisting of cultures that, even when not cut off from each other, regarded foreign contributions as threatening their authenticity. (…) these cultures could easily become antagonistic, and this was precisely the opposite view of culture held by Voltaire, Montesquieu and Rousseau.

Spengler was not just reproducing this Herderian view of the world as a world of cultures, he radicalized it. 'Different cultures became completely impervious to each other with Spengler. Biological determinism was only the logical next step (…), it was the last stage in the psychological preparation that permitted the disaster of the twentieth century to happen' (Sternhell, 2010: 371). The primacy of the organic group divides the world and serves as an attack on 'universalism', humanism, the rights of the individual and Jacobin democracy. Even more, it literally destroys the idea of universal values. This assessment is true for Herder, Spengler, *La Nouvelle Droite* and the identitarians today. Of course, times have changed. Whereas Mussolini (1932) for instance could attack democracy and universal human rights fully frontal and explicitly, we see that today, identitarians and new right intellectuals do it less overtly and far subtler. This is especially the case when they have to position themselves *vis à vis* hegemonic concepts like democracy or human rights, anti-racism or 'not-racism'.

The metapolitical project of the new right is exactly about this type of exercise, and *La Nouvelle Droite*'s intellectuals have been a master at the game. In his book 'The Problem with Democracy' for instance, Alain de Benoist pleads for an 'organic democracy' (de Benoist, 2011: 93–99), and in that sense puts himself in line with democratic hegemony. At the same time, the whole book is an attack on liberal democracy. The embrace of democracy is best understood as a form of orthopraxy. It is not much more than performing a hegemonic act – positioning oneself as democratic – but without subscribing to the ideology that gives meaning to 'democracy'. 'Orthopraxy', says Blommaert (2005: 169), 'is maybe the beginning stage of every ideological process that uses coercion as an instrument of homogenization'. In the context of metapolitics, we can turn this around. Orthopraxy is here used to give democracy a different meaning, to question the hegemony of democracy and introduce a new ideology that gives meaning to the concept. The embrace of democracy, in this sense, is a death kiss. The target is the Enlightened representative democracy. Liberal, representative democracy is not only in crisis, according to de Benoist, but he also argues that it destroys 'the sovereignty of the people'. A real and functioning democracy, according to de Benoist, should be based on the sovereignty of the people which 'resides with a collective body, the nation, whose independence thus constitutes an essential condition for the proper functioning of society' (de Benoist, 2011: 59). Using moderate Enlightenment thinkers like Rousseau and article 3 of the Declaration of 1789, he isolates the word 'democracy' from its radical Enlightenment history (Israel, 2010, 2011) and re-entextualizes it into an anti-Enlightenment discourse. This becomes clear in his argument that democracy should be organized on the basis of 'a folk' and not on the basis of 'the alleged inalienable rights of rootless individuals' (de Benoist, 2011: 98). Within this anti-Enlightenment discourse, the reason for this move is evident: a pluralism of values within one community is a 'sign of the break-up of society' (de Benoist, 2011: 70), and thus also a break up of democracy as such. According to this Schmittian logic, de Benoist argues that democracy should be based 'on citizenship, which sanctions one's belonging to a given folk – that is a culture, history and destiny – and to the political structure within which it has developed' (de Benoist, 2011: 98). The idea of 'organic pluralism' organizes de Benoit's critique on liberal democracy and his plea for an 'organic democracy'.

Just like de Benoist, Guillaume Faye (2011: 111–114) criticizes 'liberal democracy' and advocates an organic democracy, but he does it far more explicitly. Democracy is a 'sham democracy, for it neglects the people's interests' (Faye, 2011: 111). Against the liberal representative democracy, Faye pleas, just like de Benoist, to revive the 'organic democracy deeply rooted in the European tradition (…). Such a democracy is possible only among ethnically homogenous people' (Faye, 2011: 113). Faye's conception of a good,

organic democracy, just like the conceptualization of fascist democracy, is deeply anti-egalitarian and anti-liberal: 'Organic democracy (…) embraces the principle of aristocracy. That is "the selection of the best to rule". (Faye, 2011: 113). Ideally, it has 'a born leader' who is able to shape the voice of its people. Just like all anti-Enlightenment thinkers, Faye defines the people as an organism in its own right, where the leaders are 'the head' or 'the brain' of that organic nation. The democratic renewal, Faye states, is the renewal of this organism. This 'organic democracy' doesn't consider 'immediate interests alone, but the people's historic destiny, taking account of its memory and its future generations abiding the imperatives of sovereignty and independence, along with a faith in the longevity of its collective, biological, and cultural identity' (Faye, 2011: 114). Democracy in new right and identitarian discourse equals an ethnocracy (see also Bar-On, 2013: 145) and an attack not only on the idea of representative democracy, but also on the idea of unalienable and universal human rights. Democracy, just like liberty or identity, acquires new meanings in the metapolitical discourse of new right intellectuals and activists. These concepts re-introduce, as trojan horses, key ideas of the anti-Enlightenment tradition.

Metapolitics, the interregnum and revolutionary rebirth

The metapolitization of the far-right as Griffin (2011: 195) calls it has had a profound impact on the political landscape in general and that of the far-right in particular. The metapolitics of *La Nouvelle Droite* soon spread to centre-right politicians in France and extreme-right parties like Flemish Interest in Belgium and the Lega in Italy (Bar-On, 2013: 25–26). An extreme-right party like Flemish Bloc, later Flemish Interest, not only became a large electoral force, it actually succeeded in changing the discourse on democracy (Blommaert, 2007, 2017b; Maly 2012). In Flanders, democracy now equals 'the voice of the people', represented by the Flemish Bloc. Six decades later, the impact of the metapolitics of *La Nouvelle Droite* is visible in the strategies, infrastructures and discourses of contemporary right-wing movements like the alt-right and Generation Identity (Maly, 2018a, 2022b), and in debates about migration, integration and the global rise of far-right movements.

This impact of the new right project also helped shape a new intellectual extreme-right focused not only on producing ideas that attack actual existing liberal democracy, but also helped build a vision of a post-liberal, post-democratic society in the future. As Griffin (2000: 171) argues, 'the hallmark of the new right is its belief that the present world system is not only decadent, but that it will eventually give way to a new type of civilization based on healthy mythic forces'. This new type of civilization, in the spirit of the conservative revolution and the anti-Enlightenment tradition, is not a re-establishment of an old civilization, but the active vitalic construction

(Faye, 2011) of a new one based on old – archaic – values. Key thinkers of the new right suggest that we are now living in the 'interregnum', 'a tragic historical moment when everything is in flames and everything, like a phoenix, might rise reborn from the ashes' (Faye, 2011: 178). The interregnum is the time when 'rebirth' is made possible. When surrounded by the ruins of a civilization in decline, the seeds for the new culture are planted. According to *La Nouvelle Droite*, we now see the end of modernity (de Benoist & Champetier, 2000; Faye, 2010, 2011; Bar-On, 2012a: 9). Europe, Faye argues in classic anti-Enlightenment discourse, is in decline. It is colonized by 'alien people' and 'faces death in the first twenty years of the new millennium' (Faye, 2011: 178). Typical of the new right is the belief that the tide can be turned if Europeans unite 'in self-defense, expel the colonisers, throw off the American yoke, and regenerate themselves biologically and morally' (Faye, 2011: 179). This idea of rebirth is not new, especially since the idea of national rebirth has always been a central element in fascism (Griffin, 2011). Contrary to the ultra-nationalism of many fascisms, key intellectuals of the new right focus 'rebirth' on different scale levels. 'We should ask ourselves', Faye writes, 'whether the nation state in Europe may not be as anachronistic as Maurras' monarchists movement was in the 1920s' (Faye, 2010: 77). Faye, Krebs and de Benoist & Champetier plea for a European Renaissance. This new civilization will not just arise organically, it needs metapolitical work. Metapolitics is thus part of the social constructivist and revolutionary part of the political project of the new right. Typical for new right metapolitics is that it takes the assumption on board that society is a social construct and that future societies and civilizations can be made through the contemporary production of ideas or metapolitics. It is in this light that Guillaume Faye pleads for the 'vitalic construction' of a new golden future based on the 're-emergence of archaic social configurations in a new context' (Faye, 2010: 74). Along similar lines, Alain de Benoist and Charles Champetier (2000) argue that 'In a globalized world, the future belongs to large cultures and civilizations capable of organizing themselves into autonomous entities and of acquiring enough power to resist outside interference'.

In line with pre-WWII Fascist tradition (Spektorowski, 2016) *La Nouvelle Droite* intellectuals embrace transnationalism. They abandon the ultra-nationalism characterizing most pre-war forms of fascism and adopt a transnational European position. 'Europe', says de Benoist and Champetier (2000),

> Must organize itself into a federal structure, while recognizing the autonomy of all the component elements and facilitating the cooperation of the constituent regions and of individual nations. European civilization will remake itself, not by the negation, but by the recognition of historical cultures, thus permitting all inhabitants to rediscover their common origins.

Faye also envisions a pan-European civilization and explicitly argues for an 'organic regrouping of kindred cultures possessing a common will' (Faye, 2011: 24). It is the European civilization that has to be constructed, saved and fought for in order to save the 'national' and 'regional' cultures. It is this ethno-differentialist and vitalic constructionist position that enables new right activists to internationalize and build a pan-European network. Generation Identity is perhaps the most obvious pre-configuration of that idea. The movement started as a polycentric movement grounded in different cities and regions in France. It rapidly Europeanized with active chapters in Austria, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, the UK and the United States. The movement is not only organized on regional and national scales, but it is also organized on a European scale where they collaborate under the banner 'Defend Europe'.

Guillaume Faye and the birth of metapolitics 2.0

Metapolitics, in the mind of Alain de Benoist at least, was the prerogative of the 'philosopher kings' (Bar-On, 2007: 86). Metapolitics was only for the intellectual elite, an elite who they imagined to have a central role in shaping society. It is clear that in the 21st century, the metapolitical project is not just an intellectual affair anymore. Metapolitics is the common ground in a network of parties, movements, activists and influencers (Maly, 2018, 2020, 2022b). Whereas Alain de Benoist and Charles Champetier (2000) understand 'metapolitics' in relation to elite right-wing intellectuals, we see that this traditional conception of metapolitics has been stretched sometimes beyond recognition. Contemporary metapolitics is not the monopoly of intellectuals anymore. Even more, new right intellectuals and activists increasingly also imagine politicians, activists and 'prosumers' as carriers of a metapolitical project. This new conception of metapolitics, metapolitics 2.0 as I call it, is the consequence of (1) the renewed interest in the project of *La Nouvelle Droite* and in particular the rising popularity of former head of research of GRECE: Guillaume Faye, (2) the rising importance and normalization of digital media, and especially the prosumer culture promoted by web 2.0, (3) processes of re-entextualization and englobalization and (4) the role of Arktos in the distribution of his work, and work that builds further on his conceptualizations. Re-entextualization refers to the processes by which *La Nouvelle Droite's* work, and especially Faye's branch of this tradition, is successively de-contextualized and re-contextualized, and thus made into a new discourse (Blommaert, 2005: 251). It is Guillaume Faye's revision of *La Nouvelle Droite's* metapolitics that has had considerable uptake in the last decades. Guillaume Faye is one of the key mediators of the contemporary idea of metapolitics (Maly, 2022b). His work has been taken up by activists

around the world. As a result of Faye's re-emergence on the metapolitical scene, we can witness renewed attention to metapolitics.

Guillaume Faye, the alt-right and metapolitics re-invented

Guillaume Faye was, as head of GRECE's Secretariat for Research and Studies, known as its 'number two'. After a dispute about the ideological direction of the group and financial disagreements, he left GRECE in 1987 (François, 2019: 93). In the next decades he became known as the popular media figure Skyrock, and even claims to have starred in several porn movies (Faye, 2010: 104). Since his re-emergence to the metapolitical field at the end of the 20th century, he has somewhat acquired a cult status among the European-American far-right. After his death, in 2019, most of the key figures of the global new right like Richard Spencer, Greg Johnson, Martin Sellner, the Golden One and many more praised him and his intellectual work (Maly, 2022b).

Faye's contemporary stardom within the European-American far-right is connected to his second metapolitical life (Maly, 2022b). At the end of the 1990s, *La Nouvelle Droite's l'Enfant terrible* returned to the metapolitical scene with a series of influential books: *L'Archéofuturisme* (Faye, 1998), *La colonisation de l'Europe* (Faye, 2000) and *Pourquoi nous combattons: Manifeste de la résistance européenne* (Faye, 2001). It is especially the translation of *Archeofuturism* and *Why We fight* in English in 2010 and 2011 by publishing house Arktos[2] that made Faye into a celebrity intellectual within the global new right network (Maly, 2018a: 155–215, 2019a). In the years after, Faye was invited by the National Policy Institute of Richard Spencer in 2015. Faye also spoke at American Renaissance conferences in 2006 and 2012 and was invited by *Le Bloc Identitaire* in 2014 and at the *Identitarian Ideas VII* conference in 2015. He appeared in readers from Counter-Currents and was quoted and praised in papers, books, vlogs and blogs by key figures of the 21st century new right.

The impact of Faye can be illustrated by highlighting how his criticism of *La Nouvelle Droite's* metapolitics has been taken up by alt-right activists. In *Archeofuturism*, Faye argued that *La Nouvelle Droite* 'had simply overlooked the fact that the cultural battle Gramsci promoted was associated with the political and economic battle' (Faye, 2010: 29). Metapolitics, wrote Faye in his metapolitical dictionary, should not only be about 'the social diffusion of ideas and cultural values for the sake of provoking a long-term, political transformation' (Faye, 2011: 193). Implicitly criticizing de Benoist, he claimed that 'Metapolitics has to avoid excessive culturalism, which risks becoming an empty intellectualism, a boastful erudition, or a philosophy of amateurs' (Faye, 2011: 194). Metapolitics should pursue 'the political objective of positively affirming the principal lines and central concepts of its particular social/civilizational project' (Faye, 2011: 194). Metapolitics, in Faye's understanding, is thus not only about producing intellectual ideas,

but is also an 'indispensable complement to every direct form of political action, though in no case can it or should it replace such action' (Faye, 2010: 193). To be fair, de Benoist (de Benoist, 2017) did envision that *La Nouvelle Droite*'s 'cultural programme' could in 'the near future' be taken to the political field, but contrary to Faye, he did not see politics as an essential part of that metapolitical battle. Even more, de Benoist explicitly didn't want to see his metapolitical project linked to political positions (Sylvian, 2005: 9). Metapolitics was contrasted with the traditional 'politics of the masses' (Bar-On, 2007: 86). Faye criticized de Benoist for this and, for instance, regretted that *La Nouvelle Droite* never connected with *Le Front National* from Le Pen. Faye disagreed with de Benoist's understanding of the intellectual as the only agent of a metapolitical battle. Metapolitics, Faye stressed, is not only a job of intellectuals but also of politicians, activists and movements. All these actors, according to him, are necessary in a metapolitical battle (Faye, 2010: 193). For Faye, politics was a crucial scene for the metapolitical battle as politicians have privileged access to the media. Note here how Faye stresses the importance of media and media attention in the context of metapolitics. In Faye's conception, the circulation of ideas is as important as the ideas themselves, and therefore all actors that help to distribute ideas are needed.

This conception of metapolitics as necessarily connected to politics and activism was taken up by white nationalist intellectual, publisher and editor-in-chief of Counter-Currents, Greg Johnson. In his 2012 reader devoted to the establishment of the 'North American New Right' (Johnson, 2012), in his 2013 book 'New Right vs Old Right' (Johnson, 2013) and in several blogs and essays on Counter-Currents[3], Johnson reproduces Faye's critique on GRECE's conceptualization of metapolitics extensively and re-entextualizes it in a different, American context addressing American readers and making abstraction of Faye' anti-Americanism. Johnson argues that the North American alt-right should take Faye's lessons on board. Johnson even made that explicit in his definition of the North American new right: 'The North American new right is an intellectual movement with a political agenda' that because of its 'aims to change the political landscape', does not 'enjoy the luxury of ignoring party and electoral politics' (Johnson, 2012: 7–8). Johnson fully subscribes and reproduces Faye's assessment of *La Nouvelle Droite* and re-entextualizes Faye's message to build a localized, American new right. The success of Faye in the United States also has to do with the fact, as far-right publisher Greg Johnson (Counter-Currents) correctly stresses, that Faye's identitarianism, and thus also his plea for 'democratic renewal', is in the last instance rooted in 'race'. 'Faye', so says Johnson, 'thinks racially. His answer to the question 'Who are we?' is ultimately racial, not cultural, religious, or subracial' (Johnson, 2019a). Together with Krebs (2012), Faye sees culture as rooted in race.

Faye's understanding of metapolitics (and Johnson's re-entextualization of it) has been taken up by different sites and activists within the alt-right and the

global new right (Maly, 2018a). We can see it in the literal reproduction of that criticism, and maybe more importantly in the practices of the so-called alt-right activists trying to construct an American new right. Metapolitics had from the start an important role within the alt-right. In the context of the liberal society, several key figures (Kirkpatrick, 2014; Friberg, 2017; Spencer, 2017a; Leonard, 2018a) argue that metapolitics is at the heart of the new right cultural construction of that future society. 'Any political struggle must be preceded, legitimised, and supported by a metapolitical struggle', says Friberg (Friberg, 2017). This metapolitical strategy is also visible in the classic metapolitical structures influenced by *La Nouvelle Droite* – think tanks like Spencer's National Policy Institute, publishing house Counter-Currents, American Renaissance or NPI congresses, books, papers and essays – but especially in the United States, it was also embedded in vlogs, memes and offline practices influenced by digital culture and in the political activism for Trump (Maly, 2018a, 2018b). In the American uptake, not only the goal changed (a vitalistic reconstructing of American society instead of a Europa or a Eurosiberian renaissance), but also the conceptualization of metapolitics changed. This was as much a result of the nature of the alt-right as it was about the US context and the new digital reality.

The hybrid media system and metapolitics 2.0

The uptake of the idea of metapolitics by the alt-right happened not only in a different social and political context but also the technological context was different. The metapolitical battle of the alt-right took place in a post-digital context (Cramer, 2014). This new digital reality is, as I already argued, a key ingredient of the metapolitical battle of the new right in the 21st century. In this post-digital reality, Facebook, YouTube and other social media are potentially as important, or in some cases even more important, than mainstream media in realizing the goals of this metapolitical battle. This new normality in the media field has profoundly affected who can produce ideas and let them circulate. This in turn has had fundamental effects on the construction and circulation of (meta-) political messages and meanings (Blommaert, 2019b; Maly, 2022a). The 'democratization' of content production facilitated by digital media has clear effects on the production or 'input-side'. Intellectuals are not the 'only producers' of ideas anymore. Their ideas now have to compete with other political, metapolitical and non-political ideas and content. Thompson (2020: 21) stresses that these new forms of action and interaction, categorized by him as 'mediated online interaction', disrupt 'the settled roles' of the institutional gatekeepers:

> The power of the established media organizations to shape the agenda is disrupted by the emergences of a plethora of new players who are able to use communication media to interact with others while bypassing the established channels of mediated quasi interaction.

As I stressed, digital media are not neutral, they have algorithmic agency. This agency forces activists to produce information that fits the formats and make their message ready for uptake by human and algorithmic audiences (Maly, 2022a). As a result of this new media environment, 'information', leaks, scandals and junk news (Venturini, 2019) are abundantly present in the current digital ecology, and they shape contemporary metapolitics. Alt-right activists, vloggers, trolls and self-declared intellectuals have adapted to this new reality and have become DIY producers and distributors of ideas.

This new post-digital reality has also been theorized by new right activists. Leonard, an editor from far-right publisher Arktos, for instance, argues that 'one individual on an American college campus who tapes a sign reading 'It's OK to be "White" to a lamppost' (Leonard, 2018a) acts metapolitically because his action seeks 'to shift or shatter' the political conventions. The intellectual, the politician, the activist and the prosumer are now all imagined as part of the new right metapolitical battle, all helping 'to prepare the way for the regime which will supplant democracy' (Leonard, 2018a). Contemporary new right metapolitics is not limited to a purely intellectual strategy but also encompasses every social, cultural, activist and political intervention towards the construction of a post-liberal society: 'The deepest work of the metapolitician of the right is therefore necessarily anti-democratic: he seeks to produce a society in which metapolitics, save in its conservative aspect, no longer exists' (Leonard, 2018a). It is this broad conception of metapolitics as embodied in meme warfare, offline activism and politics that was dominant in the alt-right and is dominant in the global new right today (Maly, 2018e). Even more, just because the new right denounces parliamentary democracy, politicians are only understood within the logic of metapolitics. 'Parliamentary efforts', says author, CEO and co-founder of Arktos Daniël Friberg,

> Can never be more than complements to broader cultural and political work. The results of elections are but products of how public opinion has been formed and how, what, and in what manner information has been spread between these elections.
>
> *(Friberg, 2015: 34)*

Long Live the emperor: Trump and alt-right metapolitics

In the 21st century, it is Faye's broad conceptualization of metapolitics that was taken up and stretched to include digital activism. It is this conception of politics as part of a metapolitical battle that informed the support of the alt-right for Trump in 2016 (Espirit Vif Media, 2016). This can be illustrated by analysing Richard Spencer's (2016) infamous speech 'Long live the emperor!' at the National Policy Institute's 'Become Who We Are 2016' conference. In this speech, days after Trump's victory, Spencer hails Trump's victory as 'a step towards' a 'new normal', 'a moral consensus' the alt-right is fighting

for. Spencer doesn't praise him because he represents the full 'cultural programme' of the alt-right – on the contrary, he critiques Trump on many positions in that speech – but still praises him because of his metapolitical and archeofuturistic impact: his contribution to a new America based on archaic values. Spencer praises the 'ur-myth' that animated the Trump campaign. To say 'Make America Great Again' is both radically pessimistic and boyishly optimistic at the same time. This archeofuturistic quality becomes all the more obvious when Spencer frames Trump as a future nostalgic force: 'Yet MAGA is also forward looking'. Spencer argues, 'This idea that we can do this, that America can be what it was, that this idealized past can be restored. More than that, that it can reach new heights, be 'greater than ever before', as President-elect Trump put it (Spencer, 2016). In this, the palingenetic creed shouldn't be overlooked: the past shouldn't just be restored, it should reach new heights.

Spencer hails Trump as an *archeofuturistic metapolitical* instrument, that is, someone who will help to revitalize archaic ideas in service of a new vitalistic project for America. He explicitly evaluates Trump's campaign as part of a larger metapolitical battle, waged not only by intellectuals but also by prosumers, trolls and embedded memes. The memification of Trump as 'emperor', and the references to Kek and meme-magic in this speech all index the broad conceptualization of the new right metapolitical battle building further and expanding the conceptualization of metapolitics by Faye. Trump and the 'hysteria surrounding his election' and the left's reaction to the alt-right memes are juxtaposed and read as indexes of the 'liberal hegemony which governs this society' (Spencer, 2016). The praising of Trump as emperor in Spencer's speech should thus be understood, not as proof that Trump is alt-right, but as spreading a metapolitical meme contributing to the destabilization of the liberal order.

The alt-right considered Trump, classical intellectual metapolitics and metapolitical meme warfare as useful but 'not enough' to succeed in reconstructing society. At best, they are useful steps in the right direction. Leonard argues that 'from the bottom up, through grassroots initiatives or guerrilla propaganda or meme warfare or what have you – all of this is good, is important, but it is absolutely secondary' (Leonard, 2018a). A true new right metapolitics, he argues, should preconfigure the ideal society grounded in what Faye (2011) called archaic values. In the last analysis, Leonard stresses,

> An anti-democratic metapolitics cannot depend on the demos for political transformation. We, who are not egalitarians; we, who do not hold that 'all men are created equal'; we, who believe in the naturalness and hence the desirability of hierarchy in society and in politics, must look then, not first to forming a new people, but first to forming a new elite.
>
> *(Leonard, 2018b)*

The importance of the elite is not just an ideological position, it is informed by the facts on the ground. Just like Faye stressed the importance of politicians, and the access to mainstream media in a metapolitical battle, Leonard sees in the electoral success of far-right populism proof that politics is crucial to the success of a metapolitical project: 'This has indeed been one of the principal lessons of the recent rise of "populism on the Right"', he says, 'and finds its parallel also in similar political developments of the last century: "populism of the Right" in any nation requires, as its absolute prerequisite, charismatic and capable leaders' (Leonard, 2018b). A new right metapolitical battle should thus be grounded in a broad movement led by capable leaders. Echoing Lenin, Leonard stresses the importance of leaders, albeit they be politicians, activists or intellectuals: 'Our principle aim should not be the production of a new people, but rather the cultivation of new leaders; for from out of a mass, a people in the true sense can only form around a magnetic centre' (Leonard, 2018b).

Metapolitics 2.0 and the identitarian movement

The broad conceptualization of metapolitics as grounded not only in intellectual activity but also in politics and (digital) activism, pushed forward by a revolutionary activist vanguard is the legacy of Faye (Maly, 2022). It echoes Faye's conceptualization of metapolitics and of organic democracy with aristocratic leaders showing the people the way. This focus is now central in global new right theories of praxis. Friberg for instance concludes: 'To constitute a metapolitical vanguard, and hence to become a vital part of the broader initiative to set Europe back on the right path: this is the primary mission of the European new right' (Friberg, 2015: 49). In the United States that new vanguard was found in the alt-right (at least prior to the discrediting of the alt-right brand after the violent attack in Charlottesville during the Unite the Right manifestations). In Europe, the identitarian movement is seen as an excellent example (even though this partly changed after the New Zealand killing spree). Generation Identity claims to be 'a nursery for future leaders of the entire identitarian movement. Young activists trained daily' to become 'the militant aristocracy, the vanguard of our vision of the world' (Generation Identity, 2013: 43). Camus (2019: 74) says, I think rightly, that it is questionable to see de Benoist and Venner as the forefathers of the 'identitarian movement in Europe'. It is probably more correct to say that next to Renaud Camus' work on the 'Great Replacement' and the works of Dominique Venner, it was Faye's controversial and mantra-like style that clearly hit a sweet spot among the identitarians (Marchi, 2016).

Faye's book 'Pourquoi nous combattons: Manifeste de la Résistance Européenne' can without exaggeration be seen as an ideological bible of the French identitarians of the Bloc Identitaire (François, 2009). Faye was very

eager to define himself as an identitarian (TV Liberté, 2019). He explicitly wrote as an identitarian, as part of that fighting network. It is important to stress that Faye was not only a provocateur, an ideologue or a national messenger of the ideas of de Benoist, but he was also above all an educator producing a theory of praxis. His books, essays and speeches were designed to contribute to the construction of a broad metapolitical vanguard. Faye ends 'Why We Fight' by stating that:

> We have to see ourselves as the vanguard of resistance (…) Victory won't be won through peaceful bourgeois reform (…) We have to prepare ourselves for the coming tempest, to harden ourselves – for the sake of attacking, like a cobra, quickly and decisively, once the moment of opportunity strikes. In anticipating this moment, we need now to start arming ourselves – mentally and physically – we need to recruit, to proselytize, to educate, to organize in networks of solidarity and action.
>
> *(Faye, 2011: 272)*

He clearly writes to inform and form an activist's – and not just an intellectual – movement fighting for a new time.

The metapolitical dictionary that was added to the English edition of 'Why We Fight' is another excellent example of his educational role. In that dictionary, Faye (together with Belgian new right intellectual Robert Steuckers who co-authored the French version of that dictionary) is literally providing new activists and wannabe intellectuals with a metapolitical language. He teaches them to claim the key concepts of the adversary – like democracy – and provides them with the new right or conservative revolutionary meanings I described above. Faye not only explicitly explains keywords like identity, democracy, interregnum, globalism, nation and nationalism, but he also introduces a framework to help new recruits to speak and think about contemporary and future societies in a metapolitical way. The explanations he provides are explicit and thus devoid of any metapolitical quality: it is a new right to speak for dummies.

Generation Identity's reconquest and generational populism

Generation Identity's discourse, practices and goals embody Faye's dream of reconquest. Generation Identity describes itself as 'a fighting community' and 'a spearhead of resistance' that 'declares war' (Generation Identity, 2013: 8–9): 'Our ideal is Reconquest, and we will see it through to the end. Generation Identity is the barricade upon which our Youth are mounting in order to fight for our identity' (Generation Identity, 2013: 12–13). The first texts that the movement produces and publishes echo Guillaume Faye's ideal

of 'Reconquest' and they explicitly refer to Faye in a footnote to explain what they mean by 'reconquest'. The assumption of the need to reconquer is of course that terrain has been lost. In other words, the assumption is that there is a Great Replacement or an ongoing colonization of Europe that needs not only to be stopped but the land should also be reconquered. Faye (2011: 41) presents his readers with hope and reasons to fight by stressing the need for 'Reconquest'. His answer to the question 'why do we fight' is straightforward:

> We don't fight for the 'cause of peoples', because the identity of every people is its own concern, not ours (…) we fight only for the cause of our own people's destiny. Our political activities (…) are guided by the imperative of all Grand Politics: that is, by the struggle for the heritage of our ancestors and the future of our children.
>
> *(Faye, 2011: 41)*

Reconquest is only possible according to Faye in the sense of a renewel of archaic values and the re-establishment of homogenous groups. The pan-European manifestation of the identitarian movement is a pre-configuration of Faye's dream of a European revolution. The first step is metapolitical: people should see migration in terms of colonization. After the action at the Grand Mosque of Poitiers, Generation Identitaire tried to legitimize their actions by arguing:

> a nation can recover from an economic crisis or a war, but not from the replacement of its population: without the French, France will no longer exist. It is a question of survival: this is why each nation has an absolute right to choose whether it wants to accept foreigners and in what proportion.
>
> *(Generation Identity, 2013: 19)*

The goal of Generation Identitaire is

> Not a matter of gaining an electoral majority, but of remaking a people! We are a UFO in a political landscape that is fossilised as that of France – a vanguard to awakened the people, not a bunch of little politicians hiding behind their neckties. (Generation Identity, 2013: 40). They are defenders of 'direct democracy', federalism and localism.
>
> *(Generation Identity, 2013: 32)*

Generation Identity, just like Faye and de Benoist & Champetier, understands democracy as based on the identity of a homogenous people. Direct democracy works if it is grounded in localism. Their battle, again like Faye's, is

understood in biological and cultural terms, as embedded in 'our blood, our soil and our identity' (Generation Identity, 2013: 10). Whereas the alt-right especially highlights the racial component of democracy in Faye's work, we see that identitarians leave this more implicit, but they all stress the necessity of homogeneity for democracy. Identitarian activist Markus Willinger (2013: 41), for instance, again just like Faye refers to Athens when he speaks about the identitarian embrace of direct democracy and its battle against representative democracy. And he also understands democracy as based on identity and a people. And just like Faye, and *La Nouvelle Droite* in general, identitarians envision this identity in European – not nationalist terms: 'Europe, is a community of civilisation and culture. (…) Europeans must recognize this bond which has united us for 30,000 years now' (Generation Identity, 2013: 37). This vitalistic constructionism of an archeofuturistic Europe, the stress on race and ethno-pluralism, the hatred towards Islam and Muslims and advocating an organic democracy expressing the will of the European people (Willinger, 2013) makes several scholars see the identitarian movement 'as the direct-action arm of the (French) new right intended to make new right topics such as identity politics, homeland politics and anti-immigration agitation particularly attractive for youth by adapting modern communication methods to this end' (Salzborn, 2016: 50). What is missed in this type of assessment is that GI explicitly takes Faye's lessons on board and less those of Alain de Benoist. Generation Identitaire does not support the right of all individuals and communities, immigrant and non-immigrant alike in one nation, like de Benoist. They fight against Islam and for the homogenous Europe of European people.

Faye's influence on Generation Identity is not only visible in the fact that he is regularly quoted in the manifesto 'We are Generation Identity' or in the consistent use of the concept of 'Reconquest' (Generation Identity, 2013: 12, 28) as their goal, it is especially visible in their strategy. Generation Identity sees itself as a fighting community, as the 'awakeners of the people' and 'role models' whose sensational activism and its re-mediatization on social media is made for uptake by mainstream media. They target the sensationalist commercial mainstream media logic (Chadwick, 2017) in

> Order to sow the seeds of the Reconquest to come. We are a signal light toward which many young people will turn once the ethnic and political polarisation of French society leads to the return of social and political movement.
>
> *(Generation Identity, 2013: 34)*

From the start, Generation Identity wanted to overcome the 'Gramscian metapolitics in which cultural victory is a condition for political victory: it's

super-politics' (Generation Identity, 2013: 34). It is a fighting community, not for an abstract 'rights of peoples', but for regional identities and the European identity. Faye's understanding of the metapolitical as necessarily complementary to other forms of action is at the heart of the movement and their sensationalist activism. In the beginning, Generation Identity was set up as

> one of three pillars of the identitarian movement founded in 2002. This movement joins together the Bloc Identitaire, a political party and networking tool, the association Les Identitaires, which organises an identitarian summer camp each year – a place for political and militant training (…) – and Generation Identity, a fighting community.
>
> *(Generation Identity, 2013: 40)*

Generation Identity is not only an offline activist movement, it is (or at least was) also very much present online. The launch of *Generation Identitaire* didn't go unnoticed in 2012. The spectacular 'occupation' of the roof of a mosque under construction in Poitiers created a buzz, not only in France but also throughout the hybrid media system in Europe. The movement was only one month old at the time, but its 'Declaration of War' video was seen over 93,000 times on YouTube. The reupload of that video in 2018, after the original one was deleted for copyright infringement, managed to be seen by 68,000 viewers. The original video was already ready in summer, and it was shown to the activists during their 2012 camp (Generation Identity, 2013: 15). After its launch in October 2012, many identitarian activists throughout Europe used the affordances of YouTube to add subtitles. 'Prosumers' translated the declaration of the movement into different languages and the English version very quickly had more views that the original French one. The same thing happened with the introduction video of *Génération Identitaire*, which was translated 'in German, Spanish, English, Greek, Italian (…) In each case the translations were personal initiatives on the part of Europeans we do not know' (Generation Identity, 2013: 16). The message of Génération Identitaire was re-entextualized and targeted new audiences in new languages.

This stress on the 'organic uptake' is a central argument in the discursive positioning of the moment. As co-founder of *Génération Identitaire* Alban Ferrari mentions in a 2012 interview, the Austrian chapter started independently as a Facebook page (Generation Identity, 2013: 16), and the Facebook pages *Generation Identity: Germany* and *Generation Identity Italy* appeared after the sensational action of *Génération Identitaire* at the Mosque in Poitiers. In their communication, they like to stress the 'spontaneous' nature of the uptake and support. When asked if they translated the video, Ferrari highlights that 'We had intended to, but we were beaten to the punch by spontaneous, independent initiatives' (Generation Identity, 2013:16). In this

discourse, the translations and birth of different national identitarian chapters across Europe are framed in a populist logic as touching a nerve among a generation: 'the video's success proves we are on the right track and that our way of thinking is shared by most of the young people here' (Generation Identity, 2013: 15). If we look at this populism as a chronotopic mediatized communicative relation (Maly, 2018e), we see the importance not only of the populist claim to speak in name of a generation, but also of some understanding of what ticks among some people who are willing to engage with your message. That uptake of the message can then be discursively used to claim the legitimacy of that claim. The actions of the 'prosumers', the likes, shares and the followers are being presented as evidence that they truly speak in the name of this generation, not only in France but also in Europe and even in the United States. 'Since Poiters, our call to action has been heard', said a press release of the movement. Génération Identitaire also claimed to have received 500 messages in two days, and the Bloc Identitaire, nearly 3,000 messages. When researchers, encyclopaedia (see the Wikipedia page on the Generation Identitaire) and legacy media (FranceInfo, 2021) take over this label of populism, the discursive framing is successful: an extreme-right discourse has then been rebranded in 'articulating the voice of the people' (Maly, 2018e).

The occupation in Poitiers functions as a format that can be applied by the different chapters in the different countries. The action at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, where 15 activists from the *Identitäre Bewegung* put up banners reading *Sichere Grenzen, sichere Zukunft* (Secure Borders, secure future) and *Grenzen schützen! Leben Retten*! (Closed Borders! Save Lives), follow the exact format as the original action at Poitiers, including the remediatization and the attention of mass media all over the world. And also in 2020, the French chapter proves the usefulness of the format to grab media attention when they dropped a banner saying 'Justice pour les victim du racisme anti-blanc' from a building in Paris during a Black Lives Matter protest in June 2020 in the French capital. Whereas the French slogan is made for local uptake, the hashtag #whitelivesmatter below the slogan not only directs viewers to Twitter in search, it also indexes an intended international audience and an international association, especially with the alt-right.

Defend Europe: metapolitics and digital media

The different 'media guerrilla actions' on a local, national and European scale have constantly enabled the movement to enlarge its audience and its reach. This media tactic clearly worked. In May 2017, when they launched their Defend Europe Mission, the National French chapter of the pan-European movement alone had over 124.000 likes on Facebook. This mission was supported by all the European chapters, but of course also by the regional branches of the movement. The French chapter alone had branches in Nice,

Paris, Nantes, Bretagne, Dauphiné and Lille. Those branches had offline gathering locations in the form of bars and boxing clubs and had their own Facebook pages to give information, recruit members and organize events. These Facebook pages were useful in the dissemination of information from the local to the national and the European scale, and back: they created a pan-European network of influence. A network that could share and like the remediatized actions of the movement and spread it through Europe and the hybrid media system. Just like Generation Identitaire started in 2012 with their 'Declaration of War' video', the Defend Europe Mission started with a video and the launch of a brand new pan-European website.

> Every week, every day, every hour – ships packed with illegal Immigrants are flooding into European waters. An invasion is taking place. This massive immigration is changing the face of our continent. We are losing our safety and our way of life and there is a danger we Europeans will become a minority in our own European homelands. Our future is under attack.
>
> *(Defend Europe, 2017a)*

This quote started the Mission Defend Europe video that was posted on the Facebook page of Generation Identitaire on 14 May 2017. The uptake of this video was again huge. By December 2017, the video was watched over 319,000 times on Facebook, shared 2,000 times and over 13,000 profiles reacted with a thumbs up or another emoticon. In the video, we see four young identitarian militants talking about migration as a threat to Europe. Their discourse echoes Faye's conceptualization of migration as an invasion and a danger for Europe and its way of life. At the same time, it also echoes the discourse that many radical right and far-right politicians were articulating in the mainstream media. Politicians like Theo Francken (Maly, 2018a) from the New Flemish Alliance, Salvini in Italy and Le Pen in France were advocating the necessity of 'pushback' and praising the 'Australian Model' (Generation Identitaire, 2017) of pushing ships back. This political discourse circulated freely in mainstream media, and it had the effect of normalizing or de-radicalizing the actions of Generation Identity.

The Defend Europe Mission was supported by different websites and social media of the national and regional branches of the identitarian movement, but they also launched a European website and specific social media channels for this specific action. On the website, which was designed according to the corporate identity of the movement, one could not only read up on the mission, or find news, one could also click on the support button. At first, this button brought visitors to a PayPal account, but after June 2017 this was not possible anymore. PayPal blocked the identitarian account.

This backlash was also an opportunity to convince the followers of the movement to donate money and frame this act of PayPal as an attack from

the globalists. The Thumbnail clearly framed the action of PayPal as an anti-patriotic action. Considering the discourse of this movement, this act of PayPal can be seen as a reinforcement of the idea that 'the globalists are against them'. In the video, Martin Sellner argued that through this mission 'We want to show PayPal, Twitter and all these globalists and the mainstream media, that they can censure us, that they can block us, but that they can't stop us' (Defend Europe, 2017b). The videos that were recorded and posted in German (10,000 views) and English (6,900 views) generated quite some uptake. Many people commented that they had or will be transferring money or even doubling their donation. Sellner also makes sure to stress that their followers shouldn't believe 'the shitstorm' started by the mass media and thus should donate. Mass media and globalists want you to believe that 'we want people to drown. That we want the rescuing missions to end. No', Sellner says, 'we want the human trafficking to end. We want to rescue people before the Libyan coast, but we want to bring them back from where they came' (Defend Europe, 2017b). Note how Sellner stresses that they are on a rescue mission. Rescuing refers to pushing migrants back and even more importantly: 'we want to start a rescuing mission to save the future of Europe' (Defend Europe, 2017b). The dominant discourse is thus one that fits into the narrative of Faye and Camus: they are on a mission to stop the replacement. And that mission is urgent. As Sellner stresses in another video, a couple of days before the ship would be on its way to the Libyan coast:

> We live in a time of decision. This time, in our day and age, it will be decided if Europe and the whole West will have a future. At the moment this future is looking dark (…) that's why we don't plan our vacations, we plan to defend Europe this summer.
>
> *(Defend Europe, 2017c)*

By the first of August 2017, the ship was on its way with the identitarian crew to the Libyan coast. In a short vlog, Sellner stressed that this boat sailing out was the nightmare of 'Soros' and all the globalists (Defend Europe, 2017d). Underneath that video, one could read a short status update in French, Italian, English and German. It also contained a link to their WeSearchr account. WeSearcher was set up by Charles Carlisle Johnson, an American far-right activist and troll, as an alternative to Crowdfunding sites that banned far-right projects. Even though this platform was short-lived, Generation Identity managed to collect over 300,000 dollars to fund their Defend Europe Mission (234,000 to charter the ship, and another 83,000 dollars for the crew and other expenses).

The mission was a success in terms of hybrid salience. Maniou and Bantimaroudis (2018) introduced the notion of 'hybrid salience'. 'Hybrid forms of salience', they say, 'should be approached as indices of mediated significance

derived from interdependent and asymmetrical distributions of media power, divided between mainstream media outlets as well as grassroots digital platforms including various in-between hybrid media formations'. Hybrid salience highlights the fact that salience has now been fragmented over different media, actors and niches. In the case of Defend Europe, this salience was not only the effect of their own communication, but it was also the result of the Canadian far-right YouTuber Laura Southern praising the plans of Generation Identity during a live stream on Periscope in May 2017 that was posted on Twitter. Southern was later joined by the American far-right YouTuber Brittany Pettibone. Both Southern and Pettibone would regularly tweet and post vlogs on YouTube to update their followers. These postings were also amplified on Buzzfeed (Broderick, 2017). Considering their status in the alt-right, and globally in the case of Southern at the time, it is no coincidence that lots of key figures in the United States would support the Defend Europe Mission. The 'ironic' neo-Nazi site The Daily Stormer advocated the action and the former grand wizard of the KKK asked his Twitter followers to support the mission. From a metapolitical perspective, the action was a great success. It was also a success in the sense of networking. After the Mission, Sellner joined Brittany Pettibone in the United States. This trip with Pettibone was mediatized on YouTube as a work trip to allow the US movement to learn about the European identitarian movements and vice versa. It was also the start of their relationship.

Social media were thus very much part of the infrastructure of this movement. This was the case locally, but also on a national and transnational level. Most of its impact, and especially the upscaling from a French to a pan-European movement, is a result of its embeddedness in social media. The pan-European movement Generation Identity is clearly a post-digital phenomenon (Fielitz & Thurston, 2019): not only is their digital presence at least as important as their offline activism, but it is also based on digitally enabled reproduction of their message. This movement from the start benefited from the network effects of digital media: they use the affordances of digital media to connect, organize and structure different chapters on a pan-European scale and remediatize their activism for upscaling the metapolitical effect. It is also clear that they do not see the political field as separate but as an essential part of their metapolitical battle. Already in 2012, they are explicit about their connections with existing movements and youth movements of political parties like the Flemish Interest (Generation Identity, 2013: 16). In 2019, we see that the different national chapters of the official and unofficial identitarian movements in Europe have very close relations to the so-called radical right 'populist' parties like Rassemblement National in France, Flemish Interest in Belgium, FPÖ in Austria, Forum For Democracy in The Netherlands, the AFD in Germany and UKIP in the United Kingdom (Maly, 2018e; Murdoch & Mulhall, 2019). Generation Identity was built on sensational mediatized

actions. It was a brand that gave a very clear collective identity to its militants. The movement was grounded in a digital and offline infrastructure enabling militants to build strong ties. Throughout the last decade, they succeeded in building a clear repertoire of collective action, readymade for uptake in the hybrid media system. It was those actions and their structure that allowed them to upscale the movement to a European and even a trans-European scale. But in the end, the real fundament of Generation is found in its metapolitics. And their version of metapolitics is the legacy of Faye.

Martin Sellner, fashwave and Faye's metapolitics

Martin Sellner, the de-facto face of Generation Identity on a European scale was de-platformed in August 2018 by YouTube in the wake of his e-mail contact with the Christchurch shooter and the juridical actions against him. Since his channel was re-instated, he has been reluctant to use his English YouTube channel. Even more, he deleted several older videos and put others on private. Among those private videos is a series of five videos he posted in 2017 that were dedicated to the work of Faye, especially focusing on his work 'Why We Fight'. In the first video of this series, Sellner says that he read 'Why We Fight' in 2010 – thus before the birth of the Austrian Chapter of Generation Identity – in its German translation as part of a reading group in Vienna and claims that this book, even though he doesn't agree with Faye on all points, has changed him (Sellner, 2017a). 'Why We Fight', says Sellner is one of the important inspiration sources of the identitarians (Sellner, 2017b).

Before we zoom in on the actual content of the videos, it is useful to have a look at the graphics. The opening sequence echoes a vaporwave aesthetics then quite popular online. In the first shot, we see a nineties white Lamborgini Diablo driving on vaporwave techno beats and neon rasters. The Diablo was produced between 1990 and 2001. It is an object of nostalgia, referring back to the 'near past'. The Diablo, as the successor of the Countach, is a typical poster child and thus comes with strong emotions, especially for young petrolheads. This nostalgic feeling about a past where everything is better is enhanced by the vaporwave graphic. This adoption of vaporwave aesthetics by far-right movements was common practice around 2017 and was called fashwave. This trend combines far-right discourse with the then popular hype of synthwave. The result of this assemblage is the use of nostalgic 'futurist' imagery reminiscent of nineties video game culture, neon colours with a preference for purple and pink and synth beats from the eighties and nineties to promote a far-right message. The style has roots among neo-Nazis and was popularized by Andrew Anglinm from The Daily Stormer in August 2016, who called synthwave 'the Whitest music ever' and soon after began the 'Fashwave Friday series posting retro sci-fi images and sounds' (Hermansson, Lawrence, Mulhall & Murdoch, 2020:110). The style was also very popular

FIGURE 2.1 Fashwave intro of Martin Sellner's series on Guillaume Faye's Why We Fight.

Source: Martin Sellner's English YouTube Channel.

among Germanica Reconquista who used the fashwave style to make historical references in their memes come across as less old-fashioned and more appealing to a younger audience (Bogerts & Fielitz:146–147). The Lambo first seems to cruise along without a real goal, but in the end, accelerates towards the lambda sun. From the moment the Lambo reaches the sun, the title of the show appears: Identity quest.

This opening sequence could be read through Faye's Archeofuturism as a blend of nostalgia and futurism. With it, Sellner taps into a dominant nostalgia among the youth. Nostalgia, as is richly documented, is a key part of capitalist consumer societies. Interestingly, since the nineties of the last century, that nostalgia is not only very much present in advertisements, but the object of nostalgia changed fundamentally. Appadurai argued that ads increasingly:

> Create what might be called "imagined nostalgia," nostalgia for things that never were. This imagined nostalgia thus inverts the temporal logic of fantasy (which tutors the subject to imagine what could or might happen) and creates much deeper wants than simple envy, imitation, or greed could by themselves invite.
>
> *(1996: 77)*

Sellner is indeed tapping into such an imagined nostalgia designed for uptake among 20 to 30-year-olds who see the eighties and nineties as 'the past' and

as an epitome of coolness. It is not a coincidence that a lot of clothing and also nineties TV shows are coming back just now. Also, implicitly, it harks back to a time were most television shows – think of Friends or even Miami Vice – are mostly dominated by a heteronormative and white cast. Ergo, this vaporwave aesthetic frames his series on metapolitics through the opening sequence as something relevant for the youth, and relevant to find one's true identity. What that identity is, and how to find it or fight for it becomes clear in the videos. In the introduction video of the series, Sellner makes it explicit why the idea of metapolitics, as Faye introduces it, is important. He argues that he sees two trends among new activists that he considers very negative. The first one is:

> A radicalisation spiral, of people who think the most edgiest thing, the thing that is provoking the most, that is creating the most reactions in the internet in a comment or in a post, is the most courageous, the most true, the smartest thing to do.
>
> *(Sellner, 2017a)*

Sellner disagrees: 'I don't think that is true'. 'The other spiral', he identifies, 'is an opportunistic spiral, people who just want to pander to the mainstream' (Sellner, 2017a). Both spirals, according to Sellner, show a lack 'of strategic understanding, of metapolitics'. That's why he dedicates this series of vlogs to Faye's book. If we want to help establish an 'archeofuturistic future', says Sellner, we need 'to school ourselves and that is why I will present this book' (Sellner, 2017a).

Identity is the first concept that Sellner picks out of Faye's metapolitical dictionary as the stuff that can inform new identitarian activists. The first video is dedicated to the 'Identity'-lemma. Sellner calls the lemma on Identity in Faye's metapolitical dictionary 'prophetic' and subscribes to the idea that culture is 'ethnic', that it 'can't be detached from the people that created it' (Sellner, 2017b). Culture and identity are imagined to be grounded in 'biology', and thus in race. Humanity is 'not universal, one united forum and then there are some superficial differences. No, the differences are very deep and very essential. (…) humanity is pluralistic' (Sellner, 2017b). Pluralism, identity, humanity and metapolitics are thus understood in a biological and racial frame and echo Herder's pluralism. In his copy of 'Why We Fight', shown in the vlog, Sellner has written an exclamation mark next to two paragraphs. In those paragraphs, Faye argues that the 'European Identity is (…) neutralised, emptied of substance' in contrast to 'African, West Indian, and Arab-Muslim identities' that are being 'encouraged' (Faye, 2011: 172). Sellner reads those passages in full in his vlog, and of course immediately links this with Generation Identity's battle for maintaining the European identity and against the replacement. 'We, as identitarianists, we cherish this (identity),

while globalists (…) want to deny this, to overcome this' (Faye, 2011: 172). Not only does Sellner subscribe to Faye's definition of identity, but he also defines the actual goal of Generation Identity and their strategy in line with Faye's focus and even explicitly reproduces his actual words and writings, but he does that in a whole new context and to a whole new audience: young English speaking identitarians.

The second vlog is entirely focused on the idea of metapolitics. 'Metapolitics', says Sellner, 'is a very important concept for us, as we define ourselves as a metapolitical movement' (Sellner, 2017b). Sellner's introduction of Faye's lemma on 'metapolitics' is immediately connected to the fundamental goal of the identitarian movement: the fight for European identity. In the vlog, Sellner not only shares Faye's understanding of metapolitics and his critique on the 'too metapolitical strategy of GRECE', he explicitly takes up his copy of *Archeofuturism* to read Faye's (2011: 29) claim that GRECE overlooked the fact that Gramsci's cultural battle was linked to the political and economic battle of the communist party. Just like Johnson and more in general the American alt-right, Sellner not only subscribes to Faye's critique *of La Nouvelle Droite*, he stresses that his own movement – Generation Identity – has learned from those failures. In Austria, Sellner says, the intellectual right was purely metapolitical and distinct from the activist right. 'Brain and fist' were separated from each other. Generation Identity, he says, is the first movement to follow Faye's advice to 'unite brain and fist' (Sellner, 2017c).

New identitarian activists are thus advised to move beyond 'pure intellectual metapolitics', to unite brain and fist to fight for identity and against 'globalism' (Sellner, 2017d) and 'individualism, the poison of the West'(Sellner, 2017e). Metapolitics is – according to Sellner, key here: activism, politics and cultural activity should all be seen as 'part of that Ancient battle for ideas'(Sellner, 2017e). A battle that Sellner, just like Faye, *La Nouvelle Droite* and the anti-Enlightenment tradition, in general, directs against the idea of 'the primacy of the individual' and society as 'based on a social contract' (Sellner, 2017e). 'The essence of society', Sellner counterargues with references to Schmitt and Spengler, 'is the community, not the individual. It is the primacy of the community' (Sellner, 2017e). As always, the emancipation of the individual and his rights, the primacy of this individual and materialism are understood as part of that attack on the good society. 'Modernism and individualism are replacing organic communities and replacing them with abstract systems and an atomized version of humanity' (Sellner, 2017e).

The ideas of the French new right, especially in Faye's version, are re-emerging in the second decennium of the 21st century in new digital practices, new forms of activism deeply embedded in the (mainstream) digital economy (Maly, 2019a) and in complex forms of activism addressing new audiences. 'Archeofuturism' and 'Why We Fight' are not only products of their time,[4] they are best to be considered as part of a turning point in different new

local forms of new right activism. Faye's *Archeofuturism* and *Why We Fight* advances a bold and, even within the far-right, controversial future perspective (Bar-On, 2013: 189). Faye's books contribute to a more radical spin-off from GRECE's intellectual heritage and articulate an explicit, combative and future-oriented, pan-European blood-and-soil ideology.

Guillaume Faye and the birth of metapolitics 2.0

Guillaume Faye's role in the popularization of metapolitics, and especially the broadening of metapolitics from a purely intellectual practice to a broad ideological battle carried by a wide range of different actors, has played a key role in the genealogy of metapolitics 2.0. The rise of new right activists, intellectuals, movements and parties in the 21st century is not only connected to the digital economy and the digital literacy of the metapolitical activists but also to Faye's conceptualization of metapolitics and the archeofuturistic future. His celebrity intellectual status within the global new right and the global praise after his death underline this legacy (Maly, 2022). Faye is not only an agent provocateur or a radical messenger of de Benoist ideas but also an educator. His identitarianism is a new blend of anti-Enlightenment (Sternhell, 2010), reactionary modernist, conservative revolutionary and *Nouvelle Droite* ideas repackaged in a new discourse, advocating new strategies, imaginaries and providing a new generation with a new geopolitical horizon and practical advice.

Generation Identity, but also key figures of the alt-right like Richard Spencer, Greg Johnson and Jared Taylor, are his living legacy: they have appropriated or re-entextualized his ideas in new practices, new battles and new contexts directing them to new audiences. Spencer even explicitly labelled himself an archeofuturist (Hawely, 2017: 65). It is in this uptake that we see why analysing ideology should not be limited to classic texts of intellectuals but should take Thompson's lessons on board and also analyse uptake, distribution and reproduction of these ideologies within a new digital ecology. This focus on the uptake and the morphing of ideological reproduction allows us to avoid the fallacy of internalism and direct attention to an empirical understanding of the impact and meaning in society. It also forces us to take the infrastructure itself into account (Maly, 2022a).

When we do that, we not only realize that metapolitics has been taken up as a key ingredient of new right groups around the world, but we can see that many of those movements and activists mobilize similar topics and discourses in order to fight that cultural battle. The idea of white genocide or the Great Replacement, the attack on our identity, culture and values, the idea that boomers have destroyed Western society or the fight against political correctness, the left, LGBTQ+ acceptance and migration, they all have become standard discourse ingredients of the far-right around the

world. Metapolitics 2.0 is fundamentally different than *La Nouvelle Droite*'s conception of metapolitics. Metapolitics 2.0 is co-constructed by the affordances and interfaces of digital media: it is an effect of the uptake of a broader conception of metapolitics as advocated by Guillaume Faye and the integration in digital cultures facilitated by the digital utopianism ideologies underpinning major digital media platform. As a result, metapolitics has been 'democratized': not only intellectuals engage in metapolitics, but also activists, influencers, movements and politicians. The metapolitical strategies of new right actors are not only visible in the classic metapolitical structures influenced by *La Nouvelle Droite*, but are embedded and enabled by digital cultures. Metapolitics can now also be found in blogs and vlogs, memes, podcasts and influencer culture and in offline practices influenced by digital culture. In the next chapters, we will further unpack metapolitics 2.0 by zooming in on metapolitical activism (Chapter 3), metapolitical influencers (Chapter 4) and conspiracy theories (Chapter 5). In Chapter 6 we focus on the offline impact of this new metapolitical digital culture.

Notes

1 Others suggest that Joseph de Maistre was the first to introduce the concept.
2 Arktos was only able to crowdfund the money to translate *La colonisation de l'europe* (2000) in 2017 and 2018. The translation 'The Colonisation of Europe' was published by them in 2018.
3 See the many blogs and essays dedicated to the thought of Faye on Counter-Currents: https://cse.google.com/cse?cx=017178463955692752464%3Ackeh2am8da8&q=guillaume%20Faye&oq=guillaume%20Faye&gs_l=partner-generic.3...24492.27741.0.27887.0.0.0.0.0.0.0..0.0.gsnos%2Cn%3D13...0.3223j1590789j15...1.34.partner-generic..0.0.0.
4 As is illustrated in the focus on 'anti-globalization', Fukuyama's 'end of ideology' -discourse and the reproduction of Huntington's notion of the Clash of civilizations.

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3

THE GLOBAL NEW RIGHT AND THE ALGORITHMIC ACTIVISM OF SCHILD & VRIENDEN

In the previous chapter, I showed how *La Nouvelle Droite's* metapolitics as an ideological project has been taken up by activists in Europe and the United States. I first showed the historical context of metapolitics and subsequently stressed the processes of re-entextualization in which metapolitics slowly but surely was expanded to include new strategies and new actors. Metapolitics 2.0, as I call it, was profoundly mediated by Guillaume Faye. In this chapter, I will argue that contemporary new right metapolitics not only binds together different generations of actors but also different actors around the world (Johnson, 2012; Hawley, 2017; Nagle, 2017; Maly, 2018d). Several scholars have highlighted the translocal and global dimensions of contemporary far-right groups, activists and even far-right terrorism (Miller-Idriss, 2018; Maly, 2018a, 2018b; Auger, 2020; Caniglia, Winkler & Métais, 2020). This seems paradoxical, as the new and far-right is usually associated with an anti-globalist position. I will therefore start by analysing new right discourse on globalization and arguing why we should abandon methodological nationalism, and start analysing the contemporary new right from a global context. The digital media ecology, I argue, not only allowed for the globalization of metapolitical commitment, strategies and practices, but it also reshaped them, and maybe more importantly, it gave birth to a global new right culture. Metapolitics 2.0 is one of the global ingredients of the contemporary new right.

Globalization, globalism and the global new right

Already in the nineties, new right intellectuals and far-right politicians used the rupture caused by cultural or neoliberal globalization to mobilize

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people for national, regional, anti-liberal, racist and especially anti-left stances (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998; Kriesi et al., 2008; Wodak et al., 2014). In a widely read and translated paper, Alain de Benoist tapped into the anti-globalist left of the nineties and the first decade of the 21st century and argued (de Benoist, 1996: 125) that globalization, 'through a flood of universal images and sounds, (…) contributes to the standardization of lifestyles, to the reduction of differences and particularities, the conformity of attitudes and behaviours, the eradication of collective identities and traditional cultures'. Globalization is here understood as a process of homogenization – and not in left-wing terms as imperialistic, causing exploitation and inequality – driven by 'egalitarianism, the reducer of the world's diversity'. The anti-globalization discourse is in essence directed towards a specific form of globalization. It does this by adapting popular theories on globalization as a McDonaldization (see for instance the bestselling book from Barber [1996] on Jihad vs McWorld) and thus linking to mainstream popular knowledge about globalization. This so-called anti-globalism discourse is a dominant narrative among contemporary new right activists. It is paradoxically globalized and has become one of the global characteristics of the global new right. The success of this anti-globalism discourse is not only due to the preparatory work of *La Nouvelle Droite* but also the result of contemporary new right actors like Lana Lokteff, Brittany Pettibone, The Golden One, Lauren Southern, Millennial Woes and many others who have global reach and are globally connected that spread it around in different niches. Of course, Donald Trump (Blommaert, 2019b) and many other figures with access to the mainstream have certainly contributed to the further popularity and mainstreaming of this discourse.

Contrary to most popular and new right literature on globalization in the nineties of the 20th century, many fine-grained ethnographic studies contradict the growth of a so-called homogenizing global monoculture, or in more popular terms, the McDonaldization of the world (see for instance Pennycook, 2012). Mature theories on cultural globalization see it as a plurality of imagined worlds (Appadurai, 1996: 5), and the imagination of the collective through every day (mediated) practices is more and more diversified, transnational or even post-national. Even more, it is not necessarily ethnic or national anymore (Maly, Blommaert, & Ben Yakoub, 2014). Culture in post-digital and globalized times is best understood as 'a more "niched" complex of processes, developing at different scale-levels, some of them truly global, but most of them regional, national or even sub-national'. (Blommaert, 2010: 77). The truly global world of the elites, the business people and the top politicians and diplomats do impact ordinary life and usually falls beyond the reach of the common man. This scale level is highly exclusive and powerful, but globalization is more than that. Globalization also works on lower scales – the vernacular globalization that Appadurai spoke about –

and takes the form of translocal networks of locally embedded groups that are jointly producing culture in networks (Castells, 1996). The global new right is, as we have seen, paradoxically an example of this. Digitalization has a central role in this globalization of the new right. The new generation of new right intellectuals and activists use digital media not only to engage in a metapolitical battle, or to organize offline protest, but digital media form a crucial infrastructure that allows activists to educate themselves, to network, to build culture and to shape their activism. Digital media allowed far-right activists to learn from each other, and as a result, a global new right network and culture was born.

Understanding the globalization of the new right

Global culture shouldn't be understood as a synonym for a homogeneous culture on a global scale. Contrary to what popular parlance and new right theories on globalization want us to believe, globalization or globalism doesn't produce a homogenization of culture, a global monoculture (See Blommaert, 2011 for a detailed discussion), but a world of countless cultural niches operating on different scales. The global new right culture is one of those cultural niches. And within that niche, we see a complex web of different centres of normativity operating on different scales. The result is a layered, transnational and polycentric culture that preconfigures the new right world order. Material and symbolic ties within that cultural niche are very real, but they are only real in unpredictable and complex ways that beg for detailed analysis. The contemporary new right is thus not a swarm of individuals, reacting autonomously but synchronized, they are structured networked publics around sites, think tanks, intellectuals, influencers, movements and activists who lead them, sometimes as reluctant leaders (Gerbaudo, 2014), sometimes taking up the role of leader. This new right global cultural niche is not unique, but a typical product of globalization processes facilitated by digital media and rising mobility.

In order to analyse and grasp the full meaning of contemporary new right metapolitics, I employ a global perspective that focusses on the mobility of resources and the layeredness of activism. In short, I argue that if we truly want to understand new right metapolitical activism in the 21st century, we need to overcome 'methodological nationalism'. Research on politics, and in particular on nationalism and the far-right, to a large extent, still displays 'methodological nationalism (…) the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world' (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). Even though there are reasons to do that in far-right research (the regional and national claims for instance), we should realize that methodological nationalism blurs the fact that the world has always been transnational and turns a blind eye to the impact of cellular systems

(Appadurai, 2006: 27) in the construction of the contemporary (political) world. More importantly, it blurs the fact that globalization is actually used for nationalist and regionalist goals. Miller-Idriss (2018: 132), for instance, argues that 'many of these nationalist movements have distinctly and strikingly global aspects' as a result of the 'rapid transformation in communication and knowledge sharing across national boundaries'.

