

Article

Roasting a Pig in Front of a Mosque: How Pork Matters in Pegida's Anti-Islam Protest in Eindhoven

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Abstract: This article provides an analysis of a public protest by the far-right group Pegida-Netherlands, where the participants attempted to demonstratively eat pork near a mosque in Eindhoven on 26 May 2019. This led to fierce responses: hundreds of young Muslim counter-protesters prevented the Pegida supporters from reaching the mosque, shouting insults at them and throwing stones at the police. Based on field notes from the event and a variety of other research material, this article shows how pork becomes a means of provocation in a larger entanglement between people and their perceived intentions, other objects, times and places. Furthermore, the author argues that the clash between protesters and counter-protesters can be seen as a theatrical performance set up by Pegida to share its worldview with a wide audience, and critically analyzes the role of pork in Pegida's attempt to 'reclaim Dutch territory' that has been 'lost to Islamization'. Last but not least, this article discusses how provocations bring about counter-provocations. As such, this article shows the value of a material approach to the study of conflicts, and critically evaluates Pegida-Netherlands' official stance of non-violence vis-à-vis the implications of its protest language.

Keywords: Pegida; Islamophobia; far-right movements; pork; Muslims in Europe

1. A Not So Very Ordinary Day in Eindhoven

It is a warm, sunny evening on Sunday 26 May 2019 when I arrive at the crossing between the Pastoor Petersstraat and the Kruisstraat in the city of Eindhoven, the Netherlands. While this is normally one of the most inconspicuous places in the entire city, the air is filled with tension and excitement: the far-right movement *Pegida-Nederland* ('Pegida-Netherlands') has chosen the location as the starting point of a protest march.¹ Police units from all over the country have been called in to keep order. Groups of riot police, mounted police and regular police officers have already taken position on different street corners. At the beginning of the Kruisstraat, groups of young men and teenage boys are waiting in anticipation. Most of them seem to have Turkish origins, others look Moroccan-Dutch or Somali-Dutch. Many of them are wearing tracksuits, and several teenagers have brought large Turkish flags. Journalists are walking in between the youth and the police.

The Pegida protesters have planned to march through the Kruisstraat: a street that is famous for its many kebab restaurants, located in the ethnically diverse, working-class district of Woensel. Their march is supposed to end in a parking lot in front of the Al-Fourqaan mosque, where the participants intend to eat pork in protest against the 'Islamization' of the Netherlands. To maximize the provocative effect, Pegida leader Edwin Wagenveld has planned his protest in the month of Ramadan

¹ In line with the Dutch intelligence service (AIVD) and the National Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism and Security (NCTV), I refer to Pegida-Netherlands as a far-right group. The NCTV and AIVD distinguish between far-right groups that operate within the democratic legal order, and right-wing extremist groups that show a much greater willingness to cross the law (AIVD 2019; NCTV 2019).

during the last few hours before sunset, just before Muslims break their fast. The mosque board has called on Muslims not to respond to the provocation, but to no avail. As time passes, more and more young men join the crowd of counter-protesters.

Later that evening, news reports describe how hundreds of young Muslim rioters prevented the Pegida supporters from reaching the mosque, shouting insults at them and throwing stones at the police; and how the police forced Pegida to end its protest because it could no longer guarantee the safety of the protesters and local residents (Hart van Nederland; NRC Handelsblad; Omroep Brabant, 26 May 2019).

2. Pork as a Means of Provocation

The Eindhoven protest, which I will describe in more detail below, raises many questions. How should the course of events be interpreted? Why was it so important for Pegida-Netherlands to eat pork in a front of this mosque? Why did this provoke such a strong response from a large number of counter-protesters? What other responses could be observed among bystanders? And, last but not least, what does this tell us about the role of material objects (such as pork) in conflicts (such as the clash between protesters and counter-protesters in Eindhoven)? In this article, I bring together insights from the fields of religious studies and conflict studies to provide answers to these questions. In addition to my field notes from the protest, my research material includes a collection of news reports, the Pegida-Netherlands Facebook page and online newsletters; and interviews with Pegida leader Edwin Wagenveld by various mainstream and alternative media channels.

I came to observe the Eindhoven protest as part of a larger research project on the material role of foods and drinks in creating social cohesion or division in contexts of religious diversity. My curiosity had been triggered by the turmoil that Pegida-Netherlands had managed to already create beforehand. A few weeks earlier, Pegida-Netherlands had applied for a protest permit in several Dutch cities, where Pegida supporters wanted to roast a pig in front of a local mosque. In most cities the authorities rejected the application, fearing that such demonstrative barbecue events would disrupt the public order.² Precisely one year ago, a similar attempt by Pegida-Netherlands to roast pork in front of the Laleli mosque in Rotterdam had resulted in riots. Only the mayor of Eindhoven approved after much tug-of-war and under strict terms and conditions: participants were not allowed to set up a barbecue for reasons of 'fire safety'. On the 25th of May, Pegida-Netherlands posted a picture on its Facebook page showing a box with pre-grilled, seasoned bacon rashers, announcing that 'all participants would get a nice snack'.

Initially, I was somewhat surprised at the stir caused by the protesters' plan to eat pork near a mosque. It is commonly known that eating pork is considered *haram* (forbidden) by Muslims. However, as a researcher who has spent many years studying the attempts made by Muslims to counter Islamophobia (and who is also a Muslim herself), I was used to different responses from Muslims to far-right movements using pigs or pork products as part of their protests and hate crimes. These responses varied from (displays of) indifference to ironic jokes, such as the following Tweet that has been shared by Muslims across the world: 'Do these people believe that bacon is to Muslims what garlic is to vampires? Let's spread rumors that donuts are haram, so that they leave boxes of donuts near our mosques' (BBC, 7 July 2017). Moreover, pork products are omnipresent in Dutch society. It is highly likely that they are routinely eaten in the direct vicinity of the Al-Fourqaan mosque on a daily basis, without anyone even paying attention. In other words, the presence of pork does not always lead to such strong responses from Muslims.

