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Locating the ideal state:

The practice of place by far right and Islamist parties

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Abstract

This article explores the co-constitutive practice and conceptualisation of place in political parties at opposite ends of the ideological spectrum. Illustrated with examples from the Islamist Hizb ut-Tahrir in Denmark (DK) and the Netherlands (NL) and the far right Party for Freedom (NL) and the Danish People's Party (DK), we seek to better understand the role of place and space in the translation of ideology to practice. With the concept of lived space central to our argument, we propose that 'ideal places' – be they Caliphates or ethnically and religiously homogeneous nation-states – are precisely co-constitutive in that one party's utopia is the other's dystopia. However, pointing to the essence of co-constitutive opposing ideals does not suffice when addressing members, recruits, voters, or wider audiences; ideals must be realised, enacted or performed in order to move, drive and inspire people. Thus, we ask, how do political parties turn ideals into something tangible and practicable? Our argument is that a better understanding of the role of place through the concept of lived space helps explain the apparent success of ideologically driven non-conformist parties in Western Europe.

Keywords; lived space, Hizb ut-Tahrir, Danish People's Party, Party for Freedom, utopia, dystopia

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Introduction

In the present article, we seek to illustrate how a study of state ideals are practiced and used as a political tool in ideologically essentialising, non-conformist, but non-violent political activism. Our interest lies in understanding how political actors from opposite sides of the politico-religious divide in Western European politics contribute to a co-constitutive practice of place. This implies a study of how political parties use and perform place and non-place in the discursive practice of their ideal state.[1] By "essentialising" we refer to political programmes and advocacy involving ideological responses not considered inclusive, open or mainstream. This we shall develop further in our characterisation of the cases.

The theoretical and conceptual framework follows on from studies of mobility in the discipline of human and cultural geography that conceptualises space in terms of practice and relational differences. With the concept of "lived space" central to our argument, we propose for a place to be constitutive of both geographical facts and abstract ideals. In borrowing the analytical lens from human geography, and the works of Tim Cresswell (1996, 2006, 2011) and Doreen Massey (1985, 2005, 2013) in particular, we contribute to a better understanding of the shared logics of political discourse and social formations amongst activists on opposite sides of the political spectrum. Considering the (historical) prevalence of the Other in constituting place, the opposition shares an interest in constructing ideal states relating to the presence of Muslim minorities in Western Europe; as an audience and recruitment pool and, in both instances, as a constitutive Other. Thus, we illustrate how an application of lived space contributes to disciplines interested in new political history, political discourse, social movements and radicalisation processes. Hence, our aim is to illustrate the usefulness of an analytical focus on place and practice of place in social phenomena, rather than conduct thorough empirical studies in and of themselves.

Given the significant position of Muslims (and their religion) in the political discourse of (national) identity in Europe particularly, we will look at political parties

[1] And thereby investigating how the party performs the caliphate as the Caliphate (as an historically fixed ideal). We capitalise 'caliphate' to distinguish between the historically heterogeneous forms and practices of the caliphate and the discursive attempt of our case subjects to undermine such historicity and multiplicity.

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with a dominant agenda around the presence of Muslim minorities. We analyse the transnational Party for Liberation (Hizb ut-Tahrir, HT) and their ideal place, the Caliphate, and the Party for Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, PVV) and the Danish People's Party (*Dansk Folkeparti*, DF) as the discursive embodiments of fierce opposition to this ideal state. These case studies are selected because both countries have, since the 2005 *Jyllands-Posten* controversy, been places where far right actors have framed the demand of free speech around the subject of the Muslim (Olesen 2016; Tønder 2011). Notably, France is likewise a relevant case subject given the 2015 events at the office of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo (and other places) and the subsequent "*je suis* Charlie" ("I am Charlie") movement which came to symbolise "free speech" (Ali 2015). However, France does not have an active Hizb ut-Tahrir (hereafter, HT) chapter, whereas the party can organise legally in Denmark and the Netherlands (Germany has imposed a legislative ban on HT).[2] Having said that, Britain is where HT has their central media office for the English-speaking division and is one of the most active chapters in Europe in terms of their activities and output. However, because we are interested in the co-constitutive practice of ideal places, we are looking at case studies where the essentialising of the Muslim is prominent among different and opposing parties. It is for that reason that the research focuses on far right and Islamist parties in countries where "the" Muslim occupies a relatively significant position in politics. That is not to say Britain does not also have a significant far right political discourse, but rather than Denmark and the Netherlands share in common similar practices – such as the Muhammed cartoon controversies that will be covered later – by far-right parties that occupy a dominant position within politics.

The empirical material for this article is derived from the discursive practices of the three mentioned parties. We conceive of discourse as a socially meaningful configuration of meaning; in other words, discourse is not merely the utterance of meaning, but a relational structure or logic of meaning that is socially produced (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). Discourse is thus a social, and hence political, practice. We refer to discursive practices, whether linguistic or non-linguistic (such as visual representations),

[2] Even though HT rejects parliamentary participation, they refer to themselves as a party (*hizb*) and as our focus in the current article is on their state ideal and not on parliamentary attitudes and relations, we have settled for the common term "party" for all three objects of interest here.

to make sense of how HT and PVV/DF enact place. Through a conception of discourse that inscribes within the concept a lived dimension (because utterances only turn into a discourse when socially practised), the empirical study of discourse materials is coherent with the premises of "lived space". We look at the historical backgrounds and developments as well as their ideological writings available in print and online. Additionally, we have attended meetings and demonstrations and conducted interviews with representatives of HT in Denmark and the Netherlands between 2012 and 2021.

