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ARTICLE

# “*Je suis ... Charlie, Samuel, Muhammed*”: Practicing Muhammed Cartoons in Far Right and Islamist Politics

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## Abstract

Since the 2005 Jyllands-Posten controversy, both far right and Islamist actors have employed Muhammed cartoons to construct a radical frontier between Muslims and non-Muslims. This article aims to provide a better understanding of the linkages between two opposing forms of popular identification by looking at the utilization of the Muhammed cartoons to crystallize a multitude of (conflicting) subjects, affects, and demands. Following a vantage point of mutual relations, the article investigates the discursive performances of the Dutch branch of the transnational Islamist party Hizb ut-Tahrir and the far right Party for Freedom with respect to the Jyllands-Posten affair, the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks, and the 2020 killing of a French schoolteacher. Considering its cultural and political foundations of mutual respect and tolerance, the Dutch case is pertinent for examining the tension between the right to free speech and support for extremist and popular forms of (far right and Islamist) identification.

**Keywords:** cartoons; freedom; Islamism; populism; prophet Muhammed

## Introduction

The recent death of schoolteacher Samuel Paty at the hands of the young Islamist Abdoulakh Anzorov in France has reignited political debates about the role of defamation in modern secular societies.<sup>1</sup> Almost five years after the Charlie Hebdo attack where two Muslim extremists revenged the satirical magazine for defaming prophet Muhammed (d. 632), Paty had shown his students a caricature of the Prophet to discuss the topic of freedom of speech. His subsequent killing sparked a popular movement around the “*je suis Charlie*” (“I am Charlie”) precedent with adaptations such as “*je suis Samuel*” and “*je suis Prof*”, among others. Although peripheral in comparison, extremist Muslims mobilized the symbol “*je suis Muhammed*” as a

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counter-response to demonstrate their opposition to the defamation of the Prophet. On either end, the “*je suis*” demand indicates a popular division between the articulation of (liberal) freedom on the one hand, and restrictions to such freedom on the other. The recent uptake of the demand is all the more significant considering it is a reiteration of the 2005 dispute after 12 cartoons were published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, and the 2015 events in France. Such reiteration suggests a cultivation of a “frontier” between far right and Islamist extremists insofar the popular demand of “*je suis*” is crystallized around a range of different, and sometimes opposing, subject positions. Since 2005, the cartoons have become a symbol to mobilize a more heterogeneous “people” around a frontier, or polar opposition, between (extremist) Muslims and far right conservatives. Thus, constructing a political frontier is fundamental to establishing and mobilizing a popular identification that relies on a “us” and “them” opposition.

Therefore, the purpose of the article is to examine how both far right and Islamist extremists operate to sustain and develop an *irreconcilable* frontier between Muslims and non-Muslims. The discursive structuration of the Muhammed cartoons is especially relevant because it illustrates how both the far right and Islamist groups use the cartoons to construct a popular—a heterogeneous—movement. In order to make sense of the imminent entanglement of far right and Islamist discourses, this article engages with populist scholarship to render visible how a *popular* demand is constructed and mobilized. In particular, the article relies on the so-called discursive approach that considers populism as a specific form of *articulation*: a structure of identification, or discursive system, that operates to construct and perform a “we” that is constitutive of heterogeneous demands, identities, and affects. The discursive scholarship distinguishes populism from the more dominant “ideational” school (e.g., Albertazzi and McDonnell 2007; Mudde 2014; Müller 2017) in emphasizing the heterogeneous demands that underlie a “people”. Although the frontier appears homogeneous, the “we” and “them” constitute a multitude of demands and subject positions to construct such a popular division. It is therefore that the term “popular” is used instead of “populist” to emphasize the inscription of different significations of what constitutes “we” and “them”; rather than being homogeneous in essence, they consist of a multitude of demands, movements, and mobilizations.

Empirical data for the article are derived from symbolic investment in the Muhammed cartoons by the Islamist Hizb ut-Tahrir and far right Party for Freedom in the Netherlands. The case subjects are relevant in that both parties engage to a great degree with the 2005, 2015, and 2020 Muhammed cartoons. Moreover, the Party for Freedom has reproduced a selective few of the 2005 and 2015 Muhammed cartoons on multiple occasions, including organizing her own Muhammed cartoon contest, which led to an attack on two American tourists in Amsterdam in 2018. Considering her liberal and progressive heritage, the Netherlands is pertinent for exploring the tensions between popular demands of freedom and restrictions to defamation. In response to the 2020 attacks in France and Austria and the subsequent “*je suis Samuel*” demand, the Dutch branch of Hizb ut-Tahrir supported a local petition that called for the criminalization of defaming prophet Muhammed. During a debate on freedom of speech in the Dutch Parliament, the petition became a symbol for the irreconcilable frontier between

(extremist) Muslims and Dutch values, a frontier that is also evident in the account of Saba Mahmood (2009) and the reflections of Andrew F. March (2011). Exploring how both Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Party for Freedom operate to construct and expand such a frontier by integrating a more diverse array of demands and subject positions is of particular relevance to the scholarship of extremist, populist, and Islamist politics.

Based on the premise that “politics involves imagination” (Oudenampsen 2010, 6), the article explores the embeddedness of symbols and myths in the popular signification of prophet Muhammed. As a popular moment, the Muhammed cartoons are considered representative of the frontier that both parties articulate. Because the popular signification of prophet Muhammed is not bound to geographical borders, Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Party for Freedom are relevant case subjects to represent *popular* far right and Islamist discourses (Klausen 2009). Rather than merely conceiving far right and Islamist parties as diametrically opposed, the contribution of the article is to render intelligible the “in-between”: the *co*-constitutive elements that define and legitimize a popular Muslim/non-Muslim frontier. The “in-between” points to a gap in the literature concerning the relation between religion and politics, and more precisely, between religious and populist significations. As William McCormick (2021) argues, scholarship is lacking in seeking connections between religion and populism beyond the strategic perspective that considers religion as a mere tool for popular articulation. Scholars who investigate the relation between far right and Islamist politics (e.g., Ebner 2017; Moghaddam 2018; Abbas 2019) are successful in emphasizing the relational aspect, but are limited in their explanations of a shared discursive logic. Abbas’ research, for example, is focusing on the external conditions, such as socioeconomic inequalities, that make far right and Islamist discourses socially meaningful (after all, a discourse must be socially meaningful to become a discourse). Contributing to the existing literature, the focus of the article is on the concept of the “people” to reveal the *internal* discursive logic that connects Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Party for Freedom. Focusing on the internal relation is important to show that symbolic moments, such as the Muhammed cartoons, are used to strengthen the frontier by integrating a multitude of dissenting voices. It is the inclusion of different, and opposing, demands and affects that allow for an antagonistic relation to become a *popular* frontier.

