

HOW SYMBOLS MATTER: THE GRIEVANCE COMMUNITY OF POLITICAL ISLAM

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INTRODUCTION

When the office of Charlie Hebdo, a French satirical magazine with a long tradition of caricaturing and ridiculing political and religious ideas and figures, was attacked by terrorists on 7 January, it immediately became a powerful *injustice symbol* for those advocating democratic rights and values. In the days and weeks after the attack placards with *Je Suis Charlie* written on them became viral memes presented by demonstrators, media, politicians, and celebrities as a collective and global solidarity statement. This emotional phase almost eclipsed the fact that Charlie Hebdo was already an injustice symbol before 7 January, only for someone else: Muslims who resist the right to mock and even depict the prophet Muhammad. The magazine attained this role in 2006 when it re-published 12 cartoons first published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in October 2005. These caricatures set in motion a global wave of protest culminating in attacks on Danish embassies and consulates in several Muslim countries during early 2006 (Lindekilde 2010; Olesen 2007). Today, almost a decade later, the cartoons still figure as a potent injustice symbol that continues to motivate attacks and threats against Denmark in general and *Jyllands-Posten* in particular (Olesen 2014). These brief observations serve to demonstrate the main claim of the paper: that *symbols matter* and not least that they matter *politically*.

Yet symbols remain surprisingly marginalized in contemporary political sociology. The study of symbols has long been the domain of literary, media, anthropological, and semiotic studies (for some earlier exceptions in political sociology, see Elder and Cobb; Lasswell et al. 1952). Admittedly, symbols do play a role in various sociological fields: Work on political memories (e.g. Jansen 2007; Schwartz 1991) has strong affinities with the study of political symbols; in the cultural sociology of Jeffrey Alexander and others (e.g. Alexander et. al. 2004; Alexander and Smith 2005; Alexander et al. 2012) the concept of symbol is a frequent visitor; within the cultural turn in social movement studies, symbols are routinely granted attention (e.g. Emirbayer and Goodwin 1996; Jasper 1997; Jasper and Poulsen 1995); and in the framing tradition in social movement research, the concept also has a place (Benford and Snow 2000; Johnston 2009; Zuo and Benford 1995). While fruitful and inspiring none of these strands offer systematic attempts at theorizing, conceptualizing, and analyzing political symbols and, as a result, too often lose sight of the decidedly political character of symbols in regard to their production as well as their effects (Olesen 2015). If we look outside of sociology proper there is now an emerging body of symbol research within terrorism studies (e.g. Matusitz 2015; Tuman 2010). A

key insight of this literature is its acknowledgment of the global character of injustice symbols related to terrorism. Compared to political sociology, we find in these works a more concerted effort at definition and a keener sense of their political character. From a sociological perspective, however, the terrorism literature is weak on theorizing the relationship between symbols and society. The role they play in constituting and defining political collectives is not systematically discussed. The paper seeks to address these shortcomings by focusing on three overall aspects not integrated in any of the works cited above: (1) definition, delimitation, and conceptualization; (2) the link between symbols and deep-lying political-cultural schemas; and (3) the political, agentive, and contested character of symbols. While the paper has a generalizing ambition its empirical canvass are injustice symbols related to political Islam (defined here as a world-view in which religious ideas dominate and guide political ideas and action; the term in other words does not necessarily connote terrorist or other forms of political violence) and the conflict between political Islam and the West. The paper argues that injustice symbols *matter* in this conflict in three ways: (a) by being related in a *symbolic family*, which constitutes the symbolic infrastructure of a *grievance community*; (b) by *co-producing* each other and being sites of political *contestation*; and (c) by functioning as *resources* in the legitimation and motivation of political action. The paper is mainly conceptual and theoretical in orientation and seeks to offer a range of theoretical/conceptual tools for the further study of injustice symbols in relation to political Islam.