My research builds on the assumption that provocation is never intrinsic to particular objects or images, but something that happens between that was is deemed offensive and those who feel offended

² The Dutch law guarantees freedom of expression, including the right to organize and take part in demonstrations. Local authorities cannot forbid a protest on the basis of its content, but they can refuse to provide a protest permit if they fear that a particular protest will lead to the 'disruption of public order'.

(Meyer et al. 2018). The perceived intentions of the alleged ‘perpetrator’ can play an important role (O’Meara 2018). Thus, provocation happens within a relationship between humans and objects in a particular time and space. Emphasizing the relationality of provocation does not mean to downplay the role of pork as a material object, but to analyze *how* pork ‘matters’ here.

This article first provides a short history of PEGIDA in Germany and its Dutch offshoot Pegida-Netherlands. It also situates the Eindhoven protest in a broader social context of right-wing discourses about the danger of ‘Islamization’ and far-right protests against mosques and asylum centers involving pigs and pork products. The article then offers a detailed description of the Eindhoven protest and the various responses from counter-protesters and bystanders. I argue that the protest can be seen as a clever tactic by Wagenveld to set up a theatrical performance in which the counter-protesters unwittingly play an important role, and that allows him to share Pegida’s Manichean worldview to a wide audience. I show how Mark Juergensmeyer’s (2013) concept of ‘performance violence’ is relevant to this type of far-right protests. Furthermore, I argue that Pegida-Netherlands’ attempt to eat pork near a mosque goes beyond a ‘heritagization’ of pork. Building on Mary Douglas’ (1966) work on purity and danger, I show how pork here serves to ‘reclaim Dutch territory’ and symbolically cleanse it from Islam. This article then provides an analysis of the responses from the counter-protesters, and discusses how some of the counter-protesters set up a theatrical performance using contentious objects of their own. Finally, I reflect upon the benefits of a material approach to the study of such conflicts, and critically evaluate Pegida-Netherlands’ official stance of non-violence vis-à-vis the implications of its protest language.

3. The Emergence of PEGIDA in Germany

PEGIDA stands for ‘Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident’ (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* in German, or *Patriottische Europeanen tegen de Islamisering van het Avondland* in Dutch). PEGIDA emerged as a far-right protest movement in Germany in October 2014, presenting itself as the ‘authentic’ voice of the German people. Large groups of people—mostly middle-aged men—began to gather every Monday evening in the historic city center of Dresden, in protest against the political establishment in Germany and the EU, the mainstream media, the erosion of the social welfare system, the arrival of refugees, the ‘Islamization’ of Germany, and especially the ‘political correctness’ that purportedly dominated post-war German society. PEGIDA claimed, among other things, that Muslim minorities make demands that are too easily accepted by the government and the ‘elites’, who willingly tolerate that Islamic customs and conventions gradually displace the German way of life, its culture and its religious heritage (Vorländer et al. 2018; Hartz 2019).

The weekly protests soon attracted thousands of people. The largest PEGIDA demonstration took place on 12 January 2015, with an estimated 25,000 participants. PEGIDA was the first right-wing protest movement in the Federal Republic of Germany to mobilize on such a massive scale. Its supporters formed a heterogeneous crowd, ranging from people who had never been involved in politics before to activists from smaller far-right groups that already existed in Germany. Besides, PEGIDA combined its street activism with an active social media presence. Its Facebook fan page had more than 200,000 followers at its peak in the Summer of 2015 (Önnerfors 2018; Vorländer et al. 2018). However, the large protests soon resulted in a popular counter-mobilization under the name ‘NoPEGIDA’. The second largest PEGIDA demonstration (held on 19 October 2015: the first anniversary of the protests), attracted roughly 17,000 to 20,000 PEGIDA supporters and about 14,000 counter-protesters. PEGIDA rallies were also held in other German cities, but these never had as many participants as the mass gatherings in Dresden (Vorländer et al. 2018).

The Dresden protests usually consisted of three parts: a stationary starting rally with speeches to stoke the mood of the crowd, followed by a protest march (often described as an ‘evening stroll’), and a closing rally with more speeches and the collective singing of the national anthem. The demonstrations were generally well-organized, tightly disciplined and non-violent, and at the same time characterized by a mobilization of nationalist sentiments and a public display of anger and indignation. News reports showed large crowds marching in the darkness, waving flags, and chanting combative slogans such as

‘We are the people!’ (*Wir sind das Volk!*) and ‘We will be back!’. Visual references to Christianity in the form of crosses and crusaders were abundant (Vorländer et al. 2018). PEGIDA is not a religious movement in the strict sense of the word, and research shows that most of its supporters have no religious affiliation (Önnerfors 2018). However, Schmiedel (2018) argues that PEGIDA’s populism is underpinned by a tacit ‘political theology’, in which a Christian identity is seen as a fundamental aspect of being ‘German’ or ‘European’.

From the very beginning, PEGIDA manifested itself as a locally embedded and transnational movement at the same time. The Monday demonstrations and the slogan *Wir sind das Volk!* were based on protest repertoires from the late 1980s in East Germany, when people demonstrated against the government of the German Democratic Republic. Nevertheless, PEGIDA built ties with far-right protest movements, political parties and conspiracy thinkers across the Western world, and often invited foreign speakers to its rallies. For instance, the Dutch right-wing populist politician Geert Wilders spoke at a PEGIDA protest on 13 April 2015 to an audience of 10,000 PEGIDA supporters. Moreover, the name ‘Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident’ suggested that its ambitions reached far beyond Germany. Within a year, eponymous groups were formed in several European countries, including the Netherlands (Vorländer et al. 2018).