The article is structured as follows. In order to establish the conceptual and empirical contribution of the research, the first section engages with existing research on the connection of far right and Islamist politics. Drawing on the discursive approach to popular identification, the next section presents an overview of the empirical research on the Muhammed cartoons and the gaps in understanding the homogenization and condensation of the “*je suis*” articulation. This leads to an examination of the “imagining” of the “people” in the discursive performances of Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Party for Freedom, especially in regards to the symbols of “Charlie”, “Samuel”, and “Muhammed”. As a material and symbolic object, the following section abstracts the “face” of Muhammed to reveal the *co*-constitutive structure of discourse and mutual relations of right and Islamist politics. The exploration demonstrates how both parties invest in the polarization of the signifier of freedom to mobilize a wide range of people and affects. The article finishes with some concluding remarks

on the paradox of freedom and the dialectic of sameness and otherness evident in the discursive performances of both parties.

The empirical findings are interpreted according to the methodological aim to render visible the co-constitutive elements evident in the signification of prophet Muhammed. These findings are the basis for further discussion on the construction of a mutual frontier through essentialist spatial mythologies. As empirical data, the article draws on the discursive performances of the Dutch branch of Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Party for Freedom from the 2005 *Jyllands-Posten* publication until the aftermath of the 2020 attacks in France and Austria. In particular, the article examines the performance of Kurt Westergaard's Muhammed cartoon published in the *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005, republished in 2006 and 2020 by Charlie Hebdo, and adapted in 2020 by the leader of the Party for Freedom, Geert Wilders. The replication of Westergaard's cartoon functions as the reiteration and sedimentation of polarizing demands, and renders visible the internal tension embedded in the Muhammed cartoons that are used for popular representations.

Material sources consist of statements and media releases from Hizb ut-Tahrir in the Netherlands (including their media representative, Okay Pala), and Wilders, who is the leader of the *single-member* Party for Freedom. These statements are derived from party websites, parliamentary debates, social media (Facebook and Twitter), and online seminars. Moreover, the research reflects on a public petition released after the attacks in France in 2020 that demands the incrimination of defaming the Prophet and Allah, as well as the Party for Freedom's 2018 Muhammed cartoon contest. The actual depiction of Westergaard's cartoon functions as the point of reference for the decision on what statements are to be included in the dataset—the dataset only includes statements that refer to cartoons that depict the “face” of Muhammed.

### Connecting far right and Islamist politics

In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of research that focuses on the relation between far right and Islamist politics. Such a shift in research has emerged from a growing interest in far right politics grounded in anti-Muslim sentiments, especially since 9/11. Scholars in this field aim to understand the connections between the re-emergence of a far right discourse on the one hand, and the appeal for extremist Islamist identifications with the development of parties such as Daesh (also known as Islamic State) on the other. Prominent scholars, such as Tahir Abbas (2019, 2021), Julia Ebner (2017) and Ayhan Kaya (2020), are occupied with the question as to what drives the reciprocal relation between far right and Islamist parties. Despite an overlap with other bodies of literature that focus on the separate phenomena of (populist) far right and Islamist politics, the relational field of research is predominantly involved in the driving forces behind mutual processes and outcomes of radicalization. It is therefore less occupied with the constitution of the frontier (through a discursive logic of diversification) and more interested in the (material) conditions to explain the appeal for extremist ideologies.

Another option to explain such an appeal is through a discursive lens that considers the far right and Islamist discursive practices as part of a shared logic of hegemonization. The so-called discursive approach to understanding (popular) politics has

its origins in the initial work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985). Since their *magnum opus*, both Laclau and Mouffe, together with other scholars from the so-called Essex School, have further developed their theoretical contributions to the field of “populist studies” (de Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017). Most notably, the discursive approach is a contribution to the ontological foundations of populist politics, and as some argue, politics *par excellence* (Marchart 2018). The discursive approach adheres to the ontological premises that posit the social is “contingent, open-ended, and [...] political” (de Cleen et al. 2020, 4). As such, the discursive approach is preoccupied with populism considering it operates as a hegemonic formation to construct a popular—collective—will. Although recent scholarship within the discursive literature argues such preoccupation overlooks the hegemonic potential of other forms of articulation, such as nationalism (de Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017), the ontological conceptualization of populism remains useful to provide an alternative perspective to empirical research.

Different to the dominant ideational approach, a discursive lens is occupied with the emergence and constitution of a popular frontier through a redefining of demands according to an equivalence (how they relate to a common antagonist) and difference (how they sustain their particular characteristics). Similar to the ideational approach then, the discursive position seeks understanding of the constitution of a “people” (“us”) through constructing an antagonist (“them”). The distinction, however, lies in the ontological position that gives privilege to the “other”, or the antagonist, to define the social. Whereas a preoccupation with the “people” versus the “elite” in the ideational approach implies an ideological basis to its opposition, the discursive approach does not emphasize an ideological foundation. Instead, it argues for a formal approach that considers populism as a logic of articulating equivalent and different demands and affects (de Cleen et al. 2020). Rather than focusing on the normative elements, a discursive approach can explain the resilient and flexible potential of populist articulation to bring together existing *and* emerging demands. From a vantage point of contingency, the discursive approach aims to render visible how populist actors *co-construct* demands by making them socially meaningful. In other words, they are capable of *creating* demands by making them socially meaningful instead of the other way around.

The general consensus among scholars is that populism can be distinguished from other forms of politics (or articulation) in how it constructs a frontier between the “people” and the “elite” (Moffitt 2016). Such a definition of populism is essentially democratic, limited to the workings of politics within democratic institutions. That is, once the frontier between the “people” and the “elite” extends beyond democratic institutions and transforms into “something else” it tends to lose its democratic potential by sliding into articulations such as racism, fascism, or authoritarianism. Considering the purpose of the article, the general theory of Laclau (2005) and Mouffe (2018) enables a relational approach through a focus on the dynamics between heterogeneous elements that constitute a “people” (Thomassen 2019). From an ontological perspective, there is always an “other” constituted in the internal logic of populist articulation. Such an ontological approach is useful to render visible the *co-constitutive* elements of articulation, or in other words, the entanglement of defining a legitimate “us” and illegitimate “them” (Palonen 2019).