Theoretically, the paper's discussions are modeled over Durkheim's (1912/2001) late work in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. What Durkheim most importantly brings to the table is how *symbols are carriers and repositories of collective values and meanings, and, as such, central in motivating, legitimating, and focusing human action*. The main utility of such an understanding is to combine, in particular, points 2 and 3 above; that is, to advance an agenda that simultaneously sees injustice symbols as resources in and products of human agency and as reflective and productive of underlying collective value sets. It might of course be argued that the strong emphasis above on the politics of symbols undermines the utility of a Durkheimian approach. This is not the view taken here. While it is true that Durkheim's analysis in the *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* does not offer a political perspective, this is primarily a question of empirical focus. There is, in other words, nothing in Durkheim's theorizing that suggests that the study of politics in and around symbols falls outside its general scope (Olesen 2015). The basic insight is rather that symbols are a fundamental aspect of social

life. It is evident that with the increasingly complex character of late modern societies symbolic processes will also become increasingly political and traversed by power dynamics.

INJUSTICE SYMBOLS

The concept of symbol is employed not only within science but also in everyday speech and in journalistic analysis. It is therefore important to begin by identifying a number of basic components of the concept, as it is understood here. This exercise will be followed by an isolation of the concept of *injustice* symbols. Elder and Cobbs' (1983: 28) definition offer a useful starting point. In their view, a symbol is "any object used by human beings to index meanings that are not inherent in, nor discernible from, the object itself". This extra layer of meaning can be understood as a form of *universalization*. The object, in other words, becomes a representative of a wider issue and/or value set. While symbols are thus social constructs, they always have an empirical referent (object) that cannot be bent, manipulated and attributed a meaning at will (Bartmanski and Alexander 2012). On the other hand, the empirical object is often dramatized and concentrated in order to isolate its universal appeal.

Symbols cannot be understood outside of *context and agency*. This observation pushes in the direction of the *political* dimension of symbols. Collective human actors carry out symbolic meaning attribution. Collective actors are defined by a particular set of interests, values, and identities (Polletta and Jasper 2001), which are directly or indirectly attributed to objects in the symbolization process. These interests and identities are rooted in existing political-cultural schemas or frames (Olesen 2015; Gamson 1995; Snow and Benford 1992). It is in the linking of objects and schemas that the universalization of the particular occurs. For a symbol to be considered an *injustice* symbol the activity around it must involve claims, which identify a social and/or political problem and articulate a desire for change aimed at a *system of authority* (Snow and Soule 2010). The latter concept must be interpreted broadly and covers authorities such as the state and the police as well as norm-based repressive practices such as for example racism and sexism. As a result, injustice symbols reflect a set of moral-political *binaries* (Alexander 2006) that guide collective understandings of what is just and good and what is unjust and evil (Smith 2000). This more than suggests that injustice symbolization is an agentic process. Objects are symbolized and universalized through political claims carried out by political actors. Agency has a dual character: on the one hand, injustice symbols are formed *through* political action, but once formed

also become important resources *in and for* it. Summarizing and combing the contextual and agentive elements we may thus view injustice symbols dialectically, that is, as *confirmative* in the sense that they are always rooted in existing political-cultural schemas about just and unjust (the contextual dimension) *and* as important resources in the motivation and legitimation of *new* political action (the agency dimension) (these definitions and distinctions are further elaborated in the coming sections).

Different types of objects may form the empirical root of injustice symbols. The main ones are events, situations, and cultural products. *Events* cover sudden and unexpected events such as a police assault on a collective or an individual. *Situations* typically have a larger time horizon and, among other things, include occupations, wars and imprisonment. *Cultural products* are particularly relevant in a discussion of the injustice symbols of political Islam. This category includes the publication of images or texts considered to ridicule Islam (e.g. Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*). All of these categories often have a *visual* dimension where the empirical event, situation or product is documented and dramatized by photography and video. For example, the Guantanamo Bay injustice symbol has its own visual vocabulary in the form of, for example, the orange jump suits worn by prisoners at the facility. In other cases, photographic documentation and injustice symbols are inseparable. This was the case with the Abu Ghraib injustice symbol: here the photos *are* the injustice symbol, not only an amplifying factor.

