

SPECIAL ISSUE

VOLUME 7 ISSUE 3

2022

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Published online: 31 December 2022



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To cite this article:

de Groot Heupner, Susan. "Fantasy in Far Right and Islamist Political Ideologies." *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 7, no. 3 (2022): 15-34.

FANTASY IN FAR RIGHT AND ISLAMIST POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES

Susan de Groot Heupner*

Abstract: This article explores the role of fantasy in far and Islamist political ideologies, using a psychoanalytic political theory lens. With the prevalence of the politics of hatred as a backdrop, it examines the nature and function of fantasies in two competing ideologies. Through the application of the psychoanalytic concept of fantasies, the article demonstrates the similar ways in which these competing ideologies invest in an essentialist Muslim Other. The article reflects on radical politics in the Netherlands, using the far-right party, Forum for Democracy, and a mostly clandestine Islamist group, Hizb ut-Tahrir, as case subjects. Drawing on textual data, the article focuses on the hegemonic struggle that constructs a parallel society through the dreaming and implementation of alternative institutions. These “shadow institutions” reveal the potential of far-right and Islamist politics to activate antagonism between Islam and the West based on the contingent subject of the Muslim Other.

Keywords: *Islamist, far-right, ideology, fantasy, psychoanalysis*

INTRODUCTION

There is abundant literature on far-right and Islamist politics. Far-right articulations are a predominant subject matter in populist scholarship, whereas Islamist politics is more prevalent in areas of international relations and security studies. Although there is a distinct field of research that is occupied with the commonalities and relationships between far-right and Islamist politics,¹ their intersections have been scarcely studied from a perspective that recognises the role of the unconscious in the formation of collective identities. There is growing recognition in the political and social sciences that the unconscious is an important dimension

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¹ See, for example, Tahir Abbas, *Islamophobia and Radicalisation: A Vicious Cycle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Tahir Abbas, *Far Right and Islamist Radicalisation in an Age of Austerity: A Review of Sociological Trends and Implications for Policy*, Policy Brief (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2020); Julia Ebner, *The Rage: The Vicious Circle of Islamist and Far-right Extremism* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017).

in the formation of political ideologies and identities.² Within the populism scholarship, the “discursive” or “theoretical” strand inspired by the pivotal book, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, published by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in 1985, as well as their subsequent individual contributions, the unconscious is a fundamental dimension in the study of political identity formation.³ Drawing on the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, scholarship rooted in the ontological premises of Laclau and Mouffe’s theoretical intervention that privileges the position of difference and antagonism in society and politics. Through a psychoanalytic lens, the “workings of society within each individual” can be understood through the affective investments in one’s identity position in society.⁴ In a time when the Other is a prominent figure in mainstream politics, a psychoanalytic enquiry can present an alternative view in the motivations behind social and political otherisation. Even more so seeing that the politics of otherisation has moved from the peripheries into the mainstream in a lot of countries across the world. The Other is no longer a figure of the radical but an increasingly normalised subject that is at the centre of doing politics. This way of doing politics is not reserved to specific locations, political contexts or ideologies, but evident in all kinds of “worlds,” with the Islamic world being one of them.⁵ Especially seeing the Muslim has become a key figure in politics of otherisation, it is pertinent to examine what lies beneath the investment in the Muslim Other, in the far-right and Islamist politics.

What distinguishes a psychoanalytic political theorisation of the Other is the premise of a fantasmatic foundation to the process and act of social identity formation. A rationalist approach, which scrutinises the political motivations of people based on what is acknowledged, explicitly articulated and observable, does not recognise the underlying drives and desires that often inform people’s motivations.⁶ The notion of fantasy is one such entry point to the unconscious realm that can explain why people support xenophobic, nativist, authoritarian, fascist and racist politics, despite their tolerant and democratic leanings. This is apparent in current forms of antagonistic (instead of agonistic) populism where the Other functions to exclude and persecute entire social groups, of which Muslims are a prime example. Although psychoanalysis and religion are often considered an “odd couple” and largely incompatible, there is shared interest in the notion of desire.⁷ The desire that underlies the object of fantasy – the fantasmatic – is what sets apart the empirical from the conceptual figure.⁸ This nuance is especially crucial in the study of the Muslim Other. When that differentiation is missed, the

² See, for example, Jason Glynos, “Ideological Fantasy at Work,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13, no. 3 (2008); Jason Glynos, “Critical Fantasy Studies,” *Journal of Language and Politics* 20, no. 1 (2021); Yannis Stavrakakis, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Psychoanalytic Political Theory* (London: Routledge, 2019); Slavoj Žižek, *The Abyss of Freedom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

³ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, vol. 8 (New York: Verso Books, 2014).

⁴ Stephen Frosh, *The Politics of Psychoanalysis: An Introduction to Freudian and Post-Freudian Theory* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999), 317.

⁵ See, for example, Fethi Benslama, *Psychoanalysis and the Challenge of Islam* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Andrea Mura, “Religion and Islamic Radicalization,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Psychoanalytic Political Theory*, ed. Yannis Stavrakakis (London: Routledge, 2019).

⁶ Stavrakakis, *Routledge Handbook*.

⁷ Mura, “Religion and Islamic Radicalization,” 316.

⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *Interrogating the Real* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006).

symbolic figure can easily be mistaken for the empirical figure. For example, the Muslim can become the object of fear and anger based on individual and shared grievances and blame attribution. This observation and lived experience, however, does not separate the empirical (that which the Muslim represents) from the conceptual (the personification of a shadow). The shadow is the reflection of society that resides, like a mirror, in the individuals that constitute that society. There is something that preceded the centrality of the Muslim Other in concrete social struggles that, following a psychoanalytic line of argumentation, is found within society's expectation to repress antagonism.⁹

Referring to Slavoj Žižek's interpretation of Claude Levi-Strauss' analysis of the research method of drawing the spatial composition of the village of Indigenous South Americans, a photograph of the village from the sky is not a true but a distorted depiction of reality. The drawings of the Indigenous villagers did not resemble the actual disposition of the houses, but a circular or divisive depiction of the villager's relation to other sub-groups in the village.¹⁰ In the circular depiction, houses are centred around a temple; in the divisive depiction there was clear demarcation between one group of houses and another. These two representations, following psychoanalytic theory, are an expression of a "constant." This constant is the incessant presence of an antagonism that cannot be resolved but exists in tension because it composes a "balanced symbolic structure."¹¹ With respect to the Muslim Other, this example points to the symbolic structure that is held in balance through sameness (in Left politics) and otherness (in Right politics). These two opposing positions concerning the position of Muslims in society is not too different from the 20th century Jew; "all that I dream about without disturbances" on one side and "all that 'irritates' me about the Other" on the other.¹² Combined, these co-constitutive aspects are the building blocks of fantasy in a democratic and socially pluralist society. These fantasies come to the foreground when the inability to cope with the unresolvable presence of social antagonism is put to test. Hence, populist scholarship often centralises the moment of crisis, without arriving at the core of what that crisis actually evokes. This is why, when a social subject becomes more visible in society, like the Muslim has become in liberal democratic societies in recent times through increased mobility, antagonism can come to the fore more bluntly and vulgarly.

Discourse scholars, such as Ernesto Laclau,¹³ Yannis Stavrakakis,¹⁴ Jason Glynos¹⁵ and Zicman de Barros,¹⁶ draw on Lacan to theorise "politico-ideological communication."¹⁷ Lacan

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid, 231.

¹² Ibid, 233.

¹³ Ernesto Laclau, "The Impossibility of Society," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Science* 15, no. 1-3 (1991); Ernesto Laclau, *The Making of Political Identities* (London: Verso, 1994).

¹⁴ Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political (Thinking the Political)* (London: Routledge, 2002).

¹⁵ Glynos, "Ideological Fantasy at Work"; Glynos, "Critical Fantasy Studies."

¹⁶ Thomàs Zicman de Barros, "Populism: Symptom or Sublimation? Reassessing the Use of Psychoanalytic Metaphors," *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* 27, no. 2-3 (2022).

¹⁷ De Cleen, Benjamin, Jana Goyvaerts, Nico Carpentier, Jason Glynos, and Yannis Stavrakakis. "Moving discourse theory forward: A five-track proposal for future research." *Journal of Language and Politics* 20, no. 1 (2021): 22-46.

presents a psychoanalytic theory that is useful for social and political enquiry into the workings of hegemony, ideology and subjectivity.¹⁸ Discourse theorists use Lacan's conceptualisation of fantasy to make sense of the affective attachment to ideologies and discourses. Integrating a psychoanalytic dimension to studies of discourse and ideology bring political words to life. It shows how, within each political word, there is a set of relations and connections with other political words, all of which contain interests, desires and motivations that are often left unspoken.¹⁹ Discourse theorists aim to render visible these hidden and repressed elements to make sense of the social and political "logic" that make hegemonic identification possible.²⁰

Categories of political identification can be problematic in reducing complexities to a set of characteristics. In the case of modern far-right and Islamist identification, these categories are particularly consequential because they serve the reductionist intent that far-right and Islamist politics relies on. Notwithstanding, there are certain characteristics that define far-right and Islamist politics, the categories have an essentialist function that can operate in the interest of the objects that contain the categories. The common denominator in Islamist politics is the representation and identification of the Muslim as a collective subject. Far-right politics rely on a collective subject that is nation- and culture-bound. Although Islamist politics can be nation- and culture-bound, such as the Ennahda movement in Tunisia or Hamas in the Palestinian territories, it is attached to an Islamic hermeneutics that is often closed and universal, rather than open and particular. In the same vein, far-right's national, cultural or religious subject is narrow and limited in conception. Far-right and Islamist articulations are contingent on a socio-historical division that is the cause for the creation and loss of a superior "people." Such a distinct but similar foundation raises the question of to what extent there is a dialectic of forces between these different ideologies that have a shared interest in disrupting the hegemonic order. On an ideational level, these ideologies are mutually exclusive – there cannot be a caliphate and a liberal democratic order at the same time – but on a theoretical or discursive level, the premise is that these ideologies operate on the basis of a similar fantasmatic logic.

In this article, I explore the role of fantasy in far right and Islamist ideals.²¹ From a psychoanalytic political perspective, I take hatred as a vantage point because of the objective for destruction that functions as the passion for the resolving "the mythic loss of the object."²² Hatred facilitates the discursive formation of the lost object,²³ which in the case of far-right and Islamist ideals constitute the enlightened secular or enlightened Muslim being,

¹⁸ Stavrakakis, Yannis, ed. *Routledge handbook of psychoanalytic political theory* (London: Routledge, 2019).

¹⁹ Benjamin de Cleen et al., "Moving Discourse Theory Forward: A Five-track Proposal for Future Research," *Journal of Language and Politics* 20, no. 1 (2021).

²⁰ Jason Glynos and David Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory* (London: Routledge, 2007).

²¹ David Howarth, Jason Glynos and Steven Griggs, "Discourse, Explanation and Critique," *Critical Policy Studies* 10, no. 1 (2016).

²² Massimo Recalcati, "Hate as a Passion of Being," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 20, no. 2 (2012): 155.