Moreover, a discursive approach recognizes the central position of affect in social identification (and therefore, politics). With regards to populist articulation, affect is not considered separate from reason, but rather intrinsic to it (Hildebrand and Séville 2019). What makes populist politics so successful is that it compensates for the impossible desire to complete social identification by representing the “other” as the obstacle, or outside, to attaining wholeness and closure (Hildebrand and Séville 2019). Therefore, the “people” are considered a phantasmatic object upon which political agents and social subjects can project their desires and constitutive *lack*. Connecting far right and Islamist politics through a discursive approach to populist or popular politics is useful since it allows for a relational perspective regarding the construction of an antagonistic frontier. More specifically, it allows researchers to discern how far right and Islamist discourses are part of a single entity. Rather than arguing they are related in their signification of external conditions (e.g., shared discontent with the political order), a discursive perspective would posit they are intrinsically entangled through their *logic* of signification. In such a (popular) logic where the “other” constitutes a frontier, antagonistic forces are dependent on each other for their articulation of the “people” (“us”).

Reflecting on Jung and Sinclair’s (2020) work of Islamist identification, prevalent forms of far right and Islamist politics can be considered a synthesis of resistance against, and adaptation to, multiple modernities (Sinclair and Feldt 2011). In similar vein to the far right, popular forms of Islamist articulation are preoccupied with the constitution of the “*ummah*”—the global Muslim collective.<sup>2</sup> Although there are other popular forms of Islamist articulation central around the notion of “*shariah*” for example, articulations of the “*ummah*” are especially relevant and pertinent in the democratic context. Hizb ut-Tahrir, in countries such as the Netherlands, but also Denmark and the United Kingdom, are able to construct an “*ummah*” according to the spatial coordinates. That is, Hizb ut-Tahrir’s system of signification is directed toward constructing a “people”—a popular collective that is grounded in a particular hermeneutics. From his reflections on Muslim-majority countries, Vedi Hadiz (2016, 2018) considers the populist category of the “*ummah*” a substitute for the “people” more commonly used in the populist scholarship. Both the “*ummah*” and the “people” are dependent on a frontier between Muslims and non-Muslims to articulate their ideal state.

Enabling such a frontier is the foundation for a *dreampolitik* that aims to close the gap between what is politically possible within the spatial coordinates, and a fantasy of an ideal future (or in reverse, a mythology of an ideal past). Although the particularities are different, both popular forms of far right and Islamist politics institute a kind of *dreampolitik* that aims to overcome the split between reality and fantasy. Such a *dreampolitik* relies on a particular idealization of the past where the “other” is not an obstacle to identification of the “self” in the collective sense (whether cultural, religious, or else). Conceiving the entanglement of “self” and “other” is nothing new and goes as far back as ancient traditions and thought, such as the Vedas or the Dao, and continental philosophies of Hegel and Derrida, for example (Brincat and Ling 2014). What is more unusual, however, is incorporating such ontological positions in empirical research to render visible the convergence between political realities and political fantasies.



The *dreampolitik* of Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Party for Freedom relies on an idealization of the past. In his posthumous book, Zygmunt Bauman (2017) coined the term “retrotopia” to describe the prevalent inclination to return to an ideal past. Such an ideal past coincides with the formation of *frontiers* that separates one group, or tribe, from another (Bauman 2017). As with other events, such as the “burqa ban” in several European countries, the Muhammed cartoons illustrate a polarization that is embedded in the desire not to the past as such, but to a revised dream of what has been (Bauman 2017). The revision of what actually *was* to what is memorized and forgotten takes place around the notion of the “other”, or more precisely, the *lack* of an “other”. In the *dreampolitik* of Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Party for Freedom, the “other” has been the condition of defining the “us” that is deprived of an “other”; a harmonious “self” devoid of (internal) conflict.

### “*je suis* ... Charlie, Samuel, Muhammed”

What makes the “*je suis*” articulation and movement so pertinent is that it captures the diverse range of positions through a single demand. As the initial response to the attacks, “*je suis* Charlie” signifies both support with the victims and a vindication of freedom of speech as a basic (democratic) principle. The merging of the two—a condemnation of violence and the right to blaspheme—helped to sediment the demand of individual freedom in the articulation of “*je suis*” whilst keeping their particular content. In other words, the collective performance of “*je suis* Charlie” comprises different discursive constructions that are united together around the single demand. Rather than incorporating the particular constructions to construct a consistent whole—a compatible movement or demand—the differentiation of attitudes, opinions, and affects are in congruence with the overarching demand of the right to free speech (Tønder 2011, 2021). To illustrate, one can join the “*je suis* Charlie” or “*je suis* Sam” movement in support of the victims whilst condemning the discursive practices of the magazine Charlie Hedbo. Nonetheless, their particular articulations are subsumed by the collective performance of “*je suis* Charlie” which has come to represent (liberal) freedom.

In response to “*je suis* Charlie” in 2015, and “*je suis* Sam” in 2020, “*je suis* Muhammed” can be considered a counter-movement in condemning the act of defaming the Prophet, or, as Mahmood (2015) suggests, disagreement with its *repetitive* nature, which tends to be grounded in the intent to provoke Muslim extremists. In the latter case, “*je suis* Muhammed” represents a critique of the *abuse* rather than the *use* of the right to free speech. Despite such nuance, “*je suis* Muhammed” has come to represent a demand for restrictions on the *abuse* of the right to free speech, which neither warrants nor condemns the means of violence. For those who support the “*je suis* Charlie” articulation on the grounds of the basic principle of freedom, the *absence* of condemnation evident in the “*je suis* Muhammed” response is indicative of the incongruence that *fundamentally* exists between Muslims and non-Muslims. In other words, “*je suis* Charlie” (or “*je suis* Sam”) and “*je suis* Muhammed” are discursively constructed as diametrical oppositions, notwithstanding the internal differentiation of discursive constructions of the events.