SYMBOL FAMILIES

Injustice symbols are not isolated social and political phenomena. The preceding section noted how they are anchored in existing political-cultural schemas, which provide particular empirical objects with universalizing reach and potential. As a result we often see several injustice symbols gravitating, as it were, around the same schemas. We may think of these clusters as *symbol families*. The concept is potentially extendable to all kinds of injustice symbols, but is perhaps especially visible in relation to political Islam. Table 1 represents some of the main historical and contemporary injustice symbols related to political Islam. The table does not pretend to be exhaustive. It focuses mainly on what might be considered some of the best-known and most visible injustice symbols at a global level.

Empirical object	Context and background	Meaning and employment
The Crusades	A series of military campaigns from the late 11 th to the late 13 th century aimed at establishing European control over Jerusalem (captured by Muslims in 1076).	Employed consistently as a master symbol in political Islamist framing to underline the historically deep and unjust aggression of the West against the Muslim world; terms like “crusaders” and “crusader nations” are employed as symbolic labels even in contemporary issues and struggles.
Palestine	The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and subsequent Israeli military occupation and settlement of territories with predominantly Arab/Palestinian populations.	Employed consistently as a master symbol in political Islamist framing; easily linked to that of the Crusades because of the shared geographical locations; seen as an extension of policies with a deep history.
The Satanic Verses	The 1988 publication of Salman Rushdie’s book <i>The Satanic Verses</i> .	Created in the late 1980s/early 1990s, where several fatwas were issued that called for and legitimated the killing of Rushdie; the fatwas motivated various successful and attempted attacks on Rushdie and his publishers; the book was considered to ridicule the prophet Muhammad and to be a part of a Western policy of aggression and lack of respect towards Muslims and Muslim values.
Muhammad al-Dura	The killing of 12-year old boy, Muhammad al-Dura, in a 2000 crossfire incident between Israeli and Palestinian forces: the incident was filmed by a France 2 cameraman.	Employed as a visual and emotionally charged symbol of the injustices committed by Israel against Palestinians; as such interlinked with the master symbol of Palestine; al-Dura is commemorated on stamps and park and street names in the Arab world; the image of al-Dura is seen in the background of the Daniel Pearl beheading video (2002).
Guantanamo Bay	A prison facility established on Cuba (in an area leased by the United States since 1903) in early 2002: houses captives suspected of terrorist involvement.	Employed to highlight the legal and moral hypocrisy of the United States; disrespect for international conventions is portrayed as expressing a double-tongued behavior; utilizes the powerful imagery of cage-like cells and orange jump suits worn by prisoners to distill de-humanizing practices; further exposed by alleged instances of Quran desecration in 2005, which motivated widespread protest.
French ban on hijab	A 2004 French law prohibiting the wearing of religious symbols, including hijabs, niqabs, and burkas, in public schools.	Aimed at all religious symbols, not only those associated with Islam; yet widely considered by many Muslims as targeted against Muslims and as a politically and culturally motivated persecution of Muslims and Muslim cultural values.
Abu Ghraib	A 2004 series of photographs documenting humiliating and illegal prisoner treatment by United States soldiers in the prison facility at Abu Ghraib in Iraq.	Employed to expose the legal and moral hypocrisy of the United States; the treatment of Muslim prisoners transgresses both legal and moral boundaries; a

		classical exposé where hidden behavior is publicly revealed to show the “true” character of the transgressor; driven by powerful visual imagery.
The Muhammad Cartoons	The 2005 publication of 12 satirical cartoons of the prophet Muhammad in the Danish newspaper <i>Jyllands-Posten</i> .	Employed to symbolize the aggressive and disrespectful behavior of the West against Muslims and Muslim values; depiction of the prophet Muhammad is widely prohibited in Islam; the satirical aspect adds a layer of ridicule; the cartoons motivated widespread protest in Muslim countries; the cartoons have motivated several attempted and successful attacks.
Charlie Hebdo	The 2006 re-publication by French satirical magazine, Charlie Hebdo, of the Danish Muhammad Cartoons.	Closely associated with the Danish Muhammad Cartoons; legal controversies in France over the re-published cartoons; Hebdo’s continued use of satire aimed at Islam has made it a target of consistent criticism since 2006; violently attacked in January 2015.

