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The framing of RASIM on social media

How Belgian politicians represent Refugees, ASylum seekers and IMmigrants on Twitter

MA Mémoire

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Abstract

Like elsewhere in Europe, the "migration crisis" is a social and political topic of great interest in Belgium. Reaching its peak in 2015, migration flows have often been associated with the country's problems of violence and economic struggle. Divided by linguistic, cultural, and political differences, the north and the south of the country do not have the same attitudes and political expectations towards migration. The purpose of this Master's thesis is to observe how Belgian politicians address migration-related discussions and represent RASIM (Refugees, ASylum seekers, and IMmigrants) on Twitter. This study seeks to identify the representations of RASIM conveyed by Belgian politicians on Twitter and assess the differences in migration-related discourses between Walloon and Flemish politicians. A second intention of this study is to examine the differences between the representations of men, women, elderly, and children RASIM, in order to gain a better understanding of the nature of Belgian politicians' discourses. Finally, the evolution of the frequency of migration-related tweets and RASIM representations during the 5 years under study, and around specific events is observed.

This Master's thesis looks at a total of 1,499 tweets posted by Walloon and Flemish politicians between 2015 and 2020. Mendelsohn *and colleagues'* (2021) frame analysis approach is adopted to manually analyze the tweets. Then, findings are discussed using descriptive statistical analysis. The results show that RASIM are either framed as victims (of economic and social suffering, inequalities, political hardships) or as threats (to the security and the national identity of the country), without any distinction in gender or age. Their representations did fluctuate in time and around specific events. Walloon politicians tended to represent RASIM as victims, while Flemish politicians tended to represent them as threats.

Keywords: migration, migrants, Belgium, politics, framing, Walloons, Flemish, social media, Twitter.

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1. Introduction

Migration is not a new phenomenon. Since the dawn of time, some citizens of the world have been forced to move because of their country's insecurity, attacks or even dictatorship. For others, natural disasters, global warming, or poverty have been their motives for migrating (Coppin, 2020). All leave in the urgency to live, to escape the worst. Around 2015, migration movements towards western democracies accelerated. Migrants from Africa, the Middle East and South Asia attempted to reach the European Union via the Mediterranean Sea and the Balkans (Gualda *et al.,* 2016; Triandafyllidou, 2018). Trying to flee through the desert or by the sea, they have fallen prey to traffickers, smugglers, and Daesh fighters (Rosen *et al.*, 2018). The year 2015 officially marked the beginning of the "migration crisis", as refugees were perceived as being at risk, in need of protection (Stromback *et al*., 2021). The summer saw an ever-increasing stream of refugees landing on the small Greek islands, the number of shipwrecks rapidly increased and more than 3,000 people did not survive this dangerous journey (UNHCR, 2015). Through news stories and social media, Europeans notably witnessed the deaths of 71 migrants found asphyxiated in a refrigerated truck abandoned on the side of an Austrian highway (Harding, 2015), and, a few days later, the drowning of Aylan Kurdi, a 3-year-old child washed up on a Turkish beach (Bozdag *et al*., 2017). Greece got quickly overwhelmed as it could not contain the flow of refugees who took the land routes to other European countries, crossing the Balkans on foot in often extremely difficult conditions. Faced with a decisive moment in which several policies had to be mobilized, the European Union struggled to respond in a coordinated, effective, and dignified manner (Gualda *et al.*, 2016). In 2022, migration is still at the heart of news media and political debates. Since February 2022, the war in Ukraine has driven more than 3,5 million people to leave the country and flee to neighboring countries (UNHCR, 2022). Associations such as UNICEF, a United Nations agency dedicated to improving and promoting the status of children, have recalled the distress experienced by these refugees and the duty of European countries to welcome them.

A series of events in 2015 also had a substantial influence on political and public discourses. For example, the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, which killed over 130 people, led to a reaction of solidarity with the French state and of rejection of migrants. Since then, events involving migrants have been regularly reported in mainstream and social media, describing them as thieves, muggers, or criminals. Therefore, the massive and rapid influx of migrants profoundly changed the European Union's asylum policy and provoked numerous

reactions from both states and citizens, ranging from spontaneous or organized solidarity with migrants to hostility and rejection. In various European countries, demonstrations have been organized, both for and against migration (Gualda *et al.*, 2016). The regulation of migration has become a major issue in European politics. Several times since 2015, the European Commission has tried to introduce relocation quotas in order to relieve the countries on the southern coast of Europe, which are the most affected. However, some states, notably the Eastern European countries, have refused to implement them. In the name of building a secure Europe, some political parties are speaking out against migration. Over the course of years, "the meaning of the term "refugee crisis" changed from being discussed as a crisis for refugees to being discussed as a crisis for the countries that refugees were coming to"[1] (Stromback *et al.*, 2021, p. 4).

Like elsewhere in Europe, the 2015 so-called "migration crisis" dominated media and political debate in Belgium, and migration has remained on the political agenda ever since (De Cleen *et al.*, 2017). Although the country has welcomed fewer migrants than other European countries, it still has faced some significant challenges and an important part of the population has a negative attitude towards migration (Mensies, 2018). In a country divided by a linguistic, cultural, and political border, migration management found itself at the center of this duality between humanity and security. It was "problematised according to different but partially overlapping logics in the North and in the South of Belgium" (De Cleen *et al.*, 2017, p. 59). The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) in 2018 notably created a political deadlock and caused the fall of the Belgian government, as the Flemish nationalists of the N-VA opposed its ratification. Therefore, migration being a major issue for their political campaign and for the identity of their party, politicians tend to share their opinions on the subject, notably on social networks. Platforms such as Twitter are new communication tools that allow them to reach a wide audience and to convey an authentic message which does not have to be mediated by journalists. Twitter actively contributes to political conversations as it constitutes an essential channel for sharing information and building a community.

1.1. Aims and scope of the thesis

The present study examines the representations of refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, and migrants conveyed by Belgian political stakeholders on Twitter over a five-

[1] This shift in the meaning of the "crisis" is why most scholars consistently use quotation marks when using the term "refugee crisis" or "migration crisis".

year period (from the 1ste of January 2015, to the 31st of December 2020). In order to do so, Baker's (2008) term RASIM is consistently used. While it ecompasses different categories of people on the move, it acknowledges that people who are migrating have different motivations, aims, and legal status. The terms migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers are used exclusively to refer to authors and their research, so as not to misrepresent the subject of their studies, and to quote the various tweets analyzed. As such, it is important to define the distinctions between types of people on the move. In order to clearly identify these different categories, the study uses the definitions given by the International Organization for Migration (2019):

Asylum seeker	An individual who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualized procedures, an asylum seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it. Not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but every recognized refugee is initially an asylum seeker.
Immigrant	From the perspective of the country of arrival, a person who moves into a country other than that of his or her nationality or usual residence, so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence.
Migrant	An umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students.
Refugee	A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual

	residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

Table 1 - Definitions of the categories of RASIM

Studies dealing with the salience of immigration in online and offline media are numerous (Bashatah, 2017; Baider, 2018, Bozdag *et al.*, 2017). In contrast, the representation of RASIM on social media sites is largely neglected (Siapera *et al.*, 2018; Stromback *et al*., 2021). However, these studies allow for the analysis of user-generated content, including content produced by influential people such as politicians. By studying the nature of tweets posted by Flemish and Walloon politicians, this Master's thesis aims - to a certain extent - to demonstrate the cultural and political differences inherent in Belgium. Indeed, due to the language barrier, few studies investigate the differences in the use and salience of migration frames between Wallonia and Flanders. This thesis addresses a gap in literature as it constitutes an insight into the Belgian political debate. Examining tweets in both French and Dutch, it aims to analyze the representations of RASIM on Twitter to answer the following research questions:

- **RQ1a:** Which frames, if any, are used for depicting RASIM by Belgian politicians on Twitter?
- **RQ1b:** Do the frames used to represent RASIM on Twitter vary depending on the political party posting, i.e., whether it is a Walloon or Flemish political party?

Moreover, few studies also address the distinctions in representation between different categories of RASIM (gender and age) (Bashatah, 2017; Rosen *et al.*, 2018; Gray *et al.*, 2019). Yet, the portrayal of RASIM as a uniform group, or as categories with different characteristics, is also indicative of the way politicians present the issue of migration. This third sub-question is therefore asked:

- **RQ2:** Do Belgian politicians distinguish between categories of RASIM, and if so, how do representations of men RASIM differ from women, elderly, and children RASIM?

Then, the study aims to demonstrate the evolution of the representation of RASIM by Belgian politicians from the beginning of the "migration crisis" to 2020. And, as 2015 and the following years were particularly eventful, the analysis considers key events of the past five years in order to see if these have had an impact on RASIM representation.

- **RQ3a:** How did the framing of RASIM by Belgian politicians evolve between 2015 and 2020?

- **RQ3b:** Are changes in frames of RASIM correlated to the timing of major events (such as the attacks on Brussels)?

1.2. Outline of the thesis

This thesis is composed of seven chapters. Chapter 2 begins by laying out the theoretical dimensions of the research, providing an overview of the studies on representation of RASIM. Then, the role of a European identity and/or nationalism in the representation of RASIM is explored. The final section of this chapter addresses the power of social media in shaping the audience's opinion, as well as the characteristics of Twitter and its use as a political tool. Chapter 3 outlines the framing approach and its advantages when it comes to the study of RASIM representation. The following chapter (Chapter 4), Material and Method, first presents the corpus and how it was compiled, and secondly describes the methodology adopted to study the representation of RASIM. Chapter 5 presents the results obtained through the manual and statistical analysis of the tweets. In the light of the results presented in the fifth chapter, Chapter 6 engages a discussion based on the research questions. Finally, Chapter 7 closes by reviewing main conclusions and offering some suggestions for further studies.

2. Literature review

This chapter aims to lay out the theoretical dimensions of the research. Reviewing previous studies on RASIM representation, Section 2.1. provides a brief introduction to the analyses of RASIM representations by political stakeholders and news media, extending on the distinction between the coverage of men, women, elderly, and children. The following section discusses the concepts of identity and nationalism and its impact on the representation of RASIM; it goes on with an overview of Belgium's political attitude towards migration (Section 2.2.). Then, Section 2.3. discusses the power of the media and its ability to shape public opinion. Finally, the microblogging platform Twitter, the social media under study, and its role as a political campaign tool is presented.

2.1. Representations of RASIM by politicians and news media

While this Master' thesis investigates RASIM representation on social media, and more particularly on Twitter, most studies have focused on the portrayal of RASIM in online and offline news media (Siapera *et al.*, 2018; Stromback *et al.*, 2021). In addition to reviewing studies examining political speeches and programs on migration, reporting on studies analyzing

the representation of RASIM in European news media in recent years allows us to observe general trends, in order to subsequently see, during the practical analysis of the tweets, whether Belgian politicians' discourses are in line with these trends.

2.1.1. Portrayal of RASIM by European politicians

Few studies have looked at the representation of RASIM in political discourses outside of news media. Indeed, political acts of communication are often looked at through mainstream channels of communication such as news media. However, Triandafyllidou (2018), by examining speeches and programs of various European political leaders, observes that center-left and left-wing politicians adopt a more solidaire and protective stance. Moreover, Boulaka (2018) adds that when discussing migration, left-wing politicians usually underline the necessity for collaboration between European countries to help RASIM. Examining a speech of the Greek Prime Minister, the author observes that the politician openly criticized and moralized nations that adopted politics of fear and acted unilaterally. On the other hand, center-right and far-right politicians discuss migration in terms of risk and threat, adopting a discourse that creates divisions within Europe and emphasizing their nation in relation to other countries or to RASIM themselves (Triandafyllidou, 2018).

However, in her study of Matteo Renzi's discourse, an Italian political stakeholder, Colombo (2018) states that politicians can act as a balance between securitarian and humanitarian news media's stance. Indeed, news media articles usually offer stories of RASIM as victims or as threats. In his speech, the Italian politician tried to navigate between the two, offering a "total political solution to the crisis" (Colombo, 2018, p. 174). He avoided to label RASIM, using neutral labels such as *person*, rather than words such as migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers.

European politicians therefore represent RASIM in diverse ways. However, the lack of studies on migration related discussions outside of mainstream news media does not allow for a full grasp of the matter. To complete the slim panel of studies on RASIM representation in political discourse, RASIM portrayal in news media is looked at. Addressing these studies allows for a broader understanding of RASIM main representation to the public.

2.1.2. The importance of news media

News media is the primary source of information that people turn to, they are also the first channel through which domestic and foreign politics are disseminated to the public (Landgon, 2018). News media does not only reflect and relate the latest events, but they also actively contribute to the construction of the meaning of events (Bozdag *et al.,* 2017). The selection of news topics, the thematic organization of newspapers, and the choice of their titles are indirectly determined by the societal context and the ideological orientation of the newspapers and their target audiences (Baider *et al.,* 2018). Directly or indirectly, these choices (made by news media) aim to create powerful images and trigger emotions that impact the collective unconscious.

Furthermore, the coverage of RASIM can also lead to the activation of stereotypical cognitions of RASIM. These thoughts and opinions that become inherent in people can impact on their attitudes and behavior in society (Kamenova, 2014). When constantly exposed to discourses on migration, the public can engage with the conveyed ideas and perhaps be influenced in their perceptions of the political scene and in their voting behavior (Eberl *et al.,* 2018). Indeed, Eberl *et al.* (2018) state that "the more news media report on immigration, the more people tend to vote for parties with an anti-immigrant stance, as they are perceived to be the most competent about the issue of immigration" (Eberl *et al.,* 2018, p. 211). Moreover, this is all the more the case in their relationship with the *other*, as the person (the non-RASIM) does not have any direct experience with RASIM and therefore can only shape its opinion based on the content he consumes (Kamenova, 2014). According to Kamenova (2014), "very often the media act as 'backups' of the national community, of the group-bearer of the main culture and of the shared sense of 'we'" (p. 174). The climate of uncertainty surrounding this so-called "migration crisis" has therefore given news media the opportunity to shape the citizen's understanding of this phenomenon. Looking at studies on RASIM representation in European news media allows for a fuller understanding of the attitudes and the global perception of the "crisis" in receiving countries.

2.1.3. Portrayal of RASIM in news media

A large number of studies have been conducted to analyze the representation of RASIM in news media. Researchers have consistently found that, although their representation is fragmented and complex, RASIM are generally negatively portrayed and represented as

outsiders by mainstream media (Siapera *et al*., 2018; Kreis, 2017; Wigger, 2019). Langdon (2018), in his article about empathy and othering in British news media, supports the claim that the selective terminology used to refer to RASIM creates an in group/out group feeling. The use of ecological metaphors such as a flood/a deluge/a storm of RASIM highlight the force of the 'disaster' and creates an image of a situation that has "accelerated beyond our control" (Landgon, 2018, p. 4). Therefore, the choice of vocabulary and figures of speech used to describe RASIM can impact whether they receive positive or negative media coverage. In the same vein, studies have shown that the use of metaphors when referring to RASIM can influence the way they are portrayed in the collective unconscious (Siapera *et al*., 2018; Bozdag *et al*., 2017). Metaphors such as "aliens, water and natural disasters, pollution and impurity, war/fighting, house/building, disease/infection, animals, goods and the economy are salient to the argumentative structure of discourses on RASIM" (KhosraviNik, 2010, p. 7). Examining online shared articles on Reddit, Coppin (2020) highlights metaphors used to represent RASIM:

(1) "But Middle Eastern countries are very quiet about it as if those refugees were from **another planet**, I don't see how the EU is even involved with this nonsense" (p. 26).

(2) "They [RASIM] become **parasites** and wonder why people treat them like trash" (p. 26).

The very fact of naming the events "a crisis" has the effect of qualifying the situation as uncontrollable, critical, and threatening. It reduces the issue to an anonymous mass movement and dehumanizes RASIM. Moreover, Kreis (2017), through a critical discourse analysis of the use of the *#refugeesnotwelcome* in Europe, argues that the use of deictic expressions such as *our*, *here*, *us* and *them* is evidence of ethnocentrism. He illustrates this with a number of tweets, showing that the choice of vocabulary used to discuss RASIM can create a sense of exclusion and a gap between the positive self and the negative other.

(3) "To those complaining about refugees being teargassed Hungarian police were attacked 1st so decided to defend **themselves** #RefugeesNotWelcome" (p. 507).

(4) "Northern Ireland to take 2,000 refugees. Fuck off **our** own come first. #RefugeesNotWelcome" (p. 509).

Drawing on the work of Wodak, Kreis (2017) argues that this in group/out group feeling discursively constructs a national or European identity and therefore gives a negative connotation to RASIM; they are seen as not belonging to the European "imagined identity" and not worthy of becoming part of it. In their analysis of the representation of immigrants in the Irish print media, Breen *et al.* (2006) supports that discourses on migration act to other RASIM. The authors define othering "as the process by which we delimit and define *us* by delimiting and defining *them*" (Breen *et al.*, 2006, p. 14). Subsequently, a large number of researchers have confirmed that the political, public and media discourse act to other RASIM (Langdon 2018; Wigger, 2019; Narlı *et al*., 2020). However, using a frame analysis approach, Breen *et al.* (2006) also claim that some media represent RASIM in a more cosmopolitan or humanitarian way. In this case, they deconstruct the divide between the self and the other as RASIM are seen as contributors to the society or as individuals fleeing an unsafe or undesirable situation. Yet, it was subsequently shown that when RASIM are portrayed as victims or when their integration is discussed, they are then presented as controlled objects, in order to demonstrate the charity of the host country (Torkington *et* Ribeiro, 2019; Amores *et al*., 2020).

It was also shown that not all RASIM are equally visible in the media. Some groups are more represented than others, depending on their origin, ethnicity, religion, or legal status. For example, Eberl *et al.* (2018) explain that RASIM can be distinguished based on their religious affiliation, Muslim RASIM's coverage being more salient than Christians or Jewish RASIM. However, the media generally represent RASIM as a homogeneous crowd, without distinguishing them by their personal characteristics such as gender, age, origin, purpose, or status. In 2010, KhosraniVik, focusing on the representation of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants in British newspapers, stated that "terms used to refer to 'people who have moved out of their countries (...)' seem to vary in terms of the degree of associated negativity" (p. 11). He concludes that while the term *immigrant* seems to carry a negative connotation, *emigrant* seems to be used in discourse where the person is presented in a more humanitarian way. Whereas *migrant* seems to be used in various contexts, being an intermediate between *immigrant* and *emigrant*. Similarly, other researchers have supported the claim that the media tend to use the terms migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers interchangeably and without regard for their nuances, which has the effect of discrediting RASIM's motives for migration (Siapera *et al.*, 2018; Torkington *et* Ribeiro, 2019), trivializing the violence that they may seek to flee (Landgon, 2018), and "fails to acknowledge the legitimacy of asylum seeking itself" (Breen *et al.,* 2016, p. 5).

Using various research methods, researchers study the words, figures of speech and turns of phrase used in media coverage of RASIM. Drawing on previous studies, it can be observed that RASIM are mainly represented as the outsider, different from *us*. They are introduced in a negative way, notably by means of metaphors and other expressions. RASIM are also often evoked as a homogeneous group. Yet, these groups of people migrating to Europe are made up of men, women, elderly, and children who all have a different life path. The failure to recognise these different categories dehumanizes RASIM and the hard process of migration that they experience.

2.1.4. Distinction in coverage between men, women, elderly, and children RASIM in news media

Representing each category of RASIM separately is essential to reflect the reality of the migratory movement and help each category benefit from appropriate regulations (Narlı *et al.,* 2020). Moreover, invisibilizing the different categories has the effect of dehumanizing RASIM and can lead to a negative reaction towards them. In order to better account for the portrayal of RASIM by Belgian politicians on Twitter, this section focuses on the particularities of coverage for each category separately (men, women, elderly, and children).

From the outset, it is important to note that researchers have generally found that women, elderly, and children RASIM are represented to a lesser extent in the press. Women RASIM, as well as elerdly and children, are on the back burner of the "migration crisis", seen as passive in comparison to men who remain the protagonists (Langdon, 2018; Amores *et al.*, 2020; Milivojević *et al.,* 2021). Indeed, images and texts usually show adult men under 65 years old migrating, implying that the most vulnerable - women, elderly, and children - do not flee and that men only seek socioeconomic opportunities. In his study of the #RefugeesNotWelcome, Kreis (2017) illustrate that perception with the following tweet:

(5) "The vast majority 70+% are **single male** UNHCR figures not mine true refugees in Hungary are a minority #RefugeesNotWelcome" (p. 508).