Methodological nationalism ignores globalization as context in meaning-making processes and thus in culture production. Contextualizing national and regional new right practices and discourses is crucial to understand the contemporary new right. Miller-Idriss describes the effect of globalization in terms of 'deterritorialization': far-right activists can now 'align, cooperate, communicate, and support each other across national contexts' (Miller-Idriss, 2018: 134). Miller-Idriss rightfully focuses on the global and mobility of meanings, but at the same time, she seems to overstate the 'de- territorialisation' and the 'de-contextualization' that globalization and digital media cause. Even though I fully support Miller-Idriss' plea to move beyond a national or an international comparative approach and thus focus on the global and effects of mobility on meaning-making, I do think that a sociolinguistic approach to culture and globalization can deepen our understanding of far-right cultures and practices in the 21st century, and provide a more empirical and detailed account of the effects of globalization on far-right culture. The starting point in such an approach is that mobility of signs and discourses is not 'a mobility across empty spaces, but mobility across space filled with codes, customs, rules, expectations and so forth' (Blommaert, 2005: 73). This in practice means that signs are never fully de-contextualized or de-territorialized: they are used in those contexts and thus filled and shaped according to the norms, codes, rules and expectations of their users.

The rise of digitalization and mobility since the nineties of the 20th century has created a juncture visible in the scale, intensity and scope of globalization processes (Appadurai, 1996; Arnaut et al., 2016). Migration and digital media have not only reshaped our imagination of the world (Appadurai, 1996: 3), they also enabled the democratization of global (cultural) flows. Whereas in non-digital times, the transnational dimension of politics was to a large extent embedded in the networks of national political elites and vertebrate 'inter-national' organizations, this has changed in the last decades (Appadurai, 1996: 32; Maly, Blommaert & Ben Yakoub, 2014). Today, digital media function as infrastructures that enable and structure global networked activist movements (Klein 2002, 4; Wolfson, 2014; Tufekci, 2017). The rising importance of global networks, cellular systems and global cultural and political flows are emblematic of this latest phase of globalization and are largely undertheorized when it comes to new right activism. By taking on board a sociolinguistic theory of globalization (see Blommaert, 2011), I will

analyse the Flemish identitarian movement Schild & Vrienden from a global perspective, but first I want to shed some light on digital media and the global flows in contemporary far-right culture.

Metapolitics 2.0 and the global new right

Whereas the far-right has always used digital media to propagate their ideologies (Winter 2019; Weimann & Masri, 2020), we have seen that the adoption of the metapolitical strategy has changed the form and the strategies that are being used today. Even the actors themselves have changed: metapolitics has been democratized. From highbrow far-right intellectual work, it has now morphed into a broad rhizomatic network of actors (re)producing far-right ideas in many different forms using many different channels and addressing many different (niched) audiences. These changes have had fundamental effects, not only on the metapolitical battle itself but also on the structure and scale on which far-right actors operate. The affordances of digital media have shaped and facilitated the globalization of new right actors. Some of those actors work on a local scale, others on a national or European scale, and some of them operate on a truly global scale. Martin Sellner for instance is not only a prominent member of the Austrian chapter of Generation Identity, but he also plays a crucial role on a European and even a global scale. A similar argument can be made about a key figure like The Golden One (see Chapter 3). This far-right bodybuilder and influencer may be located in Sweden, but his uptake is global and is explicitly designed for global uptake. Alexander Dugin is another example. The Russian new right philosopher merged GRECE and the Traditionalism of Julius Evola for the Russian market, but at the same time, he has become one of the most influential new right intellectuals on a global scale. He is invited to congresses around the world, interviewed by mass media and translated and distributed by Arktos. In the 21st century, the new right is a polycentric, layered and transnational new right network (Maly, 2018a). This network was in the last years the object of increasing academic attention and has been labelled as the international alt-right (Hermansson, Lawrence, Mulhall & Murdoch, 2020), new right 2.0 (Watson & Barnes, 2022) or the European-American radical right (François, 2019). All those labels describe the transnationalization of the contemporary far-right and the legacy of *La Nouvelle Droite* on that transnational scale. I choose to use the label global new right for four reasons:

1 In my analysis, the alt-right is tied to activism that is first and foremost connected to the advancement of new right metapolitics in the United States. This movement in itself is indeed an international network (see Figure 3.1), but the focus of that network – even though it has received global uptake – is first and foremost the United States.

2 The alt-right itself is more effectively and correctly described as a deglobalization of the European new right. The alt-right is (was) an important centre within the global new right, but it was certainly not the only centre, nor the only important one, nor the first one.
3 The theories of the intellectuals of *La Nouvelle Droite* are – as I argued in the previous chapter – the ideological roots of contemporary movements that are described by those labels. In all actions of contemporary new right movements and actors around the world, we see the metapolitical injection of *La Nouvelle Droite*. This injection does not limit itself to Europe or the United States. Dugin for instance has appropriated it in Russia, dreaming of a Eurasian empire.
4 The metapolitical strategy of *La Nouvelle Droite* is one of the elements that creates unity in this global movement. Metapolitics has been globalized, meaning that the new right battle for culture has taken roots in many different countries of the world. It was a global injection that was subsequently deglobalized by local actors like the alt-right in the United States, Generation Identitaire in France or Schild & Vrienden in Belgium.
5 The different activists, sites, intellectuals and influencers form a truly global network. They read, share and support work from each other and use it to legitimize local and translocal goals. The Golden One reads *La Nouvelle Droite*, promotes Arktos books, is invited to congresses in the Ukraine and is viewed from all corners of the world.
6 The ideas and the battle of the contemporary new right are explicitly global in nature. They do not just imagine a national world, they fight for a new world order. They call it a pluriversum, an ethno-plural world or and multipolar world. The crux is that they do not limit themselves to nationalism, but they think in terms of civilizations and empires. They think, but as we will see, also act, on a global scale.

The global new right is in this sense a far more precise term. The global new right refers to all those sites, publishers, conferences, activists, politicians, intellectuals, influencers and media sites operating as centres of normativity. What binds them is their resistance against the 'modern world', the egalitarianism that supports contemporary cultural globalization. They fight democracy, universal human rights, liberalism and socialism, and fight for a second modernity based on the rights of people, organicism and tradition. Not globalization is the main enemy, but globalism: the neoliberal form of contemporary globalization.

Arktos and the globalization of anti-globalism

Far-right publishing house Arktos is an excellent case to understand this alternative form of globalization. Arktos was founded in 2009 and launched in

2010, and is now the 'largest retailer of radical right literature in the world' (Teitelbaum, 2019: 270). Arktos is the inheritor of Integral Tradition Publishing, a Danish publishing company which started in 2005, and Nordiska Föglaget, the far-right publishing house of Nordiska Fördbundete. Integral Tradition Publishing started as an online bookstore and publishing company specializing in occult books and texts on mysticism that promoted traditionalist and esoteric worldviews (Valencia-Garcia, 2020). The Nordiska Fördbundet publishing house was Daniel Friberg's first attempt to set up a metapolitical publishing house and media empire (Teitelbaum, 2019: 265). It is thus not a coincidence that Arktos, as a fusion of those publishers, claims not to propagate

> any specific ideology, a system of beliefs or viewpoint, nor do we seek consistency. Rather, we want to provide a voice for individuals and viewpoints who are often overlooked by the mainstream, but who offer original and challenging alternatives to our prevailing culture that cannot be found elsewhere.
>
> *(Website Arktos accessed in 2022)*

Former editor-in-chief John Morgan also claimed that Arktos is not pushing a specific ideology, but that they do provide 'alternatives for modernity' (THA Talks, 2016). The claim not to 'push an ideology', is thus not to be mistaken for being neutral, or Arktos being open to each ideology. 'Ideology' is here used in the narrow sense, as clear-cut ideologies like liberalism, fascism, or Nazism. Ideologies with clear boundaries. Arktos is an ideological publisher in the sense that it advocates all books that support, feed and shape the anti-Enlightenment tradition. Morgan, for instance, clearly argues that a pro-multiculturalist viewpoint or liberal one would not be considered for publication (THA Talks, 2016). In other words, Arktos is open to several ideologies, as long as they question the current modernity. 'Our mission is very simple' says Friberg: 'to spread the ideas of the most important thinkers of our times as broad as possible' (React, 2016). The 'luminary thinkers' that shape the contemporary anti-Enlightenment tradition promoted by Arktos are amongst others: Alain de Benoist, Guillaume Faye, Pierre Krebs, Alexander Dugin, Julius Evola, Generation Identity, Arthur Moeller van Den Bruck, Charles Maurras, Dominique Venner, H.P. Lovecraft, Markus Willinger, Oswald Spengler, James Kirkpatrick, Daniel Friberg, Jared Taylor, John Bruce Leonard and Koenraad Van Elst. Arktos publishes key thinkers of *La Nouvelle Droite*, contemporary far-right activists like (Markus Willinger, Generation Identity, Jared Taylor), Traditionalists (Julius Evola, Alexander Dugin) and Conservative Revolutionaries (Oswald Spengler, Charles Maurras). The most important thinkers are explicitly anti-liberal or more in general, anti-materialistic. This explains why Arktos can on the one hand claim to be not

ideological, and to be proud that it 'has established itself as the principal publisher in English of the writings of the European "new right" school of political thought' (Arktos website, last accessed May 2022).

Arktos *de facto* functions as a foundational new right centre of normativity operating on the highest scale of globalization. It is a metapolitical infrastructure providing ideological education to far-right activists and intellectuals around the world. It is also a truly global infrastructure. Arktos itself has set up shops in Sweden, Great Britain, Hungary and India. Its authors come from France, Italy, Belgium, the United States, the UK, Russia, Iran and many other countries. Arktos also publishes in 16 different languages. Most of these languages are European in origin: English, Dutch, Hungarian, Polish, German, Spanish, Czech, Croatian, French, Greek, Italian, Latvian, Portuguese, Serbian, Slovak & Swedish. Next to Red Ice, Arktos is one of the sponsors of the Identitarian Ideas conference and it was a founding partner of the now-defunct website Altright.com. All these initiatives attracted intellectuals, activists and visitors on a global scale. Arktos also doesn't hide the fact that its operation is global in nature. On the contrary. Not only does Friberg eagerly explain that this international form of Arktos was deliberate (Teitelbaum, 2019: 270), 'making anti-globalism global' is the official motto of the publisher on their Facebook page. Even more, they also proudly retweeted a cartoon from Ben Garrison with the same slogan shown together with cartoon versions of Alain de Benoist, Guillaume Faye, Daniel Friberg and Alexander Dugin.

Many scholars see this motto as a paradox, a *contradictio in terminis* (Valencia-Garcia, 2020: 311). What is missed is that Arktos explicitly rejects 'globalism', and not necessarily globalization as such. Globalism is presented as the real enemy. Globalism here refers to a specific form of globalization, one that is associated with Enlightenment, democracy and egalitarianism, with multiculturalism and feminism, and of course with institutions like the EU, the UN and NATO. Interestingly enough, it also refers to the notion of cultural Marxism (Blommaert, 2019b). In other words, globalism indexes the egalitarianism so detested and fought against by *La Nouvelle Droite*, the identitarians and the alt-right. The fight of Arktos aligns with them, not in rejecting globalism in the form of technology, travelling or global connections, but in rejecting the specific form of globalization that is associated with open borders, the great replacement, the attack on tradition and local cultures. Globalism is the name of the ideology – egalitarianism in traditional *Nouvelle Droite* discourse – that shapes contemporary globalization. Arktos is promoting different ideologies that give an alternative to this particular modernism, a different globalization and modernity. The bio on their Facebook page is clear on this:

> Increasingly, people sense that something seems terribly wrong with the modern world. Arktos has been founded to offer such individuals - however

> varied their philosophic and aesthetic inclinations - the resources necessary to discover for themselves a true alternative to the onslaught of modernity.

The alternatives promoted by their authors can range from the radical traditionalism of Julius Evola to Guillaume Faye's archeofuturism. What connects these authors is a metaphilosophy (Lievens, 2013) that rejects Enlightenment in its contemporary form: the anti-Enlightenment tradition.

Just like the reactionary modernists (Herf, 1984) combined traditional values with the embrace of technology, Arktos, and the contemporary new right in general, embrace technologies for metapolitical goals. In that sense, they are modernists: they do not want to go back to an old pre-technological traditional society; they embrace technologies if it helps to revive traditional values, cultures and languages. It is a common misconception that the far-right's reactionary politics would entail that they want to go back to a pre-technological era: they, on the contrary, want to fuse tradition and technology. The embrace of technology is realized by undoing the 'spirit grounding those technologies' (Lievens, 2013), the spirit of neoliberal globalization and fusing it in an archeofuturistic way, to use Faye's discourse. All mainstream media are regularly criticized by the new right authors for being liberal, left-wing or cultural Marxist, but at the same time, they try to use them as much as possible. Arktos is a classic example of this fusion. The publisher uses print on-demand to make its business sustainable, it advertises and is present on all major mainstream social media and streaming services like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Spotify (with the exception of Twitter where it got banned). It also is present on more alternative niched platforms like Odysee, GAB, VK and Telegram. While all these social media and user-generated platforms are important for the metapolitical quest and the marketing of Arktos books, the most crucial is Arktos' integration with Amazon. Several Arktos books are distributed by different book sites like Book Depository, Barnes & Noble, Free Speech library and Logik.se, but only Amazon sells them all. Even if you buy books on the website of Arktos, you are forwarded to Amazon. Customers cannot only buy the published books by Arktos there, several Arktos titles are freely available if you have Kindle Unlimited subscription and available as audiobooks on Amazon's Audible platform. Amazon thus functions, not only as a platform that provides revenue for Arktos, it *de facto* functions as a metapolitical infrastructure.

It should be clear that Arktos knows its way around the globe. It is an example of globalization. Even though Arktos publishes in 16 different languages, English is the lingua franca of the publisher. That is no coincidence as it indexes the intended audience of the publisher and thus its goal to cater to an international far-right market. The translations of the English books index the world order they try to help construct: a multipolar world, but also a world characterized by a shared anti-Enlightenment tradition. This

specific example of globalization may use the infrastructures of neoliberal globalization, but it does so to build a different form of globalization.

Arktos is an emblematic example of how globalization reshapes the far-right. The result of that interconnected and mediated cultural production is rarely a global monoculture, but is better understood as 'locality transported in locality' (Blommaert, 2010: 79) through processes of englobalization of local cultures and symbolic forms and deglobalization or re-indigenizing them in other places. This vernacular globalization as Appadurai (1996) calls it, or translocalisation, connects local groups with the cultural practices of other local groups. The globalization of far-right, new right and anti-liberal margins is such a vernacular globalization that has been enabled by digital media and is operating at one particular scale level, lower than the fully global one: 'it is the connectedness of small pockets of people located (and "local") in many different parts of the world' (Blommaert, 2011: 77). Important here is that these globalized margins are:

1 Fighting metapolitically to become global on the highest scale, to globalize their ideology in such a way that it organizes/structures the world.
2 These groups are not necessarily as marginal on a national or regional scale. It is probably not a coincidence that in 2014, Arktos set up its headquarters in Hungary. The same country where the identitarian movement set up its bank account.
3 The power of these groups is not necessarily stable but can fluctuate as a result of sudden or long-term changes. The alt-right is a case book example. The alt-right, as a result of the electoral victory of Donald Trump, suddenly became an important centre in that global new right network. It not only became highly visible in the global hybrid media system, but it also played – for a relatively short period – a central role in the culture production within this global niche.

The global new right: transporting locality in locality

As a result of digital media, digital culture and global actors like Arktos, we should seriously question the notion of national new right or Identitarian movements. In Chapter 2, we already stressed that globalization is the context in which cultural forms are produced and circulated. Taking globalization seriously as context means that we also have to question the idea of local movements. The idea of 'local movements', using local practices and local discourses to fight for local causes, seems more and more a fiction. This was clearly visible on a European scale when we analysed Generation Identity as a pan-European and even trans-Atlantic phenomenon in the previous chapter. This reality seems emblematic of many contemporary new right movements. Even though all new right actors claim to resist globalization,

universalism and cosmopolitanism, they are touched by the cultural globalization processes. Central to this transnationalization and the construction of this network is the theoretical and methodological renewal of *La Nouvelle Droite* that broke down the integral nationalism of the old right and of course the impact of digitalization. It is through digital media that these new metapolitical actors contribute to the metapolitical project. Digital media not only allow them to connect on a global scale but also allow some intellectuals like Alexander Dugin to operate globally. Dugin, just like Arktos, embraces this and explicitly calls for a 'conservative internationalism' that comes together in a fight against 'modernity' (Southern, 2018a): he embraces 'multipolarity' and therefore pleas for an 'international of nations vs. the international of the elites' (Dugin, 2021: 32). It is in these global networks that they share cultural products and are involved in processes of joint cultural production.

The global new right illustrates, contrary to their own narrative on globalization, the point Appadurai already stressed in the nineties: 'globalization is not the story of cultural homogenization' (Appadurai, 1996: 11); it transports locality into locality. The deglobalization and indignation of the Pepe meme already made this point clear. This can be further demonstrated by zooming in on the alt-right as a movement, and more generally on the cultural impact of the alt-right within the global new right. The alt-right, as a local American centre within the global new right, was responsible for producing very specific discursive materials (memes, podcasts, vlogs) and practices (trolling, algorithmic activism) to further a new right agenda. Even though the uptake of these practices was global (Maly, 2018e), the practices and discourses were, as we have seen, not instances of a global monoculture within the far-right niche. Memes and trolling practices were not just shared or copied, they were deglobalized by local actors who re-entextualize them and use them in different forms and with different meanings in a local metapolitical battle. And the alt-right itself was also not 'a local' network. Let's unpack these two arguments.

The alt-right movement itself gradually came into existence as a polycentric network. This network was embedded in all kinds of far-right media (Counter-Currents, Vdare, Taki Magazine, The Daily Stormer, TakiMagazine, Occidental Observer), think tanks (American Renaissance, National Policy Institute), publishers (Arktos, Radix), congresses (New York Forum, Amren conference), and fora (see Figure 3.1), and of course mainstream digital media like YouTube and Facebook. All these online and offline infrastructures were used as 'metapolitical instruments' and resemble the type of organizations new right movements have set up all over Europe in the 20th and 21st centuries (Griffin, 2000; cfe. Salzborn, 2016). At the same time, we see that new actors emerge in the metapolitical battle of the alt-right: trolls, influencers and Twitter activists using mainstream digital media to further the metapolitical battle. What has been labelled as 'the alt-right' was in reality different cells,

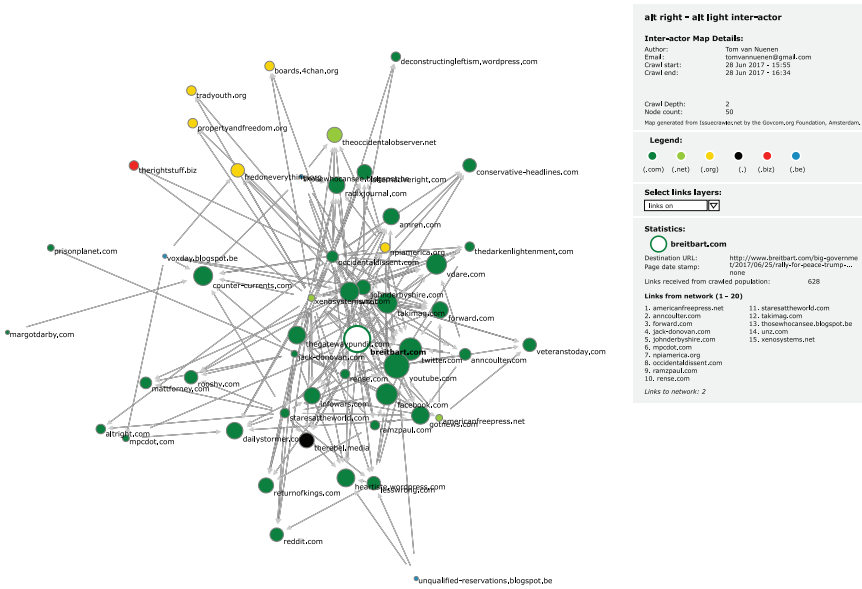

FIGURE 3.1 Network analysis Alt-right 2017 – Copyright: Ico Maly.

media, boards, groups and individual actors of the alt-right into a networked movement: 'it is a many-headed hydra made up of a collection of figures and groups, none of which fully control the loose movement's direction' (Hermansson, Lawrence, Mulhall & Murdoch, 2019). This movement was united in some actions under hashtags such as #altright and #cuckservative in their discursive battle to get Trump elected (Hawley, 2017; Maly, 2018). Even though these cells frame themselves as promoting an extreme-right alternative to the neoliberal and neoconservative Republican party and globalization (or globalism in their lingo; Hawley, 2017; Nagle, 2017; Maly, 2018), it is important to realize that this networked movement has global dimensions.

1 First of all, different actors and cells in that networked movement are not based in the United States (Arktos is operating from London and Hungary, Weev from The Daily Stormer lives in Europe and Red Ice is partly based in Sweden).
2 Second, in setting up these infrastructures and defining their metapolitical goal, several alt-right key figures like Richard Spencer, Greg Johnson or Daniel Friberg explicitly claimed to find inspiration in *La Nouvelle Droite*.
3 The digital infrastructure they use in their battle is clearly global in nature. This is, as we have seen after Charlottesville, not a detail. On the contrary, the success and impact of the alt-right were clearly connected to their integration into the mainstream. It is also the digital media that allowed for the global impact of the alt-right.

From this global perspective, alt-right figures like Greg Johnson and Richard Spencer, the radical right publishing house Arktos and identitarian activists are best understood as contemporary *indiginizations*, or re-territorializations, of the metapolitical and ideological agenda of *La Nouvelle Droite*. The alt-right for instance exists, according to John Morgan (editor of the radical right publishing house Arktos), first and fore most as 'a culture primarily of blogs, memes, podcasts, and videos', which he claims is the 'natural outgrowth of the anti-intellectualism inherent in Anglo-American political and cultural discourse (…)' (Morgan, 2017). In other words, the elitist intellectual battle of *La Nouvelle Droite* transformed into a digital culture battle carried by memes, soundbites, tweets and hashtags. This local alt-right culture was in turn taken up by other movements in other corners of the planet where the de-contextualization process starts again.

One of the most successful metapolitical instruments of the alt-right was the appropriation of the meme and the embeddedness of the metapolitical battle in the ongoing culture war between 4channers and the normies after Gamergate (Nagle, 2017: 24). This memification of the metapolitical battle for the ideals of the conservative revolution caused a global uptake and subsequent renewal of the metapolitical battle, first in the United States, but very soon on a global scale. This very specific repertoire of collective action – deeply embedded in the contemporary algorithmically determined public space – was very quickly adopted by new right and Identitarian cells around the world.

In 2016 and 2017, Pepe the Frog memes were, as we have seen, a successful export product. In Figure 3.2, you can see how the profile pic of the Flemish meme page 'De Fiere Vlaamse Meme' (The proud Flemish meme) uses Pepe in a local Flemish context (see Figure 3.2). Pepe the Frog is here positioned on a shield. On top we see Pepe wearing what resembles a war helmet from the Middle Ages and what appears to be a 'Goedendag', a weapon originally used by the militias of Medieval Flanders. Below Pepe, we see the Flemish region with the Flemish flag. On the border of the shield we read '1302 E Meme Divisie – Schild en Vriend'. The date 1302 refers to the old Flemish nationalist myth about the so-called 'Brugse metten' in 1302. In this myth, the social conflict dimension of this historical battle is downplayed to frame it as the first legendary Flemish nationalist battle against the French. 'Schild & Vriend' was used as a shibboleth to be able to identify the French enemies (Tollebeek, 1999). By choosing the baseline *Schild & Vriend*, the page positions itself in a very long tradition of Flemish nationalist politics. The E Meme Divisie probably refers to Electronic Meme Division and is clearly inspired by alt-right meming and trolling practices. Pepe is mobilized for the Flemish nationalist cause, without of course fully erasing his 'edgy history' in the United States. The sign itself has different layers of meaning that need to be peeled away. Whereas Pepe indexes contemporary internet

FIGURE 3.2 Profile picture of far-right Facebook meme group De Fiere Vlaamse Meme 2017 (The Proud Flemish Meme).

Source: https://www.facebook.com/defierevlaamse.

culture and alt-right metapolitics, the words 'Schild en Vriend', the Flemish flag and 1302 refer to a very different spatio-temporal frame. We thus see the synchronization of different digital practices and different chronotopes in one movement.

These semiotic resources are not only de-territorialized as Miller-Idress argues, but they are also constantly re-territorialized and re-contextualized. In many local American and non-American activist discourses, we will see materials and strategies reflected from other activists in other places. Not as generic or de-territorialized resources but as re-entextualizations and re-territorialized materials. These resources are all indexes of the systematic global nature of this type of metapolitics, and thus also of the specific world order they try to build. Note also how this layeredness of metapolitical memes has phatic effects (Varis & Blommaert & Varis, 2018). The identarian activist group Schild & Vrienden was born out of the Flemish nationalist and new right meme page (Ceder, 2017) and connections with radical right student fraternities. It is their adoption of these far-right memes, and their

schooling by Generation Identitaire, that allowed them to construct not only a new type of activist movement on a local scale but also connect different (individual) actors, movements and cells from different corners of the world, and thus contribute to a feeling of belonging and a shared group identity that transverses national boundaries. New right memes contribute to an imagination of a networked global new right community.

This meme page, along with many other actors operating on different scales in different countries make up the global new right. The global new right is thus not only a layered, polycentric and transnational niche in which practices and discourses are produced and distributed. It is also a very productive cultural learning environment where groups or individual activists are not only rapidly exchanging cultural products and discourses enabling learning from each other, but also helping each other in metapolitical battles. The result is that even seemingly local activism is deeply influenced by this global layered and polycentric cultural niche. I will illustrate this in more detail by analysing the above-mentioned Flemish Identitarian movement Schild & Vrienden.

The global new right and Schild & Vrienden's metapolitics

On March 3, 2018, 'Schild & Vrienden' organized an activist intervention to derail ludic protests by civil society organizations at the Gravensteen Castle in Ghent, Belgium. This Flemish far-right Identitarian movement was born out of the meme page – De Fiere Vlaamse Meme – where youngsters from different Flemish nationalist student unions (National Student Union [NSV] and Catholic Flemish High Student Union [KVHV]) and youth divisions of political parties (the extreme-right Flemish Interest [VB] and the radical right New Flemish Alliance [N-VA]) found each other. They stormed the castle because civil society organizations were protesting the 'inhuman European migration policies' (GentInsight, 2018). Schild & Vrienden showed up with 20–30 activists. They pulled down the giant European flag hanging on the wall of the castle and filmed their intervention. This video material was later edited into a 3-min clip and uploaded on the Schild & Vrienden Facebook page. The video immediately went viral. Before that uptake, the offline intervention already generated visibility in mass media (EDG, 2018; VTM Nieuws, 2018) and right-wing partisan media (Decker, 2018a; 'Schild & Vrienden Activists Took Action', 2018), which helped their video post go viral.

Attention even multiplied after Schild & Vrienden's Facebook video was deleted and different right-wing media framed it as an effect of politically correct censorship (Decker, 2018b). After Facebook banned the movie (in reality because of copyright infringement), Schild & Vrienden reuploaded it with a

different soundtrack on March 8, 2018, at which point it went viral again. One year later (7 March 2019), this second uploaded video managed to attract 185,000 views, 2,900 interactions, 1,200 shares, and 1,006 comments. These numbers, seen from a Flemish or Belgian perspective, are impressive. At face value, they suggest a huge fan-base. No wonder the post triggered massive mainstream media attention in Flanders (23 articles in the Flemish press in May 2018) and put them on the radar of (far-) right-wing outlets around the world like the Gateway Pundit and Red Ice TV. All this media coverage in turn boosted the fan and follower base of Schild & Vrienden's Facebook page from around 4,000 to over 10,000 in a couple of days (May 2018). In 2021, they acquired more than 39,000 friends on Facebook, but were also blocked on Twitter and Instagram.

In the rest of this chapter, I will analyse how Schild & Vrienden use digital media for its metapolitical battle. I will argue that the movement successfully exploits the logic of 'new' media and old mass media to draw the attention of a broad audience to its message. Reach on social media is used as proof that they articulate 'the voice of a new Flemish generation conscience about their heritage'. That massive reach is used as part of the populist communicative relation (Maly, 2018e). I will first address the historical situatedness of their activism and their metapolitical strategy. After that, I will show how that metapolitical strategy is adopted in relation to the digital environments by analysing the mediatization of their intervention at the Gravensteen castle in Ghent, Belgium. Concretely, I will use the concept of algorithmic activism (Maly, 2018a, 2018e) to stress how Schild & Vrienden not only fights a discursive battle but also uses knowledge of the digital environment to make their message go viral. I will show how the online and offline activism of Schild & Vrienden uses the media logic and affordances of digital media to stretch the so-called Overton window in mainstream media. In summary, I will make the case that their activism should be understood as a metapolitics 2.0. And connected to this, we cannot understand Schild & Vrienden as a local movement.

Schild & Vrienden and the deglobalization of the global new right

The Facebook page of Schild & Vrienden was established in March 2017. The group, from the start, was hierarchically structured with Dries Van Langenhove, a student at Ghent University, as its leader. Around him circled a core group of 30–40 activists and many less active activists/supporters. Van Langenhove was, after he became famous as the leader of Schild & Vrienden, elected as an independent on the election lists of the extreme-right party Flemish Interest.

On the one hand, Schild & Vrienden was stylized as a Flemish chapter of the pan-European movement Generation Identity (Maly, 2018d). Several

members of Schild & Vrienden, including Dries Van Langenhove, were trained at the summer university of Generation Identitaire in France in 2015. The movement still has close ties to identitarian movements in Europe and beyond (Maly, 2019a). Van Langenhove, especially after Schild & Vrienden was exposed on television as racist, anti-Semitic and extreme-right, was very open about their support for Generation Identity. The activism-format that Schild & Vrienden uses is clearly modelled on the successfully mediatized activist interventions of Identitarian movements in France, Germany, and Austria. Short, controversial, and small-scale offline interventions are mediatized on social media to generate attention, build an audience, and intervene in the public debate.

On the other hand, Schild & Vrienden drew inspiration (see Maly, 2018d) from the meme-culture of the alt-right movement. Not only did they post memes on their Facebook page, but Schild & Vrienden was also embedded in a whole network of Facebook pages (e.g., Make Vlaenderen Great Again, De Fiere Vlaamse Memes, or Departement Der Vlaemsche Memes) dedicated to spreading 'new right' Flemish nationalist memes in general, and supporting Schild & Vrienden and Dries Van Langenhove in particular (Maly, 2018d).

At the heart of this type of activism is the idea of metapolitics. Van Langenhove describes his movement as follows: 'Schild & Vrienden defends the interests of the Flemish youth. We are doing this independently from political parties. We are a metapolitical movement, online as well as offline' (Patyn, 2018). Just like in other movements, metapolitics is used by Schild & Vrienden to refer to not only a cultural battle, but also an anti-Enlightenment battle. These ideological ingredients are fully visible in Schild & Vrienden. As we shall see, key topics that are addressed on the Facebook page are the Flemish nation and 'the replacement of white autochthone Flemings'. Anti-left, anti-migration, anti-Islam, and anti-political correctness – discourses tackling the 'fake news of mainstream media', digital media 'censorship', 'identity politics', and LGBTQ+ issues are abundantly found. In this sense, Schild & Vrienden resembles the Identitarian new right movements in Europe, the United States, and the rest of the world. The stickers that they sell in their web shop are a good indication of their ideological positioning. They sell stickers with alt-right slogans ('White Lives Matter', It's Okay to be White), classic Flemish nationalist (*Linkse ratten, rol uw matten* [leftists rats, get out], Leuven Vlaams [*Leuven Flemish*]), translations of French identitarian slogans (Zekere Grenzen, zekere toekomst), and an adaptation of Trump's election slogan: 'Make Vlaenderen Great Again'. The Identitarian and alt-right slogans are accompanied by stickers framing legacy media as fake news and other anti-left and anti-Islam discourse.

What is remarkable in the light of metapolitics is that Schild & Vrienden in the first instance tried to position the movement as 'positive' by avoiding

'far-right' connotations. In all mass media interviews, Van Langenhove stressed that Schild & Vrienden 'wants to tell a positive story' (Ceder, 2017 (my translation)). Central in that 'positive story' is the stress on the Flemish identity and its culture: 'We want to create a resilient Flemish youth', said Van Langenhove,

> And give them a perspective on a future. In our country, there are too much sissies walking around who are afraid of their own shadow. Be proud to be a Fleming, realize that we are only one generation in a long and rich tradition.
>
> *(Ceder, 2017 [my translation])*

As always, we see that this battle for the future is grounded in nostalgia and a narrative of decline: 'In the last decennia, Flanders lost track', stresses Van Langenhove. The reasons why can be expected: 'Individualism and mass immigration have alienated us from each other. In a land without religion, and a remarkable loss of norms and traditions, it is easy for the youth to lose the meaning of life' (Ceder, 2017 [my translation]). This narrative of decline and nostalgia for a past that never was positions Schild & Vrienden as the rescuer of the Flemish identity and thus its future: 'With Schild & Vrienden, we want to provide the youth with meaning again. Which greater good is there, than to take care for your family, and your people' (Ceder, 2017 [my translation]).

The discourse strategy of Van Langenhove resembles the political discourse of the National-Flemish Alliance (N-VA) (see Maly, 2012, 2016, for a detailed analysis of this discourse) more than the discourse of the extreme-right Flemish nationalist party Flemish Interest (see Maly, 2020d). Just like N-VA, he articulates a 'soft' anti-Enlightenment ethno-cultural nationalism (Sternhell, 2010; Maly, 2018b) and avoids (a too) explicit blood-and-soil discourse. The fact that the Pano reportage of the public broadcasting company was understood as 'unmasking Schild & Vrienden' as extreme-right, racist, and sexist is an index of the success of that message (Cools, 2018; Lesaffer, 2018; SN, 2018). At the same time, we see that as a consequence of the strategic ambivalence that is so central in the political use of 'ironic' memes, whiteness was put central (see for instance the sticker 'it's okay to be white' in the webshop, a reference to the alt-right meme campaign).

This played moderateness shouldn't surprise us. Metapolitics was always more than just a long-term political-ideological strategy. Metapolitics gave *La Nouvelle Droite* an aura of intellectualism and moderation, despite the very radical anti-Enlightenment nature of their project (Maly, 2018d). Metapolitics was used to position this 'school of thought' as 'new', and thus

seemingly different from the 'old right'.[1] The construction of normality was inherent to the metapolitical strategy that advocated using accepted and even scientific language as vehicles for new right ideas. Hegemonic concepts like democracy, feminism, and antiracism as we have seen were infused with very specific new right meanings (see de Benoist & Champetier, 2000). *Nouvelle Droite* intellectuals like Alain de Benoist, but also contemporary Flemish new right politicians like Bart De Wever (president of N-VA), openly quoted leftist sources and positioned themselves as *ni droite, ni gauche* (Maly, 2016). This metapolitical strategy was from the start also deployed by Schild & Vrienden, who wrapped their anti-Enlightenment discourse in 'positive' rhetoric.

The activism of Schild & Vrienden is an excellent case study to show how the global new right functions as a transnational learning environment. Schild & Vrienden is emblematic in this respect and allows me to highlight how contemporary new right movements use the affordances of digital media for their 'metapolitical battle 2.0'. Their activism can best be seen as a fusion of all three forms of contemporary metapolitics. Digital media are central to this type of activism: they use these digital media to have a voice (Hymes, 1996) in a hybrid media system. Growing an audience was thus important. By the end of 2017, the group amassed 3,700 likes and more than 4,000 followers. The fact that by 2019, Schild & Vrienden had 33,000 followers on Facebook, 14,000 on Instagram and 5,687 on Twitter (1 March 2019), shows that they at least succeed in reaching an audience and mobilizing it for metapolitical goals, and thus can be understood as knowledgeable concerning the logics and affordances of new and old media.

An important dimension of this type of activism is the digital literacy of these activists. To engage in metapolitics 2.0, one has to have a very broad range of digital skills and insights. As a collective, they should not only be able to film, edit and design their content, make memes or post statuses, but they also need to have insights into the nature of the digital ecology. Discursive and mobilization power in this hybrid media system is about controlling the information flows in the whole media system (Chadwick, 2017: 285). Setting up successful socio-technical activism means that one should understand the contemporary media ecologies. Within these ecologies, popularity is a coded and quantified concept, and as such, it is manipulable (van Dijck, 2013: 13). It is this digital notion of popularity that opens a whole new domain of digital activism. I (Maly, 2018a) called this algorithmic activism: 'algorithmic activists use (theoretical or practical) knowledge about the relative weight certain signals have within the proceduralized choices the algorithms of the media platforms make as proxies of human judgement, in relation to the goals of the medium itself' (Maly, 2018a). This type of activism presupposes that activists not only subscribe

to the message they interact with but also understand the affordances and the algorithmic construction of the medium. That they understand how interaction – according to the popularity principle – generates visibility. As we shall see, the new right activists of Schild & Vrienden use this knowledge about platforms and algorithms in service of its metapolitical strategy. Metapolitics 2.0 inevitably has an important 'algorithmic activist' dimension.

The metapragmatics of the Gravensteen activism

Let's return to the central case of this chapter and zoom in on how Schild & Vrienden prepared their content for uptake. First, I shall revisit the video and analyse it at the level of 'metapragmatics' (Jacobs, 1997). This metapragmatic approach focuses on the indicators of the producer's reflexive awareness of its audience and the communicative context. In other words, we can look at the producer's intended (algorithmic) audiences, the preferred uptake of this clip (Blommaert & Maly, 2016) and their knowledge of the communicative context. In Figure 3.3, we see the different members of Schild & Vrienden march in the streets of Ghent. Dries Van Langenhove, the leader of the movement, is walking upfront with a megaphone in his hand. The framing shows us a leader and his militant followers on their way to boycott the manifestation at the Gravensteen Castle.

FIGURE 3.3 Screenshot of Schild & Vrienden Facebook video after 15 min.

Source: https://www.facebook.com/schildenvrienden/videos/1537012479753819/.

Status:

Protecting our heritage. De Vlaamse Jeugd komt op voor haar erfgoed en haar toekomst P.S. De linkse traantjes zijn beter zichtbaar in HD	**Protecting our heritage** The Flemish youth fights for its heritage and its future P.S. The leftist tears are more visible in HD
330 views – 157 interactions (likes-hearts-smiles) – 24 shares – 17 comments	

Comment 1	Tag Friend- Filmpje nogmaals op internet gezet. Links kan rapporteren zoveel het wil, maar wij geven niet op e makker.	Tag Friend- Posted video once more on the internet. The left can report as much as they like, but we don't surrender e mate.
	12 min.	Ten likes and hearts.
Comment 2	Als zelfs VTM het heeft uitgezonden, dan snap ik niet wat het probleem kan zijn.	If even VTM (commercial Flemish legacy media) has aired, then I cannot see the problem.
	8 min.	Two likes.

ADDENDUM FIGURE 3.3 Facebook status and interactions with the post

Original Source: Facebook page Schild & Vrienden.

The first important finding is the use of English. Not only is the title of the video ('Protecting our heritage') written in English, the whole video is subtitled in English (see Figure 3.3). This is especially relevant considering the importance of the Dutch language within the Flemish nationalist tradition. It informs us that the message itself was from the start produced with an international audience in mind and was thus not only targeted at the Flemish population. We will come back to this point later. The second element that deserves our attention is the accompanying Dutch Facebook status: 'The Flemish Youth fights for its heritage and its future. P.S.: The leftist tears are more visible in HD!' (my translation from Dutch). The deployed linguistic resources in this status refer to different spatio-temporal frames.

The first sentence clearly positions Schild & Vrienden as a Flemish movement fighting for a Flemish future and trying to protect its Flemish heritage. This aligns well with the use of Dutch and is designed for Flemish uptake. But there is more. They use a populist, or more concretely, a generational

populist format: they speak in the name of the 'Flemish Youth'. That is also the dominant communicative frame in the Facebook video: Schild & Vrienden is positioned by its leader Dries Van Langenhove as the representatives of *the* Flemish youth, and that Flemish youth seemingly hates 'the leftists' and fights to preserve the Flemish traditions and heritage.

This discursive frame indexes the influence of *Generation Identitaire*. From the start, the identitarians clearly positioned themselves as generational movements, fighting against the 'babyboomer' generation or the 'soixante huitards' who are accused of advocating multiculturalism and open borders (Generation Identity, 2013; Willinger, 2013). New right activists around the world have adopted this discursive frame. They all claim that they are just like the students in the sixties. And all of them, from the kekistani in the United States (Maly, 2018a), De Lavendelkinderen in the Netherlands, to the Identitarian activists of Generation Identity operating in the different European countries, frame themselves as the avant-garde of this youth counter-culture (cf. Dols de Jong, 2018; Rusman, 2018). And Dries Van Langenhove reproduces it too, not only in this video but also in numerous posts and interviews with mainstream media. In an interview with the Flemish mainstream newspaper *De Morgen*, he for instance says, 'The left-wing elite of May 68 has had its say for way too long. (…) it is time for a new counter-culture. Schild & Vrienden wants to be the avant-garde of this' (De Ceulaer, 2018a) (my translation).

In the video, following this classic new right frame, the Flemish youth are constructed as distinct from the 'the leftists', even though the images in the video show many young 'leftists'. Van Langenhove claims in the video that at the Gravensteen Castle, the 'leftists were all 40, 50 or 60 years old. People who still believe in a dream that we should become a multicultural society with completely open borders' (Schild & Vrienden, 2018). Van Langenhove triggers this public by mobilizing all these classic discursive new right tropes and explicitly accusing 'left wing' babyboomers of 'wanting to attract hundreds of millions of new illegal migrants that have no future here. This way, the leftists are endangering our future, and the future of the whole of Europe' (Schild & Vrienden, 2018). Implicitly, we see how Schild & Vrienden reproduces the white genocide/great replacement trope.

This frame is a truly global dimension of contemporary local nationalist activism and taps into already discursively constructed 'public formations' or affective publics (Papacharissi, 2015: 4) by extreme-right and radical right nationalist parties, Identitarian activists, and mass media in the last decades: the so-called 'angry white man' (Kimmel, 2013). The status and the communicative frame of the video are designed as a politics of recognition. It connects to affective traces that bind a new right translocal networked public together in their fear and anger. As a consequence, this format will be recognized by and resonate with identitarians throughout Europe. Not surprising, thus, that it generates instant applause and interactional support that helps this type of activism (see table) go viral.

	Original language	*English*
Comment 1	Fantastisch!!! 27 min. after posting the post	Fantastic! 2 likes
Comment 2	Helden 25 min.	heroes 1 like
Comment 3	Well done patriots! 12min	Well done patriots!
Comment 4	♥♥ 7min	♥♥
Comment 5	Good Job Boys 1m	Good Job Boys
Comment 6	Tags friend 35min	Tags friend 1 heart – two replies
Comment 7	Tags friend 21 min.	Tags friend
Comment 8	Tags friend 6 min.	Tags friend

Uptake of the post in the form of comments – Facebook page Schild & Vrienden.

If we now zoom in on the second part of the status update, we see a reference to a very different spatio-temporal frame. The concept of 'leftist tears' in the status update is an index of the influence of the alt-right movement in the United States. In the United States, alt-right activists and 4channers predominantly use the concept 'liberal tears' to make fun of the 'liberals' and the 'lefties' who are portrayed as 'snowflakes' (Seargeant & Monaghan, 2018).

Countless memes are produced and distributed reproducing this idea (see Figure 3.4). Through digital media, memes travel across borders and become global phatic instruments generating feelings of the community (Varis & Blommaert, 2018; Papacharissi, 2015; Procházka, 2016). New right activists around the world encounter these memes and adapt them for local purposes: They get deglobalized or *indigenized* without fully erasing their global recognizability. Liberal tears, in a Flemish context, would not really work, as 'liberals' in Flanders are commonly understood as a (centre-) right party. This adaptation not only shows how digital media enable the mobility of resources, but it is also an index of the global dimension of local action. It shows how local activism is creatively produced in interaction with resources circulating through digital infrastructures. We will come back to this point in the following sections.

If we now first switch our attention to the form, we get an insight into the digital literacy and the media ideology of these activists. The fact that the video fared quite well on Facebook, and that this is not a lucky shot, shows us that the activists are knowledgeable about the digital environment of Facebook and which content the medium will push under which conditions.

" and then Sum.! Real News ¯
_()_/¯

FIGURE 3.4 Liberal tears – Trump from the meme.

Source: 4chan.

When we zoom in on their digital literacy, their theoretical or practical knowledge of the algorithmic environment, and what is needed to ensure uptake, we, first of all, see that the activists use a content type that at the time was favoured by Facebook: the uploaded video. Facebook videos were a relatively new feature on Facebook, a feature Facebook launched to compete with YouTube. As a consequence, the digital platform pushes (short) videos on its platform.

The video of Schild & Vrienden is relatively short (2 min 50 s) and uses subtitles. As many people scroll through their newsfeed on their smartphone or computer in places where the sound of the video would be inappropriate, subtitles are a crucial feature to have 'reach' and 'engagement'. Failing to adhere to these format guidelines means that the video will not 'take off' and thus fail in its metapolitical goals. Timing is also crucial. In this case, the video was published 10 min before 10 o'clock in the morning, when most people are already behind their computers ready to interact. Immediate interaction with the post in terms of likes and comments, but especially in terms of 'shares' (Maly & Beekmans, 2018), is crucial for uptake on Facebook. Interestingly, members of Schild & Vrienden are among the first to like, share and comment on the post. That is no coincidence and I will return to this below.

If we analyse the interaction with the video, we see that the activists of Schild & Vrienden clearly know the game. In the first 15 min (see Image 14),

the video generated 330 views, 157 interactions, 17 comments, and 24 shares. After half an hour, it generated 880 views, 221 interactions, 27 comments, and 41 shares. The uptake of the clip was spectacular, and as a result, the Facebook algorithms further pushed the video. The uptake shows that the producers managed to tick all the boxes: not only did the clip go viral two times, it gathered a solid number of views (92,000) and likes (2,200) (May 2018). If we zoom in on these likes, we see that around 1,500 profiles 'like' the video, 536 'love' it, and around 100 profiles are 'sad', 'angry', or 'surprised'. This result is remarkable, especially if you realize that the video was posted on a Facebook page with only 3,000 followers. This wasn't a lucky shot either, as Schild & Vrienden manages to acquire impressive reach on Facebook.

Virality and populism as a communicative relation

Virality, likes, shares, comments, and overall 'Facebook reach' are important ingredients of the populist discourse of Schild & Vrienden. In a tweet, Dries Van Langenhove, the president of Schild & Vrienden, claimed that their Facebook community has a monthly reach of 250,000, up to 500,000 people. He ends his tweet with the suggestion of non-Schild & Vrienden fans 'that there is a world outside their bubble'. The reach of Schild & Vrienden on social media is thus used as proof that 'the other' – the left – is living in a bubble. It is this quantitative dimension of 'reach,' followers, and views that are regularly used to support the claim that Schild & Vrienden speaks 'in name of the Flemish youth'. In his discourse, Van Langenhove frames his movement and its social media success as a generational effect, as proof that they articulate the voice of the young generation:

> Especially Generation Z, let us say, everyone who today is between 15 and 25. That generation is more conservative than Generation Y, the millennials, and even that generation was already more right-wing and more conservative than the previous one. Schild & Vrienden resembles the spirit of time.
>
> *(Segers, 2018 [my translation])*

Uptake online is an inherent part of the communicative relation that is necessary to make the populist claim stick (Maly, 2018e). It is here that you see how Schild & Vrienden acquires political capital by using the popularity logic of digital media to assure mass media attention and construct their message of articulating the voice of a generation. As KhosraviNik (2018) states, the essence of social media logic is constructing creditability 'gained by visibility/popularity in a context where popularity results commercial gains regardless of their consequences' (p. 438). Success on social media leads to visibility in mass media. And not surprisingly, one of the main motives in questions of mass media journalists when interviewing Van Langenhove and reporting on Schild & Vrienden is their 'social media success' (see, e.g., Segers, 2018).

In mainstream media, a rise in likes and followers on the social media of Schild & Vrienden is frequently understood as a rise in popularity and support for the movement (see, e.g., Raeymakers, 2018). In such cases, virality is interpreted within the generational populist frame that Schild & Vrienden produces and is read as support from the Flemish youth, and thus contributes to the construction of the meaning of their activism. The populist discourse is legitimized through a discourse that focusses on vanity metrics: likes, shares and (positive) comments are framed by Van Langenhove as proof of them articulating the needs of their generation.

The facts do not support this populist reading of uptake. If we look in more detail at the profiles sharing the Facebook video from Schild & Vrienden (see Image 18), the activity that generates the largest reach on Facebook (Maly & Beekmans, 2018) – we not only get to see how 'niched' and 'targeted' but also how global their audience is. This spread was not a coincidence either, as the clip, from the very start, was not only formatted in order to generate algorithmic uptake, but it was also designed for global uptake.

On the first day, March 8, 2018, the video was shared 127 times (by 123 different profiles) (of which only one profile shared it to criticize them). This considerable number of shares could easily be mistaken for popularity among the Flemings, the Flemish youth or even among 'concerned citizens' approving the message and the offline intervention by Schild & Vrienden.

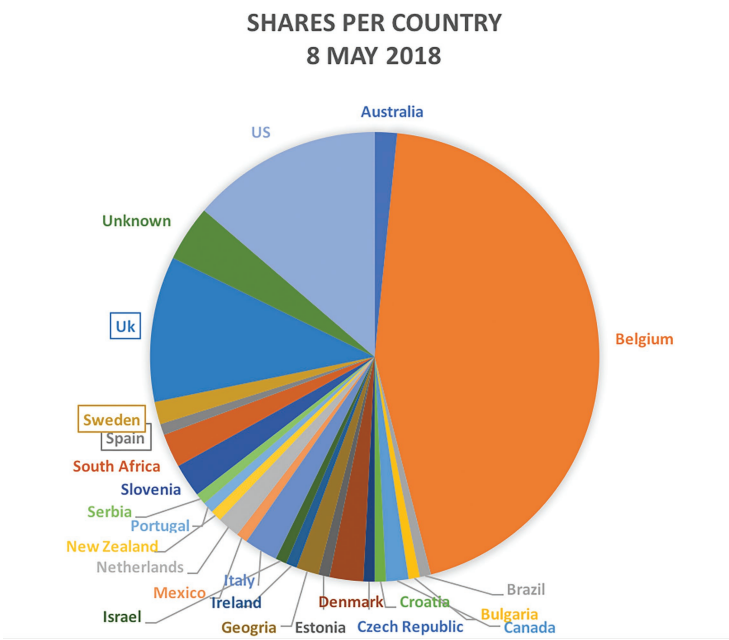

FIGURE 3.5 Facebook video Schild & Vrienden: shares per country – Copyright Ico Maly 2019.

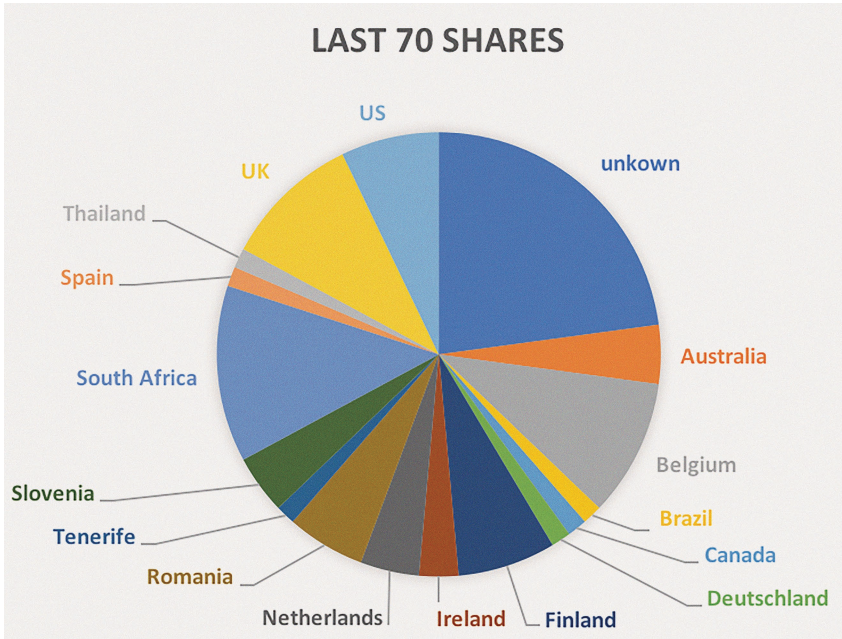

FIGURE 3.6 Last 70 shares Facebook video Schild & Vrienden. Copyright Ico Maly 2019.

The thing is that from the 123 profiles that shared the post on that first day, only 55 indicate that they are from Belgium (four profiles do not give a country of origin). Seventeen people claim to be from the United States; 13 people indicate that they live in the United Kingdom. Profiles from 24 different countries shared this post on the first day it was online.

If we look at the last 70 shares of the video (see Image 19), we see that the Belgian profiles only account for 10% of the shares. South Africa (nine shares), the United Kingdom (seven shares), and 16 sharing profiles don't give a 'home-base'. Especially, these last 16 profiles are truly 'global' new right activist profiles: They only seem to exist in order to share (new right) content from all over the world.

The claim of Schild & Vrienden and the superficial reading of some mass media journalists, in which the shares in themselves are read through a populist framework, only contribute to the metapolitical goal of these shares. It is part of the populist communicative relation (Maly, 2018a) and legitimates the populist claim of Schild & Vrienden that they speak in the name of the Flemish youth.

The data, as illustrated, clearly point in a very different direction. These shares are best understood as metapolitical activism of an affective new right public embedded within a global new right mediascape (Appadurai, 1996). The virality of the remediatization of their offline activism is to a large extent the result of this translocal network. This affective public and its

infrastructural dimension became very visible when I revisited all the profiles sharing the Schild & Vrienden video on May 30, 2018. At that time, Tommy Robinson, the former head of the English Defence League and Pegida UK, who is well networked with Martin Sellner of the Austrian chapter of Generation Identity, was sentenced to 13 months of imprisonment for contempt for the court. Robinson was arrested on Friday, May 22, 2018, and pleaded guilty. Within five hours he was arrested, sentenced, and jailed. New right activists around the world set up petitions and posted their outrage on social media. His arrest was framed as proof of the power of the liberal elite and the fact that the truth had to be silenced. If we look at the profiles initially sharing the Schild & Vrienden post, we see that 51 of the 123 profiles also shared at least one post on Tommy Robinson between 28 and 30 May. And again, this was an example of the global dimension of this new right activist network. Activists from 12 different countries posted memes, petitions, and outrage in favour of Tommy Robinson.

Generational populism, new right metapolitics 2.0 and algorithmic activism

The shares and the superficial reading of shares as an instance of 'networked individualism' (Castells, 2015) are analytically insufficient. From the moment one starts to give attention to the 'details' and starts investigating the profiles that share the video, we see the 'organized' nature of this 'popularity'. This is not a spontaneous movement that starts from a spark of outrage. These are not just ordinary citizens showing their support for this message by sharing. It is also not an act of 'slacktivism' or a feel-good activity as Morozov (2011) and Gladwell (2010) would call it: virality is an essential ingredient of metapolitics 2.0 in which new right activists wrap their radical ideas in normalcy by claiming to articulate the voice of the people by organizing virality.

Considering the importance or 'reach' and virality of the populist claim, it is important to understand how this virality is achieved. Key ingredients of virality are simple packaging, humour, augmented participation tools, prestige, positioning, and the provocation of strong emotions (Shifman, 2014: 94–96). This understanding of virality, implicitly, assumes that virality is an organic phenomenon. That virality is the result of producing a good message, a message that is ready for uptake and resonates with the people. This understanding of virality contributes to the populist claims of new right movements. Trying to explain virality by only looking at the content of the video would be committing the fallacy of internalism (Thompson, 1995). New right activists would like you to think that this uptake happens 'organically' and locally. It is this assumption that legitimates their populist discourse.

As I have shown, most of the classic elements of virality are in place, but there is more. The video was not only formatted and metapragmatically prepared for algorithmic and global uptake; the uptake itself was actively

organized. The first people who were liking, sharing, and commenting on the video were largely members and dedicated followers of Schild & Vrienden. In many cases, they would react by tagging fellow activists to notify them that the video was back online, and ask them to share or tag their 'men' (see Image 20). The tagging led to the activation of more structured interaction with the posts from militants and local pages of the extreme-right Flemish party Flemish Interest. Very quick, one would see a rise in people sharing the video, or reacting underneath it, all in similar ways: tagging, liking, and sharing.

FIGURE 3.7 'It is back online, tag your people' – Schild & Vrienden activists tags friend to realize uptake. – Source Facebook Schild & Vrienden.

Status:

Protecting our heritage. De Vlaamse Jeugd komt op voor haar erfgoed en haar toekomst P.S. De linkse traantjes zijn beter zichtbaar in HD	**Protecting our heritage** The Flemish youth fights for its heritage and its future P.S. the leftist tears are more visible in HD
8169 views -666 interactions (likes-hearts-smiles) – 189 shares – 99 comments	

Comment 1	Staat er terug op, tag je mensen	It's back online, tag your people
	5min.	

ADDENDUM FIGURE 3.7 Schild & Vrienden activists tags friend to realize uptake.

Source: Facebook Schild & Vrienden

Interaction is a key parameter triggering the Facebook algorithms. The supporters of Schild & Vrienden are clearly aware of this fact. Interactions were fast, and as a result, in a matter of minutes, a much broader uptake was realized. In a matter of 20 min, the video received likes, comments, and shares from new right activists from all over the world. It is this global uptake that was very important in organizing virality. Most of the local reach of the Schild & Vrienden video was not only realized by the sharing of local individuals but also through the sharing of the post by national and international pages and communities. This is remarkable because the Facebook algorithms favour 'personal profiles' (Arbel, 2018). Pages only generate 4% of the Newsfeed traffic. Nevertheless, we see, in the case of the first day of sharing, that 110 individual profiles sharing the video 114 times only managed to generate a measly 158 likes and 30 additional shares in total.

Thirteen (community) pages (most of them with no apparent connection to Flanders or even Belgium), on the other hand, sharing it 13 times, generated a whopping 808 likes and 195 additional shares on that first day. The page that generated the most shares (75) and likes (108) for the Schild & Vrienden video was 'Weekblad 't Pallieterke.' 't Pallieterke was founded in 1945 as a right-wing, Flemish nationalist weekly close to the extreme-right Flemish nationalist party Vlaams Belang. It is through their sharing that several Vlaams Belang militants started sharing the video.

And we see the same dynamic on a translocal scale where Facebook pages and communities engage local militants in sharing content. Pages like 'Trump 2020,' Quotidian Conservative News and the Red Symposium were all set up in 2015, using a very similar design and duplicate content from each other. They were clearly set up to support Trump. And the same is true for pages like 'Boer: Aktueel' (47 likes and 28 shares), the Finnish Defence League (20 likes and 5 shares), White is beautiful (219 likes and 38 shares), or the Traditional Britain Group (208 likes and 70 shares) who trigger local activists to share the video. One of the most influential communities in generating likes (169) and shares (22) for the Schild & Vrienden video is called 'Triggering Memes for Regressive Teens II'. This Facebook community of more than 29,000 Facebook profiles is truly global, generating shares and likes for the Schild & Vrienden video by profiles from the United Kingdom, Canada, Romania, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, Australia, and the United States.

It is not hard to see that most of the pages and profiles sharing the video were deeply committed to the battle of new right voices. Some of the Facebook pages, communities, and even profiles are truly global activist pages. The profile of 'Alan Gerard' is interesting in this respect. The profile shared the Schild & Vrienden video a whopping 21 times. The profile does not mention a location and does not have a profile picture, but does manage to have more than 1,300 friends. On 30 May alone, this profile shared more than 60 posts, all connected to new right political movements and politicians around

the world, ranging from pro-Tommy posts, to posts supporting Le Pen and promoting anti-migration. The pages and communities clearly function as important hubs that structure the global flows in the new right niche and organize and mobilize local cells for global activism. Many of these pages have a clear local goal and audience but nevertheless support other radical new right nationalist movements around the world by sharing their content. What probably helped realize this global uptake by new right activists and pages was paradoxical in that the first video was deleted from Facebook. This allowed us to reupload it with the famous narrative of 'left wing' control over social media. That narrative was redistributed by famous radical right media like *Red Ice TV* ('Schild & Vrienden Activists Took Action', 2018).

Schild & Vrienden, new right metapolitics 2.0, and algorithmic populism

Numbers and virality are social facts. The activism of Schild & Vrienden becomes visible through the mediatization on social media and in mass media. This generational populist frame resonates with the radical right, the identitarians, and alt-right activists around the world.

Communication always addresses a specific type of people and excludes others (Scollon & Scollon, 2003; Blommaert, 2013; Blommaert & Maly, 2019). In this case, it is clear that they targeted the global new right niche: the metapragmatic cues were perfectly managed. The video reproduces a discourse that is dominant within that niche. The enemy *par excellence* is framed as the 'older generation' of 'multicultural', 'open border leftists', fake news media under the control of pocos. The video was metapragmatically prepared for algorithmic and global uptake.

As we have seen, not only the format of the post was designed for algorithmic uptake, but uptake was at least partially organized by members of the movement themselves. Digital literacy is a crucial ingredient of this type of metapolitical activism. Activists use (theoretical or practical) knowledge about the relative weight certain signals have within the proceduralized choices the algorithms of the media platforms make as proxies of human judgement, in order to reach their (meta)political goal. In this sense, 'algorithmic activism' contributes to spreading (and thus functions as a vehicle for normalizing) their message by interacting with the post in order to trigger the algorithms of the medium, so that they boost the popularity rankings.

This virality is discursively exploited to present radical new right discourse as the 'voice of a new Flemish generation of youngsters' being sick of the leftists destroying the Flemish nation, its heritage, and traditions. Their success in organizing virality also succeeds in connecting the logic of social media with the logic of mass media. Since the nineties of the last century, mainstream media have been fully incorporated in a neoliberal logic of ratings and

commercialization. Success on social media is also understood as a potential 'successful story'. The popularity logic of digital media clearly resonates with the mainstream media logic. As a result, online success is very fastly read as the popularity of the movement in general. It is their visibility through the use of digital media that contributes to the idea that Schild & Vrienden are representing a real 'thing' and should thus be reported on. This 'activist action–mediatization–organizing virality–ensuring mass media attention'-loop establishes a populist communicative relation and contributes to an expanding social media audience. The rise to 10,000 followers in the slipstream of this activist intervention at the Gravensteen Castle, the visibility of their posts in mass media, and the reporting on this social media reality in mainstream news (cf. Cools & Andries, 2018; HR, 2018) construct an image of popularity and relevance, and even more, it gives attributes credibility to their populist discourse.

From the start, the group used mainstream digital media like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as metapolitical tools. The activists of Schild & Vrienden use these media to (1) choreograph assembly (Gerbaudo, 2014; Maly, 2018c), (2) (re)mediatize that activism (Maly, 2018d), (3) steer the information flow and production of Message, and (4) gain followers in order to have more leverage for future activism. In doing this, they use and traverse the logics of older and newer media to advance their political-ideological battle. This complex cycle of activities on the online–offline, old media–new media nexus is the essence of this type of socio-technical activism.

The success of the intervention of Schild & Vrienden is not only due to social media. It is, as Chadwick (2017: 184) stresses, the result of complex, hybrid assemblages of older and newer media logics. The activism of Schild & Vrienden is activism on the offline, online, and television nexus. Their offline activism at the castle was first mediated by mainstream news. This immediately caused an increase in their online followers. The publication of the video on their Facebook page started a new cycle of reporting on Schild & Vrienden. These cycles have not stopped. With modest means, and the use of the platforms of mainstream digital media like Facebook, and to a lesser extent Twitter and Instagram, we see that the activists succeed in dominating the political information cycle and infusing their radical ideas into the mainstream.