²³ *Ibid.*

respectively. The article begins with exploring the fantasy in far-right and Islamist politics as it has been revealing itself in the last two or so decades. These two manifestations are limited to their populist variant, acknowledging that far-right and Islamist politics are multiple, varied and at times, contradictory in ideology, objective and strategy. The article engages with empirical findings from the ideological materials of Hizb ut-Tahrir, a transnational Islamist movement, and Forum for Democracy, a “new wave” Dutch far-right political party and self-proclaimed social movement. Hizb ut-Tahrir (“Hizb”) was selected because it is distinct from other Islamist organisations in that it focuses not on political action in the traditional sense, such as militant conflict or democratic participation. Rather, since its establishment in Jerusalem in 1953, Hizb aims to bring enlightenment to the Muslim mind as a panacea to the corruption from the West that has penetrated every dimension of modern Islamic life. This enlightenment is the imperative for a popular demand for the re-establishment of the Caliphate.²⁴ Thus, the Caliphate is deemed the inevitable desire when Muslims return their true Islamic being. Similar to Hizb, Forum for Democracy (“Forum”) adopts a fantasy of impossibility by mobilising precisely the thing that cannot be symbolised. With that I mean, the antagonism, which in the case of Forum is the indoctrinated mind that occupies the cultural hegemonic masses, can be replaced but cannot be eradicated. In other words, the empirical Other can be replaced through hegemonic struggle, but the conceptual Other remains within the structure of society. The purpose of this article is to seek how such fantasy is mobilised by looking at two oppositions that are adhering to a similar populist logic. Empirical findings are derived from manifestos and books, complemented by seminars and interviews, and limited to content that concerns the content and form of ideal institutions, or what I call “shadow institutions.” Through the engagement with the nature of these institutions, the article reveals the fantasmatic dimension of discourse, and in particular, the fantasies of hatred that define them.

FANTASIES OF HATRED

Following a Lacanian-Freudian psychoanalytic line of thought, fantasies function to make sense of the chaos that imbues reality.²⁵ Leading on from these theoretical premises, the proposition is that, to change the subject, which in this article is the Muslim as an essentialist Other, the fantasies that structure the subject require changing. The centrality of fantasies is what leads Žižek to his conceptualisation of ideology. What “grips” people to ideology is the fantasy system that determines the content of ideology. It is this fantasy system that provides a structure through which people can view reality and, in turn, *practice* reality in accordance with what is socially acceptable, possible and impossible. These fantasy systems contain dreams, which is a manifestation of our individual and collective desires or the *zeitgeist*. When the way people dream changes, the fantasy structure that informs ideology changes and so does

²⁴ In this article I differentiate between caliphate and Caliphate to distinguish between the varied and historical forms of Islamic governance, and a specific formulation and interpretation of Islamic thought and governance in the worldview of Hizb ut-Tahrir, respectively.

²⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously* (London: Verso Books, 2012).

reality. When dreaming of a society without antagonism, as far-right and Islamist ideologies do, what is staged are desires of sameness and timelessness. Negating the essence of human and social life, this is a utopian dream. Politically, utopian dreams can spark revolutionary movements. When these utopian dreams contain desires of wholeness without difference, they can translate into political ideologies or demands that is reflective of the desires the beholder cannot grasp, obtain or relinquish.

In the words of Jacques Lacan, “fantasy is the means by which the subject maintains himself at the level of his vanishing desire.”²⁶ Such conception depends on an ontological logic that considers a dialectic between the incompleteness of any social structure and the collective desire to reconcile that incompleteness.²⁷ Fantasy provides a language to fill the void of incompleteness through the means of collective identification. In other words, collective identities have a fantasmatic dimension at their core to mitigate the dialectic between change and continuity. In the context of politics, such “fantasmatic logics” explain *what* “grips” people to certain political ideas, practices and regimes.²⁸ Where political logic concerns the mechanisms of constructing meaning – to make things socially meaningful – fantasmatic logic can explain the “force” behind those mechanisms.²⁹ For political discourse to be socially meaningful, which is the same to say; to be considered political, there is always a degree of fantasmatic logics that defines and sustains certain social practices (rejection of COVID-19 vaccinations, for example). The degree to which collective identifications are engrained in fantasmatic logics that represent the “spirit” of the times – because not all fantasies have the same affective and political force – defines the impact it has on political mobilisation (of ideas and people).

Fantasies of hatred can be considered “dormant” fantasies that can be activated under the right conditions. Presently, the politics of populist leaders in government, such as Benjamin Netanyahu, Recep Tayyip Erdogan or Narendra Modi, is marked by inflaming hatred towards segments of society. Whether on the left or right of the political spectrum, fantasies of hatred can turn into a politics of hatred when the prevailing or hegemonic ideologies no longer match our social reality, often in moments of crisis or rapid change. The speed by which technological advancements penetrate society in current times is one such example. Cohn has identified epidemics, like the Black Death, to materialise the right conditions for great conflicts, like the Crusades, between people and nations to unfold.³⁰ In a similar tone, the current scholarship on populism has marked crises, such as the financial collapse of 2007, environmental disasters or the recent pandemic, a defining characteristic of populist language (from an “ideational” perspective) or populist logic (from a “theoretical” or “discursive” perspective). Such moments are what the theoretical or discursive school that I draw inspiration from call moments of “social dislocation” – ruptures that have such an effect on the conception of “the social” that it

²⁶ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English Paperback*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 637.

²⁷ Glynos, “Ideological Fantasy at Work.”

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 278.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Stavrakakis, *Routledge Handbook*.

can be reshaped, redefined and reinstated. Considering prevalent forms of radical politics, ruptures such as 9/11, have reshaped, redefined and reinstated conceptions of place and people. Modern politics on the right and left of the spectrum represent a dialectic in the way place and people have been redefined. A similar operation or tension can be seen in the defining of Islam in far-right and Islamist politics that, in the broadest sense, promote an essentialist conception of the “good” Muslim.³¹ These politics of *who* and *what* constitute a “good” Muslim grounded in fantasies that contain the potentialities for hatred that have been used in the past and can become reactivated into new discourses.³²

Following a psychoanalytic lens, hatred is a relational experience with oneself and the external social world. Common applications of hatred in the political and social sciences that intend to understand the motivations and appeal of hatred in political ideologies tends to consider it from an external vantage point. An external perspective limits the mode of analysis to the intersubjective relations between social groups. For example, Muslim-Hindu tensions in India would be analysed by looking at political rhetoric, socioeconomic grievances, political inequalities, historical conflict and what other visible reasons there may be for the existing tensions. When shifting perspective to internal relationality, one is forced to look at the conditions of society and the individuals that constitute it, and the “perversions” that are often concealed.³³ This hidden aspect is where Žižek argues one can find the true meaning and operation of ideology. Leser and Spissinger point to the implicit workings of hatred in a context in which “self-evident truths” are normalised.³⁴ Taking it one step further, these self-evident truths, of what is moral and proper for example, are not only normalised, but deeply embedded within the structures of society that prevent one from seeing their ideological foundations.

