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Title:	“Religion in the Media; the Media of Religion: Migration, the Media, and Muslims“
Published in:	Islamic studies: journal of the Islamic Research Institute of Pakistan, Islamabad. Islamabad: IRI Publ.
Volume:	45 (3)
Year:	2006
Pages:	413 – 428
ISSN:	0578-8072

URL to the original publication: https://www.jstor.org/stable/20839028

Islamic Studies 45:3 (2006) pp. 413–428

Religion in the Media; the Media of Religion: Migration, the Media, and Muslims

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In connection with the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001, scholars have started speaking about the new media like Internet, video and audio cassettes, as providing important means of fundamentalist network-building, activist recruitment, and communication between 'terror cells.' Globalisation thereby acquires a very negative after-taste. Muslims in the Diaspora are automatically classified as prospective Islamists and thus terrorists whenever they turn to Arabic, Islamic, and other non-Western media. Increasingly, Western governments attempt to control the content of these media and their conformity to the norms of the Western legal system. Equally, preachers in mosques in Europe are required to conduct prayers in the language of the majority population and the so-called 'hate preachers' are singled out and deported to their nations of origin.

Thus, media usage among Muslims in the Diaspora is an intensively discussed subject at the moment — although primarily from a negative point of departure. The present article is not about how Islam is portrayed in the media in industrial countries with a non-Muslim majority population, but rather gives an overview of some of the issues involved when Muslims embrace new media as well as the scope these media offer the Muslim Diaspora.

Traditional Media in Islam

When the Prophet's first official muezzin, Bilāl (d. 20/641), a freed slave of African descent and one of the earliest Muslims, called to prayer in year one of the Muslim calendar, hardly could anyone have imagined that the same call, consisting of the same seven sentences — "Allah is most great. I testify that there is no God except Allah. I testify that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God. Come to prayer. Come to success. Allah is most great. There is none worthy of worship except Allah" — would have spread to every corner of the world 1400 years later. The call to prayer, an elaborate melodious call, was the

novel and powerful medium of the Islamic religion in the oral Arab society. It was called out from the mosque rooftops five times a day. Over the centuries it was destined to be heard across the globe in a wide variety of intonations. The ritual of five compulsory prayers a day, each of which followed strict rules, supported the collective identity of the small evolving Muslim congregation of the time. Soon afterwards, the representatives of this newest world religion managed, through a variety of media, to spread their message quickly. They were flexible enough to transcend various cultural traditions and even their own culture of origin, with the result that, just like any other world religion, their religious tradition mirrors the cumulative contributions of Muslims of various backgrounds and shades of opinion.

Communication through Mediatization of Religion

During the times of expansion and migration it was just as important to master the existing media as to develop new ones, for it is only possible to communicate and interact with non-Muslims by appropriating and modifying their media. These media would thus change and adapt to the cultural context, be it through speaking, singing, writing, visualising, playing or through coinage, clothing or other items of religious significance. Liturgies are just as important as the more informal conversations of mystics, which not only help ritualise religion, but also serve as genuine sources for reconstructing Muslim social history. These religious media need spaces and institutions in the form of mosques, holy shrines, mausoleums, schools, etc., which also adapt to the surroundings. Backyard mosques in Berlin, for example, tend to look just like the neighbouring buildings, while many mosques in parts of Asia cannot be distinguished from the Buddhist temple next door. A number of mediators perform within these more or less sacred spaces: preachers, prayer leaders, Islamic lawyers and Sufis but also politicians and businessmen. All of these can use the same media — the Prophetic tradition, legal opinions, mystical songs, group conversations or calligraphy — while representing various religious groups and thus competing with each other.

Traditionally, the media promoting religious renewal and the discourses surrounding them have been the prerogative of religious specialists. They often monopolised the communication between humans and the transcendental God, and thus enabled it in the first place. In return, they exercised social control, dogmatised religion and proclaimed other faiths heretical. The *fatāwā* (legal pronouncements) were just as popular and legitimate a medium in this process of the development of Islamic knowledge as the amulet. The discourse surrounding the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be

