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# Making Enemies: War(b)ordering in Norwegian Extreme Right Discourse

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines discursive practices of (b)ordering in outputs circulated by a formerly state-funded, extreme-right civil society organization, the Human Rights Service (HRS). Focusing on how an antagonistic relational structure is systematically encouraged between “non-Western,” minoritized populations and Norwegian majorities, I assess the fundamental components of a semiotics of war. The study develops the concept of war(b)ordering to describe how HRS systematically invites Norwegian majorities to perceive minoritized populations as collective enemies through three discursive frames: (a) citizen-soldier subjectivity, (b) a narrative of secret invasion, and (c) visual differential representation. Through a description of these frames underlying HRS’s representations, the article argues that the Norwegian state’s funding and mandating of this organization as an expert actor that is authorized to provide the public with knowledge about immigration and integration has conflicted with its human rights obligation to prevent racial discrimination.

## KEYWORDS

Bordering; discourse analysis; racism; Human Rights Service; social perception

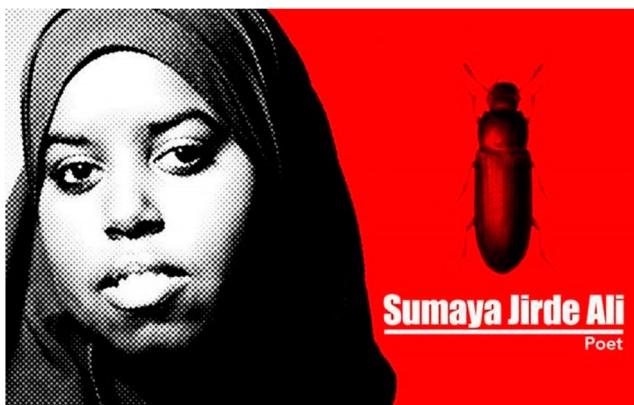
## Introduction

With recent research on far/extreme-right media communication finding that an “enough is enough atmosphere (...) fully polarized towards the ‘Other’” (SINTEF 2019, 38) is discernible across several Norwegian far/extreme-right platforms, it is becoming increasingly relevant to assess politics that help produce categories of divisive difference between majoritized/minoritized populations. Figure 1, which was recently propagated by the extreme-right media outlet the Human Rights Service (HRS), represents a critical example of how such frames are presently articulated and grounds an introduction to this article’s analysis of HRS’s discursive practices. It reflects a characteristic process of visual meaning attribution, that, through mechanisms of metaphorical association, invites negative perceptions of Norwegian Muslims and highlights the potential for HRS’s representations to tacitly influence the public mind.

In this visual rhetoric, Norwegian poet and public debater Sumaya Jirde Ali is juxtaposed with a large insect as a critique of a recent hate speech verdict given to a person who

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**Figure 1.** HRS dehumanizing the Norwegian poet and public debater Sumaya Jirde Ali. The image was subsequently removed from HRS’s webpage (Brække, Vollen, and Mohr 2020, originally published by HRS 2020a).

described Ali as “the devil’s black spawn” and a “corrupt cockroach who should go back to Somalia” (Mohr et al. 2020).<sup>1</sup> The image speaks to an online audience that may share negative sentiments toward Islam/Muslims and reenacts the symbolic violence of the hate speech it cites by producing a figurative relation between the insect and Ali’s face. It suggests that Ali and other Norwegian Muslims are “like” insects and sparks associations with historical processes in which designated internal enemies were strategically branded as vermin to incite cleansing aggression (see Kellow and Steves 1998). Several framing techniques common to HRS’s representations guide this output, which dehumanizes by encouraging a “symbolic identification of the face with the inhuman, foreclosing our apprehension of the human in the scene” (Butler 2004, 147). On one hand, like the insect, Ali’s face is depicted in blackish/grey tones, maintaining an appearance of social distance and an experience of coldness that discourages empathy. On the other, the value of the word “poet” is downplayed by its decreased font size, while the insect looms large against a bright red background – a color that more strongly conveys emotional intensity than any other (anger, rage, hate and, in different contexts, love). The aesthetic economy, with the symbolic (dis)identification of Ali’s face with a signifier of lowness as its leitmotif, renders the definition “poet” less relevant and supports a slide of metonymy in which the insect becomes a guiding metaphor for Ali as an infringement of national order and a material leakage of the unclean.

The image is illustrative of a distinct genre of visual rhetoric through which a structuring of negative emotions toward refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, and especially Muslims (henceforth RASIM<sup>2</sup>), are enabled in many HRS outputs. It indicates specific discursive processes through which a national inside, outside, and a sociodiscursive (b)order separating these categorical distinctions are negotiated, and thereby qualifies the main question addressed in this study. Namely, what are the categories of difference through which the relationship between Norwegian majorities/RASIM emerge in HRS’s discourse and to what possible effects?

The article starts with a presentation of HRS, followed by an introduction to the main theoretical perspectives applied in the analysis, namely, the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe ([1985] 2001) and the concept of war(b)ordering. Drawing

upon a core sample of 115 HRS online news outputs<sup>3</sup> collected from September 2018 to June 2020, I detail and assess the significance of three main frames which are prevalent within HRS contents. The article documents how HRS uses semiotics of war to both construct societal newcomers from the Global South as a militarized threat and frame majoritized populations as targets of oppression and violence.