Table 1. The symbol family of political Islam.

There are at least two ways of thinking about symbol familiarity: (a) temporal horizontality and verticality and (b) injustice hierarchies. The five most recent symbols in table 1 stem from the same period and are, in differing degrees, tied to the post-9/11 period. Some are related to the so-called war on terrorism (especially Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo), while others are related more to the increased salience of Islam and multiculturalism in public debates throughout the world after 9/11 (especially the French ban on hijabs, The Muhammad Cartoons, and Charlie Hebdo). In a temporal and political sense these symbols are thus *horizontally* linked. While there is a certain symbolic density in the present period all of these symbols are part of historically *vertical* relationships. As evidenced by the below quote, excerpts from a 2006 statement by Osama bin Laden in response to the Danish Muhammad Cartoons, political Islamist framing often moves seamlessly between historical periods, combining injustice symbols in horizontal and vertical ways that mutually enforce each other: “how are we to interpret France’s stance towards the hijab, and its banning in schools...And after...Salman Rushdie wrote his book in which he attacked Islam’s sacred things, the Prime Ministry of Britain received him, in a challenge to and mockery of...Muslims”. And, bin Laden goes on, “...not to mention what you have heard about the intentional desecration of the Noble Quran in Guantanamo prison...and the insulting drawings which we denounce today are nothing but the fruit of this aggressive attitude in the

West...This is just a small part of something greater” (bin Laden 2008: 114). Al-Qaeda communication, for example, routinely makes use of such symbol clusters in their public justification and mobilization efforts. The familial relationships between these symbols is evidenced here not only in their juxtaposition, but also in bin Laden’s remarks at the end of the quote, where he underlines their location within the same overall injustice frame and political-cultural schema (“...just a small part of something greater”). As noted in the preceding section, symbol formation is the result of agency and the active imputation of meaning to empirical objects. In a similar manner, symbol families are created and made operational when political actors, in their public communication, systematically draw social and political lines between them by interpreting them within an overarching injustice schema.

Symbol families often have a *hierarchical* character. Taking the Guantanamo Bay detention center as an example, we may consider this to be part of a wider injustice hierarchy. Guantanamo Bay and other prison facilities repeatedly mentioned by, for example, al-Qaeda, mainly Abu Ghraib and Bagram, are specific places and events. Yet, the injustices committed there are highlighted by organizations such as al-Qaeda to *condense* a much wider situation of injustice. There are at least two levels to be noted here. At the first level, Guantanamo and the other detention centers condense the unjust nature of the wars and occupations in Afghanistan and Iraq and of the so-called global war on terror in general. To the outside observer and potential al-Qaeda activist/terrorist/sympathizer, wars and occupations are relatively abstract, especially when, as is the case with these recent wars and occupations, there is no clearly identifiable front line and hostilities have a low intensity character (minor clashes and attacks, but rarely large-scale and protracted battles). References to concrete and visible places and prisons such as Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, and Bagram are symbolic and cognitive shortcuts to identify what is problematic about the Afghanistan and Iraq wars and occupations: the West’s military and political violation of Muslim countries, populations, and values. At the second (and widest) level, Western military/political presences in Afghanistan and Iraq are employed by al-Qaeda, often through the invocation of Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, and Bagram, as symbols of a historically continuous attempt by the West to subjugate Muslims and Islamic culture. The master injustice symbol in al-Qaeda’s discursive activities (and those of most other Jihadist organizations) is probably Palestine (see table 1). It occurs in one way or the other in most of al-Qaeda’s public interventions. Palestine’s

prominent location in the symbolic family of political Islam owes to its highly visible status at the global scene and to its deeper symbolic roots that go all the way to the Crusades.