This hiddenness is what enables mouthpieces of hateful discourse to dismiss the accusation of hatred in their ideologies. It is, as is the common justification, not motivated by a hatred of anyone in particular (e.g., Muslims) but a rational opposition against “something” (e.g., Islam). This presents the illusion to those who adhere to this ideological position that they are opposing something valid at which they have arrived at through logical and intellectual reasoning. This can be, in the case of Hizb, that Islam is the one valid ideology one will arrive at when thinking intellectually. Or, in the case of Forum, that liberation from woke society is the imperative to revive democracy. What is omitted from both viewpoints is the logical consequence of such opposition and the hatred that it can provoke or is embedded within it by nature of prescribing intellectual thought. In the case of far-right leaders, this false separation is often performed in a way that it alludes an innocent and authentic stance. For instance, in an interview, Belgian Vlaams Belang’s Sam van Rooy emphasises his relationship with an Iranian Muslim apostate to, intentionally or not, separate the “valid” demand (i.e., the incompatibility of Islam and

³¹ Susan de Groot Heupner and Kirstine Sinclair, “Locating the Ideal State: The Practice of Place by Far Right and Islamist Parties,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 44, no. 2 (2023).

³² Glynos, “Ideological Fantasy at Work.”

³³ For further discussion on the difference between external and internal relations, see Shannon Brincat and Susan de Groot Heupner, “Dialectics in Critical International Relations Theory,” in *Handbook of Critical International Relations*, ed. Steven C. Roach (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020).

³⁴ Julia Leser and Florian Spissinger, “The Functionality of Affects: Conceptualising Far-right Populist Politics beyond Negative Emotions,” *Global Discourse* 10, no. 2 (2020).

liberal democracy) from the “invalid” demand (i.e., the hatred of Muslims). Similarly, accusation that Forum’s Thierry Baudet is anti-Semitic is refuted on the grounds of his marriage to someone with Jewish roots. The Dutch Party for Freedom’s Geert Wilders rejects accusations of hatred towards Muslims; his discontent, in his words, is with Islam, not Muslims.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, these discursive practices enable revealing the shadow without recognising the shadow. The point is not that the shadow is something evil and is activated through these discursive practices. Rather, the shadow is the part that is hidden, repressed and transformed into something that can become evil. This makes it possible to refute hatred while supporting or practicing a politics of hatred. It is not hatred that people adhere to but these shadow elements that, under certain societal conditions, can transform into hatred and inform political ideologies and revolutionary movements. This is where fantasy appears coherent because the projection is not a direct reflection of the Other: it is part person and part dream. When Wilders reiterates, he has “nothing against Muslims” as it is “Islam he despises,” he is true to the logic of the shadow. Although the Muslim, whether conceived in singularity or multiplicity, is the embodiment of Islam, in an essentialist configuration (as can be seen in far-right and Islamist discourses), it is more than that. The name of the Muslim has become the object on which desires that are unseen, undisclosed and perverted can be projected.

Hizb ut-Tahrir

Islamist politics come in various forms and contents. More often, however, it does not receive the nuance it requires. Consequently, different and conflicting forms are absorbed under the minimal definition of Islamism as either Islamicised politics or politicised Islam. The latter is more prevailing how it privileges religion and hermeneutics as the base for advancing an ideological program. That is, its mission is to promote a specific hermeneutics of Islam that is political in essence. Somewhat different, Islamising politics gives a religious spirit to the realm of politics, Indonesia’s Pancasila being one such example. Through the dominant conception of Islamist politics as a form of politicised Islam, a diverse set of ideologies and practices tend to be subsumed under one concept: Islamism. Islamist projects that are diverse – and often conflicting – in their ideological and political essence, such as Daesh (also known as Islamic State), al-Qaeda or more underground groups, such as the transnational Hizb, tend to be understood through the same lens.

Important for the purpose of our discussion is the Islamist, populist and nationalist nexus. Hizb is one example of a group that aspires to refute the nationalist paradigm that is considered the roots and ongoing force of colonial hegemony. In their rejection of a nationalist “people,” Hizb antagonises the politics of the West that has come to define the formal and informal politics of former Muslim territories. Political projects that are Islamists in content but nationalist in form is therefore in conflict with Hizb’s ideological and political ambitions. What Islamists have in common in their rejection of the epitome of the modern un-Islamic world, namely secular democratic ideologies. Where they diverge in terms of popular sovereignty is the extent to which they are nationalist in form, with the politics of parties such as the Tunisian

Islamist democratic Ennahda, the pan-Islamic Muslim Brotherhood or the nationalist Hamas examples of what Hizb is not. Although pan-Islamic in outlook – aspiring for the unification of Muslims – the politics of these parties are to revive the Islamic core of popular sovereignty in a context of the relative power of a nation. This can be understood through the words of Muhammad Rashid Ridā – a disciple of the Egyptian Islamic reformist Muhammad ‘Abduh – who writes, “religion has no effect on the power or weakness of nations.”³⁵ It is thus not the endeavour of Islamist politics, in the imagination of Hizb, to change the nation’s power. Instead, its prime objective is to draw people of all nations to Islam and not draw Islam to the politics of nations. Therefore, the “people” – or “ummah” in the Islamist imagination – takes on a project that transcends the national/international nexus where the Muslim is ultimately displaced in their religious subjectivity. Emphasis is on the singular in that the Muslim is metaphorically perceived and performed in absolute terms, and not understood in possessing multiple and entangled realities, histories and subjectivities.³⁶ Even though Islamists of all kinds accept it is the secular democratic ideologies that is the source of the deprivation of Muslims (and Muslimness), their political projects can be distinguished on the basis of the identification of a shared struggle that transcends national contexts.