First, we will explain and justify the conceptual application of lived space. In this section we will lay out the theoretical foundation for the empirical analysis of "making" place. In the following section we introduce the cases in relation to the enactment of political places and spaces. We will begin with the analysis of HT, followed by DF and PVV, respectively. Here, we focus on spatial ideals to analyse the way political parties aspire and practice, or enact, place in the everyday. We bring the empirical findings together in a discussion where we explore the practice of "out of placeness" in relation to spatial conceptions of the good. Doing so enables us to connect "otherness" with place, or in other words, situate the Other in (the practice of) place. Finally, in the course of the discussion, we introduce the notions of utopia and dystopia to illustrate how conceptions of the good facilitate a shared geography with clear emphasis of the Other in the practice of HT and DF/PVV.

Space and place

In approaching different ideologically founded negotiations of place and spatial ideals, we use lived space (Cresswell 2006) and thereby argue that places must be understood not only as objective and cartographic destinations referring to things in the physical world (a dot on a map) or as subjective and ideological constructions of the social world, but also through verbs meaning that places are made up of what individuals do there. If we use the state as an illustrative example, the state can be placed with coordinates on a map, it can be described as an institution of citizenship and institutionalised structures or it can be understood through the practices of individuals. The latter implies descriptions growing from verbs. The bureaucrat and the citizen, in their multiplicity of identities, use different verbs to describe the state relating to their practices, and the state, then, is the (varying) sum of such descriptive verbs.

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Bringing the example closer to the focus of study, we can perceive the geographical coordinates of a nation, such as Denmark or the Netherlands, as the sum of practices that give meaning to this place. On the level of generality of the nation as a state, place is the sum of the multiplicity of practices associated with the multiplicity of places and peoples that reside within the nation. These lived spaces are not confined to the actual borders of the nation given the mobility of bodies, meaning and practices. Rather, they are separate elements of place, such as the multiplicity of verbs ascribed to one particular place; and the sum of these places, to a more general level, describe both national and transnational realities.

We can apply this idea of understanding of any place through practice (i.e. verbs) to the analysis of how spatial ideals, such as the Caliphate (in particular terms), are discursively practiced. We find that the manner in which an imagined place is practiced by members of HT, DF or PVV gives meaning and content to such places similar to how studies of practice in existing places give meaning to such places. From asking HT members what they would be doing in the Caliphate was it ever to be established, we find that members' descriptions of aspirations and ideals make places longed for more real and apprehensible, both to those who describe them and those hoping to understand. For instance, when attending HT conferences, members demonstrate and perform their hopes and aspirations for a future caliphate (in general terms, as a longing for place). When organising conferences with perfectly clean bathroom facilities, sufficient amounts of food and drink and otherwise orderly conduct, they show to themselves and others what they hope life in the future caliphate will be like. They *do* – practice – caliphate, so to say. This is something we have studied previously (Sinclair 2010), and here we extend this analysis by providing examples from far right parties in Denmark and the Netherlands.

There is an expanding body of research on the mutual dimension of far right and Islamist movements (e.g. Abbas 2019, Adib-Moghaddam 2018, Ebner 2017). This scholarship is focused on the reciprocal forces that further radicalise ideas, behaviours and social movements alongside a shared dichotomous frontier of "us" versus "them". In other words, it acknowledges the shared interest of constructing and sustaining the "clash of civilisation" paradigm by creating a social division between two mutually exclusive radical political identities. Rather than focusing on the contradiction and opposition

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between far right and Islamist identities, this scholarship aims at demonstrating both need each other to legitimise their mutually exclusive visions of an ideal state. Through the conception of an irreconcilable "other" – the ultimate outsider – the ideal state becomes a *practice* instead of being a mere abstract. Although it does not posit the interaction is a priori "cumulative" or "reciprocal", our research engages with the "hybrid" literature on far right and Islamist symbiosis to locate the close affinities between these political oppositions in how they are co-creating ideal places (Abbas 2019, Bartlett & Birdwell 2013). It is in that sense novel because it shifts focus from an interactive or reactive vantage point to one that is more interested in looking at the shared practice of essentialising the "other" to co-create opposing ideal states.

By understanding space through verbs, the universal becomes particular and the unknown becomes known (Cresswell 2003; Merriman *et al.*, 2008). Thus, we are equally interested in actual places and practices turning space into place as we are in the underlying sense-making processes related to practice. The conception of space as active and lived is not to say that the foundations of place are entirely open-ended and groundless. Rather, place is always contingent upon the historical and emergent conditions that determine what is possible in a particular temporal context. This, we illustrate with our empirical examples as places such as borders, and existing states can be reiterated or ignored depending on the political message and the audiences addressed. Hence, doing place is central to understanding of ideology, political activism and individual sensemaking amongst members and activists.