on him) [12 Rabī' al-Awwal, 53 B.H.– 12 Rabī' al-Awwal, 11 A.H./December 9, 569–June 7, 634]—always of paramount importance for law, theology and mysticism— was elaborated, with the Prophet projected as the aesthetic ideal, the perfect human being. A section of scholars, however, felt exasperated with the propensity of some to exaggerate the Prophet's position with the result that they tended to be critical those who in their opinion exceeded the appropriate limits of devotion to the Prophet (peace be on him). However, Burāq, the mythical mount carrying the Prophet (peace be on him) on his nocturnal voyage to the heavens, is still counted as one of the main creatures in Islamic mythology and is frequently used decoratively on trucks in South Asia. The oft-quoted Islamic ban on pictures (though not to be found in the Qur'ān, only in the *Ḥadīth*), was obviously pushing its limits continuously, within the rich culture of calligraphy, ornamentals as well as in the religious iconography and miniature painting. Even the iconoclastic Taliban in Afghanistan did not shy away from creating feminine self-portraits. When the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) and his son-in-law 'Alī, the fourth caliph, liberated the Ka'bah from idolaters' statues, this event was immortalised in artistic images summoned to promote monotheistic ideals. In other words, Muslim media have been used for all kinds of purposes from a very early stage.

Migration and Religious Media

Migration, expansion and exile drastically expanded the repertoire of religious media. Changes in communication technologies challenged their form and content and affected the people controlling them. The revolution in communication media starting in the 18th century posed an increasingly acute question regarding the power of definition of religious specialists. Following the introduction of newspapers and regular journals, above all, those in the vernacular languages, a diversified Islamic public sphere was able to evolve, which slowly emancipated itself from traditional religious authorities and becoming literate. Francis Robinson emphasised this, pointing out that "increasingly from now on any Ahmad, Mahmud or Muhammad could claim to speak for Islam."[1] Soon the Islamic public sphere started to participate in the nationalist discourse through the printed press, imagining the nation as a political community.[2] Although the members of the emerging nations did not

[1] See Francis Robinson, "Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print," *Modern Asian Studies*, 27: 1 (1993), 229–251.

[2] For the role of the media in identity formation, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). Interestingly, the print media was also variously used by representatives of Sufi brotherhoods in

all know each other, a sense of community was formed in their minds, the nation being territorially defined and sovereign while its members were seen, or more precisely, imagined, as a community of equals. Language, media and education became central vehicles for the construction and maintenance of such an imagined community.

Religious knowledge, its communication and circulation through media thus not only served liturgical purposes, but had equally important solidarity- and identity-forming, revolutionising, even anti-colonial and emancipating characteristics, especially from the 19th century onwards.

With the recent labour migration and the subsequent technological revolution, this scenario again changed drastically. For as Muslims from the post-colonial states were recruited on a temporary basis to help rebuild Europe after World War II, they brought with them part of their media, which they started (re)producing in new, including virtual, spaces of religious knowledge. Imams, teachers and preachers, religious scholars, intellectuals, journalists, businessmen and even computer hackers were, and still are, the mediators in this process.

Muslims in the Diaspora and their Media Attitudes

The first wave of labour migrants was slowed down by the oil crisis of the early seventies, but those already in Europe decided for various reasons to stay on and even arranged for their families to join them. Soon there was an increase in immigrants claiming political asylum. The European majorities reacted with various legal mechanisms, and thus advanced Islam to the public stage. Political unrest in Muslim states and racist reactions in European societies also sparked restrictive immigration policies. Meanwhile, second and third generation migrants showed an increasing propensity to articulate themselves independently.

In the nineties, there was a new wave of Muslim immigrants to Europe. The tense situation in the Balkans, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the intensification of the Middle East conflict all left their trails on European societies, and Islam became an ever-growing presence in the national media, not only in the receiving states, but also in the sending ones. The Rushdie Affair as well as '*l'affaire du foulard*' in France helped maintain a specific image of Islam, which had clearly negative, but functionally important pointers. The debates that followed were characterised by a conception of Islam as the other, as the enemy, a view supported and exaggerated by the media.[3]

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order to spread their eschatological messages among the parts of society most affected by the colonial economy.

[3] Compare the analysis by Kai Hafez, *Islam and the West in the Mass Media: Fragmented Images in*

This background of migration signalled a marked change in the media awareness among Muslims, and led to new forms, possibilities, outlets and channels of the diasporic media, as well as new vehicles for religious expression, enabling religious pluralism. The authority of traditional religious leaders has since been massively undermined. Labour migration shaped a globalisation from below, so to speak. For if previously the three T's (namely telecommunication, tourism and television) had been dominating the link to the countries of origin and had kept alive the myth of the eventual return, they had now been supplemented by the Internet, which allowed for virtual communities and transnational networks in a variety of forms. The cause for this transformation lies with the bi-culturally socialised second and third generation immigrants, who produce migrant media cultures and trans-cultures in Europe.