Indeed, even outside the scope of discussion on migration, elderly are frequently under-represented, or even absent from typical media such as news articles or social media (Amundsen, 2022; Milivojević *et al.*, 2021). The lack of elderly representation in the media shapes a certain idea in the public about their lesser importance. When elderly people are portrayed, they are often presented in a negative way. Discourses on elderly mainly discuss

impairment, isolation, dependency, grumpiness, and vulnerability. They are often represented as "a family 'burden', and a societal drain on health care and social service organizations" (Amundsen, 2022, p. 3). However, studies of the representation of elderly people in online media and social media are rare (Amundsen, 2022; Milivojević *et al.*, 2021), and studies on the representation of elderly people in the context of migration are even more so. Therefore, by looking at both the representation of RASIM in terms of age and gender, this Master's thesis begins to fill a gap in the literature.

When women and children RASIM are represented, vulnerability is the primary characteristic they are associated with. In need of protection, sympathy, and support, news media emphasize the hardship that women and children RASIM endure and reinforce the dramatic nature of their deaths (Gray *et al.*, 2019). In a recent study of the representation of women migrants in Turkish news media, Narlı *et al.*, (2020) show that they are predominantly represented in a humanitarian way. Using a positive and compassionate tone, the media demonstrate empathy for women and children RASIM who are victims of violence and sexual abuse (mainly for women) and/or of trafficking and gang culture (mainly for children) (Rosen *et al.*, 2018). Presenting children as victims humanizes their stories and causes the public to identify with them, leading to a feeling of empathy and solidarity (Langdon, 2018). A child's story addresses the questions of why this so-called "migration crisis" is happening and why RASIM are facing so much hardship (Bozdag *et al.,* 2017). The viral photo of Aylan Kurdi, the little Syrian boy who was found drowned on a Turkish beach, is a perfect example of children being represented as innocent victims and used as symbols of the hardship RASIM experience. It was reported in many news media and on social networks, and many studies have examined the social, media and political responses to this event.

Image 1 - Aylan Kurdi, photographed by Nilüfer Demir, September 02, 2015

Moreover, in her study of child migrants' representation in the British press, Rosen *et al.* (2018) add that children RASIM are more often undifferentiated from other family members and portrayed as passive dependents. This specific representation may have an impact on the representation of other family members, especially the father. Indeed, although this is rarer, men too can be presented as vulnerable. In this case, it is mainly because they are injured, disabled, elderly, or fathers in charge of a family. Their vulnerability to the threat of forced recruitment into armed groups can also be emphasized, even though they are sometimes shamed for fleeing the war, failing in their duty as men (Gray *et al.*, 2019).

Furthemore, women RASIM are more frequently associated with religious symbols than men RASIM (Amores *et al.,* 2020). Indeed, as Bashatah (2017) observes, "stories appearing in newspapers on the subject of Saudi women consistently show images of anonymous groups wearing amorphous black attire (...)" (p. 12). By doing so, the media creates a cultural stereotype of the RASIM woman and reinforces the idea that women RASIM are annihilated due to their culture. Bashatah (2017) adds that while RASIM women are often portrayed as victims, they are still framed negatively, as they are represented as helpless and vulnerable to manipulation - for example when discussing the hijab. They are predominantly portrayed as dependent on men, culture, and religion. Furthermore, Hennebry *et al.* (2017) claim that "Women are seen as 'victims' in need of protection from harm, rather than individuals whose rights need to be protected" (p. 6). When racialized and portrayed with religious cues, women RASIM are seen as in need of rescue from their own oppressive and conservative culture, a type of help that Gray *et al.* (2019) name as a paternalistic protection of European governments. Therefore, "when women are the protagonists of the news, they generally adopt roles that reinforce the values established by the patriarchal society, and that tend to objectify them and treat them as submissive and defenseless" (Amores *et al.*, 2020, p. 297).

While women and elderly are very rarely portrayed as a threat to their host country, this representation is most common for men. Focusing on the gendered representation of RASIM in British media, Gray *et al.* (2019) states that men RASIM are usually portrayed as threatening. Drawing on the example of the 'jungle' camp in Calais, the author cites a newspaper article that states:

(6) "Neighboring residents speak of being terrified by the presence of hundreds of men living rough, just yards from their front doors" (p. 281)

The article also includes the statement of a female British resident:

(7) “If it was women and children and families on their own, I wouldn't mind, but my fear is that there will be a lot of single men roaming around, walking between the camp and the village” (p. 281).

A culture of violence, especially sexual violence towards women, is therefore associated to men RASIM. This sexism and violence are often linked to their gender as well as their religious background. Indeed, focusing on Media representation of male Muslim migrants in Germany, Wigger (2019) states that those features are often associated to the portrayal of young Muslim men and their patriarchal Islamic culture. Wigger studies the representation of men RASIM after the events on New Year’s Eve 2016, when a group of men RASIM (mainly Muslim, originating from North Africa) robbed, mugged, and sexually assaulted women in the area of Cologne and other German cities (these events are commonly referred to as the Cologne events). The researcher claims that in the weeks following this event, even in articles unrelated to these events, men RASIM were portrayed as outsiders, as enemies invading their host country “with their patriarchal, alien and backward religious and cultural traditions" (Wigger, 2019, p.29). Explicitly racialized, misogyny and violence are plaited into men RASIM narratives (Gray *et al.*, 2019). The violence associated with men RASIM is illustrated in Amores *et al.* (2020) study of the gendered representation of refugees. He illustrates the violent threat of RASIM with a photo published in the Daily Mail in 2016:

Image 2 - Daily Mail (2016) - “Refugees framed as a threat” Amores et al., 2020, p. 314

Moreover, the fact that these aggressors are young is very often highlighted. Indeed, mistrust is often expressed as for minors unaccompanied boys. Those RASIM fall into the category of children, however they can also be considered as a threat (Gray *et al*., 2019). They can be considered as not really children and can be suspected of being older than they claim in order to benefit from a particular status, as a result, they are treated as adults RASIM with no special consideration. Age contestation serves to make all those claiming to be unaccompanied minors suspicious (Rosen et al., 2018).

This short overview of previous works on the discourses on RASIM has revealed that the representations of RASIM, although diverse, are mainly negative and serve to other RASIM. Being portrayed as different from *us*, RASIM are mainly represented as a large and homogeneous whole that floods Europe. However, it was also shown that not all RASIM are represented to the same extent and in the same way. Women, elderly, and children are less voiced by news media and portrayed as more vulnerable, whereas men get more coverage and tend to be portrayed as threats.

2.2. The construction of the so-called "migration crisis" by politicians

As it was shown in Section 2.1., RASIM are usually othered and negatively represented in news coverage, as they are shown as a threat to the economy, security, welfare system or cultural tradition of the host country. Although representation of RASIM vary from country to country, there are recurring similarities between the different European countries (Heidenreich, 2019; Stromback *et al.*, 2021). This section aims to discuss one of the various factors that might explain the diversity of representations of RASIM, i.e., the construction of a European and/or a national identity. By observing the phenomenon of a growing identification to *a constructed community* in Europe, and in Belgium, I attempt to better understand how nationalism can impact the way Belgian politicians represent RASIM.

2.2.1. The construction of a European and/or national identity by politicians

Social identity, together with the knowledge of belonging to a group, is what allows individuals to define who they are. Identification with a nation is therefore paramount. And recently, identification with the European Union has become a new source of group membership and self-identification for Europeans (Stockemer *et al.*, 2020). However, it is not possible to clearly define a concept as vague as the one of a European identity; it is a concept constantly evolving and composed of fragments of the identity of all its nation states. Yet,

Wodak *et al.,* (2015) state that all researchers seem to agree: an identity implies both *sameness* and *distinctiveness*, the latter being what makes it possible to differentiate the members of a group from those who are not part of this group. Therefore, "the discursive forms of inclusion and exclusion have significant importance for the cultivation of European identity/ies, since they define the 'Europeans' and create an 'imagine community' of 'Us' who exclude the *others*" (Wodak *et al.*, 2015, p. 92). The creation of a community on an arbitrary criterion allows the exclusion of those who do not meet this same criterion; in other words, otherness allows the creation of identity (Durin, 2018; Stockemer *et al.*, 2020).

Therefore, a European identity can give way to a rhetoric of exclusion, which may become a political tool to promote a certain ideology. Indeed, even if "enemies are often not real but invented in order to highlight our uniqueness and provide a challenge to fight against" (Górak-Sosnowska, 2019, p.228), it serves as a reason to mobilize resources. For example, in 2016, when the European Parliament voted on the Resolution on the situation in the Mediterranean, the ENF (Europe of Nations and Freedom) opposed this resolution that aimed to help RASIM. Their arguments were that RASIM were a danger to Europe, being both a cultural threat (trying to *Islamize* Europe), and a security threat (being responsible for terrorist attacks) (Durin, 2018). This right-wing political group in the European Parliament presented RASIM as in opposition to the modern and progressive European identity and to the security of Europe, thus using this form of identification as a tool for their political narrative (Górak-Sosnowska, 2019; Durin, 2018).

However, in their article on the Role of European and National Identity, Pinto *et al.* (2020) argue that the European identity is more supportive of immigration, while a national identity favors a more negative attitude toward RASIM. That is to say that people and politicians who identify more with Europe than with their nation tend to be more in favor of migration. Indeed, nationalism gives rise to ethnocentrism, it "reflects individuals' beliefs in the superiority of their nation in situations of perceived competition over scarce resources" (Pinto *et al*., 2020, p. 3). As a large body of research shows, the last few years have seen a rise in extreme right-wing parties in most European countries (Górak-Sosnowska, 2019; Wodak *et al.*, 2015; Pinto *et al.*, 2020). Right wing parties have capitalized on anti-RASIM (and additionally anti-Europe) sentiments. They have seized on the fact to positions RASIM as dangerous newcomers, linking them to *Islamization*, terrorist attacks and other violent events, emphasizing the differences between *them* and *us*. They adopt a nationalist rhetoric that

capitalizes on people's fears (Wodak *et al.,* 2015; Stockemer et al., 2020), and once these fears are broadcasted to the nation, they are hard to soothe, even if they are not grounded in reality (Górak-Sosnowska, 2019). Focusing on political discourses in the Netherlands before and after the Cologne events, Mensies (2018) observed that the populist political party PVV capitalized on those violent events to ask the European borders' closure and the *de-Islamization* of the country, so that the Dutch population could feel safe again. Already representing them as fortune seekers and intruders before the Cologne events, the PVV adopted a discourse that called to action against RASIM after the events.

The concept of a European identity and/or nationalism can therefore be used by politicians to position themselves in relation to migration, it can be a tool to fuel their political narratives. European politicians tend to instrumentalize European and national identity to broadcast a discourse of fear linked to RASIM. The following section aims to shed light on nationalism in Belgium, a country divided into three monolingual parts, each with its own monolingual political parties and media (the Dutch, German and French parts)[2], where identification with the nation is also fragmented. Since it was shown that politicians capitalize on nationalism to adopt a negative discourse towards RASIM, it is paramount to observe whether nationalism is strong in Belgium, to better assess RASIM representation given by Belgian politicians.

2.2.2. The construction of a sub-national identity by Belgian politicians

Like elsewhere in Europe, the increasing number of RASIM arriving in Belgium and seeking asylum dominated the media and the political agenda during the so-called 2015 "migration crisis". Since then, it has remained a major debate for the country. De Cleen *et al.* (2017) claims that the discourses on migration in Belgium are rather negative, problematizing the presence of RASIM. The authors examine the construction of the "migration crisis" in Flanders and conclude that the country's discourse falls within "a long established culturalist, securitarian and economic discursive logics" (De Cleen *et al.,* 2017, p. 59). And as a matter of fact, since 2015, the "migration crisis" has been mainly dominated by the right-wing political parties of Flanders, as the left-wing voices (of Wallonia) "have not been able to formulate and push forward fundamentally different solutions to the 'crisis'" (De Cleen *et al.*, 2017, p. 72). Moreover, focusing on the framing of migrants by populist and liberal political parties in the

[2] The German-speaking community represents less than 1% of the Belgian population, which is why this study only focuses on the two main entities.

Netherlands and Flanders, Mensies (2018) observed that Flemish populist political parties, namely the Vlaams Belang and the N-VA, tended to represent RASIM as intruders, blaming them for the violence in the country and calling for action against them.

Indeed, historically, "the Flemish identity appears to be associated with the protection of the Flemish cultural heritage" (De Wever *et al.*, 2011, p. 19). Since the early 2000s, the emergence and rise of the Flemish political party Vlaams Belang[3] has been a major political force in the country, not only in terms of its electoral successes, but also in the way it monopolizes the issue of immigration and divides much of the political and media spectrum around the issue (Fadil *et al.*, 2020). Although less radical than the Vlaams Belang, the N-VA has also played a major role in integrating anti-immigration rhetoric in recent years (De Cleen *et al.*, 2017). The more radical currents of these nationalist movements have even embraced separatist and authoritarian tendencies, calling for the scission of the country (Fadil *et al*., 2020). Therefore, right-wing Flemish nationalist parties promote Flemish identity and ethnocentrism. Flemings tend to identify with the Flemish sub-national identity, rather than with the Belgian national identity (Billiet *et al.,* 2015). It is possible that Flemings who do not identify with the right-wing political agenda of Flanders will favor a national identification with Belgium, or to a larger extent, a European identification. On the other hand, "the Walloon identity is primarily associated with the social-economic emancipation of the Walloon region, and with anti-racism and openness towards other cultures" (De Wever *et al.,* 2011, p. 19). In the French-speaking part of the country, extreme right-wing parties have almost completely disappeared from the electoral scene (which does not mean that anti-RASIM and racist attitudes do not exist in Wallonia). And there is a broad consensus in favor of maintaining a Belgian state, with separatism not being a strong political demand in southern Belgium (Fadil *et al.,* 2020).

A European identity and nationalism can therefore have an impact on the way RASIM are represented. Politicians, capitalizing on values of shared culture, shared history, shared language, etc., can create a sense of difference between RASIM - the *other* -, and *us* - the people. Belgium is composed of two regions with a different culture, language, political and media system. Nationalism is therefore fragmented, composed of sub-nationalisms. Flemish tend to identify with Flanders, whereas Walloons tend to identify with Belgium. This

[3] Formerly called Vlaams Blok, the party changed its name to Vlaams Belang after being convicted of racism in 2004.

fragmentation in nationalism explains the dichotomy present in politics around the topic of migration. Not sharing the same ideals and values, Flemish and Walloon politicians capitalize differently on the topic of migration. As Flanders' nationalism is stronger and more long-standing, they tend to be in favor of a more distrustful and strict immigration policy.

2.3. The power of social media

The previous sections have shown that RASIM are represented in a rather negative way by European news media and politicians. Capitalizing on the idea of a European identity and/or on nationalism, politicians tend to represent RASIM as a threatening homogeneous group. Politicians disseminate their political mandate and their views on migration - whether positive or negative - via mainstream media but also via social networks. Aiming to reach the widest possible audience, the political ideas disseminated on these different platforms can have a very large impact and influence on public opinion. This section aims to explain why politicians use a platform such as Twitter, and how influential it can be.

2.3.1. The influence of social media

Previous studies have shown that news media actively contribute to the construction of the meaning of events (Bozdag *et al.,* 2017). They have the power to influence public opinion on RASIM both through the frequency of the coverage and the frames used to portray them. However, we have witnessed a fundamental shift in the dominant mode of communication and information as mainstream media are now only part of the whole media system (Siapera *et al*., 2018; Ott, 2017). Now including social networks, the new media landscape is much more complex and unpredictable, it can be referred to as hybrid. Indeed, social networks have not replaced traditional media, but they have complemented them (Ott, 2017). Through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Tik Tok, etc., individuals have instant access to worldwide news, information, and other forms of content. On those platforms, they can interact with other people and share their opinion (Gorodnichenko *et al*., 2021). While mainstream media tell the story of the powerful because they have a monopoly on what information they give and how they present it, social networks allow for inclusion and participation of all. On social networks, power belongs to those who create engagement; it is wielded by those who can spread information to a large audience (Siapera *et al.,* 2018). Used correctly, social media are therefore a powerful tool to convey information, reach a wide audience and create interaction. Making it

possible to create a sense of public consensus or support, social media have therefore the power to impact public opinion in new ways (Gorodnichenko *et al.,* 2021).

Since social media are now one of the first channels through which politics and the latest news are being disseminated to the public, they play a primary role in shaping the people's understanding of social issues (Baider *et al.,* 2018). With young people in particular claiming social networks as a new mode of information, political campaigns, and politicians more broadly, have had to adapt and disseminate their ideas on social networks in order to reach the largest possible audience (Fassassi, 2017). Politicians' discourses on social media can be a source of ideology making, they can produce and reinforce collective representation (Bozdag *et al.,* 2017). Therefore, by expressing themselves on social media, political stakeholders may have the power to shape what people think of an issue and to create a cultural resonance (Landgon, 2018).

2.3.2. Twitter and its role as a political campaign tool

More than ever before, social media are playing a substantial role as a new source of information and communication (Von Nordheim *et al.*, 2018). Since its establishment in 2006, Twitter has evolved into a prevalent communication platform, empowering users, and giving them a platform to voice their opinions. In 2019, Twitter counted 330 million monthly active users worldwide (Statista Research Department, 2019). Twitter's layout allows users to connect by tweeting, responding directly to a Tweet or retweeting (Kreis, 2017). A tweet is limited to 280 characters and may also include photos or short videos[4]. When posting a tweet, users can address other users by tagging them (@username) or communicate with a vast audience, primarily constituted by their followers. However, since tweets are public, users can essentially communicate with anybody. Therefore, Twitter allows one-to-one, many-to-many or one-to-many communication. Moreover, the use of #hashtags allow for searchability of specific words, it organizes discussion around specific topics or events.

Twitter is recognized as a platform for rapid news sharing and events following; it is a real time global communication platform. The platform does not function as a network for establishing relations, but rather as a network for disseminating information. It can be used strategically by political stakeholders in order to increase their visibility and engage with their

[4] Before 2018, tweets could only be 140 characters long. It is important to note this change since this study focuses on tweets posted between 2015 and 2020.

community (Kreis, 2017). Indeed, politicians are increasingly using social networks, especially Twitter, in their campaigns to promote their work and increase community engagement (Bright *et al.*, 2020). Their presence on social networks allows them to build real support networks. It enables politicians to share images, videos, and articles, post status updates, and comment about current events in order to create a more personalized communication style that distinguishes them from their parties, their opponents and traditional news media (Marquart *et al.,* 2020). As the two examples below show (1) (2), it can allow a candidate's profile to be presented in a more authentic and accessible way as the conversations that politicians engage in on social networks appear more spontaneous and disinterested (Marquart *et al.*, 2020).

(1) #europolis Young people are interested in Europe! Debate with students from several secondary schools in the country, who put themselves in the shoes of MEPs for a few days and worked on current issues, such as migration, stereotypes, employment https://t.co/xXaU9lzvqN[5]

(2) In Hilversum for a debate on European Union and EU mess on migration and terrorism. News Hour NL2. https://t.co/2uk7c1trJ4[6]

Twitter gives politicians the opportunity to amplify the reach of their message by making their discourses interactive and accessible (Stromback *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, sharing content on social networks also allows politicians to reach a younger voting part of the population (Marquart *et al.,* 2020; Gorodnichenko *et al.,* 2021). Several studies have also shown that using Twitter as a campaigning tool significantly increases a candidate's odds of winning as voters are also more willing to go to the polling station after having seen political content in their feed (Bright *et al.*, 2020). Seeing political content on social media can therefore translate into more offline participation (Marquart *et al*., 2020).