4. Pegida-Netherlands

Pegida-Netherlands was founded by Edwin Wagenveld, who was also among the early speakers at the Monday demonstrations in Dresden. Wagenveld was born in the Netherlands, but lived in Germany as the proprietor of an internet-based retailer for pneumatic weapons, ‘self-defense articles’ and outdoor products. Within PEGIDA, he became known as *Ed aus Utrecht* or *Ed der Holländer*. More than many other speakers in Dresden, he focused on the topic of ‘Islamization’ (Van der Valk 2017; Vorländer et al. 2018). The first Pegida protest in the Netherlands took place in Utrecht on 5 October 2015. In interviews and on the Pegida-Netherlands website, Wagenveld claims that he came to the idea because Dutch journalists kept asking him when he was going to organize demonstrations in the Netherlands. During the following years, more protests followed in Utrecht, Rotterdam, Apeldoorn, Amsterdam, Ede, Nijmegen, The Hague and Breda, among other cities (Van der Valk 2017).

The topics addressed were largely similar to those in Germany, but Pegida-Netherlands developed a stronger anti-Islam focus than PEGIDA in Germany (Van der Valk 2017). Besides, Pegida-Netherlands also adopted themes that were specific to the Netherlands. For example, Pegida supporters have since November 2016 dressed up as ‘Black Pete’ (*Zwarte Piet*), in protest against claims that Black Pete is a racist caricature and the resulting adaptation of the annual *Sinterklaas* celebrations in a growing number of municipalities (*PowNed*, 24 November 2016; *Trouw*, 26 November 2017; *Algemeen Dagblad*, 19 November 2018; *Algemeen Dagblad*, 16 November 2019). Another difference with the German PEGIDA movement was that Pegida-Netherlands evolved much more around the charismatic leadership of one leader, namely Edwin Wagenveld (Van der Valk 2017).

At the first protest in Utrecht in 2015, Pegida-Netherlands managed to mobilize about 300–400 supporters. Subsequent protests in Apeldoorn on 17 January 2016 and in Amsterdam on 6 and 27 February 2016 attracted about 200 supporters. Its later protests were usually much smaller, and counted at most a few dozen participants. Often, there were more counter-protesters than Pegida supporters (Van der Valk 2017). The comparatively low participation level in the Netherlands was probably one of the reasons why Pegida-Netherlands shifted its strategy from mass gatherings to so-called ‘playful actions’ with a provocative character, designed to generate a lot of media attention. The attempts to roast pork in front of a mosque were a typical example of this strategy.

References to pigs also featured in other Pegida protests in the Netherlands. Wagenveld wore a fluffy cap shaped like a pig’s head during a protest against an asylum center in Ede (*Metro*, 20 February 2016). Similar caps were worn by several Pegida supporters during a large protest against ‘Islamization’ in Amsterdam (*Algemeen Dagblad*, 27 February 2016). In the early morning of 12 November 2017, Pegida supporters built a small makeshift ‘church’ with a large cross at the construction site of a new

mosque in Enschede. This church was then ‘consecrated’ by a man dressed up as a priest, who used a toilet brush to sprinkle fake pig’s blood over it (NOS, 12 November 2017).

5. The Threat of ‘Islamization’ and the Use of Pork by the Far-Right

The Pegida movement did not emerge in a vacuum, but can be seen as a symptom of a broader development in Western Europe that is characterized by the rise of far-right political parties and the proliferation of nationalist, anti-Muslim sentiments in wider society (Hartz 2019). Since the 1990s, and especially during the past two decades, there has been a growing focus in public debate on social problems that are seen as a result of the increasing cultural diversity in Western societies, together with a critique of ‘multiculturalism’ and the ‘political correctness’ of the so-called ‘left-wing elites’. Immigrants from Muslim majority countries and their descendents are increasingly perceived as a more or less homogeneous group of ‘Muslims’, and their presence is continually problematized in public debate. Islam is often presented as an oppressive ideology that is incompatible with, and poses a threat to ‘Western’ values such as gender equality and freedom of speech. Hence, being a committed Muslim is presumed to be incompatible with being a loyal citizen of any Western European nation-state (Bracke 2013; Van Liere 2014; Göle 2017).

Although this imagery of Islam as a threat is rooted in the colonial past, it was reinforced by the 9/11 attacks in 2001 and subsequent attacks in Europe by Al Qaeda- and ISIS-affiliated terrorists. Especially worth mentioning here is the Eurabia conspiracy theory that has become highly popular in far-right circles, and gradually gained influence in wider society during the past two decades. Its main argument is that Muslims are forging a secret plan to take over Europe by means of immigration and high birth rates, and establish continent-wide domination in the form of a caliphate (Bangstad 2013). From this perspective, anything Islam-related that is visible in the public sphere is a symptom of the Islamic occupation of the social space (Van Liere 2014).

In the Netherlands, the main driving forces in these developments have been populist parties on the political (far-)right, such as the late Pim Fortuyn’s party LPF, Geert Wilders’ Freedom Party (PVV), and more recently also, Thierry Baudet’s Forum for Democracy (FvD). The PVV for example openly strives for a ‘de-Islamization of the Netherlands’. It aims to close all mosques and Islamic schools, and to prohibit the wearing of headscarves, the call to prayers, and even the Qur’an itself. In his 2012 book ‘Marked for Death: Islam’s War Against the West and Me’, Geert Wilders writes that Europe is hit by an Islamic invasion, and that the West is engaged in a World War that is imposed on it by Islam. Moreover, centre-right parties such as the Conservative Liberals (VVD) and the Christian Democrats (CDA), as well as small conservative Christian parties have actively reproduced this rhetoric about the ‘threat of Islamization’ (Van der Valk 2017; Aouragh 2019). As racist stereotypes and prejudices against Muslims have gained plausibility among a broad audience, and are at times also reinforced by the political Left (Aouragh 2014, 2019; de Koning 2019), anti-Muslim racism is becoming almost unrecognizable as a form of racism. Therefore, the anthropologist Martijn de Koning (2019) speaks of a ‘normalization of Islamophobia’.