## Human Rights Service

HRS was founded as a civil organization by Norwegian journalist Hege Storhaug in 2001 as part of the broader socio-political context associated with the war on terror, initiated by the United States the same year. It fronts as an alternative news site and independent think tank that examines the issues of multiethnic societies, most notably the oppression of women (Fekete 2006). The Norwegian Centre for Anti-Racism, however, characterizes HRS as a “Muslim-hate organization” (Sultan and Steen 2014, 1–17), while Bangstad uses the term “polarization entrepreneur”; that is, an actor that deliberately incites resentment and attempts to “create a community of likeminded people (...) aware that these communities will not only harden positions but also move them to a more extreme point” (2014, 23, with reference to Sunstein 2009, 34).

Since 2005, HRS has received more than 26 million NOK in public funding (Vestreng 2020). In September 2021, the funding was terminated by the government. According to one spokesperson from the then ruling party, Høyre, it has “changed in a negative and unserious direction [becoming] an opinion outlet rather than a disseminator of knowledge” (Frølich quoted in Heldahl 2021). Under its period of funding and as late as 2021, the backing was nonetheless legitimized in the Norwegian government’s national budget on the grounds that it “contribute[s] to give better knowledge about immigration and integration in the population, including possibilities and challenges in this context” (ibid.). However, instead of informing the public about the “challenges and possibilities associated with immigration” in a balanced manner as suggested in the state budget, HRS engages solely in the persistent dissemination of negative and prejudiced accounts of immigrants in general and Muslims in particular. Mårtensson argued that HRS’s website (rights.no) only contains “‘cases’ of Muslim abuses and its message to the general public is that Muslims are unable to share democratic values, implying that they may not be able to integrate” (2014, 237). Bangstad and Helland (2019) similarly described HRS as a bridge between far-right views and the civil society that primarily circulates Eurabia- and anti-Muslim propaganda. They suggested that few Norwegian actors have had a greater influence on the framing of Muslims as a social and political “problem” than HRS and Storhaug (ibid.).<sup>4</sup> In line with these views, the Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi) recommended in 2016 that state funding be withdrawn from HRS as “in recent years [it] has employed rhetoric which many consider to be xenophobic and hostile to Muslims” (Ulstein 2019). However, IMDi’s recommendation was not followed by the state at the time.

In addition to its recent status as a so-called national expert actor, HRS is part of what Bangstad (2020) has termed the “Norwegian far-right ecology,” an affiliation of wealthy sponsors of far-right alternative media; prominent, populist far-right politicians; and additional far-right media outlets,<sup>5</sup> which provides the Norwegian public with anti-immigration “news” and alternative political theories about “the New World Order”

and the “deep state” (O’Donnell 2020; Spark 2000). HRS has close ties to the Norwegian populist far-right party, the Progress Party (PP), with prominent PP party member Christian Tybring Gjedde having initially enabled its funding via the state budget (Bangstad 2020). The connections between HRS, the PP, and the financial elites that support right-wing politics, which provide additional funds to HRS, suggest a circuit composed of money, media, and policy making. Therein, popular consent may be manufactured through HRS’s fear appeals against RASIM, not only to far-right political agendas but also neoliberal policies furthering the interests of the financial elite (ibid.). Bangstad argued that HRS and right-wing populism in the Norwegian context, in contrast to the common assumption of populism as anti-elitist, have proven to be beneficial for financial elites to the degree that the Norwegian strand of right-wing populism could more aptly be described as “*plutocratic populism*” (ibid., italics in original). This suggests, as Bangstad points out, that neoliberalism may have enabled the very conditions conducive to the emergence of right-wing populism and that this strand of populism may be instrumental for neoliberalism as such (ibid.).

HRS typically publishes two to four posts on its website daily, which consistently address perceived threats associated with RASIM. Typically, such outputs recontextualize news that refer to immigration/Islam, focusing on economic costs, social unrest, crime, or other negative aspects. Most are emotionally engaging and feature striking visual illustrations that capture audience attention and elicit sentiments faster and more subliminally than the texts they complement. Like cases analyzed by Ekman (2019), HRS’s reframing amounts to a ceaseless flow of affectively charged and mutually reinforcing “bad news” about RASIM that invite collective hysteria.

It includes the use of negative naming practices; one-sided framing of newcomers as a threat; and recontextualizations that develop seemingly “neutral” news items into “news pervaded by an anti-immigration or racist agenda” (ibid., 608). Although HRS strives to present itself within the dominant ideological formation of liberal democracy, Storhaug and HRS’s discourse has thus rightly been defined as expressions of “anti-immigration and straightforwardly Islamophobic ideas through a universalist rhetoric which purports to be based upon human rights, feminism, LGBT rights and democratic, enlightenment ideas” (Bangstad and Helland 2019, 5). In a previous study, I have documented how HRS likewise predisposes audience engagements via visual framings that invite an emotional bias through shadows, cold colors, and defacing photos of what appears to be Norwegian Muslims in public spaces (Andreasen 2020).

Politicians and intellectuals who hold views compatible with HRS’s position are, conversely, often represented with their faces clearly visible and portrayed in an empowering, empathetic manner. Not unlike propaganda, HRS’s discourse may tacitly influence public opinions through selective information and attempts to elicit an emotional, rather than rational, response to a perceived problem through loaded language (Jowett and O’Donnell 2012). Moreover, the Norwegian fact-checking institution, Faktisk.no, has revealed that several of HRS’ news outputs were fabrications.

Despite much political and media discussion concerning HRS’s discourse on immigration, Islam, and its position as a hitherto state-funded actor, few studies have assessed HRS’s discursive strategies and their plausible and possible effects (see, however, Andreasen 2020; Bangstad 2020). It is timely to do so given HRS’s long standing societal mandate to address the public from a powerful, enunciatory position. This includes its former right

to suggest candidates for the Norwegian Immigration Appeals Board (Utlendingsnemda) and its role as one of the “specialists” officially invited by the state to comment on certain Norwegian Official Documents (expert reports that form the basis of future policy and legislation). Further, contents from HRS’s online platform are extensively and increasingly circulated: Outputs were shared on Facebook nearly two million times in 2018 and 2019 and nearly four million times in 2020 (StoryBoard 2020).

