INTRODUCTION

# Thinking about the Other

**Abstract**

This chapter introduces readers to the scholarship of the role of the Other in modern politics. It engages with the philosophical and theoretical literature concerned with the ever-present potential of antagonism to produce political change. The chapter reflects on modern dominant manifestations of populism to draw a distinction between different political conceptions of the Other, arguing the global political stage today is occupied by a mode of thinking about the Other that is foundationally anti-democratic and anti-pluralist. In introducing the populist logic of far right and Islamist politics, it challenges the main lines of argumentation that the Muslim Other is a product of the rupture that occurred on 9/11. Rather, the chapter proposes a dialectical approach to view the re-emergence of the Muslim Other whereby the conditions of the time are brought to the foreground.

**Keywords:** far right, Islamism, populism, Muslim Other, dialectics, identity politics

> Both sides of the antagonistic relation are necessary in order to create a single space of representation.
> (Laclau 2005, 318–319)

Researchers have heavily invested in understanding the politicisation of the Other. Across the world today, the Other is determining politics in different contexts, from the Rohingyas in Myanmar, Uighurs in China, Hindus, Christians, and Sikhs in Afghanistan, Muslims in India, Hindus in Pakistan, Pakistanis in the United Kingdom, Blacks in South Africa, Indigenous peoples in Canada and Australia, women in Iran, Mexicans in the United States, to Russians in Ukraine and Ukrainians in Russia. The unfolding war between Israel and Palestine is perhaps the most obvious in being marked by the demonisation and dehumanisation of the Other, with Arab Muslims becoming the single representation of Palestinians and the Palestinian cause, disregarding the position of Christian and non-Arab Palestinians, and Israelis being subsumed under their Jewishness, neglecting the religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity that defines Israel. This centralisation of the Other reduces the war on a social plane to the hatred for the terrorising Muslim Other on the one hand, and Jewish oppressor—also an Other—on the other.

Whereas the practice of respectfully and peacefully coexisting with the Other is the more common reality across the world, there has been an increasing misappropriation of the Other that has led to escalating and devastating conflicts. This is partly due to the paradoxical nature of the Other that allows the toleration of the Other in everyday social life, while simultaneously supporting a political discourse that contributes to their demonisation. This tension between the private and public, or personal and political, is often overlooked in studies intended to comprehend the support for populist politics that relies on the demonisation of a social Other.

We can look at almost every country in the modern world and find an Other that is defining social and political realities, either in the present or immediate past. The Other refers to 'another' subject that represents radical difference. Rather than a mere representation, the Other is performed and embodied by members of the social group that constitute the Other, yet is not limited to variables of identities, such as ethnicity, race, religion and gender, which is the common inference of the Other. Rather, the Other, in the way it is referred to in this book, is a lived alterity by the observer and the observed. The content of otherness can be general or singular, like ethnic difference, without other forms of identifications attached. Or it can be more distinct and complex, such as in the case of African Muslims in the southern fringes of Europe, for example, where race, class, and religion all matter in the politicisation and dehumanisation of refugees. However, focusing solely on the Other as an object for identification, we tend to disregard that a collective consists of individuals who are the receivers, and victims, of the politicisation of their identities. They are the *subjects* that constitute the Other.

Despite the varying ways and degrees that the Other is politicised, there is a persistence in the Other defining how to relate to place, and the people who inhabit it. Understanding one's place in the world *through* the Other does not have to result in negative outcomes where people can no longer coexist peacefully, and place becomes a space for exclusion, discrimination, and violence. The Other, when articulated in terms of difference and distinctness, can be a force for constructive change that leads to resistance against social inequalities, emancipation of minorities, and politico-economic transformations that break down the structural imbalances of wealth and power that exist in today's advanced capitalist world. In democratic contexts, parties on the left advocate for difference *a priori* and tolerance towards difference, considering difference an intrinsic value of modern societies. In doing so, there is a tendency to be blinded by the nature of difference which sometimes puts politics at a standstill. The demand to tolerate difference rather than explore the essence and social and political implications of such difference can cease rather than advance politics, in the democratic constructive sense. This, I argue, is partly why far right politics, in their various contents and forms, has been so successful in recent times. By and large, the political left has kept the principle of difference so

close to their politics not wanting to acknowledge there is a large number of people with certain concerns about the radical changes they are observing, consciously and unconsciously, in society. In turn, a vacuum has emerged that has allowed a voice of resistance against a political order that encourages a society where difference reigns, and the 'people' are forgotten.

Contingent on appropriate conditions (e.g., financial crisis, mass unemployment, food scarcity), identity politics has become a recurrent feature of modern democracy. The increasing visibility and adaptability of radical right parties has coincided with a prevalence of identity politics. Recent studies on the mainstreaming of radical right parties suggest that growing adaptability across the political spectrum has contributed to a proliferation of identity politics. Today, it is not uncommon for centre-right or centre-left parties to adopt discursive strategies of identity politics to compensate for the position of radical right discourses in society and politics. As a starting point, identity politics articulates the demands of identity according to strict categories of ethnicity, nation, race, religion and gender (Fukuyama 2018). Some post-Marxist political theorists assign the popularity of identity politics to the shortcomings of the neoliberal market economy (e.g., Piketty 2013), others perceive the failure in modern democracy undermining equality and popular sovereignty (e.g., Mouffe 2019).

Identity politics and populism are often understood in the same breath (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017; Noury & Roland 2020; Rooduijn 2019). Populist politics employs identity tactics to construct political cleavages with the general aim of activating political agency among a part of the citizenry. In the context of the United States, for example, identity politics is closely related to the political agency of minority groups, as can be observed in the Black Lives Matter movement or the alt-right Proud Boys, for instance (Noury & Roland 2020). Instead of functioning as a tool for social and political agency, identity politics is predominantly practiced, even when unintentionally so, to activate binary oppositions within society. Jan Werner Müller (2016, 3) argues in *What is Populism?* that populist politics 'is always a form of identity politics'. Müller (2016) goes on to say the reliance on conflict encourages polarisation, which makes populism an inherent threat to democracy. Conversely, as post-Marxist approaches to populism propose, the conflictual nature of populist politics has the potential to unite different identities alongside a common objective. Whereas identity politics, particularly in its prevalent form, functions to segregate different identities into individual (emancipatory) struggles, the aim of populism is to construct a collective front to transform relations and structures of power (see for example, de Cleen & Glynos 2021; Mouffe 2014; Venizelos & Stavrakakis 2022).