Following the argumentation of Lars Tønder (2021) on the logics of reason and affect, the “*je suis*” articulation renders visible the entanglement of reason and affect whereby neither is privileged. As Tønder (2021) argues, such entanglement is grounded in the phenomenological tradition of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and, I would add, the later political theories of the post-foundational tradition (Thomassen 2022). These traditions share a premise of an intrinsic entanglement of reason and affect in the consciousness and organization of society. Beyond the acknowledgement of such entanglement, Tønder (2021) goes on to argue reason and affect are “mutually constitutive” in how they “bump up against each other through a series of diffractive displacements” (p. 251). The intrinsic entanglement points to the *movement* that underlies the imperative change of the world, or what Laclau (1991) calls the “impossibility of society”. Such entanglement and movement is evident in the “*je suis*” movement in the sense that “Charlie”, “Sam”, or “Muhammed” are connected through difference. That is, the universal demands that “*je suis* Charlie” or “*je suis* Muhammed” represent are constructed *through* the internal differentiation of subject positions. In other words, it demonstrates how different positions consisting of reasons and affects are integrated into a universal articulation or representation in the form of “*je suis*”, and in similar vein to the mutual constitution of reason and affect, these opposing articulations are intrinsically entangled in how they “bounce” off each other (to construe different entanglements).

Most studies that are interested in the mutual relation between far right and Islamist politics do not delineate the connection between reason and affect (see e.g., Ebner 2017; Moghaddam 2018; Abbas 2019). In doing so, their studies are limited in the analysis of the merging of different (and opposing) opinions, attitudes, perceptions, and affections under a single identification of the “people”. Therefore, these studies are more invested in the relation *between* far right and Islamist performances than the mutual constitution of their discursive configurations. Moreover, conceptual categories such as populism and islamism are often loosely applied, which overlooks the distinctness of discursive configurations (i.e., articulations) of parties such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and Daesh, for example. Although both parties can be considered both Islamist and populist in the broad sense, there are important distinctions between the structural arrangement of demands, affects, and subject positions. These differences are important for our understanding as to what attracts people to certain discourses and not to others, and which discourses are more resilient to changes in external conditions.

Despite focus on the exclusion of the “other”, most studies in the areas of “cumulative extremism” (Busher and Macklin 2015) and “mutual” or “reciprocal” radicalization (Ebner 2017; Abbas 2019) do not engage with populist scholarship on an analytical or theoretical level. I argue that the integration of a discourse-theoretical approach to populism is beneficial to reveal “*how* discursive construction takes place” (Marttila 2019, 18). Rather than focusing on the rupture itself, analytical and theoretical objectives are aimed at rendering intelligible the entanglements by which a dichotomous frontier is established and sustained. For example, in his analysis of the Muhammed cartoons, Thomas Olesen (2016) demonstrates how al-Qaeda appropriates the cartoons to articulate radical demands. On the basis of his earlier work on the Jyllands-Posten cartoons (see e.g., 2007, 2009), Olesen (2016) argues a

shift in how local events have an effect on transnational politics. In particular, Olesen (2016) emphasizes how events such as the Muhammed cartoons are transformed into what he calls “transnational injustice symbols” (p. 217). These transnational injustice symbols, I posit, are mutually constructed through articulations such as “*je suis*” that aim to instill an irreconcilable “otherness”. Although “*je suis*” allows for the integration of multiple demands, affects, and subjects, it has become hegemonized to represent a dichotomous frontier between Muslims and non-Muslims.

The names of “Charlie”, “Samuel”, and “Muhammed” are imprinted with hegemonic representations in the context of the “*je suis*” movement. Despite the differentiation of meanings and articulations, the names are hegemonized to articulate the Muslim “other”. The discursive performances of Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Party for Freedom after the Charlie Hebdo attack indicate a shared investment in hegemonizing the “*je suis*” movement around the Muslim “other”. Here, the names “Charlie”, “Samuel”, and “Muhammed” function what Laclau (2005) and post-foundational scholars term an “empty signifier” (Torfing 1999; Marttila 2015). An empty signifier operates to subvert the sign—the thing it gives meaning to—and thereby changes the structure of signification of the sign as such). Constructing an empty signifier is made responsible for the constitution of an antagonistic “other” that gives meaning to the conception of “self”. As such, empty signifiers (along with “floating” signifiers) are responsible for hegemonic discourses. In the aftermath of Charlie Hebdo, the names of “Charlie” and “Muhammed” were subverted (deprived of plural representations) to sustain far right and Islamist positions, or to put it otherwise, to advance a radical Muslim/non-Muslim frontier.

### Imagining the “people”

In the context of the Charlie Hebdo events, the names “Charlie” and “Muhammed” are representative of the articulations of the “people” and the “*ummah*” in (popular) far right and Islamist politics. Hizb ut-Tahrir aims to construct a “*ummah*” that incorporates different Muslim subjectivities under the single identification of the “good” Muslim. According to Hizb ut-Tahrir, the “good” Muslim is committed to establishing a religious collective—the *ummah*—that can emerge and thrive under the conditions of “the” Islamic State. In other words, “the” Islamic State, or Caliphate, is the precondition for the emergence of the “*ummah*” as a political collective, and the Muslim subject as the *authentic* Muslim being that constitutes the “*ummah*”. Although there are different possible articulations of the *ummah*, Hizb ut-Tahrir intends to construct an *ummah* that is homogeneous, hence the emphasis on the “*ummah*” to distinguish a particular *closed* structure of signification. Here, it is useful to consider the populist appeal to the “people”, especially in combination with far right politics. Following the recent contribution of Giorgos Katsambekis (2022) the “people” in the populist discourses of the far right aims to construct a collective, or what he calls “a sense of *unity*” (p. 54), that is achieved through the universal representation of a particularity. In the co-construction of “Charlie” and “Muhammed”, the Muslim occupies the position of such a universal representation in being deprived of the multiple subjectivities that constitute the Muslim and thus, the *ummah*.

Although the signification of the “people” and the “*ummah*” are different, both articulations are dependent on a “dreampolitik” of the Muslim. With reference to the concept of *realpolitik*, Stephen Duncombe (2007) introduces “dreampolitik” to describe the imperative of an imagined ideal in populist politics (p. 27). In her empirical study on Hizb ut-Tahrir, Kirstine Sinclair (2010) describes the caliphate as a spatial ideal or ultimate homeland. Hizb ut-Tahrir’s objective is to establish a Muslim homeland—or place—where the “*ummah*” can be realized. After all, the current *ummah* in the broad sense (to denote the Muslim collective) is not equivalent to Hizb ut-Tahrir’s notion of the “*ummah*” that involves a political commitment to the Caliphate. As such, it is in conflict with liberal democratic orders that, according to Hizb ut-Tahrir, are responsible for the social, economic, moral, and environmental predicaments of the world. Despite a different *normative* structure of signification, the “people” in the articulation of the Party for Freedom are constructed around the same opposition. In the words of Katsambekis (2022) “the *opponent* itself [acts] as a point of negative identification” in both articulations of *who* the “people” and the “*ummah*” are (p. 54).