These developments seem to have enabled far-right popular movements to rise and gain greater visibility in the public sphere. This applies both to new movements such as Pegida-Netherlands, but also to pre-existing neo-nazi groups that have shifted their focus towards Muslims and refugees. During the past twenty years, there have been a growing number of incidents targeting mosques, Islamic schools, asylum centres and family homes, varying from threatening letters to vandalism and (attempts at) arson. Pork products and pig carcasses are increasingly left behind by anonymous perpetrators as a means of intimidation (Van der Valk 2017). Examples include a pig’s head being left near a mosque in Boskoop during the month of Ramadan (*de Volkskrant*, 22 July 2013); fourteen pig heads being left at the site of a future asylum centre near Enschede (*Algemeen Dagblad*, 25 November 2015); a dead piglet hanging down from a tree at the site of a future asylum centre in Heesch, with another pig carcass being left on top of an electricity transformer in the same area (*Brabants Dagblad*, 13 January 2016); a pig’s ear being attached to the entrance gate of a mosque in Nijkerk during the Friday prayers (*Algemeen Dagblad*,

30 January 2016); a pig's head being left near a mosque in Lansingerland (*Hart van Holland*, 20 March 2016); two pig heads and several pig feet being thrown through the window of an Islamic butcher shop in Rotterdam-Kralingen (*TV Rijnmond*, 18 May 2016); and a wild boar's head being left on the grounds of a mosque in Berkel and Rodenrijs (*BN De Stem*, 11 January 2017). This phenomenon is not unique for the Netherlands, but has been observed across Europe (*Allievi* 2016). Although Edwin Wagenveld emphasizes that Pegida-Netherlands never uses any pig heads in its protests (*Café Weltschmerz*, 6 July 2019), these incidents have undoubtedly affected how the counter-protesters in Eindhoven (and many other people in the Netherlands) perceived Pegida-Netherlands' attempt to eat pork in front of the Al Fourqaan mosque.

6. The Eindhoven Protest

On the day of the protest, nobody knows how many Pegida supporters will show up in Eindhoven. When Edwin Wagenveld, the self-proclaimed *barbecuer des vaderlands* ('the national barbecuer'), finally arrives together with only a dozen men and even fewer women, the crowd of young male counter-protesters bursts out in sardonic laughter. A boy yells: 'Look how many racists there are in Eindhoven!' While riot policemen quickly surround the Pegida protesters to protect them, the counter-protesters on the opposite side of the street keep shouting profanities. Phrases like 'your mother is a cancer whore!' are directly followed by a loud 'Allahu Akbar!' The counter-protesters have come with a clear purpose: to show their rage and block the road for Pegida. Most teenagers seem to be local residents, but rumour has it that they have been joined by Turkish-Dutch members of the Turkish far-right Grey Wolves movement from other cities.

Meanwhile, the Pegida protesters prepare for their march (Figure 1). They have brought an SUV, a small trailer with a sound system, and a large banner with the text (in Dutch) 'Non-Violent and United Against Religious and Other Wars on European Territory'. An elderly man carries a small cardboard sign with the text 'Islam Destroys Civilizations'. A middle-aged woman hands out white roses to her fellow participants. Edwin Wagenveld gives a few very brief interviews to journalists. He looks angry. He has just been informed by the police that his group cannot march through the Kruisstraat as planned, because the counter-protesters are blocking the way. The police cannot guarantee anyone's safety unless Pegida take an alternative route along the Veldmaarschalk Montgomerylaan. Wagenveld only reluctantly accepts. All the time, he keeps full control over his group. Only he speaks to outsiders. When a policeman tries to explain the alternative route to the protesters, Wagenveld shouts to his people: 'Follow my instructions! I am the leader here. Listen to me and not to him!'



Figure 1. Pegida leader Edwin Wagenveld filming the counter-protesters while preparing for the march. Photo taken by the author.

It is immediately clear, however, that Wagenveld has got exactly what he wanted. For his protest to succeed, it does not really matter whether he mobilizes fifteen supporters or dozens of them, nor does it matter whether they will ultimately reach the parking lot near the mosque. In provoking hundreds of young people, he has created the impression that it has become impossible nowadays to do ‘normal Dutch things’ such as eating pork in certain parts of Eindhoven without having a mob of angry Muslims coming for you.

While the crowd of counter-protesters is still growing, my attention is caught by a young man who is walking around while carrying a prayer rug over his shoulder. It makes me curious, because it is neither a logical moment in the day to perform the obligatory *salat*, nor is this a common way to carry a prayer rug. When Pegida is about to start its protest march and all the police and journalists have taken their positions, the young man walks to the middle of the crossing together with two friends, lays down his prayer rug, and starts saying prayers in full sight. A third friend stands next to them, as if he wants to protect the three young men against anyone who might want to disrupt their prayers (Figure 2). They immediately catch the attention of many journalists, who run to take photos of them. As soon as they are done, the same young men join the crowd of counter-protesters again. One of them fiercely waves his prayer rug in the direction of the Pegida protesters, just like several others are waving their Turkish flags. It looks as if the four friends have planned their prayers as a provocation in response to the one by Pegida.



Figure 2. Counter-protesters performing a congregational prayer in the middle of the street. Photo taken by the author.

The Pegida protesters finally start moving along the Veldmaarschalk Montgomerylaan while still being surrounded by a cordon of riot police officers. The trailer with the sound system is used to play covers of famous songs. ‘Imagine’ from John Lennon has been turned into ‘Imagine no Islam’. After a while, Pegida receives permission to get back on its original route, and the protesters enter a street named Woenselse Markt (Figure 3). Meanwhile, hundreds of policemen are trying to keep the large numbers of counter-protesters under control who are trying to reach the parking lot near the Al Fourqaan mosque. As the streets leading to the mosque are completely blocked by police vans, it is impossible for me to see what is happening on that parking lot. Some of the counter-protesters and bystanders tell me that a group of teenagers are throwing stones at the police. Pegida is forced to stop in the Kloosterdreef in front of the Saint Peter’s Church (Figure 4). Some of the Pegida protesters take the opportunity to do a little dance to the beat of their own music.



