RESEARCH ARTICLE

Contesting the populist claim on “the people” through popular culture: the 0110 concerts versus the Vlaams Belang

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Although they belong to different spheres, popular culture and populism can in some cases become intertwined and interlocked because they are both built around the antagonism between people and elite. Populist parties are often happy to associate themselves with popular culture as this allows them to strengthen their bond with the (signifier) people. This article looks at an inverse movement: the contestation of a populist party’s claim on the people through popular culture. It analyzes the discursive struggle between the Flemish extreme-right populist party Vlaams Belang and 0110. On 1 October 2006, a series of concerts “for tolerance, against racism, against extremism, and against gratuitous violence” featuring many of Belgium’s most popular artists from all kinds of genres, were held in four Belgian cities. The article shows how the organization behind the 0110 concerts managed to turn popular culture against the Vlaams Belang, thus questioning this party’s claim on the signifier “people”.

Keywords: populism; popular culture; extreme right; Vlaams Belang; discourse-theoretical analysis

1. Introduction

On 1 October 2006 – one week before the Belgian local elections – a series of concerts “for tolerance, against racism, against extremism, and against gratuitous violence” (0110.be) were held in four Belgian cities: Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent, and Charleroi. The initiative for the 0110 concerts was taken by Tom Barman – singer of Antwerp rock band dEUS – who wanted to organize a concert against the extreme-right party Vlaams Belang (VB) in Antwerp. Other artists joined in and organized similar events in other cities. 0110 evolved into a media event featuring a long list of Belgian artists (playing all kinds of musical genres, including the more popular ones). The estimates are that more than 100,000 people attended the 0110 concerts. The concerts received a huge amount of media attention, and sparked a fierce debate on the usefulness of artistic initiatives against the extreme right and on the relationship between culture and politics in general. The VB itself also reacted strongly against the concerts.

This article looks at the 0110 concerts to show that popular culture is not only a site in which a political–ideological struggle can be waged, but that popular culture can also function as a tool and strategy to fight an extreme-right political party. The starting point of our argument is based on the shared core structure of popular
culture and populism, as we want to argue that both popular culture and populism build on the juxtaposition between people and elite. This does not imply that popular culture and populism can be equated, for populism is a concept that is (and needs to be) much more linked to the world of politics, political strategies and political actors. But although they belong to different spheres, popular culture and populism arguably have a similar core structure, and can in some cases become intertwined and interlocked. This is especially the case because populist parties are often happy to make use of popular culture as this allows them to strengthen their bond with the (signifier) people. But as this link between the populist parties and the signifier people is not given and to be taken for granted, political opponents might attempt to disarticulate it.

This article looks at one of these attempts: it analyzes how the organization behind the 0110 concerts attempted to disarticulate the signifier “the people” from the populist extreme-right party VB by turning popular culture against them, and using the link between popular culture and the people to weaken this party’s symbolic relationship with the signifier. Before discussing the discourse-theoretical analysis of the discursive struggle between 0110 and VB (inspired by Laclau and Mouffe’s 1985 discourse theory [DT]), we will first discuss the conceptual links between people, popular culture, and populism. The article moves from the more traditional idea of popular culture as a site of struggle between people and elite (without disavowing it) to a discussion of how the link between popular culture and the people can make popular culture a weapon against a populist political party.

2. Popular culture and the people

In his seminal *Keywords*, Williams (1983, 237) identifies four meanings of the term popular in relation to culture, where the signifier “people” is (often) attributed a crucial role. These four meanings are: “well liked by many people”, “inferior kinds of work”, “work deliberately setting out to win favour with the people”, and “culture actually made by the people for themselves”. These four definitions show that the popular is defined *vis-à-vis* the non-popular. Even in its more neutral sense of “well liked” or “widely favored”, there is the underlying opposition to that which is not liked by many. Therefore, Williams argues, the popular often has two negative connotations: inferiority (O’Sullivan, Hartley and Saunders [1983, 174] refer to the connotations “gross, base, vile, riff-raff, common, low, vulgar, plebeian, cheap”), and “deliberately setting out to win favor” (Williams 1983, 237). Different from these meanings and more positive, according to Williams, is the meaning of popular culture as the culture made by the people for the people, which is related to Herder’s ideas on the *Kultur des Volkes* (Herder 1966), a meaning that lives on in the concept of folk culture.

Popular culture has different meanings, but is always defined relationally, through its implicit or explicit antagonism to “other conceptual categories: folk culture, mass culture, dominant culture, working-class culture, etc” (Storey 2003, 1). The meaning of popular culture is not fixed but depends on its relation to the non-popular. As Hall argues,

The structuring principle [of the relation between the popular and the non-popular] does not consist of the contents of each category – which I insist will alter from one
period to another. Rather it consists of the forces and relations which sustain the
distinction, the differences. (1981, 234)

Hall (1981) situates the political significance of popular culture exactly in this
relation between the popular and the non-popular. The move to a neo-Gramscian
cultural studies, Oswell (2006, 85) writes, meant that “popular culture was not to be
measured through an anthropology of the people. Instead, popular culture was seen
to provide the cultural and ideological space within which ‘a people’ could be
politically constructed and mobilised”. Or, as Storey (2003, 12) states, neo-
Gramscian “theories of ‘popular culture’ [such as Hall’s] are really theories about
the construction of the people”.

Zooming in on the people, we can make a number of similar arguments. First,
“the people” is not a prefixed natural category, but a signifier that acquires
meaning through a diversity of discourses. The idea that the signifier “people” is a
discursive construct is illustrated by, for instance, theories on populism (see
Canovan 2005; Laclau 2005a, 2005b) and nationalism (see Balibar 1991;
Hobsbawm 1990), discourses in which the people has a pivotal role (rendering it
a nodal point – see below). From this perspective, the essentializing and
hegemonizing claims on the people can be seen as ways to generate coherent
discursive structures that at the same time form strong interpellative forces to
constitute political communities. Claims to speak for the people in an attempt to
gain legitimacy and power are of course not limited to the field of politics, they are
abound (and have been for centuries) within different societal fields – politics,
religion, culture (see Bourdieu 1990). Second, like popular culture (following
Storey’s 2003 interpretation), the constructions of the people are often antagonistic;
that is, based on the juxtaposition between the people and another identity
(Bourdieu 1990; Laclau 2005a, 2005b; see below for the different antagonisms
structuring nationalism and populism).