Katsambekis (2022) proposes that, besides moral divisions, such negative identification is also constructed along ideologico-political cleavages. Such contrasting political positions are evident in how “Charlie”, “Muhammed”, and “Samuel” are used to advance the distinct articulations of “people” and the “*ummah*” since 2005. Through the reproduction and appropriation of the Jyllands-Posten cartoons, such as Westergaard’s cartoon used in Wilders’ film *Fitna* in 2008, polarized positions around the satirical depiction of prophet Muhammed are sustained. Similar to the reaction to the release of *Fitna*, international groups such as al-Qaeda, and governments such as Pakistan and Jordan, denounced the Dutch government for allowing the abuse of the right to free speech (Ali 2015). With the release *Fitna* resulting in several *fatwas* against Wilders from al-Qaeda, the film contributed to sedimenting a polarized position between the “people” and the “*ummah*”. Polarization associated with the film is relevant because it is an indication of a pattern that has been reproduced since the Jyllands-Posten cartoons. Alongside the reproduction of the cartoons in the communication of far right and Islamist parties such as al-Qaeda (Olesen 2016), the signification of the cartoons has become more populist in the sense it allowed for more subject positions to be integrated into the discursive configurations.

The process of populist signification is grounded in the act of metaphorization; the act of substituting different elements of discourse to construct a system of signification that constitutes an impossible and illusionary “unified whole”. Constructing a populist system of signification through the act of metaphorization is evident in how the Jyllands-Posten events have become substituted with the Westergaard and not any of the other cartoons. Since the 2005 events, there has been an erasing of the plurality of the cartoons in the debate on the Jyllands-Posten publication and its aftermath. Westergaard’s cartoon has become the “face” of the Jyllands-Posten debate, largely disregarding the other 11 cartoons. Rather than representing a diversity of standpoints, Jyllands-Posten has become a metaphor for an essentialized and polarized representation of prophet Muhammed, Islam, and Muslims. Hence, Jyllands-Posten is a pertinent example of populist signification through a mutual investment in crystallizing the multitude of discursive contents to establish a unified whole.

Far right and Islamist positions concerning the Muhammed cartoons help to establish a “Muslim place”. What scholars such as Abbas (2019, 2021) frame as xenophobic and islamophobic can be equally regarded an enactment of the “Islamist dream”. Locating the Muslim in a homeland or place of origin is a co-constitutive endeavor. Even though both positions are mutually exclusive, they are mutually inclusive in the signification of “displacing” the Muslim “elsewhere”. Both far right and Islamist parties claim that the Muslim belongs in a place that enables the “good” Muslim to come into fruition. Without such a place, Muslims are unable to realize their authentic being and such “out-of-placeness” is the reason for the conflicts that exist between Muslims, and Muslims and non-Muslims. Besides, Hizb ut-Tahrir argues that the state of the world depends on the “*ummah*” and the caliphate to liberate humans from social, economic, political, moral, and environmental crises. In the form of a satirical depiction, prophet Muhammed functions as the vessel to legitimize such a homeland (which Hizb ut-Tahrir considers the caliphate) as it demonstrates the intolerance of non-Muslims (through the abuse of the right to free speech) and Muslims (the condemnation of such “abuse”).

In that sense, the “people” and the “*ummah*” are embodied constructs that function to merge the lived practice with the abstract ideal of the Muslim. Whereas the lived practice is entangled, diverse, and contingent, the abstract ideal is closed, homogeneous, and pre-determined. Such merging is observable in the “*je suis*” movement where symbols such as “Charlie”, “Samuel”, and “Muhammed” operate as a dialectic between the universal and particular. Through the act of naming (e.g., “Charlie”), the particular has the potential to be subsumed under the universal of the abstract ideal (i.e., “the” Muslim). Although such an operation is not deliberate on the whole—most people who perform “*je suis* Charlie” do not intend for such a dialectical movement to occur—the spatial and temporal conditions provide for the absorption of the particular under the universal. In other words, emerging far right and Islamist relations (since 9/11 in particular) laid the foundations for the potential of a consolidation of different subjects, affects, and demands.

Such a dialectic between opposing articulations advances a symbolization that legitimizes the use of the cartoons to subsume the lived practice of Muslims under the abstract ideal of “the” Muslims (articulated in extremist discourses). Following a discourse-theoretical perspective, the Muhammed cartoons in recent years (in particular since 2015) can be thought of as having entered a symbolic phase. Olesen (2016) suggests that “an event may be said to have entered a symbolic phase when it is systematically invoked and employed by social and political actors” (p. 223). Since the Jyllands-Posten event, Muhammed cartoons are employed to either condemn extremist positions (as the magazine Charlie Hebdo does) or strengthen extremist positions. Far right and Islamist actors take advantage of the cartoons to provoke extremist actions and strengthen their position. For example, the *fatwas* function as evidence for the Party for Freedom to strengthen the division between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Thus, the Muhammed cartoons are a kind of performance that facilitate the imagining (as an enactment) of the “people” and the “*ummah*”. Such a vantage point contributes to our understanding of far right and Islamist relations in twofold: it demonstrates the entanglement between the “people” and the “*ummah*”, and it

reveals the capacity of far right and Islamist articulations to absorb non-extremist subjects, opinions, and affects. There is thus an extension possible that disregards the non-extremist characteristics of social identifications to subsume them under an universal (and extremist) position that is reliant on a dichotomous division between Muslims and non-Muslims.

### The “face” of Muhammed

Symbols, as a kind of metaphor, hold the tension of opposites and, in doing so, have the transformative power to produce a synthesis. In prevalent forms of popular articulation, the potential of a third (i.e., new) position is oftentimes presented as a symbol. Viewing the opposing articulations of the Muhammed cartoons in terms of symbolization extends our analysis beyond the opposing character of the discourses. Instead, what is rendered visible is the *internal* connection or entanglement without which the cartoon of Muhammed would not enter a symbolic phase. Thus, the argument that follows is that both Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Party for Freedom, among others, depend on each other to construct what I argue is the “face” of Muhammed.