Figure 3. Pegida protesters walking down the Woenselse Markt in Eindhoven. Photo taken by the author.



Figure 4. Pegida protesters waiting until they can proceed towards the Al-Fourqaan mosque. Photo taken by the author.

On the opposite side of the street, many onlookers are having a good laugh while making fun of the small group of Pegida protesters. Although there is still a lot of tension in the air, the chaos is also a source of entertainment for many residents. Kebab shop owners are fraternally standing side by side with people who are drinking a beer in front of their local pub. From their body language, it seems that most people in the area sympathize with the counter-protesters, regardless of their own ethnic and

religious affiliations. The atmosphere between bystanders and counter-protesters is quite agreeable. As a hijab-wearing Muslim woman carrying a large SLR camera (which I have brought not only to take pictures, but also to visually clarify my role as a researcher), I find it easy to mingle with (non-Muslim) bystanders as well as counter-protesters. Almost all the people I speak with comment that they do not understand why the local authorities gave Pegida permission for this protest. I also notice that most of the counter-protesters do not resort to violence. Once in a while they yell some slurs at the Pegida protesters. Most of the time they are simply running up and down the street, playing a cat-and-mouse game with the police. Nevertheless, their frustration seems to be deep. When I ask them about their motivations, several boys respond in an agitated voice: 'Why do they have to do this [eat pork] in front of a mosque? And why exactly during the month of Ramadan?'

There is one category of onlookers who are not enjoying themselves at all. Throughout the evening, I keep encountering young Muslims who have inadvertently ended up in the chaos, or who have deliberately come to take a look. They all feel deeply ashamed of the counter-protesters, and argue that Muslims should not allow themselves to get provoked so easily: 'let them enjoy their pork—these riots are just making it worse for Muslims.' The same applies to those who are affiliated to the Al Fourqaan mosque. When I finally manage to slip between the police vans and reach the large parking lot in front of the mosque, I see riot police chasing young counter-protesters from one corner to another. I also see a number of male volunteers, wearing orange vests over their long thobes. They are affiliated to the mosque and try to keep order, but none of the youth listens to them. Near the mosque entrance I meet two young Muslim women who have attended a religious activity inside, but who do not dare to go home because of the stones being thrown at the police. All of them are unanimous in their condemnation of the riots, and emphasize the support they have received from people in the neighbourhood. Earlier that day, local residents and students from the Design Academy stuck flowers in the hedges around the mosque and wrote Article 1 of the Dutch constitution (guaranteeing the right to equality and nondiscrimination) with chalk on the pavement.

Meanwhile, the Pegida protesters leave the city upon orders of the police. They have not reached the parking lot where they wanted to eat their pre-grilled spiced bacon rashers. The sun is slowly going down, and I decide to go and find my way back to the railway station. Along the way, I see young men trying to knock over a road sign, upon which they are chased across the streets by mounted police. In the Kruisstraat I see Turkish-Dutch teenagers running around in an elated mood. Some of the counter-protesters have apparently been fasting, and are now taking their iftar in one of the many kebab restaurants. Outside on the pavement, two middle-aged, blond women are holding a beer bottle while standing next to their motorcycles. Looking at the aftermath of the protests, one woman says to the other with a sparkle in her eyes: *Eindhoven de gekste!* ('Eindhoven the craziest!') To which the other woman replies: *Ech wel* ('Certainly').

7. The Eindhoven Protest as a Theatrical Performance

Pegida-Netherlands did not manage to reach the mosque, but it did manage to create a spectacle generating broad media coverage.³ The Eindhoven protest can be seen as a theatrical performance set up by Wagenveld and his fellow protesters, with the local authorities and the counter-protesters unwittingly playing important roles. Hundreds of young men 'proved' that Muslims are so demanding that people cannot even eat pork anymore in the vicinity of a mosque. The Eindhoven mayor, who had already been reluctant to provide a protest permit, ultimately could not guarantee the Pegida supporters their democratic right to finish their protest, and thereby 'proved' that the political establishment allows the 'Islamization' to happen. To himself and his fellow protesters, Wagenveld assigned a

³ To a certain extent, the Eindhoven protest fits into a pattern that can increasingly be observed across the Western world, namely that of far-right movements using the potential of scandal to gain media attention (Larsson 2013; Önnarfors 2018).

martyr's role: that of a small group of peaceful protesters who face an angry crowd, and who have to persist in speaking the truth in order to save Western civilization as we know it.

This theatrical performance allowed Wagenveld to share his worldview. In a one-hour long interview with Önder Kaya in *Café Weltschmerz* that was recorded a few weeks after the event, Wagenveld explains that he aims to convey a particular image to a wide audience:

If too many people from a particular culture enter our country who do not want to adapt, and who try to impose their culture on us, danger will arise. [. . .] If you criticize them, you are being attacked, you are being threatened, which causes a wave where we limit our freedom more and more; where we have to adapt because they cannot cope with that criticism. And this is what we have visualized in the past few weeks. [. . .] We get so much support now, because Pegida makes it visible. We show what is really happening. (Café Weltschmerz, 6 July 2019)⁴

Later in the same interview, when Wagenveld and Kaya discuss Pegida-Netherlands' earlier attempt to roast pork near a mosque in Rotterdam in 2018: 'I think that my images are much clearer and much more influential to the group I represent, and the many more people I aim to represent in the future, than your image of the event' (*Café Weltschmerz*, 6 July 2019).

Using provocation as a strategy to elicit a harsh response from one's opponent and thereby gain sympathy from a wide audience is a fairly common feature of public protests.⁵ However, for Wagenveld and his supporters, there is much more at stake than the right to eat pork whenever and wherever they want. The name 'Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident', protest banners saying 'Islam destroys civilizations', and protest songs such as 'Imagine No Islam' all suggest that for Pegida-Netherlands (as for most far-right movements), this is a Huntingtonian civilizational war. Moreover, its statements are often characterized by war rhetoric. For example, in the Pegida online newsletter of June 2018, it says:

Where is the respect for the Dutch, and where is the resistance? [. . .] We are losing our country! Even more: as a result of the construction of more and more mosques and the Islamized areas surrounding them, we have occupied territories in this country where nothing is Dutch anymore!