The success of populism is precisely in the linking of different political identities, grievances, desires, and demands that are not neatly fitting together ideologically. Therefore, populism is not an ideological position, but a political strategy to bring together a wide range of people who connect with each other through their shared

opposition towards the group that is considered to control the means of production of social, political, economic, and cultural life. This group, also known as the 'elite' in populist rhetoric and scholarship, captures the various resentments, discontentment, and apprehensions that reside within society. Some of these are consciously experienced, such as the current housing crisis unfolding in most advanced capitalist countries that puts economic and mental strain on people. Others are hidden in the subconscious elements that constitutive 'individual selves' (Elias 2000 [1939], 160), in the case of 'the sheer *pleasure* for resistance itself' for example, where the prime motivation is the pleasure, and not the discontent upon which such pleasure is projected (Frosh 2019). Recent realities from across the world reveal that the incongruence of submerged, emergent, and existing discontents function to connect a multitude of different, and contrasting, voices.

Another way the Other can be practiced demands a radically different outlook on the mechanism of antagonism in politics and society. Some political theorists consider antagonism to be the root of any social constitution (e.g., Marchart 2018), whereas others focus more on its intrinsic role in democratic politics (e.g., Devenney 2016; Laclau 2005), especially concerning its potential in developing a more (radical) democratic order (e.g., Mouffe 2011, 2013, 2018). In either case, antagonism, from a theoretical and political position that recognises its democratic potential, is a process of politicising and depoliticising rather than a 'phenomenon' that needs to be prevented or overcome (through consensus politics, for instance). The crucial step is recognising antagonism as a feature that makes modern politics possible. Paraphrasing the words of political theorist Ernesto Laclau (2005), to overcome antagonism would be the end of politics. It is important to note scholars who ascribe to the 'ontological dimension of antagonism' (Mouffe 2013, 9) differentiate between politics and the political (Laclau & Mouffe 2001 [1985]). Following Chantal Mouffe's (1994) distinction, politics refers to the 'ontic', which is the actual practice and materialisation of *organising* human existence. The differential, or conflictual, social context in which politics operates is what is called 'the political'. This ontological position considers difference and conflict as the inherent foundation of social organisation and modern human life. Providing that difference cannot be resolved, antagonism, considered as the process of articulating difference, is forever present. That should not be read as there being a constant potential of actual conflicts; instead, using Oliver Marchart's (2018, 3) words, it pertains to the 'precarious nature' of our social bonds. These are always in a process of making, unmaking, and remaking; the outcome of which, at any point, is precarious and contingent.

The term 'populism' was first used as an ideological descriptor to describe political resistance of farmers in different parts of the United States that emerged in the mid to late nineteenth century (Hahn 1979)—although the phenomenon itself goes back much further than that (think about the term *populares* used in the Roman

Republic dating as far back as 133 BC). Restricted to rural workers at first, with a purge of non-rural members, populist logics were applied to construe an alliance between farmers, rural teachers, ministers, and doctors, and construct a frontier against the *non-rural* economic, social, and political elite (Tucker 1947). Populism became a term initially used by historians, and later political scientists, to describe political movements that were opposed to large forces of modernisation, globalisation, and industrialisation, and used populist tactics as their last resort (Tucker 1947), and does not frequently engage with the historical account of the *populares* to explain the politics of the Late Roman Republic (Robb 2010). However, current literature takes for granted the fact that the term stems from the late nineteenth century agrarian movement in North America (Fuentes 2020), and does not frequently engage with the historical account of the *populares* to explain the politics of the Late Roman Republic (Robb 2010). The populist scholarship does not engage with the historical account of the *populares* to explain the politics of the Late Roman Republic (Robb 2010). Although controversial, and falsely according to Margaret Robb (2010), the *populares* and *optimates* division is used to describe the popular opposition of the *populares* towards the elite, the *optimates*. Notwithstanding the validity of the term to describe Late Roman politics, it is interesting to note that the modern literature on populism does not engage with political history beyond nineteenth-century North America, and even that connection is limited. Fast forward and populism has become a derogatory term in the popular imagination to describe and explain the reactionary politics that has entered the mainstream in almost every democratic context, to varying and fluctuating political success. Hence I agree with recent scholarship that argues populism has become a signifier of its own that minimises or entirely overlooks the radical, democratic potential of a left populist alternative (Goyvaerts 2021; Katsembakis 2022; Stavrakakis 2017).

What prevalent reactionary forms of populist politics have in common is an attachment to a changing world order whereby the figure of the Other—who is often occupied by the Muslim—is either misplaced or displaced. Notwithstanding the influence of reactionary populist politics that centers around another social Other, the Muslim is a decisive figure in shaping radical and mainstream politics in different parts of the world. From the theoretical vantage point taken in this book, this is even foundational to the reactionary populist parties that do not explicitly have an Islamophobic component to their rhetoric. It is impossible, I contend, to detach the prominent position of the Muslim Other from reactionary claims and demands made by made by populists, even if the antagonist is Mexican immigrants, in the case of the US, for example. While context is undeniably important in constructing the specific demands that are articulated through populist discourse (think about the dominant populist frontier in Pakistan and India that is apparently historical, for instance), an increasing cosmopolitan world society has

been accompanied with a cosmopolitan solidarity that transcends political claims beyond the modern conventional territories of politics. Populists talk *through* local claims to mobilise people around demands and discontents that are socially meaningful to them. More inexplicably, however, is the multiplicity of unspoken claims that are activated through the emotions and affects that are mobilised with that which *is* uttered. For example, the anger that is activated through the farmers movements that are unfolding almost simultaneously in different parts of the world is perceived as anger that is the result of the demands and discontents that are articulated through the 'farmers discourse'. An extended position is that this anger was already activated through the articulation of preceding and ideologically unconnected discontents (i.e., not an extension of preceding workers' movements in ideological terms). Although the 'farmers discourse' is not conveying discontents about refugee immigration, for instance, it can be presumed based on the logical extension of the demands and discontents that formulate the 'people', that even when these claims are not articulated, through the emotions that are activated, other, seemingly unconnected, claims are mobilised. This is what psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan captures as the distinction between desire and demand. In the populist farmers movements, the demand is the 'return' of sovereignty to the 'people'; a demand which encapsulates a string of discontents and desires that are deliberately, though also unconsciously, kept below the surface.

Although far right discourses and politics differ across political and cultural contexts, the Muslim Other has consolidated a multiplicity of parties, organisations, movements, ideologies, and peoples along a populist front. In other words, populism has been utilised as a political strategy around the central denominator of the Muslim Other to sediment populism itself. Across the world, populism has become the modus operandi in a multitude of countries over a relatively short period of time. It would be reductionist to claim the Muslim Other, and the dislocations of 9/11, is the starting point of the 'populist wave' (Mudde 2016). However, the turn of the century is a reminder of the prominent political position of the Other in modern society, and a failure of the post-war period to fully acknowledge that. What makes reactionary claims persuasive is the kernel of truth that exists within each demand.