GRIEVANCE COMMUNITIES

The symbol family outlined above may be viewed as part of the symbolic infrastructure of a global political Islamist grievance community. Grievance communities are communities that: (a) have generated social and political belief and meaning systems that fundamentally challenge what they consider to be dominant authority systems; (b) are 'united', physically and/or virtually, primarily through shared perceptions of injustice and injustice oriented political-cultural schemas; (c) display a strong identity element; and (d) are not predominantly organized or represented through political parties, interest organizations, and social movements. To be able to speak of political Islam as a grievance community we need to identify a shared *political-cultural schema* (Olesen 2015). Given the diversity of the grievance community, identifying such a schema is necessarily an exercise in complexity reduction. It is nevertheless possible to highlight a number of themes more or less shared across the community. The overarching political-cultural schema of political Islam is negatively defined vis-à-vis Western (primarily symbolized by the United States) modernity (Juergensmeyer, 2005). It is thus opposed to or skeptical of the following: (a) the separation between state and religion, including the prominence of political ideas over religious ones; (b) equality between the sexes; and (c) capitalist consumerism. These elements are all hallmarks of the Western modern social and political experience. In the political-cultural schema of political Islam these three elements are integrated with two additional ones: (d) the claim that these social and political values have been and are being forced on the Muslim world, either through political and military power or through the globalization of Western consumer culture and patterns; and (e) the desire for a new social and political (world) order in which Islamic ideas form and dominate society's value and legal structure. Such visions are often rooted in a political re-imagination of a past golden age (Ayoob 2008). It is point "d" in particular that makes it relevant to speak of a *grievance* community. Grievance communities are thus premised on their relationship with a system of authority (Snow and Soule 2010) that violates core values of the community. Within the political-cultural schema of political Islam, this system of authority is, broadly speaking, the West; that is primarily Europe and the United States. Contemporarily as well as historically, the relationship between the West and the Muslim world is seen as characterized by unjust

aggression, expansion, and dominance. The schema thus rests on a number of moral-political *binaries* (Alexander 2004, 2006) that serve to portray the authority system as morally and politically corrupt and unjust: clean-unclean; honest-dishonest; victim-aggressor; Muslims-infidels.

Of course, the grievance community of political Islam cannot be reduced to injustice symbols: it is constituted and maintained by a broad variety of activities and actors. Yet at a symbolic and emotional level injustice symbols play a crucial role in its coherence. It is at this point that the late Durkheimian inspiration of the paper comes most fully into view. Durkheim's (1912/2001) argument in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* was that any form of human community and collective has and needs a symbolic infrastructure where symbols serve as *carriers and repositories of shared values in emotionally and visually accessible and recognizable ways* (Olesen 2015). As discussed in the section on definition, these injustice symbols have both confirmative and motivational functions. At the level of confirmation they serve as "evidence" of a wider unjust situation and thus support the overarching political-cultural schema of political Islam. At a motivational level, as will be discussed further in the coming sections, they motivate and legitimate political action rooted in the injustice perceptions of the grievance community. While political Islamist *terrorism*, as shown above with reference to al-Qaeda, draws strongly on such symbols it is important to note that the grievance community is much broader than supporters and practitioners of terrorism. Sketching an overarching political-cultural schema does not imply internal coherence or unity in analysis and action within the schema. The same schema supports a broad range of interpretations and methods. The grievance community concept is useful here precisely because it captures how political Islam is highly internally diverse, yet builds on a number of tenets and aspirations that are widely shared, temporally and geographically.

The latter focus on geographical sharedness suggests that the grievance community of political Islam is decidedly global in nature. It is so in at least two ways: First, several authors (for example Roy 2004) have noted how political Islam is deterritorialized in the sense that its members are globally dispersed and in many cases live outside the Muslim world, including in the West where many countries have a high proportion of Muslim citizens and migrants. Second, the solutions offered within political Islam are generally not about a retreat to the local or the national, but build on regional and global political visions modeled, as noted earlier, on the past. The grievance community of political Islam is thus