In being a material object, the caricature (or face) of Muhammed operates as the vessel of symbols. There is thus a symbolic *and* a material element to the figure of Muhammed in the context of the cartoons. In other words, there is a *face* to Muhammed that is material and such a material dimension has an effect on discourse and vice versa. Discourse-theoretical scholars such as Nico Carpentier (2017) and Emilia Palonen (2020), among other (discourse) theorists such as Michel Foucault, are acknowledging the material dimension of discourse. In the same way material object constitute discourse, so do discourse consist of a material dimension (Carpentier 2017). The “face” of Muhammed in the instance of the cartoons is one such material object that has the effect to mobilize the affects that reside in society. It is thus through the image (or the material object) of the cartoons that names such as “Charlie” and “Muhammed” are embodied in a collective moment.

Although it seems the face of Muhammed represents a polarity between extremist conceptions of the “people” and the “*ummah*”, their mutuality becomes visible when the image of the Prophet is considered as a metaphor. Here, the fine distinction is that polarities are connected beyond their opposition; subject A and B are connected through C rather than  $A \neq B$  (see also Brincat and de Groot Heupner 2020). Similar to the logic of metaphors, subject A and B are dependent on a third element that functions to *substitute* the meaning of A and B. Far right and Islamist agents are both separate entities (A and B) and part of a single entity that is part of the condition and outcome of the third element (C). In other words, subject C represents both the conditions that allow for A and B, and the contingent outcome that is the result of the interaction (e.g., securitization of Muslims).

The implications of the Jyllands-Posten cartoons provided the Party for Freedom (among others) the conditions (C) to reproduce the cartoons. After the 2020 events in France, Wilders has tweeted on multiple occasions the Muhammed cartoon drawn by the winner of the “First Annual Muhammad Art Exhibit and Contest”, Bosch Fawstin, held in TX in 2015. The cartoon depicts a violent Muhammed with a sword in his hand saying: “you can’t draw me!”, with the hand holding a pencil

replying: “that is *why* I draw you” (emphasis added). Although Wilders is notorious for his provocative behavior, the reproduction of the cartoon is more than a mere act of provocation. Such is evident from the parliamentary debate he initiated following the events in France and Austria on the right to free speech and acts of terror. The debate was centered around the petition released in the aftermath of the events in France to demand the criminalization of defaming the Prophet. Although the numbers cannot be verified, the number of signatories exceeded 100,000 after a number of days. Besides the minority Muslim party *Denk*, Members of Parliament were passionate to denounce the petition and defend the absolute right of free speech. The vast majority of Dutch parties reiterated earlier words from former French President Hollande who said, in response to the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack, the principle of freedom is non-negotiable. As is evident from the interventions of Mahmood (2009) and March (2011), the demand for restraints on the content of free speech is a condition and a paradoxical implication of post-secular societies. As March (2011) argues, it is consistent with the demand of Muslim states to impose such restrictions in the West.

In 2005, Jyllands-Posten published 12 cartoons entitled “the face of Muhammed” (*Muhammeds ansigt*). Since most cartoons did not depict prophet Muhammed, it is interesting to note how certain cartoons such as the abovementioned Westergaard cartoon became a prominent symbol for the event. In that sense, the object of the *face* of Muhammed penetrates different characterizations as to what the Prophet seems to represent to a peripheral collective (those embodied in far right and Islamist discourses). Whether or not the Prophet is depicted, the cartoons are reflective of the conditions that prevent the realization of the “people” and the “*ummah*”. The fact that the Party for Freedom can organize a Muhammed cartoon contest is, according to Hizb ut-Tahrir, indicative of the inherent intolerance of liberal democracies. On the converse, the demand to restrict the right to free speech is evidence of the Muslim as an impediment to achieve a “true people”. Here, both far right and Islamist articulations construct a metaphoric link between the Muslim who is tolerant, secular, progressive, liberal, and so on, and “the” Muslim who is in conflict with the basic tenets of liberal democracies (Mahmood 2009; March 2011). In doing so, the Muslim becomes “the” Muslim without losing the particularities that are subsumed under the universal of a single Muslim subject.

Hizb ut-Tahrir’s reaction to the cartoons indicate that, in the form of a material object, the face of Muhammed stands for the hatred for the Islamic religion, civilizations, and societies. As a metaphor, the face of Muhammed is a symptom of an erroneous ideological system of which the cartoons are a symbolic expression. Moreover, it is suggestive of a “double standard” toward the criminalization of the (ab)use of the right to free speech. When the right to free speech is used to undermine the ideological foundations of society it is criminalized, in the case of constructing a metaphoric link between a political group and an Islamist group, for example. In such instances, as is evident from the numerous countries where Hizb ut-Tahrir is banned, political ideologies are criminalized under a securitization paradigm. According to Hizb ut-Tahrir, such action points to a double standard to which political agents such as Wilders are not subjected. After all, the face of Muhammed is evidence of a bias and intolerance directed toward Muslims and their religious practices.



As a caricature, prophet Muhammed is the symbol for intolerance and violence. Although the majority of Muslims do not consider Muhammed a figure of violence, the hermeneutics of parties such as Hizb ut-Tahrir do acknowledge that violence is, in the time of the Prophet and modern times, a method to overcome persecution. The strategic objective to overcome persecution is an imperative to reinstate a “natural” order. Such a natural order is antithetical to the current hegemonic order that privileges the secular over the sacred. The predomination of the secular is, according to Hizb ut-Tahrir, an act of violence. Muslims are, in Hizb ut-Tahrir’s conception of the “good”, coerced into a “system of assimilation” that leads to the obliteration of “the” Islamic identity (Pala 2022). The adaptation of Muslims to a secular and liberal order is, for Hizb ut-Tahrir, a structural withdrawal from the true understanding of Islam and Muslim subjectivity. Although Hizb ut-Tahrir is non-violent in approach, they do acknowledge the unification of “the” *ummah* is contingent on the establishment of the caliphate.

Another interpretation of the cartoon of Muhammed (or Erdoğan) with a bomb as turban is for the bomb not to represent violence, but the womb.<sup>3</sup> Such a perspective is aligned with the prevalent “replacement theory” that has been prominent in far right discourses before Renaud Camus popularized “the Great Replacement” in 2011 (Davey and Ebner 2019). For example, the 1978 novel *The Turner Diaries* promotes the idea that native white Europeans are being replaced as a result of the migration of non-whites. Written in the context of the United States, *The Turner Diaries* is considered a prominent guidebook for far right violence, such as the 1995 Oklahoma Bombing that killed 168 people. With respect to the “face” of Muhammed in (the adaptation of) Westergaard’s cartoon, the bomb can be interpreted as the womb that brings about a culture of violence and intolerance through the migration and increasing demographics of Muslims in countries of the West. Thus, it is the wombs and not the bombs of Muslims that is deemed destructive (in the case of the Party for Freedom) and constructive (in the case of Hizb ut-Tahrir) for their respective spatial dreams.