This article analyzes the struggle between competing claims on the people and
popular culture, using Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) DT as a framework (see also
Carpentier and De Cleen 2007; Carpentier and Spinoy 2008). The theoretical
starting point of Laclau and Mouffe’s DT is the proposition that all social
phenomena and objects obtain their meaning(s) through discourse. Discourses and
identities are not stable and fixed – a discourse is never safe from elements alien to
that discourse, and this prevents the full saturation of meaning – but at the same
time discourses have to be partially fixed, since the abundance of meaning would
otherwise make any meaning impossible (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 112). The
points where the discourse is (partially) fixed, Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 112) call
nodal points – privileged signifiers that fix the meaning of a chain of signifiers (or
moments), and have a certain degree of rigidity.

In the case of popular culture, this nodal point is the people, and as the
discussion of popular culture above shows, it is the antagonism between the
people and the elite that structures discourses about popular culture. We will
argue below that the same goes for populist discourse. This shared nodal point
and the shared mechanism of the construction of the people/the popular through
a juxtaposition to the elite links populist discourses and discourses on popular
culture.
3. From the struggle within popular culture to the struggle for the signifier “people” through popular culture

Much research that is situated within the neo-Gramscian tradition is concerned with the political struggle that takes place within popular culture. Hall’s (1980) encoding/decoding model is exemplary of these concerns with how the meaning of popular culture depends on both the meanings that are inscribed at the moment of production and on the way these are read at the moment of consumption. Other authors focus almost exclusively on the moment of consumption. Fiske (1989, 15), for example, sees popular culture as that which the subordinate do with cultural commodities, which are resources out of which popular culture can be made. Or as Barker (2005, 69) formulates it: “Popular culture is constituted through the production of popular meaning located at the moment of consumption. Such meanings are the site of contestation over cultural and political values”.

This article is not concerned with the political struggle within the arena of popular culture or with popular culture as a space for the construction of the people, but with the discursive struggle over and for the signifier “people” through (political) claims on the field of popular culture. It is concerned with how political discourses – in their attempts to become hegemonic – attempt to associate themselves with popular culture, and how the “ownership” of popular culture (and its nodal point, the people) becomes the object of a struggle. Although culture and institutionalized politics are relatively separate fields that function according to their own logics, institutionalized politics attempts to make use of popular culture in several ways (see Van Zoonen 2000, 2005). Cloonan and Street (1998, 36) argue that “politics feeds of popular culture, if only because of their common concern with notions of popularity and authenticity, and their shared desire for publicity”. Political projects often try to speak to as many people as possible. In doing this, politicians and political parties sometimes associate themselves with artists (and other celebrities such as sports stars) that have a broad appeal in order to feed on their popularity. As Street (2000, 77) argues, being associated with artists is important as it says something about the politician (and about the kind of people he or she wants to speak to and associate himself/herself with). From this perspective the question of whether a political party associates itself with say a rock band or a schlager singer becomes politically relevant. But there is more: because of the centrality of the signifier “the people” for popular culture, associating with popular culture and popular artists can be a way for political projects, parties or individual politicians to link themselves to the (ordinary) people. As will be argued below, establishing this link with the people is especially important to populist parties for the signifier “the people” is at the core of populist discourse.

4. A discourse-theoretical perspective on populism

Bourdieu (1990, 152) argues that “it is clearly in the political field that the use of ‘the people’ and the ‘popular’ is most directly profitable”. Indeed, attempts to speak to, associate with, or represent the people can be found throughout the political spectrum, but are most systematic in and most crucial to populist parties. In order to discuss the relationship between populist politics and popular culture, we will first turn to Ernesto Laclau’s work to define populism. We will use his work to develop a
definition of populism that enables us to discuss the interrelations between popular culture and populist politics without treating all political uses of popular culture and all links between politics and popular culture as populist.

Laclau is obviously not the only contemporary author working on populism. On the contrary, the concept of populism is used in a wide range of contexts, and has been attributed a diversity of meanings. Populism is sometimes treated as a (thin) political ideology (for example, Canovan 2002) or a kind of political style (for example, Jagers and Walgrave 2003), whereas in other cases it refers to positive evaluations of popular culture or is used as a label for any kind of culture aimed at a broad audience. Broadening the concept of populism to the sphere of media and culture has in some cases caused the term to become synonymous with popular or popularizing, which has negative consequences for the analytical value of populism as a concept (Carpentier 2007). In this article, populism is limited to the sphere of politics, but even in the literature that focuses on political populism there is no consensus about its meaning.

Much of the literature on (political) populism actually departs from the unclarity of the concept’s meaning. Taggart (2000, 1), for example, refers to “an essential impalpability, an awkward conceptual slipperiness”. The lack of consensus on the meaning of populism can be explained by the different waves of populism and the differences between them (see Taguieff 1998), and by the use of the concept of populism on different levels of meaning (see Arditi 2007, 54–87; Jagers 2006, 19–76; Mudde 2004, 543; Taguieff 2002, 99–106). There is a certain degree of consensus on which movements or parties can be labeled populist, but not on what exactly makes a movement or party populist (Canovan 1999, 3). However, as the term “populism” already suggests, the concept of the people has a central position in many definitions. The difficulty lies in the fact that the people does not mean the same thing to all populist parties and that, as a consequence, the term “populism” does not suffice to characterize a political discourse. The use of terms such as “national populism” (Taguieff 1995) or “right-wing-populism” (Betz 2002) illustrates this.

In dealing with the conceptual diversity of populist discourses, we prefer to (at least partially) align ourselves with Laclau’s (1977, 2005a, 2005b) work on populism. Laclau avoids the problems related to defining the contents of populist discourse by arguing that “the people” is an empty signifier and that populism as such is not an ideology. Laclau’s perspective can be called “formalistic” (Stavrakakis 2004, 255–256): what counts is not the ideology behind the use of the people, but the use of this signifier and the way it structures a discourse:

A movement is not populist because in its ideology it presents actual contents identifiable as populist, but because it shows a particular logic of articulation of those contents – whatever those contents are. (Laclau 2005b, 33)

But the use of the signifier “the people” in itself does not suffice to speak of populism. In order to speak of a populist discourse, there has to be an antagonistic relation between the people and the elite (see also Canovan 2002; Mény and Surel 2000; Mudde 2004, 2007).