This article addresses the knowledge gap specifically by investigating the categories of difference through which the relationship between Norwegian majorities/RASIM is brought to emerge in HRS’s discourse. Rather than supporting productive forms of contact and negotiation of difference, HRS’s discourse systematically enables social and epistemological barriers, limiting the possibility for discursively positioned subjects to perceive alternatives to a condition of mutually exclusive hostility. I develop the term war(b)ordering to describe this process in detail.

### Discourse Theory and the Concept of War(b)ordering

We need a theoretical frame that can explain the influence that may be excerpted on social perception via differentiations between us/them at the level of texts and images to examine possible and plausible impacts of HRS publication. For this purpose, I combine two analytic approaches: the concept of (b)ordering (Pöttsch 2012, 2015) and the discourse theory (DT) of Laclau and Mouffe ([1985] 2001).

The concept of (b)ordering provides a processual approach to assess how contingent social and discursive boundaries are drawn and stabilized between the self and other across different scales such as media representations and state politics. In the present context, the notion of (b)orders do not address static spatial arrangements as such, but refers to ongoing discursive fixations of the abstract lines of separation and connection between us/them that influence how others are perceived and evaluated (Van Houtum and van Naerssen 2002). It is a perspective emphasizing that what we see and perceive may be predisposed by the ways in which the world has been made available to our minds’ eye by being “divided” into meaningful entities.

As Pöttsch explains, the concept of (b)ordering thus suggests that cultural products and media representations that deal with the self and other may interact and interfere with perception, cognition, and agency as particular differences between these entities are made discursively salient (2015, 8). Within this reading, perception and cognition is understood as mediated and predisposed by (b)ordering constructs that constitute a link between a contingent physical world and individual subjectivities (Zerubavel 1997 quoted in Pöttsch 2015, 4). (B)ordering, in Pöttsch’s view, thus refers to the formation of interpretive schemata that:

... [e]stablish and constantly reinforce relevant differences on contingent grounds [and] consistently invite political subjects to perceive, categorise, and perform social, political, cultural, or other topographies in a particular manner. (2012, 12)

This framework indicates to the condition that neither the imagining of the nation nor minorities and majorities are stable ontological entities. Rather, they are processes and must be made and remade continuously through social encounters. This, in turn, depends on the available interpretive resources through which people distinguish an

inside, an outside, and the socially relevant differences that make up the perceived boundary between them (Wimmer 2012). The point is that such boundary effects, i.e. how and through which concepts the dividing lines between us/them come to be imagined, clearly matters as the horizons of meaning through which subjects may distinguish between different identities and treat members of social categories differently (ibid.). It may hence be correct that the emergence of individual and collective identification depends on interaction as Richard Jenkins (2014) observes, but interactions are always guided in some way by discursively constructed categories and interpretive schemata that shape social expectations toward other people. Social responsiveness, as Judith Butler reminds us, is not merely a subjective state, “but a way of responding to what is before us with the resources that are available to us” (2009, 50).

Discourse theory (DT) offers a useful terminology to more precisely describe how (b)ordering occurs in HRS outputs and assess how these processes undermine or support contingent frames of in/exclusion at a social and cognitive level. In DT, discourse fundamentally refers to practices that shape the horizon for what can be thought and expressed at a given time. Discourse is what renders people, amongst other things, intelligible to each other and gives meaning to social identities. It matters for the way institutions function and people are treated whether migration is understood as a natural, primordial propensity of the human species or as an existential threat to peace and order. With the terminology of Laclau and Mouffe, identities are thus “essentially ambiguous and instable” fixations of meaning that are continuously negotiated through discursive processes that temporarily establish a specific network of relations between different elements ([1985] 2001, 100).

Laclau and Mouffe use the concept of articulation to refer to practices through which discourses and as such processes of (b)ordering are set in motion. It describes the linking together of different elements into a signifying totality wherein it is the temporarily fixed relations between elements that decides their meaning (ibid.). A discourse on immigration, for instance, may refer to the formation of interpretive frames for understanding that phenomenon by linking it to other semantic domains like war and genetic pollution. This configuration of inherently instable meaning corresponds to an understanding of discourse as “relative and precarious forms of fixation” and “[a]n attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre” (ibid., 112).

Discourses, and the (b)ordering constructs they imply, can hence be studied empirically by attending to the “relative and precarious forms of fixation” that occur when various actors attempt to stabilize identities and relationships. According to Laclau and Mouffe, this is done by examining the anchoring points or privileged signifiers that are particularly significant for the structuring of meaning within a given discourse. These key signifiers are termed “nodal points.” Examples in this case could be “Norwegian,” “immigrant,” or “Muslim.” Various discourses compete in deciding what these central identities mean by linking them to various elements and thereby activating “logics of equivalence and difference” that establish what they are similar to and different from (Jørgensen and Phillips 2013, 55).

In HRS publications, Norwegian/RASIM emerge as the two most important identities and nodal points in a wider discourse about citizenship, migration, and ethnic identity. The relational formation of nodal points happens, for instance, when chains of equivalence are established wherein Muslims are associated with an attack in a secret, misperceived war and contrasted with the vulnerability of majoritized Norwegians. The

various articulations that set up this view temporarily “freeze” the inherent fluidity and multiple possible understandings concerning the perceived relation between these entities and tacitly distribute different emotional values such as fear/solidarity. In this way, the perceived boundary between majoritized/minoritized identities are of an inherently discursive quality that, if successfully established, contribute to order and stabilize the conceptual, affective, and socio-political domains from which it first emerged (Pötzsch 2012, 11).