strongly anchored in the notion of the Umma. The Umma is a concept with varying meanings (and originally does not have political connotation), but at the most basic level it refers to a global, largely imagined community of Muslims that, in a sense, overrules national, social, and political differences (Mandaville 2003). Many activists within political Islam thus envision the installment of a new Caliphate uniting Muslims, culturally as well as politically, across the globe (Ayoob 2008) (although it should be noted that these visions are often conflictive and defined along the division between Sunni and Shia interpretations of Islam). The global grievance community is at least partly constituted and nurtured through the media, especially new media developments such as global television channels catering to a Muslim audience and Internet based communication (Shavit 2009: ch. 6). The point is not that the media have created the global grievance community of political Islam. This community has deep historical roots, but opportunities for cross-border communication and visibility have expanded its global range. The grievance community is thus in a sense an *imagined community* (Anderson, 1983). A *global* grievance community is characterized by injustice perceptions and identities that cut across national and regional divides. Imagined and global grievance communities such as these require shared injustice symbols to provide internal coherence, visibility, and connectivity in their meaning systems. It might plausibly be argued that, given the largely imagined nature of the global grievance community of political Islam, there is a particularly pronounced need for symbols to serve as collective reference and orientation points. For those with a political interest in generating and maintaining a global grievance community, injustice symbols thus come to serve highly strategic and political roles.

CO-PRODUCTION AND CONTESTATION

To understand how injustice symbols matter, we need to probe not only how they are connected with each other in family structures, but also to events and symbols *outside* the family, as it were. There are two dimensions to this overall observation that will be discussed in the following. First, it suggests how injustice symbols are often created in a co-productive and conflictual logic. Second, it indicates that injustice symbols are sites of contestation and conflicting interpretations.

The concept of co-production points to the way injustice symbols are inextricably linked with empirical events. As the concept of injustice symbol clearly indicates, this type of symbol springs from collective grievances and outrage over perceived unjust events or conditions. It is generated in an interactive and

responsive dynamic where certain events and conditions are infused with universalized meaning that in turn legitimate and focus political action. The latter point underscores an argument centrally relevant to the discussion of how symbols matter. Injustice symbols are not simply political-cultural constructs that define and give form to collective values and identities: they also, as noted above, serve directly political roles as motivators and for action. It is this aspect in particular that leads to co-productive and dialectical dynamics. This is so for the simple reason that political action on part of one collective is always monitored and potentially counteracted by other collectives as well as by systems of authority. We may distinguish between three types of co-production: solidaristic, oppositional, and responsive.

As already noted in the introduction, the Charlie Hebdo attack in 2015 cannot be understood in isolation. The attack was thus rooted in, especially, the public visibility the magazine attained when it directly supported the 2005 publication of the Danish Muhammad Cartoons. Hebdo demonstrated their support by re-publishing the Danish cartoons (as well as including some of their own) on 9 February 2006. This generated massive criticism and a highly publicized 2007 court trial in which Charlie Hebdo was accused of hate speech by the Mosque of Paris (Hebdo was later acquitted of the charges). We may think of this dynamic as a kind of *solidaristic co-production*. This occurs when one symbol inspires *supportive* actions that generate new sites of contestation with universalizing potential. Hebdo's reaction, however, cannot be understood outside the universalizing agency directed against the cartoons by actors located within the political-cultural schema of political Islam. Rather than being a supportive gesture towards the cartoons as such, it was a supportive gesture against the aggressive *response* to them, that is, against the injustice symbolization of the cartoons and their publishers.