The presence of popular elements in a discourse is not sufficient to transform it into a populist one. Populism starts at the point where popular-democratic elements are presented as an antagonistic option against the ideology of the dominant bloc. (Laclau 1977, 143)
Laclau’s critique of essentialism leads him to the conclusion that the people is a relationist concept, which can only acquire meaning through antagonism. Different identities are grouped under the signifier “the people” by opposing them to a constitutive outside: the elite. What links the people is not something positive they have in common, but their opposition to the same outside. Put in discourse-theoretical terms: populism functions according to the logic of equivalence (Laclau 2005a, 2005b). Here Laclau reverts to a concept developed together with Chantal Mouffe in *Hegemony and socialist strategy* (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) to describe the logics that discourses use to establish their hegemony. In this logic, chains of equivalence are created, articulating a diversity of meanings, subject positions and identities in the same discourse exactly by opposing them to another negative identity (or constitutive outside). The logic of equivalence thus brings together a number of identities in one discourse, without however totally eliminating their differences: chains of equivalence “can weaken, but they cannot domesticate differences” (Laclau 2005a, 79).

What complicates Laclau’s work on populism is that his position on the nature of the populist logics of equivalence and the role of the signifier “the people” has changed over time (and is sometimes ambiguous). Whereas in his earlier work (Laclau 1977) on populism, Laclau stressed the centrality of the signifier “the people” for populism, in his more recent work (Laclau 2005a, 2005b) a discourse does not necessarily need to be centered around the signifier “the people” in order to qualify as populist. Stavrakakis says:

> Although the antagonistic dichotomisation of the social space remains central, the core reference to the signifier “the people” is replaced – more or less – by the production of empty signifiers in general. This is essential in moving from an ontic to an ontological conception of populism – Laclau’s expressed aim. In other words, populism as a mode of discursive articulation is no longer associated with the location of the point de capiton “the people”. (2004, 262)

We side with Stavrakakis’ (2004, 263) critique that broadening the concept of populism to any kind of political discourse governed by the logic of equivalence (structured around any kind of empty signifier) threatens the analytical strength of the concept. For the sake of the concept’s empirical usefulness, we think that the term “populism” is best reserved for those discourses centered around the antagonism between the people and the elite. However, we do accept that other signifiers can take a similar role, but only conditionally. It is not the signifier “the people” in itself that is crucial, but the up–down dimension (as Dyrberg 2003 calls the antagonism between the people and the “power-bloc” that defines it; Mény and Surel 2002 call it vertical). Whether it is structured around the people or around another signifier is not the point. We speak of populism when a discourse is governed by the logic of equivalence and pretends to speak for the underdog whose political identity is constructed by opposing it to an elite. In practice, most of these discourses will be centered around the signifier “the people”, but this is not a necessary condition; it is the structural up–down dimension that defines a discourse as populist.

To summarize: this means that a discourse need not necessarily be built around the signifier “the people” to qualify as populist, and that not every discourse using the signifier “the people” qualifies as populist. This definition of populism allows us to make the distinction between nationalism and populism that is important to the analysis of extreme-right discourse. Nationalist discourses construct a nation/a...
people by creating an antagonism between that nation/people and other nations/peoples living within or outside the state. Nationalism’s definition of the people/the nation is thus based on an in/out distinction, rather than an up/down distinction. Nationalism can be coupled with a populist logic – for example, in the case of separatist movements that juxtapose the nation against a centralist elite that does not represent the nation – but this is not necessarily the case.

5. Populism and the discursive struggle to align with popular culture

As mentioned before, associating with popular culture is a means for political parties in the battle for popularity (Cloonan and Street 1998; Van Zoonen 2000, 2005). This goes for any political party that aims to have a broad appeal. For populist politics, however, the importance of attaching itself to popular culture goes beyond the fact that popular culture is “well liked by many people”. Populist political parties present themselves as representatives of the people by creating an antagonism between the people and themselves, on the one hand, and the elite, on the other. It is in their strategic interest to build and protect a close symbolic relationship with the signifier “people”, in as many societal fields as possible. Aligning themselves with popular culture and its nodal point the people is one of the ways to achieve this connection. This does not imply that populist parties necessarily have links with popular culture or even attempt to establish such links, but it does imply that popular culture can become politically relevant to populist parties, and to their opponents.

Indeed, no single political discourse can exercise an exclusive and everlasting claim on popular culture (or on the people). After all, there is no pre-established connection between any kind of political discourse and popular culture (see Fiske 1989, 163). Because of its discursive connection with the people, the field of popular culture can become the object of struggle between competing political projects in their attempts to become hegemonic. In the case study presented below, we look at how the strong claim of an extreme-right populist political party on the signifier “people” is contested, and how – through their use of popular culture – the political opponents of that extreme-right populist political party (at least partially) manage to reclaim the signifier “people” from that party.

6. The Vlaams Belang, the logic of populism, and popular culture

Despite the structural openness of the signifiers “the people” and “the elite”, some European populist extreme-right political parties seem to have been rather successful at claiming the people and at defining the meaning of people and elite. The Flemish extreme-right party VB is one of the most successful European extreme-right parties, with impressive election results: in the 2004 Flemish elections the party won 24.15% of the votes, which resulted in 32 (out of the 124) seats in the Flemish Parliament. In the 2007 national elections they obtained 17 seats in the national chamber of representatives (out of a total of 150 seats), but nevertheless suffered a loss of some 5% of the Flemish votes compared with the 2004 federal elections (Sinardet 2008, 1025). On the level of the municipality, the party is especially strong in Antwerp, where it won no less than 33.51% in the 2006 municipal elections.
Before turning to the analysis of 0110 as a discursive struggle between the VB and 0110, we first need to look at the VB’s populist discourse and its ideas on (popular) culture. What do the signifiers “the people”, “the elite”, and “popular culture” mean in the VB’s discourse?

6.1. The Vlaams Belang, the people and the elite

The relationship between the extreme right and populism is less straightforward than often assumed, and these two concepts cannot be equated. Populist discourses do not necessarily have an extreme-right character, and not every extreme-right discourse is populist, as for example the explicitly elitist French extreme right of the 1960s and 1970s shows (Mény and Surel 2000, 12). Nevertheless, populism is considered one of the main defining features of the contemporary extreme right, as the use of terms such as “populist radical right”, “national populism”, and “extreme-right populism” shows (see, for example, Hainsworth 2000, 6; Mudde 2002, 13; 2007). This link between the extreme right and populism also applies to the VB. According to Mudde (2007, 43), “after its beginning as an old-style radical right party, with some elitist elements, the VB developed into a well-organized populist radical right party in the 1980’s”. Today, the signifiers “the people” and “the elite” are indeed central to the VB’s discourse. This raises the question of how the people and the elite are articulated by the VB.