In the newsletter of October 2018, it is written:

Giving up is no option: our country is increasingly occupied. Every area where there is a mosque, or where a mosque is planned to be built, is lost Dutch territory and belongs to Islam. Everyone who loves his/her country and most of all his/her loved ones must take action. So, keep an eye on the Pegida-Netherlands Facebook page for the latest updates!

It is important to note that the Pegida protesters did not use any form of physical violence. The only physical violence that occurred in Eindhoven came from a minority among the counter-protesters, and first and foremost targeted the police. However, Pegida-Netherlands' attempt to demonstratively eat pork in front of a mosque is reminiscent of what Mark Juergensmeyer (2013) refers to as 'performance violence'. In his analysis of terrorism, he observes that the perpetrators often choose a time and location for their attacks that have symbolic value to them, and argues:

[Performance violence is] a symbolic, dramatic, theatrical way of performing an element of an imagined reality. [. . .] Such acts [of violence] are undertaken not only to draw attention to a cause, but also to draw those who witness them, even those who witness them vicariously through images projected by the news media, into an experience of reality that the perpetrators want to share. [. . .]

⁴ All quotes have been translated from Dutch by the article author.

⁵ In the Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant* (1 March 2016), political scientist Meindert Fennema observes similarities between Pegida-Nederland and the *Provos*, a Dutch anarchist protest movement of the 1960s that became famous for its playful acts of provocation, intended to elicit a harsh response from the police. This harsh response helped the *Provos* to gain support from a growing part of the Dutch population.

Such dramas are designed to confront those who witness them with an alternative view of the world and to force them, for at least a few moments, to be drawn into the perpetrators' view of the world. (Juergensmeyer 2013, pp. 1–2)

For Juergensmeyer, 'performance violence' is closely connected with 'cosmic war': a battle between the metaphysical forces of good and evil that transcends human experience, and that is projected onto a conflict in the here and now. The belief in a cosmic war provides an all-encompassing worldview to those who embrace it, as well as the opportunity to literally fight back against the forces of evil. It absolutizes the conflict and demonizes opponents (Juergensmeyer 2004). As Juergensmeyer (2013, p. 6) remarks: 'those who accept that their life struggles are part of a great struggle, a cosmic war, know that they are part of a grand tale that will ultimately end triumphantly, though not necessarily easily or quickly'.

Juergensmeyer's work can be criticized, among other reasons, for drawing a sharp line between 'religious' and 'secular' violence without clearly defining the two, and for exclusively connecting cosmic war to 'religious' violence. Hence, it is all the more remarkable that Juergensmeyer (2013) analyzes the terrorist attacks by Anders Behring Breivik in Oslo and Utøya on 22 July 2011 as an example of performance violence in a cosmic war, while this is typically a case where the line between 'religious' and 'secular' violence is hard to draw. The right-wing extremist Breivik saw himself as a Christian 'crusader' who had to defend the 'purity' of European society in a civilizational battle against Islam, but neither 'God' nor the Bible featured prominently in his ideology.

My argument is that Juergensmeyer's concept of 'performance violence' is useful precisely when we abandon a sharp distinction between religious and secular violence. Whether we should speak in terms of a 'cosmic war' or a 'civilizational war', I agree with Juergensmeyer that his concept of 'performance violence' is relevant to Breivik's terrorism. Moreover, in my view, this concept not only helps to get a better understanding of many terrorist attacks and armed conflicts, but also of certain theatrical acts of provocation such as the Pegida protest in Eindhoven. Although there are important differences between armed conflicts and acts of terror on the one hand, and public protests on the other hand, this analytical framework helps to shed light on the imagined reality of the protesters, and the theatrical performance of this reality.

8. How Does Pork 'Matter' Here?

The Eindhoven protest raises the question of what pork means to Pegida-Netherlands, and what role it is to perform. In interviews, Wagenveld does not say much about pork itself. In *Café Weltschmerz*, interviewer Önder Kaya sketches an imaginary situation in which the Pegida protesters have their barbecue in front of a mosque: 'The smoke from the barbecue, with the smell of roast pork, enters the mosque while Muslims are fasting and saying prayers inside. Do you understand that many Muslims would find this distasteful and repugnant?' In response, Wagenveld compares the scene with non-Muslims being forced to listen to the amplified call to prayer from mosques in the Netherlands. He repeatedly emphasizes that the barbecue was intended as a 'playful act of provocation', and argues: 'Every protest is a provocation—you always try to elicit something' (*Café Weltschmerz*, 6 July 2019). However, there are reasons to think that the attempt to roast pork (or eat pre-grilled bacon rashers) in front of a mosque was more than simply a playful act of provocation.

Pork has a long history as a contentious object in Christian–Muslim relations, albeit in many different ways.⁶ In post-Reconquista Spain for example, pork played an important role in the attempts made by the political and ecclesiastical authorities to establish a purely Catholic empire. The authorities believed that the consumption of 'Christian' food and the abandonment of 'Muslim' food would lead to a physical and spiritual transformation among the *moriscos* or 'New Christians' (i.e., Muslims who had been forced to convert to Christianity and their descendants). Meanwhile, the Spanish Inquisition used

⁶ The same can be said about Christian–Jewish relations. However, this lies beyond the scope of this article.

pork to check whether a ‘New Christian’ had sincerely converted or whether (s)he was a crypto-Muslim. As such, eating pork could be a matter of life or death (Constable 2013; Dursteler 2020). Contrariwise, among those who wanted to remain Muslim, the pig became a symbol for Christendom and its purported ‘polluted nature’ (Dursteler 2020).