Amid the Palestinian exodus, al-Nabhani presents a critique of the failure of secular ideologies to protect Palestinians. In his first book, *Inqadh Filasteen* (Saving Palestine) published in 1950 and *Rislatu al-Arab* (Message to the Arabs) in the same year, al-Nabhani links the fall of the Ottoman Empire (1924), the loss of an Islamic state, the demise of Arab and Muslim cohesion, the suppression of Islamic religion and thought under secular world hegemony, and the confusion of the Muslim mind. These were linked towards the dream of an emergent caliphate that would replace the “ideological subversion” of the West.³⁷ The Other could therefore take various forms, from the Jewish architects of the Palestinian exodus to the corporate American banker who trades in oil in the Gulf or, more recently, the LGBTQI+ movement that is a threat to Muslim families or the forced indoctrination of the Chinese state towards Uyghur Muslims in former Turkistan. Hizb draws people to their project on the basis of *jāhiliyya* – a Qur’ānic term Hizb conceives as a state of ignorance all people are subjected to in our modern world that are dispossessed of Islamic rule.³⁸ Through the concept of *jāhiliyya*, Hizb offers a re-imagination of the “people” in accordance with “proper ideas” (*fikra*) and “methods” (*tarīqa*) that designate the ultimate antithesis to modern systems.³⁹ Thus, antagonism is pursued on a vertical axis where Islam – as a political doctrine – acts as the competitor to the modern hegemonic order (of capitalism) and where Muslims are the “real”

³⁵ Ridā, cited in Malcolm Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad ‘Abduh and Rashid Rida* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966).

³⁶ Dietrich Jung, *Muslim History and Social Theory: A Global Sociology of Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

³⁷ Mohammed Ayoob and Danielle Lussier, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in Muslim Societies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020).

³⁸ Meerim Aitkulova, “Hizb Ut-Tahrir: Dreaming of Caliphate,” *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* 8, no. 1 (2017).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

people the world can strive for. In that sense, the horizontal axis negates the vertical axis, which constitutes the premise of populist articulation.

Forum for Democracy

A nexus between populist, nationalist and racist was able to be formed at the rupture of 9/11. Although locating the emergence of radical politics to a moment in time is erroneous in that it upholds a linear conception of time and space, the social dislocation related to a sequence of events on a single day is significant enough to use 9/11 as a temporal reference. Precisely because 9/11 is a single day – but signifies a decade and more – it classifies a critical moment of social dislocation that provides the conditions for demonisation that has since taken a populist, nationalist and racist hold. In some respect, 9/11 marked the beginning of a “future community reborn into innocence” where Muslims and non-Muslims alike designate themselves innocent⁴⁰ – Muslims for being the subject of a securitisation paradigm worldwide and non-Muslims for being the target of Islamist terror. The dislocation of the social has been such that a “collective flight” has taken place into the realm of the negative where the antagonist is reduced to an essential state of being. In other words, 9/11 has set the provisions for a politics that negates the open, fluid and multiple states of social being. Rather than *responding* to the problem that 9/11 represents – Muslims and Islam – according to the far-right, its main success is in the *precautions* that underlie its negative investment in the idea of the Muslim. Although the focus of the far-right and their observers has been on the object of investment – the Muslim – it is presented under the provision of precaution. It is that precaution that can be seen as the precedent that enabled a populist, nationalist and racist nexus.

Forum can be classified a manifestation of the “new wave” of the far-right. Established in 2016 in the Netherlands, Forum shares opposition on the far-right with the anti-Islam Party for Freedom, an unspoken coalition that functions to consolidate investment in a populist front. Other than “opposition politics” that are devoid of an ideological alternative, Forum presents itself as the ultimate ideological vanguard.⁴¹ It is in the “metaphoric sliding”⁴² of Forum where its populist potential can be found and what makes Forum part of the “new wave” that has come out of the social dislocation of the recent pandemic. Whereas Party for Freedom came from the social dislocation of 9/11, the pandemic provided the conditions for Forum’s current ideological state.⁴³ Stavrakakis refers to Cohn⁴⁴ to note the historical precedence of epidemics (e.g., the plagues of the 13th-15th centuries), providing the right conditions for social antagonistic politics (e.g., the Crusades).⁴⁵ Baudet, Forum’s founder and leader, has written 14

⁴⁰ Stavrakakis, *Routledge Handbook*.

⁴¹ Thierry Baudet, “Thierry Baudet Presenteert aan de Waanzinbar” [Thierry Baudet presents at the Waanzinbar], Blue Tiger [video], 1:17:52, February 11, 2023, <https://deblauwetijger.com/video/thierry-baudet-presenteert-aan-de-waanzinbar-de-gideonsbende/>.

⁴² Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (New York: Verso Books, 2005).

⁴³ The party went through several disruptions and fragmentations between 2020 and 2022, resulting in core members leaving and initiating their own parties.

⁴⁴ Norman Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom* (Manhattan: Random House, 1993).

⁴⁵ Stavrakakis, *Routledge Handbook*.

books so far, each of which he considers an ideological manifest. In contrast to ambitions of power, ideologues on the far-right present themselves as the Biblical “Gideon,” which is the frame of reference of Baudet’s latest book *de Gideonsbende*. In the Old Testament, Gideon is enforced by his intellect and ethics to become political. It is common for current figureheads of the far-right to position themselves as someone who – against their aspiration – must protect the “people” from the ignorance of the bearers of hegemonic power.