Linking the failure of the multiculturalist agenda with the Muslim Other is not limited to the political right that is 'riding the populist wave' in Europe and the United States (Bale & Kaltwasser 2021), where the Muslim has informed a discourse of civilisational replacement and social incommensurability. It is also central in religious-inspired discourses in Muslim-majority countries where a return to the 'authentic' Muslim has become a prime demand. In that sense, populists across cultural and religious spheres rely on the idea the Muslim is misplaced and displaced in the context of the liberal hegemonic order. Those political actors who have warned against the Islamisation of Europe, like the Dutch Geert Wilders, consider

Muslims incompatible with secular values and liberal principles. According to Muslim political leaders such as Recep Tayyip Erdogan, it is the intolerant, Islamophobic attitude of people in the West that is intrinsic to the liberal and secular hegemonic order. Returning to Muslimhood and Islamic governance will bring peace, tolerance, and social cohesion to the (Muslim) world. In both positions it is the notion of the 'authentic' and 'good' Muslim that is subsuming the historical and contextual Muslim, who is diverse and complex in identification, and by no means irreconcilable with secularity. This metaphorisation of the Muslim reduces Muslim subjectivities to a single space of representation and single Islamic hermeneutics and is maintained by populist actors that are ideologically opposing but politically reinforcing.

The shared efforts of these extreme[1] positions in displacing the 'true' Muslim from the secular, liberal, modern, and democratic domain translates into different politics. Ontically and ideologically, far right and Islamist politics that employs a populist strategy to construct a frontier between the real Muslim and the hegemonic order has gained significant political power in recent years.[2] Naturally, the politics of Erdogan is ideologically different to the politics of Wilders. Ontologically, however, the form by which their politics is conducted, and the content upon which it is based, is following a shared logic of discourse. That is not to say the content is the same, because the ontic dimension of politics is spatial as well as temporal. Who and what constitutes the 'elite' is dependent on the social relations that exists in a certain context. However, the discursive mode by which the Muslim is overdetermined as the primary figure that is corrupted or corrupting, terrorised or terrorising, suppressed or suppressing is similar across these ideological terrains. The 2023 electoral success of Erdogan and Wilders, among other Islamist and far right politicians, begs the question of the central place of the Other, as an ontological category, in democracy. How can democracy embrace the imperative status of the Other without the temptation for the Other to become a concrete social other, such as the Muslim, that leads to conflict that violates the basic tenets of democracy?

Contrary to what leftist political theorists are often accused of, the counter-argument is not that cultural and religious identities are open to whatever meaning, without there being any boundaries to what that may be. This is the so-called

[1] With extreme I mean the most rigid in conception and the furthest from the multiple Muslim identities that constitute the global Muslim population (see for example, Jung 2019; Rane 2021).

[2] Note must be made about the two categories central to the book: Islamism and far right. I accept these categories encompass a range of ideologies and discourses. Islamist ideologies and discourses are varied and many throughout history, ranging from theological and hermeneutical differences, specific forms of governance, cultural adaptations, to distinct aims and action. Daesh, also known as the Islamic State (IS) or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), is at great variance with the Tunisian Ennahda who claim to be 'Muslim democrats, not Islamists' (Ghannouchi 2016)

post-modernist cultural Marxism that political far right leaders such as the Dutch Thierry Baudet are said to confront. Post-Marxist theories, such as the theory of hegemony I adhere to in this book, do not contend there is no core to culture and religion. On the contrary, without that core, culture or religion ceases to exist. In the case of Islam, the parameters of meaning are conditional to the primacy of the Qur'ān, the Hadith, and to a lesser degree, the various Covenants of the prophet Muhammed (for a discussion on the Covenants and their relative neglect in recent history, see Rane 2023). Islamic hermeneutics is contingent on the conditions of time and space, and the multitude of factors that allow for certain hermeneutics to prevail, and others to disappear. What has prevailed in the modern imagination of Islam, especially since the Al-Qaeda attacks in the United States in 2001, is a narrow and closed conception of Islam and Muslimhood. Despite the persistent efforts from Muslims and non-Muslims in academia, politics, media, and other public and cultural spheres who posit the open and flexible foundations of Islam and Muslimhood, an antagonistic standpoint towards Islam has prevailed, even amongst people who consider themselves tolerant and critical. This tension is found in the simultaneous adherence of certain Muslims to such a closed and narrow conception of their religious identification. The visibility of their mode of identification, and sometimes their politics, brings into question the *a priori* position of tolerance that liberal democratic citizens adhere to. What becomes the topic of continuous debate then is whether there is a place for Islam in the West. This is however the wrong question to ask seeing it naturalises a historical antagonism between Abrahamic religions and secular societies.

Valid arguments that demonstrate coherence between Muslimhood and democratic, secular, and modern societies are easily disregarded by the realities of terrorist attacks, militant resistance, and demands for a caliphate.[3] As a subject of suspicion, the Muslim has been asked to advocate for their own legitimate place in a liberal and secular society. And even after more than two decades since the 2001 attack on the United States, Muslims are continually expected to condemn the actions of their fellow Muslims who express and perform political identities other than their own. This goes back to the erroneous question of whether there is a place for Muslims in liberal and secular democratic society. It subsumes the multiplicity of identities under the shared denominator of being a Muslim inconsistently, aiming to turn to the basic doubt of whether Islam is fundamentally aligned with principles of freedom, tolerance, and secularity.

In this context of distrust, populism has been instrumentalised to mobilise these essential conceptions of Muslimhood. It is for that reason it is analytically useful to

[3] The caliphate or *khilāfah* is an Islamic institution or state under stewardship of a *caliph* or Islamic ruler aimed at uniting and governing the Muslim world, or the *ummah*; the Muslim community.

examine populist politics that relies on the figure of the Muslim. In like fashion to the figure of the Jew, the Muslim Other is not reserved for one ideological orientation. Historically, antisemitism has existed within leftist, rightist, and Islamist political formations. It is therefore worth asking how the Muslim Other is mobilised, normalised, and performed. The point of departure is seeking out the dialectical relationship between far right and Islamist politics that share at their core a populist logic. Following Laclau and others from the Essex School, this populist logic is a political, discursive strategy to absorb and make apparent unsatisfied demands and desires that exist within society (Laclau 2005, Zicman de Barros 2019). These demands come to 'make sense', or become 'socially meaningful' using discourse-theoretical terms, when they are seen to be in equivalence to each other (Zicman de Barros 2019). They are seen in equivalence to each other when they are considered unsatisfied for one reason, which is the threat, culprit, or corrupter that unifies these demands.