However, according to Ott (2017), Twitter's structure means that the messages posted by the users are generally offensive, simple, and impetuous. Indeed, because of the limited number of characters, the platform encourages short sentences and therefore persuasive messages that are usually posted impulsively. In the political sphere, several studies have

[5] Translated from French: #europolis Les jeunes s'intéressent à l'Europe! Débat avec des étudiants de plusieurs écoles secondaires du pays, qui se sont mis dans la peau de Députés européens pour quelques jours et travaillé sur des thématiques actuelles, telles, la migration, stéréotypes, l emploi https://t.co/xXaU9lzvqN

[6] Translated from Dutch: In Hilversum voor een debat over Europese Unie en de EU-knoeiboel inzake migratie en terrorisme. Nieuwsuur NL2. https://t.co/2uk7c1trJ4

shown that twitter was also strongly used by politicians to criticize other candidates, parties, or politicians in office (Ott, 2017). In the following two examples, comments on the actions and attitudes of some politicians towards migration can be observed (3) (4).

(3) @michelhenrion Traumatised and betrayed by Christmas homily on migrants, the god of the #NVA and its #furher @Bart_DeWever is about to excommunicate @Pontifex_en #SaveFrancken @hetlaatstenieuw[7]

(4) Tough words, while @FranckenTheo took in countless sharia adepts and jihad worshippers, welcomed them and recognized them as refugees. https://t.co/pSTrKfoqiM[8]

Nevertheless, while Bright *et al.* (2020) do support that there is a substantial correlation between campaigning on social media and voters behaviors, he adds that there is a lack of evidence that politicians' interactions with their audience, by commenting, liking, retweeting, etc. improve vote outcomes. Other researchers such as Faraon *et al*. (2014) state that campaigning on social media does not have a substantial influence on voters behavior.

The way people consume information has changed and political campaigns have had to adapt to this shift. Social networks have become an essential political tool and have profoundly changed the way campaigns are conducted (Fassassi, 2017). These platforms allow them to communicate unfiltered information, avoiding journalistic gatekeeping or fact-checking (Stromback et al., 2021). Frequently used as a tool for campaigning, Twitter allows for an interactive way for politicians to communicate with a wide audience. Therefore, Twitter actively contributes to political conversations, it constitutes an essential channel for sharing information and building a community.

2.4. Summary

Since stakeholders on social media have the power to construct and reinforce people's understanding of an event, a social group, or an individual, networks such as Twitter can reinforce social discourses and attitudes towards RASIM. Moreover, in Europe, previous

[7] Translated from French: @michelhenrion Traumatisé et trahi par l'homélie de noël sur les migrants, le dieu de la #NVA et de son #furher @Bart_DeWever s'apprête à excommunier @Pontifex_fr #SauvezFrancken @hetlaatstenieuw

[8] Translated from Dutch: Stoere woorden, terwijl @FranckenTheo talloze sharia-adepten en jihadverheerlijkers binnenliet, opving en erkende als vluchtelingen. https://t.co/pSTrKfoqiM

studies have shown that the predominantly negative representation or lack of representation of different categories of RASIM (men, women, elderly, and children) in social and news media influence how RASIM are seen within the national identity and social imagination.

Following the rise of right-wing political parties, studies have mainly addressed the representations of RASIM in European and Flemish news media. Indeed, since Wallonia does not have a strong right-wing party, and therefore a pervasive discourse on immigration, its attitude towards migration has not been studied to a large extent. Moreover, because of the linguistic difference between the two regions, few studies look at discourses in Wallonia and in Flanders simultaneously. We therefore lack a comprehensive overview of the national political discussion on migration.

Walloon and Flemish politicians' discourses on Twitter may have the power to reinforce commonly held views on RASIM intrinsic to their respective regions. Looking at tweets posted by Walloon and Flemish politicians between 2015 and 2020, this Master's thesis allows for a fuller comprehension, to a certain extent, of the political discourses on RASIM and migration on Twitter. It aims to reflect the existing political tensions and divergences between the Walloon and Flemish political parties and show the possible rise of a right-wing political movement in the country. In order to do so, a frame analysis approach is employed, which allows for identification of the predominant representations of RASIM in tweets posted by Belgian politicians.

3. Theoretical framework: frame analysis approach

As mentioned previously, social media have a substantial role in shaping the audience's understanding of social issues such as migration. The concept of framing makes it possible to depict the various encoded meanings that are significant and influential in a discourse (Mendelsohn, 2021). In addition to contributing to the construction of an understanding of a societal problem, the selection of issues for attention and the selection of frames for portraying these issues are influential in the setting of political agendas (Breen *et al.,* 2006). Framing is a schema of interpretation that people reckon on to understand and react to events. The framing approach is ubiquitous in a number of fields such as social sciences and humanities - sociology, psychology, discourse analysis, etc. (Mensies, 2018). This chapter aims to demonstrate the relevance of this approach to the analysis of tweets posted by Belgian politicians. Section 3.1. begins by tracing the development of the framing theory and highlights some of the major

researchers associated with this field of study. Then, the frame analysis approach adopted in this study is presented (Section 3.2.).

3.1. Initial approach to the framing theory

G. Bateson is known to have been the first scholar to introduce the concept of framing. This anthropologist defines frame as "a spatial and temporal bounding of a set of interactive messages" (p. 191). The sociologist Goffman elaborated on Bateson psychological definition of frames, referring to them as "schemata of interpretation which enables individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label [information]" (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). Bateson and Goffman were the first to explain framing's role in interpreting linguistic messages. They considered framing as a way to provide meaning and to regulate behavior in the social context (Bashatah, 2017). Later, Tuchman made a direct link between news production and framing, "suggesting that they [news articles] are 'framed' in the sense that they suggest value-laden messages about issues essential to news events" (Bashatah, 2017, p. 78). Tuchman argued that frame analysis could be used to unravel hidden meanings in news articles, highlighting which information is excluded or included in a story (Bashatah, 2017).

In the early 1970s, culture began to be considered as an important factor in the study of frames. Entman was one of the first scholars to highlight the importance of culture in the framing approach and to incorporate it in his model of frame analysis (Bashatah, 2017). He defined framing as a way to "select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Entman's model is based on the writing process of a news story. In his model, he argues that frames become apparent in four locations during the communication process: the communicator, the text, the receiver, and culture (Bashatah, 2017).

(1) **The communicator** (for example a journalist) is responsible for the way he approaches an issue. His way of reporting a story is guided by his own belief system, influencing the manner of assessing the problem, allocating blame... (Bashatah, 2017). Journalists can follow the rules of objectivity imposed by their profession and still convey a dominant framing of the news story. The frame then adopted prevents most readers from making a neutral assessment of a situation (Entman, 1993). This model can also apply to political communication. Frames emphasize some aspects of reality while

neglecting others, which triggers different interpretations and reactions from audiences. Politicians seeking support are thus forced to compete over frames to get the public's attention. Framing thus plays a major role in the exercise of political power. The frame used in a text, or any other form of communication, is a mark of power: it relates the identity of the actors and their interests, distinguishing them from each other (Entman, 1993).

(2) In accordance with the first ideas of Tuchman, Entman claims that frames can be encountered in **the text** itself, by analyzing what pieces of information are included or excluded from it (Bashatah, 2017). Frames select and draw attention to specific aspects of reality. Thus, frames simultaneously divert attention from other aspects, which are occulted (Entman, 1993).

(3) The **receiver**, just as the communicator, brings his own frames to the text. Those can be different or similar from each other. However, according to some scholars, frames are, most often than not, rooted in a culture which is shared by the communicator (the journalist) and the receiver (the intended audience) (Bashatah, 2017). This influences the conclusions the receiver draws from the text.

(4) Finally, **culture**, such as local origin or gender, can be reflected in news coverage, often translated into words emphasizing similarity or division like 'us', 'them' (Bashatah, 2017).

Culture therefore plays a paramount role in framing. Culture, in the sense of 'a set of beliefs', organizes stereotypes, values, norms, etc.: it is underpinning knowledge. Indeed, a frame is not value-neutral, and the frame a political stakeholder uses to treat an issue plays a significant role in shaping the reader's understanding of that matter. Moreover, "a frame is a central organizing idea or way of viewing the world that may lead to the promotion of particular understandings" (Landgon, 2018, p. 2). The concept of framing therefore offers a way to describe the power of communication - in speeches, programs, and other forms of political communication such as tweets. The framing analysis approach highlights the precise way in which influence over an audience is exerted by political stakeholders. The frame determines what most people notice in a situation, how they understand and remember it, as well as how they assess it and choose to act on it (Entman, 1993).

3.2. My analytical framework

The framing theory was therefore chosen as the basis for this thesis' analytical framework. Frame analysis was employed to reveal how the migration issue and how RASIM are portrayed by Walloons and Flemish politicians, and how this portrayal has evolved over time and around specific events. For this purpose, this study relies on Mendelsohn *et al*. (2021) guidelines.

3.2.1. Frame building and frame setting

There are two types of framing approaches, depending on what the researcher focuses on. In frame-setting approaches, frames are considered to be independent variables. The aim is to study how frames will impact the audience's interpretation and evaluation of the issue (Mendelsohn *et al.*, 2021). As each person perceives information differently, depending on its background and its own prior knowledge, frame setting analyzes how frames interact with the reader's critical thinking and understanding of the issue (Kalafati, 2020). Whereas in frame-building approaches, frames are dependent variables. "Frame-building is the process by which external factors, such as a journalist's ideology or economic pressures, influence what frames are used" (Mendelsohn *et al.,* 2021, p. 2). Therefore, frames depend on the author's understanding of societal issues and events. Frame building can be observed in a number of locations, these locations are the one mentioned in Entman's cultural model, i.e., the text, the communicator, and the culture (Kalafati, 2020). In the framework of this study, discourses of Belgian politicians on Twitter are being looked at. The aim is to observe the differences in political ideology between the French-speaking and the Dutch-speaking part of the country, and how their political stance can be interpreted through the usage of frames. A frame-building approach is therefore adopted.

3.2.2. A typology of frames for studying RASIM representation

When discussing societal issues such as migration, politicians aim to create a strategic response and/or affect policy outcomes. They aim to distinguish themselves from other candidates based on their opinions and their assessment of the issue (McKasy et Zulli, 2021). Frames therefore play a major role in shaping citizens' opinions about phenomena they do not directly experience and in making them more inclined towards a political party. There is not a single mode of depiction of RASIM, but rather multiple viable narratives. RASIM on Twitter are "often politized in two versions: a far-right perspective, in which refugees are portrayed as

rapists and terrorists, and a humanitarian perspective, in which refugees are in need or protection and safety" (Mensies, 2018, p. 8). Hence, political discourses can either promote a more negative or a more cosmopolitan/positive frame; they can either create an ingroup/outgroup feeling or deconstruct the divide between the self and the other (Heidenreich, 2019). There are many different framing typologies depending on the platform, the type of speech, the identity of the authors, among others, under study. Usually divided in negative and humanitarian frames, numerous typologies portray RASIM as economic threats, criminal elements, threats to national integrity, victims, opportunities, etc (Heidenreich, 2019).

In the context of this study, the framing model developed in the study *Modeling Framing in Immigration Discourse on Social Media,* carried out by Mendelsohn *et al.* (2021) will be used. Based on the fact that frames can influence public opinion and policy, the authors of the study elaborated a model to detect frames. This model comprises three categories: (1) issue-generic frames that appear across a variety of issues - they transcend thematic boundaries and are closely related to routines of journalism and discourses, (2) issue-specific frames for migration that focus on the portrayal of RASIM, and (3) narrative frames that distinguish specific events from broader social context (Mendelsohn *et al.,* 2021). This model combines Benson (2013)'s typology of issue-specific frames, Boydstun *et al.* (2013)'s set of issue-generic frames, and Iyengar (1991)'s classification of narrative frames. The main advantage of this typology is the multiple dimensions of framing. It allows for a better understanding of the nature of immigration discourses on Twitter. Mendelsohn *et al.* classification (2021) allows to combine the precision and interpretability of issue-specific frames with the broad coverage of issue-generic frames.

Though politicians can use several frames to address migration, here I focus on several issue-generic, issue-specific, and narrative frames that are directly applicable to political discourses in Belgium. Indeed, Mendelsohn *et al. (*2021) classification is exhaustive and, considering the extent of the analysis and the information of interest, it had to be adapted to the need of the study[9]. Some frames were phased out and others were combined. In the issue-generic frame type, the following frames were discarded, either because they did not appear as relevant, or because they covered a field already partially or fully covered by another frame.

[9] Every frame and their brief definition used in the framework of this study can be found in Table 1, page 3. Mendelsohn, J., Budak, C., & Jurgens, D. (2021). Modeling Framing in Immigration Discourse on Social Media. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2104.06443*.

- **Fairness and equality:** “the (in)equality with which laws, punishments, rewards, resources are distributed”.

- **Policy prescription and evaluation:** “discussions of existing or proposed policies and their effectiveness”.

- **Quality of life:** “effects on people’s wealth, mobility, daily routines, community life, happiness, etc”.

While the following issue-generic frames were combined, as their topic seemed to be complementary:

- **Morality and ethics:** “perspectives compelled by religion or secular sense of ethics or social responsibility” and **cultural identity:** “social norms, trends, values, and customs; integration / assimilation efforts”.

- **Security and defense:** “any threat to a person, a group, or nation and defenses taken to avoid that threat” and **crime and punishment:** “the violation of policies in practice and the consequences of those violations”.

- **Capacity and resources:** “the availability or lack of time, physical, human, or financial resources” and **health and safety:** “health and safety outcomes of a policy issue, discussions of health care”.

As for issue-specific frames, only the following two frames were combined:

- **Victim of global economy:** “immigrants are victims of global poverty, underdevelopment and inequality” and **Victim humanitarian:** “immigrants experience economic, social and political suffering and hardships”.

The two narrative frames were not modified. Furthermore, in the three frame types, a category unclear was added. This category is used when a tweet addresses the topic of migration but does not fit any of the other frames. Therefore, the typology of frames used to analyze the tweets is the following:

Frame type	Frame	Description
Issue-generic	Economic	Financial implications of an issue
	Policy capacity, resources & health care	The availability or lack of time, physical, human, or financial resources; discussions of health care
	Cultural identity & ethics	Social norms, values, and customs; integration/assimilation efforts; discussions of religion
	Legality, constitutionality & jurisdiction	Court cases and existing laws that regulate policies; constitutional interpretation; legal processes such as seeking asylum or obtaining citizenship
	Crime, security & defense	Any threat to a person, group, or nation and defenses taken to avoid that threat
	Public sentiment	Effects on community life. General social attitudes, protests, polling, interest groups
	Political factors & implications	Focus on politicians, political parties, governing bodies, political campaigns, and debates; discussions of elections and voting
	External regulation & reputation	Relations between nations or states/provinces; agreements between governments; perceptions of one nation/state by another
	Unclear	Do not fit any of the issue-generic frames
Issue-specific	Victim: humanitarian & global economy	RASIM are victims of global poverty, underdevelopment, and inequality. RASIM experience economic, social, and political hardships
	Victim: war	Focus on war and violent conflict as reason for immigration
	Victim: discrimination	RASIM are victims of racism, xenophobia, and religion-based discrimination

	Hero: cultural diversity	Highlights positive aspects of differences that RASIM bring to society
	Hero: integration	RASIM successfully adapt and fit into their host society
	Hero: worker	RASIM contribute to economic prosperity and are an important source of labor
	Threat: jobs	RASIM take non-RASIM' jobs or lower their wages
	Threat: public order	RASIM threaten public safety by breaking the law or spreading disease
	Threat: fiscal	RASIM abuse social service programs and are a burden on resources
	Threat: national cohesion	RASIM' cultural differences are a threat to national unity and social harmony
	Unclear	Do not fit any of the issue-specific frames
Narrative	Episodic	Message provides concrete information on specific people, places, or events
	Thematic	Message is more abstract, placing stories in broader political and social contexts
	Unclear	Do not fit any of the narrative frames

Table 2 - Classification of frames; (modified) table from Mendelsohn et al. *(2021)*

Frames are schema of interpretation that citizens rely on to understand and react to events, including phenomena they are not in direct contact with such as migration. A framing approach makes it possible to highlight the various encoded meanings that are significant and influential in political discourses. Examining which frames are used by Walloon and Flemish politicians to represent RASIM allows for an overview of Belgium's political stance on migration; it constitutes an insight into the region's political ideology. Indeed, politicians aim to distinguish themselves from other candidates/politicians based on their opinions and their assessment of the issue, and this intention can be translated into frames. This section explained how the frames for decoding politicians' speeches were selected. The next section continues by

explaining how tweets were collected and subsequently coded to answer the research questions.

4. Material and Method

The aim of the study is to examine the representation of RASIM on Twitter conveyed by Belgian politicians. Therefore, a social media analysis was conducted, more specifically, an analysis of the microblogging platform Twitter. The first section of this chapter describes the corpus used to analyze the representations of RASIM on Twitter, including its method of compilation and downsizing (Section 4.1.). Then, Section 4.2. details the different variables under study and how tweets were manually coded according to these variables. It then describes how the data obtained by manual analysis was interpreted using descriptive statistical analysis. Finally, the limitations of the study are discussed in Section 3.3. The results obtained through this method of analysis are then set out in Chapter 5. They are subsequently discussed in the light of the literature review in Chapter 6.

3.1. Compilation of the corpus

3.1.1. Presentation of the corpus

A total of 15,100 tweets were extracted from Twitter using a methodology created in the framework of a project (Cougnon et *al.*, 2022) that aims at collecting dynamic corpora from social media, as Twitter. This project was also implemented to address and counter the problem of data representativity on social networks. Indeed, a corpus - in this case a sample of tweets - must be representative both in its sample size and in its variety and veracity of the population under study. Freely available Twitter APIs pose problems of biases, size and representativeness. For example, some APIs only offer real-time data. Often, Twitter itself limits the collection of data and "is unclear about the internal processes used to select and filter the data available through its APIs" (Cougnon *et al.*, 2022, p. 1). Therefore, when collecting data, researchers are often faced with the unfamiliarity of their material. Without knowing specifically what the bias of the corpus is, the reliability and replicability of the conclusions can become unreliable (Cougnon *et al.,* 2022). The project aims to address these issues by proposing open corpora, i.e., corpora that grow continuously, for a specific geographical region. The proposed methodology of the project still has biases. However, its strength is that it can define them. Using the REST API, only the last 3,200 tweets posted by a selected account can be collected. It implies that the whole corpus has a diverse history, giving access to tweets

from five years ago for some accounts, and to tweets from only a few months ago for very prolific accounts (Cougnon et al., 2022). However, using open corpus for a given geographical region has the advantage to counter the problem of the unfamiliarity of the material.

Data was therefore extracted as part of this larger project. For Twitter, three sub-corpora have been gathered per region: a press corpus, a political corpus, and a citizen corpus. This is the case for the 2 regions of interest for this Master's thesis: the French-speaking and the Dutch-speaking regions of Belgium. As this thesis focuses on political discourse in Belgium, only the French- and Dutch-speaking political corpora were used. 6 political parties per region are represented (all those who currently have a seat in the Federal Parliament since 2019) and 50 politicians who have a Twitter account per party were selected. Hence, data was collected from a total of 600 Twitter accounts (300 accounts of Walloon politicians and 300 accounts of Flemish politicians).

The methodology design uses the REST API from Twitter and therefore allows for the collection of historical corpora consisting of the last 3,200 tweets posted by each account, which, for this kind of population, generally (94% of accounts) corresponds to all the tweets produced by the account (Cougnon et al., 2022). Therefore, in the framework of this Master's thesis, almost all tweets posted by the 600 politicians' accounts between the 1st of January 2015 and the 31st of December 2020 were collected. Retweets were excluded from the corpus because the study only focuses on the production of the politicians themselves. Tweets deleted by users or removed tweets from suspended accounts were also excluded. The year 2015 was chosen because it is the year when the "migration crisis" reached its peak in Europe, with over one million RASIM crossing the Mediterranean Sea. The length of the study allows for the identification of specific events such as the death of Aylan Kurdi and the attacks on Paris and Brussels. These elements received extensive media coverage, and politicians have also spoken out on the events, expressing diverse opinions on migration and its consequences.