The global new right

Important to stress here again is that this local Flemish activism cannot exist outside of this global new right niche. The practices, discourses and methods are the result of the socialization of the members of Schild & Vrienden within that cultural niche. And also the uptake was a transnational uptake. This global new right audience was not reached as an *accident du parcours*,

it was addressed through the explicit use of English, and their knowledge about the norms and common discourses within that niche. If we scrutinize the different sharing profiles we encounter what we, with Appadurai (1996: 36), could call an 'ideoscape': a global cultural flow consisting of a string of images, often directly political and trying to capture (a piece of) state power. The master concepts in this chain of concepts and ideas in the ideoscape under scrutiny here are without a doubt 'the community', and it connects with familiar concepts such as 'our values', 'heritage', 'norms', 'our culture', 'borders', 'anti-migration', 'anti-left', 'anti-liberal', 'anti-cultural Marxism' and 'anti-globalism'. It is an anti-Enlightenment narrative (Sternhell, 2010) carried forward by activists who fight for a world order based on cultural differences, on borders and homogenic nations or entities, not for democracy and not for inalienable universal human rights.

Even though this ideoscape is characterized by a remarkable ideological coherence, it should be stressed that it still is a layered and polycentric landscape. If we for instance compare the Romanian far-right profiles sharing the Schild & Vrienden video with the Belgian profiles, we see that in the Romanian profiles, there is far more stress on religion, traditional family values and homophobic content, whereas the Belgian profiles in general stress the 'acceptance of LGBTQ' as part of 'our tolerant culture'. These differences in the new right or anti-Enlightenment ideoscape can be explained by looking at how they intersect with the local, national and transnational media and ethnoscapes. Or put differently, how they interact with the infrastructures and hegemonic constellations working on different scales.

When Schild & Vrienden started this action, it was foremost operating on a local, Flemish scale. As a result of mass media attention, the uptake of their mediatization on Facebook and the remediatization by right-wing outlets like the Gateway Pundit, the star of Schild & Vrienden started to shine. Van Langenhove was a guest at Red Ice, and later he was also invited to the summer university of Generation Identitaire, not as a regular guest, but as a keynote speaker. He was also asked to speak at the American Renaissance conference of Jared Taylor. All of a sudden, Van Langenhove and Schild & Vrienden were operating at a larger scale of globalization.

To summarize, the memification of the metapolitical battle for the ideals of the conservative revolution caused a global renewal of the metapolitical battle. This very specific repertoire of collective action – deeply embedded in the contemporary algorithmically determined public space – was very fast adopted by new right and Identitarian cells around the world. It was globalized. The affordances of digital media allow fast upscaling and transnational collaboration; this not only leads to 'global cultural homogenization', but also to complex processes of englobalization and deglobalization (Blommaert, 2011). Digital media did not only give birth to metapolitics 2.0, digital media facilitated a global new right network of organizations

and individual actors that have created a layered and polycentric metapolitical learning environment where individuals are not just consumers, but very quickly also producers of metapolitical discourse. The result of this process is the emergence of a global new right that crystalizes around different centres of normativity. Arktos is probably the most global and stable centre of normativity in this network. Metapolitical influencers, activist groups like Schild & Vrienden, Generation Identity, activists like Richard Spencer and sites like Counter-Currents form the material infrastructures of this global new right that becomes visible in the shared practices, discourse, places and the consumption of media. Some of these structures are stable, while others eventually disappear. It is in this unstable, constantly changing network that the global new right is enacted and becomes visible.

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4

METAPOLITICAL INFLUENCERS AND FAR-RIGHT CULTURE

In the previous chapters, we have seen that identitarian movements remediatize small but spectacular offline interventions by uploading videos on social media in the hope that mainstream media would report on them (Maly, 2019a). In a similar vein, one cannot have missed the fact that the alt-right and 4chan trolls have been successfully trolling mainstream media in order to amplify their message (Phillips, 2018) throughout the whole hybrid media system. Memes have become successful metapolitical vehicles (DeCook, 2018, Weatherby, 2019; Askanius & Keller, 2021; Trillo & Shifman, 2021). The contemporary new right exists as a whole ecology of digital media platforms for metapolitical goals: new right activists not only have their own websites and blogsm but also upload podcasts and vlogs on mainstream platforms like YouTube and use social media to find an audience. In this chapter, I will show how they appropriate micro-celebrity or influencer culture for metapolitical goals. Metapolitical influencers adapt to the technical requirements of mainstream digital platforms, they integrate into their cultures, and their content is made to fit the content and form requirements of these platforms. New right cultures, discourses and styles are produced in relation to these platforms and their cultures.

Analysing the digital practices of metapolitical influencers in such niches allows us to gain insight into how exactly this new right network takes shape. How they try to normalize their ideology and how it is taken up and thus influences consumers and prosumers. In the first part of this chapter, I will delve deeper into the growth of a global new right culture around those metapolitical influencers by focusing on the details of style. Style is here understood as the way an image is communicated (See Silverstein, 2003 for an elaborate discussion). Style in this analytical sense is understood as

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having degree and depth of organization; it contributes to the construction of the image of an influencer. This image in turn is intrinsically part of the message of those influencers. Style is part of contemporary metapolitics and is co-constitutive of contemporary new right culture in general. The digital practices of those influencers co-construct a new right cultural niche in which activists and sympathizers are socialized. I will make the case that we should understand the contemporary new right as a transnational, polycentric and layered micro-population constructed around such metapolitical influencers, websites, fora and social media accounts. All those metapolitical producers function as centres of normativity. In the second part of this chapter, I will therefore zoom in on two metapolitical influencers – The Golden One and Brittany Sellner – and analyse how they use style, metapolitical intimacy and staged authenticity to create a brand. This brand, with its stress on identity, is a metapolitical act that contributes to the construction of that global new right culture.

Far-right micropopulations, style and influencers

Metapolitical influencers play an important role in the emergence of a global new right culture (Mattheis, 2018; Maly, 2020c, Leidig, 2021, Tebaldi, 2022a). In the previous chapter, I showed how the new right is best understood as an instance of (vernacular) globalization. Metapolitical influencers take up a central role in the construction of that network, and more in particular, in the construction of a new right culture, including a specific style, rhetoric and feelings of belonging. To highlight the role of those metapolitical influencers, it is first necessary to introduce and further clarify the notion of 'orders of indexicality'. Indexicality, a key term in ethnography, refers to the meaning that emerges out of text-context relations. An index – that is a verbal or non-verbal sign – points to a feature of a certain context. A concrete example is how smoke indexes fire. A more fitting example in the context of this book is Pepe. Pepe – since the rise of the alt-right – indexes far-right actors. Utterances, symbols or signs may thus indexically invoke certain political positions, roles, identities and social norms: Pepe = far-right = Bad (or good, depending on your side of the political debate).

The concept of 'orders of indexicality' stresses 'the non-arbitrary, socially and culturally sensitive way in which indexicality operates in societies' (Blommaert, 2005: 253). In other words, the indexicals are ordered in the sense that they are connected to the groups that are using them. Pepe only became an indexical of the far-right after 4chan trolls, alt-right activists and eventually, also Hillary Clinton attributed this meaning to this symbol. Blommaert introduces the concept of orders of indexicalities to stress the fact that such ordered indexicalities 'themselves occur in the form of stratified complexes, in which some kinds of indexicalities are ranked higher than

others' (Blommaert, 2005: 74). In other words, Clinton's contextualization of Pepe functioned on a higher scale of globalization and thus was a more prestigious and influential attribution of meaning than one of far-right activists operating on a lower scale of globalization. Trump's appropriation of Pepe in a tweet, and the embrace of Clinton's notion of Deplorables to describe Pepe sharing people, provided Pepe with a new meaning. Considering his victory, we could argue that on a national scale, Trump succeeded in teaching his followers how to understand Pepe.

The notion of 'orders of indexicality' facilitates to analyse metapolitics in an empirical way. Metapolitical influencers function as centres of normativity: they are the producers of norms and meanings that enable their followers to distinguish between good and bad, cool or not, and normal or abnormal. Depending on the scale they do this, they can contribute more or less to the metapolitical battle. The orientation of individuals to orders of indexicality is what creates identities, groupness and culture. Considering the fact that the global new right exists as a polycentric, transnational and layered network, we can find different centres of normativity operating at different scale levels around which we not only see individuals doing identity work, but also the shaping of groups. Orders of indexicality, together with the notion of scales, give direction to an empirical agenda in which we can study individual metapolitical influencers as nodes in a network. It allows us to analyse how individuals do identity work (the uptake of message) in relation to one or more of those centres. This is important because it is in this identity work in relation to concrete orders of indexicality where the actual process of hegemonizing anti-Enlightenment ideologies takes place. Metapolitical influencers not only mobilize discourse but also style in their metapolitical strategies. Strategic authenticity and intimacy but also Search Engine Optimization and Social Media Optimization are used to generate uptake, bind audiences and eventually normalize their ideological positions. Some of these influencers do this on a local scale, others work on a global scale. The metapolitical strategy of *La Nouvelle Droite* could be considered successful when it moves from vernacular globalization to operating on a truly global scale. Only then would the ethno-plural world they dream of come alive. This global dimension also explains the globalization of the new right.

From this perspective, it becomes clear why mainstream digital media – a key infrastructure of contemporary neoliberal globalization – becomes so important in contemporary metapolitics. This global network of far-right activists, websites, fora and YouTube channels succeeds in the construction of several imagined worlds operating on different scales and in different niches. These different worlds, taken together, make up a far-right culture shaped in a global network. This network can best be described as a 'micro-population'. Varis and I (2016) introduced the term in order to make sense of identity and social groups in a world that has become more complex due to new kinds of

migration patterns and mobilities, the influence of new communication technologies such as the internet, as well as the neoliberal logic of consumption and commodification. Culture and social groups in the post-digital world are complex translocal, transnational, polycentric, layered and stratified phenomena not only visible in style and embedded in (both local and translocal, and online and offline) infrastructures, but also constantly (re)produced through specific discourses (Maly & Varis, 2016: 14). Micropopulations group people together in such a translocal, layered and polycentric network, recognizable by their 'style', identity discourses, cultural practices, and by the places (online and offline) where they hang out and the places where you can't find them. They are the material and cultural expression of temporary and emerging micro-hegemonies (Blommaert & Varis, 2011), or on a more detailed level, of countless orientations to different constellations of orders of indexicality. Micro-hegemonies refer to the multiple sets of norms that govern the details of social life: or in other words, the niches in which individuals produce culture and thus establish normativity. All these niches together, with their values, traditions, practices and discourses, form the global new right network.

If we take the 'Identitarians' as an example of such a micro-population, we see a stunning but layered uniformity in discourse, cultural practices and styles. The uniformity in discourse is, as I have discussed in Chapter 3, a direct legacy of *La Nouvelle Droite*. The theories, concepts, ideas and the intellectuals that *La Nouvelle Droite* promoted give some kind of coherence to the new right movements worldwide and identitarian individuals. They all stress the importance of the organic community, one's identity and culture, and attack the baby-boomers, the left, the cultural Marxists, the liberals and migration. As we already indicated, this discourse has been taken up by many different activists in different corners of the world. Identitarians also engage in larping, meme-ing, vlogging and trolling; it has all become part of their cultural repertoire (Fielitz & Thurston, 2019; Maly, 2019a). This global uptake comes, as we have seen in the previous chapter, with de-globalizing effects: discourses and practices are adopted to fit local conditions. The anti-Americanism, so prominent among key intellectuals like de Benoist and Faye, has been made invisible in the discourse of alt-right activists like Richard Spencer or Greg Johnson. Memes have become a global language in this far-right niche, but the memes are reformatted to fit the local context serving local metapolitical goals (Maly, 2018a, 2019b). A similar analysis can be made when we highlight the global and local dimensions of far-right fashion and style.

Alpha males and the metapolitics of style

Style is not only the way the image is communicated, it is also part of the design of the message (Silverstein, 2003: 15; Lempert & Silverstein, 2012: 55), and thus deserves thorough analysis. Style and fashion are key ingredients

of meaning-making processes and they cannot be analysed or understood without taking the different orders of indexicality into account. The Washington Post, for instance, operating on a truly global scale, made a point of Richard Spencer's looks: 'He dresses in three-piece Brooks Brothers suits, gold-coin cuff links and $5,000 Swiss watches, and he sports a swept-over hipster haircut known as a "fashy" (as in fascist). Spencer, who has degrees from the University of Virginia and the University of Chicago, dismisses such labels as Nazi, racist and white supremacist, preferring to describe himself as an 'identitarian'.[1] Just by describing Spencer with this attention to detail, The Washington Post is, probably unconsciously, reproducing part of Spencer's new right metapolitics on a higher scale, and to different audiences: his suit and degrees suggest that he, indeed, is not a neo-nazi. It is at least partly in the uptake and reproduction of his style that the image of 'an alternative right' or a 'new right' is constructed to a less niched audience. The metapolitical effect of his style is thus upscaled by the Washington Post. The style and Spencer's metapolitical discourse favouring keywords like identity, culture, and ethno-pluralism, instead of race and apartheid, are designed to distinguish him from the plain neo-Nazi or white supremacists and resonate with more mainstream discourses about identity, migration and patriotism.

Note here that Spencer's style is not an individual style, it is emblematic of contemporary new right fashion. In Figure 4.1, we see Richard Spencer from the National Policy Institute, Gavin McInnes from the Proud Boys, Martin Sellner from the Identitaire Bewegung, and Dries Van Langenhove from Schild & Vrienden. Even though the four men are representing different fractions of the global new right movement – Gavin McInnes being a self-declared American nationalist (and alt-light), Richard Spencer only sometimes accepts the identitarian label, Sellner has become the face of the European identitarian movement on a global scale, while Dries Van Langenhove is mostly known in Flanders. They are all four operating in different parts of the world and working on different scales. Nevertheless, the similarities in style are striking.

All of the men sport a 'stylish'/hipster-like/fashionable style. They all sport the 'fashy' hairstyle. This hairstyle became fashionable again in the second decade of the 21st century and was swiftly appropriated by identitarians and far-right activists. The fashy communicates ambivalent edginess and hipness at the same time and is thus an ideal metapolitical tool. Males combine this hairstyle with traditional suits or more leisure-oriented polos, shorts or T-shirts. Especially among the activists in action, polos are very much in vogue. The appropriation of mainstream brands such a Fred Perry, Lyle & Scott, Alpha Industries and Stone Island is common. The logos of these brands, just like the fashy hairstyle, all function as indexes of their metapolitical position. Many of them are reminiscent of Nazi symbols (Miller-Idriss, 2018: 66), but are also seen as 'cool' and normal by youth. It is this strategic

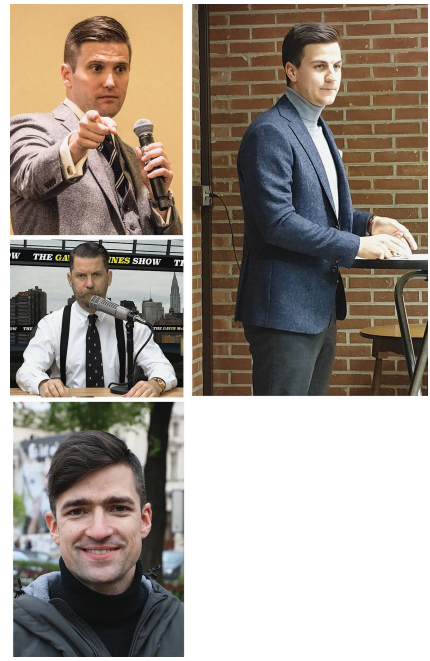

FIGURE 4.1 From left to right: Richard Spencer, Gavin McInnes, Martin Sellner, Dries Van Langenhove.

Source: Wikimedia – Collage Ico Maly.

ambivalence (Phillips, 2015) that generates the metapolitical usefulness of these style cues. In modern clothing and fashion, in particular, details are of crucial importance. It is the 'next-to-nothing' that carries the distinguishing role in clothing (Barthes, 2006: 66). Clothing, argued Barthes, is fundamentally an act of meaning, an act of signification, and thus a social act at the heart of the dialectic of society (Barthes, 2006: 97). Whereas in the *Ancién Regime*, the clothing style indicated one's class, in modern mass-produced clothing, this social-cultural function of clothing is now in details. The function of the detail – in this case, the logos and the overall style – is to get recognition from one's peers. The logos index the edginess of people in the know, but this edginess can easily be denied by stressing the mainstream nature of these brands. Even more, by wearing brands that are in vogue, they create a hip brand for themselves. It is in this complex dialectic between the radical margins and the mainstream that the metapolitics of style functions. The appropriation of hip brands makes sure that they appeal to youth cultures and stay integrated and mainstream, while at the same time, they communicate an edgy image.

FIGURE 4.2 Schild & Vrienden Instagram post.

Source: Instagram Schild & Vrienden.

Original Status	*English status*
The Chad Nationalists vs the Virgin communists	The Chad Nationalists vs the Virgin communists
1803 likes	

ADDENDUM FIGURE 4.2 Schild & Vrienden Instagram post

Source: Instagram Schild & Vrienden

The suit has a similar function. It helps to distinguish them from the classic neo-Nazis with their bomber jackets, but also from the left and their own militants. A good example can be found in the clothing styles of Schild & Vrienden. When in action, the members of Schild & Vrienden wear polos or T-shirts with the logo of the movement. This clothing functions as a uniform, unifying all members of the movement. Remarkable is that the leader of Schild & Vrienden is increasingly wearing his suit, even when the others are in their 'activist uniform'. The suit clearly functions as a distinction criterion between the leader and the regular activists. It also functions as a diacritic between the right and the left, and thus as an identity emblem. Remarkable about the post above (Figure 4.2) is that the more common members of Schild & Vrienden are now also sporting a suit. The status of the post – the Chad nationalists vs the Virgin communists – written in English, shows how the suit functions as a diacritic to distinguish themselves from 'the left'. The suit communicates them as successful, part of the mainstream and as 'normal', as ideal sons-in-law. These identity effects are enlarged by contrasting them with the 'virgin communists' who look shabby, unsuccessful and unorganized (see Figure 4.2). The suit is framed in the status of the post as an emblem of 'chad-ness'. Chad is a term that is highly uncommon in Flanders and only people well-integrated in the transnational far-right culture or 4chan will make the association with the Chad meme that generally contrasts the Chad – the emblematic alpha male – with the Virgin, the Incel or the left. It is the costume that indexes the 'chad-ness' here of these activists. The fact that the post is written in English thus functions as an index of the fact the makers of this meme image that can potentially generate global uptake. The global and the local are thus connected in complex ways.

All these clothing styles are in themselves examples of processes of deglobalization. Just like Generation Identity has its own clothing brand – Phalanx Europe,[2] - Schild & Vrienden sells its own clothing line on its site. When we look at the clothing lines of far-right movements, we see that polo is a standard product. The only difference is that the Fred Perry logos are replaced with the Lamba, in the case of Generation Identity, and the shield logo of Schild & Vrienden. The style is still there, but the logo now refers to Europe or Flanders. The Fred Perry polos are indigenized. The clothing itself is not only useful for its identity effects or its support of the collective identity, but it is also quite literally a metapolitical billboard in the attention economy. When the leader of Schild & Vrienden, Dries Van Langenhove, announced that he would be electable on the list of Flanders's far-right party Flemish Interest, he wore a suit with yellow socks sporting the Flemish lion. The socks became headline news (Figure 4.3), and of course, served as an ideal way not only to put himself in the mainstream spotlights with his messagey, but also allowed him to advertise the socks as a metapolitical product that can be bought on their site. Group membership can be bought in the form

of socks or polos. Even more, this type of commercial action reorganizes the movement into a Movement Inc. that sells products – and with a style – as a metapolitical project. A typical instrument of companies is the giveaway to draw in new customers and followers. In this case, the mass media attention is used to give ten pairs of socks away if people surf the page of Dries Van Langenhove. The affordances of Facebook allow not only to tag the page of Van Langenhove, but the post that is used to announce the giveaway is from his page as well. The commercial practice of the giveaway thus contributes to the reproduction of the 'style' as a metapolitical instrument; it is used to increase followers on both pages.

FIGURE 4.3 Grabbing mainstream media attention – a collage of three Facebook posts from Dries Van Langenhove.

Source: Facebook Dries Van Langenhove.

Original Status:	*English Status:*
Tien paar sokken te winnen. Doe mee aan de giveaway op de pagina van Dries Van Langenhove.	Ten pairs of socks to win. Participate in the giveaway on Dries Van Langenhove's page.
Picture + – Dries Van Langenhove (tag) is at Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers (tag).	
Original post original status.	Original post, English status.
De Standaard noemde me 'Marketeer van het jaar', of dat terecht is laat ik aan jullie over. Wat ik wel weet is dat sinds vandaag de 3000Ste Vlaming met onze sokken rondloopt, en dat op minder dan twee maanden tijd! Om dat succes te vieren doe ik een giveaway.	De Standaard (qualitative Flemish newspaper) called me 'Marketeer of the year', I leave it up to you to judge if that is correct. What I do know, is that as of today, Fleming nummer 3,000 walks around with our socks, and this is in less than two month's time. To celebrate this success, I organize a giveaway.

FIGURE 4.3 grabbing mainstream media attention – a collage of three Facebook posts from Dries Van Langenhove

Modest fashion as metapolitics

The feminine equivalent for the male costume is 'modest fashion'. Modest fashion developed three decades ago and is, according to Lewis (2013), now a predominantly youthful phenomenon of women who want to express their religious and collective identity – instead of an individualized identity – through their style. Far-right influencers Brittany Pettibone, Lauren Southern and Lauren Chen use Instagram to mediate modesty, femininity, moderateness and fashionability. Their modest fashion style, just like the Brooks Brothers costumes of Richard Spencer, combines a vintage feel, reminiscent of a Mad-Men-like sixties style. This type of fashion, even though it is clearly a mass-produced commercial product, challenges the very idea of fashion. It suggests timelessness or traditionalism in the sense of Dugin. In the screenshot below, we see how Brittany Pettibone stresses her feminity by wearing classic dresses with a vintage feel, Garbo-style makeup and understated timelessness. Only once can she be seen wearing jeans and that is when she went hiking. This nostalgic feminine clothing is emblematic of all metapolitical influencers and tradwives (see for instance also Matheis' analysis of Lana Lokteff, 2018), and it distinguishes them from the stereotype and meme they construct of the shouting, ugly, fat and hysterical leftist feminist.

This nostalgic fifties style, reminiscent of a mid-century Sears catalogue, as Tebaldi (2022a) stresses, is only one form of visualizing this traditionalism. It

can also be communicated as sporting clothing from further back in history. What all these tradwives' styles share is that 'all of these women insist on their role defending the timeless, natural traditional femininity from feminism and social decline' (Tebaldi, 2022a: 1). The clothing, and the discourses of these women, are filled with an 'imagined nostalgia' (Appadurai, 1996: 77) for an age where gender roles were supposed to be simple and beautiful. It is an imagined nostalgia because it is directed to a time that was never there. A time when men were men and women were women and both were successful and happy. More than just a nostalgia for the fifties and sixties when white males dominated culture and norms in Western societies, it is a performative act indexing a new future era they strive for based on traditional norms. The Instagram posts are archeofuturist preconfigurations. The evocation of the past in those far-right media practices is always future-oriented. As Griffin argues, the evocation of the past is always done 'to enlist slumbering nationalist forces in the battle for a new civilization' (Griffin, 2008: 37).

The post on the Instagram page 'Worth Fighting For' (cannot be displayed in this book due to the policies of Taylor and Francis) is emblematic of this entangled-ness between norms of 'masculinity' and 'feminity' and a larger battle against modernism and for an ethno-plural world. 'Worth Fighting For' is a very successful Instagram page with 77.6K followers dedicated to 'Traditional aesthetics' under the motto 'tradition is not the worship of ashes but the preservation of fire'. The page is connected to an online shop and has a second handle – Western Aesthetics – in case one is deleted. Considering its followers, and the accounts liking posts from the page, we can without exaggeration state that it is an influential hub in the global new right. Dries Van Langenhove from Schild & Vrienden follows it. Brittany Pettibone/Sellner liked several posts. It can thus be said to resonate with key figures in that global new right and contribute to the construction of the far-right style. The post is typical of content 'Worth Fighting For' posts. It is a slideshow of eight images. The first picture has the text 'Make Marriage and family the dreams of children' written on top of a romantic picture of two kids – not coincidentally a blond white girl and a light brown-haired white boy – in a vintage car, dressed for a wedding. The frame communicates the importance of marriage, family and children. The second picture in the series adds a more combative stance to the first one. It shows a man sitting on the mountains with the slogan 'revolt against the modern world' echoing the works of Julius Evola typed on top. Marriage, having a family, is portrayed – next to believing in Jesus (picture 3) – as traditional, and thus as a revolt against modernity. The different gender roles in that marriage are clearly defined in pictures 4 and 5. Men are excepted to be alpha men, men who work out, have discipline and go to work. Through the fifties, nostalgic pictures of women are painted as caring housewives and mothers. This traditional style is not only linked to gender roles but it is also linked to the revolt against modernity. This identity emblem in turn can be bought in the form of a t-shirt.

Style is clearly not meaningless. On the contrary, it is in their style that we see the nano-politics of identity and new right culture in general in detail. To become an identitarian individual, one needs to perform lots of identity work. Identity work is here understood as discursive orientations towards sets of features that are seen (or can be seen) as emblematic of particular identities (Blommaert & Varis, 2015). These features are manifold (hip youth culture, vintage style modest fashion, or the more explicit traditional T-shirts from 'Worth Fighting For') and include a variety of semiotic means (hairstyles, brands, fabrics, styles, modes of language) depending on the different orders of indexicality. Identities thus appear as constellations – specific arrangements or configurations of such emblematic features. The features are not organized at random. To become an identitarian, one needs to combine several identity emblems (hip or traditional clothing, looking part of the mainstream, but being edgy at the same time) with a very specific far-right metapolitical discourse. This allows for recognition by one's peers and to stay integrated in the group and the mainstream. The traditional style thus indexes a specific (meta)political position.

Digital media, digital culture and metapolitical influencers

In order to understand the ideological and stylistic normativities – the orders of indexicality – in the contemporary new right culture, it is important to understand the individual and collective creativity and the richness of the semiotic processes and outcomes, as well as the more structural elements, the infrastructures and linguistic ecologies/economies. Arnaut et al. (2017: 13) echoing Calhoun et al. (2013) conceptualized this nexus between agency or creativity and structure as the 'poiesis-infrastructures nexus'. Poiesis here is used to capture human activity as the result of creative social interaction. This interaction is of course embedded in infrastructures, and thus not totally free. These infrastructures both enable and constrain creativity and meaning-making (Calhoun et al., 2013: 197). Digital media not only affords discourse production, but it also directs behaviour: certain digital affordances request, encourage and push users towards 'particular communicative and interactive practices by means of quantified processes' (Georgakopoulou, Iversen & Stage, 2020: 24). Social media function, as LaViolette (2017) argued in relation to Reddit, as a 'Goffmanian frame' that 'circumscribes' discourse and becomes crucial to its interpretation (Goffman, 1974). The notion of the poiesis-infrastructures nexus thus 'envisages the double process of emergent normativities and sedimentations, on the one hand, and the creative and material production processes unsettling these on the other hand' (Arnaut et al., 2017: 15). Analysing new right influencers as orders of indexicality forces us to analyse how they interact, not only with their audiences but also with the platforms themselves. Digital media are a key infrastructure of

contemporary metapolitics. The new right metapolitical strategy is first and foremost focused on a deep integration in the (digital) mainstream (Maly, 2018). New right activists try to use the digital mainstream as leverage to reach new audiences. Even though many new right activists openly criticize the 'left-wing' bias of Zuckerberg and Dorsey, in practice we see that they try to conform to the (literal reading) of the community standards of these social media.

As a result of this interaction between activists and platforms, we see new (metapolitical) practices (Maly, 2018a, 2019a, 2019b, 2022), and new norms and cultures (Hou, 2018: 16–18) emerging. The described new right style is linked to the cultural practices embedded in this digital environment. One of these cultural practices is what is known as 'influencer', 'micro-celebrity' or 'social media celebrity' culture. Marvick, together with boyd and Senft, argue that micro-celebrity should be understood as 'a self-presentation technique in which people view themselves as a public persona to be consumed by others, use strategic intimacy to appeal to followers, and regard their audience as fans' (Marwick and boyd, 2011; Senft, 2013; Marwick, 2015). This 'edited self', as García-Rapp and Roca-Cuberes (2019) call it, is at the same time a product of the internal norms of each community shaping discourses, styles, looks and ideologies, the technical affordances and media-ideology of the platform (visible in its community standards and norms), and the intrinsic features of online content. Influencer culture is a socio-technical assemblage: the voice and performance of the social media influencer are not entirely 'free', but a product of socio-technological interaction between the vlogger, the platform(s) and his or her followers. This micro-celebrity culture is an integral part of the so-called attention economy, or what Venturini calls the 'economy of virality' (Venturini, 2019: 133). 'Success on YouTube is rooted on sustained attention, thanks to an ever growing, loyal and engaged audience' (García-Rapp & Roca-Cuberes, 2019).

Micro-celebrity culture finds its material base in the technological programming of digital infrastructures. The practice of influencers helps attract the attention of their followers, and as such contributes to the profit of large internet companies. It explains why somebody such as conspiracy theorist Paul Watson stays integrated: he not only tries to comply with the community standards, but he himself also contributes to the goals of the platform. He captures many eyeballs. In order to sell the user's attention, social media platforms set up a technological system that allows them to measure, quantify and standardize 'attention' in the form of 'reach', 'views', 'interactions', 'likes' and 'shares'. Metapolitical influencers are not just 'using' these digital media to have an impact and reach; their integration in the ecology of mainstream digital media contributes to the monetization of that audience labour and thus to the goals of the platforms. Social media influencers are crucial building blocks of the digital economy.

In order to be fully integrated into this economy of virality and generate uptake, metapolitical influencers need to be media literate. They need to develop specific strategies to make use of the affordances and algorithms of the different media (and their specific media logics) to build an audience and/or community (Varis & Hou, 2019: 231). The adoption of strategies of personal branding by influencers is done in relation to this economy of virality and the affordances of digital media. As the functioning of the algorithms of the different platforms is not known by anybody outside of the company that builds them, the acquiring of media literacy is based on an algorithmic imaginary (Bucher, 2015). This imaginary is constructed on the basis of practical experience and the careful monitoring of metrics, the number of likes, shares, followers and comments. These 'vanity metrics', as Rogers (2018) calls them, not only give birth to the culture of influencers and social media celebrities, they also bring into life networks of influence. The more people that follow an influencer, the more chances that their content will be liked, shared and distributed in the network. These networks of influence (Jacobson et al., 2019) – within an attention economy – not only have economic value (in terms of data production and usefulness for marketing campaigns), but they also have metapolitical value: they contribute to the spread of metapolitical ideas, fashions and styles. The adoption of social media celebrity practices can thus help to construct a metapolitical network of influence and let their metapolitical ideas circulate and contribute to a shared style. Interestingly, in the case of metapolitical influencers, that style seems highly gendered. Female metapolitical influencers mobilize a highly 'feminine style' that stresses softness, nostalgic or modest fashion and combine it with a discourse about the family, gender roles and of course the re-emergence of the community. This metapolitical seduction, as Tebaldi calls it (2022b: 23), 'blends sexual intimacy with gendered regimes of value, in order to produce a desirable subject position of men.' Male influencers create a mirror image and mobilize alpha male masculinity.

Brittany Pettibone, The Golden One and antifeminism

In what follows, I will zoom in on two metapolitical influencers: the Swedish bodybuilder, online fitness guru, entrepreneur and far-right YouTuber, The Golden One (aka Marcus Follin), and #pizzagate promotor and wife of Martin Sellner, Brittany Pettibone, known since their marriage as Brittany Sellner. Both represent two sides of a crucial new right metapolitical battlefield, which could be labelled as the antifeminist battle or the battle to recreate the nuclear family as the foundation of a healthy community. This metapolitical gender war aims to restore the 'natural order' of things by promoting the heteronormative nuclear family and traditional gender roles for men and women. This battle has a long new right history. In their new right manifesto, de Benoist

and Champetier (2000: 35) make it very clear that, to them, 'the distinction of the sexes is the first and most fundamental of natural differences (…) humanity is not one, but rather two'. This existence of biological feminine and masculine nature is considered as evident and as the basis of gender. And even though they admit that 'due to genetic factors or socio-cultural choices' people can deviate from these categories, they stress that 'in general, a large number of values and attitudes fall into feminine and masculine categories' (de Benoist & Champetier, 2000: 36). 'Feminine values' (cooperation, mediation, seduction, empathy, synthetic intuition) are then contrasted with 'masculine values' (competition, repression, domination, detachment, aggression, abstract, analytical intellection). It is from this position that they advocate a 'differentialist feminism' which recognizes men as well as women by acknowledging the equal value of their distinct and unique natures.

'Recognizing' gender in the new right discourse has a very specific meaning. Differentialist feminism metapolitically constructs gender roles that align with the 'biological nature of the two genders'. This differentialist position is, as always, pitted against 'universal feminism' and thus against egalitarianism. This focus on the rebirth of traditional, biological gender roles and the family is embedded into a discourse focused on the 'demographic crisis', the 'anti-natalism' or 'ethno-masochism' (Faye, 2010: 60) promoted by the left. Traditional gender roles and the stress on the power of family units (Faye, 2010: 81) are in this new right discourse instrumentalized as building blocks of homogenous organic communities. To arrive at an organic community, it is necessary, according to Faye (2010: 70), to develop a family policy in the light of the rebirth of traditional values and a Europe of people. In order to counter 'anti-natalism', one has to try, according to Faye, to reinstate traditional values and stop the 'emasculation process'. Men should again be men and women should be women again: or in plain wording, housewives should take care of many white children. The fashion and styles that we have just discussed contribute to the metapolitical goal that The Golden One and Brittany Pettibone personify. As metapolitical influencers, they function as role models for the 'alpha male' and the 'trad wife'.

The Golden One and the metapolitical warrior

The Golden One started his YouTube channel in 2012 and has now amassed (March 2021) over 110K subscribers and over 12 million views. He has become one of those far-right influencers operating on a global scale. He has been invited to give lectures in the Netherlands for the far-right group Erkenbrand (The Golden One, 2018), in the Ukraine for Reconquista (2018), The Scandza Forum in Sweden (The Golden One, 2019) and did collabs with many key figures and online shows in the far-right alternative influence network (Lewis, 2018) like Millennial Woes (2019) or Red Ice TV (2015).

'The Golden One' was also one of the many key figures of the global new right that praised Guillaume Faye after his death. His condolence tweet was not the first time this blonde Swedish YouTuber praised Faye. Already in 2015, he made a (now blocked) YouTube video praising Faye's book 'Why We Fight: Manifesto for a European Renaissance' as 'one of the best books I have read'. The Golden One is one of those influencers that regularly promotes new books from Arktos and can thus be seen as a key figure within the global new right operating on the highest scale of vernacular globalization.

The Golden One recommends Faye's *Why We Fight*, especially if you 'are a beginner in the political or philosophical world or need ammunition to fight off or debate the leftists' (The Golden One, 2015a). Note here how The Golden One adopts metaphors of war in relation to the idea of political debate or philosophy. That is not a coincidence, and the words 'the debate', 'philosophy' or 'metapolitics' are not only used as synonyms by him, but his whole message also argues that metapolitics is crucial in the fight for the future of Europe and the European people. These fighting metaphors also reflect, as we have seen, the central motif in Faye's book: the motive of decline and the need for a rebirth or renaissance. Faye starts *Why We Fight* with the idea that 'Europe today faces the greatest danger in her history, a danger threatening the very existence of her civilization. For she is at war and doesn't know it' (Faye, 2011: 29). This danger is brought upon us because our elites do not fight for their people and let us be colonized by migrants and Muslims in particular. The idea of the 'great replacement' was already very much present in those books from Faye. Even more, to not be replaced is why we should fight, according to Faye. We should fight 'for the cause of our own people's destiny' (Faye, 2011: 39). Faye describes the world in Schmittian terms as a struggle between ethnic peoples and civilizations for survival and domination. 'The base of everything is biocultural identity and demographic renewal', says Faye (2011: 37).

The Golden One completely agrees with Faye. 'Culture stems out of blood', he says in his video praising Faye. This fight for the survival of the biocultural identity of Europe, or in less metapolitical discourse, the white European race, is according to Faye, not only metapolitical: it is very much about the will to power, the will to become culturally, morally, economically and politically superior as people. Faye's stress on this struggle for dominance and superiority between Europeans and the Islamic colonizers is exactly the message that The Golden One puts forward on his channel. This idea, The Golden One says, 'resonates very well with the kind of aesthetics that I'm trying to portray with this channel, about strength and such virtues' (The Golden One, 2015a). This aesthetics refers to the stereotype of the virile, strong and muscular alpha male. The Golden One's bodybuilding aesthetics personifies the old motif of the warriors and strong men willing to fight and sacrifice themselves for the group. Just like Faye, The Golden One stresses

the importance of the *Warrior virtues* and stopping of 'deviralization' as Faye calls it. The Golden One sees himself as helping to construct a new legion of metapolitical warriors: troops of real alpha men who combine physical strength with metapolitical strength. In a lecture for the Ukrainian-based far-right Azov Movement and the ND-National Militia, The Golden One stressed the importance of combining real fighting and violence with the philosophical or metapolitical. In essence, he pleads for a fusion of metapolitics and the willingness to use violence in the idea of the 'metapolitical soldier' or 'metapolitical crusader' (The Golden One, 2019). In this lecture for the ND-National militia, he stresses that soldiers need to have a solid ideological world view and activists or politicians also need to be able to physically fight. This notion of the metapolitical crusader is central in the social media communication of The Golden One. All his online activity has been dedicated to the creation and education of that legion of far-right metapolitical crusaders.

The alpha male and the metapolitical crusader

A central tactic to his attempt to create this metapolitical legion of warriors is addressing young men who are struggling with their identity and with their future. He not only addresses that audience directly, but he also tries to give them a future, a purpose in life. In another popular video from 2015, he for instance explicitly addresses 'Western and Swedish Young Men' (The Golden One, 2015b) and asks them to listen to his words. He starts by recognizing their struggle and immediately gives meaning to that struggle. They are struggling because of 'white guilt', 'guilt of being a man', they are being 'shamed for being white' and 'shamed for being a man'. To all those young guys who recognize themselves in that description, he functions as the bringer of hope, and he does this using two tricolons in a row. In the first tricolon, he addresses the young viewers directly:

> You are important.
> Your life has meaning.
> Your future doesn't necessarily need to look dark.
> This is also your land.
>
> *(The Golden One, 2015b)*

The Golden One explicitly addresses these young men individually by using the pronoun 'you'. The Golden One clearly plays into affect, into feelings young men may have like doubting the meaning of life, but also worrying about the future. Importantly, those feelings are immediately connected to the state of the nations. It is implied that the reason why young men feel dislocated, living meaningless lives, is because their land is taken away from them. The individual is thus immediately portrayed as part of an 'us': they

are also, just like The Golden One himself, owners of 'their land'. The second tricolon stresses that what The Golden One assumes that these youngsters feel is normal:

> There is nothing strange about honouring your heritage.
> There is nothing strange about not wanting to be a minority in your own country.
> There is nothing strange about being proud about who you are. (…)
> *(The Golden One, 2015b)*

Note here, how through this metapolitical intimacy the classic generic fascist narrative of decline and rebirth (Griffin, 2008) is now individualized. The decline of the nation is visible in the decline of the white young man who is now hopeless and whose future is 'dark as f*ck', to quote The Golden One. The reason for the decline of the nation and white man is found in those 'extreme left cultural Marxist communist feminists'. The solution? 'Stop listening to those extreme left cultural Marxist communist feminists, and listen to a guy like me' (The Golden One, 2015b). Note here that the hope for rebirth is also individualized: it is men like The Golden One who can help young men to find their pride. And their pride is located in their land, their heritage and their willingness to fight for that land and against their minoritization.

When The Golden One gives them hope and perspective. He directly addresses his audience. 'You are important', he says, while he looks into the camera making eye contact with the viewer, raises his voice and points in an Uncle Sam kind of way to the audience to recruit them. Such a setting, where the influencer looks directly at the viewer's eyes, connects the viewer and the participant with each other. It establishes contact between the two, even if it is only on an imaginary level (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996: 122): it demands the attention of the viewer. The Golden One is directly speaking to his audience, even using both of his index fingers to underline that he is really speaking directly to them. This intimacy is further exploited metapolitically in the personal topics The Golden One talks about. He explicitly stresses that 'it is perfectly fine to be a man, to be a boy', of course implying that 'the left' doesn't think that is fine. And he urges his viewers, whenever they see a man who is not confident, to approach him and say that he is important. And again, this outreach is framed within a large societal narrative of decline. Because is it too late now to let good young forces go to waste, we need everyone to be engaged and committed in the battle for the future. The battle against devitalization is thus not only a battle to help the struggling young men, but it is also necessary to save the nation and European white civilization. The self-help narrative is a metapolitical narrative that allows young men not only to become proud but also to become a radical, anti-left, far-right nationalist alpha male. This metamorphosis is a metamorphosis in

ideology and style. A style that can also be bought in the Legio Gloria webshop in the form of food supplements, coffee and clothing.

This reborn man, the man who is confident, who is willing to fight for his ancestors, his traditions and his civilization, is a man that will be successful. 'The future can be bright', says The Golden One, 'but you have to work for it as well'. To arrive at that future, one has to become a confident warrior, and to become that warrior, one not only has to read, one has to train, go to the gym and learn how to fight. The Golden One presents himself as the role model of a healthy, confident man. He gives training programmes, sells food, gives challenges and allows young men to build a community around him. To become that role model, he uses, like all influencers, his private life in service of gathering eye balls. This influencer practice is commonly understood as 'networked intimacy'. The concept was initially introduced to try to understand how people use digital media to make friends or to display intimacy in the context of social media (Miguel, 2018). In relation to influencers, it has gotten a slightly different meaning. Networked intimacy has become an instrument to bind audiences to the influencer and create a perception of authenticity. The pictures and videos in which The Golden One introduces his daughter and his wife are all emblematic of the perfect live that he is trying to project: the harmonious marriage where men and women take up 'their natural gender roles'. His wife is part of that metapolitical business. Together, they project the image of the ideal happy traditional family consisting of a strong man and father, and a caring wife. Emblematic of this traditionalist narrative was the post of his wife on International Women's Rights Day in 2021. In this post, she shows a picture of The Golden One with their child. On the one side of the image, we read 'What do you need most in life as a women?'. The answer is provided below the picture 'A loving family. Congratulations for spoiling this for millions of families since 8 March 1909'. With this post, she confirms the discourse of The Golden One on gender relations and the joys of traditional marriage. A loving family (in her case with The Golden One) is all that a woman needs, she claims. The natural order is thus an order grounded in a dominant patriarch and a submissive feminine woman. The women fighting for women's rights are portrayed as the ones destroying that traditional family, and thus also as destroying the corner stone of a healthy organic nation. The Golden One and his wife, their individual advice, their use of networked intimacy and their help are all part of a larger metapolitical project. A project that has uptake within the far-right global network.

The Golden One, the metapolitical legion and algorithmic knowledge

It should go without saying that the metapolitics of The Golden One is dissimilar to the notion of metapolitics forwarded by de Benoist. De Benoist

not only looked down on the 'vulgar politics of the politicians', but he also saw metapolitics as driven by the long-term project to capture hearts and minds (Bar-On, 2007: 37). This also meant that GRECE rarely intervened in direct political analysis and that they were not looking for controversies in the mass media. De Benoist recognized that 'the capture of the cultural realm must be the task of an even smaller, ultra-elitist force fighting against the 'established order' (Bar-On, 2007: 52). The metapolitics of *La Nouvelle Droite* was, first and foremost, about the production of theory and the distancing oneself from violent activist groups. Second, it was about normalizing those ideas in order to fuel political changes – not by seeking mass media attention or controversy, but by educating the absolute elites. Anyone who has watched the YouTube vlogs of The Golden One knows that his version of metapolitics is not about highbrow intellectual theory or a new theoretical synthesis based on a study of all areas of knowledge published in books and journals in order to propose a coherent worldview (de Benoist & Champetier, 2000). The Golden One is emblematic of this new, 21st-century type of metapolitics, which I coined metapolitics 2.0: a metapolitics which is clearly intertwined with digital infrastructures and digital culture. The Golden One is a metapolitical influencer: he uses digital media and culture to have a voice and to 'convert' individuals to the right belief.

Important to understand is that The Golden One does not just reproduce the ideas of others. This would entail that he is a type of neutral intermediary. Anyone who has seen him knows that this is not the case. By using digital media for metapolitical goals, he is producing new ideas, assembling existing ideas in this metapolitical fitness influencer format and repackaging them while communicating them to a new niche. The key to understanding his impact is to analyse his communication in the tradition of social media influencers. Just like most influencers, The Golden One not only produces a clear-cut persona but also mobilizes strategic authenticity and networked intimacy to bind his audience. The difference between traditional influencer intimacy and metapolitical intimacy is that his personal life is used in service of metapolitical goals. After a video was posted where he discussed what it meant to become a father, a whole series followed discussing the war on fatherhood and how to raise daughters. Throughout those seemingly personal videos, he is promoting the traditional values and pan-European worldview that you can also find in a different form in the works of Faye.

Legio Gloria and the Son of Europe

Like all influencers, The Golden One has crafted his own brand. He has created a very specific public persona – a sort of modern-day pastiche of a Nordic Viking/Bodybuilder – which he uses for metapolitical and economic goals. He combines fitness videos, food advice and training videos with videos explicitly

dedicated to politics, far-right books and activists. He gets paid to give lectures, and uses Patreon to get monthly funding (586 persons donated each month before Patreon deplatformed him in March 2022). He has his own clothing line, Legio Gloria, which he regularly wears in his YouTube videos. He even has his own nutrition line. The success of The Golden One is clearly not only metapolitical, it is also a small business success. The Golden One's brand thus finances his metapolitics and vice versa. Through his online presence and his influencer techniques, he manages to inspire far-right activists and youth around the world. It is in this uptake that we can assess the meaning of his work.

One of those viewers and fans is the 'Son of Europe'. The Son of Europe is a member of the far-right Flemish identitarian movement 'Schild & Vrienden' (see Maly, 2019). In a YouTube video with the title 'How I got red pilled',[3] he explained that finding The Golden One was a 'pivotal moment' in his red pilling process: he not only 'started watching, binge watching actually, the Golden One's videos', he also started to exercise more and 'go the gym more', 'doing research and also started reading more' (Son of Europe, 2018). It is thus through the self-help, fitness and eventually also the purely political videos that the Son of Europe crafted his identity, set up an Instagram account under the name Son of Europe and became metapolitically active in the Flemish identitarian movement Schild & Vrienden. Note here how the Son of Europe tries to become the 'metapolitical warrior' we described above. Especially 'The Wild Hunt Challenge' of The Golden One (2016) would prove to be very influential in shaping the Son of Europe. It was as a result of this challenge that 'aimed at reinforcing positive behaviours in young men' that the Son of Europe created his Instagram account. During this challenge, The Golden One challenged young men to

1 Train at least five days a week,
2 Stop watching porn or at least masturbating to porn as 'I want you aggressive and disciplined'. This is non-negotiable if you want to be part of his 'legionnairies'.
3 Read an article every day and
4 Post 'a glorious picture of yourself' (…) in the most epic place you know' and 'upload it to Instagram with the tag #legiogloria'.

It was through this challenge and especially those posts, said the Son of Europe, that a community was born. This community not only created transnational ties among far-right activists. It also functioned as a learning environment. The Son of Europe claims in his video that it was in this Legio Gloria that he learnt everything about 'the domination of cultural Marxism', 'the domination of certain groups in the banking world'. He even concludes by saying that this 'formed my ideology as it is up to today' and even more, he himself started to take up the role of 'metapolitical influencer': he started posting English videos and pictures on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube in the genre of The Golden One.

The Golden One – as an influencer or micro-celebrity within the far-right niche – re-entextualizes Faye's discourse, fuses it with other traditionalist and identitarian insights, wraps it up in an idiosyncratic format and brings it to a whole new audience. His Legio Gloria challenge shows not only how he creates a group around him, but also how he uses that group to generate interaction on his profile and thus contribute to his own algorithmically sorted visibility. Not only algorithmic knowledge of algorithmic imagination is crucial to generate metapolitical impact in this digital ecology, but understanding and adjusting to the culture of the platform are also at least as important.

The Golden One's Metapolitics 2.0 is deeply weaved into the new media system (Maly, 2020a). The impact and the influence of The Golden One, and thus his role in the distribution of far-right ideology cannot be reduced to his content alone. We have to understand it in relation to his online persona and thus also in relation to the digital and algorithmic environment in which he produces his voice. Not only the management of visibility but also avoiding non-visibility, as Bucher stresses, is a constant worry for all actors in this media system. Making yourself visible and drawing attention are central to all contemporary ideological projects. The Golden One, in his long social media career, has proven to master this game. On top of that, he was able to stay fully integrated into all major digital platforms (YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook) for almost a decade. He used the affordances of all those platforms and adopted classic influencer techniques to grow an audience, to keep that audience hooked and to build a community around him.

The key to any contemporary metapolitical project is thus to be and stay integrated into the culture of the platform, and more specifically to adjust to its community rules. It is their integration into this new media ecology that allows them to become so influential. Since the end of 2020, we see that The Golden One has struggled to keep integrated. His personal Instagram and Facebook accounts have been deleted, as was his Patreon account. He is now using his existing mainstream accounts to make sure that his audience can move along with him to new platforms like GAB, Telegram and the Odyssee video platform. He has created a new Instagram account (@thegoldenjarl) where he, in less than one year, amassed over 16,8K followers. And in a desperate need to keep himself integrated into YouTube, he has announced to stop posting political videos there. This desperate attempt to reinstate his Instagram account and to maintain his YouTube account shows us just how important mainstream digital media are for this metapolitical project.

Brittany Pettibone, gender roles and the traditional family

Whereas the Golden One combines purely political content with self-help content to turn beta males into alpha males or even metapolitical warriors, Brittany Pettibone combines political and activist content with conspiracy

theories and relational advice videos. Both have over 100K followers on YouTube and can thus be seen as curating content for specific niches that are integrated into that new right network. And both metapolitical influencers highlight how important digital knowledge is in a digital metapolitical battle.

Brittany Pettibone became famous within the global new right because of her key role in bringing the #pizzagate conspiracy theory to prominence. She has since built a large following and acquired a prominent status among far-right activists around the world (Maly, 2020). She is working on a transnational scale and has a global following. Pettibone uses the action and meaning-making possibilities of different mainstream digital media like Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube and adopts the practices of influencers to further a metapolitical agenda. With more than 30,500 followers on Instagram, 154,200 followers on Twitter and 137,000 subscribers on YouTube (30 June 2020), Pettibone has created a niched media empire for herself.

The rise of Brittany Pettibone

In less than one year after her first political tweet, Pettibone had already acquired large visibility – a key value within the attention economy (García-Rapp & Roca-Cuberes, 2019). The name 'Brittany Pettibone' had become a brand with a substantial audience consisting of alt-right and identitarian activists. In the next months and years, she would capitalize on this position. Since May 2017, Pettibone started to craft her channel around her own personality. The banner 'Virtue of the West' was replaced by a professionally crafted intro positioning her name and her own logo.

Since April 2017, we also see that Pettibone more regularly started to use her Instagram account, giving her followers more insight into 'the back office' of her political activism and seemingly giving unfiltered access to her private life. This networked intimacy is not only part of the metapolitical goal, it is also very much staged. Whereas in 2016 pictures on Pettibone's Instagram mostly showed typical family pictures, we see a clear break in 2017. From her invite to Trump's inauguration, over selfies with Lauren Southern, to her performance at the Free Speech Rally in Berkeley in April 2017: Instagram was now regularly used to give her fans a look behind the scenes of her activist life. With the exception of some old #TBT pictures – showing her travelling with friends, celebrating her dog's birthday and pictures with her family – most pictures were now carefully staged to contribute to her brand as an 'important activist' and create a nostalgic feminine style. The intimacy of these 'old family' #TBT photos was re-entextualized in a political context and blended with more glamorous pictures reminiscent of fashion shoots with 'behind the scenes' pictures and stories on her political activism. Influencers, Hou (2018: 78–79) argues, try to create an aura of authenticity through the (interactive) representation of the intimate and private self: a practice Hou calls 'staged authenticity'.

A good example of how Pettibone uses staged authenticity for metapolitical goals is her wedding. In the weeks and months before her wedding with Martin Sellner – of the pan-European identitarian movement Generation Identity – followers on her Instagram could see her getting her 'wedding ring sized', kissing Martin Sellner on a carriage under the caption 'Du bist die liebe meines lebens', and pictures of both giving their wedding vows in a church in the Austrian countryside.

All these pictures and captions provide her followers with deeply intimate information. Like all – non-political – influencers, Pettibone mobilizes this aura of authenticity strategically to create a bond with her audience (Gaden & Dumitrica, 2015), giving them the feeling that they really know Pettibone. Important to stress here is how she caters to a specific style and thus functions as a role model or a centre of normativity. The difference with non-political influencers is that networked intimacy and strategic authenticity are now being mobilized in support of metapolitical goals. This metapolitical dimension becomes clear when we see how her Instagram account works in synchrony with her YouTube channel, where Pettibone posted a vlog with the title '3 Reasons Marriage Is A Risk (And Why We Still Took It)' (Pettibone, 2019a).

The same romantic wedding picture of the couple in traditional clothing is now being used as a thumbnail on YouTube. The title of the video is seemingly unpolitical. The SEO of this video is made for uptake in a very different niche by a potentially very different audience (people who are interested in marriage and maybe have doubts). The video shows the couple on the last day of their honeymoon. First, on a boat in Italy where they make the joke that now that Salvini is out of office, someone has to make sure the waters are safe for illegal immigrants. Later, they film from one of the Italian beaches. Sitting on a beach bed, they address their viewers, with a beer and a café latte in hand (indexing traditional images of men and women), and again with a small joke that the beaches are safe. When they start discussing marriage and why they did it, they are seemingly just rationally talking about all potential problems in marriage. They discuss three questions (1) Is it responsible for right-wing activists to marry and have children considering their precarious financial situation, (2) Is it responsible to set children in this world as right-wing activists and (3) a more general one, should you really bind yourself to one person for the rest of your life.

Throughout the discussion, we see two main frames. The first one is a traditional understanding of marriage and gender roles. In an ideal marriage, the man is the one that goes out working and provides food on the table. The wife is supposed to dedicate her life to the service of the children and the family. These traditional gender roles are constantly flagged throughout the video, and Pettibone explicitly states that she would leave the political life 'and obviously prioritize motherhood once I have children' (Pettibone,

2019a). It is also flagged in the fact that Pettibone decided to adopt 'Sellner' as her last name since their marriage.

The second frame explicitly and implicitly constructs a world dominated by the left. All questions related to family and marriage start from the idea that they live as far-right activists in a 'left-wing' dominated world. This meta-frame is highlighted in 'the left', 'the globalists' and 'Soros funded organizations' in particular, who they claim are trying to de-platform them, prosecute them and cancel their 'bank accounts'. This dominance of 'the left' is also highlighted in the fact that 'marriage' in today's Western societies is not sacred anymore, that people divorce, and that even polyamorous relationships are promoted. All of this is framed as a consequence of the consumption culture that the left and especially liberals have promoted.

The personal, the networked intimacy and the staged authenticity are deeply political. It is through displaying their personal story – the staged back office of their activist life – that they normalize their political goals, or better, metapoliticize them. This is all the more obvious when Martin Sellner explicitly states that having children is a political act in itself, because not having children 'is exactly what they – our enemies – want' (Pettibone, 2019a: min. 10:17–11:15min), 'It is a kind of revolutionary act', it is a kind of 'in your face against the modern world, all the globalists' (Pettibone, 2019a: min. 14:38–11:15min) who don't want you to marry. Marrying has as a goal to produce children, and thus to reproduce 'a people'. This framing of marriage and children as revolutionary echoes the great replacement theory where 'the left' is 'replacing' its people. Within the new right, as we have seen above and broader, the anti-Enlightenment tradition and radical nationalism, 'the family' is seen as the cornerstone of the nation, of the community. The prominent trope in new right discourse about the so-called degeneration of society is not only the result of migration and diversity but also of the destruction of the family by individualism and globalism. As Alain de Benoist and Charles Champetier state in their new right manifesto, it is on the local level of 'the family, the neighbourhood, the village, the city, the professions (…) that one can create a standard of living worthy of human beings, not a fragmented life' (de Benoist & Champetier, 2000).

The display of intimacy is directly connected to the new right political agenda. The inside view of their honeymoon gives the viewers the feeling of being part of their lives and constructs an image of dedication. Even on their honeymoon, they think about their followers and their political goals. They sacrifice themselves for their cause. The content is also used, just like all other social media content that they produce, to raise money. Most videos they produce not only come with calls to share and to subscribe but also to donate. In some of her videos, Pettibone even explicitly asks and argues why it is important to donate (Pettibone, 2019c, last 30 minutes). The wedding video is no exception. The issue of de-platforming/demonetizing is raised

and the video description links to several platforms (PayPal and Stripe in this case) to support their activism and buy her new book. Note also that each video she posts comes with links to all her other channels on mainstream and less mainstream digital channels. In this way, she tries to build an audience on these platforms in the hope of not only having more reach, but also preparing for potential de-platforming.

Family and relation advice as metapolitics

Since her marriage, the purely political content has become less prominent. The family, marriage, love, happiness, dating, abortion and (white) women and (white) men in general are now key topics on her channel. In the months after her marriage vlog, she posted 17 videos until June 2020 on a wide range of topics: 'Abortion as a moral good', 'The war on men', 'What makes Women great', 'Why young people are unhappy', 'Man Won't Date "Woke" Women', 'Should Women Propose Marriage To Men?' and 'Twitter Mob Attacks Mom For Posting Cute Family Photo'. Eleven of these posts deal with relationships and gender-related topics. Even though all these videos seemingly deal with relational topics, they are all deeply (meta)political.

No matter what the topic really is, they all promote a narrative on the so-called dominance of the 'woke' and 'lunatic left'. A world where feminists and anti-racists are willingly destroying the traditional family, marriage and the traditional gender roles of (white) men and women. She describes a world in decay. That decay is visible in the attack on the traditional gender roles, the destruction of the community, and especially the war on men. 'While feminism may claim to have interest in realizing equality', Pettibone broadcasts,

> It has shown itself to be far more interested in usurping the traditional male role and that is a war of sort that has been started. Boys and men are not only shamed and belittled for their masculine qualities, their masculinity is deemed toxic, a danger to society even.
>
> *(Pettibone, 2019b: min: 9:45)*

Feminism is framed not as a striving for equality, but as an attack on masculinity and boys, and men in particular. Implicit here is the notion that there is such a thing as 'pure masculine qualities' that finds their origins in the biological difference between men and women. Feminism is about the feminization of boys and men, making them into beta males: 'Meanwhile the feminization of boys and men is upheld, praised and defended. Gone are the days were men valued and respected for their desire to protect and to lead and their societal contributions' (Pettibone, 2019b: min: 9:55). We see here how Pettibone supplements the view that also The Golden One is broadcasting: the

left is destroying traditional families, and especially destroying young men. 'Not even father-days is safe any longer from the destructive hands of our brave new woke culture' (Pettibone, 2019b: min: 09:59).

This 'left'-wing discourse is presented as the norm in society and thus as all powerful, their discourse is carried by 'the most powerful institutions: the media, education and entertainment' (Pettibone, 2019c: min: 10:27). In contrast to that mass media hysteria, Brittany Sellner portrays herself as the voice of reason or common sense, taking a seemingly middle ground position (see for instance: Pettibone, 2019c: 7:59 Pettibone, 2019b). When she for instance attacks the #metoo movement, she doesn't do it full frontal, but in a smart, hedged way: 'I do not claim that society has no need for a movement like the #metoo – movement', says Pettibone, 'but if these movements truly do want to accomplish something, they need to be concerned with evidence, fair trials and shining light on all forms of violence, including the violence that affects men' (Pettibone, 2019c: 7:30–7:59). Such attacks come with identity effects. She constructs herself as the opposite of the caricature she makes of the #metoo movement. Contrary to them, she positions herself as fair, balanced and only producing evidence-based discourse. This position is reinforced by showing tweets, newspaper and website articles to 'prove' her facts. She also includes links to her sources in the bio of the videos. This way of working reminds us of how successful far-right YouTubers like Paul Joseph Watson or Lauren Southern operate. They also carefully construct an aura of 'evidence based' discourse to construct their very own idiosyncratic political narrative on the basis of facts, fiction, lies and news taken out of context and re-entextualized in a very different narrative. This type of media literacy enables them to comply with the community standards of YouTube, and thus stay integrated in the digital mainstream and let their metapolitical discourse circulate.

Pettibone's metapolitical discourse is not new at all but has roots in a two century-old tradition of the anti-Enlightenment. Just like in the anti-Enlightenment tradition in fascist and new right discourse (Griffin, 2008; Sternhell, 2010), 'the Liberals' and 'the left' - Enlightenment, Universalism and Individualism or in short 'materialism' – are seen as destroying traditions, the family and the separation of the sexes. This metapolitical work was always done in order to build a new society where traditional values are again put central. 'We have allowed our society to regress to such a disoriented state, that trying to recover it, would likely take decades and a concerted effort by many many courageous people' (Pettibone, 2019c. min: 10:27). In the conservative revolutionary tradition (Herf, 1984; Sternhell, 2010; Mohler, 2018), the decline is never accepted, and also today new right metapolitical actors see themselves as the vanguard, the elites who are actively constructing the future (Faye, 2011). And just like all conservative revolutionaries, Pettibone argues that this way forward is found in 'finding a strong, stable and

tighten real life community' (Pettibone 2019c: min: 10:27) built on clear gender roles that celebrate the 'masculinity' and 'femininity' of men and women.

Brittany Pettibone's seemingly non-political content is thus deeply (meta) political. It is produced as part of that larger new right metapolitical battle. This political goal cleverly takes the form of self-help content on relations, identity, love and family. The niche that Pettibone is carving out for herself is very similar to the one that people like Mike Cernovish, The Golden One and Jordan Peterson are tapping into. Their success is to a large extent built on a very specific niche of young men and women in search of answers, comfort and self-worth. This niche of 'Angry White Men' has over the last decades become a substantial electorate and thus a very powerful and profitable niche (Kimmel, 2013). Pettibone targets this niche and taps or constructs a new one: women and girls who are also struggling in this world. This is the set-up of Pettibone's 2018 book. 'What Makes Us Girls' is wrapped in a meta-story of trying to help young girls find their destiny by sharing their personal stories (Pettibone, 2018: 4–7). At the same time, it is a metapolitical book. These metapolitical goals are seldom recognized, and the book is sold at major outlets like Amazon and Wordery as a health and lifestyle book. Such a categorization is of course very powerful from a metapolitical point of view: it normalizes the metapolitical goals. The publication of that book, in turn, allowed her to appear on many different YouTube channels, but now as an author dedicated to making young girls happy.