When HRS publications are considered through this framework, three central (b)ordering constructs appear that structure an emergent relation between Norwegian/RASIM based on notions of war. I analyze these frames as subcomponents within a broader discursive process that I term war(b)ordering. War(b)ordering is a term that collapses the individual frames into one process. This allows me to assess the overall effects of the representational techniques identified in HRS publications while providing a close reading of central parts in the discursive structure. The concept of war(b)ordering thereby refers to how these frames may come together, mutually reinforce one another, and engender a more complex impact in terms of supporting differentials at the level of affective and moral responsiveness amongst the Norwegian public.

War(b)ordering is thus an attempt to describe discursive conditions wherein militaristic logics and a binary division between allies vs. enemies are systematically brought to bear as an interpretive optics on the perceived challenges and dilemmas of immigration. Under such conditions, people’s perception of who counts as in-group or out-group members may tacitly be folded into a structure of social perception wherein exclusion, or the use of protective force, appear as a necessary and indeed the only rational and just response to conflicts (Rosello and Wolfe 2017). Ultimately, this framework implies critical reflection on the making and breaking of patterns of perceived difference through which discursively positioned identities are shaped and may help explain the processes through which contingent regimes of in/exclusion are (re)constituted in and through media products (Pötzsch 2015; Butler 2009).

## Data and Method

The article draws on data derived from online observation of the HRS platform from September 2018 to June 2019 and November 2020 to June 2020, as well as data gathered through archival search on the HRS website. Throughout this period, 115 HRS articles that deal with immigration, refugeeism, and Islam were collected as portable document format (PDF) files along with the images that accompany these publications. The analysis of this data is contingent on a three-step process. First, I observed the formal properties of the HRS website and the frequency with which HRS published and gathered the main body of articles. This was done by collecting contents on the HRS webpage two-three days a week during the above-mentioned time period. Following Manning and Kunkel (2014), I conducted a thematic analysis of the textual contents of the publications on an ongoing basis to establish the main categories of difference through which audiences are invited to think about the relationship between Norwegian majorities/RASIM. Herein, notions of revolution/impending violence/secret invasion and discursive cues about biological/inherent difference eventually appeared as salient and reoccurring discursive frames and were chosen for further analysis on this ground.

Analytically, this choice is based on the idea that it is, partly, in and through the process of being reiterated that discursive frames become significant, capable of influencing public beliefs and enacting mindscapes of difference as social (b)orders. Through their regularity in dispersal, such frames, and the affects they imply, may become “‘fetishes’, qualities that seem to reside in objects, only through an erasure of the history of their production and circulation” (Ahmed 2004, 11). With the terminology of Butler, the frequency with which discursive frames appear matters in so far as such frames “must circulate in order to establish their hegemony. This circulation brings out or, rather, is the iterable structure of the frame” (2009, 12). The same logic was applied in the analysis of the images in HRS publications in which the most salient and consistent visual-discursive feature was chosen for further analysis. Namely, the application of various color effects and a visual differential framing that represents minoritized populations, especially Muslims, as dark, hostile figures in contrast to fully humanized political characters with view-points agreeable to HRS.

Secondly, having established central discursive themes, I searched the HRS website using keywords from the material, such as *krig* [war], *invasjon* [invasion], and *revolusjon* [revolution]. This was done to probe the consistency of their use beyond the timeframe of the main analysis and thus provide a detailed study of their role in articulating and reiterating patterns of difference. The keyword search yielded 76 additional outputs that activated frames of war, thus bringing the total number of HRS publications examined in this article to 191.

Finally, to assess possible impacts, I conducted a formal discourse analysis of the frames that were found to be significant, where I mapped the concepts through which the (Norwegian) “us” was constructed in relation to the (RASIM) “them.” In doing so, I followed the methodological guidelines presented by Jørgensen and Phillips (2013). This entailed drawing maps of how descriptive concepts were linked to the key identities (Norwegian/RASIM) in chains of equivalence and difference. The following analysis, built around the notion of war(b)ordering, thereby reflects an attempt to describe how nodal points were formed in the material while assessing the possible effects of this process considering DT. The emerging theorization interprets the fixation of meaning between the nodal points in HRS’s discourse to enable a discursive logic of militaristic social differentiation – a socio-discursive (b)order – that may ultimately support and amplify racist stereotypes and potentially encourage violent approaches for resolving social tensions.

### The Production of Citizen-Soldier Subjectivity: The First Frame

In 121 out of 191 outputs, HRS insinuates or directly states that Norway/Europe/the West is at war, under invasion, or faces conditions reminiscent of civil war in the wake of so-called non-European immigration and the presence of Islam. In one case, for instance, HRS claims in the subheading that “we are in such an extreme situation now that I believe we must be honest and say it as it is: We are at war [with Islam]” (HRS 2014b). Other salient examples include publications with headlines like, “The West is at war with Islam” (HRS 2007), “Austria (...) declares war on political Islam” (HRS 2018a), “Immigrants at ‘war’ with the Swedish” (HRS 2011), “Holy war in the streets of Germany” (HRS 2014a), “low intensity civil war in Sweden” (HRS 2013a),

and “an organized invasion of Europe” (HRS 2017a). In publications of this kind, key concepts such as war, revolution, enemies, invasion, and resistance systematically enable an antagonistic relational structure grounded in an idea of armed conflict between Norwegian majorities/RASIM. They suggest that war-like or violent conditions, fighting, and rioting are flooding or overpowering European countries, especially Norway’s neighbor, Sweden, in the wake of immigration, and encourage militaristic defense. The following use of disclaimers provides further insight to the discursive means through which audiences are invited to perceive violent conflict as a regrettable, albeit unavoidable form of contact between RASIM and majority populations:

Yes, I too would like peace in our time, but there is ‘someone’ [Muslims/immigrants] who wants it differently. But should we not still heed these facts? (HRS 2015)

[Quoting Ayaan Hirsi Ali]<sup>6</sup> The West is at war with Islam; not radical Islamism, but Islam. Not because we have declared war on Islam, but because Islam has declared war on us. (HRS 2007)

In these quotes, the idea of an ongoing state of war is recontextualized as a necessary form of self-defense against immigration and Islam, the latter framed as an irrational aggressor. They suggest that “we” are not at war with “them” and do not want war, *but* “they” are at war with “us,” and it would be naïve not to realize and act according to this reality. A sense of rationality/responsibility is developed around the notion that “we” need to act in response to the threat or face the consequences. Note that in the second quote, it is not “radical Islamism” but in fact “regular” Islam (thus regular people) that are described as having “declared war.”

The above examples suggest how the Norwegian public is invited to believe that the only way to understand immigration related conflicts is through the prism of war, criminality, and aggression. Within this framework, chains of equivalence are drawn that invite the perception of RASIM as a homogeneous enemy-figure, approaching Norwegian society from virtually all sides, while supporting the notion that their presence, unless defensive action is taken, will inevitably lead to war-like situations. A discursive (b)order is thereby established that effectively casts the situation as a Manichean battle: one of vulnerable majorities threatened by uneducated newcomers that with their primitive barbarism will necessarily engender violent, lawless, and chaotic conditions. As a result, no nuance is permitted. Regardless of vast varieties in individual characteristics, a single dominant discursive identity is established; the enemy-other that cannot be integrated or met with reason and, due to its hostile nature, must be engaged with militaristic violence to protect the self (Pöttsch 2012, 8–9). Every individual subsumed under this war(b)order thereby becomes a source of potential danger. Hostile intentions cannot be pinned down to a single figure as such; a discursive effect that aligns a broad range of identities together and constitutes them as a common threat (Ahmed 2004, 119).

The (b)ordering effects of this discourse are further developed in outputs that suggest RASIM to be inherently different or biologically/genetically damaged, implying that minoritized populations from the Global South are incapable of adapting to Norwegian society. The most interesting version of the essentializing claim that “inside of us we are not the same/equal” (HRS 2020i) is a racial figuring of RASIM as a welfare burden

on the account that immigrant families produce “genetically degenerated” children due to common cultural practices of inbreeding/consanguineous marriage. For example, HRS propagated a blog article by the infamous Danish anti-Muslim psychologist, Nicolai Sennels, which claimed that “massive amounts of consanguineous marriages during Islam’s existence over 1,400 years may have had dramatically destructive effects on the genetic material” (HRS 2010a). Therein, causal connections between culture (marriage practices), racial characteristics (genetic endowment), and inferiority (disease) are enabled in a public context wherein explicit reference to “racial difference” has otherwise become taboo (Bangstad 2015, 51). Additionally, HRS has published works with similar claims by an anonymous internet blogger operating under the pseudonym “Julia Caesar.” In one such anonymous output republished by HRS, Caesar claims that Africans in general are mentally retarded, and, like Arabs, are negatively affected by inbreeding (Partapuoli, Linløkken, and Steen 2013). Aligning it with the typical visual expression of publications written by HRS, Caesar’s text was furnished and supported with a caricature of immigrant children (*ibid.*).

Claims of mental/physical inferiority that are centered on the other’s body is a key idea through which the naturalization of racial (b)orders, problematic differences, and practices of exploitation, exclusion, and ethnic hygiene have been historically legitimated (Gilroy 2000; Hall 1997). The boundaries between groups tend to be viewed as somewhat porous and open to change and negotiation if calculations of difference are purely understood as “cultural.” However, if problematic differences can be imagined as somehow innate or genetically determined, then these boundaries are “beyond history, permanent and fixed” (Gilroy 2000), and the exclusion of others is easily justified. In this sense, Sennels’s suggestion, circulated by HRS, that consanguineous marriages may have “affected the genetic material” effectively produces racism without race (Stolcke 1995). It articulates a threat to national purity and supports proto-fears of miscegenation based on a set of differences that separate and as such (b)order the civilized/healthy self in relation to the pathological/uncivilized other, which is not without parallels to the logics of proslavery theorists who once sought to nurse racial hysteria and “deepen white anxiety by claiming that the abolition of slavery would lead to intermarriage and the degeneracy of the race” (Fredrickson 1987; 49 quoted in Hall 1997, 243).

HRS’s propagation and critique of the “non-Western” and often Muslim “culture” of consanguineous marriage (see also HRS 2010b, 2010c, 2013b, 2020c) invites moral outrage and performs the ideological tasks of biological racism, designating culture as having certain “natural effects” that effectively lead to closed genetic-cultural groups with hard, static boundaries. Culture is thereby constructed as a racial signifier and an inherent, separating difference that halts the slide of meaning around hierarchical relations, distributing inferiority and superiority across the nodal points. Echoing colonial fantasies amongst Whites at the upper end of social power hierarchies with the (transgressing) sexuality of the racial other, the threat-like character of RASIM in relation to Norwegian majorities is justified, both in economic terms and as a latent demographic promise of the eugenic pollution and contagious degeneration of the genetic health and purity of a hitherto wholesome, peaceful nation. Ahmed’s insight on the relation between the reiteration of discourse and affective responses suggests precisely how a subliminally perceived, affective (b)order may emerge in and through discourse directed toward people marked as genetically inferior and a threat to the “clean”

national body. The development of emotional orientations toward others, she writes, thus involves a “rippling effect of emotions (...) movements or associations whereby ‘feelings’ take us across different levels of signification, not all of which can be admitted in the present” (2004, 119–20).