Then, all tweets posted by the 600 politicians accounts during this 5-year period and their metadata (detailed hereafter) were indexed in a search and analytics engine, Elasticsearch. A sample was collected using a textual query system; two corresponding lists of keywords related to migration in French and in Dutch were used as search strings (see Appendix 1 - List of Keywords). Finally, the sample of tweets containing at least one of the keywords was

exported to a csv. file. A total of 15,100 tweets[10] containing at least one of the keywords and originating from the selected Twitter accounts were collected over this 5-year period. The distribution of the sample is the following:

- Walloon_politics: 5,830 tweets
- Flemish_politics: 9,180 tweets

For each tweet, the metadata available is: ID (unique identification number), screen name (name of the politician's Twitter account), name (of the politician), political party, date, and text. The following tweet, posted by the former Belgian Secretary of State for Migration (2014-2018), Theo Francken, exemplifies the metadata contained in one row of the table:

ID	sreen_ name	name	party	date	text
8213961 6179376 1000	Francke nTheo	Theo Francke n	N-VA	2017-01-17T17:38:00	Er slapen geen 'vluchtelingen' in de stations. Wel illegale migranten die asiel weigeren aan te vragen. Zucht. @vrtderedactie

Table 3 - Example of the metadata for one tweet

3.1.2. Stratified random sampling

Due to the available time and resources, and to the time-consuming manual method of analysis, the initial sample of 15,100 tweets had to be downsized using stratified random sampling. I assessed one tenth of the overall sample would be both a reasonable amount of data to manually analyze and a representative sample of the all set. I chose to select a tenth of the Walloon politicians set and a tenth of the Flemish politicians set, downsizing them separately so as not to lose the aspect that Flemish politicians tweeted to a larger extent on the topic of migration. Moreover, it was noticed that in both corpora respectively, a politician was responsible for a majority of the tweets (the Walloon' politician being David Tournay (@tournaydavid; ptb), and the Flemish' politician being Sam Van Roy (@SamvanRooy1; Vlaams Belang)). The tweets of these politicians were therefore omnipresent in the downsized samples. The stratified random sampling method had the effect of keeping the original distribution of the proportion of tweets by region but also by party. In future studies, one could

[10] The complete corpus, the sample under study, and the analyzed data are available as external files for consultation (Appendix 3).

also imagine analyzing an equal number of tweets per party and per region, in order to obtain more balanced results.

Each corpus being on a different Excel sheet, I classified each sheet in chronological order. Then, I used the formula ALEA() on Excel to randomly select one tenth of each corpus. The sample under study is therefore composed of 1,499 tweets, including:

- Walloon_politics: 583 tweets
- Flemish_politics: 916 tweets

Later in the analysis, it was observed that some of the keywords that acted as search strings to collect the data led to false results. The term *undocumented*, that can be translated by *paperless* from both French and Dutch (in French *sans-papier* and in Dutch *zonder papieren*) gave results with only the word *paper* in it. In total, 46 tweets from the Walloon corpus and 24 tweets from the Flemish corpus were discarded. The corpora were then completed to substitute the number of discarded tweets, in order to properly analyze one tenth of the data.

3.2. Classification and analysis

3.2.1. Variables under study

This section identifies the main concepts of the research and provides a definition of the variables under study. The research questions are reiterated in the framework of the variables, in order to state which variable allows to respond to which research question.

❖ **Author of the Tweet**

Politicians can influence how people understand an issue. They are important stakeholders as people rely on them for factual information. Examining Belgian politicians' discourses on Twitter provides an overview of the political discussion on migration. Furthermore, Flanders and Wallonia can be considered as two different cultural groups, they have different societal expectations which the parties reflect in their respective programs and discourses. For example, as it was mentioned previously, the north side of the country attaches great importance to migration and Flemish politicians tweeted to a greater extent than Walloon politicians on the topic of migration. They are expected to tweet more severely on the subject than Walloon politicians. Moreover, few studies investigate RASIM representations in news media and in political discourses across countries (Heidenreich, 2019). Belgium is of course

one and the same country. However, it has different regional political systems, cultures and, above all, languages. Looking at region-specific findings on how politicians frame RASIM on Twitter allow for a fuller comprehension of the political discourse on migration across the years.

Therefore, in the framework of this study, the author of a tweet is either a Flemish or a Walloon politician. This variable is relevant to answer the RQ1b: *Do the frames used to represent RASIM on Twitter vary depending on the political party posting, i.e., whether it is a Walloon or Flemish political party?* For the other research questions, no distinction is being made between Walloon and Flemish politicians, the author of the tweets being therefore considered as Belgian politicians.

- **Categories of RASIM**

Images and texts usually show adult men migrating. In the collective unconscious, it implies that the most vulnerable - women, elderly, and children - do not flee and that men only seek socioeconomic opportunities (Landgon, 2018). Furthermore, women and children are also often represented as helpless and in need of protection from harm, rather than individuals whose rights need to be protected. Even when portrayed as victims, they are still framed negatively, representing them as vulnerable to manipulation (Hennebry *et al.,* 2017). This use of selective terminology and misleading information lead to an ingroup-outgroup feeling. It reduces the issue to an anonymous mass movement and dehumanizes RASIM. Notably, representations of RASIM are subject to prevailing systems of knowledge production, tied to their age and gender (Hennebry *et al.,* 2017). Examining the difference in framing between men, women, elderly, and children addresses a gap in literature. Indeed, in migration studies, the study of women, elderly, and children has never been a major research focus (Gash *et al.,* 2020; Amundsen, 2022). However, investigating how these individuals are framed provides great insights about how their portrayal valorizes or demonizes a particular social matter such as migration (Gash *et al.,* 2020).

In the framework of this study, RASIM can be identified by gender and by age, either as men, women, children, elderly or unclear. This variable is exploited in the purpose of RQ2: *Do Belgian politicians distinguish between RASIM, and if so, how do representations of men RASIM differ from women, elderly, and children RASIM?* For the other research questions, no distinction is being made between the different categories of RASIM.

❖ **Date**

Migration is a pervasive topic. In addition to ongoing debates about the dangers of migration, its challenges and benefits, events such as terrorist attacks or the sinking of a RASIM boat induce countless discussions. Politicians address these events, expressing diverse opinions on migration, its consequences and proposing solutions. “Most of the time, peaks in coverage or in particular frames coincide with real-world developments” (Heidenreich *et al.,* 2019, p. 179). Numerous studies have already shown that disruptive events had the power to alter political discourses (Bozdag *et al.,* 2017). As Belgium has not been spared its share of events during this period, an impact of time on framing can be expected. In the framework of this study, evolution over time will be looked at through six specific events which have scared Belgium in various ways. They are outlined in the table underneath (Table 4). Evolution over time and specific dates will be looked at to answer to RQ3a: *How did the framing of RASIM by Belgian politicians evolve between 2015 and 2020?* and RQ3b: *Are changes in frames of RASIM correlated to the timing of major events (such as the attacks on Brussels)?*

Aylan Kurdi’s death - 02/09/2015	On 2 September 2015, the photo of a 3-year-old boy washed up on a Turkish beach went around the world. This child was fleeing Syria with his parents and older brother. The photo created a real shock wave, it was a reminder of reality and a call for solidarity.
Attacks on Paris - 13/11/2015	A series of attacks claimed by the Islamic State were carried out in Paris on 13 November 2015, in which 131 people died and 350 were injured. These were the deadliest attacks ever committed in France. Some of the perpetrators are of Belgian-Moroccan origin and others are accused of having arrived in Belgium through migration. Most of the weapons used and the cars rented came from Belgium. After these attacks, Belgium was often described by some media as a "hub" of terrorism in Europe.
Attacks on Brussels - 22/03/2016	On 22 March 2016, Brussels was the target of terrorist attacks at Zaventem airport and Maelbeek metro station. 32 people were killed and 340 were injured that day. The attacks were claimed by the Islamic State and some of the perpetrators of the attacks on Paris are accused of having helped plan the

	Brussels attacks.
Jungle of Calais' dismantling - 10/2016	In October 2016, the 4 square kilometer camp was dismantled as tents, shacks and other shelters were removed. The 3,100 RASIM were evacuated from the "Jungle" and sent to other parts of France to begin a resettlement process that lasted several months. Among them were more than 500 children. The Jungle is a gritty symbol of Europe's "migration crisis", but also a symbol of resilience and solidarity.
Mawda Shawri's death - 17/05/2018	Two-year-old Mawda Shawri, who had fled Iraq with her parents and brother, was shot in the head by a Belgian police officer. The tragedy occurred as Belgian police officers were chasing a van carrying around 30 RASIM, including four children. Attempting to stop the vehicle, one of the police officers allegedly tried to aim at the driver of the van.
Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) - (voted on) **19/12/2018.**	The GCM is an intergovernmental agreement that aims to cover international migration in a comprehensive manner. On 19 December 2018, 152 nations voted in favor of this pact, including Belgium. However, it created havoc in the political sphere. The federal party N-VA, including its Secretary of State for Migration Theo Francken, wanted Belgium to abstain from voting, while the other three government parties were in favor, creating a political deadlock. On 4 December, Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel announced that the issue would be put to a vote in parliament, 106 to 36 voted in favor of the agreement. It was thus announced that Belgium would approve the pact, in the name of the parliament, and not in the name of the divided government. As a result, the N-VA left the government, leading to the fall of the Belgian government on 18 December 2018.

Table 4 - Specific events that happened between 2015 and 2020

3.2.2. Coding procedure

Prior to analyzing the sample of 1,499 tweets, an initial codebook was established. Through coding, tweets were analyzed and transformed into a set of information, and the

phenomena that are explored were emphasized. The coding schedule was created out of the variables under study. Moreover, it was decided not to use a list of keywords to classify each tweet in the appropriate frame or in the appropriate category of RASIM as a word can appear in more than one frame/category and since many different and potentially unanticipated words can be used. The topic itself requires a detailed reading of each piece of data and manual content analysis allows for a nuanced interpretation of the tweets. However, the detailed coding applied consistently to the sample allows for a systematic and replicable interpretation of the data.

Variables' name	**Procedure**	**Code**
ID	Manual (copied from the data)	Unique number
Author of the Tweet	Automated (available in metadata)	(1) Walloon (2) Flemish
Type of RASIM*	Manual	(1) Men (2) Women (3) Elderly (4) Children (5) Unclear
Date	Automated (available in metadata)	Month and year
Issue-generic frames*	Manual	(1) Economic (2) Policy capacity, resources & health Care (3) Cultural identity & ethics (4) Legality, constitutionality & jurisdiction (5) Crime, security & defense (6) Public sentiment (7) Political Factors & implications (8) External regulation & reputation (9) Unclear
Issue-specific frames*	Manual	(1) Victim: Humanitarian & Global Economy (2) Victim: War (3) Victim: Discrimintation (4) Hero: Cultural diversity (5) Hero: Integration

		(6) Hero: Worker (6) Threat: Jobs (8) Threat: Public order (9) Threat: Fiscal (10) Threat: National cohesion (11) Unclear
Narrative frames*	Manual	(1) Episodic (2) Thematic (3) Unclear
* Possible to select more than one answer.		

Table 5 - Coding schedule

The actual coding of the tweets was completed using a Google Form, a survey administration software. The coding schedule was replicated in a Google Form and each item in the coding schedule corresponded to a question in the Google Form, codes being possible responses options[11]. The variables for which the procedure is automated (available in metadata) were not included in the Google Form. This method reduces the likelihood of human error as it allowed the sample of 1,499 tweets to be annotated in a systematic way. Once all the data had been reviewed, a csv file (spreadsheet) was automatically generated by Google Form and the variables for which the procedure is available in metadata were added to the file. This document therefore includes the metadata of the 1,499 tweets (ID, author of the tweet (Walloon or Flemish), date, and text) and all data from the coding procedure (category of RASIM, issue-generic, issue-specific, and narratives frames).

3.2.3. Descriptive statistical analysis

After having reviewed the csv file, created during manual analysis, for mistakes and omissions, I imported it into IBM SPSS to conduct the second step of the analysis, the descriptive statistical analysis. IBM SPSS is a software platform that offers advanced statistical analysis. Descriptive statistical analysis conveys the results drawn from the manual analysis of the tweets; it allows for the interpretation of the data associated with the formerly manually analyzed 1,499 tweets. In order to answer the research questions, frequency tables were created for every variable. Then, crosstabs between the various variables were generated.

[11] The form downloaded from Google Form is available in Appendix 3.

3.3. Methodological weakness

The detailed classification applied to the collected data allows for a systematic and replicable interpretation. Moreover, the important length of the sample (01/2015 - 12/2020) ensures a broad representation of the different discourses expressed by political stakeholders. However, the proposed research still encounters some limitations. This study was first limited by the time and resources available. Indeed, in order to ensure the first step of the analysis, which was a detailed manual analysis, the sample needed to be downsized to a more achievable and realistic size (one tenth of its original size: 1,499 tweets). Moreover, each piece of data was treated as a standalone message. Yet, tweets are often part of a larger conversation, threads providing context to the message. However, the small scale of the study and the lack of retweets is not a disadvantage to the study, as other qualitative studies of Twitter such as Bozdag *et al.* (2017) or Small (2011) only examine 961 and 1,617 tweets respectively. Furthermore, as there was no second coder, this study did not benefit from inter-coder reliability tests. However, the method of coding using a Google form ensured the standardization of the data.

Another weakness of this study is that links, pictures, videos, etc. were taken into consideration. It was observed that politicians regularly share links to newspaper articles and videos. Ott (2017) qualifies that as “the common practice of linking”. As tweets must be short and straightforward, ideas contained in newspaper articles, videos, government reports, etc. are often too complex to be tweeted. Linking therefore allows to convey more reflective and informative content. The chosen approach being time-consuming, only the textual content - and the emojis taken as a whole with the text - were analyzed.

5. Results of the tweet analysis

Through the analysis of the usage of frames in a sample of 1,499 tweets, this chapter examines the representations of RASIM by Belgian politicians on Twitter. This chapter sets out the statistical results obtained from the prior manual analysis. Without making any distinction between regions or categories of RASIM, Section 5.1. aims to provide a global overview of the results by observing which frames, if any, are generally used by Belgian politicians to represent RASIM. Section 5.2. aims to observe the nuances between the representation of RASIM by Flemish and Walloon politicians. Then, the differences in the framing of men, women, elderly, and children RASIM are analyzed in Section 5.3. Finally, Section 5.4. aims to observe, to a certain extent, the evolution in time and around specific

events of the representation of RASIM by Belgian politicians. All four sections follow the same structure. First, issue-generic frames are discussed, followed by issue-specific frames and then, narrative frames. The results reported in this section are then discussed in the next chapter (6. Discussion).

5.1. General overview: Frames used to depict RASIM

Looking at the sample composed of 1,499 tweets, this section examines which frames, if any, are used by Belgian politicians to depict RASIM on Twitter. This overview aims to give a general glance of the results to answer to RQ1a.

A. Issue-generic frames

Issue-generic frames are embedded in political and journalistic routines. They are recurring themes that appear in a variety of topics. In the framework of this thesis, tweets could be classified into 9 different categories, including unclear. A single tweet could discuss several topics, and thus be classified in two (or more) categories. This explains why, in graphs reporting issue-generic frames, the total number of tweets adds up to more than 1,499 (the number of tweets under study)[12] and why the percentages[13] stated below add up to more than 100%.

Issue-generic frames	**Number of tweets (N)**	**Observed percentage**
Economic	136	9,1%
Policy Capacity & Resources & Health Care	163	10,9%
Cultural Identity & Ethics	221	14,8%
Legality, constitutionality & juridiction	143	9,5%
Crime, security & Defense	188	12,6%
Public sentiment	139	9,3%
Political Factors & implications	467	31,2%
External regulation and reputation	408	27,2%
Unclear	105	7,0%

Table 6 - Issue-generic frames used by Belgian politicians

In this sample of 1,499 Tweets, the issue-generic frames most used by Belgian politicians to represent RASIM are the political factors and implications frame (N: 467; 31,2%) and the external regulation and reputation frame (N: 408; 27,2%). The former is used by

[12] This applies to every table presented in the Results chapter.

[13] For the purpose of this study, observed percentages are consistently reported throughout the Results chapter, so as not to lose the aspect that a tweet could contain several frames.

politicians to make proposals for a political agenda, to highlight their party's commitments to migration, and to discuss the position of parties and politicians on European and/or national policies and treaties such as the Marrakech pact (1). This frame is also used as a vehicle for criticism of one political party by another, of one politician by another, of the Prime Minister (2) or the Secretary of State for Migration (3).

(1) Has @de_NVA read the Migration Pact? The aim is to address the major challenge of migration globally. And tackle the causes, such as war, poverty and inequality!" RaoulHedebouw (PTB) #Marrakech[14]

(2) Belgium is far from fulfilling its European commitments in terms of receiving migrants (1000 out of 3000). And seeing the PM's "humour", this will continue: let the countries of entry get by on their own... we are far away #pathetic https://t.co/tlEznfy5NS[15]

(3) Referring to his nauseating/refugee debate, Franken makes us forget the violation of the rule of law by attacking the foundations of democracy https://t.co/NWfUCzSqJW[16]

Whereas, the external regulation and reputation frame is used to discuss European migration policy (4), the capacity of reception centers and camps in European countries and the migration policies of neighboring countries such as France - with the Calais Jungle (5), Greece, Germany, Italy (6), etc.

(4) If you want to tackle challenges like asylum, migration, and European defense in a European way, we have to put the right resources in place. Or are we going to let our people go to war with a catapult? #europeanbudget @EP_Belgium @ALDEgroup @openvld @radio1be[17]

[14] Translated from french: @de_NVA a-t-elle lu le Pacte migratoire ? L'objectif est de relever le défi majeur des migrations à l'échelle mondiale. Et s'attaquer aux causes, telles que la guerre, la pauvreté et l'inégalité!" RaoulHedebouw (PTB) #Marrakech

[15] Translated from french: La Belgique est bien loin de remplir ses engagements européens au niveau de l'accueil de migrants (1000 sur 3000). Et à comprendre l' « humour » du PM ça va continuer : que les pays d'entrée se démerdent… nous, on est loin #pathétique https://t.co/tlEznfy5NS

[16] Translated from French: Renvoyant à son débat nauséabond//réfugiés, Franken fait oublier1pure violation Etat de Droit en attaquant les fondements de la Démocratie https://t.co/NWfUCzSqJW

[17] Translated from Dutch: Als je de uitdagingen Europees wil aanpakken zoals asiel -en migratie en Europese defensie, moeten we daar de juiste middelen tegenover zetten. Of gaan we onze mensen met een katapult ten strijde laten trekken? #europesebegroting @EP_Belgium @ALDEgroup @openvld @radio1be

(5) Brexit: Paris backtracks on the hypothesis of no longer holding migrants in Calais https://t.co/HdWBQyE4LL[18]

(6) The thousands of camping migrants in #Paris are not coming from #Calais, but from Italy: https://t.co/3QECKN6AzG[19]

B. Issue-specific frames

Issue-specific frames identify particular aspects of migration and of the representation of RASIM. In the framework of this thesis, tweets could be classified under 11 different categories, including unclear. For that matter, 613 tweets (44,9%) were classified as unclear, as they did not express any explicit judgment on RASIM. A single tweet could portray RASIM in multiple ways, and thus be classified in two (or more) categories.

Issue-specific frames	**Number of tweets (N)**	**Observed percentage**
Victim: Humanitarian & Global Economy	227	15,1%
Victim: War	34	2,3%
Victim: Discrimination	129	8,6%
Hero: Integration	54	3,6%
Hero: Cultural diversity	23	1,5%
Hero: Worker	26	1,7%
Threat: Jobs	5	0,3%
Threat: Public order	183	12,2%
Threat: Fiscal	103	6,9%
Threat: National cohesion	184	12,3%
Unclear	673	44,9%

Table 7 - Issue-specific frames used by Belgian politicians

In this sample of 1,499 tweets, the issue-specific frame most used by Belgian politicians to represent RASIM is the victim of humanitarian and global economy frame (N: 227; 15,1%). This frame is used to discuss the inequality, the underdevelopment, and the global poverty RASIM experience. This frame is also widely used to discuss the hardship of RASIM's journey towards European countries (7), and the numerous shipwrecks happening in the Mediterranean Sea (8). The victim of discrimination frame is also fairly used by Belgian politicians to

[18] Translated from French: Brexit: Paris rétropédale sur l'hypothèse de ne plus retenir les migrants de Calais https://t.co/HdWBQyE4LL

[19] Translated from Dutch: De duizenden kamperende migranten in #Parijs komen niet zozeer vanuit #Calais, maar vanuit Italië: https://t.co/3QECKN6AzG

represent RASIM (N:129; 8,6%), whereas the victim of war frame was rarely used (N: 34; 2,3%).