Characterising political groups as "essentialising"

We characterise our cases as "essentialising" whereby indicating that we are dealing with ideological thinking which is neither inclusive nor open of nature. To be more precise, "essentialising" does not indicate support for violent means or methods, just as it does not imply criminal behaviour of sympathy. We use "essentialising" with respect to HT, DF and PVV because the ideological and rhetorical foundations of the parties aim at defining the identity, collective, and nation they support or aspire to create. With very little openness to difference, limited respect for democratic processes and legal processes and convictions due to violations of existing laws in the shape of discriminatory utterances in

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Denmark and The Netherlands, we compare and group the mentioned parties. Thus, crossing legal boundaries of these two countries informs us that our cases are not mainstream, but rather balancing a legal tight rope. We choose not to use "extreme" or "exclusionist" due to the different nature of the political ideals involved and because these terms are highly contested and demand thorough discussions of definitions. Such discussions are not central to the argument we wish to make, rather, "essentialising" is very useful when analysing the role of place in processes of Othering the opponents.

With our use of "essentialising" it is necessary to explain in some detail how we draw on work by Edward Said. In *Orientalism* (1978), Said analyses how the Academic approach to the study of the Middle East and Muslim worlds have been marked by a fascination with the "Middle Easterner" as an exotic Other and with the entire region between the Mediterranean and China as forming an opposition to the West. Inspired by the work of Foucault, Said argues that Orientalism is a hegemonic discourse ranking the West as superior and the Orient as inferior. This discourse and the real power based hereon spring from having reduced the Orient to an essence of backwardness and inferiority to the West in every possible manner and aspect. This, as Jung explains (2011), points to another level of essence in Said's analysis: the difference between the West (or Occident) and the Orient:

> 'A core feature of this oriental knowledge is the ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and the Occident (1978, 45). This essential cognitive binary differentiation is fused with a particular value attitude expressing the distinction between Western superiority and oriental inferiority (1978, 42).' (Jung 2011, p. 20).

It is exactly this double meaning of essence that we find useful in our analysis. The process of reducing something or someone in opposition to your viewpoint to an inferior essence and then proceeding with "cognitive binary differentiation" producing a clearly defined "us versus them" is an accurate characterisation of how dichotomic worldviews are displayed in both Islamist and far right actors in the Netherlands and Denmark.[2]

[2] We would like to thank one of the two reviewers of this paper for pointing us in the direction of the use of "essentialism" in the work by Karl Popper (1902-1994). Popper argues that Plato's thinking

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Enactments of political places and spaces

Hizb ut-Tahrir: the perfect event

Hizb ut-Tahrir was established in 1953 in Jerusalem. Since 1953, the group has set up branches in the Middle East, Europe, Central Asia, South East Asia, Australia, Africa and the US. The present leader Ata´ Abu Rashta has held the title since 1 May 2003 and is most probably residing in Jordan (Sinclair 2010). Today, there are functioning sections in all West European countries, and the biggest are found in the UK and Denmark (Sinclair & Khan 2016). According to the group's ideological publications, members do not differentiate between religion and politics but understands Islam as the source and guidelines for both, and all work is aimed at the re-establishment of an Islamic State, the so-called 'Khilafah' (Hizb ut-Tahrir 2012). The Caliphate is seen as a system of government that has been given by Allah. Historically, caliphate (the word stems from the Arabic "caliph" which means substitute or deputy) refers to the system of government imposed by the Arabic tribes after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 (Armstrong 2007). The caliphate was continued under the Umayyad Dynasty (661-750) centred in Damascus, the Abbasid Dynasty (750-1517) first centred in Baghdad, and afterwards in Egypt. Between 1517 and 1924, the Ottoman Sultan had the title of Caliph until Kemal Atatürk abolished the last Caliphate as a part of the creation of the modern Turkish national state in 1924 (Poulton 1997). It must be noted caliphate/*khalifah* is not a Qur'anic term, and the root of the word - "caliph" - is neither used in reference to political authority but took on a political connotation during the Umayyad period (Donner 2012; Yilmaz 2018).

Thus, from a historical point of view, the caliphate has been many and very different systems of rule with each one reflecting the surrounding societies and epochs. However, HT does not differentiate between the different forms and manifestations, or rather, HT capitalises the letter "c" as if there has only ever been one caliphate. Thus, for

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was based on a methodological essentialism in that Plato progressed from an understanding of something's ideal form towards an understanding of what happens to this ideal over time or in the meeting with objects or individuals. Popper was critical of this orientation towards understanding something's essence and argues from a point of view of realism and nominalism in his thinking (Popper 2013). In our analyses, the notion of locating something's true form is relevant of course – whether this is one's own ideology or the inferiority of that of the opponents.

HT, the caliphate is a unifying historical, religious and political base shared by all Muslims regardless of ethnicity, geography and orthodoxy (Taji-Farouki 1996). The universal aspect of the caliphate also explains the rejection of other identifications (such as nationality and ethnicity) that "split" the Muslim subject (from the Arab subject, for example) (an-Nabhani 1999). This is the ideologically determined and ahistorical point of departure for the recreation of the caliphate by HT invented in the 1950s.