New Muslim Public Sphere in Time and Space

This becomes clear by looking at the development of migration in light of the German media. Originally, there was the 'guest worker radio' and a nascent 'guest worker press,' which was later replaced by foreign programmes in state television, special migrant cinemas and an increase in the number of 'ethnic' publishers of journals and newspapers, i.e. Turkish and Arabic, etc.[4] These media increasingly competed with the media from the mother countries. With the growing market for ethnically diverse videos, the number of such imported videos rose steadily (an average consumption of ten to fifteen movies per week per family). When in the late eighties cable television and local private TV stations spread, foreign TV programmes suddenly reached even the migrants' homes. With the introduction of satellite TV in the early nineties and at the same time the diversified market for an 'ethnic' — non-German — printed press, the door was open for a separate media structure for migrants in their mother tongue. The messages of these media span from integrationist positions to isolationism depending on the target group.

These various stages are obviously closely connected to the possibilities created by the information technology. Three main trends can be distinguished in today's world. Firstly, the technological revolution enables transcending spatial constraints leading to transnational and global media. Secondly, the user groups become more diverse and encompass more ethnic — i.e. minority — groups, identities and generations. Finally, there is increasing

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a Globalizing World, Political Communication Series (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2000).

[4] For the turn to media by migrants in Germany, see Sonja Weber-Menges, "Die Entwicklung ethnischer Medienkulturen," in Rainer Geissler und Horst Pöttker, Hgg. *Massenmedien und die Integration ethnischer Minderheiten in Deutschland* (Bielefeld: Verlag, 2005), 241–306.

competition between mainstream and ethnically specialised media, as well as the novel option of 'multicultural' media.[5] These processes became dynamic with the integration of migrants in the media explained earlier.[6] They enable us to distinguish between media segregation and media integration whenever minorities participate in the production of the media. Media integration is moreover attempted either by assimilation or by intercultural means.

According to the German 'working group for international media help,' there were more than 2500 foreign language publications in Western Europe in 2004. Since 1990, this number has increased by 40%, an increase which tallies well with the immigration increase of the same period.[7] Young biculturally socialised Muslims seem to be the majority behind this media increase, because they still retain the cultural competency and language skills.

De-territorialization or New Forms of Virtual Absence

These 'ethnic' media call anew for a debate on religious or religiously legitimised boundaries. But they can of course equally well exaggerate the exclusivity of distinguishing characteristics leading to some sort of self-exotisation. However, even these methods of self-differentiation and processes of normalisation can undermine traditional views, when for instance the headscarf of young Muslim women provides them with a means of emancipation from the cultural baggage of their parents or when they resort to the headscarf as an expression of Islamic feminism. Whenever these processes of inclusion or exclusion take place, scholars speak of a creolised discourse, a discourse which encompasses all imaginable issues of society and culture, is mostly conducted in English (the language of the Internet), and transcends the classical discourses of otherness and alterity.[8] Within this

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[5] Compare the research by Sonja Weber-Menges, "Die Entwicklung ethnischer Medienkulturen," 245f, 306–308.

[6] This development has been thoroughly analysed by Rainer Geissler, "Mediale Integration von ethnischen Minderheiten," in Geissler und Pöttker, eds. *Massenmedien und die Integration ethnischer Minderheiten in Deutschland*, 71–77, 242.

[7] See Weber-Menges, "Die Entwicklung ethnischer Medienkulturen," 242.

[8] Cf. Jon W. Anderson, "Cybernauts of the Arab Diaspora: Electronic Mediation in Transnational Cultural Identities," paper prepared to Couch-Stone Symposium on "Postmodern Culture, Global Capitalism And Democratic Action," University of Maryland, 10–12 April 1997; available online: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/EMTEL/Minorities/project_home.html>; Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, eds. *New Media in the Muslim World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 5ff; Jon W. Anderson, "The Internet and Islam's new Interpreters" in ibid., 41–56; Alternatives to strict discourses of alterity can be found in Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Salman Rushdie: *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981–91* (London: Granta Books, 1991); Jamal

creolised discourse, the participants use explanatory strategies and argumentation taken from applied sciences and various areas of culture. It is thus an embedded discourse, based firmly in the realities of life of the 'translated' actors. This creolisation opens up new roads and transcends old boundaries. It is mostly found in the Diaspora, where repressive regimes cannot censor or ban it. Hence, new media are first and foremost tools for the 'new interpreters of Islam,' who question established agencies and thus may bring about change and development within the understanding of Islam and the religious communities they are part of. These actors are not limited to activists and fundamentalists; 'normal' believers, that is, middle class Muslims from a variety of professions and cultural backgrounds, also participate in it.[9]