(7) Videos. Starving refugees die just before reaching the safe coast: https://t.co/gosxVBLSkW[20]

(8) Migrant shipwreck: solidarity mission to #Catania with Dr Geraets, MP http://t.co/Tmd1T8Dst5 http://t.co/aFxJnkU4JH[21]

Furthermore, the three frames portraying RASIM as heroes were hardly exploited. However, the issue-specific frames threat to public order (N: 183; 12,2%) and threat to national cohesion (N: 184; 12,3%) were largely used by Belgian politicians to portray RASIM. The former generally deals with RASIM acts of violence that endanger the security of Belgian citizens, as well as discussions on the terrorist attacks that occurred in European countries and in Belgium (9). The latter is adopted to warn about the dangers of migration for the unity, peace, and tranquility of the country. It includes speeches that warn against the *Islamisation* of Belgium (10) and against Belgium's culture becoming a minority (11).

(9) Arrived in Europe as refugees, Adel Haddadi and Mohamed Usman should have been part of the 13 November commando https://t.co/lA3aVPuGIY[22]

(10) "But what is it anyway, this #islamisation?" Well, this: letting in 'refugees' = importing Islamic Jew hatred. https://t.co/tm0OOCisX3[23]

(11) In #Brussels it will not be long before we are a minority in our own country. When will Theo #Francken finally stop mass immigration? #dtv https://t.co/yPmK22tpFm[24]

C. Narrative frames

[20] Translated from Dutch: Videos. Uitgehongerde vluchtelingen op sterven na dood vlak voor ze de veilige kust bereiken: https://t.co/gosxVBLSkW
[21] Translated from French: Naufrage de migrants: mission de solidarité à #Catania avec la Dr Geraets, députée #PTB http://t.co/Tmd1T8Dst5 http://t.co/aFxJnkU4JH
[22] Translated from French: Arrivés en Europe comme réfugiés, Adel Haddadi et Mohamed Usman auraient dû faire partie du commando du 13 novembre https://t.co/lA3aVPuGIY
[23] Translated from Dutch: "Maar wat is dat dan toch, die #islamisering?" Wel, dit: 'vluchtelingen' binnenlaten = islamitische Jodenhaat importeren. https://t.co/tm0OOCisX3
[24] Translated from Dutch: In #Brussel zal het niet lang meer duren alvorens we een minderheid in eigen land zijn. Wanneer stopt Theo #Francken eindelijk de massale immigratie? #dtv https://t.co/yPmK22tpFm

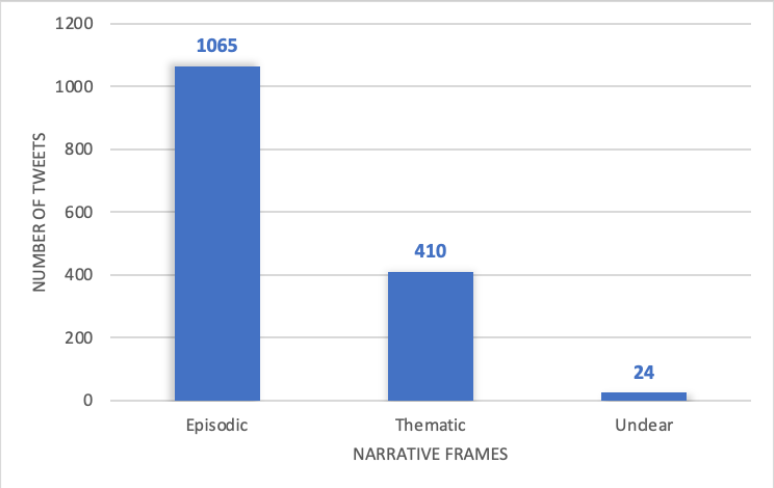

Figure 1 - Narrative frames used by Belgian politicians

Narrative frames distinguish specific events from broader social context. In this sample of 1,499 tweets posted by Belgian politicians, 1065 tweets (71%) were episodic, they highlighted specific events or individuals, and 410 (27,4%) were thematic, they placed migration within a broader social context. 24 tweets (1,6%) were classified as unclear. This indicates that Belgian politicians tend to address the subject of migration more on the basis of concrete cases, persons, and/or events.

In this global overview of the results, differences across frame typologies' coverage rates can be observed. While 94,7% of the tweets are labeled with at least one issue-generic frame and 98,4% with at least one narrative frame, only 59% are labeled with at least one issue-specific frame. This difference can be explained by the character of issue-specific frames. They are more narrowly defined and require explicit opinion of RASIM as victims, heroes, or threats. Although this category has a lot of unclear, issue-specific frames allow to reveal patterns otherwise hidden by the broadness of issue-generic frames. Therefore, the multiple framing strategy allows both for the precision of issue-specific frames and the coverage of issue-generic and narrative frames.

In response to RQ1a, *Which frames, if any, are used for depicting RASIM by Belgian politicians on Twitter?,* the issue-generic frames indicated that Belgian politicians tend to represent RASIM through a political lens, whether it is through external regulation or national political factors. Issue-specific frames have highlighted that Belgian politicians tend to represent RASIM as victims - mainly humanitarian victims - but also as threats to the country's

safety and culture. Finally, narrative frames have shown that Belgian politicians tend to represent RASIM through specific events, places and individuals.

5.2. Differences between the representation of RASIM by Flemish and Walloon politicians

In this sample of 1,499 tweets, 916 (61,1% of the total set) were posted by Flemish politicians and 583 (38,9%) were posted by Walloon politicians; politicians from Flanders address the topic of migration to a larger extent on Twitter than Walloon politicians. The analysis of issue-generic, issue-specific, and narrative frames responds to RQ1b, which investigates whether the representations of RASIM on Twitter vary depending on the political party posting, i.e., whether it is a Walloon or Flemish political party.

A. Issue-generic frames

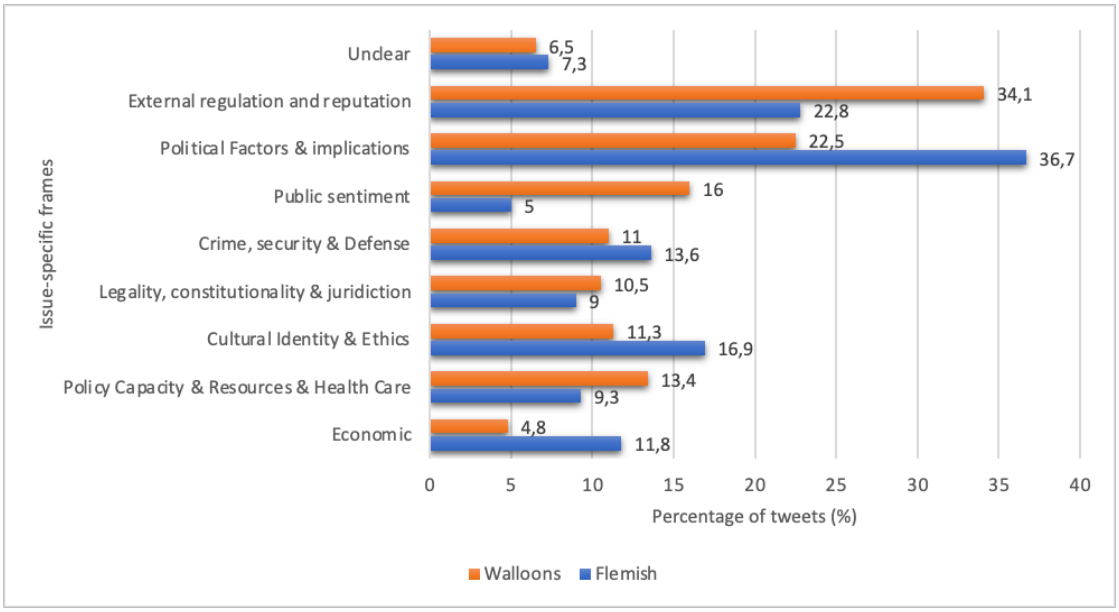

Figure 2 - Issue-generic frames per region

As mentioned in section 5.1. (A), Belgian politicians have most used the political factors and implication frame and the external regulation and reputation frame. There are significant differences in the usage of these frames between Flemish and Walloon politicians. Flemish politicians framed more tweets using the political factors and implications frame (N: 336; 36,7%) than Walloon politicians (N: 131; 22,5%), while Walloon politicians have used the external regulation and reputation frame to a larger extent (N: 199; 34,1%) than Flemish politicians (N: 209; 22,8%). The results indicate that Flemish politicians tend to discuss

migration through national political conversations, while Walloon politicians tend to address migration considering other country's situation and Europe's regulation. Moreover, Flemish politicians have also represented RASIM using the cultural identity and ethics frame (N: 155; 16,9%), more so than Walloon politicians (N: 66; 11,3%). This frame addresses the topics of social values, customs, ethnic origins (12), religion (12), and integration/assimilation (13).

(12) N. Africans? Syrians? Refugees? Migrants, ...? Doesn't matter: the problem is their Islamic culture. https://t.co/5Txzr1JmWM #Cologne[25]

(13) Muslims are usually (descendants of) immigrants. They have to adapt to our culture; to our free, secular society and way of life. That indeed means that they have to throw overboard the Islamic teachings/principles that are at odds with it.[26]

Furthermore, 11,8% (N: 108) of the tweets posted by Flemish politicians used the economic issue-generic frame, against 4,8% (N: 28) for Walloon politicians. This frame addresses the financial implication of migration (14) (15).

(14) This article also omits the fact that migrants from outside the EU receive more than twice as many social benefits as natives at almost every stage of life.[27]

(15) @nicola_sabbe @AnnickPonthier (2/2) The researchers stated that a migrant who arrives in the Netherlands at the age of 25 costs the state a total of about 43,000 euros, while a Dutch person brings in 76,000 euros. A recent report from the Norwegian government came to a similar conclusion.[28]

Finally, Walloon politicians (N: 93; 16%) have used the public sentiment frame more than Flemish politicians (N: 46; 5%). This frame is used to share citizens' opinions (16), demonstrations (17), days of solidarity for RASIM and citizens' movements to provide help,

[25] Translated from Dutch: N.-Afrikanen? Syriërs? Vluchtelingen? Migranten, ...? Maakt niet uit: probleem is hun islamitische cultuur. https://t.co/5Txzr1JmWM #Keulen
[26] Translated from Dutch: Moslims zijn doorgaans (nakomelingen van) immigranten. Ze moeten zich aanpassen aan onze cultuur; aan onze vrije, seculiere samenleving en manier van leven. Dat betekent inderdaad dat ze de islamitische leerstellingen/principes die daar haaks op staan overboord moeten gooien. 👇🏻
[27] Translated from Dutch: Ook verzwijgt dit artikel dat migranten van buiten de EU in zo goed als elke levensfase meer dan dubbel zoveel sociale uitkeringen ontvangen als autochtonen.
[28] Translated from Dutch: @nicola_sabbe @AnnickPonthier (2/2) De onderzoekers stelden dat een migrant die op zijn 25ste in Nederland aankomt, de staat in totaal zo'n 43.000 euro kost, terwijl een Nederlander 76.000 euro opbrengt. Een recent rapport van de Noorse overheid kwam tot een gelijkaardige conclusie.

especially in reception centers. It was sometimes used to mention the participation of public figures - such as politicians - in these demonstrations, to demonstrate their solidarity.

(16) #VIDEO Over 70% of Belgians think the country takes in too many migrants http://t.co/T3L5eWA74M[29]

(17) In Dresden, thousands of demonstrators say "welcome" to refugees on #7sur7_be. http://t.co/rTaRsdz4Mj[30]

B. Issue-specific frames

As mentioned in section 5.1. (B), 613 tweets (44,9%) posted by Belgian politicians were classified as unclear. There is not a significant difference in the number of tweets classified as unclear between Walloon and Flemish politicians. Respectively, 44,3% (N: 258) and 45,3% (N: 415) of their tweets fell into that category. In order to make Figure 3 more easily understandable and to clearly highlight the data of interest in this study, the category unclear was removed from it.

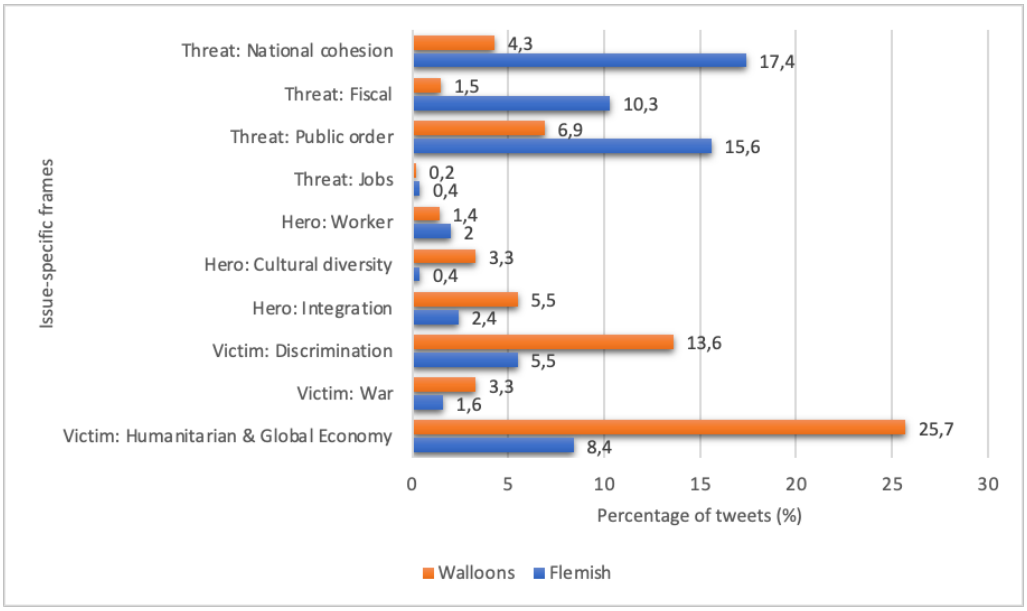

Figure 3 - Issue-specific frames per region

Walloon politicians have mostly used victims' issue-specific frames, such as the victim

[29] Translated from French: #VIDEO Plus 70% des Belges pensent que le pays accueille trop de migrants http://t.co/T3L5eWA74M

[30] Translated from French: A Dresde, des milliers de manifestants disent "bienvenue" aux réfugiés sur #7sur7_be. http://t.co/rTaRsdz4Mj

of humanitarian and global economy frame (N: 150; 25,7%) and the victim of discrimination frame (N: 79; 13,6%). The latter is used, notably, to refer to RASIM who are victims of attacks by anti-RASIM (18), of discrimination based on their ethnic origins and beliefs and/or of discrimination based on their status and motives for migration (19). Moreover, although these frames are not predominant, Walloon politicians used frames representing RASIM as heroes to a larger extent than Flemish politicians. For instance, Walloon politicians posted 32 tweets framing RASIM as heroes of integration (5,5%), whereas Flemish politicians only posted 22 heroes of integration framed tweets (2,4%).

(18) Refugee center burnt down, swastikas on a shop. When some people show hatred... #Notinmyname https://t.co/RG5EWB8hPb[31]

(19) So two EU countries think it is normal to take away refugees' possessions? Because you can only flee from war if you are poor?[32]

Flemish politicians have predominantly used threat frames, such as the threat to public order frame (N: 143; 15,6%), the threat to national cohesion frame (N: 159; 17,4%) and the threat to the economy (fiscal) frame (N: 94; 10,3%). The latter focuses on Belgium's and Europe's spending on managing the so-called "migration crisis", and on the differences in allocation between this "issue" and other fields that could benefit from that money (20).

(20) This year, EUR 1.5 billion will be freed up for the reception of asylum seekers alone, while the care sector is groaning under cuts. https://t.co/9Tjm5W6f5m[33]

C. Narrative frames

[31] Translated from French: Centre de réfugiés incendié, croix gammées sur un commerce. Quand certains sèment la haine... #Notinmyname https://t.co/RG5EWB8hPb
[32] Translated from Dutch: Dus 2 EU landen vinden het normaal om bezittingen vluchtelingen af te pakken? Omdat je alleen van oorlog mag vluchten als je arm bent?
[33] Translated from Dutch: Er wordt dit jaar 1,5 miljard euro vrijgemaakt alleen al voor de opvang van asielzoekers, terwijl de zorgsector kreunt onder besparingen. https://t.co/9Tjm5W6f5m

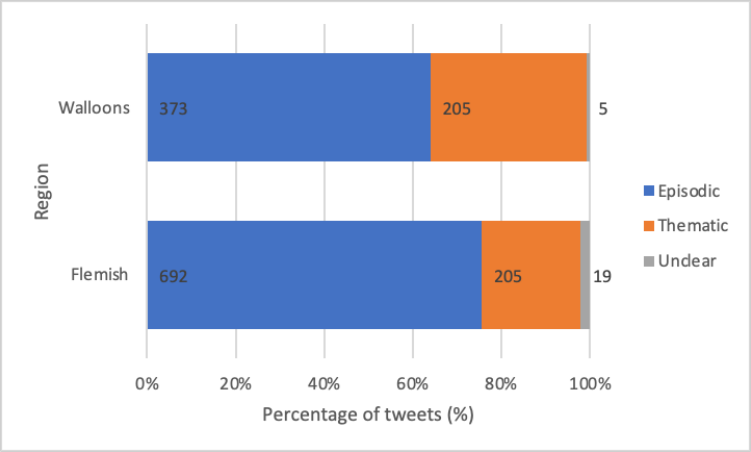

Figure 4 - Narrative per region

75,5% of the tweets (N: 692) posted by Flemish politicians are episodic - referring to specific people or events, against 64% (N: 373) for Walloon politicians. Walloon politicians posted 205 (35,2%) thematically framed tweets that place migration within a broader context. Therefore, the results indicate that Flemish politicians tend to represent RASIM in a more episodic way than Walloon politicians; Flemish politicians tend to refer more often to specific events, places, or individuals whereas Walloon tend to place migration in a broader context.

In response to RQ1b, *Do the frames used to represent RASIM on Twitter vary depending on the political party posting, i.e., whether it is a Walloon or Flemish political party?*, frames do vary depending on the region of the author of the tweet. Flemish politicians represented RASIM using threat-specific frames (to public order, national cohesion and fiscal) to a greater extent than Walloon politicians. They also addressed the topic of migration through economic (economic frame), cultural and religious (cultural identity and ethical frame) discussions. On the other hand, Walloon politicians represented RASIM 'positively' by using victim frames (of humanitarian and global economy and discrimination) and by discussing issues such as health care and resources (health care and capacity frame).

5.3. Differences in frames used to depict men, women, elderly, and children RASIM

Examining differences in the portrayal of men, women, children and elderly RASIM on Twitter allows, to a certain extent, to reveal patterns in the representation of RASIM and in political discourses on the matter of migration. This section aims to answer RQ2: *Do Belgian politicians distinguish between categories of RASIM, and if so, how do representations of men RASIM differ from women, elderly, and children RASIM?*

Categories of RASIM	Number of tweets (N)	Observed percentage
Men	133	8,9%
Women	50	3,3%
Children	77	5,1%
Elderly	1	0,1%
Unclear	1316	87,8%

Table 8 - Categories of RASIM by Belgian politicians[34]

As the category of RASIM based on gender and age criteria is hard to identify clearly, any political discourse that did not explicitly mention men, women, elderly, and/or children RASIM was classified as unclear. In this sample, a specific type of RASIM was clearly mentioned 216 times and 1316 tweets (87,8%) were classified as unclear. Men RASIM (N: 133; 8,9%) were mentioned almost twice as much as children (N: 77; 5,1%), and almost three times as much as women (N: 50; 3,3%). Older people were mentioned only once. Therefore, only a very limited subset of tweets is available for analysis of the issue-generic, issue-specific, and narrative frames used to portray RASIM by Belgian politicians. Zooming out, there is much that is unknown. The information given in this section can serve as a general guide, however, to get a better understanding of the difference between the representation of men, women, elderly, and children RASIM, further study is needed.