Following the party's founding ideology and methodology, HT chapters in Denmark and the Netherlands explicitly claim the party has no current intentions to take power or change the structure of society in any of the countries.[3] Instead, HT claims her role is to assist in the "cultivation" of the thought and practice of Muslims, to bring into being the enlightened Muslim subject (an-Nabhani 1969). A short piece on the website of HT in the Netherlands entitled *De verandering van de mens* ("the transformation of humanity") ends with the translation of *VBK surah ar Ra'd 13, aaya 11*: 'Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves' (Hizb ut-Tahrir Nederlands, n.d.). Especially relevant for Muslims who reside in secular liberal democracies, HT aims to cultivate the minds of Muslims – and potential converts – with concepts and guidelines that determine the foundations of an Islamic way of life. Although the Dutch chapter of HT has a low profile and, besides a few parliamentary motions, does not appear to be under scrutiny, their activism is directed at changing individual perceptions and behaviour to constitute a *political*, and exclusive, *ummah*.[4] For example, the Uyghur Muslims in China and the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar are primary causes to change the individual's perception of "the" *ummah* and act according to collective solidarity. Domestically, the politically and publicly endorsed "assimilation policy" validates the Caliphate as the only place where Muslims can retain their (religious) subjectivity.[5]

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3 According to HT's ideological writings (see for example, The Ummah's Charter 1989, The Islamic State 1998, and Structuring of a Party 2001), the initial two phases of implementing the Caliphate are directed at Muslim majority countries alone, whereas phase three involves world domination.

4 The term '*ummah*' has various meanings in the Qur'an (see, for example, Denny 1975) and early Islamic documents, such as the Constitution of Medina (see, for example, Denny 1977). Historically, it is, however, most commonly applied to refer to 'community' (in early Islamic periods) and 'Muslim community' more recently (e.g. Mandaville 2013), and hence ascribed a political status.

5 We emphasise the prefix "the" here to refer to the practice of essentialising (and thus, politicising) the concept of the *ummah*.

Since 2001, HT in Denmark has been the object of repeated discussions concerning the possibility of a ban in accordance with the Danish constitution (Sinclair and Khan 2016). In the summer of 2004, it was concluded that there could be found no constitutional justification for such a ban, however, the ban discussion has been initiated by politicians in connection with any major HT-event since then and the organisation was subject to investigation by the state prosecutor again in 2008. Since 2011, the Danish branch has been struggling due to a number of national and international developments. Internationally, the Arab Springs made it harder to argue that Muslim publics in the Middle East were longing for the establishment of a Caliphate rather than liberal democracies and human rights, and after 2014 and the rise of Islamic State with Al-Baghdadi as its self-proclaimed Caliph, HT members' discussions of whose Caliphate was more correct became so theoretical that recruitment on their basis proved impossible. Nationally, disagreement over how to overcome the mentioned challenges have been topped with personal disputes and infighting so much so that as we are writing this (May 2021) it is difficult to say which direction HT's Danish branch will take. Naturally, the current risk of contracting Covid-19 means popular rallies have been suspended, too, which further challenges recruitment.

Now, we are turning to the example provided by a former member of HT. The following description was given in connection with several long interviews and conversations conducted as part of the empirical data collection for Sinclair's doctoral thesis on HT in Denmark and Britain back in 2008-2009. Here, former members of the organisation were asked to describe their notions of state, homeland and belonging and as part thereof this particular individual explained how a strong sense of belonging arose when she was involved in the organisation of party events. To her, the abstract idea of the caliphate became alive and real, when she submerged herself in practical work to show participants of events what members of HT were capable of. As she explained:

> 'I was in charge of the crèche and we made sure that everything was perfect – it was almost like a miniature utopia. The wow factor was important to us and we wanted everything to be like little caliphates. It had to be perfect. There would be games and we would provide lunch, water, fruit and other snacks. Also, we would register children, write their names on stickers and place them on their backs, and

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> we would note the mothers' mobile numbers and call them if their children were crying, and we couldn't comfort them ourselves. It was important that everything was organised, and everyone was happy with the service. The kids loved it and would ask to be taken back by their parents'.

This passage shows how to this HT member the caliphate changes from being a concept and an ideal to a demonstration of what the caliphate would be in practical terms when re-established. At this event, as with all events, members sought to demonstrate what their ideal society would feel and be like once manifested in this world. Furthermore, members were building something so good that children would be asked to go back. In this manner, they were also demonstrating that future residents would join the caliphate from their own free will. In the words of this interlocutor, they created *a miniature utopia*. As argued by Sinclair elsewhere (2010), well-organised events and activists with a strong sense of detail form a significant part of HT's public staging and image as intellectual and elitist. However, more importantly, organising these events plays a major role for the involved members as they relate to the Caliphate on an individual level when they participate in a party event. Striving toward creating something perfect, a miniature utopia, works in two directions simultaneously. The result must be perfect to show how the future caliphate will be perfect, however, at the same time, succeeding in creating a perfect event feeds back into the individual member's imagination of the caliphate as something achievable and real. Put differently, when acting as party representatives and engaging in party activities, members are practicing the Caliphate. They are demonstrating to the world and to themselves how the caliphate is not solely a project of the future, but also a place of the present as they would practice their ideal state – or enter their utopia – every time they attended a party event. Hence, the caliphate is lived.

DF and PVV: Borders and Cartoons

In 1995, The Danish People's Party (DF) was founded by Pia Kjærsgaard, Poul Nødgaard, Ole Donner and Kristian Thulesen Dahl. At the time of the foundation, they were all members of parliament representing the right-wing anti-taxation party The Progress Party (*Fremskridtspartiet*). With the new party, they aimed at a stronger focus on Danish values and policies targeting so-called foreigners. And the aim was welcomed. Within only a few days, 600 individuals had joined the party and as a result of the general election in

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1998, the party was represented by 37 members of parliament (Dansk Folkeparti, n.d.). Since then, they have had election success upon election success both in the Danish and European parliaments, lasting until the parliamentary election in June 2019, where the party was squeezed on two fronts. One was a voter request for climate change responses of which they had none. The other was the occurrence of two far more extreme political initiatives, of which the least controversial, New Conservatives (*Nye Borgerlige*), entered parliament. However, between 2001 and 2019, DF have had significant influence on Danish policy making which has resulted in ever stricter regulation of immigration and integration policies based on the view that Muslims and Islam constitute a threat to *Danishness*.