Interrogating Traditional Religious Authorities

Electronic media provide important venues for the formation of the Self and the Other, especially of a diasporic public sphere, which is directed towards trans-ethnicity and trans-nationality.[10] The new media naturally also create new insecurities, as potentially anyone now has access to information previously only available to the religious specialists. They also construct an entirely new level of activity and spontaneity, of opposition and imagination. When migration and media are coupled to initiate cultural globalisation, one can speak of a veritable democratisation of the imagination; new culturally mixed areas arise, which can suggest a kind of 'lack of neighbourhood' especially when culture becomes an insecure *marker*. The new media thus enable migrants to view themselves less and less in terms of history and territory. The media de-territorialise, they no longer consider national borders as constraints, and they are globalised in the diasporic public sphere: In other words, the semantics of the Diaspora is continuously expanding.

The Internet especially allows a comparatively open interactivity and communication between like-minded users. The relative anonymity it guarantees, enables communication (and thereby 'virtual communities') between people of different sex, social status and ethnic origin; a sort of communication that is actually relatively rare 'in real life.' Active internet-users even seem to maintain particularly strong social 'off-line' relationships, be especially engaged and quick to establish contacts. The Internet can then be

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Malik, ed. *Perspectives of Mutual Encounters in South Asian History 1760–1860* (Leiden, Boston, Cologne: E.J. Brill, 2000).

[9] Compare, for example, Jon W. Anderson, "The Internet and Islam's New Interpreters" in Eickelman and Anderson, eds. *New Media in the Muslim World*, 48, 53.

[10] Cf. the interesting theories of Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Modernity* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

seen as a 'market place of ideas, identities and discourses,' as a communicative space, in which identities and the meaning and limits of the community are constantly constructed and renegotiated.[11]

There are three stages in the use of the Internet among Muslims:[12]

(1) Technologically adept Muslims — mostly natural scientists — use the Internet in the 1980s to make the most important Islamic religious texts, such as the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* available online and start inserting their own — laypersons' — comments.

(2) These creolised discourses are increasingly criticised or appropriated by officials and Islamists. They are eventually slightly modified and are authorised before they are propagated through various Islamic institutions and finally through the World Wide Web in the 1990s. This was an attempt to regain the monopoly of religious authority.

(3) Since then, the standardising discourse has been largely abandoned in order to make Islam compatible with modern life. The new elites now direct the Islamic content on the Internet towards the rising middle classes, channel it towards consumption and seem interested in removing institutionalised constraints.

One of the 'ethnomedia' of this third stage is al-Jazeera, the TV provider from Qatar, established in 1996 and by now well-known world-wide as an alternative news source to CNN and BBC.[13] The new information exchange is bypassing the former elites, who increasingly feel obliged to participate in the new discourse through the new media.[14] The old and new elites can also appropriate popular characteristics of secular and non-state media directly or

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[11] Research available by Lorne L. Dawson, "Networked Individualism and the Possibility of Virtual Diasporic Religious Communities: Seeking Conceptual Clarity," unpublished paper presented to the International Seminar on "The Impact of Information and Communication Technologies on Religious, Ethnic and Cultural Diaspora Communities in the West," Göteborg University, Sweden, October 2003, 6f; Peter Mandaville: "Communication and Diasporic Islam: A Virtual Ummah?" in Karim H. Karim, ed. *The Media of Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2003), 135–147, quote from p. 135.

[12] Cf. Jon W. Anderson, "Muslim Selves in Cyberspace: Islam in the Post-Modern Public Sphere," prepared for a panel on "Public and Private Spheres in Muslim Societies Today: Gender and New Media," Conference of the Japan Islamic Area Studies Project on "The Dynamism of Muslim Societies," Tokyo, October 5–8, 2001.

[13] See Naomi Sakr, "Testing Time for al-Jazeera," *ISIM Newsletter*, 9 (2002), 21; Ahmad Kamel, "Al-Jazeera: An Insider's View," *ISIM Newsletter*, 9 (2002), 20.

[14] Large religious and state institutions are present on the Internet and try to spread their official religious/political positions, or advertise directly or indirectly for them. Novels, films and leaflets are used likewise.

in a modified format to revitalise the religious media.[15] In this process, different, alternative conceptions of Islam and Muslim identity proliferate. Some scholars see in it an 'emerging Muslim public sphere,'[16] as if there was no public sphere in earlier Muslim contexts.