Moreover, there are numerous Christian tales in which pork is successfully used to keep Muslims at a distance, such as with the relocation of the relics of Saint Mark. In the year 828, Venetian merchants smuggled the alleged relics of Saint Mark the Evangelist out of Alexandria (Egypt), which had come under Muslim rule. According to a Roman Catholic narration, depicted in a mosaic above one of the basilica’s entrance portals, the merchants covered the containers with pork to prevent the Muslim customs officers from inspecting the content. After a dangerous sea voyage that they survived through divine intervention, the merchants brought the relics to Venice, where the Saint Mark’s Basilica was built as a sepulcher.⁷ Such tales may tell us little about the actual course of events, but reveal all the more about a particular Christian imagination in which pork can apparently be used as a symbolic shield to ward off Muslim enemies.

In recent years, pork has re-appeared in Europe as a means to draw symbolic boundaries between a post-Christian ‘us’ and a Muslim ‘them’.⁸ For example, several towns in France recently attempted to remove nonpork options from school menus, and a town in Denmark decided to require public kindergartens to serve pork on their lunch menus—the main argument being the ‘need to preserve the national identity’ (Dursteler 2020). Here, one can speak of a ‘heritagization’ of pork: a process in which pigs and pork products are reappraised as key elements of national—and European—culture (Stengs 2018; Meyer 2019).⁹ This heritagization of pork is part of a broader ‘culturalization of citizenship’, which rests upon a static and essentialized understanding of culture, and takes cultural identity rather than formal citizenship as a prime marker of belonging. This culturalization of citizenship entails a growing emphasis on the importance of symbols and traditions as a source of national pride (Tonkens and Duyvendak 2016).

The heritagization of pork can also be observed in some of Pegida-Netherlands’ writings. The Pegida newsletter of November 2018 complains that the ‘left-wing media’ contribute to the ‘Islamization’ of Dutch society:

Even TV-commercials are politically correct! Connecting people by eating together apparently only applies to a young white boy being introduced to the family of his Muslim friend (Plus Supermarkets), while at that white boy’s home, this friend would immediately take the ham out of his sandwich!

However, to fully understand the role of pork in the Eindhoven protest, one has to look beyond heritagization. In the Dutch newspaper *Zaman Vandaag*, anthropologists Irene Stengs and Markus Balkenhol interpret the use of pig carcasses and pork products against mosques and asylum centers as ‘Islamophobic attempts to pollute a particular place’ (*Zaman Vandaag*, 5–11 February 2016). I consider their interpretation to be correct, but I think that we have to go one step further. Taking into account the Pegida rhetoric of a civilizational war and the need to take action against the ‘Islamization’ of society, it seems that in the Pegida worldview, pork is not only a means to pollute a place in the eyes of the Muslim ‘other’. It is also a means to ‘reclaim Dutch territory’; i.e., to symbolically ‘cleanse’ Dutch soil from Islam.

In her pioneering work on ‘Purity and Danger’, anthropologist and cultural theorist Mary Douglas (1966) argues that there is no such thing as absolute dirt: it only exists in the eye of the beholder. Ideas about purity and pollution have as their main function to impose a system of classification on

⁷ <http://www.basilicasanmarco.it/storia-e-societa/san-marco-evangelista/il-trafugamento/?lang=en> (last accessed: 28 April 2020).

⁸ In contemporary Europe, pork is also made important as a boundary marker by many Muslims themselves. The consumption of bacon is a common disavowal ritual among ex-Muslims, and sometimes even the definitive symbol of their leaving Islam (Cottee 2015; Enstedt 2018; Dursteler 2020).

⁹ A heritagization of (especially high-quality) pork products is also possible without negative references to a Muslim ‘other’. This can be observed on a local level in certain parts of Germany, for example.

an inherently untidy experience. Pollution is what happens when something confuses or contradicts cherished classifications. Dirt is ‘matter out of place’. For Pegida-Netherlands, anything (or anyone) related to Islam in the Netherlands disrupts a rigid distinction between on the one hand what is Dutch or European and therefore belongs ‘here’, and on the other hand what is inherently foreign and inferior and thus does not belong ‘here’. In a brief interview with PowNed short before the Pegida protest near the Laleli mosque in Rotterdam in 2018, Wagensveld agitatedly explains why he wants to have a barbecue:

*When you stand in front of a house of hatred, you have to show your lack of respect. [. . .] I have no respect for the Islam. [. . .] I live here in my country and we live here according to our norms and values, and for a terror ideology like Islam, with female circumcision, anti-gay, anti-Jew [there is no place here]. Get lost with your c*nt religion! (PowNed, 8 June 2018)*

In other words, Islam is the ultimate ‘matter out of place’. That which is considered most ‘unclean’ by Muslims then becomes a ‘soap’ to symbolically cleanse Dutch soil from Islam.

9. A Prayer Rug against Pork: Provocations and Counter-Provocations

It is impossible to say whether the counter-protesters shared my analysis of the role of pork in Pegida-Netherlands’ theatrical performance. I briefly spoke with a number of counter-protesters during the event, but they were obviously not in the mood for in-depth interviews about their motivations. Moreover, the turmoil made it impossible to explain my research and exchange contact details with the young men for later interviews. To a large extent, however, their intent was expressed in their acts: to show their outrage and prevent the Pegida protesters from approaching the mosque, so that Pegida-Netherlands could not complete its protest.

In the short conversations I had with some of the counter-protesters, they expressed a deep sense of frustration. As mentioned before, several boys said to me: ‘Why do they have to do this [eat pork] in front of a mosque? And why exactly during the month of Ramadan?’ They also remarked that they did not understand why the Eindhoven mayor had allowed Pegida-Netherlands to come to Eindhoven, and felt that they needed to take matters into their own hands. Still, it was clear that their anger was not so much caused by the presence of pork itself (which remained invisible throughout the event), but by the whole assemblage of the Pegida protesters, their banners and protest songs, their overall anti-Islam rhetoric, and their attempt to enter the area around the mosque in a highly provocative way. One could say that the perceived intention to provoke was more provocative than the pork itself.