A good example of how DF draws on concrete places of symbolic value in their activism and policy influencing is their use of the Danish-German border. In 1999, Denmark joined the Schengen cooperation involving free movement across national borders between member countries and thus the abolishment of physical demarcations of the Danish-German border with effect from May 2001. Since then, it has been the official policy of DF to have physical border control – police stationed at the border – brought back. The argument is: it makes no sense to lock your front door to prevent intrusion, if the country's borders are wide open (Dansk Folkeparti, n.d.).

The open border and the consequent agenda to reintroduce border control has been of highest priority of the DF since 2001. When the police withdrew from the border station at *Sæd*, the party bought the station building and in connection with every election since then – be it municipal, regional, national, or European – politicians from the party have hosted activities at the border. For example, in May 2010, the former leader of the party Pia Kjærsgaard, visited the border near *Padborg* on the east coast and observed the work by customs patrol officers supervising the border crossing traffic. Or as the journalist covering the event in the local news explained: '*Pia Kjærsgaard visited the border to see how the customs officers tackled control of foreigners'*. As part of the same trip – the Danish-German border is 300 kms from Copenhagen and thus a three-hour drive – she visited the nearby site *Dybbøl* where Denmark lost an important battle against Prussian troops in 1864 which ultimately led to the loss of the southern part of Jutland (later reunited with Denmark in 1920), had traditional honey-cake in *Christiansfeld* and a public meeting at the Castle Inn in *Gram* (*Gram Slotskro*). Thus, the visit to the border

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also included important historical sites as well as an occasion to meet the locals and have traditional, local food. The impression supported by the journalistic coverage is this: The DF and Pia Kjærsgaard supervise the limited border control, they care about the country's safety, understand the necessity to protect it and what is valuable to its citizens (TV SYD 2010).

In 2016, border control was reintroduced temporarily as a result of an increasing number of immigrants and refugees arriving in Europe in 2014 and 2015. In 2017, the party leader who followed Kjærsgaard, Kristian Thulesen Dahl, used the municipal and regional election campaign to emphasise the political result from 2016 and to demand the temporary control being made permanent as well as better working conditions for the stationed officers. He states:

> 'It is only natural for a country to guard its borders. And at a time in history with continued waves of migrants, an acute terror threat and border crossing crime, the need for a strengthened and permanent Danish border control must be clear to everyone' (Dahl 2017).

Apparently, the symbolic importance of the border exceeds the demand for patrolling officers and physical control as this has already been reintroduced, and the importance is stressed with references to alien threats from terrorists and other criminals. In this manner, the border is a tool for the DF to establish Danes and Denmark as something pure and safe threatened by outside forces. Here, national identity is defined on the basis of a dystopian future where intolerant others are considered to erode the distinguishable system of practices and ideas. The border symbolically and materially represents the intention to sustain the hegemonic political and social order supposedly challenged by ideas and practices embodied in certain others who represent, in the social imaginary of DF, the ultimate antithesis. Even the current border restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic are made possible not only because of the threat of the virus but also because the restriction of "infected" bodies has been historically ingrained in the meaning and practice of the border. Metaphorically speaking, the foreign bodies that traverse the border are typically considered a potential "infection" to the national state by DF and the association between threats from outside the borders of the national realm and the fear of

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the ultimate otherness as represented by the Muslim subject is easily combined and activated in DF's politics.

As Michel Agiers (2016, p. 18) reminds us, borders are best understood as an active verb, as '*being made'*, rather than fixed and absolute entities. The active social component of borders is also evident in the discursive performances of the PVV in the Netherlands. Before establishing the PVV, Geert Wilders withdrew as member of parliament from the liberal democratic People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*, VVD) in 2004 to take a stance against the proposal to accept Turkey as a member nation of the European Union (Fennema 2010). In the 2005 "Declaration of Independence" (*Onafhankelijkheidsverklaring*), Wilders advocated to defend national culture and identity from the corruption and betrayal of the political and cultural elite (Fennema 2010). Taking the position of preceding public and political figures, such as Hans Janmaat, Frits Bolkestein, Pim Fortuyn, and Theo van Gogh, the PVV represents (popular) opposition against the multicultural project and tolerance towards the Muslim Other. Following the 2021 general elections, the PVV is the third largest party with 17 seats in the House of Representatives and, together with the more recently established Forum for Democracy (*Forum voor Democratie*, FvD) takes the formal position of a radically conservative opposition to the centre-right coalition government. Above all, the PVV articulates a collective will through the negation with an essentialised hermeneutics of Islam (as practiced by HT) (Wilders 2010).