Metapolitics, trad wives, alpha men and Instagram culture

People do not radicalize in relation to abstract phenomena, but in relation to (a network of) very specific individuals, websites, channels, and discourses, and within a larger socio-economic, political and technological context. The Trump campaign under Steve Bannon succeeded in connecting several of these niches together (the so-called alt-right, incels, #maga-activists, 4channers, anti-feminists, pizzagaters) in one movement (Maly, 2018a). Brittany Pettibone and The Golden One are only two of those figures around which a transnational niche came into being. Those niches as we have established are part of a translocal and polycentric network of intellectuals, activists, movements and vloggers dedicated to new right metapolitics (Maly, 2018a, 2018b, 2019). They all reproduce key elements of the so-called anti-Enlightenment tradition (Sternhell, 2010; Maly, 2018) in its post-WWII new right and identitarian manifestation: organicism, a celebration of inequality, anti-materialism, antifeminism, organic homogeneous groups and anti-leftness (Maly, 2020). But more, they also function as role models, as orders of indexicality: they cater a certain aesthetics, body culture, fashion and style. The influencers are important centres of normativity within the global new right

niche. It is for instance interesting to note that Dries Van Langenhove, the leader of Schild & Vrienden, not only follows The Golden One and Pettibone, and regularly likes their posts, he himself for instance would stress – echoing The Golden One – that he is against porn and masturbation and stress the importance of body culture for right-wing youth (De Ceulaer, 2018a).

The success of these metapolitical influencers is at least partially due to their knowledge and use of mainstream digital platforms. The programmed connectivity (van Dijck, 2013) and the system of personalization, datafication and vanity metrics help new right influencers to construct a niche, a so-called 'echo-chamber', which creates fertile ground for a metapolitical battle. The voice of the metapolitical influencer is produced in a very specific socio-technical context. If they integrate themselves successfully into the socio-technical culture of the platform, they become full members of the attention economy and the platform will contribute to the uptake of their metapolitical battle. Metapolitical influencers are not just 'using' these digital media to have an impact and reach. Their integration into the ecology of mainstream digital media contributes to the monetization of the audience labour they activate and gives direction to their digital practices and discourses. This partially explains why known far-right influencers and conspiracy theorists like Paul Joseph Watson, but also The Golden One, Pettibone and Southern, can stay active for so long on YouTube and Twitter. The 'micro-celebritization' of metapolitics is a phenomenon that is directly linked to the neoliberal capitalist ideology underpinning the current digital ecology. Their integration and understanding of this ecology at least partially explain their impact. It is the technical construction of digital media and their personalization strategies in relation to influencer practices that shape echo chambers, echo chambers that contribute to the metapolitical project.

It would be wrong, though, to disassociate far-right culture from more mainstream digital cultures. Part of the metapolitical effect is that far-right influencers introduce and appropriate digital cultures, styles and fashions that have clear links to other niches and even the mainstream. We saw it in the appropriation of hip clothing and hairstyles, and we see it in the body culture of The Golden One and the fashion and style of Brittany Pettibone. This focus on culture allows us to at least annotate a classic 'terrorism'/'radicalization' studies paradigm, namely that the pathway to radicalization is shaped by the relationship between individual and radical ideologues. This pathway to or process of radicalization is described in the literature as a linear process where individuals move from one stage to the next. It is usually visually represented in a phase funnel model (De Coensel, 2019). Radicalization in this paradigm is about the grievances of a troubled individual who finds a solution or explanation in the ideology of a radical actor. What is blurred out is more mainstream (digital) cultures.

We can illustrate this cultural blind spot through Ebner's (2020) analysis of trad wives. In her book 'Going Dark, the secret social lives of extremists',

she describes how the trad wives have a strange appeal to her. She explains this appeal in relation to her personal life. Although she does not share the group's ideology, she uses her breakup with her partner to explain her fascination with the group. Such individual explanations isolate radicalization processes from larger evolutions in society and digital culture. It uses a psychological and personal frame to analyse the impact of radical actors. 'Everyone', Ebner says, 'can be exploitable in moments of weakness, and vulnerability can be a highly temporary concept. The only effective guard is information' (Ebner, 2020: 72).

Radicalization is, as it is so often, presented as a socio-psychological process, where a weakened individual is socialized and radicalized online by far-right actors. This becomes clear when Ebner writes that

> In the end the red pill appears more like a drug that makes its consumer get addicted to the endless chase of an ideal self - whether it's Red Pill Women desperately trying to be the storybook wife, bending and twisting themselves and suppressing their desires or Red Pill Men attempting to become alpha males, adopting techniques to manipulate and seduce women.
> *(Ebner, 2020: 71)*

The drug metaphor implies that ideologues produce drug-like ideologies that get consumers addicted. They sell a bad product that keeps individuals hooked. What the author misses here is that this quest for 'self-improvement' fits into a broader and dominant neoliberal culture. Self-care books are - next to cooking books - the most sold non-fiction books. Instagram is full of people helping you become a better version of yourself. These contemporary forms of biopolitics are deeply embedded in mainstream digital culture. Pictures of well-trained alpha males receive thousands of likes on Instagram. The same is true for homemade old school food and pictures of women in feminine clothes. Nostalgia is being sold on a massive scale, and trad wives are occupying only one niche. Trad wives fit within a larger culture, which at least partially explains the success of these groups. For a lot of people, they do not seem all that radical. The metapolitical dimension of far-right influencers is therefore lost (Maly, 2020).

While Ebner's explanation is of course not necessarily untrue, it is important to stress that radicalization happens in a larger social, economic, political and cultural context. That context is at least as important in understanding how radicalization actually happens. From the moment we include this context in our analysis, the idea of these niches as strange, extremely radical, and very different from 'the mainstream' disappears. The boundaries between what is culturally extreme and what is accepted are far more fluid, and that is exactly one of the strengths of contemporary metapolitics: they use existing cultures in order to normalize their ideology and recruit new souls.

Notes

1 https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/lets-party-like-its-1933-inside-the-disturbing-alt-right-world-of-richard-spencer/2016/11/22/cf81dc74-aff7–11e6–840f-e3ebab6bcdd3_story.html
2 https://phalanx-europa.com
3 The Son of Europe published the video in 2018 but has deactivated his account after Schild & Vrienden was uncovered in a documentary as an extreme-right racist and anti-Semitic movement.

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5

DATA VOIDS, JUNK NEWS AND METAPOLITICS 2.0

We have established that metapolitics 2.0 and the global new right in general are at least partially defined and enabled by the affordances and interfaces of digital media. The contemporary metapolitical strategies of new right actors are not only crystallizing in the classic metapolitical structures influenced by *La Nouvelle Droite* – think tanks like Spencer's National Policy Institute, congresses, books, papers and essays – they are fundamentally ingrained in digital cultural practices. The far-right has not only technologically integrated itself, it has also culturally integrated its metapolitical battle in the digital mainstream and even in the hybrid media system in general. The rise of far-right ideas, movements and parties also indicates that this new digital metapolitical battle has uptake and effect on a global scale.

In this chapter, I direct attention towards the role of search engines, data voids and junk news in the metapolitical battle. In order to understand how the far-right tries to metapolitically exploit these data voids and the media ideology that is attached to Google in relation to socio-economic and political contexts, it is relevant to zoom in on three concrete cases. In the first case, I will analyse the so-called Groyper war that was waged against pro-Trump activist Charlie Kirk during Trump's election campaign. The Groyper war broke loose in 2019 in the slipstream of the Trump campaign and was directed at radicalizing that campaign by targeting Trump's foot on Campus: Charlie Kirk. Key figures in the fight at the time were Nick Fuentes and Patrick Casey. Fuentes is a far-right revolutionary conservative nationalist that had built a huge following on YouTube. He was also present during the Unite the Right manifestation in Charlottesville and was speaking outside the Capitol building during the riots. Casey on the other hand was the head of the identitarian movement Identity Evrope,

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later renamed the American Identity Movement. The Groypers circulating around Fuentes can be seen as a more localized answer to the alt-right in the glory days of Spencer: they hark back to a radical paleoconservative, Christian nationalist agenda.

In the second case and third, I will show how Covid-19 was used by new right actors and conspiracy theorists to metapolitically mobilize their audiences not only for resistance against the Covid-19 measures, but also to infuse a metapolitical understanding of the current order as being liberal and bad for the people. I start with YouTube conspiracy theory vlogger Paul Watson and look at how he exploits the Covid-19 breaking news data void for his metapolitical agenda at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. After that, in the third case, I go deeper into the metapolitics of Covid-19 by zooming out on the relation between Alexander Dugin's framing of Covid-19 and a more local case: how YouTube channel Kies Dries and Feniks Vlaanderen construct the Corona measures as oppressive.

Search engines, data voids and metapolitics 2.0

The web can be seen as one giant learning environment and the search engine is emblematic of this. Most people do not realize it anymore, but to 'surf' the web in many cases starts by entering something in a search box. This normality is as always, a site of power, or more concretely, it has powerful effects. We search the web to know about movies, entertainment, news or even 'the truth'. When we open YouTube, we *search* for videos, when we are on Facebook we tap the name of our favourite pages or groups of persons in a *search box*. We navigate the web *through searches*. The search engine in this sense always comes with a media ideology that has the potential to normalize ideas as factual.

Google and algorithmic agency

Google and YouTube, both part of the Alphabet group, are crucial infrastructures in this learning environment. Since 2015, YouTube has had over 1 billion daily users (Moore, 2016: 9). In 2019, 91. 8% of the searches worldwide were done through Google[1], and on mobile phones this even rises to 96% of all searches (Moore, 2016: 13). This dominance of Google is the result of an almost hegemonic media ideology: the idea that Google is the best search engine and that it will help us find what we are looking for (Vaidhyanathan, 2011; Moore, 2016: 15). Gershon (2010: 3) defined the term media ideology as 'a set of beliefs about communicative technologies with which users and designers explain perceived media structure and meaning'. Media ideologies thus shape how we look at media and their functions and at least partially determine how we use those media. Vaidhyanathan (2011) argued that for

many, Google is a tool to get to 'the truth'. This has also been the main discourse of Google spokespeople on their technologies. Google, its engineers and CEOs, Vaidhyanathan argues (2011: 55), spread a techno-fundamentalist eschatological ideology where Google and all its products are sold as tools for the benefit of humanity. Google, in this discourse, is not just a search engine, or even the best search engine, it is framed as a digital tool that is contributing to a better world by giving people access to knowledge, to the truth.

Google's discourse about its mission as 'don't be evil' and its claim to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful seems to resonate with users around the globe. If somebody asks a question online, the answer is quite often, 'Google is your best friend'. This media ideology is also visible in an endless series of memes and GIFs that just order you 'to Google it'. These are all indications of the cultural impact of the media ideology surrounding Google, an impact that not only guides our online behaviour but also co-constructs how we look at the results that the algorithms of Google present us. Google has become 'a proxy for quality of information, simply an extension of our collective judgement' (Vaidhyanathan, 2011: 3). Google has reached such dominance that they now have enormous power over what is found and what will remain hidden from the general eye, and thus on what counts as legitimate knowledge and what not. The argument of Thompson (1990) that the commercialization of media is a far bigger threat to the freedom of speech than state control, can be expanded to the digital media of our age. Google leads billions of people towards what they are looking for and in that sense Google functions as their lenses on the world. Google also accompanies us while watching television or scrolling through Reddit, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. The media ideology, together with the central place that Google occupies in people's lives, makes it potentially very powerful from a metapolitical perspective. Google is a *de facto* gatekeeper. The company – through its algorithms – determines what will be on the front page of search results. The algorithms running Google are, like all algorithms, not neutral. They are the result of all kinds of decisions on what will be included to define 'relevance'. Important here, is to stress that it is not just 'the algorithms as technological artefacts' that define what will end up on top of the results. To give a desired match, the search engine includes many different signals. The URL of a page, the title and subtitles on a webpage, the general text of that page, metatags, anchors, the links to other articles on that website and the incoming links, are all considered to define its relevance. Note here, that builders of websites have agency here: they can adapt their sites in such a way as to score in Google. The tools are endless: they can focus on building their site in software that allows them to prepare the site for uptake (and thus has a good URL structure, metatags, running on a fast server, …), they can write the texts on the site with search engine optimization in the back of their head and even can use plug-ins (like Yoast SEO) to help them.

And of course, Google itself provides all kinds of tricks and tools like Google Trends and AdWords to help people to build successful websites. You can even follow courses in the Google Academy on SEO.

Far-right actors are very much aware of this digital ecology and take it very seriously from a metapolitical perspective. Greg Johnson of Counter-Currents, for instance, explains in the context of the educational function of metapolitics, why they list Hitler and Mussolini among the birthdays they commemorate at the Counter-Currents website. The first reason is ideological. Even though the North American new right claims to reject the

> Totalitarianism, terrorism, imperialism and genocide of the old right, they do not reject its political model, its theoretical framework and it's key figures like Hitler and Mussolini. They claim that they should recognize *their virtues and flaws*.
>
> *(Johnson, 2013: 5)*

The second reason is found in the fact that those names produce 'spikes in search engine traffic, which we want to capture' (Johnson, 2013: 6).

Even though Google has become synonymous with search and truth, it is clear that its algorithms direct traffic to many different niches depending on the programming of the algorithms, the search queries and the builders of the websites. Even more, Google has since 2009 embarked on a personalization trajectory. Your results are not necessarily my results. Depending on your own preferences, Google can serve you different lenses in the world. Even though personalization has been highly invested in, depending on who you are and what you have been searching and where you are searching, the result might be very surprising, or worse, discomforting and scary.

A now classic example has been documented by The Guardian. When The Guardian journalist Cadwalladr (2016) typed in the words Jew and Women, the recommendation system of Google suggested search queries as 'Jews are evil' and 'women are evil'. This is not an exception as it can occur on all platforms and is part of a political ideological battle that tries to take advantage of the media ideology associated with Google and increasingly also YouTube. Even though such search engine bombs are well documented, it doesn't mean that they have become rare. A simple search on 'Feminism' on YouTube still gives results that suggest that a lot of anti-feminist content is uploaded and searched for on YouTube. Search recommendations like Feminism vs Logic, Feminism vs men's rights, feminist cringe or feminist destroyed all assume that feminism is something bad, not rational, cringe and in contradiction with men's rights. Feminism and feminist are constructed in those automatic suggestions as something we would like to see disappear.

Metapolitics, algorithmic oppression and data voids

The suggestion of additional phrases in the auto-suggest bar is an attempt by Google to narrow the query and thus give users results that match their interests (Golebiewski & boyd, 2018). But increasingly, we see that many users still seem to stumble onto such biased, racist and sexist autocompletions. Safiya Umoja Noble labels such algorithmic outcomes as algorithmic oppression and points blame almost exclusively to the programmers at Google. She rightfully tries to expose the human biases ingrained in algorithms and stresses that 'mathematical formulations to drive automated decisions are made by human beings' (Noble, 2018: 1). She highlights that even though algorithms, math and big data all come with the idea of neutrality, objectivity and thus are benign, that is not necessarily the case. As data scientist Cathy O'Neil (2017) also stresses, the algorithms and interfaces reflect the values and ideologies of their makers. These values shape the algorithms, the interfaces and eventually also the effects of them in society. There are plenty of examples of how algorithms and big data enforce racist and sexist stereotypes and deepen inequality in society.

These autocompletions can indeed only be explained when we understand the socio-technical nature of the algorithms behind such search boxes. Important here to stress again is that algorithms only work in relation to data: to human activity. The socio-technical aspect is not limited to the humans doing the programming, we should also focus on what people do in relation to algorithms (see Bucher, 2018 for an excellent discussion) in order to explain how the anti-Semitic, racist, anti-feminist, sexist and other far-right content ends up high in search results and auto-completion suggestions in Google and YouTube. A narrow focus on the algorithms and the values of their builders in the back office of digital platforms is too technological deterministic. It erases the responsibility of the users. Algorithms in themselves certainly have effects, but it is equally important to include human agency in trying to use search engines for metapolitical gains. Every professional website, from online shops to news websites, invests in search engine optimization. The dominance of Google is so big that for many sites on the internet, Google is their main source of traffic. Websites are thus built to be found by Google and good editors will apply algorithmic knowledge to make sure that each article is written according to the norms Google installs.

Far-right activists very soon understood the metapolitical potential of the internet and of Google, YouTube and social media in particular. They have invested in using their affordances for metapolitical gains. Individual webmasters have built websites and produced content in such a way that they can be found. More importantly, we see that there is a whole network of far-right websites (see the previous chapters) that link to each other, have social media accounts and have a substantial global uptake through networks of

social media accounts. YouTube now houses a far-right alternative influence network (Lewis, 2018) where many different vloggers set up collabs to build their audiences. All these actors together form a huge network of sites, movements, individual activists, individual social media accounts, bots and bot networks. Together they are in a position to game the algorithms of YouTube.

Over the years, especially after mainstream media reported dubious results that the search engine produced, Google and YouTube started to invest in creating a more safe environment. Even though Google's ideology is drenched in 'freedom of speech'-rhetoric, it has taken measures to suppress hate speech. Like all digital platforms, they moderate while disavowing it (Gillespie, 2018: 5). 'Our products are platforms for free expression' says Google, 'but we don't permit hate speech' (Google Currents Help, 2021).[2] And in the wake of several hate-related crimes, YouTube also adopted more strict policies against racism and hate speech.[3]

As a result of increasing moderation, far-right actors search for new ways to keep themselves technologically and culturally integrated into this mainstream digital ecology. One of their tactics is to exploit data voids. Golebiewski and boyd (2018: 1) define data voids as 'search terms for which the available relevant data is limited, non-existent, or deeply problematic'. Data voids are a result of the way search engines work: they scrape and index existing websites and dig up the most relevant ones for a certain search.[4] New terms for instance do not give a lot of results and are thus exploitable. Think of the term algorithmic oppression I just introduced above. When I googled it in 2020 – almost two years after the publication of the book – I almost exclusively stumbled on websites that sell or review Noble's book. The term is thus not widely picked up in different contexts and it is thus still potentially exploitable. It is clear that data voids as such are not necessarily bad or problematic. They only become problematic when actors exploit them to pitch conspiracy theories, incite hatred and violence or promote racism and sexism. In such a context, 'data voids are a security vulnerability that must be systematically, intentionally, and thoughtfully managed' (Golebiewski & boyd, 2018).

Metapolitics, junk news and spreadability

The search engine takes a central role within the hybrid media system. To be visible through search is an important aspect of contemporary metapolitics. Another way to become visible is through what Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) call 'spreadability'. Spreadability, according to the authors, refers

> To the technical resources that make it easier to circulate some kinds of content than others, the economic structures that support or restrict circulation, the attributes of a media text that might appeal to a community's

> motivation for sharing material, and the social networks that link people through the exchange of meaningful bites.
>
> *(Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013: 4)*

The notion of spreadability directs attention to the socio-technical and cultural assemblage necessary to realize the uptake of a post. Not only do actors need to have access to certain digital media (with their affordances), but they also have to be knowledgeable about the economic, but also political structures that enable but also restrict circulation. From a metapolitical perspective, the cultural aspect is as important: metapolitics 2.0 needs a community that supports metapolitics, and thus actively contributes to its spreadability. This community and the posting actor of course need to stay integrated in the platform. They have to produce content in a form that allows spreading on a certain platform, and they also need to adjust content-wise.

The basic premise of the contemporary attention-driven hybrid media system is grounded in the importance of spreadability, and thus popularity. 'Friending, following, and trending are not the same functions, but they derive from the same popularity principle underpinning the online economy of social media' (van Dijck, 2013: 13). All these functions are connected not only to the spreadability of content but also to the economic goals of the platforms. Platforms are built around the importance of content circulating and drawing eyeballs; the more users, the more time the users spend online, and the more valuable the platform becomes for advertisers. What is popular will be pushed, and what is unpopular will be algorithmically suppressed. Timing, and thus time and timeliness, are central to spreadability: digital media, and social media platforms in particular, have only increased the importance of breaking news formats, of being first: 'real-time coverage and hyper-quick publishing have developed in various forms and genres, such as live blogging, push notifications, news alerts and breaking news'. (Ekström, Ramsälv & Westlund, 2021). The circulation of 'fake news' should be understood in the context of this algorithmically programmed hybrid media system.

Venturini (2019) argues that 'Viral news' or 'Junk news' is more analytically useful concepts in understanding what is generally called 'fake news'. He warns that because of its 'vagueness', the term easily can become a weapon to discredit opposing sources of information (Venturini, 2019: 125). This weaponization of 'fake news' is of course essential to the metapolitical practice: what metapolitical actors see as fake is a world that is explained through the globalist paradigm, while the liberal elite sees far-right news as fake, as constructed. That is why Venturini argues that the notion of 'fake news' is misleading because it supposes that malicious pieces of news are manufactured, while reliable ones correspond directly to reality, denying the very essence of journalistic mediation in its efforts to select, combine, translate and present different pieces of information in a news story' (Venturini, 2019: 125). This

is of course not to argue that facts and the truth do not exist, but it is important to understand how actors read/interpret the facts. Failing to understand this is failing to understand how metapolitical actors produce news, not just as fake, but as an alternative reading of the facts, questioning the consensus. This became painfully clear in an interview with Alexander Dugin on BBC (BBC Newsnight, 2016). Dugin starts his answer by arguing that 'truth', to him, 'is relative' (…). 'We have our special Russian truth that you need to accept, as something that is maybe not your truth'. The journalist immediately interrupts Dugin, asking 'Even if it is not true?'. The BBC journalist here chooses not to accept the idea that 'truth can be relative', and speaks in terms of absolute truth: something is true or not. In this perspective, Russia is producing 'fake news', while the United States is producing truth. From the perspective of the metapolitician, the journalist is reproducing 'one truth': the American truth that tries to impose itself as 'the absolute truth'.

This postmodernist turn started with *La Nouvelle Droite*, and is essential to its ethnopluralist worldview. In this view, truth is connected to certain people, with specific values, norms and traditions. It is this locality that shapes the interpretation of facts, and thus gives ground to several 'truths'. Important here to realize is that locality, in Dugin's narrative, is nationalistic, and it is created by the people in power of a nation: the warriors. Or to reframe this in Dugin's rhetoric: truth is geopolitically constructed. Whereas the United States positions itself as the leader of the world and thus claims the absolute truth, Dugin's perspective starts from a multipolar world where Russia is also capable of creating its own truth. The difference even goes deeper. The journalist uses a rational orientation towards the truth. Rationality, as a specific orientation to knowledge and truth, is of course intrinsically connected to scientific thinking and especially to Enlightenment (See Blommaert, 2018b). This scientific method is grounded in strictly logical forms of argument, the necessity to have evidence for claims, and is focused on producing 'absolute truths'. Blommaert contrasts this with reasonability. 'Being reasonable', argues Blommaert:

> Is a much less precise orientation to knowledge, and – not to put too fine a point on it – "reasonable" stands for "credible", something we and our interacting others are ready to accept as true, correct, valid, and to which we are ready to be held accountable.
>
> *(Blommaert, 2018b)*

Dugin, and with him many new right thinkers, reject the rational method and its outcome. Truth to Dugin is not a matter of the scientific method, but from or of belief (BBC Newsnight, 2016). We could argue that he metapolitically weaponizes 'reasonability'. And he is not the first anti-Enlightenment intellectual to do this. Within the anti-Enlightenment tradition there was a

basic hostility towards rationalism, its historicism 'demolished the concept of a common human nature, of a universal reason that gives rise to a universal natural law, regarding this way of thinking as empty, abstract and above all hypocritical' (Sternhell, 2010: 20). What we thus see in that interview between the journalist and Dugin is a clash between two paradigms: Enlightenment vs anti-Enlightenment, science vs historicism, universalism vs particularism, absolute truth vs relative truth. Dugin's intervention sees the truth in terms of what is reasonable within a certain context. Or more specifically, the truth is dependent on the soul of the people. In this paradigm, 'truth' or 'knowing' is the result of the description of the soul of a people (Maly, 2012). It is not the result of a painstakingly, disciplined and detailed methodologically inspired search for the truth, but what is believed by a people. And what is believed by a people is the result of metapolitics, of its culture. This notion of 'truth' is also deeply anti-democratic, as the truth is constructed by the elites and not by the common man.

This insight is important, as it underlines why the concept of 'fake news' is problematic as an analytical tool in the analysis of the new right. As both the rational and the reasonable approach to truth are grounded in ergoic argumentations, the difference is

> In *how* ergoic patterns can be and are being made, the conditions under which ergoic patterns are being ratified: strict rules of method apply to rational orientations, while such rules are absent (or at least hugely less rigorous) in reasonable orientations.
>
> *(Blommaert, 2018b)*

'The reasonable' approach of anti-Enlightenment thinkers is grounded in the primacy of the organic group. It is the group that determines truth, value and meaning, not science or the scientific method. New right thinkers and activists thus see everything that doesn't fit their narrative, and metapolitical quest, as 'fake news'. This framing is not only strategic but also paradigmatic as they do not accept the same notion of what is true and false.

Considering how metapolitics and their conception of truth is connected to digitalization, and thus to the spreadability of discourse, the concept of junk news or viral news is much more productive. It allows us to focus on the *discursive battle for fixing meaning*: on how they try to fix a specific belief in 'truth'. Junk news allows focussing on the construction of the national or partisan truth or a metapolitical truth that is weaponized to destroy the belief in scientific truths or 'absolute truth'. This fight is not just a fight for the truth, but a fight for a different world order. Analysing metapolitically weaponized junk news means focussing on its diffusion and uptake of it. 'It is dangerous', to quote Venturini (2019: 126), 'not because it is false, but because it saturates public debate'. This saturation not only distracts from more important

discussions, but it also has potential paradigmatic effects: it makes the rational unreasonable and incredible. It changes how we deal with truth in society, and thus opens a whole can of metapolitical possibilities. This can range from questioning the Corona measures to questioning the whole political and economic system and of course the media themselves. Digital platforms that use deplatforming and delete posts are then not seen as protecting the truth, but as destroying one specific truth in favour of the absolute truth of the globalists. Questioning this 'absolute truth', in the words of Dugin, is the start of an awakening (Dugin, 2021). This awakening is the result of many different orders of indexicality working on different scales trying to construct a specific 'truth'. One of these actors is Nick Fuentes, who succeeds in constructing an audience around him and mobilizing them in this battle for meaning.

Data voids and the Groyper war

Charlie Kirk from Turning Point USA started a Culture War college tour in the fall of 2019. This tour was the first and foremost set up in support of Donald Trump's re-election. It can easily be seen as a less popular retake of the college tours of Milo Yiannopoulous in 2015 and 2016, who was also set up to get 'edgy' support for Trump. By mid-October 2019, Charlie Kirk's college tour was increasingly haunted by the so-called Groyper and Nicker Groyper Q&A trolls. These offline trolls used the Q&A sessions that were part of the Culture War show format to frame Charlie Kirk as a fake, 'anti-white' conservative.

Charlie Kirk's culture war tour

The 24-year-young Charlie Kirk presented himself as the new cool conservative kid on the block and was hyped as the new conservative wonder-boy (Guinto, 2019). Kirk is the founder of Turning Point USA (TPUSA), a billionaire-funded 'non-profit' organization that wants to 'identify, educate, train, and organize students to promote the principles of freedom, free markets, and limited government'. TPUSA claimed to 'be the largest and fastest-growing youth organization in America'[5] with already 400 Chapters at different universities. Kirk had strong ties with the Trump campaign, for which he worked in 2016 as a social media manager. In 2019, Kirk explicitly bragged about trying to get one million students to vote for Trump (Creitz, 2019). Even though, as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, TPUSA should be non-partisan, it was from the start clear from Kirk's history, his discourse, and TPUSA's initiative Students For Trump that Kirk was Trump's man on campus.

In the wake of Trump's re-election campaign, Charlie Kirk with guests like Rob Smith, Rand Paul and Donald Trump Jr. have embarked on a 'Culture War' college tour. The concept of 'Culture War' has a long pedigree in the

United States. Since its rise to prominence, the concept of Culture Wars had a rather negative connotation of radical differences, polarization and, especially in the discourse of Pat Buchanan, it referred to a radical left destroying the nation. Kirk here adopts the concept as a badge of honour to fight for the right for the nation and thus he appropriates an edginess. Kirk adopts a format that Milo adopted four years before and just like Milo's performances in 2015 and 2016, this college tour was clearly aimed at raising support for Trump by constructing Kirk, Turning Point USA and thus also Trump and his family as edgy and in tune with digital culture. It is also noteworthy that they use nostalgic graphics and superhero-like lighting in the Culture War logo: they are designed to present Kirk as in line with youth culture. In the communication about the tour, Kirk himself is stylized as a fifties kind of reborn Elvis, embodying American nostalgia. The graphic style is reminiscent of an edgy eighties vaporwave neon-light cool, which is also quite common in fashwave art among new right activists and influencers.

It's not a coincidence that TPUSA was described in mainstream media as making conservativism cool (Guinto, 2019). That was exactly the setup. The whole campaign explicitly positioned itself as an edgy conservative right in the American Culture Wars against 'the left'. Even more, it took up the same metapolitical understanding of Culture Wars as Milo, Bannon, and Breitbart: as a cultural battle for hegemony (Maly, 2018a). In the words of Kirk: 'Politics is a by-product of winners and losers of the culture war. To save the culture we must win'. Just like Milo, Kirk was also a regular writer for Breitbart, and his discourse and the tactic of university tours also remind us of the role Milo took up in the 2016 election. But whereas Milo succeeded in unifying the alt-right and alt-light, the Gamergate trolls and 4channers behind Trump, Charlie Kirk struggled to get broad support from the former alt-right and new radical right Christian and America First activists. His legitimacy was explicitly targeted by self-declared Trump fans who questioned his policies on Israel and his betrayal of the heteronormative nuclear family.

Q&A-trolling Charlie Kirk's Culture War

The Culture War college tour started on 7 October 2019 at the University Of Nevada in Reno, after which the show moved to Grand Canyon University in Phoenix on 21 October, the Colorado State University in Fort Collins and the University of Iowa on 23 and 24 October. The next day, the tour stopped at the University of New Hampshire. During these last stops of the tour, a new phenomenon became visible. More and more new self-declared 'dissident right' activists used the opportunity of the Q&A sessions of the show to frame Kirk and what they saw as 'The Conservative, Inc.' as imposters and fake conservatives. The old divide and infighting between the alt-right and the alt-light re-emerge but now in a new format, with a network of self-declared

radical Christian nationalists. These activists go by the name 'nickers' – in the sense of fans of extreme-right YouTube personality and host of *America First* Nick Fuentes – or Groypers. Groyper is a meme that first appeared in 2015 on 4chan. It started its life as a version of Pepe the Frog resting his chin on interlinked hands, which then morphed into a figure of its own. Groyper was, again on 4chan, given a new life as a 'toad, who is friend with Pepe'.

In 2019, the Groypers were a network of young radical Christian conservative activists, shitposters and trolls circling around the Twitter account of @thatgroyper. Many of them used 'Groyper' in their profile name. They are white nationalist, deeply conservative, Christian revolutionaries opposing the US alliance with Israel, LGBTQs and the left in general. The Groyper network is known for coordinating targeted harassment against 'cucks' and 'faggots'. The central goal of the Groyper Wars is to mobilize trolls and activists to help push a base of conservatives and Trump supporters in a white nationalist direction (IREHR, 2020). Key figure Nick Fuentes already had a long history within the American radical right and was for instance also present during the infamous 'Unite the right' rally in Charlottesville in 2017 and the Capitol Riots in 2020. Another Groyper with history is Patrick Casey of the American Identity Movement (former Identity Evropa).

The Groypers were highly visible on Twitter, even though most of them have a limited number of followers. In mid-October 2019 they went offline and used the Culture War Tour Q&A sessions to launch a far-right 'Groyper war' against Charlie Kirk and 'The Conservative, Inc.' (Fuentes, 2019a). This phenomenon reached its first climax on 29 October, 2019, when Kirk's Culture War tour stopped at Ohio State University. As usual, the Culture War rally was live-streamed via Twitter and Facebook. Interestingly, most viewers of the live stream were not watching the stream through TPUSA's social media accounts but on the DLive channel of rising far new right *America First* vlogger Nick Fuentes. Fuentes used the affordances of Dlive.tv for double screening (Chadwick, 2017) on steroids and broadcasted live comments on top of the remediatization of Kirk's performance. Interestingly, Fuentes gained far more traction than Kirk: around 4,000 people watched Fuentes commenting on the official TPUSA stream, while only 400 watched TPUSA's stream.

The reason for this uptake was by then obvious. Nick Fuentes' audiences – nickers, zoomers and Groypers, as they were called by Fuentes at the time – were hoping that, just like during the Culture War show in Colorado, Groypers would use the Q&A sessions to troll Kirk. According to Fuentes, this first Q&A-troll intervention in Colorado less than a week before started 'a great crusade by the nickers, the Groypers, by all kinds of right wing people to expose Charlie Kirk (as) a fake conservative, civic nationalist, Conservative Inc.' (Fuentes, 2019a). Since then, there was a steady escalation of Q&A trolls asking Kirk extreme-right and white nationalist questions. Fuentes' audience was not let down on 29 October, 2019: 14 people were allowed to

ask questions after the show, of which 11 were Groypers and nickers. They asked questions aimed at framing Charlie Kirk as pro-Israel, anti-white, anti-American, loyal to a different country, anti-Christian, pro-drag queen and an anal sex-supporting fake conservative. All the interventions in the context of this 'Groyper war' were directed towards 'exposing' Charlie Kirk as a 'cuck' destroying America. This type of activism is quite sophisticated as it makes full use of the affordances of different platforms in the digital ecology. More concretely, the Groypers used Kirk's show, his live stream and his own social media against him before his own fans. And to add insult to injury, they remediatize it with comments on their own social media where they manage to get even more uptake than Kirk. This sophistication can best be illustrated by zooming in on the Q&A-troll that managed to become the Twitter-talk of the evening on 29 October. For people not in the know, his intervention must have seemed absurd, nonsensical and even a political. This Q&A-troll, just like the one before him, looked like a MAGA kid and even like a supporter of Kirk. He wore an 'I love ISR' pin and a 'socialism sucks' pin in combination with a red MAGA hat. All indexes of him being a Student for Trump and a supporter of Kirk.

His first words – 'What a racist question that was' – also seem supportive of Kirk and his guest on stage, Smith. At first sight, the troll seems to agree with Smith's qualification of the former Q&A-troll's question as a racist question, which adds to the interpretation that he is 'one of them'. That interpretation would soon prove wrong. Let us look at the Q&A session:

Q&A-troll: I have a quick and fun, light-hearted question for you, Charlie. So, you gave a speech in Jerusalem earlier this year? Were there any awesome fun dancing parties that you guys hit afterwards? Cause I heard that Israelis are some of the best dancers in the world. I mean, if you don't believe me, Google 'dancing Israelis', – it is insane how good their dancing is. Would you agree or disagree with that?'
Charlie Kirk: 'Israel is a beautiful country, a great country too'.
Q&A-troll: 'It is our greatest ally'.
Charlie Kirk: 'Correct'.

This Q&A-troll's offline intervention was set up, stylized, and formatted as a digital practice. First and foremost, he intervened as a troll using irony to mock the adversary and to make him look like an idiot. Even without considering the digital culture of trolling, the offline intervention cannot fully be understood from an offline perspective. The troll's performance was clearly produced for digital uptake and addresses not only Charlie Kirk and the audience in the room but all the viewers of the live stream and the multiple remediations of that stream. His suggestion to 'Google dancing Israelis' directs

the online audience towards a data void filled with extreme-right anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. This 18-year-old anti-Semitic conspiracy theory is built around the idea that '4,000 Israelis' were absent on 9/11 and 5 were spotted dancing. The Groyper troll here reintroduces this conspiracy theory in the context of a Culture War to highlight that Charlie Kirk's pro-Israel stance is *against* American interests, and thus to further the America First argument.

This type of message-politics can only be understood and work in the online/offline nexus. The troll not only uses Kirk's live stream, he uses Google and the accompanied media ideology for a new right metapolitical battle. The Q&A-troll's intervention uses this media ideology – if you don't believe me, just Google dancing Israelis – to wrap this anti-Semitic conspiracy theory in an aura of truth. Searching on Google is here used as a synonym for searching for truth.

What may have seemed like an absurd, nonsensical intervention by many of the viewers was met with enormous enthusiasm among the Groypers, nickers and alt-righters on Twitter. The Q&A-troll's intervention was immediately extracted from the live stream and remediatized within the Groyper network on Twitter. They started to massively tweet the hashtag #dancingisraelis in the hope to get it trending. Googling dancing Israelis after this event (on 30 October 2019) not only directs users to the existing conspiracy theory but also shows several highlighted YouTube clips of the Q&A-troll asking his seemingly nonsensical question. As a result, the Groypers and Fuentes – instead of Kirk – became the 'talk of the town.'

Kirk's culture war tour, data voids and metapolitics

Offline Q&A-trolling is thus to be understood within the context of a new kind of activism in a post-digital society, which makes full use of the affordances and media logics of a hybrid media system. Groyper Q&A-trolling amounts to performing a digital practice offline but is clearly not limited to the offline: it carefully hacks the digital communication of its adversary to generate digital uptake. The Groypers' offline activism 'hacks' Kirk's own media channels to get *their* message circulating. It is Charlie Kirk himself who streams the Q&A-trolling interventions towards his own audiences. 'Dissident right' influencers like Nick Fuentes use the affordances of digital media like DLive.tv to take in Kirk's audience by re-mediatizing his stream and adding live comments. The Groyper network on Twitter, white nationalists, alt-righters, and nickers use Twitter to live comment and to share memes and little extracts of Groypers 'demolishing' Kirk's performances.

This endless remediatization creates buzz around the phenomenon and serves as a recruiting and mobilizing instrument for future Groypers while engaging in Q&A-trolling and other practices. Such networked movements are now quite common metapolitical manifestations. This is not your typical

old-school hierarchically structured movement, but a movement build around several influencers who function as soft leaders (Gerbaudo, 2014) by hyphening and guiding followers into activism and teaching them how to think and speak (meta)politics. These future interventions will in turn lead to further information flows. And, eventually, they will probably lead to the amplification of their existence and their metapolitical battle's outreach by the mainstream media, who will feel the need to report on this new type of activism. It is through such seemingly marginal forms of activism that far-right actors seem to succeed in amplifying their message and letting it circulate not only in the margins of the internet but also generate more broad uptake.

Throughout 2019, Fuentes was able to build and mobilize a community of activists around him. He could mobilize this crowd online, not only in the form of trolling actions and crowdfunding but also offline during such Q&A-trolling sessions. In the fall of 2020, he succeeded in mobilizing many of these Groypers or American firsters for different rallies in the Stop the Steal protests and even organizing rallies himself (see the letter of the Select Committee to investigate the January 6th attack on the United States Capitol[6]). The Groypers and Fuentes were also prominently active in front of the Capitol on January 6th. This role cannot be disconnected from his digital metapolitical activity. Throughout the years most mainstream digital platforms like Facebook, Reddit and YouTube demonetized and eventually banned them. Even more niched platforms like Twitch and Clubhouse deplatformed them. By January 2021, Fuentes ran the most popular channel on DLive and had 125,000 followers on Twitter. After the Capitol Riots, he got banned by both. Considering the importance of a broad uptake for metapolitical goals, the deplatforming and deplatformization since 2020 is an increasing problem for new right and far-right movements. Such moments of crisis – think of the New Zealand shootings, the extensive trolling of Milo and the Cambridge Analytica scandal – have had huge effects on new right metapolitical actors.

Covid-19, Junk news and metapolitics

Covid-19 is also such a moment of crisis. The pandemic has had an enormous impact on day-to-day politics and far-right metapolitics. It only accelerated the problem of keeping integrated into the mainstream digital media. And this integration was all the more important when offline manifestations became harder and harder to organize. Another issue was that Covid-19 became the dominant news item for months in a row, and thus determined the far-right agenda. The online new right activist had to adjust to this new reality and to a new digital environment. Since the election of Trump in 2016 and the Charlottesville attack in 2017, digital media has become increasingly stricter in their treatment of the far-right online. The libertarian discourse of the mainstream digital media was always accompanied by moderation

(Gillespie, 2018), but since 2016 this moderation was not just focused on what was illegal. More and more platforms developed policies around 'fake news', incitement to hatred and the far-right in general. These policies were even intensified after the 2020 elections and the Capitol Riots in the United States when most mainstream digital media platforms designed a strategy of deplatforming and even deplatformization of a substantial part of the far-right (van Dijck, de Winkel & Schäfer, 2021).

Covid-19 thus coincided with a new phase in the governance of the digital ecosystem by major platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Google. Not just individual users from the fringes, but also massive accounts like the one of Trump were banned (on several platforms at the same time). Even more, the whole movement was the object of de-platformization. This strategy was among other things the result of increasing pressure from the public at large, mass media and politicians on those platforms concerning conspiracy theories, hate speech and racism. When the seriousness hit about Covid-19, we saw an exceptional phase of explicit and visible organization of search results and warnings connected to pages, posts and search results that produced (fake) news about Covid-19.

Considering the lives that were at stake during this pandemic, we for the first time could explicitly see how digital media companies were taking precautions. Several major Western Tech companies – Google, Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin, YouTube and Reddit – declared that they would combat misinformation on the Coronavirus. Tweets and Facebook posts on the Coronavirus came with additional banners from those media with links to reliable sources. On search engines like Google, which had more than enough qualitative news to show, we saw that search results were highly structured. When searching for information on the Coronavirus, Google was very explicit in their interventions: they clearly prioritized official government communication, showing safety tips and local mainstream media news.

Metapolitics, breaking news data voids and the Coronavirus crisis

New right movements, metapolitical influencers and platforms needed to readjust their discourse and algorithmic strategy in order (1) to keep themselves integrated into the digital mainstream, (2) generate uptake and (3) position themselves vis a vis this new reality. The adjustment to this new socio-technical, political and medical context was not a homogenous process within the global new right (McNeil-Wilson, 2020; Van Dongen & Leidig, 2021). This again underlines the importance to understand the globalization of the new right not as a process of homogenization, but as a much more complex, layered, polycentric, transnational and stratified phenomenon. Local movements do not just take over practices and discourses from other movements, but 'indigenize' them for local purposes. Thierry Baudet in the

Netherlands has fully accepted the idea of Covid-19 as a hoax, and part of a large conspiracy 'the Great Reset'. He aligns, not for the first time, with Alexander Dugin in this case. Also, Pegida in Germany successfully drew the card of Covid-19 as a first step to a totalitarian control and surveillance society (Volk, 2021). Other movements have shown themselves more nuanced and restricted (like Schild & Vrienden or Paul Watson who I will discuss here), but they all sought to use Covid-19 for metapolitical purposes, to delegitimize governments and in the end, they used Covid-19 to brand themselves as 'pro- Freedom'. How they did this completely depended on the chronotope in which they were fighting. Depending on the time and space, we could see movements taking up very different positions. But all of those actors had to take a position and produce content to use Covid-19 for metapolitical goals.

The tired old slogan 'never waste a good crisis' has taken on a new dimension in the digital era. Each crisis comes with new search terms and thus new ways in which all kinds of people and organizations try to get their agenda across. The breaking news format has become a central characteristic of the hybrid media system. It of course has its roots in commercial television, where it was used to bring 'fresh news' and to report on events that were occurring live. Breaking news as a format was visible in the breaking news banners, live broadcasting and the interruption of the normal schedule broadcasting. 'Breaking News' is of course not only an 'informative format'; it has always been an intrinsic part of a commercialized media landscape. Concretely, it has always functioned as an opportunity for mainstream media to score: to draw in new readers or viewers and to establish themselves as important actors in the media field.

The breaking news format has become increasingly important in an attention-driven hybrid media system. In this new media landscape 'News organizations have reorganized to prioritize breaking news, understood as crucial in providing the fresh and exciting news feed that online news promise their audience.' (Ekström, Ramsälv & Westlund, 2021). Striving to be the first to bring hot news is at the heart of the battle for virality, and thus also for impact. Especially in cases where breaking news focusses on a rare place or a rare disease for which not many qualitative search results are available, this opens opportunities to drive traffic. Such breaking news data voids also enable actors to optimize their content in order to score top rankings in the search engines of Google, YouTube and other platforms (Golebiewski & boyd, 2018). And even when there is no such data void, or one is not the first to produce content on the hot news, key terms associated with the breaking news still create an opportunity to drive traffic.

Far-right activists, conspiracy thinkers, and right-wing political influencers, as we have seen, have shown to be very skilled and media-literate not only in using breaking news for their political agenda, but also in optimizing

their content and getting it ready for uptake. The Coronavirus crisis is no exception. The pandemic has been carefully used by these political actors to drive traffic and exploit the public's attention, to politicize their audience. Counter-Currents (Costello, 2020), Stefan Molyneux (2020), Nick Fuentes (2020) on his America First show, and InfoWars[7] have all produced content on the Coronavirus. Even though different actors used different frames in different chronotopic contexts, we can say that many of them successfully used Corona for metapolitical goals and for offline mobilization. After the second wave, the opposition to the Corona measures became a very powerful mobilizer as we have seen for instance in Germany, the Netherlands and in Belgium. It is therefore important to understand in detail how those activists used Covid-19 metapolitically. I will do this by zooming in on Paul Joseph Watson and Alexander Dugin who operate on a more global scale, and on the videos of Dries Van Langenhove and the role of a new movement in Flanders called Feniks in relation to the manifestations that they organized in Brussels.

Paul Joseph Watson, bat soup and globalism

Paul Joseph Watson was one of those far-right YouTubers trying to metapolitically exploit the Coronavirus from the very start. Watson is a brand of his own. Paul Watson is one of the most successful far-right influencers and conspiracy theorists on YouTube. His videos easily manage to reach several hundred thousand viewers. In 2022 he not only had almost 1, 9 million subscribers, he even succeeded in monetizing his content by getting ad revenue through YouTube. He has been active since 2012 and was deeply involved in the production and reproduction of conspiracy theories on 9/11 and the new world order. In the slipstream, he became active in the pro-Trump camp and was explicitly seen as a central node in the alt-right network by Andrew Anglin of the Daily Stormer (Anglin, 2016). The contribution, said Anglin, of conspiracy theories to the alt-right was questioning mainstream narratives. Richard Spencer, on the other hand, considered Watson as alt-light, as a libertarian individualist in Twitter-fight. If we now consider him as an outsider, as not truly part of the global new right, or not, what matters is that Watson's discourse produces powerful myths that have a huge uptake. Those myths consistently target globalism, feminism, liberalism, socialism, wokeness and multiculturalism. In other words, his videos are metapolitically contributing to the construction of that new right world order.

The conspiracy theory-producing YouTuber is a master in keeping himself integrated into the digital mainstream. Even though InfoWars and Alex Jones with whom he has been associated for years, have been banned from YouTube, Watson is still very much alive and kicking on the most watched video platform. He is also a master at tapping into existing hypes and driving traffic to his channel. The Coronavirus was thus for him just another

opportunity to reach a new wide audience and to further a political agenda. One of the reasons for his success is his thorough understanding of search engine optimization on YouTube and the fact that he easily taps into hyped or popular items in the hybrid media system. From the *Joker* movie hype to the bushfires in Australia, Watson seems to have his say on each breaking news item in mainstream media and on YouTube. Paul Joseph Watson is one of those YouTubers that uses each heavily mediatized real-world event to further his political agenda. Already on 24 January 2020, Watson published his first video on the Coronavirus titled 'bat soup' (Watson, 2020a). Over 783,000 people have viewed this video so far and more than 16,000 people have commented on it. In the video, Watson manufactures a fearmongering bogus story mixing up facts and fiction. The scientific fact that the Coronavirus was probably transmitted from bats to humans is simplified and reframed in a cultural othering narrative focussing on the 'habit of Chinese people' to eat 'bat soup'. The complex scientific reality of the transition of the virus from bats infecting other animals via their excrement or saliva is completely erased (Lu et al., 2019): the intermediaries transmitting the virus to humans are erased from the picture.

In Watson's narrative, it is 'the strange cultural habits of the Chinese' that are to blame for this pandemic crisis. The combination with the image of a bat in a bowl of soups supports this further. The epidemic is re-entextualized in a, by now, overly familiar discourse attacking the so-called cultural relativism of the left and their moralizations as well as their framing of the right as bigots and racists. The video uses all affordances available to draw in a crowd: it is a short video with a thumbnail that features a scary bat wearing a face mask (indexing the Coronavirus) along with the Chinese flag. Together with the title 'bat soup' and the status 'Eat the bat, bigot!', the video immediately sparks disgust and fear. Such sensational messages that bring new information, stir controversies and generate instant affective reactions – outrage in this case – perform very well in attention-based digital media like YouTube. Research also shows that 'Exaggerated, hyper-partisan stories are highly spreadable' (Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017). Watson is a master at this game. Match this with his timing, and you know how he generates uptake. When most mainstream media were hardly discussing the virus, he already framed it as 'a globalist disease'.

On 11 March 2019, he posted a second video titled 'c o r o n a v i r u s' (Watson, 2020b) accompanied by an emoji with a face mask and the status 'Thanks, open borders!' More than 755,000 people viewed the video and it received 77,000 likes and more than 11,500 comments in the first month. This video focuses on the global nature of the Coronavirus and immediately frames it in an existing anti-globalism discourse (Diggit Magazine, 2019). The video makes one point: namely, that any success in the battle against the virus is based on a policy of closed borders. Watson praises Russia, Singapore,

South Korea and Hong Kong for their swift action in closing their borders and connects this to their success in controlling the virus. All the other measures that these countries have been taking are completely erased. The Coronavirus is used here to stress the deadly effects of globalism and highlight the benefits of closed borders. This frame is one of the dominant frames among far-right movements and organizations in 2020 (McNeil-Wilson, 2020).

This video by Watson shows the complexity of so-called 'fake news'. Throughout the video, he uses several mainstream media sources to back his political agenda. Facts are isolated and re-entextualized in a political narrative. As we have seen, Venturini (2019: 126) argues that we should understand this type of news not per se as 'fake' news but as *viral* news or, better yet, 'junk news'. Concretely, he argues that we should focus more on 'diffusion' than on 'falsity'. Watson provides a good case for examining these arguments. Watson surfs the waves of breaking news by producing content that simplifies, twists and merges facts with fiction, specifically leaving out certain parts of the truth to make a 'new', sensational video like the one in the last example in order to make a metapolitical point: a world without borders is bad for your health. Watson's content is in the first place ideological (or metapolitical). In order to wage this metapolitical battle, he carefully constructs his content and uses the affordances of the digital ecology to the fullest. The Coronavirus video was not only posted on YouTube, but Watson also used Twitter (and, before his ban, also Facebook), where the video received almost 5,000 retweets. The success of his Twitter account is not only based on his content but also on bots and the bot-like behaviour of his followers. A scan of 2,000 of his followers in Botometer shows that around 20% of his followers are bots or display bot-like behaviour. This type of algorithmic activism boosts interaction, and thus also reach and visibility in this attention-based economy.

Covid-19 was clearly an important topic that drove a lot of viewers to Watson's channel. Between March and May 2020, Watson published five videos dedicated to Covid-19 and the different government policies. The first videos focused on the origins of the virus and pushed the message that globalism was the real reason that Covid-19 became a pandemic. The following video (Idiots react to Coronavirus, Watson, 2020c) starts with making fun of journalists criticizing Trump's consistent phrasing of Covid-19 as the Chinese Virus as racist. Not only does Watson make fun of those journalists, he again connects this political correctness narrative to globalism and the refusal to close the borders. In this framing, political correctness becomes the cause of the pandemic and the deaths. Throughout the video, influencers, stars and migrants are portrayed as idiots. This same narrative is produced in the third video (social distancing, Watson, 2020d), where the contradictions between the liberal elites claiming that social distancing is necessary to beat Covid-19, and their own practices and posts asking people to come

to Chinatown to fight anti-Chinese racism, are highlighted. The main message is exactly the same: political correctness and open borders are bad for your health. It also furthers the meta-narrative that liberals are hypocritical, which is bad for the people. All his claims are accompanied by screenshots of newspaper articles, tweets and clips from TikTok, or get an ironic tone. In essence, his position is carefully drafted to not break the community guidelines of YouTube. Watson doesn't deny the existence of Covid-19, nor its gravity. On the contrary: in these first videos discussing Covid-19, he blames the liberal, pro-multicultural elites with their political correctness and open border politics for being not strict enough in tackling the pandemic. This narrative is slowly but surely traded in for a new narrative on the 'control-society'. At the beginning of May 2020, he released a video called 'Covid-1984' (Watson, 2020e) hinting at George Orwell's famous 1984 novel. In that video, he starts again by repeating his position on the hypocrisy of the liberal elites about keeping the borders open for foreigners while pushing for harder measures for the locals. It is by the end that Watson starts criticizing the use of CCTV to monitor social distancing, using anecdotes about the right of the police to stop you from kissing inside of your house, special idea cards to control the freedom of movement and police checkpoints to enforce the quarantine. Whereas Watson in the first videos focused on the lack of policy, he now strongly opposes the surveillance society that he sees emerging (Watson, 2020ge).

Junk news and the metapolitics of Covid-19: From Dugin to Feniks Vlaanderen

No matter how different new right influencers, politicians, activists and intellectuals frame Covid-19, what they all seem to share is their framing of liberal or left-wing government policies as oppressive. Watson describes it in terms of a big brother society reminiscent of Orwell's big brother world in his novel 1984. Thierry Baudet frames Covid-19 as part of the Great Reset:

> A transition of the late-capitalist society to a neo-communist one in which climate propaganda as a water melon (green on the outside, red on the inside) controls life and brings it under the control of the state where zero privacy or democracy exists.
>
> *(Baudet, 2021)*

Baudet here follows Dugin who even published a book on Covid-19 as part of the Great Reset. In this book, he tries to theorize two conspiracy theories – the Great Reset and QAnon's Great Awakening – by recontextualizing them in geopolitical terms. Covid-19 policies are then read as part of the battle of the globalists.

Covid-19 and the Great Reset as mobilizing myths

Dugin argues that Covid-19 is an excuse to organize 'mind control (through censorship and manipulation of social media, total surveillance and data collection of everyone) and the introduction of new technologies' (Dugin, 2021: 3). Covid-19, says Dugin, is part of the Great Reset. Dugin defines this Great Reset not just as a plan for economic recovery after Covid-19, but as the last stage of (neo)liberal globalization, or globalism. Globalism is all about the destruction of collective identities no matter if they depend on the nation, class or race. This third phase evolves, according to Dugin, around gender and posthumanism (Dugin, 2021: 12–13), or more concretely around the 'destruction of Gender as something objective, essential, and irreplaceable' and the destruction of the human as collective identity 'that must be overcome, abolished and destroyed' (Dugin, 2021: 13). In other words, Covid-19 is part of The Great Reset in the sense that it allows globalists to undo what Trump and the populist wave in Europe have established: the rise of European discontent with mass immigration and gender politics, the Yellow Vest movement, and the election of Trump, who subjected 'the globalist ideology, practices and goals to hard and direct criticism. And he was supported by about half of Americans' (Dugin, 2021: 14). Resistance to the Covid-19 measures is in this sense intrinsically connected to the resistance to the globalist agenda.

We see here again how conspiracy theories function as mobilizing myths. Covid-19 in Dugin's theory is nothing more than another index of the presence of a globalist elite that tries to destroy its people and is considering becoming totalitarian in order to defend this globalist order. We again, in a different form, are confronted with the interregnum, with the Spenglerian idea that our civilization is in decline and that this decay can be stopped if we hark back to traditional values. Protesting the Covid-19 measures is thus not just a demonstration against specific policies, it is a heroic deed: people are now fighting for their society, for freedom and their identity. They are fighting against totalitarianism. No matter the details of the different new right narratives about the Covid-19 measures, what they all seem to share is that they help construct a Sorelian social myth: it creates a heroic myth that mobilizes the people. If the new right wants to establish this new world order, it has to emotionally touch the masses. As Sorel argued 'as long as there are no myths accepted by the masses, one may go on talking of revolts indefinitely, without ever provoking any revolutionary movement' (Sorel, 2014: 49)

New right movements around the world have used Covid-19 measures to create such a mobilizing myth. We can see that this critical attitude towards the Corona policies of the different Western governments has paid off for many new right influencers and movements. Not necessarily in the sense of support of a majority who label anti-vaxxers and Corona sceptics

as dangerous, anti-scientific and undermining the whole Covid-19 approach, but in succeeding to mobilize or at least connect with new audiences who would not see themselves as far-right or even right-wing. Covid-19 allowed new right influencers to reach large new audiences, even if they had to do this from more niched platforms. The Times reported that in 2020, eight of the ten top earners on DLive were far-right commentators, white nationalist extremists or conspiracy theorists in 2020. Nick Fuentes was one of those. It was estimated that he made around $ 1,40,000 through his DLive streams that year (Bergengruen, 2020). This metapolitical reach led to a large mobilization of power. In different countries around the world, far-right influencers, movements and politicians succeeded in setting up large protest marches against their governments and the Corona policies.

In Belgium, we saw how the far-right political party Flemish Interest tried to surf and make the waves of the anti-Corona protests. N-VA, the radical right party more to the centre than Flemish Interest, also criticized the Corona measures from the federal Belgian government, while they were at the same time deploying them on the Flemish level. Flemish Interest was also actively mobilizing their militants to go to the Corona protests. Dries Van Langenhove, elected for Flemish Interest and president of the identitarian movement Schild & Vrienden, was very vocal in this anti-Covid-19 policy. Even though he was less explicit than Baudet, Dugin or Fuentes, he too zoomed in on the lack of freedom and the devastating surveillance state that Covid-19 gave birth to. Kies Dries is his YouTube channel and the name of one specific format. That format – Dries Van Langehove sitting at a desk in a news anchor pose addressing his audience – echoes the format of Nick Fuentes on his live streaming show. On his channel, Van Langenhove has posted several vlogs, podcasts and episodes of his YouTube show Kies Dries dedicated to Covid-19. On average, those vlogs were watched between 9,000 and 16,000 times, which makes them among his most watched YouTube videos. The videos themselves come with explicit flags that direct the users to more information on Covid-19, but none of his videos, as far as I could see, has been banned, and his account is still up and running. This shows that Van Langenhove succeeds in producing a metapolitical discourse without crossing the norms of the community guidelines.

The central narrative in Van Langenhove's posts targets 'the unconstitutional and far-reaching policies' that the Belgian government has put into practice and the role of politicians and virologists in this. Especially Marc Van Ranst, the Belgian Fauci, is the target (Van Langenhove, 2021a). Van Ranst is an ideal target for the far-right, as he is known not only as a virologist but also as a left-wing, anti-racist and anti-far-right intellectual. Van Langenhove even compared him with Stalin (Van Langenhove, 2021a): an all-powerful dictator. Van Ranst, says Van Langenhove (2021b), has contempt for the people and therefore uses lies to manipulate the people. Contrary to Sweden,

Tweet Dries Van Langenhove, who 'ironically' distances himself from 'TheGreatReset' theory

Dutch Tweet	
Ik zou dit net zoals heel wat wereldleiders #thegreatreset kunnen noemen, maar ik ben natuurlijk geen gekke complotdenker.	Like many world leaders, I could call this #thegreatreset, but of course, I'm not a crazy conspiracy theorist.
EU-Coronaherstelfonds: 74 miljard voor 'ecologische transitie' 17 miljard voor 'gendergelijkheid' Amper nine Miljard voor gezondheidszorg	EU Corona Recovery Fund: 74 billion for 'ecological transition' 17 billion for 'gender equality' Barely nineBillion for healthcare
17 retweets – 1 citation – 59 thumbs up	

Source: Twitter Dries Van Langenhove.

says Van Langenhove, our elite did not trust its people to behave and didn't take reasonable measures. In order to further frame Van Ranst as a liar and a manipulator that is not to be trusted, he dug up an old lecture from Van Ranst on crisis communication during pandemics (Van Langenhove, 2021b). In that clip, which was widely circulated online, we see Van Ranst explaining how you can at the start of a pandemic communicate with the media in order to make the people conscious of the danger. Van Langenhove reframes this, by suggesting dark and manipulative behaviour. The effects are clear: The people don't believe the elites anymore, and trust their own intuition and observation (Van Langenhove, 2021b). Covid-19 is thus framed in a populist logic, where governments and virologists are presented as elites who rule against the voice of the people, who lie and manipulate. Governments and their policies are framed as undemocratic.

Even though Van Langenhove avoids explicit reference to the Great Reset, he does create a very similar narrative about the birth of a totalitarian society. In another YouTube video, Van Langenhove frames the social democrat minister of health Frank Vandenbroucke as a dictator (Van Langenhove, 2021e) and the government policies as dictatorial measures. Especially the so-called Corona Passport is framed 'as a dangerous idea that we have to stop with all possible means' (Van Langenhove, 2021c), as a stepping stone to a surveillance society with the government controlling its citizens. When he does use the Great Reset name, he carefully uses irony to make sure that he doesn't violate the community guidelines and mainstream judgement. In the tweet (see above) he lists all the funding for the ecological transition and gender equality and contrasts it with the extra funding for healthcare. He adds the reflection 'I could label this #thegreatreset, just like many world leaders, but I'm of course not a crazy conspiracy thinker. By hedging his community he stays integrated into Twitter while passing the judgement to his followers.

Feniks and the Corona protests

Van Langenhove's metapolitical work around Covid-19 was largely produced in his capacity as a politician for Flemish Interest and on his YouTube channel. Schild & Vrienden was rather absent in the Covid-19 debate, but all of a sudden a new organization took an important role in the Corona protests in Belgium: Feniks. Feniks, represented by Stephan Vanberingen, which is an alias for Sacha Vliegen, was next to Sarah Melis and Ezra Armakye one of the faces of the massive anti-Corona protest march in Brussels on 21 November 2021. Sacha Vliegen was a member of Voorpost, an extreme-right movement in Flanders, the Netherlands and South Africa, and is a member of Schild & Vrienden. This link to Schild & Vrienden is clear in the formatting of the Feniks website. Even though the organization is brand new in 2021, it immediately had a web shop with a sweater and several stickers. The design of the webshop is a duplicate of the Schild & Vrienden webshop. The dominant blue has been replaced with bordeau and the Schild & Vrienden logo has been changed into Feniks, but the overall structure of the webshop is the same.

Feniks presents itself as a 'metapolitical collective' that wants to build an 'antithesis against contemporary globalism' (Feniks, 2022a). Its motto is 'Past left and right. Against globalism'. This positioning of Feniks clearly echoes the language of *La Nouvelle Droite*, and especially of Guillaume Faye and Robert Steuckers. That is not coincidental, as Feniks publishes on the Synergon Info blog of Robert Steuckers (Feniks, 2022a, b). Steuckers is a Belgian new right intellectual, a close friend and partner of Guillaume Faye and a former member of *La Nouvelle Droite*'s Studies and Research Secretariat (Steuckers, 2020: 45). Steuckers, just like Faye, fights for European civilization and against Westernization or Americanisation. The new right, according to Faye and Steuckers, was 'a barrier of resistance to Westernism, Atlanticism and the policies of resignation and submissions that these negative forces led to all around Europe and particularly in Belgium' (Steuckers, 2020 45). They stood for 'serious metapolitics' and wanted to avoid 'reckless entryism'. This serious metapolitics was grounded in ideology, an ideology where the state did not only intervene in the economy but also took 'into account non-economic factors' (Steuckers, 2020: 66).