Media and academics alike have preoccupied themselves with dominant essentialist populisms, using a limited definition of populism to provide answers to its emergence and appeal. In doing so, the potential of populism to achieve constructive social and political change has been largely disregarded. The one-sided take on populism has allowed for the deepening of racial, ethnic, religious and national divisions. What reactionary populism has done is strengthen the already existing tensions that social differences can provoke. Alternatively, a left populism redirects these tensions that often occur in moments of crisis or rapid change to reduce rather than strengthen social divisions. It is no surprise, therefore, that populism has emerged as a leading political force in current times of rapid social change as a result of economic, environmental, geopolitical, and technological developments. What has been unforeseen to many, however, is that this has taken a reactionary form, and religious identity has come back to the fore. In the final sections of the book, we shall discuss the contingency of populism, and the conditions that make reactionary populisms more likely to prevail than a populism that promotes social heterogeneity.

Although the focus of the book is on far right and Islamist ideologies that adhere to a populist logic that is reactionary in *content*, it draws on theoretical interventions that posit the need for the articulation of an antagonism that opposes the inequalities and anti-democratic tendencies of the neoliberal hegemonic order (Mouffe 2013). This theoretical approach, also called a discourse-theoretical, post-foundational or post-structural approach, is particularly useful for contexts where populism has been utilised to promote certain ideologies (Vulović & Palonen 2023). This is the case in Turkey, for instance, where the leading Justice and Development Party regime has been successful in attaching populism to a specific kind of Islamism. Likewise, as recent election outcomes in the Netherlands demonstrate, the far right Party for Freedom has triumphed through the use of a populist articulation that is attached to a strict form of nationalism, or a masquerade of

nationalism that is more like racism or what some call civilisationism (Yilmaz & Morieson 2023). Marina Vulović and Emilia Palonen (2023) propose a distinction between the form and content of populism, or the ontological and ontic dimension of populism respectively, to make visible the interactions between populism and other forms of politics and certain ideologies, such as nationalism, authoritarianism, and Islamism. The ontological dimension (or form) by which the 'people' are constructed vis-à-vis the 'elite' remains the same (which is why Laclauian scholars adhere to populism as a *logic* or *mode* of articulation or signification); however, what differs is the ontic *content* that is attached to the *form.* That 'empty form of populism' (Palonen 2018) is the constant variable that defines the mode of 'doing' politics (Eklundh & Knott 2020, 11), which is essentialist, closed, and therefore, anti-democratic.

The debate between the 'ideational' and 'theoretical' school of populism often leans on the emphasis, or lack of emphasis, placed on the *form* of populism. Because of its focus on seeking populism's defining characteristics, it is not surprising the ideational scholarship is more dominant. We are embedded in a world where ontologies and epistemologies of partition and stasis reign (Brincat 2011), and the populism scholarship is not immune to that; where an object is abstracted from the whole, like the Muslim in the West, to be inspected under a magnifying loupe, without being placed back into the whole. And so the Muslim becomes assessed on their degree of integration, religiosity, and subjectivity *at a specific moment in time*, without that temporality being understood from a broader lens that considers that religiosity, for instance, an expression of time itself. As an alternative, I resort to a dialectical mode of thinking that prioritises seeing the object as constituting a complex web of social relations. What becomes the object under scrutiny then, is not the defining characteristics of an ideological force, but the ways in which it constitutes itself in relation to its surrounding world.

Second, there are distinct political implications attached to a homogeneous (closed, exclusive, or reactionary) or heterogeneous (open, inclusive, or progressive) construction of the Other. Arguably, and contrary to what theories of modernity posited in the twentieth century, the advancements of society have brought with them a strong inclination to retreat to narrow conceptions of selfhood and otherhood. This is due to the philosophical, psychological, cultural, and ideological conditions that make the overdetermination of simplistic, reduced, and fixed conceptions of ourselves, and our social and environmental world, possible. These conditions are not deterministic in that they cannot lead to a mode of being and politics that is more conducive to the realisation of stronger democracies, lesser inequalities, and better social empathy and understanding. What has unfolded, however, is a weakening of democracies around the world, due to the triumph of advanced capitalism that has been accompanied by increasing inequalities,

political distrust, and a collective disinclination to listen to voices of difference. These are the conditions for populism to thrive, and simultaneously, the outcomes that prevailing forms of populism further seek to exploit.

The aim of the book is to explore the dialectic between far right and Islamist populisms through the shared investment in a Muslim Other and examine the implications of that relationship for modern pluralist societies. It pertains to the serious impediment to society in a globally interwoven and entangled world; a world in which place is more fluid and space is more prone to being 'encroached' by an Other. The book proposes a closer engagement with the essential role of the Other in modern pluralist and democratic societies. It therefore asks, how is the politics of a Muslim Other effective in manufacturing a social division that undermines the possibility of society?

Although the book is not limited to one place, the empirical evidence that informs this exploration is located in the Netherlands. I selected the Dutch context because I am a Dutch national and therefore understand the cultural and linguistic background. But more relevant is the Dutch far right Party for Freedom and the founder and leader, Wilders, as the emblem of mainstreaming an Islamophobic, populist politics in the Netherlands, Europe, the United States, India, and other places where Muslim migration has prevailed in recent decades. Moreover, the Netherlands is one of the few places where the transnational Islamist organisation, Hizb ut-Tahrir, remains legally operational. Although Hizb ut-Tahrir is a relatively insignificant organisation in terms of political power, they have been consistent since their origin in the 1950s in legitimising the demand of a caliphate to govern Muslims around the world. Besides, they are one of the few political organisations that advocates for a caliphate consistently and systematically within democratic contexts. Finally, Hizb ut-Tahrir deploys a populist logic in bringing together a diverse range of socio-economic challenges, unfulfilled desires, unattained fantasies, and spiritual shortages that they link to hegemonic capitalist, Western ideology. This makes the organisation, as a political discourse, an important case subject, because it renders visible the *workings* of populism within a temporal context of anti-Muslim politics.