The Muhammad Cartoons and Charlie Hebdo are also part of an *oppositional co-productive* dynamic. While the Danish Muhammad Cartoons were not a direct response to 9/11, they were clearly situated in and related to the new world political climate created by 9/11 and the war against terror. The period between 9/11 and the publication of the cartoons on 30 September 2005 had seen a string of highly publicized terrorist attacks, most notably the 2002 and 2005 Bali bomb attacks, and the Madrid 2004 and London 2005 attacks on public transportation. These became powerful injustice symbols in especially Europe and the United States of a political Islamist aggression against Western values and citizens, which also manifested itself in several incidents where artists, politicians, and media were

threatened, intimidated, and attacked because of activities deemed to mock and criticize Islam. *Jyllands-Posten* thus responded to what they saw as a contraction of the de facto right to free speech. In an indirect sense, then, we may view the cartoons as an injustice symbol created in an oppositional response to other injustice symbols and unjust and illegitimate political acts. Tracing this thinking further back, and recalling the historical and familial structure discussed above, we can further view 9/11 and other major attacks turned into injustice symbols, as political Islamist responses to injustice symbols produced by European states and the United States (see table 1). The Palestine master symbol, for example, thus figure very prominently in al-Qaeda's framing before as well as after 9/11 as a legitimating symbolic resource. The argument is not that there is a linear and direct causality linking these events. Rather, the observations expand several points outlined above: that the political-cultural schema of political Islam is a reservoir of numerous injustice symbols that serve as political resources in the motivation and legitimation of political action (see also the section on resources and outcomes).

The cases of the Muhammad Cartoons and Charlie Hebdo further illustrate the contestedness of many injustice symbols related to political Islam. As suggested in the introduction and above, these symbols are in fact often injustice symbols for political Islamists as well as those opposing and/or resisting them. While the cartoons, for example, became an injustice symbols for many Muslims and one politically employed by radical Islamists, the cartoons, or rather the *reaction* against them, has also become an injustice symbol for many in the West: a confirmation of the aggressive nature of political Islam and, to some at least, the irreconcilable character of this conflict. We may label this as *responsive co-production*. A similar dynamic was at play in the symbolization of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (see table 1). While the book still figures as an injustice symbol in the political-cultural schema of political Islam, it and its author have also, as a result of the political Islamist response, acquired symbolic status for those opposing political Islam and what they see as its systematic assault on core Western values such as, most notably, freedom of speech and expression.

RESOURCES AND OUTCOMES

This section continues and elaborates on a theme laid out already: that injustice symbols serve a dual role as confirmative and motivating for political action. We may, in other words, think of them as *both resources in and outcomes of political action*. The resource-outcome pair seeks to integrate the

agentive and contextual dimensions discussed in the section on injustice symbols and thus provides the most direct answer to the paper's main concern: how symbols matter. The resource dimension argues that symbols are crucial elements in the communication strategies of political Islamists as well as in their recruitment and legitimation strategies. The outcome dimension points to the fact that symbols are enduring elements in and of the political-cultural schema of political Islam. This is an extensive debate, but two things are especially worth discussing here: (a) the dynamic interaction between the resource and outcome dimensions and the (b) forms in which injustice symbols are "preserved".

Any injustice symbol begins its political career as an empirical object (see the section on injustice symbols). Through political actors' universalizing interpretation and employment it acquires symbolic status. It is at this point we can begin to think of the symbol as a resource; a part of what Swidler (1986) refers to as the cultural toolbox available for claims making actors. But being part of the toolbox also indicates that the symbol has achieved social and political permanency and become a lasting outcome of action. Stating that injustice symbols are outcomes does not suggest any kind of meaning fixation. This is where the interplay between resources and outcomes comes most clearly into play. Whenever an injustice symbol is employed as a cultural resource in political claims making it, at least, potentially changes its meaning (Johnston 2009; Williams 2004). That an injustice symbol has become an enduring outcome and entered into the political-cultural structure of society is perhaps best viewed and assessed through its degree of *spatial and/or temporal displacement*. In other words, it is when an injustice symbol is verifiably employed as a resource outside of its temporal and/or spatial origin that its permanency and stability is most clearly displayed. Several of the injustice symbols in table 1 exemplify such displacement. This is of course most notable with the historically deep symbols such as the Crusades and Palestine, but also with recent ones. As shown by Olesen (2014), the Muhammad Cartoons have for example been utilized as a legitimating and recruitment resource in a number of aborted or failed terrorist attempts against Denmark and Jyllands-Posten in the period 2008 to 2010. This temporal displacement, i.e. the continued use of the symbol outside of its immediate temporal context is a testament to its symbolical-political durability. Some of the attacks and plans were related to al-Qaeda, while others were driven by other organizations and by individuals or so-called lone wolves. While al-Qaeda has been a key actor in the symbolization of the cartoons, the diversity of

actors inspired by them clearly demonstrates their permanency and visibility in the symbolic infrastructure of the political Islamist grievance community and their admission into its symbol family.