Wilders is prominent in reiterating the 2005 *Jyllands-Posten* controversy by reproducing Muhammed cartoons that are provocative for essentialist Islamist parties and actors, such as HT. When in September 2005, the newspaper Danish Jyllands-Posten published twelve cartoons under the title *Muhammeds Ansigt* "The Face of Muhammed", large demonstrations were held across the Muslim world. The demonstrations, which Saba Mahmood (2009) argues were exploited for various reasons by (Muslim) governments and Islamists alike, symbolised a commitment to the Prophet in the objection of defamation. In turn, the (violent) reactions of Muslims provoked a strong commitment across the political spectrum to the right of free speech. Gradually, a selected few of the Jyllands-Posten cartoons became a symbol for the "resistance" against the objections of defaming the Prophet prevalent among a small group of Muslims (Sinclair, 2021).

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In his 2008 short film *Fitna*, Wilders reproduced one of the most distributed cartoons published in the *Jyllands-Posten*. Kurt Westergaard, the cartoonist, accused Wilders of misappropriating the cartoon for political ends, and the cartoon was later cut from the film. Nonetheless, the cartoon has been used widely to substantiate the claim that Muslims are essentially intolerant to secular values that grant the right to defame religion and religious symbols. In 2020, Wilders reproduced Westergaard's cartoon again but with the face of Turkish President Erdôgan with the title "terrorist" for which Erdôgan filed a complaint under Turkish law (where insulting the President in a crime). In 2018, Wilders organised a Muhammed cartoon contest to be held in the party's office in Dutch parliament. In the end, the contest was cancelled after an attack in Amsterdam by a German-based refugee from Afghanistan who wanted to retaliate against Wilders' attack on the Prophet. The attack demonstrated the message of the cartoon: that Muslims are essentially intolerant and therefore at odds with liberal and secular societies.

The practice of the Muhammed cartoons helps to instil an imagination of place as ideal, historical, and essentialised. Through the discursive practice of both the far right and Islamists, the cartoons have a polarising function in creating an essential distinction between the Orient and the Occident (Jung 2011). In their response to the cartoons, HT is practising the ideal place of the caliphate; a place where the Prophet and Muslims are protected from defamation. Through this example, we aim to illustrate that the caliphate as an essentialised concept, beyond geographical boundaries, is practiced not only within Muslim majority countries but within the greater Muslim diaspora as a function of identity and belonging; sustaining an otherness from majority homogenous host societies. We argue that the uses of place, whether positively or negatively, are comparable in the three cases; HT, DF and PVV. All three parties excel at combining place with acceptable/unacceptable behaviour and appeal to sense-making amongst their public and membership audiences. The illustrative places are sufficiently specific and unspecific to function in the imagination of the audiences. Pointing to insufficient border control reads like pointing to a threat from outside, and Muhammed cartoons symbols of expressions of not belonging "here" and a national "us" and hosting the perfect event points to state-making abilities in a future caliphate. At the same time, the ways places are used and referred to are sufficiently clear in communicating good and bad, right and wrong.

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The practice of "out of placeness"

As has become evident from our analysis thus far, a mythological understanding of the past - representing a complete and closed place or identity – is fundamental to the making and defining of place. As Cresswell (2006) suggests, place is rooted in history. By reversing this statement – history is rooted in place – we can more easily perceive the multiplicity and tension in the making of place. With reference to the illustrations chosen here, we suggest the practice of a certain mythology of place is particularly evident when the mobility of bodies changes the physical dimension of place. In this context, the range of possibility of how history can be defined is altered by the sum of practices of migrants. Thus, theoretically, we could say that the practice of the caliphate in Denmark or the Netherlands is co-constitutive, that both DF/PVV and HT contribute to the history of place in the way they imagine their generic ideal state.

In their conception of spatial ideas (or ideal places), both DF/PVV and HT practice an alternative socio-political ideal in defining and changing the limits of what is right and proper. In their practice, they are deliberately non-conformist and provocative, contesting the everyday conceptions of the good. The annual 'Khalifah Conference' organised by different HT chapters is an example of an event that dislocates social and political common sense. In 2014, a motion was proposed in response to a conference organised in the Netherlands to ban the Dutch HT chapter. The motion, initiated by the centre-right Christian Democratic Appeal (*Christen-Democratisch Appèl*, CDA) and the Calvinistic Reformed Political Party (*Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij*, SGP) stated 'there is no place for such condemnable ideals in the Netherlands'. Paradoxically, however, the improperness of the ideal of the caliphate (note: without capital 'c') is imperative to its practice as a distanced, or even impossible, spatial ideal. In different words, the enactment of the caliphate as a daily practice (such as the Khalifah Conference) relies on its improperness, as an act of political activism. Rather than saying, "there is no place for such condemnable ideals" full stop, the motion emphasises there is no place for the caliphate *here*. This is telling of both HT's political ideal – that the ideal state is elsewhere – and the spatial ideals of DF/PVV that are under threat *because of* the Muslim Other and her place of origin: the Caliphate. HT is demonstrating to the public that the Caliphate can be anywhere, while DF/PVV is equally clear in demonstrating *not here!* The ideal depends on a Muslim-free place.