Adhering to discourse-theoretical foundations, the book employs a method that is aimed at bringing to the foreground the relations and conditions that make the object of the Muslim possible (de Cleen et al. 2021). Although the 'radical displacement' in the conception of the Muslim cannot be temporally located, the book starts from the emergence of Party for Freedom as a party in 2005. The reason for this is twofold. First, it captures the global discourse that developed after the 2001 attacks in the United States and the war in Iraq and Afghanistan and can be considered a moment of displacement in the growth of far right and Islamist politics. With the formation of Party for Freedom in the Dutch context, discourses that rely on

a frontier between the West and Islam evolved into a dialectical relationship. It is needless to say that mythological and rhetorical foundations existed well before 2001; the construction of the Muslim post-2001 was contingent on the prevailing conditions that made an irreconcilable conception possible. The ample amount of studies that abstract the 'post-2001' period highlight the dialectics of Islamist terrorism, far right politics, and the institutionalisation of Islamophobia, in the case of the so-called Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) policies.[4] There is, however, empirical and theoretical implications of a preoccupation with the conditions after 2001. From a discourse-theoretical standpoint, the events of 2001 act as a moment of radical displacement which has allowed the Muslim to be signified as Other. Theoretically, this is of course contingent, and the signification of the Muslim could have been otherwise. Empirically, the conditions in the case of the Netherlands were such that allowed the amalgamation of Muslims with the 'failure' of the model of multiculturalism, as politicians in the 1980s and 1990s had begun to argue (Oudenampsen 2020). The failed tale of multiculturalism, according to politicians like Frits Bolkenstein, Paul Scheffer, and Pim Fortuyn, rests on the argument that tolerance and difference has been detrimental to Culture.

Second, the emergence of Party for Freedom as a voice to a considerable amount of people in society is an important moment in time to discern the susceptibility of constructing a division around society's Other, especially when taking into account Party for Freedom, is the largest party in Parliament since 2023, with 37 seats. It therefore begins with an exploration of religious and cultural divisions that exist within society. The vantage point is that any form of social division is the outcome of a given signification of society. It is therefore always a political act in that polarisation is the outcome of a discourse that is socially meaningful to a section of society. Without the *lived practice* of social division (or the discourse of polarisation), the linguistic construction of a division remains an intangible phenomenon. After all, discourse must always be *lived* for a constellation of contents to become a discourse. Without people to adhere to certain demands such as the 'de-Islamisation' of the Netherlands and Europe, in their attitudes, behaviour, and emotions, these demands will 'float' into the 'discursive realm' without being formed into a discourse (Martilla 2019). The social relevance and meaningfulness is found in the process of linking discursive elements to one another so that the individual elements can formulate a discourse. Using the demand of 'de-Islamisation of society' as articulated by the far right, or 're-Islamisation of society' by Islamists, how they become socially meaningful is contingent on how they are put

[4] The CVE paradigm has shifted since the rise in extreme and radical right movements and violence and is now including different extremisms. However, CVE was initially limited to Muslim extremism and Islamic radicalism (Abbas 2021).

in relationship with other elements, like the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the absence of an Islamic state that transcends national borders. *How* these demands are signified depends on their relationship with other meaning-contents.

Methodologically, what is required is a constant moving from the general to the specific and back again. This may, to some readers, be deemed random, unstructured, and disorganised. However, it is precisely the tension between the general and the specific that defines populist politics. Party for Freedom and Hizb ut-Tahrir are worth examining because they operate on the general and the specific. On the general, they aim to constitute a universal that is stripped from any particularities. Hence why Wilders tends to refer to Islam to ascribe those who adhere to Islam—Muslims—universalist features (e.g., adherents to a political ideology of violence) without bringing to mind the diverse theological, spiritual, ethnic, cultural, and racial constituents that constitute Muslims. This metaphorisation is a political act to subsume Muslims under a universalist conception of Islam. The general, however, interacts with the specific in that such a metaphorisation is only possible if the two elements that constitute the substitution (in this case, Islam and Muslims) are connected to other elements that make the metaphor socially relevant. It has to therefore be situated within the local sphere, meaning that general claims and demands also contain specific elements, and vice versa. This is a dialectical method of inquiry not only by seeking out the relationship between different discourses (far right and Islamist) but also by moving between different levels of observation (Brincat & de Groot Heupner 2020). Some readers would consider such an approach lacking a methodical application, and this is understandable seeing dominant modes of inquiry adhere to strict categorisations and demarcations. However, it is the rationale of this inquiry to take a more fluid approach for the exact reason to render visible the fluid nature of populism.

This methodological stance also explains the selection of Hizb ut-Tahrir. There are numerous other Islamist organisations, movements, and parties that operate in Western contexts, such as the Muslim Brotherhood. However, Hizb ut-Tahrir is relevant because it relies heavily on ideological persuasion and mobilisation. And while a transnational organisation such as the Muslim Brotherhood similarly mobilises people around ideological desires and demands, their politics is dependent on the local context. Hizb ut-Tahrir operates according to a strict ideological and political method for achieving the *khalifah*. The organisation is a self-proclaimed *hizb* or party, but they abstain from electoral politics, notwithstanding the local context. Their entire mobilisation rests on ideological persuasion (or reasoned enlightenment) to re-constitute the *ummah* according to a fixed, ideological conception of Islam. The first step is to create a vanguard who prescribe to 'intellectual reasoning' that guides them to a political hermeneutics of Islam. This vanguard will lead the *ummah* towards the right path, away from the hegemonic Western, liberal

order that undermines Muslim solidarity, perverts Islamic thought, and prevents a harmonious society. The third and final step is military mobilisation to establish an Islamic state by which the *ummah*, which here includes non-Muslims also, can be governed. If Hizb ut-Tahrir is assessed on the basis of their political success or membership for their analytical validity, their relevance could be considered limited. However, despite their illegitimate status in most countries, the organisation remains active and, most notably, relevant for Muslims seeking an ideological and political alternative. In Indonesia, where the organisation was banned in 2017, Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) remains an active and socially meaningful voice in moralising the public space. It is therefore valid to include Hizb ut-Tahrir in studies that explore Islamist politics that mobilises people around a frontier between Islam and the West. Moreover, because the Dutch Hizb ut-Tahrir is operational, the Netherlands is invaluable in the examination of the dialectic of the Muslim Other.

How are the voices of politicians such as Wilders and organisations like Hizb ut-Tahrir constructing a social division in Dutch society? The answers pivot on the shared foundations upon which each discourse rests. Bringing to light the *mutual investment* in the Muslim Other directs attention to the populist aim to disrupt the hegemonic order. Rather than seeking *how* each discourse constructs the Muslim Other, the intent of the book is to demonstrate what this mutual investment means for the hegemonic order. What does it mean for democratic politics? And what does it mean for pluralist societies? How successful are far right and Islamist politics that share at their core an irreconcilable conception of the Muslim Other in *manufacturing* a division in society along multiple cleavages? These questions are largely left unanswered for the reason that most studies tend to disregard the relational dimension that binds far right and Islamist politics together. The few studies that examine the relational element emphasise the interaction itself, and focus therefore on conclusions such as 'reciprocal radicalisation' (Bailey & Edwards 2017), components of the discourse, such as Islamophobia (Abbas 2012, 2019), or performances of discourse, in the conception of extremism and radicalisation (Ebner 2017), do not acknowledge the immanent position of the Other in politics. This leads to different conclusions and prescriptions concerning the role of the hegemonic, neoliberal and democratic order that is, from a discourse-theoretical standpoint, explicable for the appeal of anti-democratic politics.