Pervasive allusions to unavoidable, violent conflicts and notions of genetic differences are characteristic of how the relationship between majoritized populations and RASIM are framed by HRS. It represents a discursive process through which a war (b)order separating these identities are stabilized that effectively render it more difficult to imagine adaptation, hybridization, or integration as possible or plausible outcomes. Only militant self-defense in the face of imminent domination and social/physical detachment to avoid the chaos pressing against state and bodily boundaries remain conceivable. Thereby, the first frame of war(b)ordering supports the emergence of what we may term citizen-soldier subjectivities: audiences that are discursively positioned and develop an identity as responsible citizens around the culturally defined role of the soldier, encompassing concepts of virtuous, necessary resistance, and sets out to defend “our dear Norway” (HRS 2017d) from the figure of a biologically inferior, faceless enemy beyond reason.

### The Narrative of Secret Invasion: The Second Frame

The second dimension of war(b)ordering emerges from 24 outputs in which the presence of RASIM in Norwegian society is defined in terms of a quiet attack/a planned, secret invasion. Most notably, this view is set up via content expressing the idea that a “cultural revolution” is taking place and/or about strategic efforts to undermine Norwegian society’s liberal democratic order. Consider, for example, outputs titled: “Settling the score with Islam or a changed Norway forever?” (HRS 2020d), “Mosque Norway: A cultural revolution” (HRS 2017b), “A demographic revolution” (HRS 2020e), and “Cultural revolution” (HRS 2019). RASIM, in particular Muslims, are consistently linked to the notion of revolution, stealthy incursion, and the idea that Norwegians will be culturally dominated or supplanted if the truth is not realized and appropriate counteraction taken. Norwegian culture is constructed as endangered and as about to be revolutionized from within and eventually supplanted by barbarism, backwardness, and fundamentalism. The first output cited above provides a salient case in point: The subheading questions whether the Norwegian government is “courageous enough to take a necessary confrontation with Islam, or will it give way? The clock is ticking, and it is not ticking to the advantage of our civilization” (HRS 2020d). An account follows of a “powerful warning” given by Morten Messerschmidt (a leading politician from the ultranationalist Danish Peoples Party), to Danish society, “a warning which could be 100% attached to the Islamification of Norway” (ibid.). HRS paraphrases Messerschmidt’s warning, which consists of an analogy between the funding and construction of mosques in Denmark and the mythological narrative of the Trojan War:

Odysseus managed to get the Trojans themselves to pull in the Trojan horse, full of Greek soldiers, on their own territory. In this way the cunning Greeks won the battle against the Trojans (...) It [Danish mosques] is a Trojan horse, camouflaged in tropes about religious freedom, which now are to be used as a spearhead in the continued Islamification of Denmark. (ibid.)

HRS's summary of Messerschmidt's allegory illustrates how a narrative of subtle militarization orients audiences toward a basic ideological truth of unseen dark forces secretly laboring to infiltrate and take over "the Norwegian house," its values, people, and culture. In this example, mosques are veiled incubators of war, sneakily transporting and breeding a human apparatus of insurgency, while immigration from "non-Western countries" is figured as the foolish, self-defeating act of accommodating the enemy. Considered in relation to frequent allusions to the threat of demographic/cultural substitution and shifting ethnic and cultural power balances, the narrative alludes, on one hand, to the notion of failure to notice an approaching enemy. On the other hand, it promises that seemingly mundane scenes, for example, people attending service at a mosque, may not be what they seem. In other words, subjection is encouraged as audiences are urged to register everyday scenes through an affective cloud of suspicion wherein RASIM, especially Muslims, emerge as religious-ideological agents secretly laboring to bring down the liberal-democratic order (see Andreasen 2020 for a similar argument). It implies a "fear of small numbers" (Appadurai 2006) that plays upon and (re)activates anxieties already discernable among parts of the white Norwegian majority of being decimated and/or supplanted by minorities against which the former is invited to develop an increasingly inflexible, idealized self-understanding and gird itself to "fight a perceived agenda of disenfranchisement and persecution" (Pautz 2016, 214).

The frames of secret invasion establish a marked boundary between us/them by subsuming RASIM under an idea of shrewd enemy agents while casting majorities as victims of an attack. They also imply a more subtle (b)ordering effect in so far as political adversaries and those who publicly contest HRS's discourse can more easily be categorized as national traitors, complicitous with the advancing enemy. For example, in an article published in the leading Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* in 2011, HRS founder Storhaug refers to demonstrators protesting the reprinting of the Muhammed cartoons in Norway as *Quislings* (war traitors and enemies within) (Døving 2019, 89). Likewise, appeals to solidarity with Muslims by well-known intellectual Per Fugelli have been slurred by HRS as cowardly "politics of appeasement" similar to that of Neville Chamberlain during WWII, and thereby made to resemble national treason (HRS 2016). The point is that, when dissent or counter narratives are made equivalent to treason or siding with the enemy in this manner, the space for such discussions to occur is narrowed – not only in the public sphere but also within individual minds. As such, it works to limit the possible flow of differences between the nodal points and possibly block political re-articulations based on discourses of, for example, humanitarianism, diversity, or the possibility of adaptation or cultural hybridity.