A. Issue-generic frames

Of the 216 occurrences that clearly identify a specific category of RASIM, only one referred to (an) elderly RASIM. It used a legality, constitutionality and juridiction frame. Consequently, in this limited sample, 100% of the tweets mentioning elderly RASIM are considered as using the legality, constitutionality and juridiction frame. Therefore, this category was removed from Figure 5, in order not to weaken the graph's clarity.

[34] As for the issue-generic and issue-specific typologies of frame, a single tweet could mention several categories of RASIM, and thus be classified in two (or more) categories.

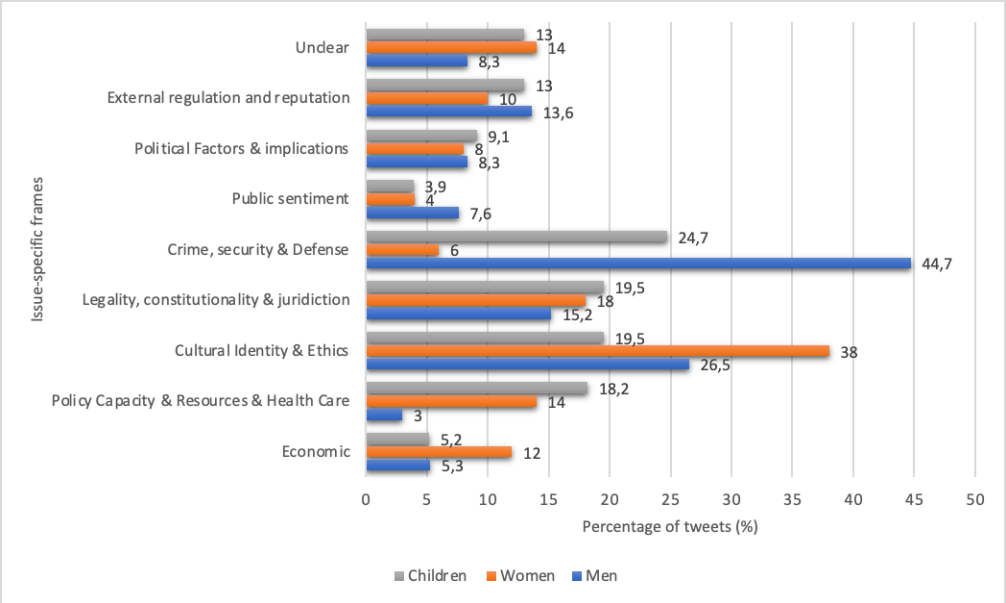

Figure 5 - Issue-generic frames per type of RASIM

Using issue-generic frames, women RASIM were more represented by Belgian politicians with the cultural identity and ethics frame (N: 19; 38%). This frame discusses social values, customs, ethnic origins, religion, and integration/assimilation. Women RASIM were also mentioned using the economic frame several times more (N: 6; 12%) than men (N: 7; 5,3%) or children RASIM (N: 4; 5,2%). Furthermore, with 7 occurrences (14%) mentioning women and 14 (18,2%) mentioning children, the policy capacity, resources, and health care frame was used to a large extent to picture women, and all the more children RASIM. This issue-generic frame is used to discuss reception centers' situation, RASIM's precarious living conditions (especially in the Maximilien park, a park in Brussels where many RASIM settled while waiting for a response from the foreigners' office) (21), and social housing. But it can also address health care issues such as diseases (22) and pregnancies.

(21) The shocking photo: Forced to wash her newborn baby on the doorstep of her tent in a refugee camp https://t.co/37s0jaYkMY[35]

(22) Tuberculosis cases soar among asylum seekers: "Monitoring is complex" https://t.co/Evqm41KToo[36]

[35] Translated from French: La photo qui choque: obligée de laver son nouveau-né sur le pas de sa tente dans un camp de réfugiés https://t.co/37s0jaYkMY

[36] Translated from French: Le nombre de cas de tuberculose explose chez les demandeurs d'asile: "Le suivi est complexe" https://t.co/Evqm41KToo

Moreover, the legality, constitutionality and juridiction frame was also used several times to mention women (N: 9; 18%) and children (N: 15; 19,5%) RASIM. This frame is used to discuss existing laws and policies (23), constitutional interpretation, and legal processes such as seeking asylum (24) or obtaining citizenship.

(23) There is in fact almost no way to arrive "legally" on the territory. Moreover, each refugee legally has 8 days to report to the Aliens Office. All this is a new buzz calculated to attack Human Rights. #SafePassageNow https://t.co/70Xw8vG3sL[37]

(24) Asylum applications: FPS Justice calls for guardians for minors https://t.co/msiOTNLG4E[38]

On the other hand, men RASIM were more represented under the crime, security and defense frame (N: 59; 44,7%). This frame addresses acts of violence and crimes - notably the attacks committed in several European countries (25), threat to an individual or to the nation (26), and the defenses implemented to prevent them. This frame comprises violence and threat against any group of people, therefore it can also imply that RASIM are victims of these threats (27). Moreover, 24,7% (N: 19) of the tweets explicitly representing children RASIM also used the crime, security, and defense frame (28). This number is four times as high as the women's (N: 3; 6%). Men and children RASIM are therefore more likely to be framed in crime and safety discourses.

(25) Paris attacks: two refugees linked to the attacks arrested in Austria https://t.co/RqhvVZu6ED https://t.co/7P6AmeUWww[39]

(26) @RemyBonny @destandaard Without mass immigration, there would be no virulent homophobia today in asylum centers and in certain neighborhoods in big cities such as Brussels, which LGBT people now shun or modify their behavior = the consequence of your ideology, not mine! Reading tip 👇 https://t.co/JGYCxEBsnz[40]

[37] Il n'existe dans les faits quasiment aucune manière d'arriver "légalement" sur le territoire. De plus, chaque réfugié dispose légalement de 8 jours pour se manifester à l'office des étrangers. Tout ça est un nouveau buzz calculé pour s'attaquer aux Droits Humains. #SafePassageNow https://t.co/70Xw8vG3sL
[38] Translated from French: Demandes d'asile: le SPF Justice lance un appel aux tuteurs pour les mineurs https://t.co/msiOTNLG4E
[39] Translated from French: Attentats à Paris: deux réfugiés liés aux attentats arrêtés en Autriche https://t.co/RqhvVZu6ED https://t.co/7P6AmeUWww
[40] Translated from Dutch: @RemyBonny @destandaard Zonder massa-immigratie was er vandaag geen virulente homohaat in asielcentra en in bepaalde wijken in grote steden zoals Brussel, die nu door

(27) 10,000 unaccompanied child refugees are missing in Europe. One year ago, the European Commission came up with various proposals. Where are we now? Come and join the debate.[41]

(28) Unaccompanied minor asylum seekers rape young girl in Eriksdals pool in #Stockholm: https://t.co/hrbJSp3yOD[42]

B. Issue-specific frames

The only occurrence representing elderly RASIM framed RASIM as a threat to national cohesion. Once again, in order not to compromise the clarity of the graph, this tweet was left out of Figure 6.

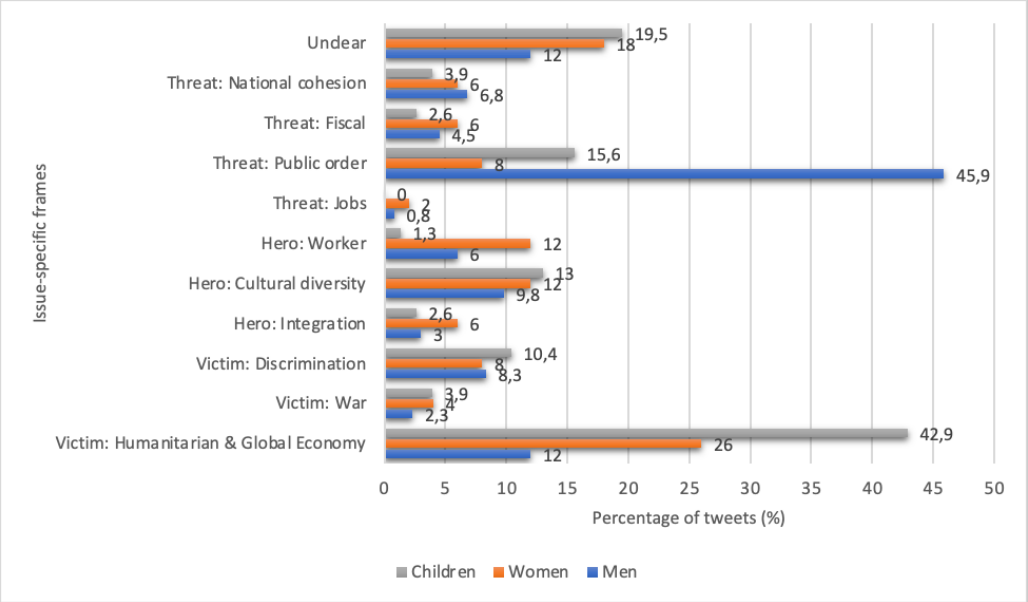

Figure 6 - Issue-specific frames per category of RASIM

Using issue-specific frames, Belgian politicians framed 33 times (42,9%) children RASIM under victim humanitarian and global economy. This frame is used to discuss the inequality, the underdevelopment, and the global poverty RASIM experience (N: 13; 26%)

holebi's worden gemeden of waar ze hun gedrag aanpassen = het gevolg van jóuw ideologie, niet de mijne! Leestip 👇 https://t.co/JGYCxEBsnz

[41] Translated from Dutch: 10.000 niet-begeleide minderjarige vluchtelingen zijn vermist in Europa. 1 jaar geleden kwam de Europese Commissie met verschillende voorstellen. Waar staan we nu? Kom en debatteer mee.

[42] Alleenstaande minderjarige asielzoekers verkrachten jong meisje in Eriksdals zwembad in #Stockholm: https://t.co/hrbJSp3yOD

(29). An important number of tweets also represented women RASIM using the same frame. Furthermore, a larger number of tweets referred to women RASIM as heroes than men and children RASIM. However, the hero integration, hero cultural diversity and hero worker frames are still not strongly exploited.

(29) Children in migration. So many, so vulnerable. Always a victim, never a perpetrator. #InternationalMigrantDay #ChildrenInMigration #Humanity #ContinueFighting https://t.co/uJXJvpOoad[43]

With 61 occurrences (45,9%), men RASIM were mainly represented using the threat to public order frame. 12 (15,6%) tweets referring to children RASIM also used this frame, while only 4 tweets (8%) mentioned women RASIM under that frame.

C. Narrative frames

In order to study the usage of narrative frames in the representation of RASIM, tweets that could not explicitly identify a certain type of narrative frames left out of this section of the analysis. As a reminder, only 24 tweets were classified as unclear in the narrative frames category. Only looking at the subset of 216 occurrences that identify a certain category of RASIM and a type of narrative frames allows for a clearer representation of the data. Furthermore, as for the two sections below, the only occurrence mentioning an elderly RASIM was left out of the following graph. This tweet was classified as episodic.

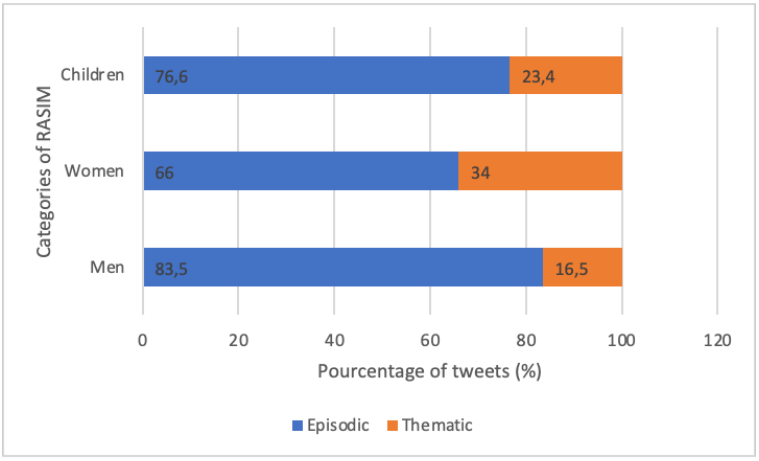

Figure 7 - Narrative frame per category of RASIM

[43] Translated from Dutch: Kinderen in migratie. Zovelen, zo kwetsbaar. Altijd slachtoffer, nooit dader. #InternationalMigrantDay #ChildrenInMigration #Humanity #BlijvenStrijden https://t.co/uJXJvpOoad

34% (N: 17) of the tweets mentioning women were classified as thematic, while only 16,5% (N: 22) of the tweets mentioning men were classified as such. This means that women RASIM were represented in the global context of migration to a larger extent than men, but also than children (N: 18; 23,4%). Men RASIM were more often represented through references to specific events, individuals, or places.

In response to RQ2, *Do Belgian politicians distinguish between categories of RASIM, and if so, how do representations of men RASIM differ from women, elderly, and children RASIM?,* the results above have shown that Belgian politicians do clearly specify a category of RASIM when tweeting. Where genders and age were clearly identified, substantial differences in their portrayal were observed. Men were more often portrayed and in a more negative way, compared to women, children and elderly who were portrayed as vulnerable. However, these results are based on a very small sample and require further research.

5.4. Frames evolution in time and around specific events

Discussions on a matter evolve over time - both in frequency and tone, as events have the power to generate and shape them. By looking at the frequency of tweets and the use of frames between January 2015 to December 2020, I examine the evolution over time of political discourses on migration in Belgium (RQ3a). I also observe if some pikes in frequency coincide with specific events (RQ3b). In order to preserve the readability of the graphs and the interpretation of the data of interest to the analysis, tweets that were classified as unclear were removed from the figures reporting on issue-generic, issue-specific, and narrative frames over time.

A first global observation can be made when looking at Figure 8, which represents the number of tweets posted every month during the five years under study. Politicians tweeted more about RASIM in the first two years of the so-called “migration crisis”, i.e., 2015 and 2016. The frequency of tweets mentioning migration or RASIM tapers off around 2017, although some pikes can still be observed. The month with the most tweets posted is March 2016, coinciding with the attacks on Brussels on March 22, 2016. Then, a significant number of tweets can also be observed in September 2015, potentially corresponding to the death of Aylan Kurdi on September 02, 2015. In the month of May and especially June 2018, another pike can be observed, coinciding with the death of Mawda Shawri on May 17, 2018.

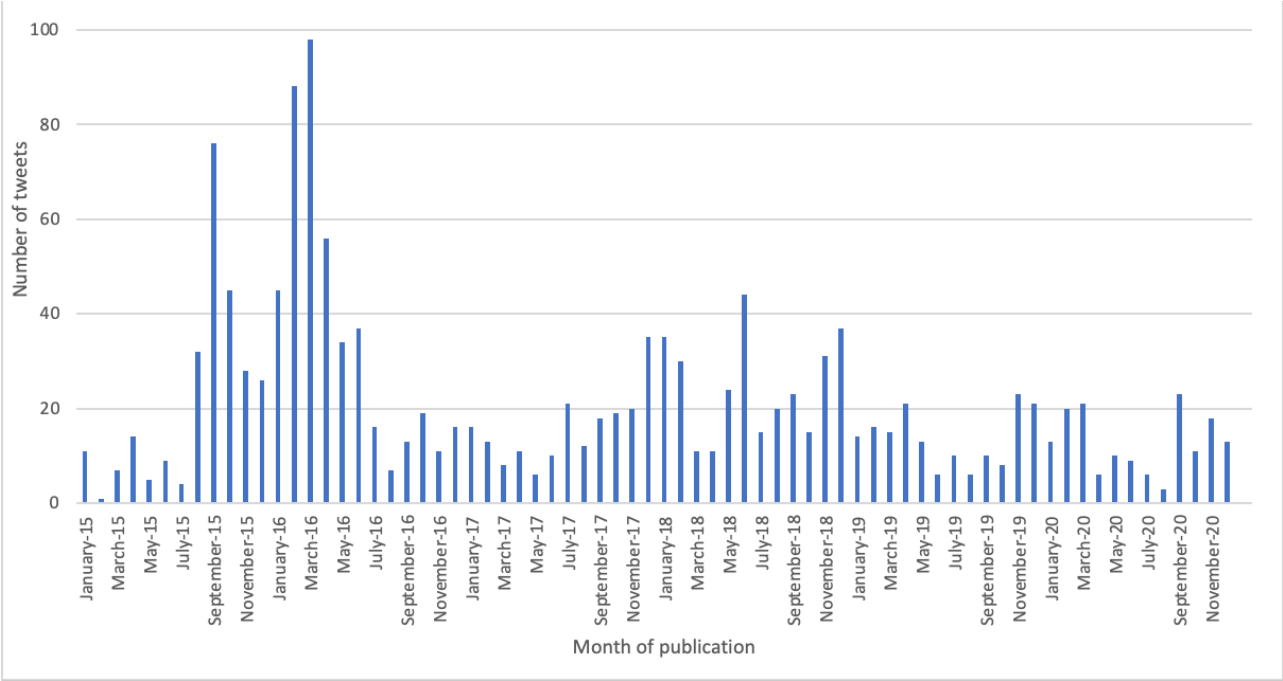

Figure 8 - Frequency of tweets

A. Issue-generic frames

In view of the high number of frames (9 different frames) in the issue-generic frame typology, a single graph covering their usage for the 5 years under study would not have been suitable to bring out the elements of interest. To counter this problem, three graphs representing respectively the usage of issue-generic frames by Belgian politicians in 2015, 2016, and 2018 are outlined in this section. Indeed, these three years cover the six events that were chosen to analyze the representation of RASIM around specific events. It is important to note that these graphs represent the differences in tweet frequency between each month, but that they are not comparable from one year to the next. Indeed, the graphs were created in order to report the data as legibly as possible. Each graph therefore has a different tweet scale since, as mentioned above, Belgian politicians tweeted to a greater extent in 2016 than in 2018.

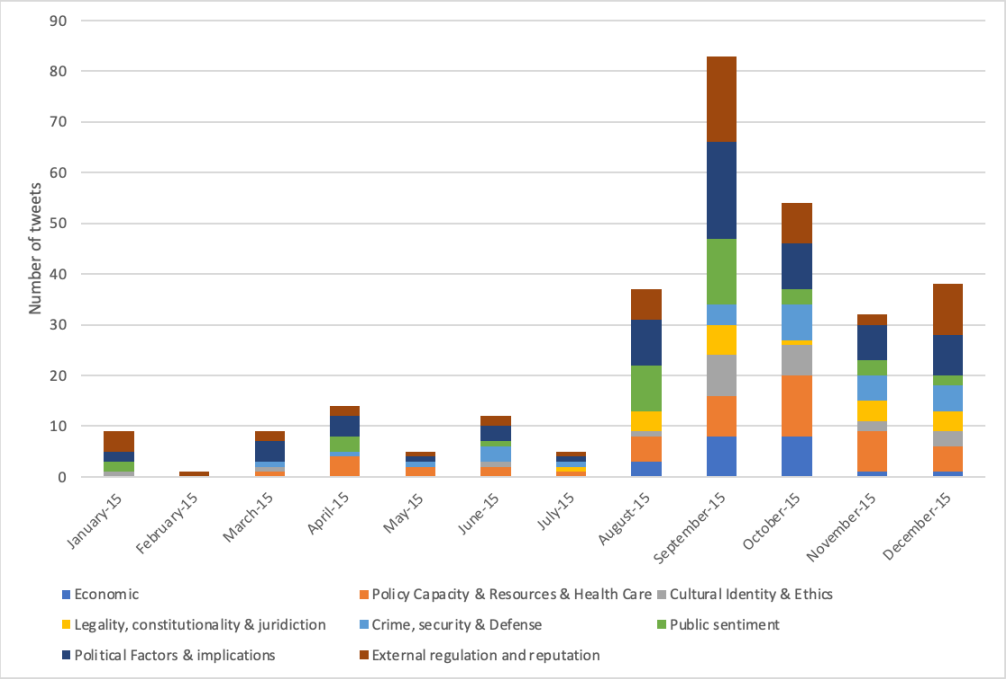

Figure 9 - Issue-generic frames per month in 2015

September was the month with the most tweets mentioning RASIM in 2015. It is also the month when the 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi was found drowned on a Turkish beach. An increase in the external regulation and reputation frame can be observed. This frame can serve to discuss other countries' situation and position towards migration. It could have been used to discuss Turkey's response to this tragedy. It is also accompanied by a rise in the political factors and implications frame, discussing Belgium's attitude towards the "migration crisis". An increase in the public sentiment frame is also apparent, it shows that Belgian citizens demonstrated, participated in opinion polls, or have shown solidarity with RASIM. The death of this young child was one of the greatest tragedies of 2015 and of the beginning of the "migration crisis". The importance of this event can be observed both in the frequency and in the frames used to discuss this event.