The Other is embedded in modern pluralist democracies not in the existence of a concrete other, but in the structural possibility to replace the big Other—e.g., the State—for a concrete other. Empirically, our scholarly focus has been on the former—the existence of a concrete other—instead of the latter. For example, Andreas Zick et al. (2011) support the proposition there is a strong correlation between negative attitudes toward different groups that are perceived to not belong to the majority group defining cultural or national identity. Based on a survey conducted

among 8,000 participants across eight European countries, the authors argue there exists a 'group-focused enmity' that is part of a 'syndrome' of negative attitudes towards different groups considered 'different', 'abnormal' or 'inferior' (Zick et al. 2011, 13). With respect to attitudes and prejudices towards Jews and Muslims, there is a high correlation coefficient of .37 across the countries, particularly in Western European countries. In the Netherlands, there is a strong relationship between negative attitudes towards Muslims and immigrants, with a figure of .66. Although the quantitative analysis suggests negative attitudes towards Muslims are not inseparable from other forms of prejudice, the single-country data indicate that negative attitudes towards Muslims and Islam are most widespread (Zick et al. 2011).

By the 1980s, after detaching itself from overt fascism and totalitarianism, the far right had successfully escaped marginalisation by using economic instability and structural discontent to create a new "loser" group (Rydgren 2005, 415). A clear symptom of this instability and related discontents is the concept, lived experience, and policy of the Other in the form of 'a new innovative master frame' (of which Islamophobia is the key example, but we can also consider antisemitism in response to the unfolding war between Israel and Hamas/Palestine) (Rydgren 2005, 414). As the original source of definition (not including Edward Said's earlier work under the term orientalism), the Runnymede Trust (1997, 1) defines Islamophobia on the grounds of the minimum definition of xenophobia to denote the 'hatred [...] fear or dislike of all or most Muslims'. While it remains the cornerstone of any interpretation of Islamophobia more than two decades on, key limitations of the definition have been widely identified (e.g., van der Valk & Törnberg 2015). In her reporting of Islamophobia in the Netherlands, Irene van der Valk contends that the definition is highly emotional and subjective, which has made the separation between legitimate concerns about the practice of Muslims and interpretation of Islam and outright acts of discrimination and racism almost impossible (van der Valk 2012). While it is an important concept to examine the social and individual realities of discrimination and prejudice, it can also provoke further polarisation on both sides of the spectrum (Allen 2010). Despite questions of legitimacy, initiatives such as the Islamic Human Rights Commission's "Islamophobe of the Year" award bear witness to an inadequate response to address the flaws of the concept, and the nature of the phenomenon (Allen 2010). While religion is the key variable, as shown in the dataset of Zick et al. (2011), the politics of Islamophobia are intertwined with the politics of race and ethnicity (Abbas 2017; Mondon & Winter 2020). In the Netherlands, Dutch-Moroccans function as the primary metonymic subject in the same way Turkish do in Germany or Algerians in France (Jones 2016). Thus, by way of substituting ethnic identity with religious identity and vice versa, Dutch-Moroccans and Muslims become one of the same.

Corresponding with the migration of Muslims during the second half of the twentieth century, there has been an export of different (national) Islams to Europe

and other Western countries (Laurence 2011). In his analysis on the emancipation of Europe's Muslims, Jonathan Laurence (2011) observes that it has historically been in the interest of sending as well as host countries to curb the level by which Muslim migrants, or guest workers, integrate. They were, after all, supposed to return to their home countries. Retrospectively, host governments were not sufficiently adaptive to the changing pattern from temporary to permanent migration, allowing (and continuing to allow) foreign governments, such as Turkey and Morocco to manage the religious affairs of the Muslim diaspora (Laurence 2011). Particularly prevalent between the 1980s and 2000s, the export of different (national) Islams was closely intertwined with increasing concerns about the threat of amalgamation of radical ideas across the Muslim world (Laurence 2011). Islamophobia, given attention in the late 1990s with the Runnymede Trust report, is not merely an outcome of patterns of Muslim migration, but is also entangled with the export of different national and cultural, and particularly conservative and fundamentalist, Islams. It is therefore important to consider the prevalence of Islamophobia and the popularity of radical right parties as inseparable from the export (both to Western countries and elsewhere) and import (especially across the Muslim world) of Islamisms disguised as Islams.

Islamism is widely acknowledged as an illiberal form of governance despite its variations in terms of hermeneutics, strategies and objectives. One of the dominant reasons attributed to the modern (re)articulations of Islamism is the democratisation of the Muslim world by regimes that 'socially marginalized, economically ignored, politically persecuted and publicly demonized' Islam in the past (Osman 2016, xii). Resistance against neo-colonisation, such as the Arab Spring (2010–12), is considered a critique of 'prevalence of forms of organized modernity in the Muslim world' (Jung 2017, 29). The social unrest that marked the Arab Spring activated concerns predominantly across the Gulf region and raised questions about the validity of dominant modernisation theories with respect to the presence (or lack of presence) of religion (Jung 2011; Osman 2020). The discrepancy between the novelty of the term and the history of the phenomenon can help explain certain scholarly accounts that emphasise a resurgence or revival of Islamic politics. Roy (2004, 58), for example, defines Islamic politics as aiming to claim to 're-create a true Islamic society' founded on divine law and politics. On a dialectical basis, Abu-Rabi' (2010) refutes Roy's proposition of one single paradigm that does not give primacy to historical motions and adaptations. In the words of Abu-Rabi' (2010, xx), 'there is too much that is contemporary […] to constitute one single paradigm'. From the observations of Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (2010, 219), Islamism is going through a process of reform that is 'closer to being relativist rather than absolutist, practical rather than idealistic, moderate rather than extreme, constructive rather than destructive, and specific rather than general'. In light of Edward Said's critique

of orientalism, the entangled discourses of occidentalists and orientalists alike prevail and develop in a space of entangled modernities, which renders a linear explanation unimaginable or, as Abu-Rabi' (2010) suggests, inaccurate.