The VB is a Flemish-nationalist party. Its nationalist discourse is built around the demand for an independent Flemish state for the Flemish people/nation (Jagers 2006, 205–206). Like other extreme-right parties, the VB holds a specific view on who belongs to the nation and who does not. Mudde (2007, 22) calls this view nativist: a combination of nationalism and xenophobia. Both nationalism and xenophobia are ways of ingroup–outgroup differentiation that construct the (identity of) the people, where non-natives serve as constitutive outside(s) to the people. The VB considers internal differences subordinate to the unity of the people and simultaneously stresses the difference with other groups (Jacobs and Rummens 2003, 6). It constructs the Flemish people in opposition to a number of outgroups that do not share this people’s “common history, language, culture, mores and values” (Jagers 2006, 205–207). One constitutive outside is the French-speaking population of Belgium, as the VB’s main goal is the creation of an independent Flemish state for a culturally defined Flemish people (see Jagers 2006, 214; Mudde 2007, 19; Swyngedouw and Ivaldi 2001, 4–5). To the VB, the people are a cultural entity (Jagers 2006, 211; see Mény and Surel 2000, 177–222). Because of this nationalist homogenizing strategy, the socio-economic differences within the Flemish people are not thematized by the VB. Immigrants are a second constitutive outside: they are said to “destroy Flemish culture” (Swyngedouw 1998, 65–66). Swyngedouw and Ivaldi (2001, 4) argue that, because of taboos established in the aftermath of the Second World War and because of existing anti-racist laws, explicit biologically racist statements are not often to be found in the VB’s formal discourse, but that “those arguments are plainly suggested” (see also Spruyt 1995, 105–147).

As we argued before, nationalism(nativism) and populism share the notion of the people, and construct the people differently, but can nevertheless be articulated. Indeed, in VB discourse these two ways of defining the people frequently overlap, Jagers (2006, 208–209) argues, for example, when the VB speaks of the
French-speaking Belgian elite that dominated/dominates the Flemish people. The VB stresses the Flemish people’s history of oppression and struggle for recognition and emancipation from the French-speaking Belgian elite. A similar articulation of nationalism and populism occurs when the government is criticized for taking care of immigrants while ignoring or even going against the needs of the autochthonous population. But the nativist and populist definition of the people need not necessarily overlap. The Flemish political parties/politicians that collaborate with the Belgian regime, for example, are part of the elite in a populist discourse, but remain part of the people/the nation in a nativist sense – a tension that is resolved by articulating them as traitors of that nation (see Mudde 2007, 64–79).

For the VB, the elite consists first of all of its political opponents. The party presents itself as radically different from the “traditional” parties (Swyngedouw and Ivaldi 2001, 12–14). It is the sole defender of the interests of the Flemish people, the voice of the silent majority, a resistance movement (Jagers 2006, 219, 233 and 251–252). But the elite also includes magistrates, media (almost all considered left-wing by the VB), academia (common sense is valued higher than intellectual knowledge), the monarchy (the symbol of Belgium), labor unions and, sometimes, the church. All of these groups are lumped together in their opposition to the VB (Jagers 2006, 224–233). By contrasting itself with all of these elites, the VB presents itself as the party of the people.

6.2. The Vlaams Belang and popular culture

Now what do these definitions of the people and the elite imply for the VB’s views on popular culture? As a party that bases its discourse on the notion of the people, and distinguishes itself from political opponents through a populist discourse, the VB potentially has a political-strategic interest in aligning itself with popular culture – especially because the party departs from an (ethnic-)cultural definition of the people.

Despite the possible importance of this connection, the VB’s position on culture has rarely been analyzed in the academic literature. Most information on the VB’s discourse on culture can be found in the more journalistic or semi-academic literature. These works (mainly Gijsels 1992, 123–136; Spruyt 2000, 119–122) argue that the VB’s program hardly mentions culture and that the party does not produce texts that directly deal with culture. However, these authors list a series of controversies, incidents, and debates where the VB did voice its opinions about culture. These do give us an idea about the VB’s views on culture as the VB’s interventions about culture are characterized by a number of recurring (and interrelated) themes.

A first important theme is Flemish nationalism. For the VB, culture is first and foremost a means to stimulate Flemish nationalist consciousness, Spruyt (2000, 121) argues. Flemish-nationalist symbols – Flemish flags, singing the Flemish “national” anthem (the Flemish Lion) are prominently visible at meetings and manifestations (see also Gijsels 1992, 135). The VB also demands that cultural institutions focus their investments on Dutch-language, Flemish culture.

A second recurring theme is anti-multiculturalism. The support for Flemish culture goes hand in hand with critiques of “multicultural” cultural initiatives and of the subsidizing of such initiatives. The VB’s ideas about an ethnic-culturally defined
Flanders are clearly exemplified by violent VB protests against a number of performances at Flemish national holiday festivities: against the performance of Alida Neslo (who is of Suriname descent) in 1987 and against Willem Vermandere’s performance of a song defending multicultural society in 1992. These incidents can be considered protests against the construction of Flanders as a multicultural region through (popular) culture.

A third recurring theme is conservatism. The VB criticizes what it considers progressive cultural decadence, and argues against the governments’ financial support of such culture. Also, cultural events that explicitly show sexuality, homosexuality, abortion, and drug use have been the object of VB critique (Gijsels 1992, 123–136; Spruyt 2000, 121; see also Meuleman 2004).

The above-discussed existing reflections on the VB’s views on culture are mainly based on the VB’s critiques of specific forms of culture, but the VB also takes an explicitly positive stance towards other forms of culture, as the use of Flemish-nationalist symbols (e.g. the Flemish anthem and the Flemish flag) illustrates. The VB also expresses a positive appreciation for artists and books that played a role in the Flemish nationalist movement (who thus also become symbols of Flemish nationalism) or represent what the VB considers European culture. In 1991, for instance, then president and founder of the party, Karel Dillen, published a collection of European poems that, according to Gijsels (1992, 135), featured a list of “heimatpoets, militant collaborators, authors of caramel verses and of fascist prose”. The VB’s appreciation of these rather highbrow artists is thus based on these artists’ political importance or political preferences. But popular culture also plays a role for the VB, as it attempts to associate itself with specific forms of popular culture by, for example, releasing a carnival song or by inviting popular artists – mainly schlager singers – to perform at party meetings. These performing artists predominantly have a degree of popular appeal. In these cases, not the explicit political opinions of the artists are important, but rather the fact that they appeal to and symbolically represent the ordinary people that the VB claims to represent. As Meuleman (2004) notes, not many artists like to be identified with the VB. Apart from a more general reluctance to engage in or be linked to party politics, and the fact that many popular artists do not support the VB, it can safely be assumed that the public disapproval for the VB also plays a role. A prominent case in this respect is that of the Strangers. On 24 November 1992, the band – which sings Antwerp dialect lyrics over well-known pop tunes – performed at a VB meeting. The band was heavily criticized for its performance and lost much of its support in the media. What is important for our argument is that the populist VB does attempt to associate itself with popular culture at some points. Our case study of 0110 asks the question what happens when popular artists perform against the VB.