This legacy of Steuckers and Faye is clear in the discourse of Feniks. As we can see in the Facebook post below, the intertextuality between Steuckers, Faye and Feniks is explicit: All fight against Atlantism and for European civilization. Feniks published two blogs on their site that were simultaneously published on Synergon Info, a blog by Robert Steuckers in Dutch and translated into German. The first blog was dedicated to the war in Ukraine under the title 'No more brother wars' (Feniks, 2022a). The second post focused on identitarianism (and why people claim it would be racist (Feniks, 2022b). This identitarianism is negatively defined by Feniks by referring to migration

Feniks Facebook Post

Picture	
Grey picture of the NATO logo, with Feniks Logo and Feniks in letters on top of it.	Below we see the sentence: Faulting with the trans-atlantic partnership is necessary to reach real European Sovereignty.
Orginal Status	English status.
De Soevereiniteit van Europa blijft onbestaande zolang het in zijn buitenlands beleid ondergeschikt blijft aan de Verenigde Staten. Een breuk met het 'Transatlantische partnerschap' is noodzakelijk om tot Echte Europese soevereiniteit te komen.	The Sovereignty of Europe remains non-existent as long as it remains subordinate to the United States in its foreign policy. A break with the 'Transatlantic Partnership' is necessary to achieve Real European sovereignty.

Source: Facebook page of Feniks.

as an identitarian and cultural threat, and positively by referring to the anti-Enlightenment tradition of Herder (which they label counter-Enlightenment or gegen-Aufklaring). The French Revolution, just like with many new right intellectuals, is seen as an attack on the people. Feniks is convinced that this fault line is still very relevant today. On the one hand, you have the Davos – people (Feniks, 2022b), or liberal globalists. These globalists think that their ideals, culture and norms should reign the world and that they should be the basis of a global culture. They refer to a quote of the Flemish Liberal politician Gwendolyn Rutte, who said that 'Our culture is superior to other cultures and it is fair to say that'. This is read by Feniks (2022b) as 'A direct reference to the linear view of history and the universal blueprint that should serve for global civilization'.

At the other side of the fault line, Feniks argues, you have the anti-Enlightenment thinkers like Spengler, but also Dugin, who argue 'That different civilizations can coexist and negotiate on an equal footing.' Here we see how, with references to Dugin, Herder and Spengler, they introduce a pluralist view of the world where societies are equal but different: 'Every culture is culturally equivalent according to that principle, even if cultures are at a different stage of their development, or organize themselves according to completely different (eg religious) principles' (Feniks, 2022b). It is this ethno-pluralism that again allows them to position themselves as the true antiracists, and the globalists as those who herald an imperialist superiority thinking. Not only liberals, they say, but also the left in the form of cultural Marxists has accepted this globalist ideology. What is worse, according to them, is that these globalists and the cultural Marxists destroy collective identities, which in the end will lead to the destruction of European culture and civilization (Feniks,

2022b). It is thus the identitarian embrace that will save the diversity of the people and humankind.

This identitarian anti-Enlightenment ideology coincides with the Corona protest. The fight against globalism is also a fight against tyranny. The main narrative of Feniks to mobilize against the Corona measures of the Belgian government focusses on freedom. In a Facebook video titled 'For Freedom, against the System', posted on their Facebook pages, we see that in the protest march, members of Feniks walked in Feniks sweaters, white masks holding a banner saying 'No compulsory vaccination, No compulsory masks, no lockdown, no vaccination id'. The following status was posted together with this video:

> Be a free thinker, never accept everything you hear as truth. Be critical and evaluate everything you believe in. The European population has awakened from a psychosis of fear. Globalist politicians like Alexander De Croo and Conner Rousseau are on the losing side. 2022 is the year we take back our freedom!
>
> *(Feniks, Facebook post, 24 January 2022)*

Note here how the protest is framed in terms of the 'European people' who are awakening. Even though they talk about the Belgian protests, those protests are framed in a European civilizational discourse reminiscent of Steuckers and Faye. And just like Dugin theorizes Qanon and Trump by making use of the InfoWars concept of the 'Great Awakening' (Dugin, 2021: 27), Feniks sees the protests as a process of awakening. Those awakened European people are positioned against 'Globalist politicians'. Covid-19 measures are thus framed in relation to the globalist ideology, a globalized ideology that is nothing more than tyranny. 'Today', Feniks writes in another Facebook post on 23 January, 'Politicians are taking advantage of a crisis to implement far-reaching control measures for the population. Today we see the consequences of social engineering. Constitutional freedoms should not become conditional' (Feniks, Facebook post on 23 January). Notice how Covid-19 is not denied, not framed as a hoax, but as a crisis that is used to push a surveillance society.

Feniks thus promotes a discourse quite similar to that of Van Langenhove and Flemish Interest on a local scale, and echoes Steuckers, Dugin's and Faye's discourse on Europe, globalism and Atlantism. This discourse tries not only to capture the anger that some people felt during the pandemic, it clearly tries to metapolitically construct and channel that anger away from the concrete anti-Covid measures in the direction of globalism as the main target of resistance. Looking at the uptake of that narrative on their social media, it is clear that it doesn't resonate with a large mass of people. The maximum amount of likes on posts is around 80 or 100. The massive

mobilization for the marches in Brussels has thus not been done through the explicit metapolitical discourse of Feniks, but through a more neutral and specific discourse around freedom and criticism of government policy. Feniks did play a crucial role behind the scenes in organizing the marches (Eeckhaut & Cools, 2021), including Dries Van Langenhove. Melis was trained by Van Langenhove to communicate with the media. Feniks is thus a metapolitical vehicle of Schild & Vrienden, one that was not known as having far-right sympathies. The massive mobilization is thus the result of a more specific discourse which allows far-right actors to hide behind a respectable front in order to bring together many different niches, and many different channels and local and translocal actors just like the Capitol Riots. They succeeded in merging national and international anti-vaxxers, hipsters on the verge of bankruptcy, holistic believers and extreme-right activists together in a massive march: 35,000 protestors were estimated to join the protests. From a metapolitical perspective of these massive mobilizations as interesting, it allows the organizers to use the populist format and present their discourse as the voice of the people, but it also has the potential of building a larger audience.

The metapolitical move of Feniks backfired from the moment that mass media saw that spokeswoman Sarah Melis wore a Feniks sweater and discovered the links between Feniks and Schild & Vrienden. The eruption of violence after the protests in November (Cardoen, Decre & Baert, 2021) also didn't help, as it became clear that those protests were not 'just the people' who were fed up with the Corona policies, but that mass media started to write about how the extreme-right 'hijacked the protests' (Eeckhaut & Cools, 2021).

Junk news, data voids and metapolitics

The massive attention to and communication of mainstream media sources, government and health institution information on the Coronavirus had a double effect. On the one hand, it made it more difficult to 'stumble across' junk news. On the other hand, it created suspicion and thus a market for people actively searching for 'alternative news' on the virus. Especially people distrusting governments and mainstream media – a public that had been carefully built up in recent years – see these interventions by mainstream digital media as censorship, proof of the Deep State's existence and even dictatorship. This narrative has shaped a very large niche over the years, which far-right activists have exploited very meticulously during 2020 and 2021, resulting in massive offline demonstrations all over the world. Meticulously meant in this case very careful communication in search of a metapolitical niche that navigates between the enforced discourse on Covid-19 by algorithmic and human moderation, and the quest to use Covid-19 for metapolitical

goals. But Covid-19 also had a huge impact on new groups of people, and far-right movements and influencers tried to reach those groups and mobilize them, not only for the direct resistance to the Covid-19 policies but also against globalism and the Great Reset.

In all cases analysed, we have seen in detail how far-right activists are integrated into mainstream digital infrastructures and how they mobilize them and the accompanying media ideologies for metapolitical goals. The cases of Paul Joseph Watson, Schild & Vrienden and Feniks illustrate how metapolitical activists use media hypes and global crises to further their metapolitical agenda. It also illustrates how they fully understand the hybrid media logic and exploit it skilfully. Digital media enables activists to reach a large audience by surfing the hype of the moment. Even if social media and mass media are dedicated to weed out 'fake news' and conspiracy theories, metapolitical influencers and activists succeed in finding ways to reach their (algorithmic) audiences. The scale social media operate on, and the diversity of platforms, makes controlling metapolitically charged junk news a complex affair. The statements issued by tech companies on hate speech and fake news sound promising, but the point here is that the problem of junk news is a fault of the system. All digital media monetize reach, engagement and even production of content by their users. Junk news is a product of this configuration of the digital ecology and it won't be fixed with a technological patch. And that is exactly what Big Tech companies rely on. They propose *technological* fixes for combatting this phenomenon of junk news. All too often, this battle against 'fake news' focusses on binary logic: whether something is 'fake' or not, a producer trustworthy or not. This type of evaluation is not only very hard to make, but it is even harder to programme. In the worst cases, it leads to involuntary blocks (Koetsier, 2020) or (shadow) banning of users, but in reality, it often means that non-mainstream media have less reach but also that more subtle types of junk news still circulate. Metapolitical influencers navigate this newly regulated digital ecology carefully and try to stay integrated into the digital mainstream. Watson's posts, just like the posts of Van Langenhove and Feniks, are still visible on Twitter and on YouTube, reaching ever more people.

Deplatforming in itself is clearly not a silver bullet. Nick Fuentes was for instance banned from YouTube, but he was still very visible on Twitter where he is promoting his different media platforms. And even if DLive suspended his account after Fuentes' role in the Capital Riots, he has now set up his own streaming platform AmericaFirst.live and his own conference AFPAC. He also managed to have over 10,000 followers on GAB. Important to realize is that while metapolitical actors prefer mainstream digital media, they also prepare for deplatforming by trying to build audiences on new platforms where they are allowed to speak more 'freely'.

Notes

1 See Statcounter (accessed in 2020).
2 See Google Support: https://support.google.com/googlecurrents/answer/9680387?hl=en
3 See Google Support: https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2801939?hl=en&ref_topic=9282436
4 Golebiewski & boyd (2019) identify different type of data voids: (1) Breaking News data voids, (2) Strategic term data voids, (3) Outdated term data voids, (4) Fragmented concepts and (5) Problematic queries.
5 See about section on TPUSA's website (accessed in 2019)
6 https://january6th.house.gov/sites/democrats.january6th.house.gov/files/2022-1-19.BGT%20Letter%20to%20Fuentes%20-%20Cover%20Letter%20and%20Schedule_Redacted2.pdf
7 InfoWars (2020). Search Query on Corona: https://www.infowars.com/?s=corona

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6

METAPOLITICAL TERRORISM AND DIGITAL MEDIA

I started this book with words from Brenton Tarrant, the Christchurch terrorist. Fifty years after the founding of GRECE, the metapolitical project seems to have come full circle and ended up not only in the rise of radical right politicians, parties and movements, but also in violence. Dylann Roof in Charleston, Brenton Tarrant in Christchurch, Stephan Balliet in Halle, the Charlottesville car attack, the Capitol Riots, the Buffalo shooting and many smaller violent attacks around the globe illustrate how, in the end, the metapoliticization of the far-right seems to breed violence. Several scholars connect the rise in far-right terrorism to digital media (Auger, 2020; Crawford & Keen, 2020; Weimann & Masri, 2020). Most attention goes out to the role of conspiracy theories, leaderless resistance and the gamification of terrorism (Ebner, 2020; Schlegel, 2021a, 2021b). A key metaphor in contemporary work on digitalization and far-right terrorism is the idea that far-right terrorism is the effect of 'a virus of hate', as Weimann and Masri describe it (2020). The problem with such a virus metaphor is that (1) it conceptualizes people as helpless and passive creatures (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013d), susceptible to 'the virus of hate' that some radical right individuals and groups distribute, and (2) the far-right message is portrayed as inherently very powerful.

From an ethnographic perspective, it becomes very clear that radicalization does not happen in a vacuum: it is a layered and complex process. The virus metaphor and also the funnel theory at least partially obfuscate the role of culture and context in general. Radicalization always occurs in specific social, economic, political and technological contexts. In other words, the virus metaphor creates a blind spot for the metapolitical dimension: the fact that metapolitical activists use digital cultures and mainstream cultures in order to normalize their ideas. Understanding the transnationalization of far-right terrorism

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makes studying culture and the meaning-making infrastructures compulsory. The role of digital metapolitics in the so-called fifth wave of terrorism (Auger, 2020) and the digital infrastructure of that terrorism has received too little attention. Even more, a lot of those new far-right terrorists have used their killing spree to amplify their voices. This mediatization is a key aspect of that violence. Far-right terrorists carefully prepare the (digital) media uptake of their attack. They build websites, write manifestos, stream their terrorist act or make sure that mass media reports on their violence. They even use their trials to communicate their ideological message to the world. Their terrorism uses hybrid media logics to steer the information flow in the global media system.

In this chapter, I zoom in on the link between that violence and the discourses of *La Nouvelle Droite*, the *identitarian movements* and the American white nationalist media by analysing the manifestos of Dylann Roof and Brenton Tarrant from an intertextuality perspective. The ethno-differentialist discourse of *La Nouvelle Droite* was increasingly drenched in a rhetoric of war, and when such discourse hits the streets, it breeds violence. A discourse analytical approach that focusses on the relation between discourse and violence, and includes a notion of symbolic violence, leads to questioning black and white distinctions between metapolitics and violence, as some scholars seem to assume (Ravndal, 2021). Adopting a cultural perspective makes visible that even though Roof and Tarrant have been socialized in quite different far-right niches operating on different scales within the global new right, they both started from a shared hegemonic notion within the global new right that there is an undeclared war going on. That is why they saw their violence as necessary, not only to defend the 'white race', but also to create consciousness about that ongoing war.

Both terrorist acts are emblematic of what I call metapolitical terrorism. Their killing sprees were not only executed to instill fear, but they were also instruments in a cultural war to make 'white people' concious about 'the great replacement' and to spur them to action. Such metapolitical terrorism of course has a very paradoxical effect. On the one hand, it undermines the traditional metapolitical project by de-normalizing it and highlighting the inherently violent nature of far-right ideologies. On the other hand, within their niche, it normalizes violence by gamifying, praising and framing it as cool and necessary. Andres Breivik, Dylann Roof and Brenton Tarrant are not only central figures in a global far-right culture that celebrate their violence and bravery. They have become edgy memes themselves that are used to normalizing their violence.

The great replacement and the re-emergence of far-right violence

When de Benoist and *La Nouvelle Droite* introduced metapolitics and ethno-differentialism, it was introduced, as we have seen, as a fundamental renewal of the far-right, a step away from the violent far-right tradition of pre-war

fascism. This metapolitization of the far-right has been very successful. It met an urgent need of some far-right actors on the margins after the World War II, when even 'fascism's more astute activists' realized 'that the age of mass armed parties led by charismatic leaders was dead, and that in order to survive at all as an ideology in the absence of a pervasive palingenetic climate, it had to be extensively overhauled' (Griffin, 2000: 165). In the decades after the erection of GRECE, this metapolitization not only inspired far-right intellectuals but also inspired and motivated far-right activists, journalists, political parties and movements to invest in a metapolitical battle. Already in the nineties, we saw that the new, so-called radical right populist parties like the FPÖ in Austria, Vlaams Blok in Belgium and Front National in France, succeeded in translating this metapolitization and especially its ethno-differentialism into electoral capital. Vlaams Blok (Flemish Bloc) as a party had clear connections with the collaboration milieu in Flanders but won election after election with a discourse that combined neo-racism (or a differentialist anti-racism) with an ethnocratic position. Even more, it succeeded in conquering hegemony on concepts such as democracy, culture, integration and migration (Blommaert, 2007). We see an interesting historical parallel here. Differentialism was not an invention *of La Nouvelle Droite*. The first differentialist was probably Joseph Gottfried Herder. In the final analysis of the Herderian multidimensionality, Sternhell argued that Herder's historical significance was his contribution to the rise of ethnic nationalism (Sternhell, 2010: 275–278). It was this cultural nationalism that in the end gave birth to political nationalism and violence.

The story repeats itself at the end of the 20th century: *La Nouvelle Droite's* cultural battle became a successful political battle. Guillaume Faye was very much aware of this, and argued at the end of the nineties that political parties and activists had an important metapolitical role: they too produced and were able to circulate ideas and could do it on a much larger scale (Faye, 2010: 28–30). It was in the wake of that radical right success that Faye argued for a more Gramscian way of understanding metapolitics. This, of course, didn't include the notion of class, nor did it focus on realizing a communist society or the building of a united front against fascism (Anderson, 1977; Corijn, 2021). What Faye meant by 'adopting of more Gramscian' understanding of metapolitics was including political parties and movements in the metapolitical strategy, and thus moving beyond purely intellectual metapolitics. The identitarian movement is an example of this new, more activist metapolitical avantgarde (Maly, 2022b). Interesting to note, is that this broadening of metapolitics was also accompanied by a more explicit discourse. Not only the concept of decline and the stress on the need for rebirth or renaissance was present, it also came with a more combative discourse. Faye's 'Why We Fight' was drenched in a rhetoric of war. The keywords from the table of contents alone highlight that his discourse immersed people in the idea of civil

war. Faye talks about enemies, colonization, the dangers of disarmament, the 'menace of the South' and the 'domestic Front'. Faye doesn't leave room for doubt: Europe, according to him 'is at war' but she 'doesn't even know it' (Faye, 2011: 29). The role of Faye's metapolitics is to let people understand their situation as a war-like situation. 'We Europeans', he writes,

> Are rapidly and massively being occupied and colonized by peoples from the South and by Islam. (…) Europe is the sick man of the world. It's obvious in her demographic decline, in her physiological devirilisation, and in the reigning ideology of ethnomasochism, imposed by politically correct censors and the controlled media. We are gnawed at from within and attacked from without.
>
> *(Faye, 2011: 29)*

This war is a war that threatens the culture, traditions, values and identity of European civilization. If nothing changes, he writes in 2000, 'in two generations France will no longer have a majority European population, and this for the first time in her history. Germany, Italy, Spain, Belgium, and Holland are on the same catastrophic path, just a few years behind us'. He creates an apocalyptic urgency that needs direct action right now. Faye therefore calls for a reconquest in the name of 'our people' and 'our identity' (Faye, 2011: 264). Nothing is yet lost and pessimism is not an option, according to Faye. He serves his readers a clear dichotomy: 'In history', he says, 'it's always struggling minorities who make the difference, not the amorphous masses. And it's no longer a matter of Left or Right either, but whether you're part of the resistance' (Faye, 2011: 30).

Faye is echoed in the writings of Generation Identity activists. Identitarian Markus Willinger, for instance, starts his book with the following sentences:

> Europe is in a deep crisis (…) it is a crisis of the European spirit. (…) The people of Europe have lost their will to live; they are dying out, because they don't want to thrive any longer, because they don't want to have any more children, and because they've forgotten what it means to stand up and fight for one's own.
>
> *(Willinger, 2013: 13)*

Willinger takes up the narrative of decline, and frames migration, just like Faye, in terms of 'colonization' and 'invasion' and natality rates and family policies. 'Never before in human history', he states, 'have foreign people invaded to such an extent into a populated region without encountering any resistance from its indigenous residents' (Willinger, 2013: 14). That is why he, and Generation Identity in general, declares war against the 68 ers and the colonizers (Generation Identity, 2013; Willinger, 2013). Just like the anti-Enlightenment tradition

started as a cultural battle and evolved into a political battle grounded in a biological understanding of groups, we see that the cultural and linguistic definition of groups morphs back into (1) a biologically determined view of culture, (2) a political and even a violent battle. The fight for identity in the discourse of Faye and Generation Identity is in the end not only a fight for a 'biocultural identity', *but* it is also clearly described as a rhetoric of war, colonization, defending and thus holding the seeds that can grow out in real physical violence.

It is not enough to stop 'the invaders', a successful reconquest is also a question of the will and of demographics and family policies. Generation Identity not only takes on board the identity concept of Faye or his narrative on the decline, but they also stress the urgent need for 'reconquest!' (Generation Identity, 2013: 19). This combination of the motive of decline with the stress on the possibility and necessity of rebirth is what Griffin calls the palingenetic creed (Griffin, 2008: 37). He sees this creed as an essential characteristic of generic fascism. This palingenetic creed is also an essential ingredient of the contemporary new right (Bar-On, 2013). The focus of *La Nouvelle Droite* was always, says Bar-On, directed towards the construction of a different modernity. This future society, according to Faye, has to be made by blending the archaic and the new, the modern. And action is needed now. These calls to action cannot be read as metaphors only. 'Ideas spur people on to action, and even when they are only rationalizations of psychological or social pressures or economic processes, intellectual constructions rapidly acquire a power of their own and become autonomous political forces' (Sternhell, 2010: 30). As we have seen, the ideas of *La Nouvelle Droite* have been taken up by activists and movements around the world, and they have become not only a political force, they also became a source of violence.

One central idea that we find in almost all manifestos of far-right terrorists is the myth of the Great Replacement, also known in slightly different versions as 'white genocide' or 'the colonization of Europe' (Crawford & Keen, 2020). On the website of The Daily Stormer, visitors can see a demographic counter that projects the replacement of whites in the United States. The idea has already escaped the margins. This idea is for instance also promoted in books of far-right political parties like Flemish Interest in Belgium (Van Grieken, 2017a; Maly, 2020b), but also in the discourse of more centre-right politicians of the Christian Democrat party. This theory, according to Ebner (2020: 236) combines 'all four features of a violence-inciting ideology, so-called 'crisis narratives': conspiracy, dystopia, impurity and existential threat'. In what follows, I want to discuss two cases of white terrorism that are motivated by the idea that they should help save the white race and make people conscious: (1) The shooting of Dylann Roof and (2) the murderous killing spree of Brenton Tarrant. I will discuss both cases not only as examples of metapolitical terrorism but also as reflecting the integration of those actors in different far-right niches within the global new right culture.

Dylann Roof will be analysed as an American white nationalist terrorist operating on a more local scale. I will show how he is socialized online in relation to white nationalist sites such as American Renaissance, the Council for Conservative Citizens and The Daily Stormer, but also in relation to more traditional neo-Nazi sites such as Stormfront. Those sites form communities and learning environments on an American scale. Even though most far-right sites and organizations denounced his murderous riot, his discourse and to a lesser extent even his terrorism eventually generated global uptake. Not only did he became memefied, his manifesto was framed as a product of 'truth-seeking' and even more other white nationalist terrorists followed in his footsteps. As a result of this 'audience labour', his localism became globalized.

Brenton Tarrant referred briefly to Roof, but he clearly was influenced by far more sophisticated discourses and terrorist practices. He operated on a higher scale of cultural globalization. Even though he is an Australian, he travelled the world, sought contact with far-right movements in different countries and was socialized in new right communities that operate on a more globalized scale. His discourse is deeply influenced by identitarianism and far-right meme and streaming culture on 8Chan. If Dylann Roof speaks like an old school racist and American white supremacist, Brenton Tarrant represents the *metapolitization* of far-right terrorism. Interesting, though, is that both terrorists see their act not only as part of that ongoing war against invaders; they also see it as part of the culture war.

Data voids and Dylann Roof's metapolitical terrorism

17 June 2015. Dylann Roof enters the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston. From the anti-slavery movement, over the 1968 civil rights movement until today, this 200-year-old church – one of the oldest 'black' churches in the United States – has had a strong commitment to the civil rights movement in the United States. That commitment was targeted by Roof, shooting ten and killing nine of the believers that day. Roof imagined himself a warrior in a centuries-old civil war. His killing spree was planned and executed not only to generate fear but also as part of a larger metapolitical goal. Roof wanted to spark up a new civil/racial war and the first step to achieve that was to make whites racially conscious. Seen from the perspective of an attention-based media system, his murderous riot can also be read as a way to generate attention for his manifesto.

Dylann Roof, metapolitics and white nationalist terrorism

The central problem of today, said Roof, is that white people are not racially conscious anymore. In his opinion, modern history classes, media and rules

make whites racially unconscious (Roof, 2015: 2). 'Black people are racially aware almost from birth, but white people on average dont (sic) think about race in their daily lives. And this is our problem. We need to and have to' (Roof, 2015: 2). Race, in Roof's mind, is what organizes society on its most fundamental level. Society, in his case America, should be a *white* America. Even though Roof sees himself as an American patriot, and honours the soldiers who fought for the country, he hates 'the sight of the American flag. Modern American patriotism is an absolute joke. People pretending like they have something to be proud of while White people are being murdered daily in the streets' (Roof, 2015: 5). On several pictures on his website, we see Roof burning the American flag and waving the confederate flag with pride. Good American patriotism equals white nationalism, and that is why he prefers the confederate flag. The confederate flag is used as a symbol of white nationalism, it stands for a nostalgic history where whites were still in charge. The America that was worth fighting for, was the America before the desegregation and civil rights movement:

> I myself would have rather lived in 1940's American (sic) than Nazi Germany, and no this is not ignorance speaking, it is just my opinion. So I dont (sic) blame the veterans of any wars up until after (sic) Vietnam, because at least they had an American (sic) to be proud of and fight for.
>
> *(Roof, 2015: 5)*

Roof clearly argues here in favour of American blood-and-soil nationalism for European people. Only when a nation is racially homogenous it can be a good society. Diversity within one nation is seen by Roof as an essential treat. From this racist ideological perspective, the problem is that whites, because they, contrary to blacks, are not race conscious, are blind to the problems of a diverse society. The threat of diversity is defined by Roof in racial terms. It is for instance because he defines Jews as white that he doesn't see their presence as a problem:

> Unlike many White naitonalists (sic), I am of the opinion that the majority of American and European jews (sic) are White. In my opinion the issues with jews (sic) is (sic) not their blood, but their identity. I think that if we could somehow destroy the jewish (sic) identity, then they wouldn't (sic) cause much of a problem.
>
> *(Roof, 2015: 4)*

His racism is *old school*, and race is the fundamental diacritic. Culture follows from the idea of biological races. In his manifesto, Roof describes several 'races' (Black, Jewish, Asian and Hispanic people), allocates different

cultural characteristics to each group and describes the relations whites should have with those races. Note the complete absence of Muslims and Islam as a diversity problem: it is first and foremost the 'black race' which occupies Roof. Black people are a danger to whites and that danger is in essence racially defined. 'Niggers' says Roof, 'are stupid and violent. At the same time, they have the capacity to be very slick.' […] 'Negroes have lower Iqs (sic), lower impulse control, and higher testosterone levels in generals (sic). These three things alone are a recipe for violent behavior'. (Roof, 2015: 3). It is thus the biological nature of races that is framed by Roof as the cause of 'black violence' against whites. His racism is based on a reproduction of the old biological racial discourses where each race is seen to have 'a biologically determined capacity for cultural development' (Miles, 1993: 28). Roof ranks the races and discusses their cultures just like colonial discourse from superior to inferior, from cultured and civilized to barbaric (Corbey, 1989) and he is very explicit about the superiority of the white race (Roof, 2015: 2).

This vintage 'scientific racist' discourse is very much present on websites where Roof was active as a reader or poster like American Renaissance, the Council for Conservative Citizens, Stormfront and The Daily Stormer (Philip, 2015). His racism indexes the context in which Roof lives and writes. It not only reflects the racist history in the United States or the fact that Obama was president, or the sites he visits, but it also reflects the Americanization of *La Nouvelle Droite*'s metapolitics. Whereas *La Nouvelle Droite* thinkers such as Alain de Benoist focus their attention on recent migration or Islam, in the case of Faye, and use culture and identity as the explicit diacritics, the North American new right is still grounded in explicit biological racism. In his book New Right vs. Old Right, Greg Johnson from Counter-Current argues that contrary to *La Nouvelle Droite*, the American new right, 'because of the blending of European stocks and breakdown of more compact European national identities in North America', is 'forced to stress the deeper roots of common European identity, including racial identity' (Johnson, 2013: 2). This is probably also the reason why Faye and not de Benoist was so influential among American new right actors. Roof's discourse echoes this American racist tradition, and this is nowhere more obvious than in the complete absence of attention to Islam or Muslims (Roof, 2015: 2). We also see it in his white supremacist discourse explicitly claiming white superiority. Roof, contrary to *La Nouvelle Droite's* differentialism, adopts a hierarchical differentialism. His discourse blends modern-day racism with a discourse that echoes the long history of structural and biologically determined anti-black racism in the United States that has roots in the racism of the plant owners from the 19th century, the KKK and the southern racial conservatists.

Synchronizing the history of segregation

Roof's manifesto contains an abundance of orientations to different chronotopic histories. The American civil war, colonial racism, Hitler's Nazism, the black civil rights movement, neo-Nazi skinheads, the KKK and even Hollywood movies are all invoked to make his point. Contemporary conservative discourse on minorities is mixed with biologically determined racism from the colonial era, new right discourse on Jews and the Council of Conservative Citizen's discourse on apartheid and black-on-white crime. Roof's discourse is not just a 'local' discourse, it obviously has transnational roots, but it is primarily used for local ends: it is made meaningful in the local life of Roof. In this life, black people are seemingly his biggest occupation. It is also not an individual discourse, it has a long and complex, transnational social and political history. The synchronization of these historicities speaks very clearly to us in his use of different concepts to categorize blacks: he uses the words niggers, negroes, blacks and black people interchangeably to describe 'the dangerous other'. All these concepts have a different chronotopic history that sticks to them. It also indexes his integration into those different traditions. It is through a careful analysis of his language use that we can determine that he speaks as a member of a specific 'community of racists among which there exists bonds of imitation' (Balibar, 1991: 18). This community is not a homogenous community, but exists as a network of different nodes that each function as centres of normativity. It is Roof's individual integration in this specific configuration of niches that shapes his discourse. That networked community of racists is polycentric: it is oriented around different online places that co-construct Roof's discourse. His discourse on race wars as a civil war has clear intertextual links with discourses one can find on sites like the Council of Conservative Citizens, American Renaissance and The Daily Stormer. The manifesto is thus best read not as an individual product, but as the result of a dialogue with others. When he for instance claims that 'Jews are white' and that many disagree with that, he is in dialogue with the forum members on neo-Nazi sites like The Daily Stormer or Stormfront (Philip, 2015). And he enters that dialogue by appropriating the voice of the American Renaissance that sees Jewish citizens as potential allies (Taylor, 2006). In other words, his specific idiosyncratic discourse shows his integration into a very specific American polycentric white nationalist niche.

Roof's voice synchronizes many different historical events, ideological positions and his own biography into a new voice. This voice indexes the very specific position and a very specific time in history from which he speaks (Blommaert, 2005: 142). He not only speaks as a white male, a white supremacist, a 'real American' or a Southerner. He also speaks from a self-proclaimed underdog position: Roof talks (and obviously writes) as a white

drop-out from a southern state in the multicultural America of the 21st century under Obama, a black president. It is this very specific class position, which intersects with racial fault lines in the United States, that not only makes him influenceable by far-right racism, but it also shapes his discourse. His own biography, his own experiences become a metonym of the state-of-affairs of the United States. He speaks in the name of 'the white race' and 'white culture' that in his eyes has lost its dominance in America, and even in Europe 'the homeland of whites' (Roof, 2015: 3). The different historical events, experiences and relations are blended in one text with the explicit goal of convincing the reader. This synchronization of historicities with his biography is an act of power in the margins.

The most dominant centre of normativity in Roof's discourse is the Council of Conservative Citizens. It is also the only organization that he explicitly names in his manifesto. According to their Statement of Principle, the Council adheres to the idea that

> America is a Christian country and that its people are a Christian people […] We therefore oppose the massive immigration of Non-European and non-Western people […] We oppose all efforts to mix the races of mankind, to promote non-white races over the European-American people through so-called 'affirmative action' […] We support the cultural and national heritage of the United States and the race and civilization of which it is part.
>
> *(Council of Conservative Citizens, 2015)*

The Council of Conservative Citizens, just like Roof, defines the real America as a 'European-America' and thus a white America. Note here the differentialist dimension that is added to this more traditional biological racist discourse: the focus is on resisting the mix. What the Council of Conservative Citizens means with 'the race and civilization of which it is part', becomes obvious quite quickly. A short look at their magazines and articles reveals that they side with the apartheid regime in South Africa and Rhodesia. This focus on the former apartheid countries explains why Roof is so occupied with those countries that he even wears their flags on his vest. 'Race integrity' is high on the Council of Conservative Citizen's agenda. The fact that Roof mentions the site explicitly in his manifesto shows that he aligns himself with their agenda, he shares their ideas on white nationalism, racism and supremacy, and wants to promote them. His battle and their battle are one: Creating racial consciousness and fighting for a white America.

The Council of Conservative Citizens was founded in 1985, but its history dates back to the so-called Citizen's Councils. Those councils were the mass social movement arm of the white nationalist anti-desegregation Dixiecrat revolt. These old councils were known as actors of massive popular grassroots resistance (Lowndes, 2008: 39–41). After a very successful period of

mass mobilization, they lost impact in the 1970s but found new life in the eighties as the Council of Conservative Citizens. Among the spokespeople of those new councils was Jared Taylor. Taylor is an influential classic white nationalist and paleoconservative who also runs American Renaissance and is known for his stress on the importance of race. Taylor not only played an important role in facilitating racist discourse, he also is an outspoken fan and friend of Guillaume Faye (Steuckers, 2020). The intertextuality between Roof's discourse and that of the Council of Conservative Citizens and the American Renaissance becomes very explicit when he takes on board the notion that the basis of all problems of violence and criminality is in the end a problem of 'race relations'. Roof here echoes the classic discourse of 'race realists' like Jared Taylor on the assumed correlation between race and criminality (see for instance, Taylor, 2007). As a result of this discourse on diversity and criminality, he sees segregation as the only viable option. He followed the argument that

> Segregation was not a bad thing. It was a defensive measure. Segregation did not exist to hold back negroes. It existed to protect us from them. And I mean that in multiple ways. Not only did it protect us from having to interact with them, and from being physically harmed by them, but it protected us from being brought down to their level. Integration has done nothing but bring Whites down to level of brute animals.
>
> *(Roof, 2015: 2)*

Roof's plea for segregation is grounded in his old school racism that stresses that social behaviour is biologically determined. Roof's apartheid is also grounded in a hierarchical differentialism that sees blacks as closer to nature, more violent and animal-like. It is this racial conception of blacks that (1) grounds his plea for segregation and (2) drives him to take action. 'I believe,' Roof says 'that even if we made up only 30 percent of the population we could take it back completely. But by no means should we wait any longer to take drastic action'. Whites, according to him, need to take back control and segregate. That is the only way forward. His pleas for apartheid are again indexes of his socialization in relation to the Council of Conservative Citizens. A lot of their publications were dedicated to the struggle of the Boers in South Africa and they explicitly praised the necessity of apartheid to protect whites. Roof was not known as a good student, but this far-right ecology proved very productive for him.

Echoing the discourse of the Council, he sees contemporary South Africa after apartheid as proof that it will only get worse. 'If anyone thinks that think (sic) will eventually just change for the better, consider how in South Africa they have affirmative action for the black population that makes up 80 percent of the population' (Roof, 2015: 3). It is from this perspective that he feels that

drastic action is needed. That drastic action cannot be limited to the internet, it needs to go offline.

> 'To take a saying from a film, 'I see all this stuff going on, and I dont see anyone doing anything about it. And it pisses me off'. To take a saying from my favourite film, 'Even if my life is worth less than a speck of dirt, I want to use it for the good of society'. 'I have no choice. I am not in the position to, alone, go into the ghetto and fight. I chose Charleston because it is most historic city in my state, and at one time had the highest ratio of blacks to Whites in the country. We have no skinheads, no real KKK, no one doing anything but talking on the internet. Well someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me.' (Roof, 2015: 6).

Racial consciousness, metapolitics and violence

Roof's murderous riot served two interconnected goals: (1) awakening the racial consciousness of the 'white race' and (2) engaging those 'race realists' in a racial war that he hoped would enflame by his murderous riot. The killing spree was a way to draw eyeballs to his manifesto and his site in the hope of fixating on the meaning of his terrorist act and enflaming a race war. Making white people racially conscious is Roof's fundamental goal, as it is only when they are conscious of the racial fundaments of contemporary problems that they will realize that segregation is the only solution and take the necessary steps. In order to achieve that racial consciousness, he set up, several months before his riot, a website which he called The Last Rhodesian[1] and wrote at least two manifestos (McLeod, 2016) to get his voice out. The website was very rudimentary. It shows Roof's limited skills and understanding of hybrid media logics (Chadwick, 2017). Roof probably didn't understand Search Engine Optimization and he certainly didn't use it. Even integration in social media was completely lacking. The site had three pages: A homepage, a picture page and a page where he published his hastily written manifesto. The name of the website referred to the Republic of Rhodesia (1965–1979), the apartheid state in southern Africa (the equivalent to Zimbabwe's territory today) where a small white minority dominated the country and its black population. The same apartheid state that the Council of Conservative Citizens paid attention to. The white supremacist political Rhodesian elite was ideologically racist and founded an apartheid state that was never recognized by the international community because of its racial and discriminatory policies. Even though this Rhodesian republic was a rogue state, it inspired Roof: to him, it was a symbol of an ideal ethno-state.

The idea behind *The Last Rhodesian* is emblematic of Roof's idea of white people being under attack and losing the racial war between white and black in the United States of the 21st century. The Last Rhodesian is a metaphor for the last white man fighting for power over 'its rightful nation'. That message was

FIGURE 6.1 Homepage The Last Rhodesian.

Source: www.lastrhodesian.com.

multimodally constructed on the home page (see Figure 6.1). On the black background, and below the title The Last Rhodesian in contrasting white, visitors saw a still from the Australian cult movie 'Romper Stomper' picturing the dying neo-Nazi named Hando after being stabbed in the neck with a *Hitlerjugend* knife. Hando wears several neo-Nazi identity emblems himself: Shaven hair, SS skulls and a Swastika pin on his jacket and even a tattoo on his neck reading Skinhead. The picture is recontextualized, and as a consequence, it acquires a whole new meaning (Silverstein & Urban, 1996). Whereas in the movie, Hando is stabbed by his neo-Nazi buddy, this context disappears on the website. In combination with the title, Hando becomes 'The Last Rhodesian': that is, the last white nationalist, a victim of the centuries-old civil racial war that Roof envisions to be still shaping the contemporary world. The homepage multimodally states that it is urgent for white people to act if they don't want to get extinct. White genocide is near. Note that Roof does not use a hipster identitarian as the central picture: the last white man is a neo-Nazi, with explicit identity emblems.

Roof's manifesto, his website and violence all contribute to getting his message out. And from this perspective, we see how his murderous riot is continuous with the metapolitical battle that the Council of Conservative Citizens is waging. The Council sees the internet as a metapolitical tool to communicate, to educate and to fight for their goals, and it is Roof's killing spree that generated massive attention for their site. According to Google Trends, an all-time high number of people searched for the Council of Conservative Citizens on the day Roof entered the Charleston church. In other words, he drove a massive amount of traffic to their site.

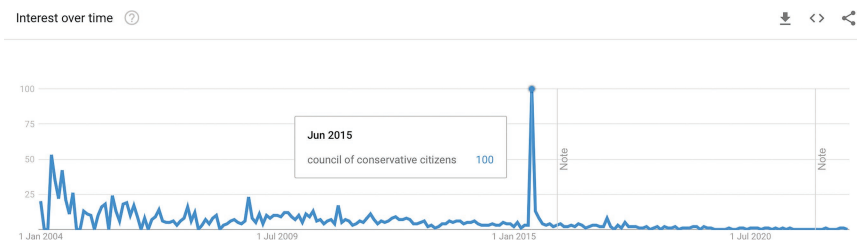

FIGURE 6.2 Google trends for the search term 'council of conservative citizens'.

Data Source: Google Trends (https://www.google.com/trends).

Data voids and terrorism as metapolitics

Roof's manifesto was not only a deeply racist legitimation of his murders or a truthful account of his radicalization, it was also a metapolitical manifesto in its own right. Roof may not have been very knowledgeable about using social media, or sites that are built to be found, but he did understand mass media logic. He understood that his murderous riot would produce endless headlines and make journalists and regular users search for his manifesto. Even more, Roof was very conscious about the role that online search can play in becoming racially aware, as he himself claims to have been radicalized through Google. In his manifesto, he not only explains his deeds and goals but also explains how he became racially aware:

> The event that truly awakened me was the Trayvon Martin case. I kept hearing and seeing his name, and eventually I decided to look him up. I read the Wikipedia article and right away I was unable to understand what the big deal was. It was obvious that Zimmerman was in the right. But more importantly this prompted me to type in the words 'black on White crime' into Google, and I have never been the same since that day. The first website I came to was the Council of Conservative Citizens. There were pages upon pages of these brutal black on White murders. I was in disbelief. At this moment I realized that something was very wrong. How could the news be blowing up the Trayvon Martin case while hundreds of these black on White murders got ignored?
>
> *(Roof, 2015: 1)*

Golebiewski and boyd give the case of Dylann Roof as a concrete example of radicalization through a data void. According to them (Golebiewski & boyd, 2018: 4) the search query 'black on white crime' is a 'classic example of a data void' that is weaponized by far-right actors. In this analysis, Roof's manifesto is read as a truthful self-reporting of his own radicalization process. What is missed is the metapolitical dimension of Roof's terrorist act.

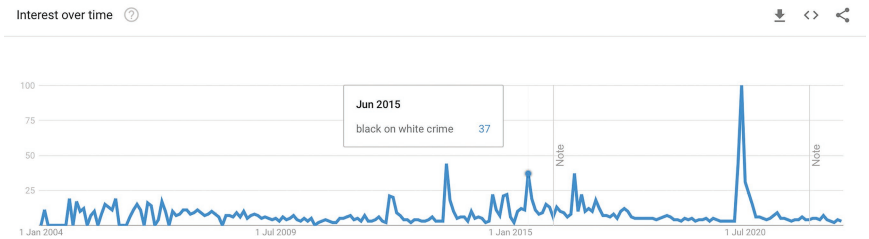

FIGURE 6.3 Google trends for the search term: black-on-white crime in the United States 2015–2020.

Data Source: Google Trends (https://www.google.com/trends).

Roof wanted to make white people racially aware (Roof, 2015: 1). The passage that Golebiewski and boyd (2018: 4) see as evidence of Dylann Roof's radicalization through a data void is at the very least also a performative and metapolitical act. Even if he really searched Google for 'black on White crime' after reading the Wikipedia article, it is most likely an index of his pre-existing ideological convictions. There is little in the Wikipedia article that will lead somebody to type in those words in that order, let alone that he would capitalize white and not black. Roof's murderous riot is not just 'taking the online battle offline' as he claims, it was also very much about generating attention for the cause, and thus using the offline to direct people to online echo chambers. It was no coincidence that he mentioned the Council of Conservative Citizens, and we shouldn't read this manifesto as a pure testimony without metapolitical goals. His mentioning of the search queries is certainly also an invitation to the reader to Google black-on-white crime. His riot and his conviction generated a massive peak in search queries for black-on-white crime. A peak that was only topped during the murder of George Floyd in 2022.

Personal testimonials are a common metapolitical practice among far-right influencers. As Lewis (2018: 24) shows, the transformation from left to right, or here from so-proclaimed non-racist to racially aware, is a popular testimonial trope that is weaponized to amplify support. These testimonies are often framed as awakenings. Roof's 'personal awakening' is an invitation for people reading his testimony to do the same, to read Wikipedia, to Google black-on-white crime and to go to the website of the Council of Conservative Citizens. And that is exactly what people did after Roof's racial murder: they typed in 'black on White crime' and when they did that, they found the entrance to a new world.

It is not a coincidence that the results I got when searching black-on-white crime in Google on the day of his terrorist attack was a link to the site of the

Council for Conservative Citizens. The second result was a link to the FBI with stats that seemingly support this white nationalist trope. This was accompanied by a collection of memes that was highlighted by Google images on the search page. If you click on images you would find that all the images and memes Google provided to people searching these words, supported the narrative of Roof. Roof directed an enormous amount of people – the most in the last five years – to a data void filled with far-right content. This data void is an intertextual bubble: all links and images support the same discourse. The point here is that the informational ecosystem that Roof directs his audience was an information environment created by far-right activists in relation to the algorithms of Google.

Roof, hybrid media salience and (failed) metapolitics

Reading Roof's testimonial, not as a personal explanation of his killing spree, but as a metapolitical act to make people racially aware, allows us to see much more. Like Laqueur (1977: 112) already established, the success of a terrorist operation is almost fully dependent on the publicity it generates. Seen from this perspective, Roof's murderous riot was a huge success. It was his act that drove traffic to his manifesto, to the site of the Council of Conservative Citizens and into the black-on-white crime data void. Roof uses his murderous act and a very rudimentary website to 'set the agenda'. The agenda-setting theory, and especially the concept of salience, highlights how media attention for certain issues is not just a reflection of reality but also shapes reality. In a hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2017), we see that legacy media are not the only actors anymore capable of setting the agenda. Roof's killing spree can thus be seen as a form of 'hybrid salience' (Maniou & Bantimaroudis, 2018), the notion that the attention to his deed has now been fragmented over different media, actors and niches, and with that hybridization comes new interpretations of the event. This polycentric salience also means different ways of uptake.

Roof's act was mass-mediated and he enjoyed horizontal (social media) and vertical (mainstream media) salience. The uptake and understanding of his act and discourse were different depending on the niches in which the uptake took place. In the legacy media, his murderous riot and his white nationalist and racist discourse completely undermined the potential for uptake of his discourse. Even without taking the massacre into account, his white nationalist and deeply racist message was out of touch with the spirit of the time (Silverstein, 2003). It did not align with the dominant ideologies, and in that sense, it was devoid of key characteristics of metapolitical discourse that were always designed to at least aspire to normality and avoid all racist, extremist or radical connotations. Only a small niche of

far-right extremists would subscribe to Roof's discourse. The reason that got him the attention he wanted is the same reason his message can only be read as mad, psychotic, deeply racist, horrible, sick and so on, from a mainstream perspective. Even the extreme-right white nationalist website that inspired Roof, the Council of Conservative Citizens, not exactly a moderate voice, had to distance itself from his monstrous act. At the same time, we see that they had done it in such a way so as not to alienate their ideological base. Looking from the mainstream or the left, the statement of the president of the Council of Conservative Citizens published on the white nationalist website American Renaissance (Holt III, 2015) is very remarkable:

> It has been brought to the attention of the Council of Conservative Citizens that Dylann Roof–the alleged perpetrator of mass murder in Charleston this week–credits the CofCC website for his knowledge of black-on-white violent crime. This is not surprising: The CofCC is one of perhaps three websites in the world that accurately and honestly reports black-on-white violent crime, and in particular, the seemingly endless incidents involving black-on-white murder. […] The CofCC is hardly responsible for the actions of this deranged individual merely because he gleaned accurate information from our website.

Holt's words show that mainstream or legacy media are still dominant in a hybrid media system. They still set the agenda and the accepted ways of thinking about certain events or thoughts. The whole message reflects this position of the mass media and the pressure they can put on far-right organizations to position themselves *vis à vis* radical and violent acts. Holt cannot but denounce the violence and keep Roof at a distance. On the other hand, the CofCC's president is also addressing another part of the population integrated into a very different media environment where people think differently – maybe not so much about the act itself, but at least about the discourse that Roof has positioned in the hybrid media system. With this one speech act, Holt has to address two very different audiences with different normativities at the same time: 'the general public' who is shocked by the massacre, and his radical base who may or may not disapprove of the act, but certainly supports the discourse of Roof. That is why he calls Roof deranged and denies any responsibility while at the same time soothes his base by emphasizing 'the accurate information' the Council of Conservative Citizens is providing. In this attempt to please both audiences merged together through Roof, he tries to further his ideological agenda and explicitly states that the organization stands by 'the honest and accurate facts' that Roof has written down. The effect of his communication has two consequences. First of all, we see that all politicians, mostly Republicans, that

have accepted money from the organization or spoke at their events, tried to distance themselves publicly from the organization. Most of them even sent their money back. Roof and the mass media attention for his metapolitical terrorism created a serious backlash for the organization. Secondly, we see that the white nationalist supporters were satisfied with this response. More than 200 people reacted on the site of the American Renaissance (Holt III, 2015), most of them praising Holt for his 'rational tone'. In these reactions, we see explicit intertextual links with the discourse of Roof and the Council for Conservative Citizens. Pleasing their audience thus meant further marginalizing the organization.

Roof failed from an old school metapolitical perspective and he has clearly also failed to start a racial war. His terrorism and his explicit discourse made him into a racist lunatic that the Council for Conservative Citizens could not support publicly. At the same time, his act did make his manifesto salient. And if we assess his act from a more niched perspective, we see different things. The blog *The Alternative Right*, which at the time was not yet known as a key centre of the so-called alt-right, jumped in to defend 'the white men's burden', gun possession and the inevitability of racism. Racism will keep rising, the blog argued, because 'There is an iron law that ensures that the more multicultural a society becomes, the more racist it inevitably becomes' (2015, 25 June). The alternative right re-entextualized Roof's terrorism and his discourse in a neo-racist and differentialist new right discourse. Racism, in this logic, is the natural reaction to a multicultural society. The Alternative Right, by re-entextualizing Roof's discourse, tries to normalize his black-on-white discourse and uses it to stop the banning of guns: 'Banning guns in America is simply not doable. This is because gun ownership is embedded in American culture and society, and the continuing threat from Black and Hispanic dysfunction will mean that Whites will continue to support it' (The Alternative Right, 2015, 19 June).

Counter-Currents on the other hand even called for a crowd-sourced operation to thicken the manifesto of Roof and back it up with proof, with facts. Following this crowdsourcing, Counter-Currents published *Dylann Roof's manifesto (Annotated)* with Dylann Roof as author and known alt-right and Arktos editor James O' Meara as editor. The annotated text appeared on 30 June 2015 on the site with many footnotes 'supporting' Dylann Roof's world view'. The text came with a disclaimer that stated that

> The purpose of this project is to show that Roof's worldview was not based on 'ignorance' or 'prejudice' but on verifiable facts. Of course, none of these facts necessitated Roof's decision to go on a shooting spree, which was an error of moral and practical reasoning, not of matters of fact.
>
> *(Roof, 2015b)*

Roof's metapolitics may have failed in a public sphere dominated by legacy media, but it clearly had uptake and impact within a niched sphere. Brenton Tarrant was only one of his readers.

Bowl patrol, memes and white terrorist culture

Roof's killing spree was metapolitical in nature: he was killing to realize cultural change: only when white people became racially aware and understood that the civil war was already in full swing, they would be able to start fighting for a different future. Roof's terrorism shouldn't be understood as the act of a loner but as a reflection of a certain culture. The idea that Dylann Roof was a lone wolf may be correct if one looks at it through the terrorism studies lens as 'an attack carried out by a single individual without any operational ties to a terror organisation' (Boaz Ganor, 2020). From a cultural studies perspective, it is without a doubt that there is nothing 'lone' about his behaviour. Roof's actions reflect a very specific and identifiable albeit complex, layered and polycentric culture. Within that network of sites, he became somebody. He not only learned to think about race relations in relation to texts on those sites, but he also interacted with others (Philip, 2015). In doing so, he acquired very specific templates of thoughts and rationalized far-right thoughts and modes of action. His act and his manifesto show us how the affordances of online infrastructures allow for the production and normalization of such very specific, culturally organized logics of action (Blommaert, 2017b).

The act in itself was not only the effect of such a far-right-niched culture, but it was also the start of vibrant cultural production. His discourse not only became the centre of attention, but it was also debated in mainstream news. President Obama's multiple interventions may have been very powerful in producing a negative message and denouncing his racist view for the majority of the audiences, but the matter still remains that he has generated uptake for his discourse. As a result of this mass mediatization, Roof has become a (ironic) 'cult-hero' among certain extreme-right activists. His bowl haircut became the raw material for massive amounts of 'memes' that functioned as convivial devices in far-right online communities. Such convivial devices facilitate 'the production of a social-structuring level of engagement in loose, temporal, and elastic collectives operating in social media environments' (Varis & Blommaert, 2014). On Discord, for instance, there was a Bowl Patrol server. The meme below (Figure 6.4) was shared on that server and shows a bowl cut take on the classic 'That's where you're wrong kiddo' meme. The bowl cut here not only indexes Roof but also the fact that he was able to truly hit 'the other side'. It functions within that context not only as an ironic attribution of coolness to Roof's hairstyle but also as phatic communication: it creates conviviality or groupness. This groupness is

FIGURE 6.4 Bowl cut meme 'That's where you're wrong' kiddo with the bowl cut patrol logo.

Source: https://discordleaks.unicornriot.ninja/discord/server/30.

also indexed by the bowl cut patrol logo on the meme. This logo is made by superimposing Roof's bowl cut on a shield that resembles the divisional insignia of the Waffen SS. Members of that Discord server read as a who's who of the alt-right and neo-Nazi scene in the United States. They include key figures from Vanguard America, The Right Stuff network and The Daily Stormer.[2] The ironic neo-Nazi discourse that was typical for all those media – the layers upon layers of ironic racism to hide the real racism in plain sight[3] – is very much present in the Bowlpatrol Discord server too. The bowl cut memes and the Bowlcast radio show combine this ironic neo-Nazi discourse with regular praise of Roof's killing spree as a masterstroke. Praising him with the nickname Saint Roof[4] and picturing him as a saint with a halo all adds to a very specific far-right culture.

The reason why he is being labelled a Saint, or a chad (see below), is because he has been successful in his attack. Success here is measured in terms of victims. In the meme below (Figure 6.5), we see a gaming logic introduced in the discourse. Roof is being framed as a winner because he succeeded in killing so many churchgoers. Gamification of terrorism has become a central focal point in far-right terrorist research after the attack of Brenton Tarrant in Christchurch (Ebner, 2020; Schlegel, 2021a, 2021b). The attack of Tarrant, but also of the far-right gunmen in Halle in Germany, Poway in California, El Paso, Texas in the United States and Baerum in Norway followed a similar format in which

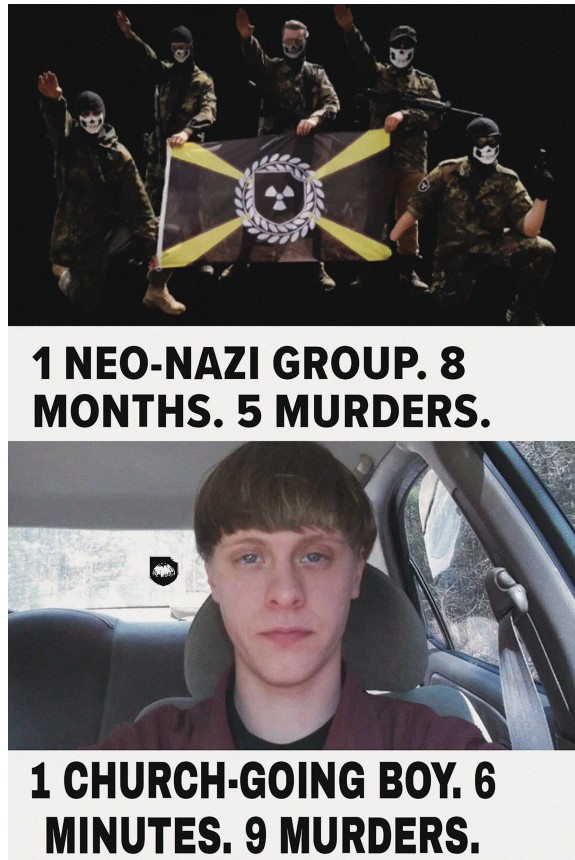

FIGURE 6.5 Gamification of terrorism.

Source: https://discordleaks.unicornriot.ninja/discord/server/30.

not only ideology, or integration in far-right hubs like 4chan and 8kun, it also showed their integration into gaming contexts. GamerGate was a well-known recruiting base for the alt-right in 2014 and 2015 (Yiannopoulos, 2017). Not only gaming culture and gamified language were appropriated, but we also saw that they used the gaming infrastructures. The riot in Charlottesville was organized on the gaming server Discord, and Schild & Vrienden also used Discord to organize themselves (Maly, 2019a). With the use of these infrastructures and cultures came the gamification of terrorism. On the one hand, we see how far-right terrorists in Christchurch, Halle and El Paso have adopted the Let's Play video format and live streamed their attacks. Such a live stream gamifies the attacker's and the viewers' experience of the event (Schlegel, 2021: 6).

On the other hand, we see how gamification introduces new frames to understand the terrorist act. The gamification of terrorism also has a

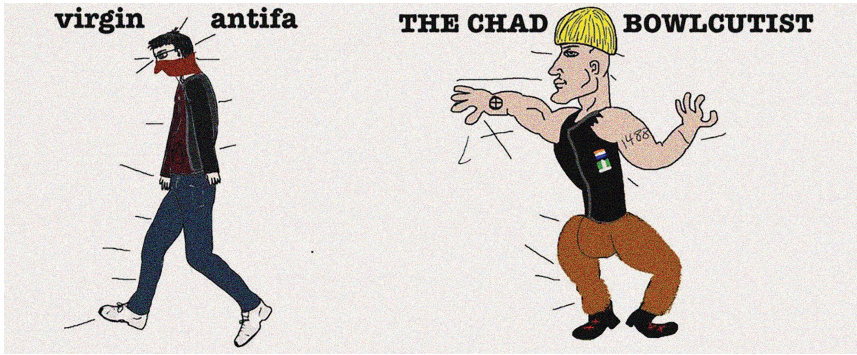

FIGURE 6.6 Bowl cut chad meme.

Source: https://discordleaks.unicornriot.ninja/discord/server/30.

metapolitical dimension: game discourses and practices are now being used to change the frame in which members of their community understand the terrorist act. In the meme above, Roof is not a loser or a terrorist: he is a chad, a saint who successfully fought for his people. As a result of this success in game terms, the bowl cut – usually an index of the prototypical losers – can become an index of success and coolness (see Figure 6.6).

The group created a group identity around Dylann Roof's killing spree. In this small extremist community, the bowl cut functions as an index of being enlightened and even becomes the stuff that is seen as 'chad-like'. In the meme (Figure 6.6) above, we not only see an alpha male represented in 'the classic chad meme', but the chad now also has a bowl cut and is awarded with traditional neo-Nazi sign tattoos. All conversations in those Discord groups combine very explicit neo-Nazi racist discourse with genocidal edgy jokes and memes with a celebrative but also deeply ironic discourse on the actions of Roof and his haircut. These interactions among far-right neo-Nazis are not metapolitical from a mainstream perspective. They weren't produced for uptake by broad audiences, they were part of intimate and ludic but also very shocking interactions that normalize racist violence among 'friends'. In this group, this discourse has a clear cultural dimension and normalizes outsider behaviour.

Blommaert (2017) uses Raymond Williams' concept of 'structures of feeling' to show how such interactions gradually become 'structured' by ideological framings provided by similar feelings articulated by others in the group. It is 'through such ludic forms of practice', Blommaert argues, that 'this sharedness is experienced as important and formative'. In other words, the memes, the racist discourse, the praise for Roof and the group emblems, all contribute to the normalization of violence. It is through such interactions in very specific, for outsiders incomprehensibe, language full of references to the

FIGURE 6.7 Bowl cut meme right-wing death squad.

Source: https://discordleaks.unicornriot.ninja/discord/server/30.

bowl cut such as 'The Final Bowlution', or 'TheBowlfather', that new radical logics of action are normalized. In the specific meme culture of this group, not only the martyr-ship of Roof is celebrated, but his actions are presented as welcome actions that should be expanded. The memification of Roof is thus an index of a far-right terrorist culture. According to Unicorn Riot and the Antidefamation League references to Dylann Roof and the 'bowl cut' or 'bowl' have turned up in at least five recent criminal cases.[5] The most famous of those cases is probably the murderous killing spree of Brenton Tarrant.

Metapolitics 2.0 and Brenton Tarrant's reconquest

Brenton Tarrant, the perpetrator of the terrorist attack in a New Zealand Mosque taking 49 innocent lives, defines himself in his manifesto as a crusader for the white race, a terrorist even and an eco-fascist. And he does it with pride. He sees himself, just like Breivik and Roof, as a future hero, as a soldier fighting for the survival of the white race. Contrary to Roof who was emblematic of a radical American manifestation of the global new right, Tarrant was deeply integrated into the digital culture of the global far-right on a global scale. He was active on 8chan, travelled the world and searched for contact with far-right activists and terrorists in different countries. The attack of Tarrant was also far more sophisticated than the one of Roof. And that

sophistication wasn't limited to the execution of the riot; it became especially clear in his discourse and how he prepared the uptake of that discourse in the hybrid media system.

The great replacement and reconquest

The title of Tarrant's manifesto is the first indication of his integration into global new right. The Great Replacement is a classic trope among the identitarian movements in Europe. It is commonly seen as referring to the work of Renaud Camus, who, in two French books published in 2010 and 2011 and one English book published in 2020, defined what he called 'Le grand remplacement' or the Great Replacement. This replacement according to him is about 'the brutal change of population which has been taking place in France (and in Europe) since the beginning of the last quarter of the last century and which has been gaining momentum ever since' (Camus, 2020: 19). Camus describes this replacement in terms of a new colonialism that is executed by invaders or so-called 'replacees mostly from Africa and very often Muslims' (Camus, 2020: 21) and facilitated by the 'replacists, who want the change of people and civilization, which they are prone to call multiculturalism, or 'vivre ensemble' (Camus, 2020: 20). The replacists is a collective name for the mainstream politicians, journalists and media in general.

Camus' diagnosis of replacement relies on 'an ethnic or racial "common sense" of belonging' (Bracke & Aguilar, 2020). Replacement, or colonialization in his discourse, doesn't rely on taking over the political power of a foreign country; it refers to the visual changing of society. In his 2020 book, we can see this 'common sense' notion of belonging in how he answers his own question of what it means to be French: 'Not asking (oneself) the question (to oneself). Not Wondering about it' (Camus, 2018: 12). France and Frenchness should be felt as natural, something that is hegemonic and is just there in all little villages and streets. The mere presence of 'the Other' destroys that common sense in Camus' logic. It is this visual and common sense destruction that makes him rephrase multiculturalism and integration paradigms as 'replacement vehicles'. The replacement or colonialization equals the destruction of a nostalgic common sense that becomes visible in the streets through 'turbans and Djellaba's'. Important to stress here, is that in the end, culture is racially determined for Camus and race thus takes a central role in this thesis. 'When all is said and done', Camus says (2018: 66), 'we are a European people of white race'. Not only does Camus define the French as a race, replacement is defined as a *replacement of races*.

Camus's theory is grounded in a racial blood-and-soil organicism that especially resembles the work of Guillaume Faye. Already in 2000 did Faye write his book 'The Colonisation of Europe', in which he makes the exact same claim as Camus. He, too, reframes immigration in terms of 'a massive

colonization settlement of the West', predicts 'an ethnic civil war' and sounds 'the call to reconquering' (Faye, 2016: xii). Both Camus and Faye are key intellectuals of the European identitarian movement. Camus may denounce that he is an identitarian (Camus, 2018: 12), his ideas on the Great Replacement have found fertile soil among identitarian activists who pushed that idea to fame. The uptake of this far-right conspiracy theory is substantial and was increasing on a monthly basis before the Christchurch attack. Before that attack, researchers found '1.5 million tweets referencing the Great Replacement theory between April 2012 and April 2019 in English, French and German language' (Davey & Ebner, 2019). The identitarians have been a crucial factor in the uptake of this far-right theory. Martin Sellner (Traditional Britain Group, 2017), when delivering his speech during a Traditional Britain conference in 2017, not only refers to this replacement theory, but he also explains it in similar terms as Camus. People, he said,

> cannot withstand a complete replacement. Today we see a rupture, we see people on the streets, when I was walking from London, there are all these Arabic Scriptures on the shop, saw the face of those people and I knew, those people are not British, they do not feel British, they have a completely different identity.

The replacement or colonizing is described in relation to the presence of 'non-whites', and the visibility of their cultures and languages in the streets.

This same 'eye witness' discourse framing 'diversity in one country' as colonization and migrants as invaders is also present in the discourse of Tarrant when he describes his visit to France. Seeing the diversity in the French streets was for him the final straw that pushed him into action.