In the Netherlands, Islam became a political antagonist in the 1990s with the sounds of centre-right politician Frits Bolkenstein and the controversial public figure and later politician, Pim Fortuyn, who was killed three months after he established his political party (which 17 per cent of the nation voted for in the 2002 elections that followed his death). The critique of the 1990s constructed an equivalence between multiculturalist ideals and politics, and the immigration – or lack of assimilation – of Muslims. In 1997, Fortuyn captured this critique of the politics of the idealistic left in his book *Against the Islamisation of our Culture*, which became the fundament for the later politics of Wilders, who initiated a party based on a negation of Islam after the killing of another public critic of Islam, Theo van Gogh, in 2005. With the establishment of Forum in 2017, the Muslim has become consolidated with the antagonist of the “elite.” Although such a “coalition” was clear in the 1990s with the multiculturalist agenda being a metaphor for the “elite,” it took the horizontal antagonist of the Muslim to broaden and sediment that opposition. In other words, the two decades prior to the establishment of Forum created the right conditions for Baudet to consolidate the unsatisfied demands that were articulated in that time into a populist front.

SHADOW INSTITUTIONS

The examples of Forum and Hizb illustrate a close encounter with fantasy. They prescribe institutions that capture the enlightened thought and ideological content that follows from it. These institutions, which I call shadow institutions, hide (though not repress) certain characteristics, in a similar way in which philanthropic foundations can hide (though not repress) their profitable aims behind the mask of the altruistic persona. The fantasy embedded in these institutions operates to mask the unresolvable presence of antagonism in social life. It presents the illusion that antagonism can be overcome by the “right” way to view the world. Once these institutions are realised, whether educational (e.g., Forum schools), cultural (e.g., media), political (e.g., Islamic state) or otherwise, human coexistence will be harmonious because it will be guided by proper thought and reasoning. This fantasy can be mobilised successfully, especially because it conceals the shadow that is contained within it. From a normative political perspective, the destructive potential constitutes the power to negate the pluralistic and secular fundamentals of modern democratic society. Keeping the shadow elements of these institutions invisible is precisely what brings these shadows into effect. When the shadow remains concealed, the dissonance is kept undisturbed, while repressed elements, such as hidden desires, can be released.

Forum's conspiratorial articulation of the COVID-19 pandemic legitimised the creation of counter-hegemonic institutions. It can be said that the pandemic, as a signifier, was the uniting moment for Forum to unite its discursive elements around a central antagonist. The unification around a "fifth dimension" did not go without cost, with the core of the membership fragmented into different peripheral parties and a substantial decrease in political representation because of Forum's radical stance. The consensus among commentators and the public is that Forum is too radical to be considered a concern. In turn, Forum has used its downtrodden position further to appeal to those "intelligent enough" to see through the veneer of the political elites. Arguably, such "radicalisation" has contributed to an identification that Forum presents something that exists outside the ideological perimeters of the *modus operandi*. Whereas other far-right parties, such as the established Party for Freedom, focus on policy change within the perimeters of the current political model, Forum is proposing a "complete alternative." For example, the Party for Freedom's efforts to ban material properties of Islam, like mosques, the Qur'ān, Islamic schools and headscarf, are much too narrow an approach for Forum. Instead, political action must adhere to an ideological programme that is absolute in its opposition against the status quo. Therefore, institutions must be built that correspond to the dichotomous frontier on a social level. Thus far, these institutions consist of a media apparatus, including two notable publishers, one of which with a corresponding online video channel and regular magazine publication, and an online talk show "Forum Inside," primary school education under the brand "Renaissance schools" and a think-tank or "scientific bureau" *The Renaissance Institute*. In a recent interview, Baudet expressed his aims to extend these further into the cultural, economic and social spheres, referring to sovereign housing cooperation, an independent cinema and considering a separate currency.⁴⁶ Despite the relative insignificance of these institutions in scope and success – besides the non-affiliate but supportive publisher *Blue Tiger* – there is an effective power in the political act of *dreaming* of practical change and revolution. That dreaming pokes the shadow, because within these institutions – for example, the Renaissance schools – lies the unspoken antagonist.

The unspoken antagonist lies within the potential of the modern mind. The ontic antagonists are the material manifestations of the corrupt mind. Like the populist conception of the corrupt elite, the corrupt mind takes shape in those who are unable to see beyond the "third dimension." There is another "übermensch" who can perceive in "fifth dimensional" terms, and can therefore see the large, fundamental structures and mechanisms that function to control and shape the masses. Therefore, there is no need to refute accusations such as racism, fascism or totalitarianism, because it is they who identify with its negation (e.g., anti-racists) who cannot see they are the ones who are producing that which they reject (e.g., a totalitarian state). Baudet insinuates that "we need to be the racists and fascists in order for them to be the anti-racists and anti-fascists." In other words, "they" cannot consider themselves morally righteous without a referential subject. Although it is a deflection of the accusation, the point is that critique from the political centre and the left is easily subsumed under the metaphoric "Übermensch." As

⁴⁶ Baudet, "Thierry Baudet."

such, Forum can persuade and mobilise people in constructing a metaphoric link between true reason inscribed in the “*übermensch*” and being the ultimate and sole vanguard.

Hizb’s institutional blueprint was first developed by Taqiuddin Al-Nabhani, an Islamic scholar and jurist from Jerusalem, who initiated Hizb in 1953/1954 and was the *ameer* (ruler or leader) until he died in 1977. Al-Nabhani has written some of the most fundamental manifestos for Hizb, including *Concepts of Hizb ut-Tahrir* (1953), *The Islamic State* (1953), *The System of Islam* (1953) and *Political Thoughts* (1972).⁴⁷ Although other manifestos draw on the institutional dimension of the Caliphate, for my purpose I focus on *The Social System in Islam* (1953), *The Economic System in Islam* (1953) and *The Ruling System in Islam* (1953). These three fundamental writings are thought to capture the various social, economic and political institutions that define the Caliphate. The Caliphate differs from prophethood in that it is a “human and not a theological state.”⁴⁸ Whereas the prophethood and messengership (of Muḥammad) are theological positions, the Caliphate is a “human post.”⁴⁹ Prophet Muḥammad consulted the message received from Allah with the people to bring Islam to the world. In contrast, the Caliphate is a constitution of temporal leadership and rule in a human capacity, though based on the word of God.⁵⁰ Being derived from the word of God and actions of the Prophet, the Caliphate constitutes a “singular and not collective leadership.”⁵¹ Singular leadership corresponds with the implementation of Sharia rule that defines all actions and relations of people, with themselves and others.⁵² With Sharia – divine law – the singular frame of reference for all actions and relations, it is coherent to have a hierarchical political constitution that supports the total rule of the *ameer*.