7. A discourse-theoretical analysis of 0110

7.1. Method and research material

We have discussed the link between the people and popular culture, between populist political discourses and the people, and between populist political discourses and popular culture. This gives us the tools for an analysis of the discursive struggle between 0110 and the VB. Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) DT, and particularly Laclau’s
theory of populism, provides us with the concepts necessary to analyze 0110 as a discursive struggle for the people. However, DT offers no methodological guidelines. In this article, general DT concepts, and especially the DT concepts central to Laclau’s theory of populism (empty signifier, antagonism, and chain of equivalence), are used as sensitizing concepts (Blumer 1969) in a discourse-theoretical analysis (see Carpentier and De Cleen 2007).

The discourse-theoretical analysis presented below is based on the external communication of the VB on 0110 and of the organization of 0110 that can be found on their websites9 and on the coverage of the concerts in the Flemish press (see below). Several types of documents can be found on the VB website: there are the overviews of VB representatives’ media appearances (called “In the media”), the press releases, the online journal *E-Magazine*, the weekly column of the (now ex-)party president entitled “Common sense” (“Gezond Verstand”), and several comments per day on current events in politics and society in “Current events” (“Actualiteit”). All texts that refer to 0110 (directly or indirectly) were analyzed: two “In the media” texts, one “Press release” (“Persbericht”), five *E-Magazine* articles, two “Common sense” columns, and 23 “Current events” texts. This was supplemented by two external communication texts, whose publication were key interventions in the 0110 debate and that were (partly) published and discussed in the press: VB MP Filip Dewinter’s open letter to the artists participating in 0110 and VB MP Francis Van den Eynde’s open letter to Helmut Lotti, one of the artists participating in the concerts. Both texts could be found on the personal websites of the VB MP in question.

The 0110 web site produced less material. Using the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine (www.archive.org), all of the different versions (updates) of the website were downloaded. The material to be found on the different versions of the 0110 website consisted of: the general 0110 manifesto, the manifestos for each of the organizing cities, the 0110 line-up per city, news items from the 0110 organization on the new names that were added to the line-up, a list of sponsors, practical information on the 0110 concerts, and information on 0110-related events. In total, this generated 31 documents.

A second part of the corpus consists of the press coverage of 0110 between 6 April 2005 – the day Tom Barman announced the concerts – and 31 December 2006 in the newspapers *Gazet Van Antwerpen* (78 articles), *Het Laatste Nieuws* (108 articles), *De Morgen* (199 articles), *Het Nieuwsblad* (171 articles), *De Standaard* (138 articles), *De Tijd* (20 articles) and the weeklies *Knack* (23 articles), *Focus Knack* (20 articles), and *Weekend Knack* (3 articles).

### 7.2. 0110 and the symbolic reclaiming of the people

The 0110 concerts can be seen as part of a tradition of concerts with a political message such as Live Aid, Live8, and, thematically closer to 0110, Rock Against Racism (see Street 2003; Street et al. 2007). From the initial phase, the aim of the 0110 concerts (the name “0110” itself came only later) is to reach as many people as possible to give a strong “signal” against the extreme-right party VB. 0110 shares this motivation of showing the existence of a large counter-extreme-right force with a series of earlier anti-racist/anti-extreme-right initiatives in Belgium (see Detant 2005; Van Aelst 2000).
But 0110 also differs from these earlier anti-racist events in that it keeps a clearer distance from institutionalized politics. Firstly, the 0110 organization does not want to become involved in party political debates. It presents 0110 as a cultural event with political relevance, but steers clear from the field of institutionalized politics. So 0110 formulates no precise political demands, is reluctant of political rhetoric, and does not side with any political party. The original 0110 manifesto written by Tom Barman – the singer of one of Belgium’s most successful and critically acclaimed rock bands dEUS, movie director, and DJ – says:

There is no speeching, no patronizing, no condemnations, everyone is welcome. But the message is clear: Flanders deserves better than the extreme-right. In this way, we celebrate the complexity of life with a simple music party. (0110.be, 12 July 2006)

Secondly, 0110 avoids any kind of link with political parties or any other kind of politically affiliated organizations in terms of its practical organization. Belgian artists had spoken out against racism and the extreme right before the 0110 concerts, but 0110 differs from most of these earlier Belgian anti-racist/anti-extreme-right initiatives as concerns the relationship between artists and political actors. 0110 is organized by artists and their managers without the support of the actors that are usually involved in anti-racist events, such as labor unions, non-governmental organizations, and the peace movement. Also, political parties and affiliated organizations are not granted any visibility at the concerts. This distance from institutionalized politics makes it easier for 0110 to involve more artists and create a broad appeal. At the same time, this explicit distance from the political field (and the fact that most politicians respect this distance, sometimes because they are critical of 0110) makes it more difficult for the VB to disarm the initiative with the populist argument that 0110 is an attack on the VB organized by its political opponents, the political elite.

Whereas the distance to institutionalized politics is important to avoid a populist critique on the initiative, the main strength of 0110 as a contestation of the VB’s claim on the people lies in the participation of a number of artists that are considered popular. From the outset, 0110 aimed to make a broadly supported statement, by including artists from different genres. In Focus Knack of 6 April 2005, Barman states:

No, we want to provoke reactions, that’s the whole point. It also has to be much more than a few rockers doing their left-wing thing, to put it a little disrespectfully. The goal is that we make it a big party. We want to show a different side of Antwerp: a tolerant Antwerp, that makes clear what it thinks about the Vlaams Belang.