Within the context of (orientalist) modernity, Islamic civilisations and societies have come to be exposed to the tensions between the secular and the religious, the Salafist and the modern, and the Arab and the European (Osman 2016, 254). Abu-Rabi' (2010, xi) reflects on the vast array of Islamist doctrines to say that 'from Muhammad Muntasir in Indonesia to Abu al-'Ala al-Mawdudi in India and later Pakistan, to Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb in Egypt, [each of them] were driven by a global vision which they translated to their followers in the local idiom'. In British India, the political theory of Sayyid Abu A'la al-Mawdudi was found on the premise that religion and politics are fundamentally inextricable (Cheema 2013), not unlike the consensus of most Indian philosophers that religion and philosophy in India are inseparable (Baggini 2018). In Egypt, a similar intersection between religion and politics is apparent in the prominent ideology of Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb (Esposito & El-Din Shahin 2018). These examples illustrate the importance of spatial histories in understanding the legitimacy of Islamism in the context of the twenty-first century.

From Roy's (2004) perspective, the inevitable disenchantment with Islamism will instigate a period of 'post-Islamism', characterised by the privatisation and depoliticisation of religion. Yet, as Abu-Rabi' (2010) notes, the demand for authority and autonomy does not necessarily equate with the desire to achieve such a goal. Whereas the abstinence of politics can be interpreted as the incapability of Islamism to integrate into a geopolitical world of liberal and democratic politics, the observations of Abu-Rabi' (2010) imply that the goal of integrating religion and politics is not necessarily one of immediacy. Hizb ut-Tahrir is an example of a political group that abstained from politics on the ontic level (Sinclair 2010). Any discrepancy between action and thought does not necessitate a distinction per se between those who are and those who are not concerned with obtaining immediate political power. As Ergün Yıldırım (2012, 37) points out, the defining emphasis on the political constituent tends to reduce Islamism to 'a form of instrumentalization of Islam' for the pursuit of political ends. Such a reductionist approach assigns to Islam a mere political means and leaves the political ideology stripped bare of the intellectual and spiritual dimensions that have historically been intrinsic to any form of Islamism (Yıldırım 2012).

As a common denominator, the eighteenth-century Islamist Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab, the nineteenth-century Egyptian Muhammad 'Abduh and the twentieth century Egyptian Sayyid Qutb aimed to establish an alternative to the hegemonic articulation of the West (Jung 2019). Besides its Anglo-Saxon and evangelist connotations, the category of fundamental thought is prevalent in the scholarly and

theological inquiry in the first principles of jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*) and religion (*usul al-din*) (Choueiri 1997). However, as Khaled M. Abou El Fadl (2005, 18) notes, the term 'fundamentalism' with respect to Islam implies 'only fundamentalists base their interpretations on the Qur'ān the traditions of the Prophet'. This produces a false binary between different normative denominations of Muslim subjectivity and fundamentalists (Abou El Fadl 2005). With respect to the literary works of the intellectual and spiritual founders of revivalist and reformist thought, fundamentalist ideology can justifiably be expounded as an authentic Islamic signifier (Choueiri 1997).

Islamic revivalism denotes the popular reactionary movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that is marked by the signification of Islam as 'a symbol of resistance and defiance' (Abou El Fadl 2005, 43). Rather than a genuine interest in developing Islamic thought, revivalists such as Muhammad al-Shawkani and Ali Jalal al-San'ani were more interested in using Islam to oppose religious innovations and territorial domination (Abu-Rabi' 2010). The influential revivalist movement coincided with the radical and extreme puritanical movement associated with Muhammed Ibn Adbul Wahhab and the consequent movement of Wahhabism, albeit with complicated associations (Abou Ed Fadl 2005; Ali 2003). In the form of a new synthesis, Islamic reformism took centre stage as a necessary innovative movement to compensate for the conscious stagnation of Islamic societies. In contrast to revivalism, Islamic reformism found inspiration in the primary objectives of the Reformation and modes of analysis situated at the core of the Enlightenment (Choueiri 1997). The analytical paradigm of science and reason became the source for reform and rational interpretation (*ijtihad*) of Islamic principles, removed from historical accumulated traditions. With the consolidations of modernities in the wider political community, reformists such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad 'Abduh turned to Islam as a 'normative system' (Choueiri 1997, 32) and a restorative instrument for the modernisation of Muslim subjectivities.

Initially derived from the Qur'ān and reinterpreted in the twentieth century by Islamist thinkers (e.g., Mawdudi), the concept of ignorance (*jahiliyya*) is employed to signify the modern nation as the bearer of *jahiliyya* (Soage 2009). Contrary to the nation of Islam and belief, the modern nation is grounded in the dissolvement of spirit and unity (synonymous with misguidance and disbelief), and founded upon artificial divisions of race, culture and place (Choueiri 1997). Notwithstanding the theological diversity among Islamist thinkers, the common denominator of intertwining religion and politics is suggestive of the vigorous attempts to separate Islam from the liberal and secular ideologies defining the modern nation. Thus, Islamism is ultimately tied to the ideational embodiment of the nation that legitimises the resistance against, and adaptation to, forces of modernity (Sinclair & Feldt 2011; Jung & Sinclair 2015). What Olivier Roy (2004, 29) coins a "globalised"

Islam is the synthesis of different struggles against hegemonies of modernity, and the consequence of a 'westernisation [and objectification] of Islam'.

Through the prism of Western modernity, Islamism is understood as a mere form of resistance (Silvestri 2010). The earlier work of Gilles Kepel (2000) resonates with Sara Silvestri's (2010) reduction of Islamism to a kind of reactionary politics on a macro level (Sinclair 2010). The reduction of Islam to a mere object of instrumentality neglects the reproduction and transformations of Islamisms into new forms, spaces and places (Sinclair & Feldt, 2011). For Qutb, the community of Muslims (*ummah*) is not tied to geographical and political boundaries, and is therefore the ultimate embodiment of spiritual association (Abu-Rabi' 2010; Esposito & El-Din Shahin 2018). The convergence of populism and nationalism further contributes to a conception of Islamism as a mere form of resistance. Therefore, the confluence of populism and nationalism is not separated from modern articulations of Islamism. Rather, modern Islamism is intertwined with populist and nationalist articulations in its prevalent ambition to establish a metaphoric relation between the *ummah* and the Islamic nation. In the articulation of the transnational Hizb ut-Tahrir, the *ummah* is the nation, and the *ummah* is the party (*hizb*). Hence, Hizb ut-Tahrir is the *name* of the people, the *ummah*, and therefore an authentic representation of Islam. Yet, the dominant conception of Islamism as the antithesis of secular politics leads to the confluence between nationalism and Islamism often being unacknowledged (McNeil-Willson 2021). For example, in the context of Indonesia, Vedi Hadiz (2014, 131) considers that the 'New Islamic Populism' employs religious rather than nationalist symbols and concepts. However, more recent research on Islamist populism conducted by Ihsan Yilmaz and Nicholas Morieson (e.g., 2022, 2023) among others, indicates that the nationalist and civilisationist dimensions are entangled in a more complex way than Hadiz argued.