Injustice symbols may be preserved and carried in a variety of forms. Some are primarily generated and preserved through speech and writing, while others have a visual dimension. Looking back to table 1 it is evident that there are notable differences in this regard. The Satanic Verses and the French ban on hijabs, for example, do not have a significant visual dimension, but are primarily employed through the use of certain words and historical-empirical references. Other symbols, like most notably Abu Ghraib, the Muhammad Cartoons, and the shooting of Muhammad al-Dura, cannot be meaningfully separated from their visual dimension. Of course, even within this category there are notable differences. Abu Ghraib and al-Dura's visuality is based on documentary photography and video that capture acts of injustice. The Muhammad Cartoons, in contrast, revolves around a set of drawings made for artistic and political purposes. Between these poles, non-visual and visual injustice symbols we find a number of symbols that are not, as in the case of Abu Ghraib, for example, predicated on visuality. This is the case with Guantanamo Bay whose central and legally contested role in the war against terror has made it a core injustice symbol for those contesting the United States (this does not only include political Islamist organizations, but also Western based human rights organizations; Olesen 2011, 2015). There is no doubt, however, that the Guantanamo Bay injustice symbol is visually *supported*. The images of outdoor and cage-like cells and prisoners in orange jump suits have become powerful cognitive short cuts to the depiction of Guantanamo Bay as a major injustice symbol of our time. The media ecology of the present with its multiple user driven platforms offers historically unprecedented opportunities for preserving injustice symbols in ways that make them constantly and globally available. YouTube, for example, contains countless examples of videos that in different ways commemorate the injustices depicted in table 1 and utilize them to condemn and motivate action. YouTube and the web in general thus functions as an open global cultural toolbox, but one that, recalling the dialectical argument above, is being constantly reworked through action and active employment of injustice symbols.

CONCLUSION

The paper has sought to provide a mainly theoretical and conceptual answer to *how symbols matter* and how they matter politically. Its emphasis has been on a specific subset of symbols, namely *injustice*

symbols. Injustice symbols are created and utilized by political actors and revolve around injustice claims directed at identifiable systems of authority. Empirically, the paper has focused on injustice symbols related to political Islam. The discussion of how symbols matter has rested on two basic arguments: that symbols are simultaneously *resources in and outcomes* of political action and that symbolization involves elements of both *agency and context*. Both arguments point to the essentially *dialectical* nature of injustice symbolization. They suggest that political actors, on the one hand, utilize symbols strategically to maximize public resonance and strengthen recruitment and legitimation efforts. On the other, symbols are always the result of political actors' *universalization* of particular objects (events, situations, cultural products, etc.). Once formed the symbol enters into the political-cultural structure of society where it becomes part of the ideational and symbolic reservoir of available resources. These theoretical/conceptual arguments were specified through four thematic discussions with relevance for political Islamist injustice symbols: first, it was argued that we may identify a *family* of political Islamist symbols; second, it was discussed how this family constitutes the symbolic infrastructure of political Islamist *grievance community*; third, it was shown how many of these injustice symbols are engaged in *co-productive and contested* dynamics; and fourth, that they serve as both *resources* for and *outcomes* of political action. The symbolic family and grievance community of political Islam is global in nature. The global grievance community is an *imagined community* where symbols play an important role in generating a degree of cohesion and shared identity. The paper's discussions have drawn on a late Durkheimian framework, which posits a close link between symbols, society, and collectivity. In this perspective, injustice symbols are always connected with and produced through existing political-cultural schemas. Yet in a dialectical perspective new injustice symbols also expand, shape and sometimes strengthen the schemas in which they are grounded.

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