> The final push was witnessing the state of French cities and towns. For many years I had been hearing and reading of the invasion of France by non-whites, many of these rumours and stories I believed to be exaggerations, created to push a political narrative. But once I arrived in France, I found the stories to not only be true, but profoundly understated. In every French (sic) city, in every french (sic) town the invaders were there. No matter where I travelled, no matter how small or rural the community I visited, the invaders were there.

This paragraph echoes the words of Camus and Sellner; he also presents the visible changes in the streets as 'proof' of replacement. Notice also how Camus, Sellner, Tarrant and Roof use a testimonial narrative in order to convince the reader. Just like Roof claimed not to be raised as a racist, Tarrant claims to not have believed the theories on replacement, but then – the epiphany moment arrived when he saw it with his own eyes. Varis (2019) points out that such 'ideology of seeing is believing' attributes authority to the visual as 'evidence'.

In a similar vein, Blommaert (2019) describes the position of the 'eye witness' as an argumentative device in strategies of persuasion, articulating a particularly compelling 'veridictional' epistemic stance. It is this *my eyes don't lie* strategy that is used to give authority to what in the public debate had already been framed as a far-right conspiracy theory during and after the Unite the Right Tiki Torch march when protestors would chant 'you will not replace us'.

Another intertextual connection with Faye and the Identarian movement that Tarrant stresses is the importance of differences in birth rates.

> If there is one thing I want you to remember from these writings, its (sic) that the birth-rates must change. Even if we were to deport all Non-Europeans from our lands tomorrow, the European people would still be spiraling into decay and eventual death. Every day we become fewer in number, we grow older, we grow weaker. In the end we must return to replacement fertility levels, or it will kill us.

Or in other words, just like Faye, Camus and Willinger, he is tremendously concerned with family policies and the survival of the white race. Note here too, that he does not only refer the reader to several Wikipedia links with numbers to 'prove' his point, but also relies on the 'Seeing is believing' ideology. He claims that he could see the decline in birth rates in the people on the streets in France.

> The french (sic) people were often in a minority themselves, and the French that were in the streets were often alone, childless or of advanced age. Whilst the immigrants were young, energized and with large families and many children.

Images of diversity, and especially the dichotomy between young migrants and old white people, are seen as emblematic of the death of the white race. The replacement is described and felt as acute: replacement is understood as white genocide and the death of white civilization. This replacement is not only seen by the right in the declining birth rates or the presence of migrants and Muslims in particular, but also in Islamic terrorism now and historic wars. Tarrant tries to legitimize his killing spree as 'revenge on the invaders for the hundreds of thousands of deaths caused by foreign invaders in European lands throughout history'. He sees himself as a warrior or knight that, just like 'Traini, Anders Breivik, Dylan Roof, Anton Lundin *Pettersson, Darren Osbourne',* takes a stand against ethnic and cultural genocide. Tarrant frames his terrorist act completely within this theory of replacement. It is this theory that normalizes his logic of action. Important to stress here, again, is that this terrorism is not only executed to instil fear but serves metapolitical goals. Tarrant, just like Breivik and Roof, searches for an audience for his message.

Securing uptake for his manifesto

Tarrant was methodical not only in the execution of his terrorist attack but also in making sure that he generated uptake. Before he entered the Masjid an-Nur in Christchurch, he posted a message on his Facebook page 'with links to seven different file sharing websites that contained copies of a manifesto he had written explaining his motivation for the terrorist attack he was about to carry out'.[6] The fact that he posted the manifesto on seven different file sharing websites contradicts his claim in the manifesto that 'the attack was a (sic) end in itself, with all the necessary affect required. These (sic) writing, and their coverage, are just a bonus'. The care with which he tries to secure uptake shows not only the importance he attaches to the distribution of his manifesto, but also illustrates his media-savviness and his integration into different online platforms. Tarrant clearly considered that some of those sharing platforms could pull down his manifesto before it spread. By using different platforms he was trying to secure his chances for uptake.

His media literacy also speaks from his post on 8chan. This bulletin board is not only dedicated to sensational stuff, but it is also known for its radical audience which favours 'edgy content' and is a meme-making factory. If we analyse the announcement of his raid on 8chan, it becomes obvious that he saw himself as 'amongst friends' whom he addressed as people he has spent a lot of shared time with. His use of the 8chan lingo and the meme that accompanies his post all index that he was indeed a long-time and fully integrated member of this online anonymous community. This post was not only a message to friends but also first and foremost a call to action. It was posted two minutes after his Facebook post and was thus clearly part of his well-planned strategy to secure uptake of his killing spree. The post contains links to his Facebook Livestream and to the different sharing platforms.

Four minutes later, after messaging family members, he sent out a mail to the Office of the Prime Minister, the leader of the Opposition and many media organizations. In that mail with the subject line 'On the attack in New Zealand Today', he uses emotionless and formal language: 'I was the partisan that committed the assault. I have attached my writings to explain my actions and beliefs as well as provided links to webpages to download the documents below'. Notice also how he manages to mobilize different genres. Whereas his post on 8chan was trollish and indexed his integration into that niched culture, his mail to the officials and mass media was written in formal, passionless rhetoric. These genres are clearly mobilized to produce uptake within the groups he is addressing.

Just like Breivik was very much concerned about the uptake of his compendium (Ravndal, 2013), Tarrant invested a lot in getting that manifesto out. Tarrant, contrary to his role model Breivik, did not invest in acquiring the e-mails of thousands of far-right sympathizers to get the message out;

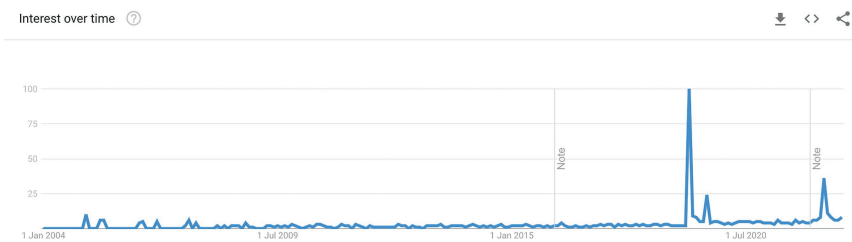

FIGURE 6.8 Google trends for the search term: The great replacement between 2004 and 2020.

Data Source: Google Trends (https://google.com/trends).

he made efficient use of the mass media logic and the social media logics to guarantee massive uptake throughout the whole hybrid media system. He announced it on 8chan, and he also set up a Facebook account and a Twitter account on 12 March and mailed it to important political people and journalists. Just like Dylann Roof and Breivik's terrorism, Tarrant's terrorism had a substantial metapolitical dimension. Tarrant, just like Breivik, even interviewed himself at great length in his manifesto, thus preformulating the news and providing answers to questions. In a hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2017), white terrorists use digital media and offline action to draw attention to their cause. And attracting eyeballs was exactly what he did. His killing spree made interest in the Great Replacement theory spike. It became the talk of the town on a global scale. Even if the Great Replacement theory was already gaining massive traction in the months before the attack, his killing spree caused unseen search engine activity.

Even more important than spreading the news, his manifesto and the live stream, he urged the 8chan anons to repackage his manifesto in memes. In memes and meme culture, he saw a far more effective way of spreading his message. In the manifesto, he urged his followers to 'Be creative, be expressive, be emotional and above all be passionate. (…) Paint, write, sing, dance, recite poetry. Hell, even meme. Create memes, post memes, and spread memes. Memes have done more for the ethno-nationalist movement than any manifesto'. The importance of this far-right trolling and meme culture in the contemporary far-right pro-violence culture cannot be underestimated (Maly, 2018a). Tarrant himself was clearly a product of that culture and he did all he could to please them. Not only did he post the announcement with the live stream, but he also made a soundtrack from extreme-right video memes. This soundtrack was beat to his live stream of the mosque shootings – a soundtrack that was heavily discussed on 8chan during his livestream by anons who got the references.

He thus explicitly produced raw material for the production of memes in the hope that they would catch on, go viral and spread the message. Even more,

he gave them the assignment to do so. As a member of such a community, he not only understood their role in the continuity of the distribution of his manifesto and stream, he also knew the cultural potential of that community in normalizing far-right violence. As we have seen, those memes not only contribute to the normalization of a certain logic of action, they also contribute to a specific terrorist culture. This culturalization of Tarrant is now a fact, not only in New Zealand but also around the world.

In the spring of 2021, I was asked by Telefacts, a news show on VTM, a commercial television channel in Belgium, to analyse data they had gathered on far-right radicalization. In those data, I encountered a new young Flemish identitarian group that operated on Instagram under the name Volksverbond (People's Union). On their public page, they would post metapolitical slideshows to 'inform' the people about the colonization of Belgium by migrants. In their private chats, they not only celebrated Brenton Tarrant's terrorism or shared memes about him, but they also normalized having guns and learning to use them. In a meme posted in their chatbox, the members of the group not only presented him as Jesus and thus not only as a saint but also as a saviour; they also claimed that his music was on their playlists and that watching his video is the best indoctrination video in the world. Here you see that (1) the live streaming is aimed at 'the highest degree of publicity possible' (Schlegel, 2021b: 7), (2) live watching generates not only live watching but also extended watching. It becomes a resource around which a culture can grow. This culture is again not a local affair, but potentially a global one. It uses the gaming format and its associated normality to normalize terrorism. In those memes, just as we have seen in the terrorist culture around Roof, we witness the reframing of the act of Tarrant. In the gaming format, Tarrant has become the hero of the narrative: he is the winner of the game, the saint. As a direct result, you see a normalization of violence and a culture of guns. Considering the Belgian context, where guns and their use are strictly regulated and where no mainstream gun culture exists, it shows how Tarrant's terrorist attack produced a culture that was deglobalized and resulted in further radicalization. The irony of the meme facilitated a culture where far-right violence was celebrated. Gamified language, and thus also gamified far-right terrorist culture, shouldn't be just disregarded as unimportant, a mere by-product. Language as we know is performative (Pocock, 1973): it is through language that we acquire a perspective on reality. Gaming cultural resources are potentially powerful in shifting the perspective on violent terrorism by normalizing it. It is through the logic of the action frame of the game that Terrant and Roof became seen as Saints, heroes or chads. Even if the members celebrating those perpetrators make those comments in an ironic way, they still contribute to the distribution and normalization of his violent actions and his far-right ideology. Or in other words, it contributes to the social relatedness of the group (Schlegel, 2021b: 7).

The fact that Tarrant's manifesto, his stream and his playlist have generated such substantial uptake means that they contributed to white terrorist culture. This not only indexes his knowledge of those niches but also how powerful they can be. Scholars refer in this context to the recruitment effect of the gamification of terrorism. The introduction and appropriation of gaming culture in far-right terrorism generates further uptake and thus visibility of the act in the hybrid attention economy. It is through his live stream that Tarrant generates massive visibility. Tarrant and the gaming culture of white terrorism have provided a format for far-right attacks. This format not only has the potential to normalize, but it is also made for uptake within the whole hybrid media system. The power effects become clear when new far-right terrorists step into his footsteps. John Timothy Earnest, who stormed a synagogue in Poway, California, and opened fire on the Jewish congregation, said he was inspired by Tarrant, and also the man who murdered 22 people in El Paso claimed to be a supporter of the Christchurch shooter (Daerden, 2019c). In Norway, a man followed Tarrant's example. Not only did they all write manifestos and claim to be inspired by Tarrant's manifesto, but they also posted on bulletin boards to announce their attacks (Daerden, 2019b). The usual label of copycats or lone wolfs obscures the cultural and social aspects of these logics of action.

White terrorist culture and metapolitics 2.0

Both terrorist attacks of Roof and Tarrant can, from a cultural perspective, be understood as part of a dialogue. A dialogue with very specific niched communities within the global new right. Roof's manifesto oriented itself to American nodes in that global network, whereas Tarrant was in a clear dialogue with his 'lads' on 8chan. Tarrant was also with the identitarian movement in Europe whom he had financially supported by donating over 2,500 British pounds (Daerden, 2019a). Tarrant especially was very much integrated into the global new right, and white terrorist culture in particular. He knew the theories of the global new right and had, or at least claimed to have, studied the practices and manifestos of previous far-right terrorists and used ready-made formats, including the gamification of his killing spree, which was already an existing format.

Tarrant himself stresses the social dimension of his attack when he frames himself and his actions as part of a group of 'soldiers'. The categorization of 'lone wolf' presupposes an old hierarchical form of organization with clear leaders. In a post-digital era, with its gamification and 'leaderless' resistance (Crawford & Keen, 2020: 3), this is an anachronism. Instead, the concept of leaderless far-right resistance is adopted by the American Klansman Louis Beam (Crawford & Keen, 2020). The problem with this concept is that it obfuscates more than it illuminates. The seemingly leaderless resistance is not so

much leaderless as it is networked. Offline (and online) mobilization is more and more the result of so-called reluctant leaders or soft leaders (Gerbaudo, 2014). These leaders lead by example, by posting things online, setting up pages or administering groups. It is through the network effect and the affordances of digital media, and its facilitation of networked individualism (Miller, 2011) and digital cultures, that the coherence of the fifth wave of terrorism, in terms of discourse and logics of action, are shaped. Roof, Tarrant and the Buffalo Shooter are not just terrorists, they also act as leaders within those niches. They hoped to make people aware and to lead by example. In his manifesto, Tarrant explicitly wanted to persuade other white men to become soldiers. And of course the same is true for their own behaviour: they themselves were influenced by others who led by example. If we take on board one of the fundamental insights of symbolic interactionism, namely that '(...) social interaction is a process that forms human conduct instead of being merely a means or a setting for the expression or release of human conduct' (Blumer, 1969: 8), we understand how the 'lone wolf categorization' doesn't work to describe and understand the acts of Roof and Tarrant. Their behaviour is not only individual behaviour, it is also social and cultural behaviour. The fifth wave of terrorism is rooted within the global new right. It is the result of a cultural synchronization of far-right ideologies and myths like the Great Replacement theory, digital culture in general and the cultural gamification of terrorism. The result of this polycentric culture is visible in specific logics of actions: the announcement of the act, the search for media uptake through the use of mass and hybrid media logics, the appropriation of gaming culture and infrastructures for massive effect, and the publication of a manifesto for metapolitical goals. The Buffalo Shooter is an excellent example of this type of terrorism. He was adopting the logics of action of Brenton Tarrant: he used his killing spree to generate attention for his manifesto, which was also clearly inspired by Tarrant. Just like Tarrant, he metapragmatically preformulated the news by interviewing himself. The manifesto also echoes Dylann Roof's manifesto, as he, just like Roof, describes the different races. What is more, there is again that link to a whole series of nodes within the global new right: from /pol /to The Daily Stormer and Breitbart. His discourses are mainstream within the global new right, and his killing spree is a tool to generate attention, to let people search for the Great Replacement.

If we take Tarrant as an example, we see that he is socialized, or formed as you wish, in relation to many different centres of normativity operating on different scales. Tarrant's manifesto, in form and content, shows a remarkable resemblance to the manifest of Breivik. And Tarrant himself explicitly praised 'knight justiciar Anders Behring Breivik' as a model from which he took inspiration. And this normativity of Breivik becomes clear in the main motifs that echo Breivik's manifesto. Tarrant constructs himself, just

like Breivik, through gamified language as a knight: a crusader. Moreover, he even claims, probably falsely, to have contacted Breivik and 'receiving a blessing for my mission after contacting his brother knights'. Brenton Tarrant thus not only looks at Breivik, he imagines himself as a member of the reborn Knights Templar, a crusader against 'cultural genocide' fighting for 'Millions of European and other ethno-nationalist peoples that wish to live in peace amongst their own people, living in their own lands, practicing their own traditions and deciding the future of their own kind'. This reference to 'millions' supporting his cause is also a direct intertextual link connecting Tarrant's and Breivik's manifestos, and a constant theme in Breivikian circles.

If we further analyse the discourse in that manifesto, we see next to the link with the identitarians Camus and Faye, which I already discussed, that his discourse also orients to contemporary alt-right discourses on white nationalism and white genocide as expressed by people like Richard Spencer, YouTube channels like Red Ice, or extreme-right sites and publishers like Counter-Currents. He, for instance, frames himself as 'an Ethno-nationalist Eco-fascist' fighting for 'ethnic autonomy for all peoples with a focus on the preservation of nature, and the natural order'. Such eco-fascist rhetoric was also to be found in Richard Spencer's infamous Charlottesville Manifesto where he defined man as having 'the potential to become nature's steward or its destroyer' (Spencer, 2017a). The terrorist act is legitimated in the manifesto by taking refuge in existing new right discourse. The result of his killing spree and the launched manifesto is that it creates echo-chamber uptakes, for instance in an article on Counter-Currents that 'explains' his killing spree from the same assumptions and discourses that Tarrant mobilizes to explain his deed (Johnson, 2019b): 'We obviously don't know all the facts yet, but based on the manifesto attributed to Tarrant entitled "The Great Replacement", Tarrant believes that whites are being replaced in our homelands by fast-breeding non-whites, including Muslims. This is absolutely correct'. Johnson of course distances himself from this killing spree and claims that it is against white interests, but at the same time, he uses this act to stress this could 'not have happened in a homogeneously white society'. Ergo, if you want to avoid racial violence, you should not stop the racists or far-right terrorists, but the mixing of races.

8chan was clearly one centre to which Tarrant oriented. The fact that he speaks the language and understood the rules of online practices show the degree to which he was a member of this group (See also Ebner, 2020). He not only knew the group culturally, but he also knew their language and ways of doing. His post on 8chan indexed to his 8chan peers that he was one of them. He treated the anons as 'fellow crusaders' in a battle to save the white nations of the world. He did see a clear distinction between 'their cultural war' and his killing spree. He saw it as their duty to start spreading memes and engage in shitposting to spread his message further. He thus did everything he could to not only please them but also to activate them. Again, we see how through his acts and discourse a lot of other people's voices are reproduced.

What looks like an individualist action offline has clear social-cultural and political online dimensions (Veranoudi, Lu, Molnar, & Liza Tóth-Szöllős, 2019). He not only acted offline as an individual who made the choice by himself, but also imagined himself online as a Knights Templar warrior and a member of several polycentric and transnational white nationalist networks. And importantly, he not only imagined himself as part of a group with a goal, his followers and the followers of Roof took on board the same mission. Even though Tarrant explicitly states that he is not a member of any nationalist or political group or organization, we should be careful to label Tarrant a 'lone wolf'. Legally speaking, he probably acted alone. The Norwegian judges passing judgement on Breivik concluded that too. But if we analyse the roots and formats and discourses of those perpetrators we see that this labelling is inadequate to understand white terrorism as a contemporary phenomenon. The concept of a 'lone wolf' comes with associations of individuals radicalizing themselves while being isolated in society. It immediately triggers the frame of 'the freak' with mental issues. This individualist 'freak' frame has an offline bias and uses an anachronistic model of political and activist organization, which makes us blind to the social, cultural, and political dimensions of these types of radicalization. The thing is, his offline behaviour had an enormous online shadow.

Dissociating the individual act from the broader social, cultural, political and technological context in which his voice is produced causes us to miss the broader picture of white terrorism. It is a socio-cultural and technological fact. It is constructed in collaboration with other people from different corners of the world and different timeframes in niched online spaces. In digital culture studies, scholars have now been arguing for several years that digital media are spaces where new types of social groups emerge. These groups are light communities (Blommaert, 2016), micro-populations (Maly & Varis, 2016), networked (boyd, 2001) or affective publics (Papacharissi, 2015). They do not necessarily share the same location, nor do they know each other's name, but they do function as social groups. They produce norms and normality, and engage in structured and formatted modes of practice (Blommaert, 2017b) and logics of action. Note that these social groups are in themselves also polycentric. Roof oriented himself towards largely American-based hubs in the global network, whereas Tarrant operated on a more global scale. Many more different configurations are possible. One example is the Hanau terrorist who combined Great Replacement rhetoric with even more marginal conspiracy theories (Crawford & Keen, 2020).

White terrorist culture is thus in itself a polycentric social group that occurs as a network of different nodes that come together with an individual or a series of individuals. Important is that we cannot understand white terrorism without looking at the emergence of contemporary new right metapolitics. It is this ideological dimension, embedded in YouTube channels, fora, journals, books, think tanks, Discord servers, memes and manifestos that

explain an essential part of the rationale of the terrorist and the cultural material informing his acts. White terrorists cannot be understood if we detach their individual acts from the social and online dimensions that shaped them and generated audiences for them.

To conclude this chapter, I want to zoom out again and try to understand the effects of far-right terrorist culture within the global new right. As I see it now, far-right terrorism and violence always have four effects. First, violence always comes with a spike in attention not only to the violence, but also to the ideological project of the perpetrators. Secondly, it usually comes with a surge in the digital media the perpetrators were using to announce their act. Thirdly, we see a break-up of the groups after the attack. Some seem to laud the violent action, others clearly want to walk a more metapolitical path. Fourthly, new media are used to further the metapolitical goals, or even more, new alt-tech media is set up, or one tries to re-integrate that media in the digital mainstream. This results in many more niched groups that again can start to grow, to create their own metapolitics and logics of action. Important to realize is that fragmentation in niche groups, from a meta-perspective, doesn't harm the metapolitics, it only redistributes the actors who can recruit in their own niches. Even more, those niches are from an ideological perspective still connected, and nothing prevents them from coming together again when certain situations call for it.

Notes

1 The website was hosted on http://lastrhodesian.com
2 See the file that Unicorn Riot has made public https://unicornriot.ninja/2019/bowl-patrol-dylann-roof-fans-hope-to-inspire-more-mass-shootings/
3 Remember the advice of The Daily Stormer style guide that the unindoctrinated should not be able to tell if we are joking or not. There should also be a conscious awareness of mocking stereotypes of hateful racists. I usually think of this as self-deprecating humor I am a racist making fun of stereotype of racists, because I don't take myself super-seriously: https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/4325810/Writers.pdf
4 See the file that Unicorn Riot has made public https://unicornriot.ninja/2019/bowl-patrol-dylann-roof-fans-hope-to-inspire-more-mass-shootings/
5 See https://www.adl.org/blog/hardcore-white-supremacists-elevate-dylann-roof-to-cult-hero-status and https://unicornriot.ninja/2019/bowl-patrol-dylann-roof-fans-hope-to-inspire-more-mass-shootings/
6 Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Attack on Christchurch Mosques (15 March 2019) https://christchurchattack.royalcommission.nz/the-report/part-1-purpose-and-process/the-terrorist-attack/

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7

THE GLOBAL NEW RIGHT

Between mainstreaming and deplatformization

Mobility of resources, the flows of discourse and the role of algorithmic knowledge have taken up a central place in my analysis and description of the global new right. It's now time to add a last dimension: complexity. This book has been in the making for the last seven years, and it very soon became obvious to me, and now also to the reader of this book, that it is rather impossible to describe the global new right in a traditional sense, adopting a synchronic descriptive stance. First of all, it should be obvious that a purely local or national perspective on the new right is inherently problematic. Not only do many of these actors surpass the national scale, or theorize the future in terms of empires at higher and lower scales than the national, it is also unmistakably so that even purely local action is informed by discourses, formats and practices from different corners of the world. What presents itself as local synchronic discursive action – think of the Schild & Vrienden's mediatized activism in Ghent – is increasingly the result of stuff from different chronotopes that are blended together. It is in these discursive practices that the global new right gets its shape. Second, it is this reality characterized by a high mobility of actors, resources and practices that generates unpredictability: what is there today, is not necessary there tomorrow. The global new right is perpetually changing and in motion: it changes form, appearance, actors, infrastructures and discourses. It is a complex system.

Perpetual change: introducing complexity

Taking up this challenge of mobility and complexity is a paradigmatic challenge. In my mind, it demands a close ethnographic analysis of what activists, influencers, intellectuals and politicians actually do. It urges us to adopt a

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diachronic perspective, and thus to look at discourse as language-in-action: detailed attention to the discourses they deploy and how they mix stuff together is a prerequisite of understanding the contemporary new right. But there is more, as we have seen throughout the cases in this book: the contemporary new right is constantly emerging and changing. The analysis of Schild & Vrienden shows a movement at the start of its rise, which is visible in the sudden upscaling of its impact, not only nationally but also internationally. Four years later, the movement is hardly visible anymore. It has been banned from Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Its reappearance on Instagram is not really successful (2,981 followers instead of the 25K before the ban). Their leader is still active and visible, but now as a politician and YouTuber. The ethnographic approach, I will argue throughout this chapter, forces us to see the global new right as a complex system that is constantly in motion. Such systems, argues Blommaert (2013: 9), are 'open and unfinished'. They are the result of 'several apparently unrelated forces' that operate 'simultaneously but without being centrally controlled or planned' and work in and on those systems. In such a system, change is endemic and perpetual. If we understand the global new right as such a complex system, we have to focus not so much on the essence of that system, but on this perpetual process of change and describe it as such. It also means that we shouldn't isolate the actors from their social, political, economic and technological contexts. On the contrary, it becomes crucial to understand the global new right as a socio-technical assemblage, and thus to see the interdependence between actors and platforms, actors and government, and of course also actors and users of platforms.

Anyone working on the contemporary new right will recognize the feeling that we are always working and publishing on actors, practices and power relations of the past. Most of the actors that I have described in this book until now may not have the same weight anymore, operate on lower or higher scales then I describe them in this book, have moved to different platforms or were the object of complete deplatformization (van Dijck, Winkel & Tobias Schäfer, 2021). Movements disappear but reappear under a different banner, in a different field or even morph into new forms with different actors in the front region, operating on different scales, using different discourses. What seems like 'non-related' or chaos is not an absence of order but is in fact a very specific form of order 'characterized, intriguingly, by the increased interaction, interdependence and hence coherence between different parts of a system' (Blommaert, 2013: 9). Adopting this perspective of complexity lets us see the new right actors in relation to the infrastructures they use for their metapolitical work. The order of the global new right as a system is shaped not only by the new right actors themselves, but also by the platforms they use, the states with all their powers of the countries they work in, and of course by the general political, cultural and economic context that influences all these systems.

This complex relation between the internal dynamics of the global new right network and external pressures from platforms, activists and governments on the network is important to sketch diachronically. Considering the metapolitical goal of this global new right network, success would, at least in emic terms, be defined as hegemonizing their world view. In so far as they succeed in this, external pressures on the global right as a system would diminish: their discourses and their practices would seem normal not only in their own niche but at large. The metapolitical dynamic, when their ideas become hegemonic, would end up in uniformity. This uniformity is generally understood as 'mainstreaming', or in Gramscian terms, cultural hegemony. This hegemony is clearly not just a matter of ideas, but also of the infrastructures and social groups that are supporting hegemony. The trench warfare that Gramsci saw as essential to a battle for hegemony in Western Democracies (Anderson, 1977) is today very clearly also a battle to dominate, control and use the digital infrastructure to disseminate ideas. The metapolitics of the contemporary new right is thus also a battle to use (and control) the digital infrastructures in order to build hegemony. This process of uniformity or hegemonization necessarily operates in a complex, layered, polycentric and transnationally connected world. Even the global new right itself is, as we have seen, layered and transnational, and thus organized on different scale levels and in different chronotopes.

What is considered normal in one chronotope is not necessarily normal in another. Important is that those chronotopes can influence each other: the normalization of a certain metapolitical position by Trump can have a normalizing effect on other chronotopes. The opposite is also true. When the Pano documentary framed Schild & Vrienden as racist, anti-Semitic and potentially violent, it also had potential effects on Thierry Baudet and Forum for Democracy in the Netherlands. The press was aware that Van Langenhove was present at several activities of Forum for Democracy, as Baudet himself had posted a selfie with Van Langenhove on Twitter. Their connection was a public thing, and could thus render Baudet vulnerable. Baudet or his team rapidly deleted the selfie after the Pano documentary went live and sparked controversy. We can see this move as one that tries to maintain a metapolitical edge and tries to limit the effects of external pressures in order to stay integrated into the digital mainstream and avoid damage to the metapolitical project in the Netherlands. Sometimes those pressures are not controllable at all. This was the case with Generation Identitaire in France. The movement got convicted in 2021 and officially stopped existing. This of course does not mean that the activists actually disappear, and many of them were active in Generation Reconquest, the political youth movement that supported the presidential campaign of Eric Zemmour. It does change the configuration of the movement, and consequently also has effects on the global new right network: a key infrastructure in the network at risk to disappear. As a result

of these internal dynamics and external pressures, the global new right is constantly shifting and perpetually changing, hoovering between the mainstreaming of certain new right ideas and actors, and the total deplatformization of others.

In this last chapter, I want to describe the global new right as a complex system in search of hegemony. First, I will further zoom in on the success of *La Nouvelle Droite* and contemporary new right metapolitics, in the sense of the uptake of key ideas by more mainstream, or at least influential, actors. I'll argue that a lot of *La Nouvelle Droite*'s ideas have found legitimacy in the mainstream. At the same time, it is important to show how external pressures – in the form of juridical actions, deplatforming and even deplatformization – affect the structure of the global new right. I will first focus on how metapolitical influencers try to manage their visibility and avoid, prepare and deal with deplatforming. After that, I will elaborate on the effects of deplatformization by analysing how The Daily Stormer is still trying to influence the debate from the margins of the digital ecosystem. Lastly, I will focus on how Generation Identitaire reappeared in many different shapes and platforms after the movement was dissolved by the court. This last chapter of the book highlights the diachronic description we have seen throughout the book by focusing on the constant change and how movements, activists and influencers we have discussed in previous chapters look in 2022. I explicitly focus on this mainstream and marginal nexus, or the visibility - invisibility nexus.

The new right and the contemporary anti-Enlightenment

La Nouvelle Droite's metapolitics may be the most successful export product of this far-right school of thought. Not only was *La Nouvelle Droite* responsible for the metapolitization of fascism (Griffin, 2008: 195), but it also had an enormous effect outside of the far-right niches: 'As for the efficacy of the ND's Gramscian strategy', Bar-On (2012: 25) stressed that, 'its ideas and discourse shifts soon spread to French political figures on the centre-right and the extreme-right, including former president Giscard D'Estaing, interior minister Michel Poniatowski, in the governments of Jacques Chirac and Raymond Barre' (Bar-On, 2012: 26). According to Bar-On, the impact of *La Nouvelle Droite* didn't end there 'Through Dugin and Panarin', he argues, they also

> influenced the Russian new right. Even more importantly they impacted the discourses and topics of almost all European extreme-right-wing political groupings. *La Nouvelle Droite's* metapolitics helped the rise of extreme-right parties, usually framed as populist parties in the nineties of the last century.
>
> *(Bar-On, 2012: 26)*

The rise of extreme-right parties all over Europe in the nineties, and especially their framing of migration and integration, had a substantial mainstreaming effect on the idea that homogeneity is necessary for a nation's survival. The so-called migrant debate discussed by left and right parties was a result of the electoral power of the extreme-right, grounded on 'the idea that the ideal society should be as uniform and homogeneous as possible' (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998: 117). This cultural racism, or culturism as Schinkel calls it, is at least partially informed by the differentialism introduced by de Benoist and his comrades. This ideology was further amplified as a result of 9/11. The essay and book of Samuel Huntington on the 'Clash of civilization' was now seen as the work of a visionary predicting the clash of cultures (Maly et al., 2007, Maly, 2009). 9/11 was commonly seen as an index of the 'truthfulness' of Huntington's thesis (Said, 2001). Islam and Muslims in particular became the dangerous other instead of the exotic other (Said, 1978). Head scarfs, mosques, the 'integration problem', Qur'an lessons and radical jihadist terrorism were topics that were regularly discussed in mainstream media as inherently problematic and threatening the local culture. Far-right politicians like Wilders in the Netherlands, Haider in Austria, Flemish Bloc (later Flemish Interest) in Belgium, and of course Front National in France, were driving forces of this framing of Islam and Muslims as the enemy par excellence. 'The trope of the Trojan horse', argue Bracke and Aguillar (2020), 'is central to the imaginary and analytic of what we conceptualize as Europe's "Muslim Question". Central in all the debates, but also legislation and policies, practices and discrimination and violence, argue Bracke and Aguillar, is the notion of 'Islam' as (1) invading the nation as an alien body that (2) needs to be regulated through integration and assimilation. This debate on Islam may be instigated by electoral success. Especially after 9/11, it was and is still further amplified by mainstream parties from the right, but also from the left.

The success of Huntington, and the rise of the Muslim Question since the nineties, has the effect of normalizing (at least to a certain extent) certain theses of Guillaume Faye. Not unsurprisingly, Faye echoed Huntington's theory in the nineties in *Pourquoi nous combattons*. 'The Twenty-first century', Faye argues, 'heralds a clash of civilisations – not the advent of a unified, humane civilisation, as modernists believe'. (Faye, 2011: 108). Faye followed Huntington who argued that the differences between civilizations are not only cultural but are also here to stay. Cultural Differences, said Huntington (1993: 4), 'are far more fundamental than differences among political ideologies and political regimes'. But Faye doesn't just adopt Huntington's work, he deepens it and radicalizes it. Whereas Huntington argued that 'the West is at a peak of power' (Huntington, 1993: 7), Faye defended the complete opposite: 'Western civilization', he argues, 'is not actually a civilization at all, but rather a technical mode of life, lacking depth, based exclusively on a quasi-Pavlovian domestication of material habits; and, as such, it's ephemeral, for

it rests on no memory, no tradition, no cultural substance, but rather on modes as fleeting as a culuminimbus cloud, on the most superficial forms of condition' (Faye, 2011: 108). Where Huntington sees the West as superior, Faye sees a weakened and degenerated civilization in decline. The decline is, as is typical for all anti-Enlightenment thinkers, seen as the effect of materialistic ideologies. This radicalization and criticism of Huntington may have sounded out of place in the nineties of the 20th century, but it will get picked up in the second decade of the 21st century.

A second fundamental difference between Huntington's hypothesis and the one of Faye is that Huntington first and foremost locates that clash of civilizations on a global level, and thus focuses on the 'the interaction between the West and non-Western civilizations and among non-Western civilizations' (Huntington, 1993: 4). Faye sees the same enemy as Huntington – namely Islam – but he locates the danger locally, within Western civilization. Islam is seen as colonizing Europe, ergo, as the Trojan horse. Islam is framed as a monolithic block that 'denounces Western civilization, like it formerly denounced Communism, and for good reason. But what it proposes instead is something even worse: another form of totalitarianism' (Faye, 2011: 108). Faye sees in Islam a civilizational project that is totally incompatible with European culture, and together with American Western civilization, it is seen as the principal adversary of European culture. Faye adopts 'an ultra-version of the "clash of civilizations," becoming the prophet of the impending unification of the white race, first in "Eurosiberia," then on a global scale with the advent of "Septentrion" (The North)'(Camus, Lebourg & Todd, 2017: 141).

Almost three decades after Huntington's thesis, it is not only quite normal to frame Islam as a foreign enemy and a local Trojan horse. Even more, Faye's framing of the West as a non-civilization, and even Europe as a civilization in decline, is more widespread than most could have imagined in the nineties. Faye was convicted for spreading racism and hate after publishing the French version of the colonization of Europe and was explicitly ousted from GRECE once more in 2000 as a result of that thesis. Today, the whole notion of 'The Great Replacement', and thus the colonization of Europe, is far more widespread than even Faye himself could believe. This is the work of identitarian movements and far-right intellectuals such as Faye and Renaud Camus, and far-right parties like Flemish Interest (Maly, 2021) who explicitly embrace the notion.

In Flanders, we see that Flemish Interest president Tom Van Grieken explicitly refers to Camus when discussing 'mass-immigration': 'Defending the Flemish identity is at the heart of my party', he writes (2017: 80); 'our singularity is pressurized by mass immigration, islamization, political correctness and the Belgian non-identity' (…), and this phenomenon also occurs in other Western-European countries. The French writer Renaud Camus talks about 'Le grand replacement', or replacement immigration, which replaces the native

population and replaces it by allochthones' (Van Grieken, 2017: 80–81). Not only does Van Grieken here explicitly cite Renaud Camus, one of the key intellectuals of the identitarian movement, but he fully subscribes to the idea of 'replacement' and the identitarian agenda and discourse. This identitarianism also becomes visible in his plea for a new post-EU Europe as 'an association of free, independent and sovereign states that freely cooperate on some domains (…). He, again, wants a Europa were we all can be proud of, proud of our civilization and our patchwork or marvellous people and cultures' (Van Grieken, 2017: 334).

That an extreme-right politician is quoting Renaud Camus's 'Great Replacement' theory is relevant, but maybe not all that surprising. What is more surprising is how the press discussed this book of the then new president of Flemish Interest. Van Grieken's book got an exceptionally favourable reception in the mainstream media (Maly, 2020a). Especially his style was celebrated by the mainstream media who even labelled him 'the ideal son in law' (Brinckman, 2017). The most popular newspaper of Flanders, Het Laatste Nieuws, claimed that his book was full of 'surprising ideas'. Brinckman, from the newspaper De Standaard, claimed that whereas the programme is still radical, Van Grieken 'in his language never takes things too far' (Brinckman, 2017). The renowned media-intellectual Jonathan Holslag not only wrote the preface but called Van Grieken 'a talented young force who commits to politics from an honest concern about our society' (Holslag, 2017). In the preface and later interviews, Holslag praised Van Grieken's stress on identity, national values and certain proposals.

Holslag is not known as a radical or extreme-right intellectual in Flanders. On the contrary, he is regularly invited on news bulletins and talk shows to give his opinion about foreign affairs, China and the position of our country in the world. He functioned as 'a special advisor to the First Vice-President of the European Commission', led 'research projects for the European Parliament' and advised 'Fortune Global 500 companies' on their Asia Strategy (Bio Holslag on his website). This clearly isn't the resume of a far-right activist, but one of a renowned professor. At the same time, we see that Holslag shares several assumptions with far-right thinkers like Guillaume Faye and echoes a Spenglerian perspective on world history. When Holslag for instance enrolled himself in the Belgian army as a volunteer, he justified his decision with the following discourse: 'I think that's a nice European ideal: a strong spirit in a strong, combative body. We live in interesting times. (…) We must all become warriors, that is the essence' (Holslag, 2017). This commitment to becoming a warrior is contextualized in a larger narrative of sacrifice and patriotism on the one hand and in a narrative of moral and cultural decay on the other. 'The greatest threat to the Flemish society is its own weakness. Culture and identity are not achievements. There is effort necessary and the Flemish themselves are not really inclined to make the

effort' (Holslag, 2017). The people should again fight for the nation's values and culture. And Holslag sees it as a lack of will to sacrifice themselves for the community, with Flanders and Europe in decline. According to him, we are dealing with a civilizational crisis. (Holslag, 2017): we have ended up, writes Holslag, in a 'situation that many historians have described as decadence: a lot of people just prefer not to be confronted with arguments that point to the hollowness of their prosperity' (Holslag, 2017). According to him, today we live in 'post-cultural' times. Paving the way out of that decay is therefore not a matter of redistribution, more rights, or a deepening and scaling up of democracy, but should be found in strengthening the soul. If we want to grow and be strong again, argues Holslag, then we as a nation and as a European culture must: 'One: restore our dignity. Two: sharpen our values. Three: strengthen the economy. Four: build a positive European sphere of influence through strong diplomacy. And five: have a strong military force to defend' (De Ceulaer, 2018b).

Once again, we see the Spenglerian ideal of a culturally, economically and militarily strong nation in a strong Europe. 'We all have to become fighters' says Holslag, for 'if the soul and the militancy and the citizenship of people disappear, it's game over. That's an important one lesson from history' (Holslag, 2017). The nation (and by extension Europe) can only become great if her people are noble, if we are all warriors for the whole and if our elite excels. And we can only become strong warriors if we are first proud of ourselves, our identity, our culture and our truth. Only then we can be a power factor again. Because 'no matter how individualistic one becomes, the we-feeling remains crucial and that asks for symbols, values, language, and so on. Throughout history, identity has been a source of inspiration, strength and self-confidence' (Holslag, 2017). Holslag clearly echoes the discourse of the conservative revolutionaries. Faye would have appreciated how his discourse is injected into the mainstream without triggering labels like far-right, conservative revolutionary thought or even new right. The resemblance with the identitarian discourse cannot be denied. It is remarkable how this discourse corresponds to the discourse of radical groups such as Schild & Vrienden, Generation Identitaire or a far-right intellectual such as Guillaume Faye. All those identitarians advocate putting our traditions at the centre and plea for renewed resilience of our youth as a response to the decline of our civilization that has occurred since May 1968. The idea that our society is under threat – and that the nation's strength is in its culture and in the will of its members to propagate that culture and amplify it – is widespread. What is even more interesting is that Holslag and Van Grieken are not the only two voices in Flanders that echo this rhetoric of decline.

Marc Elchardus, a renowned intellectual in Flanders, known for his intellectual impact on several generations of Social Democrats, joins the choir. In his most recent book – Reset: On identity, community and democracy

(Elchardus, 2021) – he follows Sorel in his analysis that class has lost its mobilizing force: 'As for the pursuit of "big identity", the class project now seems dead' (Elchardus, 2021: 16). Elchardus' distinction between 'small' and 'big' pursuit of identity is grounded in a Durkheimian perspective that defines the 'big identities' – like race, class and the nation – as the foundation of 'thick communities'. These thick communities are the necessary foundation for solidarity according to him. As Elchardus sees class warfare as something of the past, he follows Sorel in the embrace of the nation as the foundation of a social democratic project. This embrace rapidly brings him to an attack on the radical Enlightenment, Wokeness, politically correct thinking (Elchardus, 2021: 235), and the philosophy of universal human rights (Elchardus, 2021: 238). What really bothers him, just like all anti-Enlightenment thinkers, is the universal dimension of human rights. Human rights, to him, are nothing more than 'Liberal sameness in a straitjacket' (Elchardus, 2021: 460). Elchardus here literally echoes Alain de Benoist: liberalism is understood as the great equalizer and destroyer of democracy.

Elchardus, in his search to renew social democracy, fully and explicitly embraces the anti-Enlightenment tradition. Burke and Herder are all of a sudden fighters against racism, colonialism and imperialism because they 'respect the diversity of cultures and civilizations' (Elchardus, 2021: 242). Culture – in the form of the Durkheimian thick communities – is framed as the main driver of the world. Those cultures are, just like the intellectuals of *La Nouvelle Droite* understood them, constructed as national, religious or at least large-scale cultures grouping many people together under one identitarian banner through shared norms, values and traditions. Nationalism replaces class warfare as a mobilizing myth in his discourse. This nationalism takes such a central role that he explicitly pleads for a 'communitarian democracy', which he contrasts with the Jacobin democracy that is grounded in the ideal of universal human rights. The first condition to realize such a 'communitarian democracy' is that 'the attractive, workable communities of nation states protect their own project' (Elchardus, 2021: 348), not only because this gives its citizens the possibility to live according to their own insights, but also because it can serve as an example and a source of inspiration for other communities. To protect this 'project', communities have two instruments: 'selection' and 'socialization'. This communitarian democracy is nothing more than the 'organic democracy' in traditional *Nouvelle Droite* discourse. Elchardus sketches a world dominated by a diversity of nations and communities that should try to protect their culture, traditions and identity. This is why 'liberal democracy' and universal human rights are defined as problematic: they do not align with the diverse needs of those cultures and traditions: they push a monocultural liberal culture. This argument of course echoes *La Nouvelle Droite's* criticism of liberalism, democracy and human rights, and it is thus not a coincidence that Elchardus quotes de Benoist.

This anti-Enlightenment ideology that prioritizes the nation or the organic community is not only popular in Flanders. All over the world, new politicians have stood up to reproduce this vision on the nation or the 'organic community'. In the Netherlands we have Thierry Baudet and Geert Wilders, in France we have Marine Le Pen and Eric Zemmour, in Great-Brittan we have UKIP, in Austria we have FPO, in Italy, Salvini, in Brazil, Bolsonaro and, of course, in the heart of the world system we have had Trump. Trump has been the most influential ventriloquist of the anti-Enlightenment. Even though he further polarized the country and thus didn't succeed in realizing hegemony, he has generated a global uptake of his ideas. Slogans like 'America First' construct a Schmittian world of competing nations and an urge to be the best nation in that world. The 'Make America Great Again' slogan also adds nostalgia in the mix, a nostalgia for better times, to the America of parents and grandparents. Implicitly, it thus gives people a sense of 'ownership': those old generations have built America and are thus entitled. This is further reinforced by Trump's use of a specific nationalism. Whereas Obama, but also Bernie Sanders, refers to America as a 'nation of immigrants', Trump refers to 'our nation', a nation that is rooted in values and our love for our country. This nationalism has, throughout the years, become increasingly central to his discourse. His 2022 campaign to 'Save America' is about 'rebuilding our nation'. This rebuilding is done by ensuring that we always keep 'America First, in our foreign and domestic policy. We take pride in our country, we teach the truth about our history, we celebrate our rich heritage and national traditions, and of course, we respect our great American Flag' (Trump, 2022).

In all of these discourses, we see how the notion of decline and degeneracy of the community's culture and tradition needs to be countered. Elchardus, Van Grieken, Trump and Holslag all see the group, its culture and its traditions as crucial for any future of their society. And it is the materialistic ideologies, the left and the liberals with their universal human rights who they see as responsible for the decline, the attack on the nation and its traditions. This attack comes in the form of the expansion of universal human rights, migration and wokeness. The new right has influential people who articulated some if not all of their ideas, and they do this on the front stage, nationally and in the case of Trump also internationally. No matter how loud and how wide these key figures articulated their voices, they didn't do this without resistance.

Deplatforming, deplatformization and hegemony

Even though several core ideas of *La Nouvelle Droite* and the global new right have become hegemonic, or at the very least are being articulated by people in power or powerful people, several contemporary actors struggle

to keep themselves integrated into the digital mainstream. The most famous case is of course the deplatforming of Trump, not just by Twitter, but by all major Western digital platforms. The deplatforming of one of the most followed and powerful men in the world invites us to analyse the role of those platforms in guarding hegemony and the impact these platforms have on the circulation of new right discourses. Platforms are not just socio-technical infrastructures that enable groups to communicate, but they are as Srnicek (2017: 48) argues,

> A new type of firm (…) characterized by providing the infrastructure to intermediate between different user groups, by displaying monopoly tendencies driven by network effects, by employing cross-subsidisation to draw in different groups and by having a designed core architecture that governs the interaction possibilities.

Those firms do not just host social interaction of their users, but they also organize, circulate and moderate those interactions (Gillespie, 2018). These social media platforms, considering their Western monopolies, have tremendous power in structuring the 'public sphere', and thus also in making metapolitics visible or invisible. They have a commercial, socio-cultural role, but they also have a crucial political role, as they organize and structure the public sphere.

Platform, deplatforming and deplatformization

Considering the commercial nature of those platforms, the commercial and political importance of network effects, and the impact of social media governance strategies of deplatforming and deplatformization it is important to understand the tension between the commercial nature of those platforms and their political role. The deplatforming and deplatformization, especially of highly popular accounts, may be deemed necessary from a democratic logic but is in potential contradiction with the commercial goals of those firms (van Dijck, Winkel & Tobias Schäfer, 2021) as platforms need successful users, generating uptake. It is those users – micro-celebrities – that generate uptake and make sure that platforms can engage many users to stay active on the platform many times. From this perspective, non-intervention seems to be in line with the neoliberal ideology of those platforms and with their libertarian commitment to non-moderation. But as Gillespie compellingly argues, no matter how much platforms boast about their commitment to absolute freedom of speech, platforms can*not* not moderate. Making money – at least within the corporate ecosystem – means getting and holding as many users online for as much time as possible, interacting as much as possible. From a negative perspective, this means that they shouldn't only make sure that

influencers attract people, they also need to take into account the negative effects of toxic cultures on their platforms, as radical right influencers can push more users of a platform than they attract. Platforms thus have to balance between 'too little curation, and users may leave to avoid the toxic environment that has taken hold; too much moderation, and users may still go, rejecting the platform as either too intrusive or too antiseptic' (Gillespie, 2018: 12). Of course, all kinds of algorithmic artifices are possible in regulating the user environment without using their ultimate weapon. It is thus not coincidental that deplatforming and deplatformization are the last steps in a long process of trying to moderate the platform. The point is that all social media platforms 'do and must, moderate the content and activity of users using some logistics of detection, review and enforcement' (Gillespie, 2018: 21).

Platforms have internal and economic motivations to moderate their platforms. It is a result of their moderation policies that they also shed light on the values that organize that moderation. Most GAFAM platforms were first ruled by a libertarian and neoliberal moderation logic. They were children of the digital utopianism that characterized so many Silicon Valley start-ups. This utopianism was founded in the alliance between the techno-libertarians of the computer industry, the former counter-culturalists of the San Francisco Bay area, and the social conservatives of the new right (Turner, 2008: 233). This ideological merger came with a big distrust of the state, and all external or internal interventions. Technology, and especially the internet, should be completely free. In John Barlow's speech on 'declaration of the independence of cyber-space' he declared that

> The global social space we are building to be naturally independent of the tyrannies you seek to impose on us. You have no moral right to rule us nor do you possess any methods of enforcement we have true reason to fear.
>
> *(Barlow, 1996)*

This is emblematic of this media ideology. The legitimacy of the state to intervene online was from the start seen as illegitimate within this Californian ideology (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996).

The need for moderation was forced upon platforms as a result of external forces. Especially 'crises' have pushed platforms to increasingly moderate online. That started already in the nineties of the last century after several cases of defamation, hate speech, doxing and porn. Political speech was rarely focused on, and the far-right successfully managed to use this commercial ecosystem for their benefit. By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, there were many different far-right sites, BBS and social media pages that were used for ideological purposes, but the real spike happened in the first year of the second decade of the 21st century (Winter, 2019) when the far-right was fully integrated into the Web 2.0 platforms. Next to traditional,

more conservative outlets like the American Conservative, VDARE, the Occidental Quarterly, The National Policy Institute and American Renaissance, more niched far-right platforms, emerged. Between 2008 and 2013, the alt-right would produce content that is emblematic of contemporary new right movements: essays, books, blogs and vlogs.

> Starting in about 2015, however, the alt-right began embracing new tactics (…) It now also has a constellation of online message boards, such as /pol/, My posting Career, and Salo Forum, where the radical right gathers anonymously and shares ideas and content.
>
> *(Hawley, 2017: 19)*

It is also in this period that the Alternative Right site was launched. Together with the old school magazines and sites, this new right culture of blogs, podcasts, memes and vlogs that Morgan was referring to grew rapidly. It is during this period that the alt-right discovered memes and trolling for metapolitical goals. Slowly but surely the alt-right got its shape as a polycentric network with centres like American Renaissance, The Daily Stormer, and The Right Stuff. But their real success was the result of using trolling and memeing on newspaper sites, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. In other words, the digital utopianism of the Californian ideology facilitated the far-right to integrate themselves into the booming social network platforms and to reach new audiences outside of their own bubble. This new edgy, 'funny' digital face of the movement existed next to the more traditional new right formats like blogs, think tanks, conferences and essays. The latter allowed for the theorization of the movement while the first allowed them to recruit new members and militants. And even more importantly, it got them massive amounts of attention, not only within those digital platforms, but also globally in the whole hybrid media system. It is this attention that allowed for the upscaling of the movement and its integration and influence on the global new right.

This libertarian ideology underpinning the mainstream social media platforms has been foundational to the growth and expansion of the global new right. The rise of the global new right is hard to imagine without their integration into the digital economy. In assessing the role of this media ideology, it is important to keep the lessons of the British sociologist Raymond Williams in mind. The rise is not so much the result of the technology itself, but of how that technology is used and structured in relation to the broader socio-economic and political context. The new right was profiting by responding to the commercial logic and structure of Web 2.0. The different nodes of the alt-right, including undisguised neo-Nazi sites like The Daily Stormer and The Right Stuff, were an integral part of the digital mainstream in that period. They were hosted, had web addresses, could be found on Google, had accounts on Twitter and Facebook (except for the most radical factions), and

received financial support from companies like PayPal. Also, alt-light sites like Breitbart were very much present in the digital mainstream. Facebook still tolerates the medium, Apple still offers the Breitbart app and Taboola provides traffic and advertising revenue.

Metapolitics and the digital guardians of hegemony

The inclusion of the alt-right in the mainstream digital economy was critical to its metapolitical strategy. On the one hand, the alt-right generated visitors through Facebook, Twitter and other social media, and in this way built up a following. On the other hand, the mainstream digital platforms provided the necessary income. It's no coincidence that Infowars launched a campaign against internet marketing company AdRoll when it refused to host any more ads. Nicas (2018) also found that the deplatforming of Infowars had serious negative effects on his uptake. Contrary to Jones' statements, Infowars didn't thrive after the ban. On the contrary, it lost half of its visitors. No matter the far-right discourse about the positive impact that deplatforming has on their metapolitical enterprise, the reality suggests otherwise: most of them invest a lot in visibility on the mainstream platforms. The struggle to stay integrated into the mainstream digital economy is not just a technical matter. Integration is, as we have seen throughout this book, also very much a cultural thing tied up in the ideologies that are embedded in those technologies. Those ideologies are not only those of its owners and makers but also increasingly those of the societies they function in. Public protest and political actions put pressure on the 'everything goes' mentality. Facebook, Twitter and Google were initially quite vocal about their position: they denounced their role as editors and the associated responsibility. Of course, they did moderate and steer the results, pages and users, but the general discourse was one of 'non-intervention'. Twitter did let the alt-right do their thing for a very long time. Milo Yiannopoulos has grown up on Twitter, and the alt-right saw Twitter as a crucial tool spreading and reading real news (Righton.net, 2016). But after the troll campaign against actress Leslie Jones (who starred in the 2016 Ghostbusters remake in which the heroes are all women), the pressure on Twitter to do something about harassment and bullying increased considerably. As a result, Yiannopoulos was one of the first in a line of several alt-right stars to be blocked. Milo, immediately, framed this as a political move from Twitter: 'There's a systemic bias against conservatives and libertarians [on Twitter]', he said. 'The progressive press is going to take their side, dishonestly suggesting that I was making life difficult for a black woman'. He added: 'This is a political decision. With this they are sending a message to conservatives that they're not welcome on Twitter' (Ng, 2016). The negative effects of that ban were immediately downplayed by him (and by Alex Jones). 'I'm not going to pretend I'm upset', said Milo. 'It has served me brilliantly. And this has done me no harm – it has turned me into a free speech martyr. (…) This is the

most gigantic possible gift!' (NG, 2016). Milo here was referring to the free publicity, and thus the further uptake of his message. One year later, when he was disinvited from CPAC and Simon & Schuster cancelled his book after Milo supported adults having sex with him when he was 13, he still presented himself as unaffected by everything. Three years later, when Facebook banned him, one more time, he was not that vocal anymore: 'Before I was banned everywhere, I had four million fans across various platforms', he wrote in a post on the Milo Yiannopoulos Discussion Facebook page. 'FOUR MILLION. No, I am glad to get 3,000 views on a meme on Telegram. That's what they did for me. That's what they did for us. It was a declaration of war'. (Berr, 2019). Three years later, Milo has just over 33,000 followers on Telegram and has almost been forgotten entirely in the mainstream public space.

All this aligns with research done by Rogers (2020). When analysing the impact of deplatforming strategies of the major Western tech giants, he came to the conclusion that the audiences of the new platforms have thinned substantially. This goes to show how important the major digital structures are in waging a metapolitical battle. Digital platforms are, seen from a new right Gramscian perspective, part of the complex structure of the current hegemony that makes it resistant to direct attacks (Anderson, 1977: 7). In other words, and from a new right perspective, successful metapolitics is not possible without realizing hegemony in this digital ecosystem. That is of course why the new right used them in full. 'The internet', argued managing editor of Altright.com Vincent Law (aka Bogdan Olegovich Polishchuk) (2017), 'provides an infrastructure that allows the truth of the red pill to circulate, to undermine the impact of the elites and overthrow them'. According to Law, the seeds for the new world order, a world of nations, have been planted. The internet as an infrastructure was seen by alt-right activists as crucial for the global advance of the new right, as something that would inherently awaken, red pill more and more people.

In the first week after Trump's election, Twitter banned a series of alt-right activists. Several alt-right voices framed this as proof of the liberal omnipotence and criticized what they saw as the politically correct mock trials. The Twitter Trust & Safety Council, which was founded in February 2016, was initially the main target. This advisory body was made up of more than 40 organizations specializing in bullying, internet literacy and hate speech. The alt-right presented this body as a 'feminist, Orwellian' cover to take out the alt-right, especially 'white men' (Righton, 2016). They framed Zuckerberg and Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey as puppets of the liberal establishment. They controled the public space. This pushback against the alt-right was seen as the old order, which refused to adapt to the new developments (Law, 2017). 'Instead of accepting the fragmentation of new media by the internet and adapting to that new landscape, the governing elite have created "fake news" to bring voters back to the traditional and verifiable sources of information', says Law (2017). This discursive action was of course trying to prevent further deplatformings of far-right actors. Any intervention from the

government, the law or the platforms was systematically framed as part of the liberal elite oppressing the freedom of speech, the voice of the people and even the truth. Trump's fake news rhetoric, of course, contributed to the demonization of the mainstream press as conspiring against the right. Jones rang the same bell after being de-platformed by YouTube and Facebook. He described social media platforms as a weapon system 'now attacking the United States with traitors inside the major security agencies blocking Trump's resistance of the program' (Nicas, 2018). From 2016 onwards, the far-right is increasingly framing digital media as the guardians of the liberal hegemony or the deep state. Whereas at the start of these bans, new right actors still referred to the Streisand law and boosted that this wouldn't impact their uptake, which changed rapidly in the subsequent deplatforming and deplatformization waves in the years to follow. The boasting martyrdom discourse is thus best seen as an instrument in trying to stop being deplatformed.

The impact of such deplatforming strategies shows the importance of seeing the global new right as a complex system in motion. Digital platforms were an intrinsic part of the rise of the global new right. New right actors didn't just 'use' those platforms, and the platforms had, as we have seen, a huge effect on their discourse, their visibility and the upscaling of the movement. Digital uptake was used as proof of their articulation of what their generation wanted. The moment that those infrastructures, under pressure from the outside world, made adjustments to the digital utopianist principles had huge effects on the global new right. Many different actors lost their access to the mainstream and had to readjust their metapolitical strategies. Facebook and Instagram have lost much metapolitical appeal as a result of these deplatforming strategies. It meant that not only a lot of those activists, like Martin Sellner and Milo but also The Golden One, had to reassess their strategies. Some of them took refuge in Telegram (which is one of the most successful far-right media), others like The Golden One adjusted their discourse to stay integrated into YouTube and started a new account under a different name on Instagram (thegoldenjarl) while setting up accounts on GAB, Odysee and Telegram. As a result of these external pressures, the global new right is perpetually changing. To understand how exactly the global new right changes, it is important to look at the dynamics behind the different deplatforming and deplatformization waves.

Crises and deplatforming and deplatformization waves

2016 saw the first high-profile cases of deplatforming, and Milo was emblematic of this. The first big deplatforming wave happened shortly after the deadly car attack during the Unite the Right manifestation in Charlottesville in 2017. All organizers of the Unite the Right manifestation and movements and alt-right media that were present or mobilized for the rally were dumped by one or more online services in the following weeks. Eli Mosley, CEO of

Identity Evropa, saw his Gmail deleted. Google Play shut down the alt-right social network GAB. Richard Spencer's blog Radix and his think tank The National Policy Institute were banned from the Squarespace platform and went offline. Mailchimp refused to send future American Renaissance newsletters. The League of the South website was denied by the hosting company. WordPress threw American Vanguard off its platform. Cloudfare refused to provide services to neo-Nazis. Even Über deleted the accounts of alt-righters and Airbnb blocked them. Facebook and Twitter banned prominent and less prominent alt-right media and personalities from their platforms. On August 16, 2017, Counter-Currents' Facebook account and that of its editor-in-chief Greg Johnson were deleted. Facebook issued a warning to American Renaissance and blocked the page for seven days. The Facebook pages of the League of the South, Vanguard America and National Policy Institute, Radix Journal, Identity Europe and VDARE were removed. Payment services such as PayPal and platforms such as GoFundMe also intervened. PayPal shut down Counter-Currents, Richard Spencer, Jihad Watch, American Renaissance (AR Staff, 2017), League of the South, VDARE (Brimeow, 2017), and many other alt-right media. Square Cash banned AltRight.com. Social media and search engines allow the alt-rights to reach an ever-widening audience, but services like PayPal, GoFundMe, and Patreon hit these organizations at the very heart of their financial enterprise. AR and Counter-Currents indicated that the PayPal ban could potentially cause them to lose a large portion of their regular monthly donations and some of their sales (Johnson, 2017).

After Charlottesville, the sites of most of these radical factions of the alt-right could still be found via Google (only The Daily Stormer had to be looked up on the dark web). But their exclusion from social media like Facebook and Twitter inevitably affected their reach and growth opportunities, and their exclusion from digital payment platforms went to the heart of the alt-right business model. In retrospect, we can see how these collective deplatforming and deplatformization strategies gave a serious blow to the alt-right network. Charlottesville introduced the first collective wave of deplatforming radical right actors. Many platforms and actors took serious digital hits after this deadly car ride in 'meatspace'. The Daily Stormer was hit the worst: in their case, it amounted to full deplatformization. Whereas deplatforming refers to the removal of one account from a certain platform, deplatformization applies more broadly 'to the denial of infrastructural services deeper down the stack, for example, browsers, cloud services, pay systems, app stores, advertising services, domain name systems and so on' (van Dijck, de Winkel & Schäfer, 2021: 5). In the case of The Daily Stormer, it meant that the site was pushed to and over the edges of the digital ecosystem into the dark web.

Here we encounter what I see as the negative dialectic of metapolitics. The more a new right actor becomes visible and has an impact outside of its own network, the higher the chances that this account will be noticed by users who report it, governments who become aware of the law-breaking activity of that

actor and platform algorithms that detect the content. The threat of invisibility, and thus the end of the metapolitical project, is always a real possibility, and that possibility has a serious impact on the content, form and practices of metapolitical actors. Especially after 2017, more and more far-right actors are not only trying to stay integrated into the digital ecosystem of GAFEM, but they also prepare for potential invisibility. See for instance the hypermedia strategy of The Golden One and how he uses, just like Brittany Pettibone, the status of his YouTube video to direct viewers to all his other channels. First, we see his own commercial sites listed, then his social media beginning with niched and less moderated platforms like Telegram and GAB. In the end, we see the sites where users can support him through bitcoins and money transfers.

Within the mainstream, commercial digital ecosystem, visibility and invisibility are very unstable and layered phenomena. One can be deplatformed by Facebook and shadowbanned on YouTube while still being very visible on Twitter. Deplatforming and deplatformization are only the most extreme gradations of the management of the visibility of users by the platform. Platforms can shadowban, ban hashtags, downrank content, temporarily ban users, label misinformation or ban a specific post. On top of all that, we should keep in mind that the algorithmic architecture of news feeds and trending topics are not automatically imposing visibility on all subjects; on the contrary, it is always a scarce good that needs to be carefully managed (Bucher, 2018: 85). The more radical and explicit actors become, and the better they manage their visibility in this ecosystem, the more chance that something triggers external human and non-human actors to undermine their visibility.