A relation is presumed between musical preferences and political preference. Rock music and its fans are linked to left-wing politics and anti-racism; popular Flemish artists and their fans, by contrast, are not expected to be left-wing and anti-racist. So 0110 is presented not as a left-wing initiative against the extreme right, but as a message supported by a united group of people, spanning the political spectrum. Tom Barman makes the link between the participation of popular artists and the strength of the signal against the populist VB more explicit by stating that at 0110 “people’s singers” (volkszangers) will perform against the “party of the people”:

In the last 15 years nothing happened before the elections, there was no positive signal from the world of artists and the Vlaams Belang just got bigger. Now we do something and yes, the party will probably grow even more. But the so-called “largest people’s
party” will know that it is not necessarily supported by some of the greatest “people’s singers” in Flanders. (Tom Barman in Het Laatste Nieuws, 12 September 2006)

At the level of artists’ explicit stances against the VB, the picture is not clear-cut. The participation of more and more artists from different genres leads to a less explicit and more ambiguous message, at least for some of the participating artists. Tom Barman conceived 0110 as a concert against the VB, and intended that 0110 would be a clear political statement. The more artists join 0110, the more this explicit anti-VB stance moves to the background. Quite a number of artists are not willing to support an initiative that is explicitly directed against the VB (which does not mean they are not against the VB), while others keep silent or say very little about their participation in the concerts. Artists such as Tom Barman, however, do not want to give up the anti-extreme-right message. The solution is found in putting the signifier “tolerance” to the forefront. In the first interview on 0110 (Focus Knack, 5 April 2006), Tom Barman had already linked the idea of tolerance to the struggle against the VB when he said:

We want to show a different face of Antwerp: a tolerant Antwerp that makes clear how it thinks about the Vlaams Belang.

All artists unite under the banner of tolerance, a signifier that leaves enough space for individual artists to specify their personal motivation for participating in the concerts. The emptiness of the signifier “tolerance” makes it possible to link a number of different messages and concerns under one header. For some, performing for tolerance equals performing against the VB, while for others the extreme right is just one of the examples of intolerance to be found in contemporary society, besides for example road rage, and “gratuitous violence”, a term coined by the media after a so-called surge of violent deaths.10 The title of the concerts becomes “For tolerance”, with “against racism, extremism, and gratuitous violence” as a sub-header.

The participation of so many artists from different genres leads to ambiguity regarding the explicit anti-VB stance of 0110. But 0110’s timing (one week before the elections), the fact that 0110 was originally explicitly presented as a concert geared against the VB and that a stance against the VB was equated with a pro-tolerance message by, for example, Tom Barman, and the fact that even a broad message of tolerance is still utterly incompatible with the VB’s ideology do imply that 0110 remains a more or less explicit form of resistance against the VB. This discursive framing unavoidably affects the artists’ participation in the concerts, for they become aligned with both the pro-tolerance discourse and the resistance against the VB discourse. The 0110 line-up turns out to be an impressive list of Belgian artists including big rock names (on a Belgian scale, that is) such as dEUS, Hooverphonic, and Arno, and schlager and pop artists such as Laura Lynn, Helmut Lotti, Will Tura, and Clouseau. Most of the popular artists are careful to make (explicit) statements, but some popular artists do play songs that refer to the importance of tolerance, like Clouseau’s “Het zit vanbinnen” (“It’s on the inside” – which is about the insignificance of outer appearances) and Helmut Lotti’s “Oaster iets scheelt” (“If something is wrong” – about the lack of tolerance in all of us).

0110 is threatening for the VB’s populist logic because, especially through the popular artists’ participation, the link between the VB and the ordinary Flemish
people becomes disrupted. Even the mere presence of popular artists, the symbolic
(cultural) representatives of the people, who take position against the (intolerance of
the) party of the people, disrupts the naturalness of the VB’s claim on the signifier
“people”. Their presence also implies that 0110 cannot simply be dismissed as a
performance of the politically correct leftist artistic elite performing against the party
of the people.

7.3. The Vlaams Belang and 0110: trying to protect a populist claim on the people
The VB reacts fiercely against the attempts to weaken its symbolic claim on the
signifier “people”. When looking at the VB’s external communication about 0110, it
is clear that the party has problems with exactly those characteristics that give 0110 a
broad appeal: the participation of popular artists, the ambiguous attitude towards
explicitly speaking out against the VB, and the distance 0110 keeps from the field of
institutionalized politics. The party deploys a number of strategies to criticize and to
try to delegitimize 0110 and to (re-)establish the link between the VB and popular
artists (and thus the people).

A first strategy is to present 0110 as a political propaganda tool used by the
traditional political parties in their struggle against the VB. 0110 is presented as a
way for the elite to criticize the party of the people. In the same movement, this
critique against the VB is reduced to election propaganda.

It is well known that really all means are suited to halt the rise of the Vlaams Belang. To
that end the traditional parties are preparing all weapons to attack our party. On
October 1st, one week before the local elections, a number of Flemish artists are
organizing a real concert against the Vlaams Belang in Antwerp, Ghent and Brussels.
(“Actualiteit”, 4 July 2006)

As discussed above, 0110 was organized by artists, without the involvement of
political actors of any kind. In its attempts to fit 0110 into its populist logic, the VB
explicitly states that its political opponents are behind the concerts (although the
other political parties are not involved in the organization of the concerts). Note the
move from traditional parties to artists in the next extract.

In order to incorporate 0110 into a populist logic, the VB tries to reduce the
ambiguity that characterizes 0110’s message. The message of tolerance is contested
and 0110 is presented as election propaganda.

It should be clear by now that the entire plan has little or nothing to do with “tolerance”
but everything with an operation orchestrated and paid for by the regime against a
successful opposition party. (“Actualiteit”, 14 July 2006)

To prove that 0110 is an anti-VB event, the VB constantly refers to, and often quotes,
statements by artists involved in the organization of 0110 in which they speak out
against the VB explicitly. The signifier “tolerance” itself is almost continuously
questioned by putting it between brackets, adding “so-called” or referring to
(in)tolerance. Another way to question the link between the VB and intolerance and
to try to neutralize the 0110 discourse is to present the VB as the victim of intolerance. A “Current events” text about the VB’s 1 October election congress mentions Dewinter’s speech:

Dewinter referred to the “concerts for tolerance” that took place at the same time somewhere else in Antwerp, and said that the Vlaams Belang had been waiting for an invitation to 0110 for an entire week. “For one must admit that, as victims of intolerance we Vlaams Belangers are experts by experience.” (“Actualiteit”, 2 October 2006)

The VB even calls 0110 undemocratic and argues that artists’ performances against the VB are a form of blackmail. But 0110 is not only “undemocratic”, it is also useless, for “real democracy” (“Actualiteit”, 2 October 2006) is not affected by concerts against the VB. The VB places 0110 in a tradition of leftist anti-VB campaigns and concludes that 0110 most probably will not affect the election results because voters do not follow voting advice.