Besides, the counter-protesters I spoke with did not see the Pegida protest as an isolated act, but as yet another expression of hatred against Islam. One of the few teenage girls among the counter-protesters said to me: ‘Barking dogs don’t bite so easily, but if you keep pestering a dog, he will bite! And that is also what happens here.’ For a moment, I was puzzled by her somewhat clumsy use of a well-known proverb, which people normally project onto others instead of themselves. I then realized that she referred to a sense of having been confronted with hostile attitudes towards Muslims for a long time, and the Pegida protest being the last drop. However, one has to be careful not to focus exclusively on political motivations. Many of the counter-protesters also simply seemed to have fun. This ludic aspect of rioting, in addition to it being an opportunity for young men to express particular notions of masculinity, has also been observed in other contexts (Verkaaik 2004).

Interestingly, the Eindhoven protest shows how provocations can bring about counter-provocations. Some of the counter-protesters responded to Pegida-Netherlands with a theatrical performance of their own, the most sensational aspect being the prayer performed by three young men in the middle of the street. This was not just any type of prayer, but a congregational, Islamic prayer performed according to strict ritual rules. It was literally a religious occupation of public space. One can hardly think of a stronger provocation to Pegida-Netherlands, and it is difficult *not* to see the prayer as an attempt to mark the area as the counter-protesters’ territory. Additionally, the prayer can be seen as an assertion

of the right to be ‘unapologetically Muslim’ in a society where the public display of Islamic piety is often frowned upon.

It is striking that the young men did not put the prayer rug away after finishing their prayers, but stretched it out in the air while shouting ‘Allahu Akbar!’ at the Pegida protesters. As such, it seems that the prayer rug was not only a means to provoke the Pegida protesters and mark their territory; it also served as a symbolic shield to ward off the protesters’ attempt to reach the mosque with their box of bacon rashers. The same can be said about the Turkish flags that several counter-protesters were waving throughout the evening. In bringing such flags along to the protest, these counter-protesters reinforced rather than challenged perceptions of Turkish-Dutch people as ‘foreign elements’ in the Netherlands. The Eindhoven protest took place amidst heated public debates about the political influence of the Turkish president Erdogan on Dutch citizens of Turkish origins, and the alleged lack of identification among Turkish-Dutch people with Dutch society and its values. However, these counter-protesters did not seem to care much about these debates. Instead, they asserted their Turkish identity, and used their flags to mark ‘their’ territory and ward off the Pegida protesters. In doing so, they thus reproduced Pegida’s symbolic language of war.

The sharp contrast between the responses from the counter-protesters on the one hand and the Al Fourqaan mosque (and many Muslim bystanders) on the other hand is symptomatic for the heated debates among Muslims about how to respond to Islamophobic provocations. While the mosque board had called on Muslims not to respond to the Pegida protest, the counter-protesters—mostly young men who lived in the area but were not directly affiliated to the mosque—entered into direct confrontation with the protesters and the police, and refused to listen to the mosque volunteers who tried to bring everything under control. Discussions about how to respond (and whether to respond at all) emerge almost every time when provocative statements against Islam and Muslims are made (cf. [van Es 2019](#)). The question of whether to rise up against those who insult you, or to remain silent in order to prevent an Islamophobic backlash leads to deep divides among Muslims—also in Eindhoven.

10. Discussion

This article has shown how pork becomes a contentious object in the context of the Pegida protest in Eindhoven on 26 May 2019. In line with [Meyer et al. \(2018\)](#), I argue that pork is never intrinsically offensive—also not to Muslims. It has the potential to become a means of provocation in a larger entanglement between people and their perceived intentions, other objects (protest banners and a trailer with a sound system, among other things), places (a street famous for its kebab restaurants and a parking lot near a mosque), and time (the final hours before sunset during the month of Ramadan). A similar argument can be made for the prayer rug and Turkish flags that some of the counter-protesters brought along. They are not intrinsically provocative, but they can be turned into contentious objects within particular ‘human-object entanglements’ ([Meyer 2019](#)).

This article illustrates the value of a material approach to the study of conflicts. Such an approach can help to understand the ‘language’ of public protests beyond verbal statements. In the previous sections, I have argued that Pegida-Netherlands’ attempt to eat pork near the Al-Fourqaan mosque can be seen as an attempt to ‘reclaim territory’ and symbolically ‘cleanse’ Dutch soil from Islam.

This has serious implications. As religious studies scholar Lucien van Liere argues regarding Geert Wilders’ Freedom Party, Pegida-Netherlands is not after ‘emancipating’ Islam from its purported backwardness, but aims to ‘eradicate difference and cultural ambivalence through elimination’ (2014, p. 198). Wagenveld consistently emphasizes that Pegida-Netherlands is a non-violent movement. Indeed, it has so far neither used any physical violence, nor explicitly called for violence against Muslims, asylum seekers, or anyone else. Moreover, Pegida-Netherlands openly rejects the Nazi ideology, and its logo even includes a swastika being thrown into a waste can. Nevertheless, Pegida-Netherlands’ stance of non-violence contrasts sharply with its war-like rhetoric and its striving for an ‘Islam free Netherlands’—a goal that can only be achieved through violence and/or other severe human rights violations. And although Wagenveld repeatedly claims that Pegida-Netherlands first and foremost

targets Islam as an ‘ideology’, this is by default not without consequences for concrete human beings who are Muslim or who are perceived as such by others.

Yet, the responses from bystanders to the Eindhoven protest show that the coexistence that Wagenveld deems impossible and even undesirable already exists. The non-Muslim residents of Woensel who remarked that they fully understood the counter-protesters, and the kebab restaurant owners who stood side by side with pub visitors while having a good laugh at the small group of Pegida protesters, do not fit into Pegida-Netherlands’ Manichean worldview. No matter what people think of each other and regardless of the frictions that emerge now and then, most people find ways to live together in the practice of everyday life.

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