Then, in November 2015, the attacks on Paris took place. However, there has not been a big increase in the number of tweets, nor an increase in the external regulation and reputation frame, a frame that often serves to discuss neighboring countries actions' towards migration and external events. A slight increase in the crime, security, and defense frame can be observed. However, it already started rising in September, and therefore does not coincide with the attacks themselves.

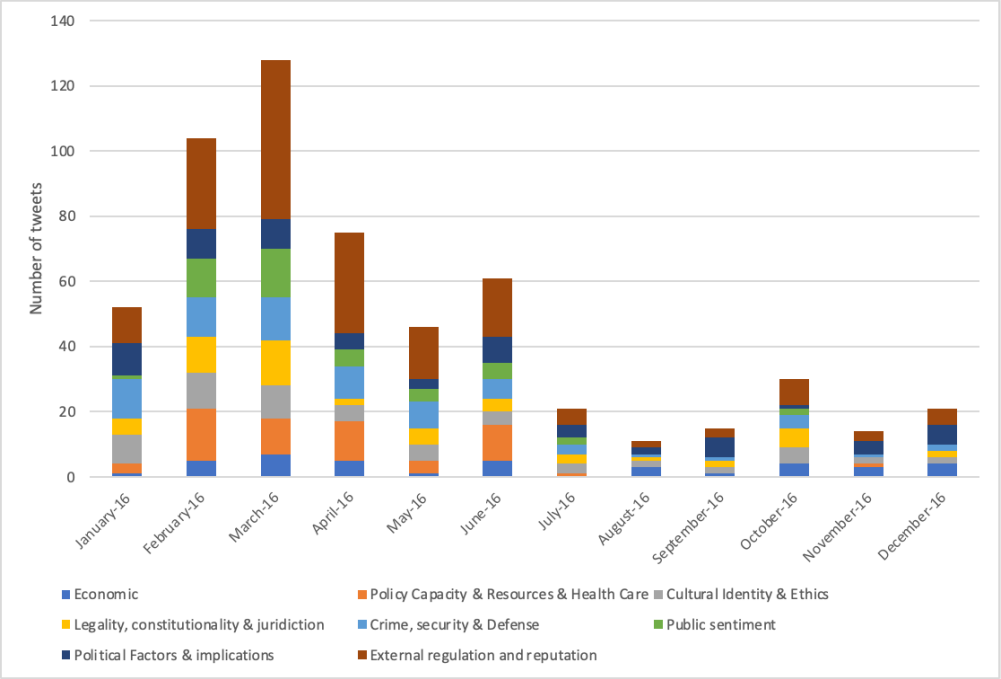

Figure 10 - Issue-generic frames per month in 2016

As seen above, March, the month of the attacks on Brussels, is the month in which the most tweets mentioning RASIM were posted. The external regulation and reputation frame as well as the legality, constitutionality, and juridiction frames have risen. The latter could have been used to discuss the (il)legal status of the perpetrators or the penalties they faced. The higher share in the crime, security, and defense frame (which started in September 2015) continued before, during, and after the Brussels attacks. It decreases from July 2016 onwards. While the public sentiment frame also increased at the time of this event.

In October 2016, there was a slight increase in the number of tweets, corresponding to the Jungle of Calais' dismantling. The frames mostly used to represent RASIM have all increased (economic, public sentiment, and cultural identity and ethics), especially the legality, constitutionality, and juridiction frame and the external regulation and reputation frame (30).

(30) What if the migrants excluded from Calais landed at the Belgian coast? Jungle evacuation questioned https://t.co/zOHIVo7P6t[44]

[44] Translated from French: Et si les migrants exclus de Calais débarquaient à la côte belge? L'évacuation de la jungle remise en question https://t.co/zOHIVo7P6t

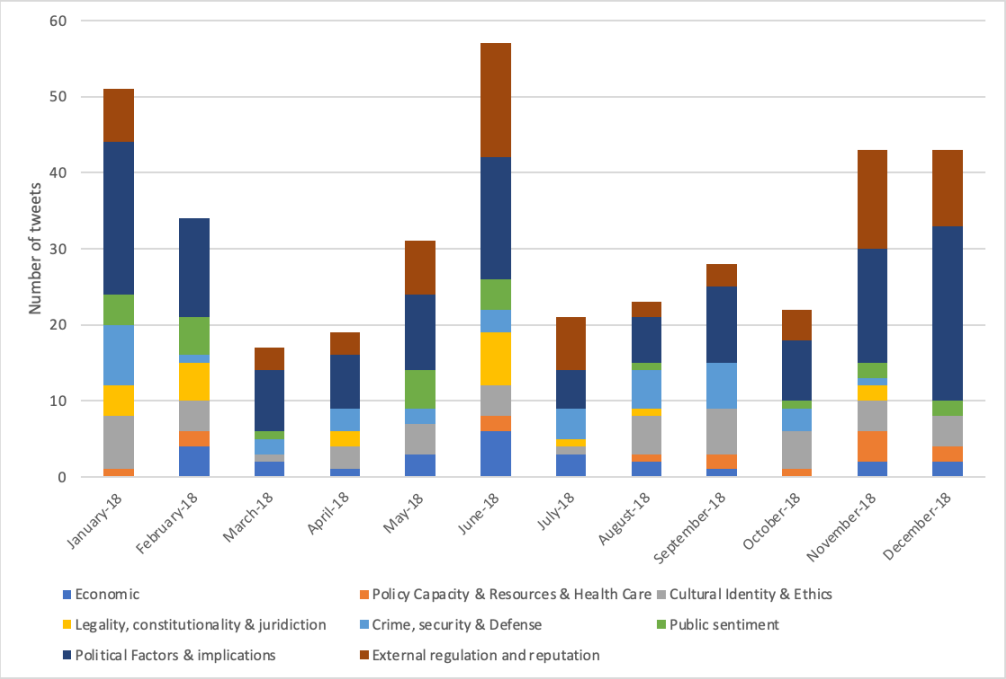

Figure 11 - Issue-generic frames per month in 2018

In 2018, the external regulation and reputation frame and the political factors and implication frame were exploited to a large extent, and even more so around the two events of interest: Mawda Shawri's death in May and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration voted in December. Indeed, the latter created havoc on the international scene and between the political parties in Belgium, as some did not want to give their agreement (31).

(31) What Theo Francken is not telling us: they signed the 'Marrakesh Declaration', which identifies migration from Africa to the EU as "a necessary positive and beneficial phenomenon contributing to global development" (Hungary was the only one not to sign). 👇 https://t.co/YP9EIPZBXh[45]

In the month following the tragic incident involving the death of a young child, the issue of the status of the family was heavily discussed. Indeed, the members of Mawda's family were illegal RASIM as, before the incident, they had not been granted refugee status. However, they later expressed their wish to remain in Belgium for the duration of the trial. A rise in the legality, constitutionality, and juridiction frame can indeed be observed (32).

[45] Translated from Dutch: Wat Theo Francken verzwijgt: Ze ondertekenden er de 'Verklaring van Marrakesh', waarin migratie vanuit Afrika naar de EU wordt benoemd als "een noodzakelijk positief en voordelig fenomeen dat bijdraagt tot de globale ontwikkeling" (Hongarije ondertekende als enige niet). 👇 https://t.co/YP9EIPZBXh

(32) Regularizing the Mawda family was a difficult decision. DVZ advice was NEGATIVE but losing a child was terrible. Therefore, no repatriation for investigation purposes, but Dublin claim opened in Germany. They went back there after an investigation. By the way, they had been rejected there. No refugees.[46]

B. Issue-specific frames

The issue-specific frame typology also includes a high number of frames (11 different frames). The same approach as for Section A is therefore adopted, and graphs representing respectively the usage of issue-specific frames by Belgian politicians in 2015, 2016, and 2018 are outlined.

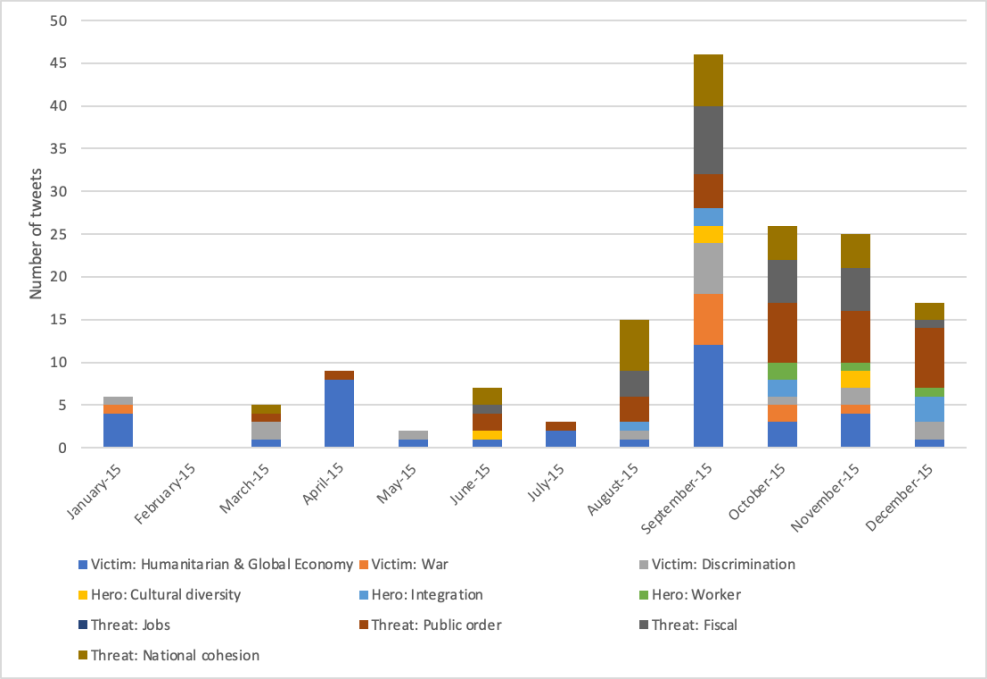

Figure 12 - Issue-specific frames per month in 2015

Around the time of the death of Aylan Kurdi in September, there was an increase in the victim of humanitarian and global economy frame. First of all, to discuss the tragic character of shipwrecks, but also the hardship Aylan's family went through. The victim of war frame which was previously and generally very little used shows a very clear increase in September, which diminishes fairly quickly in the next months. During this month, the threat to public

[46] Translated from Dutch: Familie Mawda regulariseren was moeilijke beslissing. Advies DVZ was NEGATIEF maar kind verliezen vreselijk. Daarom géén repatriëring td onderzoek maar wel Dublinclaim op Duitsland geopend. Daar m ze terug heen na onderzoek. Ze waren er trouwens afgewezen. Géén vluchtelingen

order frame was rather low compared to the following months. Indeed, from September on, an increase in the threat to public order frame can be observed. However, the rise does not coincide with the attacks on Paris in November.

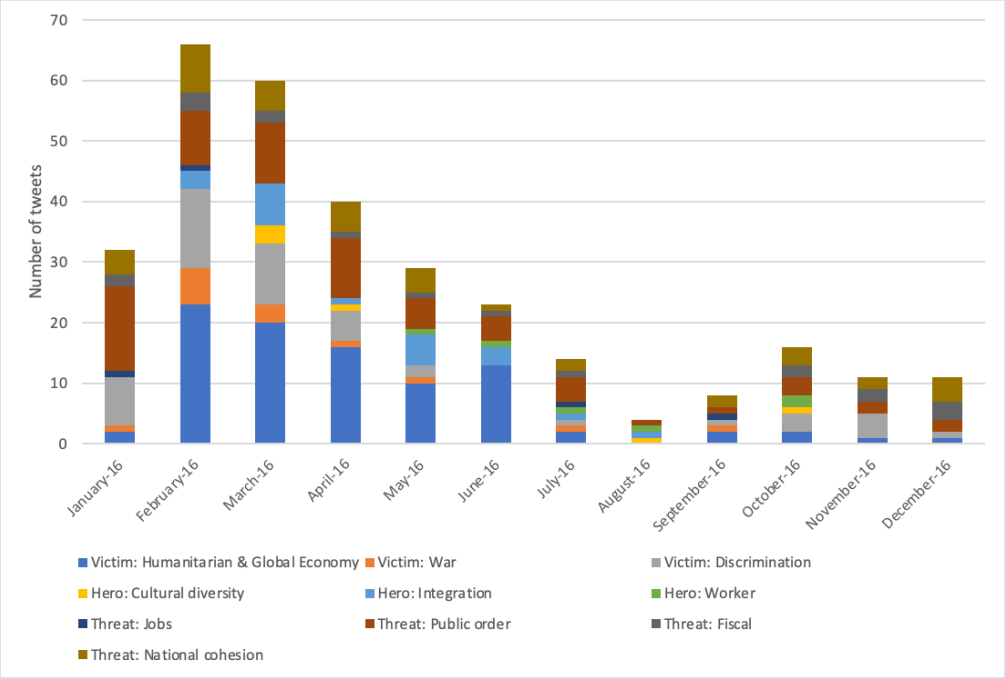

Figure 13 - Issue-specific frames per month in 2016

In 2016, the threat to public order frame was consistently used. It only started decreasing two months after the attacks on Brussels, in June. Moreover, the hero of cultural diversity and the hero of integration frames both increased in March, whereas the victim of humanitarian and victim of discrimination frames decreased significantly from the event onwards.

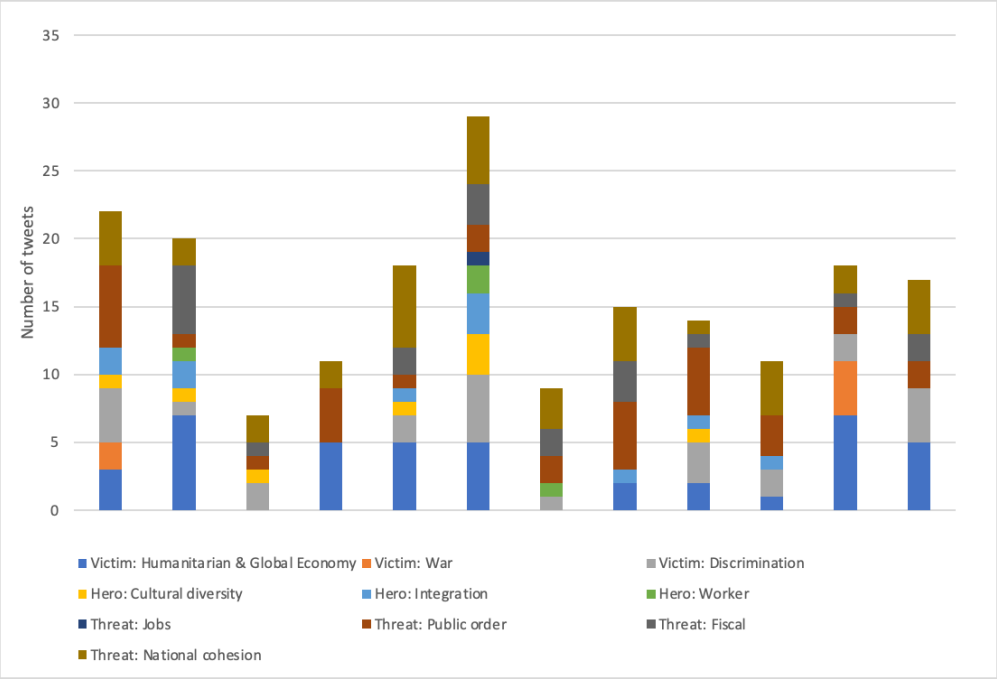

Figure 14 - Issue-specific frames per month in 2018

Around the event of Mawda's death, the hero of cultural diversity and the hero of integration frames increased. The victim of humanitarian and global economy frame was not used to a greater or lesser extent than in other months of 2018. However, the victim of discrimination frame increased (33). The same frame also increased in December, around the vote for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration. It was perhaps used to denounce the rejectionist stance of some parties towards the treaty.

(33) Since it is on the soil of repression and closure that smugglers thrive, it is not the "hunt for migrants" that will weaken them." #Mawda talks about us and the society we are building... https://t.co/OVNrkJLTTg[47]

C. Narrative frames

As the narrative frame typology is composed of only two different frames - episodic and thematic, the creation of a graph covering the 5 years of the analysis did not interfere with the salience of important information, such as the specific events under study.

[47] Translated from French: "Puisque c'est sur le terreau de la répression et de la fermeture que prospèrent les passeurs, ce n'est pas la « chasse aux migrants » qui les affaiblira." #Mawda nous parle de nous et de la société que nous construisons... https://t.co/OVNrkJLTTg

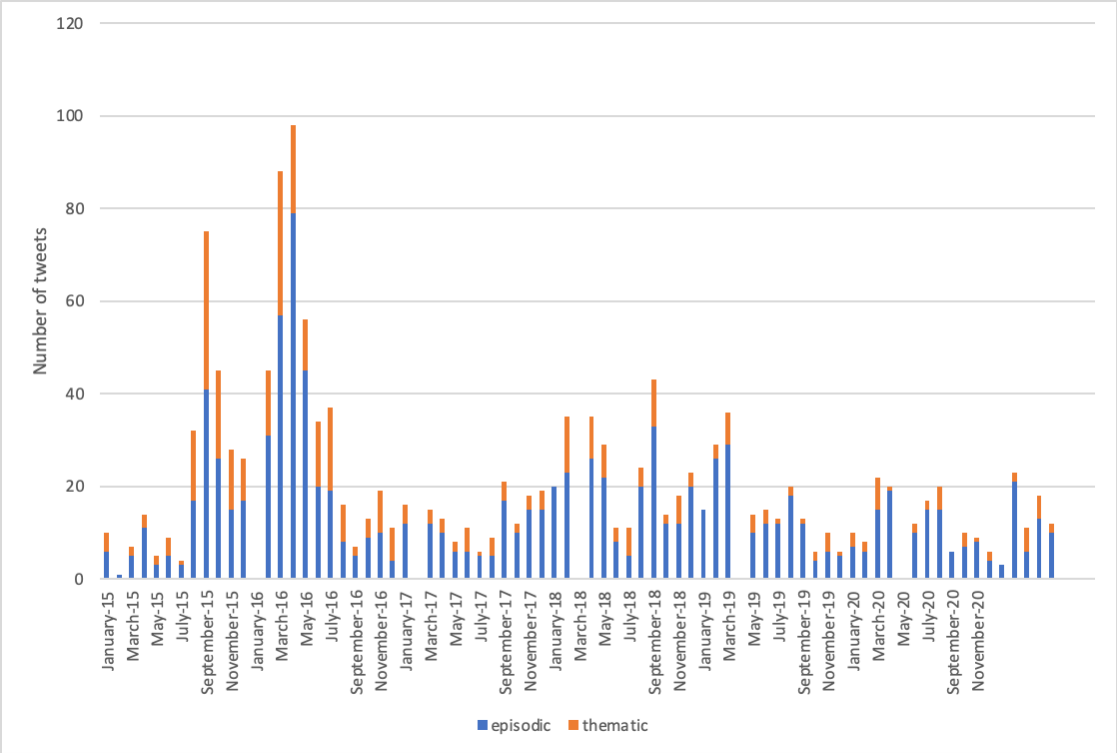

Figure 15 - Narrative frames from 2015 to 2020

It was previously established that Belgian politicians represented RASIM by using the episodic frame, rather than the thematic frame, which can be confirmed by the observation of this graph. However, the difference between the episodic and the thematic frames is more marked from 2017 onwards. Indeed, during the first two years of the "migration crisis", the number of episodic and thematic tweets is rather equal. In 2015 and 2016, RASIM were therefore both represented through the global spectrum of the migration issue and through discussions of specific events, individuals, and places. The pike in frequency in March 2016 shows that the Attacks on Brussels were predominantly discussed using the episodic frame. In May and June 2018, there is significant pike in the episodic frame, together with a light pike in the thematic frame. Those concur with Mawda Shawri's death (Mai 2018). A similar phenomenon can be observed around the time of the vote for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM), in December 2018. Nevertheless, the difference between the number of episodic and thematic framed tweets around Aylan Kurdi's death (September 2016) is not significant.