Ah well, it is probably not worth all the hassle. Let all those singers and little bands warble a politically correct little song. After all the anti-Vlaams Blok and anti-Vlaams Belang campaigns – including notorious Hitler posters – the organizers were faced with defeat. The chances that it will be different this time are extremely small. For the Antwerp and Flemish voters do not care for political patronizing. Let the left have its party on October 1st. We will throw one on October 8th! (“Actualiteit”, 5 July 2006)

Whereas 0110 goes to lengths to present 0110 as more than a left-wing event – through the participation of popular artists, the distance from political parties and the broader message of tolerance – the VB tries hard to reduce 0110 and its message of tolerance to (“useless”) leftist election propaganda. However, the VB does not explicitly question the value of tolerance. Rather, it tries to break the connection between the message of tolerance and anti-racism, and the resistance against the VB.

Of course it is a good thing that artists too commit and speak out against intolerance and racism. The perfidious attempt to link racism and intolerance to the Vlaams Belang and to dissuade the voter to vote Vlaams Belang by creating the impression that popular artists support this point of view however is unfair and unacceptable. (Filip Dewinter, open letter, 4 July 2006)

The VB is especially troubled by the “creation” of “the impression that popular artists support this point of view” through their performances at 0110. Indeed, the VB’s reactions are the strongest when 0110 announces the participation of a number of popular artists in the concerts. Apparently, the disarticulation of popular artists from the VB and/or its ideology causes a serious strain on its populist discourse. Artists defined as politically correct or alternative do not cause any problems for its populist logic, for their statements against the VB can easily be dismissed as an attack by the (cultural) elite on the party of the people. However, the VB has trouble criticizing popular artists and defining them as part of the elite. But their presence is still conceived as a problem. So how does the VB deal with their participation in the 0110 concerts?

The VB’s basic strategy is to distinguish between the “small group of politically correct” organizers of 0110 and the popular artists performing at the concerts. The party attempts to disarticulate the popular artists from the message of 0110 by arguing that these artists are merely being used by the “extreme leftist” organizers of
the concerts. In this fashion, the VB attempts to depoliticize the participation of popular artists at the concerts.

Apart from alternative rock band also “traditional” artists such as Clouseau, Helmut Lotti, Will Tura, Johan Verminnen en Laura Lynn will perform. Quite a number of the artists participating are themselves from a Flemish-nationalist background, but apparently now they let themselves be used by the extreme left to battle against the biggest party of Flanders. (“Actualiteit”, 4 July 2006)

In his open letter to the artists, Filip Dewinter – one of the VB’s leaders and electoral strongholds – suggests that popular artists performing at 0110 do not know what they are performing for, as they have been misled. He warns them not to perform against the VB, and sends a message to their fans, claiming that this performance does not just imply an attack on the VB, but on its voters as well.

May I point out that in the meantime the Vlaams Belang is the largest party of Flanders that represents almost one million Flemings. A lot of these Vlaams Belang voters are probably enthusiastic fans of yourself or of one of the other artists that are participating in these anti-Vlaams Belang concerts. Do you consider all of these Vlaams Belang voters intolerant racists? I am convinced that this is not the case. Even more, I have the impression that you hardly know what it is you are collaborating in on next October 1st. For that matter, I am convinced that as Flemish artist you want to keep a neutral party political position. For that matter, I dare presume that as a Flemish artist you address all Flemings without distinction on the basis of political, religious or philosophical convictions. It is therefore very improbable that you would take the liberty to formulate a voting advise against a specific Flemish party, through which you go against an important part of the Flemish public opinion. (Dewinter, open letter, 4 July 2006)

A second strategy is to claim that the artists yielded for the pressure of the media, a critique that chimes with the critique of mainstream media as part of the elite mentioned above. In much of its external communication, the VB criticizes the media’s purported uncritical support of the 0110 concerts. It is this support that explains (for the VB) the success of 0110 both in terms of popular support (0110 is not “spontaneous popular anger”; “Actualiteit”, 2 October 2006) and in terms of the artists participating, not the fact that many people support 0110’s message. The party suggests that at least some artists’ performances can be explained by their fear of negative reactions from the “small leftist media world”.

And so we are not impressed. We only showed our displeasure about the fact that artists let themselves be dragged along in a dirty election campaign, secretly subsidised by the government and undoubtedly also under “soft compulsion” of the “us-knows-us” [ons-kent-ons] and “we-help-each other”-system of the small leftist media world. (“Gezond Verstand”, 15 July 2006)

For the VB, it is this pressure that explains the impressive line-up of 0110. The VB refers to The Strangers case mentioned above as an example of how the media put pressure on artists that perform for the VB. In his open letter, Dewinter states:

Evidently I realize very well that the cordon sanitaire does not count only for the Vlaams Belang. Singers, artists, writers, journalists and even sportsmen are the victim of it as well. May I give the example of the popular Antwerp band “The Strangers” who many years ago dared to perform at a Vlaams Belang manifestation. For years, they were boycotted by the public broadcaster, by all sorts of radio stations and by some concert organizers. (Dewinter, open letter, 4 July 2006)
A third way the VB attempts to neutralize the critique against the party is by re-establishing the links between specific Flemish artists and the party of the people. For instance, VB MP Francis Van den Eynde writes an open letter to Helmut Lotti. In this letter Van den Eynde calls Lotti’s father a “long-time propagandist” for the VB and refers to Lotti’s alleged youth membership of the Vlaams Nationaal Jeugdverbond (the Flemish National Youth Alliance – a right-wing nationalist youth movement).

Van den Eynde’s letter to Helmut Lotti and the above excerpt of Dewinter’s open letter show how the VB puts pressure on the artists not to perform at the 0110 concerts by arguing that popular artists should not go against the largest party of Flanders and its voters, many of which are presumed to be fans of these artists. The assumption underpinning this argument is that popular artists simply cannot be against the VB, because that would mean that they would go against the people and as a consequence, would stop being popular.

More and more, the political, cultural and intellectual elite of our people locks itself inside a politically correct ivory tower. The distance between the man and woman in the street and the world of full and semi FF’s [Famous Flemings] of all sorts is becoming bigger and bigger. I am convinced that you as a popular artist want to stand in between and with the people instead of going against the people. I therefore do not doubt your honest and good intentions and am convinced that you will draw appropriate conclusions from my writings. (Dewinter, open letter, 4 July 2006)

This is the ultimate consequence of the VB’s populist discourse: artists that go against the VB are not popular. However, throughout the corpus the VB shows a reluctance to call popular artists who perform at 0110 part of the elite, which points to the strength of the discursive link between the people and popular culture.