From that perspective, it is consistent for the Dutch branch of Hizb ut-Tahrir to take a firm position against the defamation of the Prophet (and Allah). In the words of Hizb ut-Tahrir, “we will not accept for the Prophet or Allah are subject of ridicule under the guise of freedom of expression” (Pala 2016, 5). Contrary to the Party for Freedom, Hizb ut-Tahrir does not consider it a restriction of the right to free speech, but rather the enactment of respect and tolerance. In that sense, their position is in agreement with the statement of Hizb ut-Tahrir’s media representative, Okay Pala, who provided in a recent interview that Hizb ut-Tahrir “supports coexistence when it is accompanied by respect for Muslims and their religion” (2022, January 22). In other words, the Dutch branch of Hizb ut-Tahrir operates within the spatial coordinates of the secular and liberal order to mobilize the demand of respect and tolerance. The defamation of the Prophet (and Allah) is testimonial to a lack of respect and tolerance, and therefore, a double standard which Hizb ut-Tahrir considers inherent to the evolution of Western societies.

In 2020, Wilders reproduced Westergaard’s cartoon to depict Turkish President Erdoğan instead of prophet Muhammed with the banner “terrorist” (Wilders 2020, October 24). In response, Erdoğan took legal action against Wilders on the grounds



of “insulting the President”, which is a crime under Turkish law. Wilders performance, according to Erdoğan, reflected on the diplomatic relations with the Netherlands and, according to Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu “shows the true colours” of Western nations (Schaart 2020). Wilders’ reproduction of the cartoon is an act of constructing a metaphoric link between Erdoğan—as a physical leader—and Islam of which Erdoğan is the embodiment. That is, Wilders gives a modern face to the symbolic “face” of Muhammed through the material substitution of the depiction of Muhammed with Erdoğan. In doing so, Wilders reiterates and substantiates the misconception of Westergaard’s cartoon that originated to aim at those who use Islam to legitimize violence (McLaughlin 2008). Instead, Wilders appropriates the cartoon to infer a universal hermeneutics that relies on the construction of a metaphoric link between “extremists” and “pluralists” Muslim subjectivities.

### Polarizing freedom

The “face” of Muhammed is utilized to install a hegemonic formation around the universal representation of “the” people (or the equivalent in Hizb ut-Tahrir terms: “the” *ummah*). Besides “filling” the political collective of “the” people with content, a discursive approach renders visible the significance of an emptiness (rather than a fullness) to allow for the movement between the particular and universal (Katsambekis 2022). Although “the” people and “the” *ummah* in the mutual performances of the Party for Freedom and Hizb ut-Tahrir appear complete (as a homogeneous collective), there is an emptiness in the universal (of freedom, e.g.) that allows for the absorption of different contents and subjects into the discursive configuration (Katsambekis 2022).

The 2018 cartoon contest to be held in the parliamentary office of the Party for Freedom reveals the tension between fullness and emptiness to construct and sediment a popular frontier between “the” people and “the” *ummah*. Since the 2015 attacks at the Texas Muhammed Cartoon Convention (where Wilders spoke) and Charlie Hebdo, Wilders has encouraged the public to produce satirical depictions of the Prophet. The 2018 cartoon contest resulted in an attack at Amsterdam Central Station which injured two American tourists. The 19-year old man from Afghanistan, Jawed S., travelled from Germany to revenge Wilders for promoting the defamation of the Prophet. Jawed S. claims he acted to “defend his Prophet” and has no regret of his actions. Wilders’ subsequent decision to cancel the cartoon contest to “protect innocent people” validates the dichotomous frontier between “the” people and “the” *ummah*. From the perspective of Jawed S., his actions were on behalf of the *ummah* in the broad sense, rather than “the” *ummah* as a narrow collective. Such a mythological interpretation of what the *ummah* represents is upheld through the (discursive) performance of agents such as Wilders and Jawed S.

After the 2020 events, Wilders encouraged schools, media, and the public to publish Muhammed cartoons to show the Netherlands is “a free country” and that “there is no place here for Muslims who undermine our freedom” (Wilders 2020, October 20). In a press release, Hizb ut-Tahrir (2020, November 8) condemns the Dutch Prime Minister, Mark Rutte, for stating that “no one has the right *not* to be offended” [emphasis added]. Rutte’s statement is, according to Hizb ut-Tahrir (2020, November

8) symptomatic of the “ideological bankruptcy” of the system. Thus, rather than condemning the peripheral discourse of the Party for Freedom, Hizb ut-Tahrir aims to emphasize the conflict is not with political agents such as Wilders, but a system built on unconditional freedom as a whole. Therefore, Hizb ut-Tahrir demands Muslims to not remain silent at the face of persecution.

What becomes evident is a polarizing effect in the co-constitutive signification of freedom. Rather than conceiving the *content* imprinted upon the notion of freedom as polarizing, it is the position it occupies within the structure of both (co-constitutive) discourses that helps to construct “the” people/*ummah* frontier. Here, it must be noted that democratic politics depends on contestation and disruption of established beliefs and practices. Even though some enactments of “the” people are more disruptive than others, instituting “a” people requires a force that aims to disrupt the prevailing social and political order. In other words, freedom is not simply an ideational concept (as some populist theories and studies presume), but occupies a discursive function to enable the formation of an “*internal* antagonistic frontier” (Katsambekis 2022, 61, emphasis added). Thus, what is more significant than the content imprinted upon “freedom” is how it functions to establish links between different—and opposing—existing and emergent unsatisfied demands and affects that can be mobilized against the antagonistic “elite”.<sup>4</sup>

With the signifier of the “people” as central nodal point (reference point) to give structure to the discourse, the signifier of “freedom” operates to divide the “people” across an antagonistic frontier. In other words, it makes possible the antagonistic frontier between “us” and “them” alongside a horizontal delineation (the “other” as a cultural, ethnic, or religious subject) and a vertical delineation (the “other” as the opponent of power) (de Cleen 2017). The signifier of “freedom” in both the discursive configuration of the Party for Freedom and Hizb ut-Tahrir operates to create a division on both the horizontal and vertical front. For example, the *dream* of the caliphate in the discourse of Hizb ut-Tahrir relies on the division of a cultural and religious “other” that in turn is contingent upon an opposition with the hegemonic order. In the same vein, the “other” as outsider is imperative for the *dream* of the nation that is antithetical to prevalent *pluralist* ideologies of nationhood. As can be seen then, the signifier of freedom has a polarizing function in constructing a division between the mythological dreams or fantasies of the caliphate and the nation.