Deplatforming of individuals or individual accounts happens increasingly and is a regular practice on most of the mainstream digital platforms. Banning users first 'rose in popularity when social media platforms struggled to come up with solutions to fighting the Islamic State' (Rauchfleisch & Kaiser, 2021). Today we associate this governance policy first and foremost with the banning of far-right actors. The deplatforming of many users or the full deplatformization of many far-right actors at once happens in waves, usually connected to larger socio-technical crises, scandals or eruptions of violence. As we have seen, there was a deadly attack needed in the 'meatspace' of Charleston before digital platforms started to act against new right metapoliticians. Facebook decided to ban Generation Identity from its platform in 2018, one month after several members of the Austrian chapter were arrested, but the real blow to the European identitarian movements came after the Christchurch attack. The Capitol Riots were the reason to finally deplatform former President Trump from Facebook and Twitter. And in his slipstream, on 12 January 2021, Facebook announced a huge crackdown on QAnon accounts, and Twitter decided to suspend those accounts. The Capital Riots were also the reason to put Parler offline and several individual far-right influencers and activists were also deplatformed. Nick Fuentes, for instance, who at the

time was already banned from most mainstream platforms, was now also banned from DLive. In many cases, the platforms or users who are the subject of deplatforming or deplatformization already encountered several less far-reaching interventions that already negatively affected their visibility in the mainstream digital ecology. Trump's tweets were already accompanied by a warning, Dries Van Langenhove was temporarily banned several times and Nick Fuentes was already pushed outside of the digital mainstream.

Such waves of deplatforming or deplatformization are connected to specific online and offline practices. Physical violence in 'meatspace' is maybe the most obvious one. The Capital Riots, the Charlottesville terrorist attack, and the attack in New Zealand all had huge online backlashes from the far-right online. Symbolic violence in the form of trolling, doxing and explicit threats with violence, incitement of hatred and racism are other triggers. The banning of actors is then usually explained as them breaking the community guidelines (or a new interpretation of those guidelines). These practices also work on the level of an individual activist, movement or influencers, but get a different meaning when this is deployed in waves. Think for instance of the banning of all the identitarian movements in Europa, including Schild & Vrienden in Flanders by Twitter. This happened on the same day in the whole of Europe (EDM, 2020), which facilitates a 'victimization discourse' by the identitarians. Dries Van Langenhove could then suggest a McCarthey-like censorship: 'Today it's Schild en Vrienden, tomorrow it's up to the next one, until everyone with a migration-critical opinion has been silenced' (Van Langenhove Tweet 10 July 2020), he wrote on his personal Twitter account. Community guidelines address the individual user but are deployed collectively, which feeds the myth of left-wing political correctness of the church. Alt-right frames this expulsion from the digital economy as part of the struggle, as proof of liberal and left-wing power and of the oppression of the white man.

The global new right between visibility and invisibility

Deplatforming and deplatformization, just like less invasive instruments of social media platform governance, are now ubiquitous. Far-right actors have to adjust their strategies if they want to keep using mainstream media for metapolitical goals. Alternative platforms like Bitchute, Telegram, GAB and Odysee cannot mitigate the loss of reach by being deplatformed (Fielitz, Schwarz & Hitziger, 2022; Rogers, 2020; Rauchfleisch & Kaiser, 2021), but they can be complementary to mainstream platforms. They have different functions than mainstream channels. Whereas mainstream channels are crucial for metapolitical goals, alternative channels help them in community building. They also allow users to post videos that were not allowed on the mainstream platforms and even get massive numbers of viewers there. Even though it is quite exceptional that a far-right actor has the same reach there

as on the mainstream platforms, they can become successful main platforms after a metapolitical actor has been deplatformed from all mainstream platforms. Nick Fuentes did succeed in using DLive and having a substantial reach before he also got banned there.

Community rules, metapolitics and mitigating potential deplatforming

This central role of mainstream digital platforms for metapolitical action means that platforms are having more power over far-right actors, which in practice also results in them co-constructing metapolitical discourse. The community rules of platforms are thus not just rules, they are directing metapolitical discourse in specific directions. Certain topics and words shall be avoided in the hope of maintaining one's reach to a broad, more mainstream audience. When the alt-right subreddit was shut down, Red Ice posted a quick blog in which it emphasized that it was always extremely careful about what it allowed on its subreddit and that it scrupulously moderated hate speech. 'As one of the moderators at the subreddit, I would say we are pretty vigilant about trying to abide by Reddit's terms of service by removing "hate" speech such as slurs or taking down material that is proliferating personal information of people, i.e. "doxing"' (Red Ice TV, 2017)'. Note here that Red Ice, in their own shows and on their own website, are clearly not removing or taking town material that is considered hate. Even more, the use of brackets shows that they do not agree with Reddit's qualification of their discourse as being 'hate', but they clearly saw the need to adopt their ways in order to stay integrated on mainstream platforms. 'In fact, we were purposely hyper-vigilant by having absurd warnings like NSFW tags on posts and an age restriction warning on the subreddit just to inform readers that they were entering a "dangerous" part of the internet' (Red Ice TV, 2017). So even though Red Ice didn't agree on the definition of hate speech (indexed by the brackets around 'hate'), they do follow the guidelines. The affordances of the platform and the community guidelines shape – orthopraxically – the metapolitics of Red Ice TV. Paradoxically, this could further boost the metapolitical impact of Red Ice TV because it allows users who first get acquainted with Red Ice to be smoothed in.

Considering the centrality of digital mainstream platforms in the practice of metapoliticians, it is not a surprise that far-right metapoliticians spend quite some time discussing the topic of social media governance. The Golden One for instance dedicates 6 out of 45 videos in 2021 explicitly discussing the role of social media. The first video is called 'Why they hate me' (The Golden One, 2021a). In this video, he discusses the removal of the Legio Gloria Instagram page: 'Got no warning, no reason given and we absolutely did not break any community guidelines'. The reason the account was banned, according to him, is because 'it is politically motivated. I'm a public dissident and I'm in opposition of the current regime. Therefore they harass me in this way and no it doesn't have anything to do with mass reportings, because then

you could appeal, but this couldn't be appealed'. In this discourse, we see two elements: (1) the Golden One is very explicit about his knowledge of the community guidelines. The guidelines define the borders of his metapolitical activity, and he is clearly careful not to transgress those. He is clearly also knowledgeable about the procedures that are in place. In the same video, he even dares YouTube to find anything harmful or hateful he has ever said on this platform. (2) The banning is understood as political repression. Instagram is thus not just a commercial firm, it is part of the current regime.

Top comments under
Why they hate me – The Golden One vlog on YouTube

20,950 views – 2,200 thumbs up – 491 reactions	
Comment 1	No one is more hated than the one who speaks the truth.
288 likes – 12 reactions	
Comment 2	As I've said before, the people making the demonetizing/ deplatforming decisions are miserable, overweight, pink-haired lesbians wearing Buddy Holly glasses who lead horrible lives. The fact that they hate you is a badge of honour. We know it's always 'what you see is what you get' with you. I'm glad you are so real. I know you will keep going. Thank you.
125 likes – 4 reactions	
Comment 3	I'm a downtrodden, distrustful and deficient person. It's easy to fall back into the old thought patterns where everyone looks like an enemy, but I try my best every day to assume that I am likeable, that I'm defined by my good sides too and not just my flaws, that other people will see me in the same light I try to see them. It's one foot in front of the other but looking back I can see I've made some progress. The Golden One's videos never made me feel bad and that's because I was brave enough to get over my initial assumptions about him to see what he was really like.
6 likes –reactions	
Comment 4	You inspire and empower. That always scares the weak.
163 likes –30 reactions	
Comment 5	I too get a surge of motivation every time I watch a video by The Golden One. Not only are his words full of wisdom and encouragement, but he also serves as a great example and role model, Thank you, Markus, for being a guide on so many people's paths to self-improvement! You have done more to help people than these jealous liberals will do in their entire lives. They know that, and that's what makes them so angry.
7 likes –0 reactions	

This discourse does not only say something about his understanding of the guidelines and how he applies them, but it is also a discourse that is directed at uptake, at mobilizing his followers against mainstream social media by framing those media as biased, unfair and thus as part of the liberal elites trying to control the right. The message of The Golden One immediately gets uptake. The video is seen more than 20,000 times, and 491 people commented on it. The most popular posts are the ones that framed The Golden One's intervention as 'speaking truth to power'. The fact that Legio Gloria is banned is indeed read through the discourse of The Golden One: it is an act of political repression against someone who is not scared to tell 'the truth'.

This discourse on social media as the enemy, and thus part of the established order to use 'hate speech' to suppress the right and the voice of the people, can be seen all over the global new right. Brittany Sellner for instance argues that content moderation and deplatforming strategies are slippery slopes. 'We went from Milo to Trump in the span of four years. It's absolutely insane how fast it is happening' (Chen, 2021). One of the important drivers of these deplatformizing waves, according to Sellner, is the 'left':

> The left is very good at this, to their credit, they are so good at destroying, both through guilt by association, so they say you spoke to this person once, and therefore you are completely in league with everything they are believe. And they are able to convince other people of this as well, for instance Patreon.
>
> *(Chen, 2021)*

This narrative is also visible with The Golden One when he argues that they frame him as some kind of terrorist, a radical (Golden One, 2021). Maybe more interesting is that this narrative is also visible in the many comments below The Golden One's videos. If we look at the comments, we see that two out of the three most popular comments articulate the stereotype of the 'feminist left' that pushes for the deplatforming of the right. This surveillance and 'guilt by association by the left' is framed as a massive undertaking, succeeding not only in deplatforming President Trump but also in generally installing a repressive climate where far-right activists don't dare to be seen with other far-right activists out of fear of being framed as more radical and thus get deplatformed. 'This is how they get you! It is really risky', says Sellner, 'to be talking to people openly (…) it is very hard to do, but very effective as they can then atomize and isolate everyone' (Chen, 2021). In the case of Brittany Sellner, this fear of being seen in the company of others is to be taken literally. Her husband, Martin Sellner, is not only deplatformed by Instagram (and Facebook and Twitter) but according to Brittany Pettibone, all pictures of Martin Sellner are also algorithmically banned from the platform. That is why she regularly posts pictures of herself with her husband while he is looking away from the camera or with his face hidden from view.

The uploading of such pictures usually quite rapidly triggers a whole series of reactions on the 'stupid fascists' algorithmically banning Martin Sellner's face. In the reaction, a clear us-them categorization is visible where mainstream digital media are portrayed as irrational fascists censoring the right. The Sellners, through such pictures, are framed as the victims of an oppressive totalitarian regime of the 'lefty tech companies'. Such photos are thus metapolitically speaking very productive without breaking the community guidelines of the platform that they post them on. They implicitly and sometimes explicitly construct an all-powerful enemy that controls all major platforms. At the same time, the practice itself illustrates the constructive role of such moderation policies in the actual form of contemporary metapolitics. Brittany Sellner complies with those guidelines and thus doesn't show her husband's face in the hope of still being integrated herself. The fear is thus not only a fear towards the left's 'guilt by association' politics, but especially of being deplatformed.

Such metapolitical discourse creates a perception of a massive repressive culture driven by the left and eventually institutionalized in mainstream media platforms. It also distracts attention from the actual hate and racism they produce and reframes it through a victim discourse. Dries Van Langenhove also regularly posts about censorship on social media and from Facebook in particular. Every social media warning, temporary ban or full ban is framed in a narrative where social media functions as all-powerful censorship machines in service of the left, the politically correct elites. In one post we see Van Langenhove complaining on Twitter that he, yesterday,

> Denounced the anti-white racism that is growing day by day. The result? Facebook deletes the message and blocks my account for 30 days. They want to prevent at all costs that you will get to know the truth about the growing hatred of immigrants for Flemish people.

The narrative is again clear: social media governance has nothing to do with legitimate demands, but everything with a non-defined 'they' trying to control the narrative. Digital media platforms are seen as the ones destroying the right to freedom of speech.

Freedom of speech, attention and the hypermedia strategy

This narrative on 'freedom of speech' as a legitimation to produce racist and sexist talk being freely reproduced is not new. Already in the nineties of the last century, we witnessed the far-right politicization of freedom of speech (Zemni, 2007). Freedom of speech was the banner *par excellence* that legitimized radical talk in the mainstream public sphere. The idea that far-right voices were 'cancelled' was already a thing decades ago. And its function was

quite similar then as it is today: it pushed journalists (and today's platforms) to not intervene. Even more, in the nineties, this 'freedom of speech' discourse generated massive amounts of mass media attention. This is also the case today. Van Langenhove's post above generated 387 likes, 247 retweets and 87 reactions. It is not only one of his more popular posts on Twitter, but it also shows the dominance of the right to the idea of freedom of speech. Freedom of speech is dissociated from democracy as a grand narrative and is now used for legitimate anti-democratic talk.

An interesting fact about this last Tweet is of course the use of Twitter to complain about Facebook's governance. In other words, it is an index of the hypermediality of the far-right. Metapolitical activists, movements, intellectuals and influencers try to be integrated into as many mainstream media platforms as possible. They all try to be on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and TikTok. It is only in the second instance that they also make accounts on more niched platforms like Telegram, GAB, Odysee and Bitchut. Many of them use their presence on mainstream digital platforms to recruit their followers and invite them to follow them on their alternative platforms. When Schild & Vrienden got banned from Instagram, Van Langenhove let the image circulate of a laser-eyed Zuckerberg with the caption 'Stop Censorship, follow us on Telegram'. These kinds of posts have become very common among far-right actors who prepare for potential deplatforming. They use their precarious integration in the digital mainstream and the network effects in order to recruit new followers on new channels.

The Golden One too uses his presence on YouTube to recruit new members and turn them into custumers, financial donators and followers on other social media platforms. Contrary to Pettibone, he clearly favours building audiences on more niched platforms like GAB and Mind. As a result of this platform precarity, new right actors are commonly early adopters of new platforms. Certainly, at first, those new platforms function as duplicates of the mainstream platforms. The same videos appear on YouTube and BitChute, but the more pressure there is to abide by the community rules, the more we see them differentiating between the platforms. The Golden One will post similar things on GAB as on Twitter, but will also show himself shooting his Victoria (an FN-Mag 58 assault rifle) and his Elisabeth (an AK5 assault gun) on GAB. GAB functions more as a close community, where influencers have the feeling to be more 'among friends'. Their behaviour seems less constructed in relation to imagined surveillance (Duffy & Chan NK, 2019). Rauchfleisch & Kaiser (2021) found similar results, and they concluded that mainstream media are more for 'agitational activities' aimed at the mainstream audience, 'while alternative platforms are necessary for forming and keeping a collective identity' (Rauchfleisch & Kaiser, 2021: 7). This community building is certainly present on The Golden One's GAB page. On that page, The Golden One actively engages in interaction with his fans.

This complex relation between new right actors, mainstream digital media and alternative far-right media shows the complexity of the network. Community guidelines are not only read by new right actors but also by many who try not to cross the lines of the platform. This is a precondition for successful metapolitical action. Alternative platforms, and especially far-right platforms like GAB, are primarily used as a back-up. The less an actor is known by the public at large as a far-right activist, the less the chance that they will explicitly praise media like GAB. Digital platforms clearly do direct user behaviour through community guidelines, temporary bans and of course permanent bans. New right actors adjust their discourse, but this orientation towards the cultural power of those platforms is not to be read as an orthodox orientation: it is orthopraxy at its best. The new right influencers play lip service. Within the boundaries set by the platform, they try to mobilize and 'educate' the broad audience and direct them to more radical niches. Of course, this is only possible for those still integrated into the mainstream. As a result of several waves of deplatforming, more and more actors are only visible on some platforms and not on others. In the worst case, they are pushed to the margins of the internet and even into the so-called dark web.

Deplatformization: the case of The Daily Stormer

The 'ironic' neo-nazi website The Daily Stormer is one of the sites that was not just deplatformed, but became the object of deplatformization after the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville. Up until the Unite the Right rally, The Daily Stormer was an überradical 'ironic' neo-Nazi clickbait site and an influential node in the alt-right network (that doesn't shy away from making an 'ironic' tribute to Mein Kampf and Nazism). With its 'ironic', controversial, or 'edgy' posts, it was a hub legitimating antisemitism, racism and white nationalism through layers upon layers of irony. The Daily Stormer functioned as a far-right meme factory, producer of far-right discourse and an educational hotspot for many far-right activists around the globe. According to Andrew Anglin, the founder of the site, The Daily Stormer page visits were on par with Breitbart before the site got deplatformed.

The Daily Stormer's journey to the dark side started on 11 August 2017, the night of the Charlottesville tiki torch march. On that night, the site was first hit by a DDOS attack which was so massive that it went offline. Cloudfare, the company that The Daily Stormer hired to protect the site from such attacks, was unable to contain the storm. The well-known grey hat hacker The Jester informed The Daily Stormer's administrator, Weev, via Twitter that 'it would be a shame if something happened to his beautiful site'. Not much later, a new article appeared on The Daily Stormer, apparently posted by Anonymous: 'End of Hate: Anonymous now in control of Daily Stormer #tangodown'. #tangodown is the signature The Jester leaves when he takes

down a site. Anonymous denied having hacked the site, something The Jester happily retweeted several times. Not only was the site hacked and attacked, but also The Daily Stormer's Discord server and The Daily Stormer's webmaster, the far-right troll Weev, and its own Discord server went offline, as did Weev's LinkedIn account. It was the beginning of The Daily Stormer's digital disintegration.

On August 14, 2017, domain provider GoDaddy announced that it was giving The Daily Stormer 24 hours to find another provider. The first step Weev and Anglin tried to take was to register a domain with Google. Three hours later, Google withdrew that registration. The Daily Stormer then moved to Moscow, where the site appeared on the domain www.dailystormer.ru. At the same time, the site also moved to the dark web address http://dstormer-6em3i4km.onion/. Moving to the dark web of course means being part of the internet that is not indexed and can therefore not be found on Google or Yahoo. That migration was a necessary move because the Russian domain and the subsequent lol domain were to be cancelled. The Daily Stormer was wandering from one domain to another for the next years. The Daily Stormer's PayPal account was already blocked since 2014, and the site no longer had access to the crowdfunding site Patreon.

In 2017, the site was successfully pushed to the edges of the ecosystem. The Daily Stormer wasn't just deplatformed, but it was also the object of deplatformization. The site was pushed to the fringes of the digital ecosystem. Without a mainstream domain name indexed in Google and other search engines, without a platform to collect crowdfunding and without a presence on any of the mainstream social media, The Daily Stormer lost access to all the infrastructural services needed to function in the regular internet. Deplatformization is not a content moderation strategy of a single platform but affects the whole ecosystem of platforms. It isn't just about blocking specific actors on specific platforms, but it is also the denial of infrastructural services throughout the stack. It was not only deplatformed by social media but also, for example, by browsers, cloud services, pay systems, app stores, advertising services, domain name systems, and so on (Van Dijck, de Winkel and Schäfer, 2021: 5). Deplatformization can thus be seen as the guarding of the ideological boundaries, not of one platform, but of the whole mainstream digital ecosystem. Private companies individually and collectively decide who has a voice in the digital mainstream. The power of those private companies isn't limited to the known social media platforms. To become the subject of deplatformization means not only being pushed outside of the mainstream, into the fringes, it also means that you will have to endure financial, metapolitical and even juridical blows.

The Daily Stormer is a good case to study the impact of such deplatformization strategies. Since 2017, the Stormer has been trying to come back and be present in the mainstream ecosystem. This journey can read as a perpetual

story of integration and disintegration in the margins of the mainstream digital ecosystem. GAB consistently functioned as the gateway through which Andrew Anglin, the founder of The Daily Stormer, could reach out to more mainstream audiences. He – or other militants of The Daily Stormer – used GAB to update his followers on the digital whereabouts of The Daily Stormer and to financially support it. The Andrew Anglin profile on GAB has 21.5K followers. In comparison with other far-right activists like Martin Sellner (3.1K followers), The Golden One (8.4K followers), Nicholas J. Fuentes (137K followers) and Paul Joseph Watson aka Prisonplanet (573.6K followers), Anglin generates substantial uptake through GAB. Even compared to Watson, who has more than 20 times the number of followers, Anglin's posts on average get several hundreds of likes whereas Watson in many cases collects fewer likes on his posts. That is remarkable because Anglin's profile mostly uses GAB to post about the whereabouts of The Daily Stormer.

In the about section of his GAB profile, Anglin informs his followers about the loss of another mainstream domain register, and educates his followers on where and how they can find the site on TOR. Introducing this media literacy is crucial for the survival of The Daily Stormer, and it is thus a common subject of his GAB posts. The Daily Stormer is not only dependent on its reach for metapolitical goals but also on keeping the site floating financially. And for the latter, The Daily Stormer visitors need careful directions as well. The Stormer cannot use PayPal or process credit cards. It also stopped using bitcoins as this could potentially endanger the privacy of the supporters. It now uses Monero to accept financial support. To guide the visitors of the Andrew Anglin GAB page, he lists a long code. Pasting this code in your browser directs you to a bulletin board called 'Gamer Uprising', where The Daily Stormer explains why they opt for Monero and why fans should use it. It is through GAB and the perpetual fight to reintegrate The Daily Stormer in the mainstream that the site still exists and still has influence.

How The Daily Stormer navigates deplatformization policies and still tries to impact the mainstream becomes clear if we zoom in on some organized trolling by this neo-nazi platform. The action starts on 5 October 2017, a couple of months after the deplatformization of The Daily Stormer. The site had, only recently, found a Catalonian domain name (dailystormer.cat) which allowed them back in the indexed part of the internet. Nevertheless, most visitors to that new domain name were probably directed there through a GAB post where Anglin announced the umpteenth resurface of the site. The main article of the day was a call for action. It focused on a tweet from a non-public figure out of Highland Park, Illinois. This person and his brother owned a deli. This man sent out a distasteful tweet after the Las Vegas massacre saying 'Soon as I heard it was country music, I felt relief. White people shooting white people isn't terrorism, … it's community relief #lasvegas'. This tweet, considering Stephen Paddock murdered 58 people in Las

Vegas, made this common man Tweeter an ideal target of trolls. The Daily Stormer launched an attack from its new Catalan domain, dailystormer.cat. They doxxed this man by posting his phone number, the address of his deli and his Twitter address. Hundreds of Twitter users bombarded the man with accusations, curses, memes and threats. The result? He had to publicly apologize and quit his deli. This trolling spree drew attention to The Daily Stormer's core message: Whites are under threat.

This trolling spree of course also highlights the impact The Daily Stormer still has from the margins. It shows that even though the site had been the object of deplatformization, it is still at the centre of a network of activists. This network of activists still has a presence in the mainstream ecosystem and with that network, the influence of The Daily Stormer far exceeds the fringes it was pushed into. Even in the platform ecosystem dominated by the Big Five, we see that The Daily Stormer still is active. That being said, its influence has diminished considerably after deplatformization. No one will accidentally stumble on its website: The Daily Stormer is now a website for the people already in the know, for their own filter bubble. If we now look at deplatformization from a complex system's perspective, we understand that The Daily Stormer is maybe invisible if we would scrape important far-right hubs, but it is still very much active underneath the surface. Even more, it still contributes to practices above the surface. The invisibility of The Daily Stormer creates a potential bias. What seems like organic counter comments (and perceived as chaos by the victims of this trolling) is seen from that below-surface perspective as the result of structure and order. Even at the fringes of the system, sites like The Daily Stormer can still be found and have an impact. The Buffalo shooter for instance explicitly mentions the role of The Daily Stormer – now on a Chinese domain name – in his 'awakening'. In other words, we need this hub to explain how the global new right has evolved, and how it is structured even today: it organizes interaction in the digital ecosystem, without being visible in it. In other words, it is still part of the structure of the global new right, now operating on a different, lower scale than before. The deplatformizaton has seriously affected the visibility of The Daily Stormer, its impact and the scale it operates on, but it has not fully erased its impact.

Deplatformed and prosecuted: the transformation of Generation Identitaire

Next to platforms, states and legacy media also have a substantial impact on how the global new right is shaped and changed. The power of the so-called fourth estate operates largely indirectly: mass media reporting on far-right actors can initiate government and platform interventions. The Atlantic reporting on Richard Spencer speaking in front of alt-right activists giving

them the Roman salutes had a substantial impact on the metapolitical project of the alt-right, and the Pano reportage not only destroyed the image of Schild & Vrienden as a positive movement, but it was also the start of a court case against the movement. States exert quite some impact on the shape and form of the global new right. They do this by defining and enforcing specific legal boundaries and shaping a political context in which specific practices, actors and discourses come to exist. For instance, the widely accepted definition of freedom of speech as (rather) absolute in the United States has had a formative impact on the political context there, and on the metapolitical discourse of the alt-right. This is especially clear in the alt-right's explicit embrace of race as a main diacritic.

Such local conditions can have global impacts. Section 230 of the US Telecommunication law for instance not only created a safe haven for the Silicon Valley platforms (Gillespie, 2014: 26–28), but also indexes the power of neoliberal digital utopianist ideology (Turner, 2008) of those platforms and the moderation policies they rolled out. It was this ideology and the government policies that enabled the alt-right to build a complex network of sites, blogs, vlogs and social media accounts that were explicit about race, circulated ironic 'Hitler' memes and were able to finance itself, and become an influential node in the global new right. In Germany, this would have been always much harder to accomplish. As a result of the country's history, Germany has much stricter legislation on hate speech, racism and of course the celebration of Nazism. Sharing symbols reminiscent of the Third Reich and Holocaust denial are considered a crime there. This history embedded in the national practice of law has resulted in a specific approach to combatting online hate crimes: 'The German Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG) has assumed an internationally pioneering role in obliging platform operators to enforce national laws and regulations within a given timeframe. This strict approach stems from the realization that social networks have played a major role in the emergence of violent right-wing actors in recent years' (Fielitz, Schwarz & Hitziger, 2020: 28). The NetzDG bill forces social media companies to remove illegal content within 24 hours or face large fines. This of course formats what far-right actors can still post, and what not. It has for instance caused a diminished visibility of explicit neo-Nazis and of the identitarians in Germany (Fielitz, Schwarz & Hitziger, 2020: 31).

The power of the state is clearly not completely distinct from platform power, as states can demand platforms to delete users, posts or even certain networks. Even though the power of states over platforms is substantial, the scale of this impact is usually active on a lower scale than the globally operating digital platforms. States and their institutions also tend to work slower. Whereas digital platforms can decide to ban all identitarian accounts overnight and execute that decision immediately on a global scale, states

only have jurisdiction on their own territory and this juridical route normally takes time. To understand the impact of the state on the form and reach of the global new right, we zoom in on Generation Identitaire. I zoom in on the morphing of Generation Identitaire after the movement was banned from several mainstream platforms, and actually dissolved in France after a judgement from the court.

The dissolution of Generation Identitaire

Generation Identity was one of the most successful European hubs in the global new right. The French movement eventually had global uptake. At its height, the original French invention became a truly transnational movement with chapters in the UK & Ireland, the Netherlands, Flanders, Italy, Spain, Germany, Austria, Australia and America. The movement became highly visible not only on mainstream digital media platforms but also in the whole hybrid media system, and this is present on a global scale. National and international broadcasting companies, newspapers and magazines dedicated space and time to describe this new right-wing movement and thus introduce them into their national mainstream. At the start, the movement was known for its controversial actions, and especially its style – not uncommonly where they were described as hipsters. As a result of these actions, and the uptake of their discourse by many far-right terrorists, they increasingly were framed as extreme. On a global and European scale, the Christchurch attack, and especially the news that the Tarrant had email contact with Martin Sellner of the Austrian chapter and had supported the movement financially, eventually led to the fall of the movement.

In France, Generation Identitaire was finally dissolved in March 2021 after the Minister of the Interior, Gérald Darmanin, had requested the dissolution of GI in January 2021. The direct cause of his question was the 'Defend Europe: Alps mission' of Generation Identity. The mission, argued Sellner in front of the live stream of Lauren Southern (2018b), who was at the scene, was set up by some French and Italian members of their national chapters. They invited all the European chapters and the mission became a transnational action. During that mission, the members of Generation Identity mimicked a border police patrol, including white jeeps with blue Defend Europe logos, helicopters with the same logo and police-like uniforms. The whole point of the action was metapolitical. It was set up to capture eyeballs in an attention economy, and especially draw attention to the issue of migrants coming into France. The hope was that they could illustrate that the national French police doesn't mobilize against those migrants, but does arrest those who try to stop these nationalists from defending their country. In other words, it was set up to install the idea that 'the elites' don't want to protect their own country and thus facilitate the replacement of the natives.

The activists took it too far with this mission. Their biggest mistake was impersonating a police force which *de facto* made them a militia under French law. This was enough for the mayors of Occitania and the minister to press charges. As a result of the court decision, Generation Identitaire needed to be dissolved. Before the court ruled, 1,500 activists and sympathizers from France, the Netherlands and Belgium (including Dries Van Langenhove and several other members of Schild & Vrienden) marched the streets in Paris in support of the French identitarian movement. As habitual, the protest march was prepared meticulously for uptake. Militants carried French flags and blue and white protest signs with emblematic figures like a French soldier in a World War I outfit saying: would you dissolve them too? The metaphor is clear: just like the French soldiers in World War I, Generation Identitaire is fighting for the future of France, but now, the government tries to dissolve this army.

This march was the last visible manifestation of the movement. The website (generationidentitaire.org) was put offline. The last newsletter was sent on 18 February 2021. This dissolution of the movement is a serious blow to the mobilization and the metapolitical project of the movement. Not only did the activists lose the Generation Identity brand, its structure and its website, but they also lost the community that was carefully built around the movement and its digital presence. That being said, the dissolution of the movement is of course not the end of its discourse, its ideology, its actors and their tradition of practices.

Thaïs D'Escufon: from spokeswoman to metapolitical influencer

Thaïs d'Escufon, spokeswoman of the movement, could already make her case on the Canal 8 show *Touche pas à mon poste* the day after the dissolution, which was then remediatized by the Daily Motion (Daily Motion, 2021). A couple of months later, in May 2021, d'Escufon also started her own YouTube channel. She capitalizes on her fame as a spokesperson for the movement and her integration into the global new right. In less than a year, she managed to collect 51.3k followers on YouTube. This strong rise on YouTube was also a side effect of her collabs with other influencers like Brittany Pettibone (2021) who interviewed d'Escufon in a vlog called 'Fighting for France' and in which she urged her followers to subscribe to d'Escufon's channel, adding that her videos are subtitled in English. This vlog was seen over 36k times.

Just like all influencers, d'Escufon deploys a hypermedia strategy, setting up accounts on Instagram (already banned), Telegram (24k subscribers) and Gettr (24,5k). This intermedial approach is set up to prepare for potential deplatforming. D'Escufon cleverly uses mainstream digital platforms to invite people to follow her on more obscure, but less moderated platforms. In her

YouTube video "3 Arguments à NE PLUS UTILISER en débat!" (D'Escufon, 2022b), she for instance cleverly announces that she will also give a fourth argument that right-wing people shouldn't use in debates, but that this will be posted exclusively on her Gettr account. This of course leads people to her Gettr account. The uptake of her initial YouTube video is quite substantial: 27,000 people watched it in the first 20 hours. The views of the Gettr exclusive video are not made public, but this post on her Gettr wall got 354 likes and 66 shares. She also succeeded in building a substantial following on Gettr: 24,6k followers is half of the followers on her YouTube account. Considering that Gettr is a really niched platform compared to YouTube and that she only made an account in October 2021, it is safe to say that her hypermedia strategy seemed to work. She is also not shy to address the topic of deplatforming and to explicitly ask her followers to migrate with her to Gettr (D'Escufon, 2022c).

D'Escufon's (2021a) first YouTube video 'Thaïs d'Escufon – JE PARS EN CROISADE SUR YOUTUBE!' was uploaded in June 2021. The video cleverly mentions her name in the title, capturing all search traffic on her name. Considering the fact that Generation Identity was dissolved just a couple of months before, this would allow fans, militants and sympathizes to find her on this new platform. Her first video introduces her goals with the platform. The viewers see d'Escufon walking through the city, saying that she 'doesn't fit in this society'. The reason for her feeling like an outsider is not surprising: She doesn't want to be on Tinder or be a climate activist. She doesn't want to be taught about gender theory at university. She sketches a world in decline, a world where the woke left is in control and where – to succeed and not feel like an alien – one needs to conform to this left-wing ideology. In order words, just like the video's thumbnail says, 'the battle continues'. She is continuing her fight, but now with other means. Interesting to see is how multilingualism is mobilized in the different modes of communication afforded by YouTube. The title is French, the thumbnail pic is in English. The video is French-spoken, but subtitled in English. Thais d'Escufon now has become a metapolitical influencer, and she targets not only a French audience but all identitarians. The global new right is imagined as part of the audience that can help her find new clicks, likes and subscribers and thus generate visibility in France and abroad. She publishes on average one video every month on topics like why white privilege is normal, patriotism and Europe, and the role of women on the right.

Next to international metapolitical influencers like Brittany Sellner, Lauren Southern and Laura Loomer, we now have a French girl that echoes Guillaume Faye's and *La Nouvelle Droite's* discourse. This is illustrated very well in her video on patriotism and Europe. She starts this video by arguing that 'we cannot defend the French identity, without defending European identity'. She is aware of the radicalness of this discourse on the right, even today, as she incorporates potential criticism in her discourse:

> You may answer that between France and Europe you have to choose. That I'm a Europeanist or even a fake patriot and yet I am firmly that we have to move beyond French patriotism to be fully effective in the relentless battle for our identity.
>
> *(D'Escufon, 2022a)*

d'Escufon explicitly positions herself as an activist that fights for a European empire in which Frenchness gets its place. This European dimension in which to understand her French nationalism is reminiscent of *La Nouvelle Droite's* innovation of the far-right. The identitarianism of Faye and Generation Identity is now mediated by a young French girl.

Important here to note is how she mobilizes not just this identitarian new right discourse, she also brings in style and adopts influencer tactics. She is always dressed in a feminine style with a French flavour: skirts with pastel-coloured tops, and in this case also stiletto boots. Her appearance is carefully staged. She usually has this nostalgic blue background accompanied by hip white seventies space-age furniture. On the television, we see a purple-coloured vaporwave graphic with the words 'Defend Europe'. These words not only refer to the topic of the video but of course also to the former 'Defend Europe' missions of Generation Identitaire. The logo in the background pictures a hand with a flare that turns into Thai. The flares are again echoing her activism with Generation Identity. Even though we see her in this professional décor, she also uses clever influencer tactics like addressing her audience directly, sharing more personal experiences and creating a para-social bond with her followers.

Le natifs Paris

Thais d'Escufon is not the only way in which Generation Identitaires lives. Generation Identitaire also reappears in a series of new movements operating on a lower scale. One of the most prominent of those movements is *Les Natifs Paris* (The Parisian Natives). Les Natifs presents themselves as a group of 'young, proud and rooted Parisians' engaged in 'action, community building and sports'. The logo of the movement is a hipster-like figure, including an (ironic) so-called French moustache and vintage hat, a playful take on the far-right hipster image of Generation Identitaire. The blue and white colours of the logo echo the logo of Defend Europe and the Generation Identity billboards during the march in Paris a couple of months before, and of course also those of Thais d'Escufon's YouTube décor.

The movement officially started on 11 November 2021 with a post on Instagram and Telegram. This hypermedia strategy, from the very start, shows how this new movement is very aware of potential deplatforming, and immediately prepares for it. The post is a series of three photos of drawings of a

French World War I soldier glued on walls and pillars in the French Capital. The intertextual connection with the panels during the last Generation Identitaire March is explicit. The French soldier is again used as an emblem of the battle for the survival of the nation. *Les Natifs* claim to have redecorated Paris with these posters to honour those 'men who have sacrificed themselves so that we could stay French'. This first post immediately has uptake: more than 600 people like it, among which are Dries Van Langenhove, the president of Schild & Vrienden, and activist accounts like deus_vult and Patria, and movement accounts like Nemesis Besançon (the identitarian feminist movement) and La Relève (Free and conservative youth movement). In the first 15 days, the page managed to have 1,000 followers, and they doubled that in May 2022. This is not a page that starts from scratch; Le Natifs are clearly heavily networked and that network is not limited to the Parisian borders.

In the press release of 12th of November 2021, the new movement claimed to be forced into the resistance as a result of the growing insecurity, cosmopolitanism and third-world-ism, and the fact that 'the natives' are forgotten by media and politicians. The former members of Generation Identitaire now appropriate a discourse of 'the natives' against their colonizers. This type of discourse of course echoes the work of Guillaume Faye on the colonization of Europe. It is thus also not a coincidence that Guillaume Faye's 'Why we fight' is the first book they recommend their followers to read. In that same Instagram post, they also recommend Dominque Venner. In another Instagram Post dedicated to their 'Cercle de lecture #1', we see again books of Venner, but also the Clash of Civilizations by Samuel Huntington and a book from Eric Zemmour, the far-right presidential candidate in 2022. The ideology and the discourse of *Les Natifs* echo Generation Identity and the ideological work of Faye and *La Nouvelle Droite*. Generation Identitaire may be dissolved, but we see a whole series of new pages, movements and influencers popping up.

The practices of this 'new movement' are also clearly informed by the 'repertoires of collective action' (Tilly, 1974: 143–171) developed in Generation Identitaire. The spectacular but albeit small, local, offline but afterwards heavily mediated activism on social media has been introduced on the right by Generation Identitaire. The French identitarians followed de Benoist's call to learn from the methodologies of the left, to renew the right and enlarge its metapolitical impact. This repertoire of collective action was first appropriated by the original French movement *Generation Identitaire* from organizations like Green Peace to serve their nationalist cause. *Les Natifs* reuse this model when they mobilize around Notre Dame, the famous medieval cathedral in Paris that burned in 2019. They published the first Instagram post dedicated to the perseverance of La Notre Dame on 29 March, and four more posts followed. The posts frame La Notre Dame as part of the French patrimony that has to be rebuilt in its original form. In this discourse, Notre Dame is mythicized as an exceptional and fascinating Parisian heritage 'that

brought Paris closer to heaven' (Les Natifs, Instagram post, 29 March 2022). The metapolitical potential of Notre Dame is not to be underestimated. Roland Barthes already captured the mythological power of gothic cathedrals as they are 'the supreme creation of an era, conceived with the passion of unknown artists, and consumed in image if not in usage by a whole population which appropriates them as a purely magical object' (Barthes, 1957: 88). In their online communication about the Notre Dame, this cultural capital is appropriated in the metapolitical battle. The cathedral is discursively framed not just as a cathedral, but as part of the identity of the French and even more, as an object from another universe.

The Notre Dame is also symbolic among identitarians for another reason. It is the place where Dominique Venner – one of the prominent intellectuals of *La Nouvelle Droite* – committed suicide in 2013. He saw his suicide, according to his suicide note, as a sacrifice 'to break the lethargy that overwhelms us'. This sacrifice was done in order to protest and lay the foundation of protest by others. His 'voluntary death' was meant to awaken 'the slumbering conscience'. In order to do this he said that he has chosen this 'highly symbolic place, The Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, that I respect and admire, because it was built by the genius of my ancestors on even older places of worship, recalling our immemorial origins.' (Venner, 2013 my translation). He understands his suicide as a potential rebirth, as a negation of the inevitability of the civilizational decline caused by individualism, consumer culture and the replacement of our people. The Notre Dame, In Venner's mind, stands for the complete opposite: the eternal, the spirit of tradition and the ancestors.

The Notre Dame is thus in many ways a central symbol of this identitarian struggle. Les Natifs dedicate 4 out of 20 posts to the topic of Notre Dame. It is also around the Cathedral that they mobilize and organize offline action. On 9 December 2021, they distributed flyers with the cathedral on it and the slogan 'Stop Au Saccage' (Stop the Rampage). They target the idea to turn the cathedral into a tourist museum and demand that it is rebuilt the way it was. This taps into that magical feeling that a cathedral evokes, and this re-enchantment of the cathedral contributes to the overall metapolitical goal to create an irrational, affective bond between people and this superlative object of history. On 16 April 2022, they again put an Instagram post online, now with a movie of the burning Notre Dame and the slogan to never forget the fire and ask people to fight for it. The movement uses hashtags to have a broader uptake: #notredame, #france, #honneur, #patrimonie, #paris and #incendienotredame. The hashtags allow them to tap into a broader audience, not necessarily in tune with the identitarian ideology. These hashtags serve as an indexing system in a clerical sense (Rosa & Bonilla, 2015: 5): they allow people looking for these topics to stumble upon these posts and maybe become convinced about the battle of Les Natifs. Hashtags of course

also function as semiotic indexes as they frame the post as a fight for the patrimony of Paris and France. The metapolitical function is the result of these two index systems combined. The post, with its hashtags, presents *Le Natifs'* activism as a committed but not necessarily radical fight for France to new audiences, and it uses the object that is commonly read as an object of brilliance, of an absence of origin (Barthes, 1957: 88) to fight against its desacrification by turning it into an all too human tourist museum.

The protest in front of Notre Dame follows the recipe of *Generation Identitaire*: small-scale protest with a limited number of activists, but remediatized on social media to have a large impact. This upscaling of activism – from the local to the national scale – is done by using social media: Twitter, Instagram and Telegram are used to generate uptake. The action is also mediatized by the Instagram account Occidentis.fr. This social media page has over 41,000 followers and the reel post they made receives 3,323 likes. Occidentis is a far-right news site dedicated to the same topics as the identitarian movement: the fight against wokeness, antiracism and LGBTQ+ movement and for homogenous cultures and nations. *Les Natifs Paris* uses the repertoires of resistance of Generation Identitaire and uses heritage to mobilize militants and French citizens for their cause. At the same time, the visibility is also realized by trying to generate uptake in a large French and international network of sympathizers.

Metapolitical networks

Les Natif Paris and Thais d'Escufon form, together with many different identitarian nodes that have been created in the last years, a new metapolitical French network. Thais d'Escufon explicitly referred to this network in her May 2022 video. She sees La Furia (22,3K followers on Instagram), La Cocarde Etudiante (16,7K followers on Instagram), SOS Calvaires (24,3K followers on Instagram) and Generation Z (42,7K followers on the main account on Instagram) as different nodes in a larger network of influencers, movements, and think tanks that fight metapolitically and politically. Generation Z is the most obvious reemergence of Generation Identitaire in France. Interestingly, this reemergence came in the form of a new political movement in support of the presidential candidacy of Eric Zemmour. Zemmour was, after the dissolution of Generation Identity, one of the more prominent talking heads to support Generation Identity. Generation Identity, said Zemmour, is a victim of the 'at the same time' policy of Macron. With this, he referred to a policy that he accuses President Macron to deploy. Namely, he suggests that Macron wants to balance out the banning of some Islamist groups by banning a victim on the right to compensate (Figaro, 2021).

Considering this explicit support for Generation Identity, it is quite unsurprising that Damien Rieu, co-founder and former spokesman of Generation

Identity, announced that he would join Eric Zemmour in his fight for the French presidential elections.

> While I originally could be counted among the skeptics, I gradually acquired the conviction that it is around Reconquest! and Generation Z that the recomposition - and therefore the future - of the rooted right will take place (…). I made the decision to join in my turn the campaign of Eric Zemmour.
> *(Bourgeois, 2022)*

Note here the stress on the word 'rooted right' (la droite enracinée in French), which is also very visible in the framing of *Les Natifs Paris* as '*Les jeunes Parisiens fiers & enracinés*'.

The presence of the former spokesman is very clear, not only in the name of Generation Z, its 'rootedness' or the overall topic of the party, namely the reconquering of France but also in the digital presence of this political youth movement. Each large French city gets its own chapter of this political movement and its own digital presence on Instagram and Facebook. As such, the movement builds a layered, polycentric movement and a digital environment in which they can produce information that steers the minds of the followers. The same digital structure of local chapters of identitarian activists is also visible in the already mentioned network of identitarian 'feminist' movements called Nemesis (Collectif.nemesis on Instagram). This French collective has dozens of local chapters on the city level (Nemesis_lille59, Nemesis_lyon69, Nemesis_caen14, Nemesis_morbihan56, Nemesis_reims51, …) active on Instagram, but also chapters in Switzerland (Nemesis_suisse) and Belgium (Nemesis_ Bruxelles). All these pages have between a couple of hundreds and a couple of thousands of followers, and the pages are also following each other. The result is the construction of an identitarian ecosystem now targeting especially women. Note how these identitarians appropriate the label 'feminism' in their metapolitical battle. The appropriation echoes the metapolitics of de Benoist and Champetiers claiming to be 'feminists differentielle'. In the manifesto of these 'non-comformist feminists', we read that they fight for 'Western women' and that they have three objectives:

> (1) Denounce all violence against women both in their daily life, at their place of work or even in the street. (2) Denounce the dangerous impact of mass immigration on Western women so that this subject becomes a public debate. (3) Promote European civilization, not as having reduced women to the role of objects, but as the cradle of their fulfilment.

This 'feminism' is a good example of what Farris (2012) calls femonationalism, or the contemporary mobilization of (specific) feminist ideas by nationalists, or in this case identitarians for metapolitical goals. The fight for

women's rights is here subordinate to the fight for 'European civilization' and against mass immigration. In other words, feminism is here metapolitical discourse for the embrace of 'white women' and the expulsion and demonization of the migrant other.

Generation Z, *Les Natif Paris* and Nemesis are all metapolitical digital networks that propagate the same discourse: an identitarian discourse targeting specific niches (based on age, location, gender and nation). Together they upscale this network and bring together many different niches in one national polycentric movement. Generation Identity may be dissolved, but it has come back in many different forms, through many different digital accounts, addressing many different audiences and topics. From 'identitarian feminists', to 'heritage fighters', to political movements and metapolitical influencers: Generation Identity morphs in many different constellations. And this change, as a result of bans and deplatforming, will probably be perpetual. It is also not limited to France. In Belgium, we see that Schild & Vrienden has lost traction and that Feniks was the first spin-off that tried to take off where Schild & Vrienden left off but is now tailored to generate uptake in times of Covid-19. Dries Van Langenhove is now functioning as a metapolitical influencer on YouTube, but also as a politician that uses his speaking rights in parliament for metapolitical goals.

The global new right as a complex system

The global new right today, when I'm writing this conclusion of the last chapter of the book, looks nothing like the global new right when I started this project seven years ago. And it will probably look entirely different when the readers read these sentences. Understanding the global new right as a layered, polycentric and transnational network benefits from a perspective informed by the notion of complex systems. All the practices and publications of new right intellectuals, influencers and movements are historical documents; they are testimonies of the histories of those actors in ever-changing compositions. The case studies in this book shouldn't be read as attempts of fixing for once and for all what the global new right is; they are chronicles of complexity, indexes of this complex system that is perpetually changing and evolving.

In such a complex system, we encounter different historicities and different speeds in interaction. In the period 2008–2015, not that much was visible of that network, at least for 'normies'. But the building blocks of that global new right network were already decades in the making. This happened slowly, at least seen from the outside. The rise of Web 2.0 allowed new right actors to increasingly connect, upscale, play above their game and reach a broader audience. Even more, it changed the whole movement. The alt-right label for instance was not owned by Richard Spencer anymore when it enjoyed global uptake: it was the digital culture of Web 2.0 and its prosumer-oriented

technologies and practices that turned 'the alt-right' into an important node in this global new right network. The alt-right that became globally famous was a networked movement. The prominent actors of that network were not in first instance the think tanks and the long essays, but the #alt-right hashtag, the trolling and meming by anonymous and less anonymous actors. The intellectual foundation was years in the making, but the actual success was the result of digital culture and the affordances and algorithms of the digital ecosystem. 'The alt-right', said Spencer, 'is what it is today not because of me; it is what it is today because I let it go. I didn't possess it, and it was taken up by all these people' (Spencer quoted in Hawley, 2017: 68). This sudden success is a classic network effect and it cannot be understood as the result of the internal strength of the movement; it is the result of a complex series of socio-technical assemblages. The controversies that accompanied the #altright movement were ticking all the algorithmic boxes of the mainstream digital platforms at the time. The uptake was not just an uptake of ideas, it was very much an algorithmic uptake biased towards sensation, controversies and in general, attention-grabbing content. Activists succeeded in gaming the algorithms in order to acquire spreadability.

This in turn introduced very fast changes in the network: the alt-right became an important node in a truly global phenomenon. A phenomenon that, especially after the election of Trump, drew global mainstream media attention. The alt-right became the talk of the town. This visibility, in the end, triggered all kinds of external forces: platforms, governments and civil society actors were all of a sudden very conscious about the emergence of this new right movement. Counter-movements were born, and a leftist activist punched Spencer, governments were increasingly alarmed and platforms were pressured by government and economic interests to take action. New right and extreme-right movements, activists and intellectuals took notice of this new edgy and seemingly polar movement. The alt-right functioned as an important order of indexicality on a global scale.

The story of Generation Identity is quite similar, albeit different. It came into existence when the right adopted left-wing methodologies and used them to launch a new identitarian discourse. The use of digital media platforms allowed the movement to grow rapidly: it became a pan-European networked movement first and in the slipstream of the alt-right it became a global phenomenon. The larger the movement became, and the more attention it grabbed through the mediatization of their metapolitical activism, the more it became the object of intense scrutiny and counteractions from platforms and governments. This crackdown was not the end of this movement, but it did have to reinvent itself and morph in many different and unpredictable ways. New nodes operating on different scale levels with different tools are emerging, and as a result not only does the French metapolitical landscape change but also the global new right takes new shapes, acquires new faces,

new discourses and new practices. This perpetual change as a result of internal (infighting, ideological differences, …) and external causes (prosecution, deplatforming, deplatformization) is the essence of this metapolitical network.

The global new right is a perpetually changing system of systems united in a metapolitical battle for a different world order. The backbone of this network is the different media platforms they use to fight and undermine hegemony. As long as the digital mainstream platforms were committed as much as possible to a non-intervention governance strategy, this global new right could easily upscale through networking and expand its reach and thus gain more power. The libertarian and digital utopianist ideology embedded in much of the Silicon Valley-based platforms wasn't much of a strong supporter of the neoliberal hegemony. This changed after 2016. First, we saw the ban of Milo after relentless trolling and then the case of the first deplatformization wave in 2017 after the Charlottesville attack. This dialectic between metapolitics and violence has caused increased platform governance, and thus – from the perspective of the far-right – guardians of hegemony. The Web 2.0 set-up of these digital platforms is of course in its core vulnerable to the perpetual reemergence of new accounts, new platforms and new groups who use those platforms for new metapolitical projects and to lure the mainstream audiences to more niched platforms with less moderation.

As a result of these dynamics, we see an increasingly complex multitude of crisscrossing and overlapping multiscalar metapolitical projects. The different scales can display different kinds of order, some can be stable for a very long time, but then all of a sudden as a result of external or internal causes, morph rapidly into new projects and new networks. The new right is thus not a homogenous group, fighting for power. What all these groups do seem to share is an acute understanding that for this new world to be born, metapolitical action in the digital realm is necessary. This metapolitical action is deeply embedded in several digital cultures operating more towards the mainstream and at the same time also extremely niched in the case of metapolitical terrorist culture. A second essential characteristic of the global new right is that this system is perpetually in motion. The global new right is a highly unstable system, but it is still a system and thus a structure. A structure where some features are stable for a long time (metapolitical, *La Nouvelle Droite,* ….) and others have a higher pace of change and development.

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8

METAPOLITICS, ALGORITHMS AND VIOLENCE

On 17 May 2021, Jürgen Cönings, a Belgian soldier suspected of extreme-right leanings, stole heavy weaponry among which were four rocket launchers, a personal defence weapon and a semi-automatic weapon from the military depots in the Belgian army station in Leopoldsburg. The day after, he left three farewell letters and took his military decoration with him to put it on the family grave. Cönings was listed as a potentially violent extremist and was known to be in contact with Thomas Boutens, a convicted far-right terrorist. In the years before, he had already threatened Marc Van Ranst, the Belgian virologist who became known during the Covid-19 pandemic. Police confirmed that Cönings had two targets for his intended terrorism, Marc Van Ranst and the Tevhid-moskee in Eisden (Maasmechelen, Belgium). In his farewell letters, he focused on the political elites and virologists controlling our lives:

'I can't live with the lies of people who decide how we should live' (…) The so-called political elite, and now also virologists, decide how you and I should live. They incite hatred and frustration (…) and nobody resist. And if you say something, you get punished. I go in the resistance'. (Cönings, my translation)

That Cönings was serious about his plans about going 'into the resistance' is beyond any doubt. On the 18th, Cönings drove to Van Ranst's house with an SUV full of guns. When he found that the virologist was not at home, he fled into a nearby forest. Those letters, his presence at Van Ranst's house and the theft of the guns were the start of a manhunt which lasted until 21 June 2021 when a passer by found Coning's dead body.

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Jürgen Cönings and the dialectics of metapolitics

The heavily mediatized manhunt also led to the Facebook page 'Als 1 achter Jurgen'(As one behind Jürgen). The about section of the page stated: 'Save our hero. This is abuse of power'. In three days' time, the group had managed to have over 8,100 members. In the end, more than 45,000 people joined the group. Even though not all members of the group fully supported JC's intentions and narrative, the dominant narratives depicted Jürgen Cönings at the very least as a victim of the system and its imperial wars, the majority even saw him as more, as a 'hero of the resistance'. To them, Cönings was a 'freedom fighter' and the mass media, politicians and even the police were seen as liars. This shared mindset is the product of their previous socialization in different niches and their interactions in this group. Some people had a longer history within the far-right, others were more recently socialized within anti-vax groups or groups that were highly critical of Covid-19 policies of the government, and several had a long history in more conspiracy-oriented groups. What people in this new social niche shared was a distrust of mass media and the 'elites' in society. In the interaction in this group, a dominant meta-narrative that constructed an oppressive and especially untrustworthy and hypocritical elite that doesn't care about its people emerged. The exact definition of those elites could vary substantially. One user would see the so-called Vivaldi government of Belgium as the elites in control, another would frame the national mass media as the elites lying to the people. The elites were also described as 'rats' and 'filthy whores'. In other posts, 'the elites' would suddenly refer to actors operating on a different scale: Facebook & Zuckerberg and of course, Soros and his Avaaz became targets of their anger. No matter who exactly was depicted as the elite, they were imagined to be all-powerful: in control, being able to set up conspiracies on a global scale, organizing not only what is acceptable in public debate, but also controlling the people in the public sphere. Some of these populist depictions have long local histories in the discourses of the Flemish far-right party Flemish Interest, other discourses have more recent and international origins. They all got synchronized together in one layered narrative that framed Jürgen Cönings as the 'resistance' fighting for the people – our children in particular – against those lying elites.

The post from one of the admins of the Facebook group is emblematic of this populist narrative. Jürgen Cönings, according to him, can count on 'a lot of support of the people' which gives the 'Vivaldi government an uncanny feeling'. Cönings makes them uneasy because he is seen as too knowledgeable about things that the government wants to hide. Cönings is described in a QAnon kind of narrative: as somebody in the know, who knows the system from within and is now fighting for us. And this is of course life threatening for those elites, and subsequently also life threatening for Cönings, as those elites will not hold back to save their power. As a result of his inside

knowledge, the elites try to discredit him. That is why they frame him and his supporters as 'extreme right'. The admin of the page openly dreams of a mutiny within the army that will force the government to resign and 'throw the virologists under the bus'. This post is emblematic of the pre-revolutionary narrative in the group. The uptake of it was substantial; within the first four hours, more than 50 people shared it on their own profiles. This engagement indexes a culture of commitment, and a shared view on the political constellation and the need for resistance.

This discourse and its niched popular uptake align well with the conceptualization of the government, media and 'the elites' in the discourses of the many niches that made up the Capitol Riots. That narrative also framed the state and the media as bad for the people. Covid-19 discourses only reinforced this distrust of the government and the elites. Conspiracy thinkers constructed all kinds of wild claims about Covid-19 as part of a scheme of world domination. The Covid-19 measures were a new fault line in society and far-right and radical right movements, parties and influencers were using this new world to produce new discourses, find support and of course also metapolitically exploit this health crisis. They fed the myth that Covid-19 was nothing more than a tool to issue a society of full control (Fuchs, 2021). Whereas in the United States Fauci was seen as the demon by Trump supporters, in Flanders the radical and extreme-right were targeting Marc Van Ranst as an emblem of a government destroying its people.

In such a constellation, a culture of violence can grow. When one member of the 'Als 1 achter Jurgen' group wrote, 'I want to ask a very honest question to the thousands of members of this group: Would you reconsider your support if Jürgen kills somebody? And would it depend on the victim?', the answers were telling. A majority of the 92 comments explicitly stated that they would keep supporting him. In the latter group some invoke the notion of self-defence, or argue that the government is mafia and thus legitimates any defence: 'it is about the future of our children', says one user. Several argue that they wouldn't mind if Marc Van Ranst would disappear and some even argue that he should 'receive another medal if he would kill MvR (Marc Van Ranst)'. Another one goes even further, claiming that he would have even more respect for Cönings if he kills some 'snobs in BXL' (referring to a politician in government) and that 'he wouldn't mind him killing some coloured people'. Such interactions normalize violence as a way to save 'the people' from 'the elites'.

Just like in the United States, the manhunt on Jürgen Cönings brought together people from different niches and fused them into one temporal group. The online support of Jürgen Cönings in this Facebook functions as a learning environment. It facilitates the rapid merger of extreme-right populist discourses and anti-Corona protest spiced up with racist discourses and anti-government discourses. This new synchronized discourse is moulded on

existing international far-right voices: we hear echoes of Trump, Groypers, QAnon discourses and conspiracy theories on Covid-19. Those discursive ingredients were made to work in the local context. This group can also not be detached from discourses that got quite some airplay in the whole Flemish hybrid media system. The focus on Van Ranst as a doctor of doom, and thus a puppet of the elites, was not limited to this marginal niche of society. Theo Francken, a popular politician of the radical right anti-Enlightenment party N-VA (Maly, 2016), called Marc Van Ranst doctor Hate. Feniks, anti-Covid protestors and Flemish Interest constructed the government as bad for the people, as stealing our freedom.

The party that capitalized the most on the Covid-19 protests in Flanders was the extreme-right party Flemish Interest. This party, of which Cönings used to be a member, was targeting the Corona policies quite hard. 18 days before Cönings' plan started to unfold in the real world, Tom Van Grieken, the President of Flemish Interest, held his traditional 1 May speech under the banner 'Time for Freedom!'. That speech was fully dedicated to the 'attack on freedom' by the Belgian government. The government was accused of unconstitutional behaviour, absurd measures and stealing the freedom of the people. The speech was remediatized on YouTube where it was seen over 5,000 times. In the opening statement of this YouTube video, we see Tom Van Grieken on his way to Mechelen saying that 'In the last year our freedom has been taken away by this Purple-Green government' (Vlaams Belang, 2021). And he added that 'what bothers me the most, is that the ministers who have taken away our freedom, don't follow those rules themselves'. The discourse of lying, untrustworthy politicians stealing the freedom of the people was produced here, long before the support group of Cönings came to life. And Van Grieken was not the inventor of this discourse either; Trump and many other radical and extreme-right voices and conspiracy theorists around the world beat him to it. This is classic politics of recognition: Van Grieken addresses different audiences – including anti-vaxxers, conspiracy theorists and of course his traditional voters – without fully and explicitly articulating the known conspiracy theories. He walks a thin line between what is 'acceptable discourse' and full-blown conspiracy theories.

This type of criticism targeting the Corona measures of the government seamlessly ties into more traditional extreme-right discourses linking multiculturality and crime (Maly, 2020a). The measures, argued Van Grieken, 'have to be enforced by police and security staff. But these people are increasingly confronted with a lack of respect and even physical violence'. These utterances of the president of Flemish Interest are edited on cell phone videos showing 'allochthone youths' fighting with security staff of the railways. The intro of the video ends with Van Grieken stressing that they are ready to fight, to fight hard for the freedom of the people. In the next shot, we see Van Grieken arriving just in time in Mechelen to see the speech of his Flemish

Interest colleague Wim Verheyden. In the fragment, Verheyden focused on 'Sihame-gate' and connected it to the multicultural policies in Flanders. Sihame El Kaouakibi was famous as the driving force behind several dance projects helping allochthone youths integrate. Because of her fame and qualities as a 'role model' she was invited by the liberal party to get into politics. Soon she was accused of massive fraud. Her trajectory from civil society to top politics was used by Verheyden to stress that multicultural policies are devasting for the Flemish people. This same blend of narratives was also very common on the 'As 1 behind Jurgen' Facebook page: the popularity of Sihame and the fact that she wasn't jailed yet, was contrasted with Cönings' history, his service for the country and the massive manhunt. It was all read as proof that something fishy was going on.

In a Facebook page like 'As 1 behind Jürgen', we see the impact of a multilayered and polycentric far-right metapolitical battle. This battle has been waged over the last four decades and has accounted for the normalization of certain radical ideas about 'the elites' and the replacement of the people. This metapolitics can very quickly be adapted to new topics. Conspiracy theories play an important role here. They tap into a by now widespread and shared feeling of distrust towards governments and elites among many niches ranging from the classic extreme-right militants to the QAnon moms or yoga communities. Within those niches, this shared feeling can best be described with what Raymond Williams has called structures of feelings (Williams, 1961: 69–90). The oxymoron in structures of feeling forces us to focus on the relation between agency and structure, on the poiesis-infrastructure nexus I discussed earlier: on the becoming of, the emergence of a culture of a period. In the context of the global new right, structures of feeling do not necessarily work on the level of a period or a nation, but within the different niches of the global new right, they create a sharedness. It is that sharedness that allows members of those niches to see themselves as kindred spirits, as victims of the system, of the elites.

Structures of feeling, said Williams, are 'the actual living sense, the deep community that makes the communication possible, is naturally drawn upon' (Williams, 1961: 69). He used the concept to define a social experience that is still in process, in motion and in becoming. Conspiracy theories, as the Sorelian myths we have defined them, provide alternative views and new hypotheses to understand reality and form the largely ungrabbable building blocks that facilitate communication among members of such newly and rapidly emerging groups. They tie together the most extreme conspiracy theories, with the extreme-right populist discourse. They shape a general populist cultural coherence in which 'the elites', including scientists, politicians and journalists, are creating a fake world. Even though Van Grieken does not explicitly talk about a conspiracy, and he doesn't mention Bill Gates, Soros or a secret group planning world domination, his discourse addresses those who

believe in such conspiracy theories. His discourse has the quality of blending believers in such theories with older anti-migration groups. The notion of 'the elites' allows for that shared feeling of being lied to, being betrayed, the general feeling that 'something is seriously wrong', no matter in which of the different anti-elite niches people were socialized in. This shared feeling creates openness to alternative views and to the narratives of others who seem to share that same distrust.

This structure of feeling is metapolitically created and exploited by all kinds of activist movements (think of Feniks), influencers (Dries Van Langenhove, Nick Fuentes, …), far-right intellectuals (Alexander Dugin) and politicians (Tom Van Grieken of Flemish Interest, Thierry Baudet of Forum for Democracy). This general distrust in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic is then connected to other topics where that same structure of feeling is exploited. Covid-19 measures are in that respect connected to the politicians' mishandling of migration. Not only can all topics be mobilized to undermine the legitimacy of those 'in power', the topics can be connected. In moments of crises, the connection of these topics, and the niched groups that gather around those topics can be mobilized and form mobs or breed resistance and even violence. All those local and translocal narratives are synchronized in a niched shared experience in which a potential far-right terrorist like Jürgen Cönings can suddenly become a hero. We cannot understand the support for Coning's intended violence if we isolate it from the metapolitics of the right. The sharp distinction between violence and metapolitics, as Ravndal (2021) advocates, underestimates the power of ideas. Or more concretely, this hard distinction makes blind the relation between symbolic and physical violence inherently tied into the new right metapolitical project. As we have seen throughout this book, it is not metapolitics or violence. There is a far more complex dialectical relation between metapolitics and far-right terrorism. Tarrant, Roof, but also the shooters in Halle, El Paso and Buffalo were all motivating their terrorist action through the mobilization of discourses of decline, celebration of diversity, saving their people and fighting against replacement. They were all targeting the elites destroying the people. Cönings is no exception, his targets – a Mosque and a left-wing virologist – are emblematic of the metapolitics of the Flemish new right and the merger of recent anti-Covid discourses and long established anti-migration discourses. Dries Van Langenhove, Flemish Interest and Theo Francken framed Van Ranst as a left-wing and polarizing icon of a government oppressive of its own people.