On the one hand, to answer RQ3a, *how did the framing of RASIM by Belgian politicians evolve between 2015 and 2020?*, the tweet frequency decreased after the two first years of the "migration crisis". Concerning RQ3b, *are changes in frames of RASIM correlated to the timing*

of major events?, yes, around the time of specific events, substantial pikes are apparent. However, events taking place in France did not extensively impact the volume of migration-related discussions and on the representations of RASIM. Around events such as the attacks on Brussels, Belgian politicians represented RASIM in a more negative way, discussing crimes, violence, and threats. Whereas, around the time of tragic events such as the death of a child, they adopted a more positive and supportive tone.

6. Discussion

While a growing body of research investigates how news media frame migration, little is known about the representations of RASIM by politicians - especially Belgian politicians since Walloon and Flemish politicians are divided by a cultural and linguistic difference. The aim of this Master's thesis was to gain insight into the framing of RASIM as portrayed by Belgian politicians. By analyzing a sample of 1,499 tweets, the study researched the political framing of RASIM, while trying to apprehend the differences between the two regions, the differences between the categories of RASIM and the evolution over time. This chapter discusses the results presented in Chapter 5 and answers, to a certain extent, the research questions. The three sections of this chapter correspond to the three primary research questions.

6.1. Representation of RASIM by Walloon and Flemish politicians

The first research question was divided into two sub-questions. The first sought to identify the representations of RASIM as conveyed by Belgian politicians on Twitter, whereas the second sought to determine whether these representations differed between Walloon and Flemish politicians. Previous studies suggest that two main narratives serve to depict RASIM on social media: a positive and cosmopolitan narrative, which represents RASIM as victims and emphasizes solidarity, and a negative narrative, which depicts RASIM as threats or burdens (Baider *et al.*, 2018; Langdon, 2018). However, most studies also claim that discourses on migration primarily use the second narrative, and frame RASIM in a negative way (Stromback *et al.*, 2021). This negative social media representation of RASIM accelerates the otherization of these minority groups (Narlı *et al*., 2020), as it portrays them as outsiders who do not belong to the constructed European and national identity (Kreis, 2017). The findings from the tweet analysis do show that RASIM were primarily represented as victims or as threats. However, the victims' issue-specific frames were used to a slightly bigger extent than the threats frames. This difference with other European countries could be explained by the bigger distance

separating Belgium and the Balkan routes, and by the smaller number of RASIM the country has received (Heidenreich *et al*., 2017).

Moreover, the fact that a large number of tweets could not be classified in one of the issue-specific frames (and was therefore classified as unclear), while it did correspond to an issue-generic or a narrative frame, indicates that Belgian politicians tend to discuss migration without giving their explicit opinion on RASIM. Indeed, an issue-specific frame implies an overt opinion on RASIM being victims, heroes, or threats. This means that Belgian politicians tend to discuss migration through general political issues such as the economy, legality, and health care. And, when addressing political issues and particular events, they tend not to give their clear opinion on RASIM. Furthermore, looking at issue-generic frames, Belgian politicians mostly use the political factors and implication frame and the external reputation and regulation frame. The former focuses on "politicians, political parties, governing bodies, political campaigns, and debates; discussions of elections and voting" (Mendelsohn *et al.,* 2021, p. 3). This suggests that politicians do use Twitter to promote their work and engage with their community (Bright *et al.*, 2020; Marquart *et al.,* 2020). This finding also coincides with the characteristics of Twitter as outlined by Ott (2017). Indeed, the researcher pointed out that the tweet format was favorable to short, negative, and aggressive messages, and that politicians therefore used the platform to criticize each other. The significant use of the political factors and implication frame both suggests that Belgian politicians use Twitter as a campaign tool and as a channel to express their opinion on other politicians and on policies openly.

Regarding whether Walloon and Flemish politicians represented RASIM differently, the literature review suggested that politicians to the north of the country have a stronger (sub-)nationalism, have a powerful stance on the political issue of migration in Belgium and stand for a strict immigration policy (Fadil *et al.*, 2020; De Cleen *et al.*, 2017). Prior to the analysis, it was already noted that Flemish politicians tweeted to a larger extent on the topic of migration than Walloon politicians. Moreover, the findings corroborate these studies, as Flemish politicians have represented RASIM using threat issue-specific frames (to the public order, to national cohesion and fiscal) to a greater extent than Walloon politicians. They also addressed the topic of migration through economic (economic frame), cultural and religious (cultural identity and ethic frame) discussions. On the other hand, Walloon politician represented RASIM "positively" using victims' frames (of humanitarian and global economy and of

discrimination) and discussing issues such as health care and resources (health care and capacity frame).

6.2. Distinction between the representations of RASIM

The second main research question sought to determine whether Belgian politicians clearly identified a certain category of RASIM when discussing migration and, if so, whether they represented men, women, elderly, and children RASIM differently. The first observation that can be made is that RASIM are mainly represented as a homogeneous group. Indeed, 87,8% (N: 1,316) of the tweets were classified as unclear as they did not clearly identify a specific category of RASIM. Whether on the basis of age or gender, the RASIM were not distinguished to a significant extent. However, the lack of distinction implies that RASIM are a homogeneous cultural, ethnic, and social group. It can have an impact on the creation and the perception of RASIM and migration discussions (Bashatah, 2017), reinforcing existing or pre-constructed representations and stereotypes. Furthemore, explaining and making visible the history, the situation, and the needs (legal, social, and health needs) of different categories of individuals is crucial to create and formulate policies that are adapted to the social integration of all (Narlı *et al*., 2020).

Regarding the second part of this research question - whether Belgian politicians represented men, women, elderly, and children RASIM differently -, the answer is limited by the lack of data. Indeed, a specific category of RASIM was clearly mentioned 216 times. Therefore, only a very limited subset of tweets was available for analysis of frames used to portray RASIM by Belgian politicians. The findings discussed in the framework of this Master's thesis can therefore be used as a general guide, as well as a lead for future studies. However, to better understand the difference between the representation of men, women, elderly, and RASIM children, further study is needed. Nevertheless, it was observed that Belgian politicians represented men RASIM to a much larger extent than women, elderly, and children RASIM. This corroborates the numerous studies that have shown that discussions on migration take the men breadwinner as a norm and render other vulnerable groups largely invisible (Rosen *et al.,* 2018; Amores *et al.*, 2020; Milivojević *et al.,* 2021). When Belgian politicians represent a majority of men RASIM, they undermine the objectives of migration by suggesting that men RASIM seek a better quality of life, and that they are not driven by difficult living conditions, war, or persecution, as these factors would imply the departure of the whole family (Langdon, 2018). Moreover, the lack of women, children, and elderly representation on

social media conveys a certain idea in the public about their lesser importance, it worsens their social positions and is ground for discrimination. Indeed, “stereotypes most often occur due to a lack of information about a group or an individual within a group” (Milivojević *et al.*, 2021, p. 118).

Furthermore, men RASIM were more negatively framed than other categories of RASIM. Indeed, the crime security and defense issue-generic frame, as well as the threat to public order issue-specific frame were largely used. Moreover, a greater number of episodic framed tweets were used to portray men RASIM, suggesting that particular individuals are associated with specific events and places. This supports the claims that men RASIM are primarily associated with a culture of violence (Wigger, 2019; Gray *et al.*, 2019). Because of their gender, as well as their age, RASIM are therefore more susceptible to be represented as a threat. Indeed, a significant number of tweets representing children RASIM were framed using the crime, security, and defense issue-generic frame as well. Rosen *et al.* (2018) state that children can be suspected of being older than they claim, and that unaccompanied minors (boys) inspire mistrust and apprehension. Negative social media representation of men and children RASIM accelerates the otherization of these minority groups (Narlı *et al*., 2020).

On the other hand, women, and children RASIM were mentioned in health care discussions and represented as victims. Using a positive and supportive tone, Belgian politicians portrayed men and children RASIM as humanitarian victims. They emphasized the hardship of their journey, the risks they take and the poor conditions they endure. “The vulnerability of ‘womenandchildren’ is further reinforced by the implication that their suffering and death is *especially upsetting*” (Gray *et al.*, 2019, p. 280). These findings also support Hennebry *et al.* (2017) claim that “women are seen as ‘victims’ in need of protection from harm, rather than individuals whose rights need to be protected” (p. 6). Moreover, a significant number of tweets mentioning women RASIM were framed using the cultural identity and ethic issue-generic frame, which addresses social norms, values, customs, and religion. This finding is in line with other studies, claiming that women RASIM are more frequently associated with religious symbols and appear as dependent on culture, men, and religion (Batasha, 2017; Amores *et al.,* 2020).

6.3. Evolution of the representation of RASIM by Belgian politicians

Finally, the third research question was divided into two sub-questions. The first one looked at the evolution of the representation of RASIM by Belgian politicians since 2015, both in terms of frequency and frames. Whereas the second one looked at the change in representation of RASIM around the time of major events, both in terms of frequency and frames. It was found that the frequency of tweets waned after the first two years of the "migration crisis", in 2017. Nevertheless, some pikes in the number of tweets posted by Belgian politicians still subsided. As mentioned earlier, tweets posted by Belgian politicians mainly mentioned RASIM through specific events, individuals, or places. Pikes in this episodic narrative frame corresponded to real life events. Indeed, pikes in frequency coinciding with the six events under study were observed, supporting studies that state that events do have an impact on the coverage RASIM (Bozdag *et al.*, 2019; Heidenreich *et al*., 2017; Langdon, 2018). However, it is interesting to note that, although the external and regulation frame is the issue-generic frame most used by Belgian politicians to discuss migration, the two events that happened in France - the attacks on Paris and the Jungle of Calais' dismantling - appear very little in the analysis of the frequency of tweets, and of the usage of frames and their evolution. Whereas the death of Aylan Kurdi, the third event that happened outside of Belgium, did have an impact on the frequency and the usage of frames.

Analyzing the response of different European countries to the "migration crisis", Gualda *et al.* (2016) found that countries like Italy, Portugal, and Germany responded to the death of Aylan Kurdi by displaying solidarity and a sense of responsibility towards the protection of children. Indeed, an increase in both the public sentiment issue-generic frame and in the issue-specific victims (of war and of humanitarian and global economy) frames were observed. Around the time of Mawda Shawri's death, an increase in the victim of discrimination issue-specific frame was also seen. These events are therefore reported using more positive frames, and the casualties are described as voiceless and innocent victims. These events and the consequent responses in frequency of tweets and usage of frames also support the observations made in section 6.2., which claimed that the vulnerability and helplessness of children RASIM is often emphasized.

Furthermore, around the time of the vote for the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, an increase in the usage of the external regulation and reputation frame and the political factors and implications frame were observed. However, there was no significant

rise in an issue-specific frame. Migration as a social and political issue was therefore addressed, more so than RASIM themselves. Discourses on the topic of migration are often critical of European and national policies, and of other politicians and parties (Ott, 2017; Gualda *et al.,* 2016). Around the GCM, discourses on migration became even more critical towards both the European governments and the Belgian governments, blaming them for their decisions and actions regarding the "migration crisis". Moreover, in March 2016, around the time of the attacks on Brussels, the usage of the crime, security, and defense issue-generic frame and of the threat to public order issue-specific frame increased. This corroborates Bozdag *et al.* (2019) and Gualda *et al.* (2016) observations that negative and threat representations intensify right after terrorist attacks. Both the increase in frequency and the change in frame imply a direct connection between migration and the attacks. It conflates terrorism and RASIM, introducing suspicion (Gualda *et al.,* 2016). The evolution of the frequency of tweets and of the usage of frames clearly show that events have an impact on the framing of the so-called "migration crisis". It corroborates Bozdag *et al.* 's (2019) findings that "politicians' refugee-related tweet frequency clearly correlates with particular events" (p. 4055).

7. Conclusion

This Master's thesis has shed some light on the representations of RASIM going through a sample of 1,499 tweets posted by Belgian politicians from January 2015 to December 2020. A frame analysis approach was adopted as it has the advantage to depict the various encoded meanings that are significant and influential in a discourse. It allows the interpretation of the content posted on social media such as the microblogging platform Twitter, which is a powerful political tool and public opinion shaper. This study adopted Mendelsohn *et al.,* (2021) frame analysis approach to investigate the nature and evolution of the frames used in migration-related discussions, and to provide an overview of the representations of all categories of RASIM as conveyed by Belgian politicians. Each tweet was manually analyzed and labeled with the appropriate frames. Then, the data obtained from the manual analysis were described using descriptive statistical analysis. The thesis had three main objectives: (1) identifying the representations of RASIM conveyed in tweets posted by Walloons and Flemish politicians, (2) understanding the differences between the representations of men, women, elderly, and children RASIM in Belgian politicians' discourses, and finally (3) examining the evolution of the frequency of migration-related tweets and the shifts in RASIM representations around particular events.

Belgian politicians primarily discuss migration through general issues and use Twitter as a platform to promote their political position and express their opinion on Belgian and European policies. The results of the analysis are consistent with the bulk of the studies: when Belgian politicians express openly their opinion, they depict RASIM in two main ways: either as victims or as threats. However, the findings do not corroborate the claims that RASIM representations are mainly negative, as the most used frames were victims' frames. As for the differences between Wallonia and Flanders, politicians put a different emphasis on migration and the issues that tag along with it. Flemish politicians tweeted to a larger extent on the topic of migration, addressed it through economic and religious discussions and represented RASIM as threats. While Walloons politicians addressed it through health care discussions and represented RASIM as victims.

Belgian politicians mainly represent RASIM as a homogeneous crowd, they do not distinguish between the age and the gender of the different individuals on the move. When a certain category of RASIM is mentioned, men RASIM are represented to a greater extent and in a more negative way than women, elderly, and children, whose vulnerability and helplessness are emphasized.

Finally, the analysis of the frequency of tweets and of their framing corroborate previous studies. Real life events have an impact on both the volume of migration-related discussions and on the representations of RASIM. Around events such as the attacks on Brussels, RASIM were represented in a more negative way, discussing crimes, violence, and threats. Whereas, around the time of tragic events such as the death of a child, Belgian politicians tend to adopt a more positive and supportive tone towards RASIM.

7.1. Perspective for further studies

A plethora of research has tried to sketch the representations of RASIM in news media, but social media and political discourses have been rarely investigated. This Master's thesis tried to add to the understanding of the representations of RASIM by politicians on Twitter. However, more studies are needed to explore political discourses about RASIM on social media. Further research might also explore the impact that these discourses have on the electorate. Indeed, social networks are an essential medium of information, and although they have not replaced traditional channels, they are omnipresent in the new media and political information habits. The use of social networks by stakeholders (such as politicians) as well as

by citizens when addressing prevalent issues such as migration, and the impact of this use on users, are key research topics.

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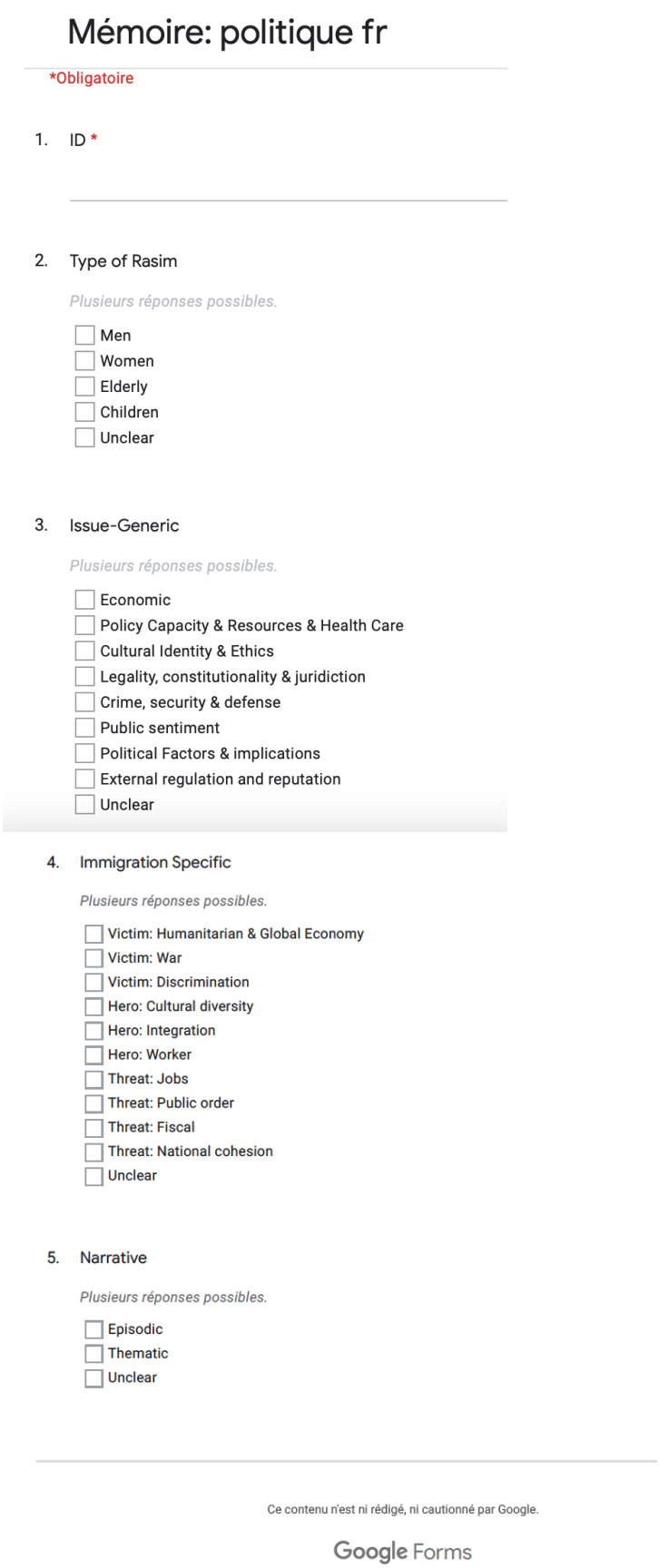
Appendix

Appendix 1 - List of Keywords

Keywords in French	Keywords in Dutch
Migrant	Migrant
Migrants	Migranten
Réfugié	Vluchteling
Réfugiés	Vluchtelingen
Demandeur d'asile	Asielzoeker
Demandeurs d'asile	Asielzoekers
Immigrant	Immigrant
Immigrants	Immigranten
Immigration	Immigratie
Expatrié	Staatloze
Expatriés	Migratie
Migration	Emigratie
Emigration	Migratiestromen
Migratoire	Zonder papieren
Sans-papier	Asiel
Sans-papiers	
Asile	

Appendix 2 – Google Form used from the manual analysis of the tweets



Mémoire: politique fr

*Obligatoire

1. ID *

2. Type of Rasim

Plusieurs réponses possibles.

- [ ] Men
- [ ] Women
- [ ] Elderly
- [ ] Children
- [ ] Unclear

3. Issue-Generic

Plusieurs réponses possibles.

- [ ] Economic
- [ ] Policy Capacity & Resources & Health Care
- [ ] Cultural Identity & Ethics
- [ ] Legality, constitutionality & juridiction
- [ ] Crime, security & defense
- [ ] Public sentiment
- [ ] Political Factors & implications
- [ ] External regulation and reputation
- [ ] Unclear

4. Immigration Specific

Plusieurs réponses possibles.

- [ ] Victim: Humanitarian & Global Economy
- [ ] Victim: War
- [ ] Victim: Discrimination
- [ ] Hero: Cultural diversity
- [ ] Hero: Integration
- [ ] Hero: Worker
- [ ] Threat: Jobs
- [ ] Threat: Public order
- [ ] Threat: Fiscal
- [ ] Threat: National cohesion
- [ ] Unclear

5. Narrative

Plusieurs réponses possibles.

- [ ] Episodic
- [ ] Thematic
- [ ] Unclear

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