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Where the Muslim subject is considered “out of place” by parties such as DF and PVV, so also does HT conceive there is a place of origin – a homeland – for Muslims. In either case, Muslims must not occupy a social position that adds meaning to a place not considered their natural or ultimate homeland. Instead, Muslims have a place of their own that is whole and closed in entity. We can therefore say that the contestation between DF/PVV and HT is about the confines of place, about what is “in place” and “out of place”. The “out of placeness” of Muslims rests on the assumption that Muslims can only swear allegiance to *one* place and not multiple places simultaneously. And thereby equally saying Muslims have but one, static identity rather than more complex, dynamic and incomplete identities; their alliance is, first and foremost, with their Muslimness (Hall 1989).[6] For PVV, in our view, the Muhammed cartoons signify the same “out of placeness” of Muslims in their commitment to the “non place” of the caliphate. With the caliphate as a “non-place” – an impossible utopia – the Muhammed cartoons offer a possibility to practice the rejection of the secular value that grants people the right to offend and defame. In claiming the cartoons are a symbol of a social and political order that is irreconcilable with Islamic traditions, values and principles, HT is practicing the ideal state of the caliphate where such defamation will be not tolerated. And by doing so within the spatial coordinates of the Netherlands and Denmark, they are practicing a kind of displacement, which we argue is best considered a symbolic and *active* (rather than passive) form of spatial resistance.

DF/PVV aspire to restore the *proper* meaning of place confined to a mythology of origin. For HT, the caliphate represents the proper place for Muslims, bound to a historical imaginary of a place of origin. As Sinclair and Jung (2020, 105) write, HT’s aim is ‘directed at both the formation of Muslim subjects and an Islamic social order’ by means of transgressing the boundaries between state and subjectivity. For both sides, the position of Muslims in the West is a threat to the potential transgression of the meaning of place (as either the Occident or Orient). By ascribing normatively essentialising meanings to place (e.g. cultural or religious purity) both DF/PVV and HT want to demonstrate that the properness of place is a matter of power, and not merely a matter of truth or rightness. In their essentialising position, DF/PVV and HT want to restore the

[6] Here we are considering Stuart Hall’s understanding of culture in terms of ‘roots’ or ‘routes’ (1987, 1995), but also Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) and the ‘school’ of discourse theory, who propose thinking of identities as a “never complete, always in process” representation (Hall 1987, p. 221).

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proper meaning of place and metaphorically replace it with origin or nature. In other words, place is practiced as having inherent (natural) features and qualities only ascribed to a given people.

In the practice of “out of placeness”, HT and PVV/DF are engaging in a shared practice of *origin* (or nature) espousing an ideology (of cultural and social multiplicity) that is at odds with the dominant social and political order. In the view of DF and PVV, the cultural and political elite is betraying place (as a place of origin) by allowing for the Muslim Other, and her embodiment of the caliphate (as her natural place of origin). The "wave" of immigrants since 2014 are a warning of the end of place. It is therefore that, for the PVV, Hungary serves as an example in defending the “fort of Europe” against the “flock” of Muslim migrants (Wilders 2017). Hungary is defending the origin of place (the European continent and peoples). Although from an opposite position in ideational terms, HT practices place on the basis of the same cultural spirit that jeopardises the ideal of the ultimate homeland: the Caliphate. We are thus arguing the presence of a shared essentialising geography whereby DF/PVV and HT are the active agents of a dialectic of the ideal spatial order.

Dystopia and utopia

The former member of HT talking about her work in the organisation as a matter of creating utopia at events, spiked our thinking in terms of the dichotomy of utopia and dystopia. Hence, after pointing to the dichotomy between utopia and dystopia in our reading of the use of place in our case studies, we turn to an investigation into how this dichotomy may qualify our analysis of lived space in essentialising political phenomena.

Derived from the 16th century Greek language, utopia can be translated to “not” (*ou*) and “place” (*topos*), first used in Thomas More’s 1516 novel Utopia. In his book, More describes in precision the social life of the fictional land Utopia that, when taken literally, can be defined as being “nowhere” or “not in place”. Yet, taking into account More’s common play on words we should consider the double meaning of utopia related to the Greek word “*eutopos*” which translated into “good place”. As Merijn Oudenampsen (2016, 43) suggests, More’s utopia is both normative and satirical in it being ‘an unstable and unrealizable image of the future that serves to critique the present’. Slavoj Žižek (2004) introduces a third conception beyond the imaginary and the

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normative to claim utopia is an immediate enactment - a practice that responds to the emergent disaster of human reality. Thus, for Žižek, utopia is a practice, neither planned nor imagined, but an inevitable enactment in the form of a synthesis to escape the status quo. In our analysis, we look at this double meaning of "no place" and "good place" in the way utopia is enacted. By thinking of utopia in this active sense (i.e. as a verb) we are able to see the *impossible*, namely to construct a place that can never be "in place". Therefore, paradoxically, we speak of utopia as imaginary and emergent as well as present and existent.

In the 19th century, John Stuart Mill (1868) introduced dystopia to the social sciences with reference to the earlier medical usage of the prefix "*dys*" to refer to that which is abnormal, bad or ill. Mill used the term in a speech to insinuate utopia is fundamentally dystopian due to its inherent impracticability. In the words of Mill (1868), 'what is commonly called Utopian is something too good to be practicable; but what they appear to favour is too bad to be practicable'. With his dystopia, Mill designates what is already present in More's utopia, namely the normative dichotomy of good and bad. As with any dichotomy, utopia and dystopia are mutually inclusive concepts in their conception, and mutually exclusive in their outcome – a dystopian and utopian spatial ideal cannot coincide together. However, there can be no practice/discourse of utopia without the precedent of a practice/discourse of dystopia, and vice versa.