Every societal topic can be metapolitically exploited and merged with other topics. Together all these narratives, and the groups that mobilize and are mobilized through those narratives, can function as one metapolitical network, and – when the time is right and circumstances collide – be mobilized into an offline mass by existing or new movements, influencers and parties. That was the lesson of the Capitol Riots. Metapolitics 2.0 succeeds

in creating a shared feeling that everything is going wrong, and that the elites, the left and immigrants are to blame. It is this sense of urgency that mobilizes.

Metapolitics 2.0 and global digital new right cultures

Understanding contemporary new right violence and terrorism demands contextualizing it in a decade-old metapolitical battle. New right metapolitics with its stress on the decline of society, its neo-racism and the construction and exclusion of 'the other' in terms of the destructiveness of the left, the feminist, the liberal and the ethnic other sets a frame of 'war'. The enemy is accused of waging war on traditions, language, culture and our identity: it shapes a worldview where there is an ongoing war against the people. Metapolitics, and especially a Faye-inspired identitarian metapolitics 2.0, legitimates the necessity of urgent action. As Faye's *compagnion du route* Robert Steuckers argues, Faye's discourse 'hyper mobilizing' (Steuckers, 2020: 12). This hypermobilization comes from the urgency he sketches and the hope that he provides that change is still possible. Combine this with a discourse of war, and it is a matter of time that someone sees it as a duty to act. In essence, new right metapolitics is a revolutionary project designed to first change the hearts and minds of people, but with the end goal of overthrowing the established order. In a world of networked individualism and affective audiences, this resistance can take many different shapes: from revolution and even terrorism to posting stickers, bodybuilding and binge-watching YouTube videos.

Metapolitics, as envisioned by *La Nouvelle Droite*, was, as we have seen, in the first instance an intellectual exercise and it was produced in classic intellectual products: journals, books, congresses, think tanks, and (intellectual) websites. It focused on giving the extreme and far-right an intellectual foundation. In the first decade of the 21st century, we saw similar strategies deployed by new right activists all over the world. The renaissance of the new right in Germany in the 21st century was embedded in new institutions and organizations like the 'Institut für Staatspolitik,' the 'Bibliothek des Konservatismus,' and magazines like *Sezession* (see Salzborn, 2016 for an overview). In the United States too, we see that people like Greg Johnson and Richard Spencer and the alt-right in general, influenced by the metapolitics of *La Nouvelle Droite*, invested in setting up think tanks (National Policy Institute), publishing houses (Arktos and Counter-Currents) and websites (*Taki's Magazine*, Occident Observer, Counter-Currents) that were dedicated to intellectually ground a North American new right movement (Johnson, 2012).

The global renaissance of new right movements and their metapolitical strategies soon morphed in the second decade of the 21st century. Contemporary new right activists, as a result of their integration into digital mainstream and more niched platforms and the digital cultures they bred, used very

different means to engage in 'metapolitics.' In the United States we witnessed the rise of the alt-right as a digital culture. #Gamergate was a first turning point, as it showed the possibilities for right-wing activism using trolling and memetic warfare (Yiannopoulos, 2017; Maly, 2018d). These new forms of metapolitical activism use digital media to attract young(er) people and give them an 'edgy' and revolting character. Adopting these new digital cultures came with the claim that 'the right' is the edgy avant-garde of their generation. The internet, and especially the digital utopianist moderation policies of mainstream social platforms enabled the new right, and especially the so-called alt-light in the United States, to rethink their metapolitical project in terms of 'popular culture' and journalism. Breitbart for instance was from the start set up as a metapolitical project. 'Culture matters', writes Milo (Yiannopoulos, 2017: 27) while quoting Andrew Breitbart, stating that 'politics is downstream from culture.' The site was set up to be integrated into mainstream digital media so it could reach a broad audience or in other words normalize and popularize its ideological agenda. It functioned as an entryist vehicle for more radical nodes in the global new right network. The same logic was also visible in other projects like altright.com, The Daily Stormer or in the visibility of new right activists in their YouTube vlogs and collabs (Lewis, 2018).

These 'local renewals' soon transgressed borders and influenced activists from all corners of the world. This was not an accidental by-product, but the result of already existing infrastructures of a global new right. Arktos played a pivotal role, as did several important websites with a more global reach like Reddit, 4chan and 8chan. Mass media did the rest: their attention to these new practices allowed new right activists to upscale their game. This 'edgy' new right digital culture found solid ground to grow in Europe. No coincidence there: metapolitics, the European new right product par excellence, came back home in a whole new package and it fused with a more activist new right culture and political climate that was growing for several decades in Europe. Pegida and Generation Identity were emblematic of those new metapolitical developments in Europe (Salzborn, 2016: 50). These movements, usually embedded within mainstream digital media like Facebook, not only try to tap into feelings of alienation, poverty, and fast change in an era of digitalization, globalization, neoliberalism, and superdiversity, but also set up new forms of activism. Whereas the mass protests of Pegida were used to make a populist claim by referring to offline mobilization power, the identitarian movements used highly mediatized activism to claim the voice of their generation and to give their positions an 'edgy' feel. Generation Identity used the affordances of digital media to choreograph offline protest marches and organize small-scale interventions that were later remediatized to reach bigger audiences and to conceal that they are not able to mobilize larger audiences offline. Both movements exploited the core principles of the attention economy and had huge salience in the hybrid media system, again on a regional, national and transnational scale.

Metapolitics	*Metapolitics 2.0*
• *Preserve an intellectual elite* • *Papers, articles, books* • *Intellectualism* • *Content* • *Niched audience* • *High Brow Culture/analogue*	• *Prosumers, influencers, activists, intellectuals, politicians, …* • *Vlogs, memes, trolling, influencers, hashtags, stickers* • *Content and form* • *Message* • *Digital/algorithmic literacy* • *Layered audience* • *Digital Culture/Algorithmic logic*

Especially Generation Identity was, just like the alt-right in the United States, adopting a metapolitical strategy informed by the intellectual work of Guillaume Faye. It is in the uptake of the actions and infrastructures that facilitated this new metapolitical action that the global new right took shape and that new forms of metapolitics saw the light of day. Metapolitics was influenced by the digital utopianism that drives Web 2.0 and has fundamentally changed, becoming metapolitics 2.0.

La Nouvelle Droite's metapolitics, as conceptualized by de Benoist, was the preserve of an intellectual elite. Only the elites – in the case of the far-right intellectuals of *La Nouvelle Droite* – were imagined to produce and thus introduce new ideas in society. To give legitimacy to those ideas, *La Nouvelle Droite* appropriated the scientific form. The focus was first and foremost on content that would be recognized by others as 'intellectual' and thus as deep highbrow cultural ideas. The metapolitics of *La Nouvelle Droite* was directed towards elite audiences of politicians, academics and journalists who would then ideally reproduce those ideas and let them circulate in society. In this conceptualization of metapolitics, the public is imagined as sheeplike consumers and mindless reproducers of the ideas of the elites.

Under the influence of Web 2.0 ideology, and prosumer culture, we see that metapolitics 2.0 is not just produced by a small club of intellectuals. Metapolitics has now been 'democratized': influencers, activists, movements and prosumers now produce and reproduce metapolitical discourse. As a result, metapolitics has changed form. It is not limited to articles, essays or papers anymore. We can now see memes, trolling, hashtags, stickers and posters, but also comments, likes, shares, videos, clothing, conspiracy theories and vaporwave aesthetics as metapolitical action. Metapolitics now has a populist aesthetic as it is integrated into many different popular but niched digital cultures instead of highbrow culture. The style of contemporary metapolitics suggests that this is not the discourse of the elites, but of youth, the common man. As a result of this 'democratization' of metapolitics, metapolitical actors now direct their communication to a much broader but layered and niched network of audiences spanning the globe. In order

to stay integrated into this economy of virality and thus generate uptake, metapolitical influencers but also more traditional far-right activists need to be media literate. They need to develop specific strategies and make full use of the affordances and algorithms of the different media (and their specific media logics), and gain algorithmic knowledge to build an audience and/or community. This communication is not just about content, it is heavily influenced by the media that they use to communicate: metapolitics 2.0 has an algorithmic logic and is influenced by Web 2.0 ideology.

This new type of metapolitics in the digital age is clearly not only about the circulation of ideas, it is also about digital literacy and digital culture. The mediatized performance of the new right identity has in itself become a metapolitical deed. It is through this careful stylization of hair, body, clothes and language that new right actors address different audiences. Such (meta) politics of addressivity and recognition is crucial to stay integrated into many different socio-technical environments at the same time. These integrational and addressive qualities are found in 'the details': the logos on the shirt, the Flemish flag socks and the style of the clothing. These details not only secure their uptake or integration but also preconfigure their cool, edgy and archeo-futuristic society. These norms and meanings communicated through fashion do not just spontaneously erupt, they are introduced by people who have the power and reach to do that. Influencers play, just like in other cultural niches, an important role in the construction of style; in this case, a far-right style.

The ideological strength of the new right in the 21st century stems from the fact that it is a digitally embedded, international and highly eclectic movement. The far-right has not only technologically integrated itself, but it has also culturally integrated its metapolitical battle into the digital mainstream. This integration has fundamental effects not only on concrete metapolitical practices but also on the structure and the reach of the far-right. The far-right has globalized, it has become a transnational, polycentric and layered network, a perpetually changing complex system, where certain ideas and practices and styles are operating on a global scale (think of memes, trolling or the fashy haircut for men) while other practices are only visible and productive on lower scales and in more niched groups. The metapoliticization of the far-right is now a translocal phenomenon deeply intertwined with the digital infrastructures and the local context. The advance of the new right ideology in the 21st century was deeply embedded in the mainstream digital infrastructure. This digital integration ensured that metapolitical actors could scale up and that small niches could expand rapidly. The digital structure facilitated a successful and impactful metapolitical struggle. As a result of symbolic and terrorist new right violence, states and platforms started to increase moderation and juridical measures to stop new right actors. These external pressures cause the global new right to perpetually change, gain strength in some fields and contexts, and lose reach in others. Internal and external pressures force

it to adapt, reorganize and reappear under new names, in new formats and on new platforms. The global new right is a complex system: no matter the constant change, there is order. A complex order that binds the system together. Metapolitics is the glue connecting all those actors in their fight for a new world order grounded in the anti-Enlightenment ideals of that second modernity. A world of homogeneous nations, communities and civilizations that reject democratic ideology.

Metapolitics and the anti-Enlightenment tradition

The French philosopher Claude Lefort (2016) saw democracy and politics as inextricably linked. In his thinking, democracy and politics referred to a never-ending dialogue or struggle between ideas that make up the ever-changing constitution of society. That battle, according to Lefort, is always unfinished. There is never a final solution or an end. This endless dialogue, however, takes place within the limits of democracy. The analytical notion of politics as a discursive struggle for meaning and hegemony is usually implicitly conceived within that political democratic system. It is a struggle to create the constitution of democracy. However, in the case of the new right, their metapolitical struggle questions the very foundations of democracy itself and rejects its ideology and structure. Democracy, the new right and the anti-Enlightenment intellectuals understood quite correctly, is not ideologically empty, nor was it ever politically neutral. It is inherently intertwined with the struggle of the radical Enlightenment thinkers (Israel, 2010). Democracy cannot be separated from the Enlightenment ideology of equality, freedom and universal human rights. At least not without changing the meaning of democracy itself. And that is exactly the goal of metapolitics.

In radical Enlightenment thinking, there can be no democracy without universal human rights. The idea of universal human rights is the foundation of an enlightened democracy. According to the radical Enlightenment thinkers, each individual has inalienable individual rights in democracy. The state and those in power never have the right to restrict those rights. The state is seen as an instrument to guarantee every human being his natural rights. The state is therefore an instrument in the hands of and at the service of the people. According to the Condorcet, despotism and tyranny arise when, in the absence of representative control over the laws, human rights are infringed (Condorcet, 1790). Alexis De Tocqueville pointed out that the citizen therefore has the right to unite and resist against policies that infringe on his rights. If not, people will not live in a democratic regime, but in a tyranny of the ruling majority (De Tocqueville, 1835). Power in this democratic ideology *de facto* rests with the people. 'The people' are not imagined as homogeneous people characterized by shared values, norms and language, but consist of individual people with rights who at all times have the right to protest if

those rights are violated (Hardt, 2007). This individualism is not the antithesis of solidarity or social groups. Individuals are social animals that join and create groups, but – and this is the difference with the anti-Enlightenment tradition: individuals also have the right to leave groups if one sees fit. To realize democracy and human rights, and only then, are revolt and revolution allowed within the Enlightenment tradition. Democracy was not a mere formality, it was always meant to be more than just elections. The essence of democracy therefore lies in respecting and extending human rights. Denis Diderot, Paul Henri Thiry d'Holbach, Emmanuel Joseph Sièyes, Nicolas de Condorcet, Jacques Pierre Brissot, Gabriel Bonnot de Mably, Constantin-François de Chasseboeuf de Volney, Thomas Paine, Joseph Priestley and the Dutch democratic patriots of 1780 all understood representative democracy as embedded in a democratic ideology. Representative democracy had to guarantee that every person was equal: that every person was equally free to live up to his or her own goals, to pursue happiness and to realize his or her ambitions (Israel, 2011: 814).

The political struggle of the global new right functions formally within the limits of democracy: extreme-right and radical right parties like Front National, Zemmour's reconquest, Trump and Flemish Interest use the democratic system to attract voters. They set up parties, and in most cases also set up party activities. They are electable and thus formally part of democracy. But their politics are not democratic; they are a metapolitical instrument. They try to legitimize and spread their ideology through 'democratic' means. We can also make the same conclusion for the various action groups who pretend to speak in the name of the people and exert their 'right to freedom of speech'. A formalistic perspective on democratic space, politics and democracy blinds us for the ideological significance of their political, metapolitical and action-based struggle. Traditionally, anti-Enlightenment conservatism à la Edmund Burke has been on a collision course with democratic ideology. You only have to pick up his booklet Reflections on the Revolution (Burke, 1790) in France to realize that Burke (1790), as Zeev Sternhell convincingly demonstrates, and his followers Hippolyte Taine, Ernest Renan, Joseph de Maistre and Friedrich Meinecke 2, waged a centuries-long ideological struggle against democracy (Sternhell, 2010). That voice was widespread in pre-World War II Europe (Sternhell, 1986), and it is on the rise again today.

If de Benoist and Champetier speak out in favour of democracy in their Manifesto of the French New Right (de Benoist & Champetier, 2000), then that notion of 'democracy' acquires meaning in a very different tradition. Democracy is detached from the Jacobin tradition, its Enlightenment ideology and its connection with universal human rights (de Benoist & Champetier, 2000; de Benoist, 2011). *La Nouvelle Droite's* organic democracy is not based on individual rights, but on 'organic, culturally homogeneous groups'. The new right democracy stands for the realization of

'the common identity of the administrators and the governed' (de Benoist & Champetier, 2000: 18). This 'organic democracy' consists of a people with an identity and is based on a Schmittian distinction between the citizen and the non-citizen, between friend and enemy. *La Nouvelle Droite's* commitment to democracy is not just a rejection of democratic ideology, it is a full frontal attack. The metapolitical embrace of democracy infuses it with an anti-Enlightenment meaning. It becomes a synonym of the nation or the organic group and the power of an aristocratic elite speaking in the name of the people. According to de Benoist and Champetier, the democratic debate is no more than loose opinions and accusations (de Benoist & Champetier, 2000: 19). According to them, we must move towards a new synthesis, a synthesis beyond left and right. We have to build that new order, a new politics. The Schmittian Return of Politics. The metapolitics of the new right creates an anti-democracy. Anti-democracy is not necessarily a dictatorship. It is the mirror image of Jacobin democracy. It is a democracy that has been stripped of the radical Enlightenment ideology. The basis of anti-democracy is not the idea of inalienable, natural rights of the individual, but the primacy of the organic community. As with all anti-Enlightenment thinkers, that community is presented as an independent being, as a body. That body forms a whole that cannot be traced back to the individuals of which it consists. Individuals exist only as part of the whole and the interest of the whole takes precedence.

The body of the community is essentially the moral and social order, and that order must be preserved at all costs. The social order is characterized by inequality: inequality between men and women, between leaders and ordinary people. That inequality is not only defined as natural but as something good. The different organic communities, in turn, create even more inequality or difference. Biological differences add to cultural differences and that results in separate entities that must be preserved. That is the natural order and must not be questioned. Rights are embedded in that natural order and can never be universal for new right actors, let alone inalienable. Rights are acquired within the community. The good, aristocratic elites have the right to lead, the people shouldn't think but execute and live their lives in service of the greatness of the community. The elites think and the people feel. This division of roles within the community forms the basis of the order. The political is thus not universal, but possible only in the organic group. It is that group that has the right to grant rights. It is the group that defines as a group who is a citizen and who is not, who has rights and who does not. And it is the leaders of the group who must lead the community who are the voice of the people.

Richard Spencer takes this classic French new right line of argument in an article about the 4th of July, the American national holiday (Spencer, 2017b). In that piece, he denounces the celebration of the independence of the United States because, like France's national holiday, it is essentially the celebration of the Enlightenment. The national holiday does not celebrate a patriotic

war, but what Spencer, echoing Burke's criticism of the French Revolution, denounces as the victory of 'abstract ideas'. Abstract ideas such as inalienable rights, freedom, equality, and democracy are 'anti-ideals' for Spencer and the global new right in general. Those ideas stand in the way of what the real national ideals should be: 'the soul and history of the people, the source of wisdom and tradition, a vision of something greater and more dominant and powerful than the individual'. Spencer here echoes Julius Evola's vision of 'the true right' (Evola, 2013). Evola also denounced the Enlightenment and the French Revolution in particular as the cause of the destruction of European culture and prestige. According to Spencer, the alt-right should go straight to the heart of the social order, namely the resistance against the philosophers and their ideals of Enlightenment, and should argue for the obvious truth that 'all men are created unequal'.

Enlightenment, argued Guillaume Faye, corrupted democracy. 'Democracy is now a world dogma, but it's a sham democracy, for it neglects the people's interests. Western democracies are actually oligarchies that conceal their betrayal of the Hellenic-Germanic tradition of democracy' (Faye, 2011: 111). He pleads for an organic democracy that is only possible 'among an ethnically homogenous people'. In case of the latter, populism is the solution. 'Populism must be made positive', he argued, as it 'defends the people's interests before that of the political class and advocates direct democracy' (Faye, 2011: 221). We see the same ideas in Génération Identitaire's declaration of war. While the movement claims to stand up for 'democracy', it rejects representative democracy. Her vision on democracy is based on referendums. For Génération Identitaire, direct democracy is the 'real democracy' (Willinger, 2013). Here too, the democratic flag is raised to wage an anti-democratic struggle: A struggle against universal rights and humanism. The radical Enlightenment thinkers, just like the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, saw in direct or simplistic democracy an invitation for unrest, chaos and destruction. For them, it was completely incompatible with the common good and would inevitably result in the undermining of human rights and the fomenting of hatred and racism. Direct democracy reduces democracy to 'the opinion of the people' and thus surrenders people to demagogues. This anti-democratic interpretation of *Génération Identitaire's* commitment to democracy is further substantiated by their explicit struggle: against equality, against universalism and against human rights (Willinger, 2013: 31), and for national homogeneity (Willinger, 2013: 43) for the reproduction of tradition (Willinger, 2013: 71) and for the idea of rebirth, of a new golden age, a new ethnopluralist world order. In that new order, there are no fixed principles and fixed rights, but cultural and ever-changing rights. Anti-democracy is, from an Enlightenment perspective, a tyranny, a despotic regime.

Metapolitics as violence: warriors and the cult of violence

The metapolitical discourse that binds the global new right together undermines not only the legitimacy of the political class but also the system in general. It attacks democracy, universal human rights, liberalism and socialism, in short, materialism. The meta-narrative is one that focuses on decline, decadence and the destruction of a people, its cultures and identity. 'The enemy', wrote Faye (2010: 18), 'is no longer outside but inside the City, and the ruling ideology, paralyzed, is incapable of spotting him'. The mindset that is created is one in which people need to act now, in order to prevent the complete crumbling of society, of culture and of 'who we are'. This type of discourse, with its palingenetic creed, tries to mobilize militants to act for change, to stop the decline and work towards a re-awakening that inaugurates a new era. It prepares for a revolution, for war. Faye is blunt about this:

> The situation our forces find themselves in with respect to the system is similar to that which existed in the 1930s: no point of agreement is possible (…) the only strategy is all-out war. In adopting a revolutionary stance, aimed at overthrowing a civilization, we must be ready to face total war – fight without quarter.
>
> *(Faye, 2010: 19)*

In the interregnum, the phase between the collapse of system and the new order, metapoliticians prepare for the construction of that new universe. Metapolitical actors are seen as responsible for producing the need to rethink a new world order and to fight for its birth. In order to realize that rebirth, a revolution of the mind is first needed. This is the metapolitical strategy: it is set up to socialize people. It hopes to create a shared analysis of the state of affairs and infuses a feeling of urgency. A feeling that action is needed now. After he creates that need to act, The Golden One also provides ways to act: he guides followers in finding the 'right' path. The Golden One tries to build 'metapolitical warriors', that is, alpha males that combine ideological socialization with the becoming of a 'strong man', a disciplined warrior willing to fight for his community, his ideals. A cult of the body is combined with ideological integration and learning how to defend oneself. That action is framed as individual and collective action. The Golden One helps turn 'weak individuals' into alpha men by inspiring them to go to the gym, stop masturbating and become strong. This – as we have seen – can be done individually: men are urged to become 'real men', to turn themselves into alpha men. This fight can also be done in relation to a network of men. The Wild Hunt challenge creates networks of individuals that socialize themselves online.

The identitarian movement adopts a similar focus. Their narrative about replacement and the need to 'defend ourselves, our identity and Europe' speaks with the same urgency to take action. This action is found in the different highly mediatized controversial actions of the movement, but it was also visible in their offline boxing school where they taught their members how to box and defend themselves. This practice was also adopted by Schild & Vrienden in Flanders. They too set up regular boxing, kickboxing and self-defence classes for its militants and posted about it on their socials. Implicit in this discourse on 'defending oneself' is the construction of the other as aggressor, colonizer and destroyer of traditions, culture and identity. The other is the migrant, the left activist, the LGBTQ+ person, the politician, the human rights activist. The metapolitical discourse about migration as colonization is a form of symbolic violence, especially when it succeeds in becoming hegemonic, and thus imposes its meaning on society. When they successfully frame 'the other', they construct 'the other' as enemy and obfuscate the real power relationships and actual policies. This adds an enormous symbolic force to the already unequal power relationships as it frames minorities as warriors in disguise, as Trojan horses. Their humanity is denied as they are never seen as humans that seek help and deserve a humanist approach. They are the only enemies that are at war with us, that are destroying our culture, traditions, society and identity with support of the elites.

The great replacement discourse and its call directed to young men to become warriors in the face of this attack are more than just words. Words are performative. They set their mind towards certain behaviours. That behaviour can be activist in the sense of liking, sharing, posting and commenting online. They can also become members of more activist movements, and start training. Once socialized in that world, all observations can be framed in this logic: from Covid-19 to the presence of different languages in their neighbourhood. It can all become evidence that urgent action is needed. The manifesto of the Buffalo shooter draws radical but logical conclusions from the white genocide/great replacement narrative that is mainstream within the global new right. When he contextualizes his terrorist killing spree, he uses a classic new right discourse:

> We must inevitably correct the disaster of hedonistic, nihilistic individualism. But it will take some time, time we do not have due to the crisis of mass immigration. Due to mass immigration we lack the time scale required to enact the civilizational paradigm shift we need to undertake to return to health and prosperity. Mass immigration will disenfranchise us, subvert our nations, destroy our communities, destroy our ethnic ties, destroy our cultures, destroy our peoples. Long before low fertility levels ever could. Thus, before we deal with the fertility rates, we must deal with

> both the invaders within our lands and the invaders that seek to enter our lands. We must crush immigration and deport those invaders already living on our soil. It is not just a matter of our prosperity, but the very survival of our people.[1]

Not only mass immigration is a threat, but also hedonistic nihilistic individualism, our own will to reproduce and sustain our people. The difference between these terrorists and the metapoliticians is the notion of time. In the mind of the terrorist, we don't have the time to convince others metapolitically, to work on the long term. We need to act right now for 'the very survival of our people'. Metapolitics does not suffice, as it takes too much time. This is the paradox of successful metapolitics. From the moment it generates uptake, it opens up Pandora's box. Especially in a digitally networked world, the ideas travel, morph and radicalize. Metapolitics may have been deployed to steer the 'true right' away from violence; the revolutionary ideas when one dares to take them to their logical conclusion give birth to violence. First symbolic violence, later physical violence. The transgressive humour ended up, at least in certain niches, in a terrorist culture. This evolution is not surprising, considering that the praising of the warrior, the importance of fighting skills, and the calls to action are so prominent in metapolitics 2.0. As a result, a true cult of violence has re-emerged. Professional metapoliticians know that they have to steer away from any public support of political violence, but behind the scenes, in chat groups, private servers and the darker corners of the internet, a new culture of violence is growing. This cult of violence is not mainstream within the global new right, but it is the logical consequence of their metapolitical project and it gives birth to marginal niches within this global new right network that celebrates violence, gamifies it and celebrates those who had the bravery 'to act', to bring it offline. Metapolitical terrorism is not just an act of networked individualism, it also contributes to a niched culture where violence is celebrated, where terrorists become heroes and stars in their own videogames. It is in those niches that new violent logics of action grow. Metapolitical terrorism is, as we have seen, strongly formatted: from the live streaming to the discourse used to legitimate their actions, there is remarkable consistency. It is a cultural phenomenon directed at awakening the masses, recruiting new soldiers in the civilizational battle. This cultural dimension becomes all the more clear when the terrorist counts on metapolitical prosumers to redistribute their content in the form of memes, Spotify lists, annotated manifestos and of course the video of the live streaming itself. After the Christchurch killing, users downloaded the live stream and edited it to circumvent automatic detection and deletion by Facebook and YouTube algorithms.

> YouTube reported that in the hours after the shooting videos were being posted at a rate of about one per second, with users editing the size of the clips, adding additional footage, or otherwise trying to fool the automatic censors.
>
> *(Byman, 2022: 96)*

This type of algorithmic knowledge and practices is crucial to let this culture of violence grow.

This terrorist culture, covered in layers of irony or not, is not something to disregard. It contributes not only to the formatization of far-right terrorism, but it also normalizes violence. Users active in such radical niches get avalanches of discourses that legitimize, banalize, gamify and celebrate violence for 'the good cause'. Even more, there is a far larger global new right network that gives an intellectual foundation for this type of action. When radical far-right platforms – like the Daily Stormer and Counter-Currents – disapprove of such killing sprees (as they don't further the cause), the discourses that they produce do support the main theories that are used to legitimize these actions by their perpetrators. And nothing says that they wouldn't support more collective acts of violence from the moment people in power call for urgent action. The Capitol Riots have proven that this is not entirely fictitious. The metapolitical discourse is still a revolutionary discourse and metapoliticians use the algorithmically structured platforms to prepare the militants to see themselves as warriors, as heroes in a civilizational revolution. As long as those metapolitical actors succeed in using digital platforms to find massive audiences, circumvent algorithmic moderation and use the popularity principle for their cause, so long will violence, algorithms and metapolitics stay intimately connected.

Note

1 Manifesto Buffalo shooter, 2022, p. 2.

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EPILOGUE

Metapolitics, digital ethnography and democracy

'Life', wrote Dell Hymes (1969: 14),

> Is impossible without something for which one can hope. Recognizing ourselves as members of an emerging world community, we cannot avoid hope (or despair) for it. When we study local communities, we cannot escape assumptions, open or hidden, as to that for which they hope and to what can be hoped for them.

Hymes here addresses a key issue within anthropology and ethnography (and in fact in all sciences), namely that the researcher is not an objective fly on the wall but is part of the production of knowledge. This position, he argues, shapes our role as researchers. 'The general problem, then', Hymes goes on, 'is not simply empirical – what has occurred; nor only methodological and theoretical – how to study what has occurred, how best explain it. It is also a moral problem, a problem of one's commitments in, and to, the world' (Hymes, 1969: 14). The production of knowledge is connected not only to our position in society but also to how we want the world to look and thus to our worldview and hopes for a better world. 'Anthropologists have indeed commonly thought of themselves as belonging to the "party of humanity", and the world view Gay ascribes to the Enlightenment, as passionate rationalism and a tragic humanism is not alien to anthropologists', said Hymes; 'It is, I would urge, the view best suited to them'. In the same vein, Blommaert (2018: 16–17) argued that ethnography had the potential to become a democratic science. Ethnography is explicitly political as it has the potential to question 'the truth' of the powerful in society and fight to give voice to the oppressed, the discriminated and excluded.

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After reading this book, as an anthropologist or anyone who embraces a 'tragic humanism', feelings of despair may get the better of you. The 'community' studied here is not local but operates in a global network and its assumptions are not immediately favourable for those who hope that humanism, rationalism and Enlightenment values will prevail. Metapolitics in its traditional new right meaning, and its contemporary manifestation is a full frontal attack on humanism, the idea of universal human rights, Enlightened democracy, equality and freedom for an emerging world community. Ethnography, as anthropology's most successful export product, is maybe best suited to bring back hope and the lust to fight for a world community where universal human rights are not paper tigers used to invade countries, but to work 'in the spirit of what Marx called scientific socialism, for a just society and an individualistic culture where the free development of each is both enriched and restrained by the free development of all….' (Hymes, 1969: 14).

Ethnography is clearly more than a method for collecting particular types of data that can be ad hoc added to other programmes. Ethnography is not empty but comes with a full scientific programme. For Hymes, ethnography could be 'a democratic and anti-hegemonic science' (Blommaert, 2018a: 16). This democratic and anti-hegemonic quality of ethnography starts with calling into question the status of truth, to find more and look deeper. It is this critical quality of ethnography that allowed me to not only describe the rise of the global new right and its metapolitical strategy, but hopefully also contribute to our understanding of that rise as a complex socio-technical assemblage that is only possible in specific social, economic, cultural and political contexts. The rise of the new right is clearly not a technological problem. The digital ethnographic approach (Varis, 2016) helped us to move beyond any technological determinism which is so popular today in explaining the role of technology in radicalization. In many accounts on online radicalization, one seems to blame 'the recommendation algorithms'. The algorithms are seen as the main or maybe even the only actor that is responsible for the promotion of racism (Noble, 2018) or constructing a 'rabbit hole' and promoting 'radicalization' (Roose, 2019). Digital media scholar Tufekci, for instance, called the YouTube algorithm a great radicalizer and YouTube, 'given its billion or so users' (…), 'one of the most powerful radicalizing instruments of the 21st century' (Tufekci, 2018). Such claims give readers the impression that those recommendation algorithms work independently and overrule human agency. New research shows that YouTube's recommendation mechanism does not promote inflammatory or radicalized content (Ledwich & Zaitsev, 2020). Both claims do rely on technological determinism, as they seem to understand the algorithms as completely independent actors. By adopting an ethnographic interactionist approach, the focus is not on the algorithms and the platforms alone but on what people do with interfaces and algorithms

in particular contexts. It brings human (and non-human) agency in the picture when trying to understand radicalization processes in relation to digital media.

This digital ethnographic approach allows us to study metapolitics not in the abstract, but in the concrete and specific instances of metapolitical activity: in its social, political, economic, technological and historical context. The result is a theoretically inspired interpretation and description of contemporary metapolitics. It is in this thick description of metapolitics that we start seeing 'radicalization' in all its complexity. It is not just radical ideas that radicalize individuals. We see how contemporary metapolitical actors use existing niched and more mainstream (digital) cultures, hegemonic ideas and algorithmic knowledge to build a polycentric, transnational and layered cultural niche. How they make use of the digital utopianist ideologies that organize our digital media. How they use search engine and social media optimization, influencer culture, data voids, meme culture and trolling to normalize their viewpoints. How they build their own media and set up Green Peace-like activism under the banner of democracy and free speech to destroy both. How they embrace and support political candidates in which they see metapolitical potential. The result of these metapolitical endeavours is the emergence of an expanding translocal and polycentric cultural niche in which new recruits find a coherent world. A world that uses technologies and existing normalities to preconfigure a new world. A world that is grounded in the rejection of 'globalism' which functions as a shorthand for liberal democracy and socialist democracy, but also the welfare state, the idea of universal human rights and humankind in general. Enlightenment modernity is attacked fully frontal (see Faye, 2010, 2011; Krebs, 2012) in the name of democracy, anti-racism and feminism. The truth is that these Enlightenment concepts are filled with ethnocracy, organicism and inequality. This anti-Enlightenment thought is updated and repackaged, but the ideas have already proven to bring nothing good.

This new right world fuses traditionalism with technology. It is grounded in a new modernity, a modernity that embraces technological progress and digital cultures. This reconciliation of technology and traditional values and the fight for a different, archeofuturistic world, to use Guillaume Faye's lingo, is grounded in a celebration of inequality and a propagation of war: war against everyone who is different, is born in a different place, loves somebody of the same sex or embraces queerness. This anti-Enlightenment tradition comes as a full-blown alternative for liberal democracy and socialist utopias. It uses key infrastructures of the neoliberalist economy and adopts libertarian digital cultures and injects them with far-right metapolitics. Several ideas have already escaped the margins decades ago and restructured our world in a less just world, a world with less hope for a world community, a just world built on humanist values.

The mass movements of the 20th century have been replaced by a polycentric network. The cult of the leader has been replaced by micro-cults of many different leaders in many different niches. And the all-encompassing ideology has fragmented over the different niches. All those niches are formed around different micro-ideologies (anti-feminism, racism, conservativism, gamer culture, incels, metapolitical terrorism). In all those niches, we see essential ingredients, but rarely all ingredients of new right ideology at the same time. Note, however, that once these niches are fused, full-blown ideologically motived mass movements hit the streets: we have seen snippets of what that alternative looks like in the Capitol Riots, in the support of failed and successful terrorists and in the rise in far-right terrorism. This new right ideology has all ingredients in itself to build a radical, modern, authoritarian and exclusive world order. This new world order is now preconfigured within the global new right network. Nationalism is replaced by a transnational battle for organic communities on the one hand, and white civilization on the other. It is grounded in a fierce dislike of equality and the idea of Universal Human Rights and in a vision of humans as conditioned by history, culture and in the end race. It is this vision on humankind that is fundamental to the metapolitical battle. From the moment this view on men and women is accepted, the larger building blocks of the Enlightenment tradition will start to crumble as well. 'The eruption of irrationality, the destruction of the idea of the unity of the human race and an absolute fate in the capacity of the political power to mold society', as Zeev Sternhell (2010: 443) concluded, were responsible for the massacres of the 20th century. These ideas are not just back, they are finding traction among young and older generations around the world. They are promoted by influencers, activists, politicians and political parties. The new communicative economy is at least partially enabling this new wave of far-right metapolitics. And when it hits the streets, we see the same consequences as always: attacks on democracy, people on the left, migrants and of course equality and the Enlightenment tradition in general. If we turn our heads, if we do not engage in an in-depth study, and if we do not dare to draw the consequences from those studies and face the social evils, we will lose more than we would dare to accept today.

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INDEX

Note: *Italic* page numbers refer to figures.

abstract ideas 308
Aguillar, L.M.H. 255
algorithmic activism, global new right and 138–140; globalization, globalism and 107–109; globalization of 109–111; metapolitics 2.0 and 111–112; Schild & Vrienden's metapolitics and 121–138
algorithms 14; agency 182–184; attention-based media system and 29–30; humans and 29; logic of post-digital societies 27–29; oppression 185–186
alpha males: metapolitical crusader 162–164; and metapolitics 149–160; metapolitics, trad wives, alpha men and Instagram culture 173–175
'Als 1 achter Jurgen' (Facebook page) 296, 297, 299
Alternative Right site 263
The Alternative Right (blog) 230
alt-right 6, 9, 34–35, 230, 302; activists 84; Faye, G. 82–84; movement 117–118; Trump and 85–87
American Identity Movement 182
American Renaissance 229, 230, 263
Anglin, A. 96, 198, 277
anti-Americanism 83
anti-democracy 307
anti-Enlightenment tradition 68, 173, 188–189, 216–217, 305–308
antifeminism 159–160
anti-globalism, globalization of 112–116
anti-Muslim racism 3
anti-natalism 160
anti-Semitic conspiracy theory 194
Appadurai, A. 3, 97, 108, 116, 139
archaic values 86
Archeofuturism (Faye) 6, 18, 72, 82, 97, 99–100, 115
archeofuturism, defined 72
Arktos 112–116, 140; contemporary new right and 115; *de facto* functions 114; globalism 114; globalization 115–116; ideologies 113
Arnaut, E.A. 157
attention-based media system: algorithmic culture and 29–30; audience labour 29–30; humans and algorithms interaction between 29; vanity metrics 30
audience labour 13–14, 29–30
Auger, V.A. 7, 8, 10
Azov Movement 162

Bakhtin, Mikhail 39
Balibar, E. 3

Balliet, S. 213
Bannon, S. 173
Bantimaroudis, P. 94
Barbrook, R. 11
Barlow, J. 262
Bar-On 68–70, 254
'*bat soup*' (video on Coronavirus) 199
Baudet, T. 196, 201, 253, 260
big data approach 57
big identity 259
biocultural identity 217
black on white crime 221, 226–228
black race 220
black violence 220
Bloc Identitaire 87, 92
Blommaert, J. 8, 31, 33, 39, 42, 47, 56, 78, 147, 188, 234, 238, 252
Boer: Aktueel page 136
Bongino, D. 31
Bourdieu, P. 8
bowl cut meme 231–235; bowl cut patrol logo *232*; chad meme *234*; right-wing death squat *235*
bowl patrol, memes and white terrorist culture 231–235
boyd, d. 158, 186, 226, 227
Bracke, S. 255
Brand, S. 11
breaking news data voids 196–198
Breitbart, A. 264, 302
Breivik, A. 243–244
Bucher, T. 33
Buffalo shooting/shooters 7, 213, 243, 278, 310
Burke, E. 51, 73, 75, 259, 306, 308

Cadwalladr, C. 184
Calhoun, C. 157
Californian ideology 11
Cameron, A. 11
Camus, R. 8, 87, 94, 236–238, 244, 256, 257
capitalism 11, 68–70, 72
Capitol Riots 31, 34, 195, 196, 209, 213, 268, 297, 300, 312
Casey, P. 181
Chadwick, A. 13, 55
Champetier, C. 16, 69, 75, 76, 80, 81, 160, 287, 306, 307
chaotic transition period 13
Charlottesville attack (2017) 195
chronotopes 39, 253
Citizen's Councils 222
Clinton, H. 147, 148
Cloudfare 267
The Colonisation of Europe (Faye) 236
communication 137; *see also* language
communitarian democracy 259
Condorcet, N. 305, 306
Cönings, J. 295–301, 300
conservative internationalism 27, 117
conspiracy theories 32–33
contemporary anti-Enlightenment: Bar-On 254–255; extreme-right parties (Europe) 255; Holslag, J. 257–258; mass-immigration 256–257; organic community 260; 'small' and 'big' pursuit of identity 259
contemporary new right 109–110; Arktos and 115
contexts 38–39; chronotope 39–40; and contextualization 48; national mass media 40; revisited 45–48; social situation 39–40
Corona Passport 204
Corona protests 205–208
Council of Conservative Citizens 221–229
Covid-19 182, 195–196, 300; Feniks and Corona protests 205–208; Great Reset as mobilizing myths 201–204; Paul Joseph Watson, bat soup and globalism 198–201; junk news and metapolitics 195–208; metapolitics, breaking news data voids and Coronavirus crisis 196–198; *see also* Watson, J. P.
Cramer, F. 16
cultural domination 8, 10
culturalism 3
culture war tour 190–191; data voids and metapolitics 194–195; Q&A-trolling 191–194

The Daily Stormer 95, 96, 254, 263, 267; deplatformization 267, 275–278
Darmanin, G. 280
data voids 19; defined 186; Dylann Roof's metapolitical terrorism, and 218–235; and Groyper war 190–195; metapolitics, algorithmic oppression and 185–186; and terrorism as metapolitics 226–228

De Benoist, A. 2, 4–6, 15–17, 65, 66, 68, 69, 71–73, 75–77, 80–83, 87, 88, 108, 125, 149, 160, 164, 165, 214, 220, 255, 259, 287, 303, 306, 307; *The problem with democracy* 78; *View from the Right* 2; *Vue du Droite* 68
Declaration of 1789 78
de-contextualization 110
De Fina, A. 39
De Maistre, J. 73
De Mann, H. 70
democracy 305–308; communitarian 259; organic 78–79, 307, 308
deplatforming and deplatformization: The Daily Stormer 267, 275–278; individuals, or individual accounts 268–269; online and offline practices 269; platform 261–264; waves and crises 266–269
d'Escufon, T.: "3 Arguments a` NE PLUS UTILISER en de´bat!" 282; criticism in discourse 282–283
des idées mères 2
D'Estaing, G. 254
de-territorialisation 110
De Tocqueville, A. 305
De Wever, B. 125
digital: culture 157–159; ecology 15; literacy 137
digital ethnographic discourse analysis 41–45; ethnographers 43–46; ethnographic knowledge 44; ethnography described 44–45; language 45–46
digital ethnography: big data approach 57; case method and live 52–58; discourse analysis (*see* digital ethnographic discourse analysis); hybrid media system 52; intertextuality and entextualization 50–52; live ethnography 55–57; long-term 48–50, 57–58; mediated online interaction 53; social media platforms 52–53
digitalization 9–10; in globalization 109; socio-technical assemblage 9
digital media 9, 46; as actors and context 46–47; conspiracy theories 32–33; as context 30–34; far-right 30–31; metapolitical influencers and 157–159; metapolitics and 92–96; micro-hegemonies 31–32; micro-populations 31; migration and 110; popularity 138; uptake 34
Discord group 56, 231–234
discourse/discourse analysis: digital ethnographic approach 42–45; ethnographic approach to 41–45; multimodal approach to 41–42; violence and 214
DLive 195
Dong, J. 56
Dorsey, J. 265
Dugin, A. 27, 72, 111, 188, 189, 197, 198, 201, 206

Ebner, J. 217; *Going Dark* 174–175
ecosystem 9
egalitarianism 72, 75
8chan 218, 235, 239, 240, 244, 302
Elchardus, M. 258, 259, 260; *Reset. On identity, community and democracy* 258–259
Electronic Meme Division 119
Elmer, G. 55
emasculation process 160
Enlightenment modernism 71
ethnographer 43–46, 52, 56, 57
ethnographic key incident approach 57
ethnographic knowledge 44
ethnography: approach to discourse and discourse analysis 41–45; contextualization 46–48; described 44–45; digital (*see* digital ethnography); knowledge 44; language 45–46
ethno-pluralism 2, 74
European Renaissance 72
Evola, J. 67, 71–73, 115, 156, 308
eye witness 237, 238

Facebook 9, 56, 195, 196, 252, 263, 264; algorithms interaction 136; posts from Dries Van Langenhove *154*
fake news 187, 200, 265, 266
family and relation advice as metapolitics 171–173
far-right: actors 184; movements 6–7; terrorist attack (2019) 7; terrorists 7, 214

far-right violence: great replacement and re-emergence of 214–218; metapolitics *vs.* 8
Farris, Sara R. 287
fashion 149–150; *see also* style
Fashwave Friday series 96–100
Faye, G. 2, 5, 6, 8, 15, 18, 65, 68, 71–73, 75, 76, 80, 81, 87–89, 107, 115, 149, 160–162, 205, 207, 216, 217, 220, 223, 237, 238, 244, 255–258, 284, 303, 308, 309; alt-right and metapolitics re-invented 82–84; and birth of metapolitics 2.0 100–101; *The Colonisation of Europe* 236; *La colonisation de l'Europe* 82; *L'Archéofuturisme* 82; *Manifeste de la résistance européenne* 82; Martin Sellner, fashwave and Faye's metapolitics 96–100; *Pourquoi nous combattons. Manifeste de la Résistance Européenne* 82, 87; *Why we fight* 18, 88, 96
Feels Guy 36
female metapolitical influencers 159
feminism 70, 171–172; style 159; values 160
femonationalism 287
Feniks 20, 198, 209, 288; and Corona protests 205–208
Ferrari, A. 91
Fighting for France 281
Flemish Interest 79, 95, 121, 122, 124, 135, 153, 203, 205, 207, 217, 255, 256, 257, 298, 300, 306
Flemish youth 128
Ford, S. 186
'For Freedom, against the System' (Facebook video) 207
Forum for Democracy 253
4chan 36, 42, 146, 147, 153, 192, 302
FPÖ (Austria) 215, 216
Francken, T. 93, 298
Frantz, C. 66, 67
freedom of speech 186, 273–275
French Revolution 73, 206, 308
Friberg, D. 84, 85, 113, 118
Front National (France) 215
Fuentes, N. 31, 56, 181, 195, 198, 203, 209, 268, 269, 277

GAB profile 277
GAFAM platforms 262
Gamergate 119, 191, 233, 302
Gamer Uprising 277
gamification of terrorism 232–234, *233*
García-Rapp, Florencia 158
Gates, B. 299
generational populism: Generation Identity and reconquest 88–92; new right metapolitics 2.0 and algorithmic activism 134–137
Generation Identitaire 93, 121, 123, 128, 253, 278–280; dissolution of 280–281; goal of 89; Le Natifs Paris 283–286; Thaïs d'Escufon (spokeswoman to metapolitical influencer) 281–283
Generation Identity 18, 28, 54, 100, 111, 123, 128, 216–217, 268; described 88–89; reconquest and generational populism 88–92
Generation Z 286, 287, 288
German Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG) 279
Gershon, I. 182
Gettr 281, 282
Giambattista, V. 51, 73
Gillespie, T. 261
Gladwell, M. 134
globalism 107–109, 202
globalization 107–109; alt-right 34–35; of anti-globalism 112–116; Arktos 115–116; as context 34–38; cultural or neoliberal 107–108; deglobalization 36–37; digitalization 109; ethnographic studies 108; far-right 34; of new right 109–111; Trump-Smug Pepe Border wall meme *35*, 35–36; vernacular 108–109
global new right: complexity 251–254; contemporary anti-Enlightenment, and 254–260; deplatforming, deplatformization and hegemony 260–269; Generation Identitaire, transformation of 278–288; visibility and invisibility, between 269–278
global new right and algorithmic activism 138–140; globalization, globalism and 107–109; globalization of 109–111; metapolitics 2.0 and 111–112; Schild & Vrienden's metapolitics and 121–138

GoDaddy 276
Goffman, E. 40
Going Dark (Ebner) 174–175
The Golden One 28, 54, 65, 82, 147, 266, 270, 272, 274, 277, 309; Legio Gloria and Son of Europe 165–167; metapolitical legion and algorithmic knowledge 164–165; metapolitical warrior and 160–167; metapolitics 2.0 167
Golebiewski, M. 186, 226, 227
Google 182–184, 196, 264
Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft (GAFAM) 9
Google Play 267
Gramsci 4, 8, 66–69, 253
Gramscianism of the right 68
Gravensteen activism, metapragmatics of 126–131
Great Awakening concept 207
Great Replacement theory 8, 32, 217, 236–238, 243, 256, 257
Great Reset 201–204; defined 202
GRECE's metapolitics 6
Green, J. 186
Griffin, R. 6, 43, 79, 156, 217
Groupement de Recherche et d'Etudes pour la Civilisation Européenne (GRECE) 1, 66
Groyper: riots 65; trolls 56
Groyper war 20, 181–182; data voids and 190–195
Gruzd, A. 14
Guénon, R. 71

hegemony 8–9; concepts 125; global new right 260–269; metapolitics and digital guardians of 264–266
Herder, J.G. 51, 73–77, 98, 206, 215, 259
Herf, Jeffrey 67
Hitler, A. 184, 221
Holslag, J. 257, 258, 260
Holt III, E. 229, 230
homogenization 18, 75, 78, 108, 109, 117, 196
Hou, M. 168
humanity 72, 75, 76, 77, 98, 183, 310
Huntington, S. 255, 256; hypothesis 255, 256
hybrid media system 13, 28, 186; and metapolitics 2.0 84–85
hybrid salience 94–95, 228–231
Hymes, D. 42

identitarianism, defined 205–206
identitarian movements 87, 111, 214
identitarians 6, 9, 149
identity 98–99
Identity Evrope 181
identity work 157
imagined nostalgia 97–98, 156
indexicality 147–148
influencers 30, 304
Infowars 207; deplatforming of 264
Instagram 9, 155, 252; metapolitics, trad wives, alpha men and 173–175; 'Worth fighting for' (page) 156
Integral Tradition Publishing 113
interaction 13, 52, 54, 55, 136, 157; with algorithms 28, 29; between activists and platforms 158; between humans and algorithms 29; far-right neo-Nazis 234; online 15, 53, 53, 54; socio-technological 158
International Women's Rights Day 164
interregnum 79–81, 309
Islam 255

Jenkins, H. 186
Johnson, C.C. 94
Johnson, G. 18, 82, 83, 100, 118, 119, 149, 184, 267, 301; *New Right vs. Old Right* 83, 220
Jones, L. 264
Jünger, E. 73
junk news 187–190, 209; Covid-19 195–201, 195–208; data voids and metapolitics 208–209

Kaiser, J. 274
Kant, I. 308
KhosraviNik, M. 131
Kirk, C. 56, 181, 190; culture war tour (*see* culture war tour)
Krebs, P. 2, 72, 73, 76

La colonisation de l'Europe (Faye) 82
language 45–46
La Notre Dame 284–285
La Nouvelle Droite 1, 2, 4, 7, 16, 18, 67, 108, 215, 303, 307
Laqueur, W. 228
L'Archéofuturisme (Faye) 82

La Relève (Free and conservative youth movement) 284
The Last Rhodesian 224–225, *225*
Lauren Chen 155
LaViolette, J. 19, 157
leaderless far-right resistance concept 242–243
Lefort, C. 305
leftist tears concept 129
left-wing discourse 172
Legio Gloria 165–167
Le grand replacement 256–257
Le Mai 68 de La Nouvelle Droite 69
Lenin 87
Lentin, A. 3
Leonard, J.B. 85–87
Les Natif Paris 286, 288
Lewis, R. 155, 227
liberal tears 129, *130*
libertarian ideology 263
Linkedin 196
Live Action role Playing (LARPing) 10
live ethnography 55, 57
lone wolf concept 242, 245
Long live the emperor! 85–87
Loomer, L. 282

Macron (President) 286
Mailchimp 267
'Make America Great Again' slogan 260
Maldraw 36
Manifeste de la résistance européenne (Faye) 82
Maniou, T.A. 94
Marvick 158
Marwick, A. 11
Marxism 69, 70
masculine values 160
Masri, N. 213
mass media 15, 33, 47, 92, 94, 131, 239–240, 302; attention 138, 139, 154, 165, 230, 274; diffusion of symbolic forms distributed through 16, 28; national mass media 40, 296
Maurras, C. 67, 73
McDonaldization 108
McInnes, G. 31, 150, *151*
media ideology: defined as 182; *see also* search engines
mediated online interaction 84
Meinecke, F. 73
Melis, S. 208
message 12
metapolitical crusader 162–164
metapolitical influencers: alpha males (*see* alpha males); digital media, digital culture and 157–159; far-right micropopulations, style and 147–149; orders of indexicality concept 147–148; style 146–147
metapolitical terrorism 213–214, 311–312; bowl patrol, memes and white terrorist culture 231–235; data voids and terrorism as metapolitics 226–228; great replacement and re-emergence of far-right violence 214–218; hybrid media salience and (failed) metapolitics 228–231; metapolitics and white nationalist terrorism 218–220; racial consciousness, metapolitics and violence 224–225; segregation, synchronizing history of 221–224; white terrorist culture (*see* white terrorist culture)
metapolitics 4–6, 66, 99; algorithmic oppression and data voids 185–186; anti-Enlightenment tradition and 305–308; democratization 303–304; described 66–67; and digital guardians of hegemony 264–266; digitalization and 9–10; and digital media 92–96; ethno-differentialism and organic democracy 75–79; failed 228–231; interregnum and revolutionary rebirth 79–81; junk news and spreadability 186–190; Jürgen Cönings and dialectics of 296–301; of style 149–160; trad wives, alpha men and Instagram culture 173–175; and violence 6–9; as violence 309–312
metapolitics 1.0: Bar-On 68–69; French new right's claim on Gramsci 67–69; metapolitics described 66–67; New Left themes 70–71
metapolitics 2.0 10–11, 33, 65–66; audience labour and uptake 13–15; and Brenton Tarrant's reconquest 235–242; Faye,

G. 81–87, 100–101; global digital new right cultures and 301–305; global new right and 111–112; The Golden One 167; hybrid media system and 84–85; identitarian movement and 87–100; mainstream or non-mainstream digital media 11–12; message 12–13; result of web 2.0 media ideology 11; visibility and non-visibility 13; white terrorist culture and 242–246
metapragmatics of Gravensteen activism 126–131
methodological nationalism 109–110
micro-celebrities 30, 261
micro-celebrity culture 158
micro-hegemonies 31–32, 149
micro-populations 31, 147–149
Miller-Idriss, C. 110, 120
Milo 264, 265, 272
Milo Yiannopoulos Discussion Facebook page 265
Mission Defend Europe video 93
modest fashion as metapolitics: identity work 157; nostalgic fifties style 155–156; 'Worth fighting for' Instagram page 156
Mohler, A. 6
Molyneux, S. 198
Morgan, J. 113, 119, 263
Morozov, E. 134
Mosley, E. 266
multiculturalism 3, 32, 114, 128, 198, 236
Muslim Question 255
Muslims 255
Mussolini 77, 184

National-Flemish Alliance (N-VA) 124
national holiday 307–308
national mass media 40, 296
Nazism 221
Nazi symbols 150
Nemesis (Collectif.nemesis on Instagram) 287, 288
Nemesis Besançon (the identitarian feminist movement) 284
neo-Nazi discourse 232
neo-racism 3
network analysis Alt-right 2017 *118*
networked intimacy 164
newer media logics 13
New Left themes 70
new right and anti-Enlightenment tradition 71–75; archeofuturism 72; egalitarianism 72; Enlightenment modernism 71; ethno-pluralism 74; pluralism 74–75
new right discourses 10
New Right vs. Old Right (Johnson) 83, 220
Nicas, J. 264
Nietzsche, F. 71
Nordic Resistance Movement (Sweden) 38
Nordiska Fördbundet publishing house 113
nostalgia 175
not-racism 3
Notre Dame 284–286

Obama, B. 220, 222, 260
Occidentis 286
old media 13
O' Meara, J. 230
O'Neil, C. 185
orders of indexicality concept 147–148, 157
organic democracy 78–79, 307, 308
organic pluralism 77
orthopraxy 78
Orwell, G. 201, 265

Paddock, S. 277
pan-European movement 122
Pano documentary 253
Passeron, J. 8
PayPal account 93–94, 264, 267, 276
Pegida 197, 302
people, defined as 79
pepe-the-frog memes 119
personal awakening 227
Pettibone, B. 54, 155, 159–160, 268, 272; family and relation advice as metapolitics 171–173; gender roles and traditional family 167–173; rise of 168–171; *What makes us girls* 54, 173
#pizzagate conspiracy theory 168
platform 261–262; crises 262–263; internal and economic motivations 262; social media 263–264
pluralism 74–75, 77, 98

Poniatowski, M. 254
populism: generational, new right metapolitics 2.0 and algorithmic activism 134–137; Schild & Vrienden, new right metapolitics 2.0, and algorithmic populism 137–138; and virality as communicative relation 131–134
post-colonialism 70–71
post-digital societies: algorithmic logic of 27–29; digital infrastructure 28–29; hybrid media system 28
post-war fascism 6
Pourquoi nous combattons. Manifeste de la Résistance Européenne (Faye) 82, 87
The problem with democracy (De Benoist) 78
prosumers: culture 303; described 15, 29, 81; actions of 92

QAnon: Great Awakening 201; theories 33
Q&A-trolling Charlie Kirk's culture war 191–194

race/racism 3–4, 219; racial consciousness 224–225
radicalization 174, 175, 213
radical right populist parties 215
Radix 267
Rauchfleisch, A. 274
Ravndal, J.A. 300
reconquest 88–92; Great Replacement 236–238; securing uptake for his manifesto 239–242
Reddit 195, 302
Red Ice 270
re-entextualizations 15
reluctant leaders/soft leaders 243
Renan, E. 73
replacement immigration 256–257
Reset. On identity, community and democracy (Elchardus) 258–259
Rieu, D. 286
The Right Stuff 43, 50, 232, 263
right to difference 2
right-wing-extremist attacks 7
right-wing metapolitics 66
Robinson, T. 134
Roca-Cuberes, Carel 158
Rogers, R. 159, 265
Roof, D. 20, 213, 214, 217, 218, 237, 243, 245, 300
Rutte, G. 206

Sanders, B. 260
Save America campaign 260
Schild & Vrienden 18, 28, 55, 56, 70, 111, 119, 209, 252; activists tags friend to realize uptake *135*; and deglobalization of global new right 122–126; Facebook video 121–122, *126*, *132*, *133*; generational populism, new right metapolitics 2.0 and algorithmic activism 134–137; Instagram post *152*; metapolitics and global new right 121–122; metapragmatics of Gravensteen activism 126–131; new right metapolitics 2.0 and algorithmic populism 137–138; virality and populism as communicative relation 131–134
Schmitt, C. 67, 73, 78
Search Engine Optimization 148, 224
search engines: Google and algorithmic agency 182–184; metapolitics, algorithmic oppression and data voids 185–186; metapolitics, junk news and spreadability 186–190
segregation 221–224
self-branding 14
self-care books 175
Sellner, B. 282
Sellner, M. 18, 19, 82, 94, 95, 111, 150, *151*, 159, 169, 170, 172, 237, 266, 272, 273, 280; fashwave and Faye's metapolitics 96–100
Senft, Theresa M. 158
Shifman, L. 37
Smug Trump Pepe 35–36; deglobalization 36–37, *37*; LGBTQ+ activists *vs*. *38*; wall meme *35*
social media 95; celebrity 158
social media optimization 148, 317
social situation 39–40
socio-technical assemblage 9
sociotechnological assemblages 17
soixante huitards 128
Son of Europe 165–167

Sorel, G. 69, 70, 202
Sorelian concept of myth 32–33
Southern, L. 95, 108, 155, 168, 172, 174, 282
Spektorowski, A. 6, *69*
Spencer, M. 18
Spencer, R. 77, 82, 85, 86, 100, 118, 119, 140, 149, 150, *151,* 198, 244, 267, 278, 288, 289, 301, 307, 308; Brooks Brothers costumes 155
Spengler, O. 51, 67, 71, 73, 76, 77, 99, 206
spreadability: described 186–187; functions 187
Srnicek, N. 261
staged authenticity 168–169
Sternhell, Z. 4, 32, 50, 68, 73, 74, 77, 215, 306, 318
Steuckers, R. 2, 205
Stop the Steal 32, 195
'structures of feeling' concept 234–235
style: alpha males and metapolitics 149–160; Brittany Pettibone, The Golden One and antifeminism 159–160; clothing 151–155; described 146–147; far-right micropopulations and influencers 147–149; hairstyle 150–151; modest fashion as metapolitics 155–157; Schild & Vrienden Instagram post *152*
substantialization 3
symbolic domination 8
symbolic violence 8, 214

Taguieff, Pierre-André 2
Tarrant, B. 2, 4, 7, 20, 47, 213, 214, 217, 218, 242–245, 300; reconquest (*see* reconquest)
Taylor, J. 100, 223
Tebaldi, C. 155, 159
terrorism: Dylann Roof's metapolitical terrorism (*see* metapolitical terrorism); gamification of 232–234, *233*
thick communities 259
Thompson, J.B. 16, 28, 33, 52, 84, 183
"3 Arguments a` NE PLUS UTILISER en de´bat!" (YouTube video) 282
Titley, G. 3
Traditional Britain Group 136
trad wives 174–175
Trayvon Martin case 226
'Triggering Memes for Regressive Teens II' 136
true right 1, 2, 4, 30, 68, 75, 308, 311
Trump, D. 28, 108, 118, 136, 148, 196, 202, 207, 253, 260, 261, 265, 266, 268, 272, 289, 297, 298; and alt-right metapolitics 85–87; election campaign (2020) 20; *see also* Groyper war
Trump-Smug Pepe Border wall meme *35,* 35–36
Turner, F. 11
Twitter 9, 195, 196, 209, 252, 263, 264, 278
Twitter Trust & Safety Council 265

Unite the Right rally 181, 192, 266, 275
US Telecommunication law 278
utopianism 262

Vaidhyanathan, S. 182, 183
Vandenbroucke, F. 204
Van Dijck, J. 11, 12
Van Grieken, T. 256–258, 260, 298, 299
vanity metrics 30, 132, 159
Van Langenhove, D. 122–124, 126, 128, 131, 132, 139, 150, *151,* 156, 174, 198, 203–205, 207–209, 253, 273, 274, 284, 300; Facebook posts from *154*
Van Ranst, M. 203, 295, 297, 298
Varis, P. 31, 148, 237
Venner, D. 2, 73, 87, 285
Venturini, T. 187, 189
Verheyden, W. 299
vernacular globalization 108–109, 116
Vial, P. 2
Viereck, P. 66, 67
View from the Right (De Benoist) 2
violence 6–9, 309–312; discourses and 214; racial consciousness, metapolitics and 224–225; symbolic 8; warriors and cult of violence 309–312
virality 134–135, 137; and populism as communicative relation 131–134
viral news 187–190
visibility and invisibility, global new right between 268–269; community rules, metapolitics

and mitigating potential deplatforming 270–273; deplatformization: Daily Stormer 275–278; freedom of speech, attention and hypermedia strategy 273–275
Vivaldi government of Belgium 296
Vlaams Blok (Belgium) 215
Vliegen, S. 205
Vue du Droite (De Benoist) 68

Wacquant, L.J.D. 8
Wagner, R. 66
Watson, P.J. 20, 158, 172, 198–201, 209, 277; '*bat soup*' (video on Coronavirus) 199; '*c o r o n a v i r u s*' (video) 199–200
web 2.0 ideology 11, 303
Weimann, G. 213
Wellman, B. 14
WeSearchr account 94
What makes us girls (Pettibone) 54, 173
white genocide 32, 100, 217, 225, 238, 244, 310
white terrorist culture 242–246; 8chan 244; described 245–246; global new right 246; leaderless far-right resistance concept 242–243; lone wolf concept 245; reluctant leaders or soft leaders 243; Tarrant's manifesto 243–244
Why we fight (Faye) 18, 88, 96
Wilders, G. 260
Williams, R. 234, 299
Willinger, M. 90, 216, 238
Wojak meme 36
'Worth fighting for' Instagram page 156

Yiannopoulos, M. 264
YouTube 9, 29, 195, 196, 198–201, 209, 263; "3 Arguments a` NE PLUS UTILISER en de´bat!" video 282

Zemmour, E. 260, 286, 287
Zuckerberg, M. 265