As the second dimension of HRS's war(b)ordering, the narrative of secret invasion establishes a mindscape with clear lines of division between an inside (victims), an outside (perpetrators), as well as a subdomain of internal traitoring figures. Under such conditions, majoritized populations are (b)ordered into (unwitting) targets of an ongoing, albeit misperceived attack by enemy forces, thereby justifying their immediate militarized protection while tacitly offering popular desires for revenge/resistance as common-sense reactions – not only against the aggressors, but also dissenters and enemies within.

## Visual Differential Representation: The Third Frame

The third frame of war(b)ordering emerges through particular kinds of images, featuring in 49 HRS outputs, that distribute visibility/invisibility across identities and divide what we may term a “political self” from the shadowy, threatening “others.” As a visual rhetoric contributing to a particular “distribution of the sensible” (Rancière 2004), these images frame RASIM as faceless, unknowable figures, in contrast to what tends to be white, often ultra-nationalist, politicians and activists with worldviews agreeable to HRS, who are typically depicted via portraits of smiling, empathetic faces. This differential representation produces a field of intelligibility that tacitly distinguishes between good and evil, light and dark, known and unknown, and iconic versions of who and what the trustworthy human and its other may look like. Thus, two figures are established on visual-discursive grounds separated by a (b)order that effectively differentiates between those populations on whom the future of the nation depends, and those who represent a direct, albeit shadowy threat.

Consider, for example, how feelings of affinity and estrangement are structured via the publication “Saved girls from adult spouses: Can face impeachment” (HRS 2020h) that depicts the former vice-chairman of the Danish political party *Venstre*, Inger Støjberg,<sup>7</sup> when compared to the illustration of Muslims in an output termed “France in full attack against Islam – the Hijab must go” (HRS 2020g). The image in the first publication exemplifies how political “selves” tend to be represented via a discursive design based on the maximization of humaneness: portrait-style images of smiling, empathetic faces with sparkling eyes full of life. In this sample, what is probably a professional press image and profile picture of a cheeky, smiling, well-postured Støjberg is placed next to a shadowy, slightly backgrounded, image of what is presumably a colored girl wearing a veil. The girl’s face is blurred, colored completely black, while the hijab is highlighted in red, emotionally provoking nuances. Next to this image, Støjbergs face appears sharp, human, friendly, and engaging. In contrast to images depicting “political others”, this type of representation (for additional examples of “Political selves” see HRS 2017c, 2020d, 2020j) charges their referent with individual personality and a sense of integrity, power, and sincerity. They place an ethical demand on viewers, invite us to respond to their humanness, and thus identify with their viewpoint (that tend to imply exclusionary, nationalist, and sometimes, anti-Muslim rhetoric). These are protagonist imageries that “give us the idea of the human with whom we are to identify (...) the patriotic hero who expands our own ego boundary ecstatically into that of the nation” (Butler 2004, 145).

Conversely, the image in the second output (HRS 2020g), constructs an idea on visual grounds of “political others.” It depicts, in black/white colors, what is presumably two veiled Muslim women walking down the street from behind and demonstrates how facelessness, combined with added shadow effects or monochrome colors anchored in anti-immigration and anti-Muslim narratives, are fundamental to the visual and narrative structuring of emotions in many HRS outputs (for similar examples see also HRS 2018b, 2020e, 2020f, 2021). Suggesting how war(b)ordering is enabled through such imagery, Butler (2009) argued for the importance of mediated images in the framing of the other to legitimate, perpetuate, and secure public consent for wars and exclusion by producing “grievable” and “ungrievable” lives and populations (see also Beyer et al.

2019). Similarly, Sontag (1979) emphasized that representations turn people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. In this case, the twin framing of RASIM as shadowy and faceless others versus fully humanized political “allies” implies how this control and symbolic appropriation is used to create a tacit semantic structure that delineates particular identities and bodies in terms of friend/foe, trustworthy/untrustworthy, and good/evil. The manipulative techniques (blurring, shadowing, and face erasure), which associate RASIM with threat in this second type of images, thus has a discursive effect in that visual-normative schemes may work “precisely through providing no image, no name, no narrative, so that there never was a life, and there never was a death” (Butler 2004, 146–7). Butler’s (2004) account of effacement suggests that being able to respond to the face of the other means to be awake to what is precarious in another’s life. It indicates how the background of visual meaning against which HRS’s war rhetoric circulates covertly silences the potential for ethical responsiveness by establishing the war(b)order as an epistemological barrier that constrains audiences from engaging with the faces, stories, and shared social substance of the other (Pöttsch 2012).

Though the veiling of the humanness of RASIM behind visual-discursive barriers is clearly involved in producing discursive closure, it is also an effect that arises as these identities are “emptied” of personal traits and allowed to emerge as an “empty signifier” that is open to appropriation by HRS discourse. In other words, the production of a dominant visual background of faceless, generic others produces a signifier of threat that is deflated and without a specific referent. It “represent[s] an undetermined quantity of signification, in itself void of meaning and thus apt to receive any meaning” (Levi-Strauss 1987, 66–7). This implies that discursive appeals to fear and negative emotions toward a target group may not work as well if the targets have smiling faces, shining eyes, and personal histories. The representation of RASIM as vague, blurry characters with no human and personal qualities, however, guides audiences’ imagination to collapse a vast range of human beings into a single figure and helps HRS, as their interpreters, to stabilize their shared meaning potential under key notions like “war,” “invasion,” “threat,” etc.. RASIM are, in other words, drawn together through their facelessness in HRS discourse into one, shadowy figure and rendered vulnerable to the semiotics of war, danger, and distrust that appeal to become a shared mindscape and hegemonic reading.