### Concluding remarks

The *dreampolitik* of both parties indicate an entanglement of popular articulations that has significant implications for empirical research and political and social theories of populist, radical, and extremist politics. The polarizing effects of the reiteration and reproduction of the Muhammed cartoons render visible the importance of a relational viewpoint that extends beyond the self/other connection. Rather, the article suggests the need for a theoretical vantage point that acknowledges the interpenetration of self and other, which does not always lead to consistent ideational projects or agendas. On the contrary, the interpenetration allows for contradictions to thrive without disrupting the discursive configuration. Thus, beyond recognizing the self/other relation, it is important to render intelligible the *changing* nature of such

a relation through certain discursive performances that can be seen to strengthen the conditions for antagonistic identification. The Charlie Hebdo event, the attacks in 2020, and the more localized provocations illustrate how the “face” of Muhammed operates to sediment a fundamental division between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Such a division is contingent upon a universal conception of selfhood and otherhood. Rather than a pure nationalist or Islamist frontier, a populist configuration is productive to instill a universal that is both flexible and fixed (i.e., not deprived of particularities). Therefore, a discursive approach to understanding the interaction between popular embodiments such as Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Party for Freedom is valuable in that it allows for multiple oppositions (both vertical and horizontal). Instead of suggesting the “people” and the “elite” constitute the primary frontier, as is most dominant in populist studies, a discursive approach considers the various positions (some of which are in contradiction to one another) that serve to mobilize people on the basis of different, and opposing, affects, toward a common objective or collective. Moreover, a vantage point of *mutual* relations enables us to discern the progressive, productive, and pluralist potential of popular identification.

What can be considered the “paradox of freedom” can also be conceptualized in terms of the immanent relations that constitute far right and Islamist discourses. The lack of dissenting voices within Hizb ut-Tahrir, for example, to point out the cartoons are a projection of the cartoonist and not a depiction of Muhammed, evinces the need to uphold a polarizing subject (the “other”) through the paradox of freedom. In the case Hizb ut-Tahrir members were to separate the cartoons from the Prophet and their religion, the polarizing effect would dissipate. It can be argued then that the Muhammed cartoons, since the Jyllands-Posten publication onwards, have become the symbol for resistance on the one hand, and mutual support on the other. Leftist intellectuals, for instance, support the right to depict the Prophet, but condemn the provocation (and reiteration) of doing so. For radical Islamists, the Muhammed cartoons are the symbol of active resistance, or in the words of the Dutch branch of Hizb ut-Tahrir (2018), it is time for Muslims to let themselves heard. The same can be argued for the far right who consider the depiction of Muhammed as an act of resistance to the leftist elite who do “turn a blind eye” to the irreconcilable Muslim subject.

Much in favor of the far right and Islamists alike, “Charlie” became a symbol of resistance against the paradox of freedom. “Charlie” allowed for the emergence of the symbol of “Muhammed” or “Muslim” in the context of the “*je suis*” articulation. Through the preoccupation with radical discourses (in politics, media, and academia), these symbols are absorbed in popular forms of far right and Islamist discourses, rather than incorporated in pluralist discourses. Although pluralist discourses employ the symbols, they are not popularized through a populist logic of condensation. Such condensation involves a movement or dialectic between universals and particulars, which is evident in prevalent populist forms of politics. That is, the Muhammed cartoons produce and sustain a tension between the *populus* (the citizens) and the minority that claim to represent the *populus* (Laclau 2005).

The article has revealed the interpenetration of popular forms of far right and Islamist articulation through the example of the Muhammed cartoons. The empirical and metaphorical “face” of Muhammed has shown useful to demonstrate the shared discursive logics behind the construction of the “people” and the “*ummah*”. Despite their

ideational and political opposition, the “people” and the “*ummah*” in the articulations of the Party for Freedom and Hizb ut-Tahrir respectively, operate in accordance with a mutual polarization vis-à-vis each other, and the hegemonic order or establishment. In other words, constructing, sustaining, and progressing the polarization is imperative for the mobilization of people and affects with respect to a common opponent. Such mobilization of people and affects, as the article illustrates, is dependent on a *dreampolitik* that inscribes a mythological frontier between the Muslim and non-Muslim.

Rather than the antagonist, sameness is what comes to be the constitutive foundation of popular identification. While the “other” is indispensable, the “same” is what formulates the antagonistic other and mobilizes the antagonistic self. As a symbolic and material object, Muhammed represents the “violent reduction of difference to sameness” (Torfing 1999, 194) in constructing a “people” that is closed, exclusive, and non-democratic. Thus, rather than conceiving of the Muhammed cartoons and the subsequent “*je suis*” articulations as interactive, cumulative, or reciprocal in identification and radicalization, I argue the need to go beyond such an interpretation and consider such symbolic and material performances as sedimenting a radical closeness that has an impact on the “mainstreaming” of non-pluralist spatial ideals on a much broader level.

## Notes

1. Please note “Islamist” is not capitalized to emphasize the distinction between Islam as a religion, civilization, and faith, and the political interpretation and manifestation of scriptures and Islamic texts. In doing so, I am not dismissing the primacy of Islamic concepts to different Islamist ideologies, but to direct attention to the politization of these concepts, such as *shariah* and *ummah*, over time.
2. Please note there have been various articulations of the *ummah* throughout Islamic history, and the term has different meanings in the Qur’an, some of which are pluralists in essence including non-Muslims (Denny 1975).
3. I would like to thank and acknowledge one of the two reviewers of the article for introducing the alternative interpretation of the cartoon whereby the bomb is not taken literal but symbolic with respect to Muslim migration and demographic change.
4. For example, the International Conference to Review the Global Vision of the Holocaust held in Iran in 2006 is an exemplary event that aims to transgress the spatial delineation of freedom. It demonstrates freedom is conditional to historical and cultural coordinates; where Europeans cannot legally deny the Holocaust, so can Muslims not defame the Prophets in their spatial confines.

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