Dietrich Jung (2017, 2019) presents a social theory of modern Muslim subjectivities to oppose the singular view of modernity as a linear process towards secularity. Contrary to classical modernisation theory, modernity, as Zygmunt Bauman (2013) argued before him, should be put in the plural to account for its 'social and cultural diversity' (Jung 2017, 13). Theories of Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt's (2000) 'multiple modernities' are ultimately relevant to the study of the Muslim subject to 'bring religion and tradition back in' to counter the classical assumptions that modernity is identical to human progress and cultural homogeneity (Jung 2017, 16). Instead of upholding the classical paradigm, Kirstine Sinclair (2010, 109) suggests 'the victimization of Muslims should not be seen as something Middle Eastern, Arabic or Muslim but as containing elements of modern, Western culture and self-imaging'.

With regard to Muslims in the West, studies of integration are often tied, even when inexplicit, to research on the religiosity among Muslims. To put it differently, the religiosity of Muslims is both a qualitative and quantitative indicator of social

integration into Dutch culture (e.g., Elfersy 2013; Ersanilla & Koopmans 2013; Jackson 2009; Maliepaard et al. 2012). For example, in the research conducted by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (Maliepaard et al. 2012, 359), religiosity is quantified on the basis of mosque attendance to test 'mechanisms of religious decline and religious vitality'. The study builds on former research to evaluate whether there exists a continuing 'secularizing trend' [sic] among first- and second-generation Muslims (Maliepaard et al. 2012, 359). The quantitative data indicates an increase in mosque attendance, which the study infers as a diminishing secularising effect. Drawing such a positive correlation is problematic for at least two reasons. First, religiosity is measured on the basis of religious practices, which gives an indication of religious belief and practice but not of religious interpretation. It does not provide answers as to what informs religious belief and practice, whether it is religious fundamentals or a particular philosophy on social and political life. Second, the findings (and methods) are grounded in the classical modernisation theory that keeps up the mythology that secularity is something modern, and specific to Western cultures (i.e., the product of the evolution of Christianity).

Fundamental to a discourse-theoretical approach to populism is the notion of affect, something that is often disregarded from the extremism or radicalisation scholarship that is occupied with the relationality of far right and Islamist politics. The 'emotional turn' in politics refers to the heightened performance of emotions in politics, and theoretical recognition that emotions are intrinsic to politics. Naturally, the prevalence of emotions in politics is not a new discovery, but particularly in the populism scholarship, emotions and affect have been theoretically and empirically neglected. In post-structural theories of hegemony, such as the Laclauian school of populism, affect is deemed an elemental principle of the political. Here, affect is distinct from emotions, with emotions being a phenomenal experience—something someone can feel and identify—while affect is something that lies beneath the phenomenal (Yates 2019). Both are experienced but emotions are recognised, and given names, whereas affect can remain 'dormant' in the unconscious. Drawing on the psychoanalytic theory of Lacan, affect is linked to repression and contains the ideas that are forbidden and, therefore, repressed (Yates 2019). Through this lens it is the fantasmatic dimensions that underlie certain discourses, such as returning to a society that privileges cultural homogeneity over diversity, that contains the affective power. Whether explicitly articulated or not, these fantasmatic dimensions contain certain emotions, such as hope, resentment, or contempt, that are then mobilised.

What is of interest then is how affect is mobilised in the ideological fantasies that inform far right and Islamist politics. The return to 'culture' and 'religion' in the form of an ethnocentric state (the far right demand) or a religio-centric state (the Islamist demand) contains a fantasy of achieving uniformity and wholeness.

This fantasy is obstructed by the presence of the Other, who prevents the subject (e.g., individual, nation) from becoming whole. From a discourse-theoretical lens, the *lack* constituted within self-identification is at risk of being articulated fantasmatically; through the fantasy that wholeness is possible. In other words, social identities can *resolve* the lack that is experienced by framing the Other to be the explanation for it. Because lack is essential to social identification, and thus politics, how it is articulated is contingent. The fact it is being articulated through ideological fantasies, such as the caliphate, demonstrates a political utilisation of lack to mobilise emotions, such as angst and fear, attached to an impossible wholeness.

That impossible wholeness, as the book will demonstrate, does not exist in a vacuum but has come to the surface in different parts of the world, with different ideologies attached, as affective forces are activated. Albeit not for the right reasons, I consider there is no better example in our current global world to demonstrate this than the lived practice of essentialising of the Muslim.

In relative complexities, these essentialising mechanisms are narrowing our social space. We are witnessing growing cleavages between social identities, with the Muslim and non-Muslim cleavage being one of them. A social division that transcends spatial boundaries has severe implications for individuals, groups, nations, and the global order. Individuals become the victims of discrimination and racism, as lived experiences of Muslims in the West evinces (see for example, Abbas 2021; Akbarzadeh 2016; Duderija & Rane 2019; Mondon & Winter 2017). A most diverse religious group has been reduced to a single denominator. Such signification has a significant effect on how people in that group respond. We have seen Muslims, in the West in particular, retreat to silence, while others, mostly Muslim intellectuals, resist the reduction of lived experiences of Muslims, and the distortion of Islam. Then there are those who have elected to fight in material terms, through militant resistance, for instance. Another serious implication of the wedge between Muslim and non-Muslim populations is military conflict.

In Orientalism (1978), the late Edward Said explains how a particular intellectual approach can influence our understanding of entire cultures and histories. In his 2018 book *Thinking Antagonism*, Marchart presents an alternative approach to dominant political ontologies, or more accurately, ontologies of the political, that define modern ways of thought concerning the notion and status of difference in democratic, social constitution and political identification. Conflictual thinking is nothing new; the post-modern intellectual tradition is grounded in it. Said (1978) reminds us of the implications of the epistemological ‘crisis’ that reduces the role of the Other in the constitution of selfhood. Marchart provokes us to think about ontologies about the political that disturb our common knowledge of the Other as something that should be subdued or overcome. Psychoanalysis teaches us that (mis)perceptions of the Other are more telling of (mis)understandings of the Self.

The purpose of the book is to bring to the foreground the Other/Self dialectic and the implications of a universalisation of the Other for democratic, pluralist societies and, most critically, non-violence. I am hopeful the reader will be asked to think in terms of relations, and consider the value of doing so in their engagement with the polarising and essentialising political ideologies that are pervading our world today.

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