One central social constituent of the political institution is the act of *da’wah* – the obligation of each Muslim to convey the message of Islam to the rest of the world. *Da’wah* is one of the few social institutions, because most other duties fall under the function of the state. Within the context of Hizb, *da’wah* is a responsibility that lies with the party because Muslims do not possess the true and clear mind that allows them to conduct *da’wah*. It is therefore political actors such as Hizb who need to “watch over [the Muslims]” to guarantee the application of Islam through the institution of the Caliphate.⁵³ Although more considered a political than social act, *da’wah* is a performance that is engrained in each part of social life because it is the performance of Islam. In *The Social System in Islam*, Hizb defines the sole interest of an Islamic social system to organise the relationships between men and women since all other parts of life are organised through the institution of the Caliphate. The social institution takes a shadow form in presenting a contradiction between what it prescribes and what Hizb articulates in

⁴⁷ These publication dates refer to the original versions in Arabic. The English translations were published later and used for reference in the article.

⁴⁸ Hizb ut-Tahrir, *The Ruling System in Islam*, 5th ed. (London: Khilafah Publications, n.d.).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁵⁰ Hizb ut-Tahrir acknowledges Prophet Muhammad was a man and ruler; therefore, he occupied a human post. However, the Khalifah solely occupies a human role, in contrast to Muhammad who was also a prophet and Messenger, which constitutes a theological and not a human role.

⁵¹ Hizb ut-Tahrir, *The Ruling System in Islam*, 139.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 301.

modern times. The concept of *dhimmi* (non-Muslims living in the Caliphate) is such that it presents as a second-class citizen respected and tolerated. However, through the social institution of Hizb, relations between men and women are such that it conflicts with modern secular and liberal ideals. A recent (5 March 2023) Hizb conference in the Netherlands discussed the threat of Western ideals on the Muslim family. In response to developments in gender identities and relations, the conference focused on the “chaos” and “problems” that Western secular ideals bring to the “natural” constitution of families around the world. The shadow side is in the potential to remove women from “the shadow of the banner of *kufi*” and institute a version of Islam that is not in dialogue with context.⁵⁴

Economic institutions are subordinate to the political and social institutions that pertain to thought.⁵⁵ In other words, intellectual wealth is more important than material wealth because the former can restore the latter, but such is not guaranteed in reverse.⁵⁶ The economic institutions are thus a reflection of a radical negation of the current capitalist model, revoking the principle of free acquisition of wealth. Based on the premise that the acquisition of wealth is essential to human nature, possession of wealth and private ownership is not revoked but controlled to prevent excess.⁵⁷ The inevitable excess – and subsequent inequalities – that occurs when people are “left to their own devices” provides the reasons for authoritarian economics.⁵⁸ Although private ownership is imperative – because it aligns with human nature – the Caliphate designs and implements the methods that define the structures and relations of wealth and possession. Behind the guise of a fair and equal economic model lies the shadow of exclusion. With a model designed on the principle that the strong must support the weak, ownership and wealth is controlled to guarantee “the livelihood for each citizen of the State.”⁵⁹ However, it is reasonable to assume *dhimmi*s are not included in the protection mechanisms of the state granting them equal wealth and ownership. In *The Economic System of Islam*, the rights of *dhimmi*s are seen as equal to Muslims, but only regarding matters of the accumulation of wealth, such as trade, which is in the benefit of the state. Since the state operates in the benefit of its citizens, what is left unspoken is to what extent the “weak” *dhimmi* – the *dhimmi* unable to accumulate wealth – is entitled to economic protections. That which is unspoken is where the shadow resides.

The economic, political and social institutions demonstrate that Hizb draws a frontier between their Islamic hermeneutics and Western ideologies and more secular, liberal or progressive Islamic hermeneutics on the basis of a real and correct state of mind. In the manifestos *Presence of Mind* (1976), *Islamic Thought* (n.d.) and *Thinking* (1973), Hizb lays out the foundations of the “natural state of mind and his creation.” Man is religious because “religiousness is an instinct;”⁶⁰ it is a natural state of mind and being in the world. Atheists and

⁵⁴ Taqiuddin al-Nabhani, *The Social System in Islam*, 4th ed. (Beirut: Hizb ut-Tahrir, 2003), 142.

⁵⁵ Taqiuddin al-Nabhani, *The Economic System of Islam*, 6th ed. (n.p., 2004/2008).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁶⁰ Hizb ut-Tahrir, *Islamic Thought* (London: Khilafah Publications, n.d.), 4.

non-believers of Allah are evidence of the “distraction of man from his innate nature.”⁶¹ Not unlike Forum how describes their antagonist as burdened with emotion to explain their inaptitude to reason, Hizb considers the *kufir* (disbeliever) mind linked to emotion and therefore unsound and irrational. When the West invaded Islamic countries, in the historical account of Hizb, they imported a naturalness that subjects and objects are to be studied and philosophised, something Hizb relates to the introduction of concepts that require “slow thinking.”⁶² Deliberation as such imposed on the spontaneous and intuitive mind relates to subjects and objects in their natural status. Domination of the West is, therefore, a metaphoric substitution for the domination of thought or, more precisely, the suppression of authentic, natural and correct thought. The visible antagonist is thus the power of the West evident in political systems, corporate structures, neoliberal thought and individualised behaviour, to name a few. In the words of Al-Nabhani, “[the] problem is not the domination of the West...Rather, the problem is slowness in thinking; so the problem is what has to be treated.”⁶³ The hidden antagonist that constitutes the shadow side of imagined institutions is the Western, or non-Islamic, mind. While the mind contains a subject, which is materialised in objects – like institutions – it is also the mind that contains the shadow. The position of Hizb is that “it is not correct to escape from the problem by directing these matters to the domination or to the West.”⁶⁴ Thus, whereas the West remains the antagonist – because it negates correct thinking – the hidden antagonist is a projection inward, instead of outwards. In other words, the hidden antagonist is purely contingent because anyone, Muslim or non-Muslim alike, can become “the Western mind.”