When the two examples and types of images are compared, it becomes clear that the appearance of RASIM is circumscribed by a “limit to discourse that establishes the limits of human intelligibility” (Butler 2004, 35) and how this intelligibility and inherent facelessness is systematically highlighted against a background of vivid smiles. In this sense, the images generate an aesthetic economy of the political self/other based on negativity; that is, the faceless other is systematically articulated through the constitutive outside of a fully human self, and vice versa. A limit to “their” humanness emerges and simulates a certain version of reality, which, in a highly mediatized society, might easily constitute a primary epistemological contact zone for some audiences. It also becomes clear precisely how this may establish and stabilize a contingent, discursively induced set of differences, a visual-discursive (b)order between self/other, allies/enemies, and safe/dangerous, that encourages or discourages moral responsiveness and social identification. This effect emerges, then, through discursive chains of difference, visually shaping interpretive schemata that maximize the emotional, social, and epistemological differentiation between the figure of a humanized, political self and the threat of the inhuman, unknowable other.

Visual differential representation is a systematic, discursive blurring, and erasure of the face of the designated other and constitutes the third frame of HRS's war(b)ordering. Similar to narrative structures wherein the enemy is presented as an evil character who plans to harm innocents, for audiences to identify with the protagonist and a perceived need to struggle against the enemy, RASIM are narrated as dark, menacing figures in contrast to the light, empathetic nature of the political self. It renders antagonism toward RASIM plausible by blocking out empathy-inducing features and producing templates of the politically "pure" and "impure." Both Douglas (1966), through her notion of material out of place, and Kristeva (1982), with her concept of the abject, have suggested that the concepts of the pure and the impure imply a cultural mechanism for producing particular forms of bounded stability and creating subjects who revolt against disturbed (b)orders. The production of a visual-discursive (b)order between the "pure/impure" is, thus, performative in that it may incite a desire to reinstate cultural order, "to clean up," by supporting a particular kind of perceived difference between Norwegians/RASIM and make this difference speak the unconscious language of cultural classification. It silently invites individual desires and actions to:

... Sweep it [the impure] up, throw it out, restore the place to order, bring back the normal state of affairs. The retreat of many cultures towards "closure" against foreigners, intruders, aliens and "others" is part of the same process of purification (...) such expelled or excluded groups [are] "abjected" (from the Latin meaning, literally, "thrown out"). (Hall 1997, 236)

In sum, visual differential representation may tacitly relay and distribute emotions and give plausibility to HRS' political articulations of an ongoing state of war as an "ultimately mythological and religious idea of evil enemies and epic battles against faceless forces of darkness" (Pötzsch 2012, 8). Combined, the three frames of war(b)ordering enable the "antecedent ethical relation to the face of the other [to be] replaced by the violent maintenance of protective barriers dividing us from what is brought to emerge as merely an enemy" (ibid., 8).

## Conclusion

Through the detailed description of the frames underlying HRS's representations, this article has examined the broad strokes of what the Norwegian public are encouraged to believe about societal newcomers from the Global South. Rather than informing the public of the "challenges and possibilities associated with immigration" in the balanced manner suggested by their former state sanctioned mandate, HRS engages in one-sided, highly emotionalized framing of newcomers as a militarized threat. This discourse encourages different dimensions of racism and enables a fearful emotional tone of experience towards minoritized populations that may affect audiences' beliefs, reasoning, and preparedness to support policies or endorse claims. Considered a rhetoric stratagem and tool of persuasion, HRS' representations attempt to capture public attention, infiltrate the character of political perception, and invite people to think about complex socio-political situations in terms of simplistic scripts for emotions and behavior grounded in a cultural logic of war. As such, this choreography of allies vs. enemies exerts subliminal influence and may implant affective triggers that suggest a negative mood or association into the majority's perception of people identified as "immigrants" that gain in effect through a (mis)use of long-standing, state-sanctioned discursive authority.

In sum, HRS's representations should be understood as a field of discursively conditioned negative assumptions about RASIM and a cognitive intervention to make the public believe that the only way to understand immigration related conflicts is through the prism of war, criminality, and aggression. Such emotional tactics predispose exclusion and, in utmost consequence, renders the use of violence morally acceptable. When understood in a discourse-theoretical framework, these horizons of plausibility emerge via texts and images that systematically limit the possibility for discursively positioned subjects to think and see alternatives to a condition of mutually exclusive hostility with those who emerge merely as objects and shadows rather than women and men. These are visual-discursive borders of war: war(b)orders.

Through its commitment to the Human Rights Declaration, the Norwegian state has pledged to prevent racial discrimination. This analysis suggests that this obligation has conflicted with the state's provision of implicit ideological and direct economic support to HRS and highlights the necessity for the Norwegian state to not reactivate its funding of HRS to fulfill its basic human rights obligations.

## Notes

1. These statements were published in a Facebook comment: A 70-year-old Norwegian woman was sentenced to a fine of 25,000 NOK and 24 days of conditional imprisonment for hate speech. The quotations, as well as all other Norwegian quotations in this article, were translated by the author.
2. HRS's discourse indistinctively discusses Islam, migration, refugees, and immigrants, tending to conflate these categories. I make use of the abbreviation RASIM to address the fact that exclusionary reasoning is not tied to one specific category as such, but targets people identified broadly as "non-Western immigrants."
3. Data collected from HRS's main webpage [www.right.no](http://www.right.no).
4. In addition to founding HRS, Storhaug has authored several books voicing antiimmigration/Muslim ideas.
5. Most notably the two alternative, far-right news platforms Document.no and Resett.no.
6. Somali-born Dutch American activist, writer, and politician, best known for her conviction that "Islam is fundamentally incompatible with Western democratic values, especially those upholding the rights of women" (Britannica 2021).
7. Støjberg is well-known for developing exceedingly harsh stances toward immigration and is one of the only two Danish politicians in a century to face impeachment.

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