Considering utopia first and foremost as a practice of spatial ideals serves as a vantage point to analyse the conceptions of the good that informs its rationality. As More invokes us to think, utopia opens political imagination to be susceptible to an ideal. By way of being visionary, the practice of utopia is not bound to the rational and can expand beyond the possible, toward that which is temporally and spatially radical. In the context of democracy, Thomas Brockelman (2003, 185) writes 'the impossibility of the utopian is the very *starting-point* of radical democratic theory'. With that in mind, the political enactment - or practice - of utopia, is the utility of a radical collective and not utopia itself. As Žižek (2004) suggests, the closure of utopia is only possible when the Other is negated. What this implies is that the projection of closure is visible in the negation of the Other in the political identities that we present in our case study. For example, members of HT practice utopia when they develop and meet to discuss the details of the future caliphate. They likewise practice dystopia when they speak about the inevitable catastrophe for

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Muslims in the spatial context of the current world order. As signifiers then, the utopia/dystopia dichotomy creates a negative and irreconcilable frontier between the caliphate on the one hand and democratic society on the other; what is good is the caliphate and what is bad is democracy. Following the same discursive logic, DF and PVV likewise practice utopia and dystopia according to the negation of the (Muslim) Other.

This leads us to what Ẑiẑek (2004) calls the "the real core of utopia". The aforementioned member of HT *re-enacts* the vision of the caliphate not in its future ideal state (when it is established) but within the perimeters of what is (discursively) possible. Therefore, our argument goes, the members of the party do not merely imagine utopia but also re-enact its past ideal – its mythology. As Ẑiẑek suggests in his 2004 lecture series, the real utopia is not an act of 'free imagination' but rather an act that derives from 'an inner urge'; a necessary invention because there is no other option. The crèche in the example above may not signify the ideal type crèche imagined for the ideal type caliphate, but rather signifies the utopia that is possible to be enacted given the spatial symbolic coordinates. While the crèche in itself is not an act of impossibility – nothing in the practice sounds particularly utopian or radical – but in the words of Ẑiẑek (2004), utopia is not about planning but about enacting the impossible; it is a process. In the words of an-Nabhani (1999, 25), 'for ideas to be political, they must be related to the possible. That is why politics is the art of the possible, not the impossible'. For the HT member above, the crèche signifies the enactment of the possible, the practice of the caliphate within the coordinates of what is deemed possible. From interviews with the Dutch media representative, Okay Pala, we can suggest HT does not want to be defined as a peripheral party. Rather, HT wants to be defined *beyond* the periphery. What is deemed politically possible is inherently a reflection of the hegemonic liberal democratic (and capitalist) order. Therefore, as Pala explained during an interview (2018), HT can never be defined using 'western' categories, such as the political centre, left or right. For HT, in the hegemonic spatial context, the caliphate is a practice of possibility in its very impossibility. Paradoxically then, the positioning of HT *beyond* the frame of possibility legitimises the caliphate as an alternative order that is more just and equitable. When Pala (2018, November 5) was asked where to position the party on the traditional political spectrum, he argued the spectrum is only limited to a particular ideological view of the

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world to which HT does not belong. In his view, the spectrum is a means to define, and subsequently delegitimise, the impossible. By being positioned beyond the normative boundaries of the political spectrum, HT enacts the impossibility that is fundamental to the utopian imaginary.

Concluding Reflections: A co-constitutive practice of place

Our interest in understanding the inner workings of essentialising political activism through the lens of lived space stems from the Islamist caliphate ideal and its role amongst activists. After applying the lived space lens to other ideologically informed essentialising parties, we argue that this approach helps us move beyond mere documentation and analysis of discourses. As an alternative, the perspective of lived space helps to understand how particular spatial examples and practices appeal to the imagination of activists, recruits and voters. With our analysis we intend to demonstrate the caliphate is more than an imaginary ideal; it is, in Žižekian terms, immediately enacted. Such enactment of the caliphate, in the example of the crèche for instance, is a *re*-enactment of a particular utopian spatial ideal. In other words, the utopia –as well as the dystopia – of the caliphate, is being practiced everyday through the likes of activists, recruits and voters, both in opposition and approval.

Thinking *with* place and studying lived space adds to our understanding of essentialising political activism. It is more than ideas and activities, and due to framing of place and identification with an ideal state, the imagination of a better future is activated. Furthermore, it is not purely idealist but a tangible future as it is *placed.* This, the placing in a state or countering a state, adds to its attraction as it can be immediately enacted. It makes it more obtainable and thus closer to the here and now. Behind the state ideal and practice of place lie almost archetypical notions of utopia and dystopia. The political organisation succeeding in activating these deep founded understandings of good and bad will succeed in mobilising member activists.

As we have come to discern from the inference of the concept of lived space to the imaginary of the good, for dystopia to "make sense", place must be able to revoke some kind of natural state. In the words of Cresswell (1996, 161), the "nature" of place can be 'offered as justification for particular views of what is good, just, and appropriate'. As the case studies suggest, the dystopian imaginary tells a story of a probable future

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inadvertently proclaiming a natural state of social order. The natural aura of place becomes evident when we look at the utopia/dystopia dialectic in the discursive practice of the caliphate, creating a frontier between “in place” and “out of place”, through a mythology of a “non-place” In their heretical position, both the utopian and dystopian imaginary of the caliphate functions to dislocate the subjects *beyond* place. By positioning their utopian and dystopian discourse of the Muslim subject beyond place we argue that both subjects co-constitutively practice the caliphate. The co-constitutive practice of the ideal state draws attention to the utility of place and “non-place” to shift the peripheries of common sense meaning and practice of place.

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