The antagonist presents the illusion that, once the antagonist is eradicated, the ideal can be realised.⁶⁵ The act of *seeking* a singular antagonist reveals the contingent nature of antagonism. The seeking of an antagonist presents a solution to overcome the impossibility to constraining and sustaining a harmonious whole (of an individual or social constitution). The antagonist presents the illusion that the ideal can be realised once the antagonist is eradicated.⁶⁶ The purpose behind *seeking* an antagonist is to emphasise the contingent potential that determines *who* and *what* can or cannot act as an antagonism in a certain time and place. Because an antagonist is only effective when it captures existing *and* emergent needs, demands and desires. The Muslim acts as such an antagonist even when, in the case of Forum, it is not articulated in explicit political terms. Implicitly, Forum invests in the Muslim antagonists through a metaphoric linkage with discontents and desires that have structured an anti-Muslim discourse for some time. The contingent potential is used to distract from the undemocratic outcomes that have become possible because of the reiteration of an antagonistic other. Thus, the Other – whatever form or “reincarnation” it takes – functions to sediment the “rational” opposition against configurations of power.⁶⁷ Moreover, because it is capable of reincarnation, it embeds

⁶¹ Ibid., 18.

⁶² Hizb ut-Tahrir, *Presence of Mind* (London: Khilafah Publications, 1976), 27.

⁶³ Ibid., 38.

⁶⁴ Hizb ut-Tahrir, *Presence of Mind*, 38.

⁶⁵ Glynos, “Ideological Fantasy at Work.”

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*.

the unconscious premise that an antagonist subject exists. As such, in its absence, there is a seeking for it. Because in that seeking for those we hate, the ideal self can sustain itself.⁶⁸ The “restlessness” that search provokes is an attempt to negate that exact restlessness.⁶⁹ Hence, the prevalence of antagonistic politics in moments of crises. The promise to reinstate calm is a response to the restlessness that is felt when societies undergo change and rapid transformations. That restlessness is presented in the search for an antagonist and a dismissal of social constitutions’ imperfect, impermanent and conflictual nature.

Forum and Hizb are constructing a “parallel society” insofar as they are inscribing a fundamental incommensurability to hegemonic institutions and practices within their ideologies and politics. Lefort argued that totalitarianism emerges when a particular a political discourse (or what he referred to as parties or movements) claim to be different from all other discourses.⁷⁰ In Lefort’s words, “it destroys all opposition since it claims to represent the whole of society and to possess a legitimacy that places it above the law.”⁷¹ This is evident in the politics of Forum and Hizb. Their parallel societies are such that they present an ideal – the *content* of fantasies – but also, as Glynos writes, the “impediment” to that ideal – the *logic* of fantasies.⁷² In the case of Hizb, for example, the West is the impediment to the realisation of the caliphate and the authentic Muslim being. The obstacle of the West functions to create a parallel society where future citizens are already *above* the prevailing world society. They have “risen” to another possible world as a result of their discernment of what the world has become and is becoming.

As argued elsewhere with Sinclair, Hizb practices such a parallel society within the coordinates of secular democracies in their practice of the ideal state.⁷³ When they have conferences, for instance, their hopes and aspirations for the Caliphate are practised amid a clean and safe environment.⁷⁴ Although the Caliphate in ideal terms cannot be practised and instituted in the context of secular democracies, Hizb creates a material space where members can *feel* the radical alternative the Caliphate offers. In other words, these conferences and similar activities are a fantasmatic experience not because it is an intellectual engagement with the idea of the Caliphate but because it is an experience of the ideal – a quest that cannot be fulfilled. That is not to suggest the Caliphate in the imagination of Hizb cannot be fulfilled in a political sense; the laws and institutions could be established and performed in accordance with the ideological blueprint. However, what cannot be fulfilled is the oneness and wholeness the Caliphate promises to deliver. It is therefore an experience of the ideal that makes the performance of these activities meaningful.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. David Macey (Cambridge: Polity, 1988).

⁷¹ Ibid., 19.

⁷² Glynos, “Ideological Fantasy at Work,” 283.

⁷³ De Groot Heupner and Sinclair, “Locating the Ideal State.”

⁷⁴ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

This article has employed a psychoanalytic political theory lens to explore how fantasy informs far-right and Islamist ideologies. Following the premise that fantasy is a fundamental component of any social constitution, the article has shown that democracy relies on fantasy, and that far-right and Islamist politics has successfully deployed fantasy in recent times. It has examined these opposing ideologies to render visible how fantasy is mobilised using a populist logic to create an antagonism where the “enlightened” people are to negate the “oblivious” elite to restore the social order. A comparison of the Dutch far-right Forum for Democracy and Islamist Hizb ut-Tahrir illustrates how a similar fantasmatic logic is used to create a parallel society. This parallel society represents a prototypical populist front against the hegemonic order that is considered incommensurable with the “natural” state of human beings and social order. Forum for Democracy and Hizb ut-Tahrir deploy a fantasy of sameness and wholeness where antagonism is reduced to non-existence. This non-existence of antagonism is a persuasive antidote in a time of rapid and radical technological, environmental and social change, and a fantasy of a return to a mythical place of oneness and sameness can provide an ease around the growing visibility of social (and artificial) difference.

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