8. Conclusion: 0110, popular culture and the logics of populism

This article departed from the argument that, because of their similar structure built around the nodal point the people, popular culture and populist politics can become intertwined. The 0110 case study presented here showed how the struggle for the signifier “people” can be waged through a struggle over popular culture. Rather than a political project per se, 0110 is a cultural initiative with a political message. What 0110 does, first and foremost, is reclaim the signifier “people” from an extreme-right discourse by turning popular culture and its artists against the party, whilst remaining detached from institutionalized politics.

Feeling threatened, the VB deploys a number of strategies to re-establish the link between VB, popular culture and its artists. One of the main strategies is to present 0110 as a tool used by competing parties against the VB. This counter-strategy turns out to be problematic as 0110 refuses to be claimed by any political party. This distance from institutionalized politics is important for the strength of 0110 as a political statement. If 0110 would have associated itself with other political parties, it would have made it easier for the VB to discredit 0110 as an attack by the political elite on the party of the people. In a sense, 0110 becomes a third space, being political and non-political at the same time. As we have seen, the VB still tries to do reduce 0110 to a party political tool, but fails to make a convincing case.

More important than the argument that 0110 is part of an electoral campaign against the VB, is the linking together of 0110 and the VB’s political opponents as
parts of the same politically correct elite that is far removed from the people. But this strategy also becomes problematic as the participation of popular artists in the 0110 concerts makes it difficult for the VB to discredit all participants as part of the elite. Without explicitly claiming the signifier “the people”, 0110 manages to destabilize the VB’s populist discourse through the fact that popular artists perform at concerts that are still (sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly) seen as events geared against the VB. The party deploys a number of strategies to minimize the strain caused to its populist discourse by the participation of these popular artists in 0110. These counter-strategies consist of attempts to disarticulate the artists considered popular from the 0110 discourse and to re-articulate them into VB discourse. When the artists in question refuse this repositioning, the only remaining conclusion of the VB’s populist discourse is that these artists are not popular, which is difficult to maintain and communicate.

When we return to our definition of populism, we see that 0110 is dominated by the logic of equivalence with the VB functioning as a constitutive outside. 0110 cannot in itself be considered populist (according to the definition discussed above) because there is no up/down antagonism that structures its discourse. Rather, 0110 questions the up/down dimension crucial to the VB’s populist discourse by breaking down the boundaries between alternative and popular music, as artists from all kinds of genres perform for tolerance. At the same time, 0110 of course only functions as an anti-extreme-right statement because all actors involved accept that there is a relation between cultural and political preferences and that there is an up/down dimension to this relation.

The discourse-theoretical analysis presented here cannot and does not aim to make claims about the electoral impact of 0110. It is quite simply impossible to measure 0110’s direct electoral impact, not only for a discourse analysis. But 0110 did prove to be successful in questioning the naturalness of the VB’s claim on the people by turning popular culture against the party. If we do look at the 8 October elections, one week after 0110, we see that the outcomes were not clear-cut. The VB lost or stagnated in a number of cities. In Antwerp, for example, the VB gained 0.5% but Filip Dewinter lost the popularity contest to social-democrat mayor Patrick Janssens, the VB lost in some of the districts that were its strongholds in Antwerp and, for the first time in many years, the VB was no longer the largest party in the city. In another large Flemish city, Ghent, the VB suffered a 1.5% loss and, like in Antwerp, the social-democrat party of the mayor won the elections. But the VB did make a leap forward in many smaller towns throughout Flanders, which shows that any linear connection between these elections and the 0110 concerts cannot be taken for granted. Still, the reclaiming of the signifier people through the 0110 can be considered an important moment in the political struggle against the extreme right in Belgium. What 0110 did undoubtedly show is that popular culture and the people are still very much linked, and that because of this link the field of popular culture can have a direct relevance to the world of politics and can become the object of political struggle.

Notes
1. In the margins of the concerts, a number of other (much smaller) artistic initiatives were organized under the 0110 banner. Luc Tuymans organized an arts exposition entitled “Mute in Antwerp”, at the location where on 11 May 2006 Hans Van Themse shot and
killed a two-year-old girl and her Malinese nanny, a murder that was considered to be inspired by racism. *Mute*, the 0110 website states, means “‘falling silent’ or ‘silencing something or someone’”. Also, a literary event called “0110 Literair” (0110 Literary) was held on 1 October. Ninety-five authors wrote poetry to be published by the media under the header “Messages for the population”.

2. This does not imply that they ignore the role of institutions in “disciplining and policing” the boundary between, for example, what is part of the great tradition and what is not (see Hall 1981, 236).

3. This article focuses on the struggle for the signifier people through the struggle over popular culture, but it should be clear that the signifiers “popular culture”, “the people” and “power-bloc/elite” do not have a fixed meaning – politically nor culturally – but are constructed in and through discourse. They are elements that can be articulated in different discourses, disarticulated from a certain discourse, and rearticulated in another discourse. The meaning of those signifiers depends on the discourse in which they are articulated. “People”, “elite”, and “popular culture” therefore have different meanings in different discourses. The struggle between competing discourses for popular culture (as a way of claiming the people) is thus at the same time a struggle over the meaning of popular culture, people, and elite.


5. See http://polling2007.belgium.be/nl/cha/seat/seat_etop.html. This implies a much higher percentage in Flanders for only the inhabitants of Flanders and Brussels can vote for the VB.

6. Also, compared with the 2003 national elections, the VB lost votes in some areas. In the Antwerp canton – traditionally the area where the VB is the strongest – the party won 28.43% compared with 30.46% in 2003.


8. However, the socio-economic dimension does play a role in the VB’s populist discourse as a way to oppose the Flemish people to the political establishment as well as to foreigners and Waloons. The political elite is criticized as being corrupt and in it for the money. The VB also systematically points to how the political establishment (also economically) favors foreigners and Waloons and disadvantages the Flemish (Jagers 2006, 211). At the same time the VB sees Flanders’ economic prosperity as the result of the Flemish’ work ethos that is again juxtaposed to the Walloons’ and foreigners’ lack thereof (Jagers 2006, 217–218).

9. www.vlaamsbelang.be and www.0110.be, respectively. www.0110.be is actually the URL for a blog by a Belgian blogger who allowed the 0110 organization to temporarily use the URL. The 0110 website is no longer accessible.

10. This included the death of Joe Van Holsbeeck after being stabbed in an armed robbery of his MP3 player (12 April 2006), the murder of a two-year-old and her Malinese nanny by Hans Van Themsche (9 May 2006), and the death of Guido De Moor after a violent incident with a number of youths of Moroccan descent on an Antwerp bus (24 June 2006).

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