New Media Serving Exclusivism and Inclusivism

Provisions for '*ḥadīth*-online' count among these new forms of transnational culture,[17] as do cyber-*muftīs*, which will not be treated here at length, however. Suffice it to mention that these services are easily accessible and do not presuppose any common knowledge of the particular context of either the question or the answer. By disregarding the context of the question posed, the issuing of the *fatwā*[18] becomes an abstract action. The lack of immediate personal contact also provides for new Muslim institutions (cyber-*muftīs*) and a virtually constituted community of Muslims. The participants can actively take part in the interpretation of these de-contextualised legal opinions.[19]

"IslamiCity," for example, is a *fatwā*-bank based in America, but dominated by and oriented towards Saudi Arabs. In contrast, the globally active *fatwā*-bank of Shaykh Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī responds specifically to legal concerns of Muslims in the Diaspora, equally through para-religious communication. Al-Qaraḍāwī, through the "IslamOnline" portal based in Qatar, is presenting his site as an important source for Muslim normative behaviour and he has even acquired celebrity status in some milieux. It is possible to interact directly with the Shaykh in an online chat room. In this immediate experience, the traditional teacher-pupil, question-answer situation is re-enabled in electronic form.

Because of its interactivity, such societally organised technology is public and therefore prescribes public behaviour.[20] By this token, not only does the

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[15] Cf. for instance Maimuna Huq, "From Piety to Romance: Islam-oriented Texts in Bangladesh," in Eickelman and Anderson, eds. *New Media in the Muslim World*, 133–161, who shows, how Islamic groups in Bangladesh publish novels conforming to the successful format of secular romantic novels and thrillers in order to attract the masses and thereby spread Islamic values (or even concrete political or religious opinions on a current issue) — and how they succeed.

[16] Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, "Redefining Muslim Publics," in Eickelman and Anderson, eds. *New Media in the Muslim World*, 6

[17] Cf. for instance, Ermete Mariani, "Hadith On-line: Writing Islamic Tradition," *ISIM Newsletter*, 9 (2002), 24.

[18] A *fatwā* is a legal opinion by a *muftī*, and has a limited binding character. A *fatwā* can be opposed by a different opinion.

[19] A first analysis by Martin Brückner, "IslamiCity: Creating An Islamic Cybersociety," *ISIM Newsletter*, 8 (2001), 17; Eickelman and Anderson, eds. *New Media in the Muslim World*, 3f.

[20] According to the thesis of Anderson, "Muslim Selves in Cyberspace."

Internet provide an unlimited source of religious knowledge and communication, but it also represents a socialising institution. Research has shown that Islamists on the Internet are moderated by the many co-interpreters. This is because they are forced to argue coherently and react to criticism by the continuous comments, corrections and critical questioning from opposing views. Within this process, they are often exposed as unable to explain themselves fully.[21]

New media can equally serve the purpose of propagating an orthodox image of Islam, when specific normative sections of religious communication are highlighted. For example, the Muslim mystics, i.e. Sufis, who have acquired a significant popularity among migrants and converts, use the media that are equally manifold, spanning from books and pamphlets to Internet-forums.[22] Quite a few of them build their own identity on their opposition to the majority society, in terms of alterity and difference. This is especially true for converts, like the group around 'Abdal Qādir al-Murābiṭ, alias 'Abdal Qādir al-Ṣūfī, alias Ian Dallas (born around 1931), who was initiated to Islam by a Moroccan Sufi. This movement, called Murābiṭūn, or 'those who stand on the outpost of the Islamic Empire,' has established branches all over Europe and America. It calls for the introduction of Islamic Law, rejects charismatic leadership and esoteric experiences and makes use of a thoroughly anti-Western discourse, even proclaiming an Islamic reconquista of Spain and *jihād* against global capitalism. It also rejects all kinds of paper money in favour of the 'Islamic Dinar,' gold and silver coins coined by the movement itself. The financial journal *Gold-Eagle* already warned in 1998 that this Islamic Dinar "could indeed pose a threat to the US Dollar and the existing world order."[23]

The project culminated in a virtual currency on the Internet, the e-Dinar, whose propagators control numerous branches worldwide. This currency is supposed to offer an alternative to Western economic interests. The theoretical underpinnings of this numismatic venture can be found in 'Abdal Qadir's book, *Technique of the Coup de Banque* (Mallorca: Kutubia Mayurqa, 2000). In this book, he argues that the Muslim community has to identify Western capitalism as the enemy of Islam and of life itself, and indicates that the

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[21] Empirical research by Peter Mandaville, "Communication and Diasporic Islam: A Virtual Ummah?," 144.

[22] Cf. Marcia Hermansen, "Literary Productions of Western Sufi Movements;" and Leonard Lewisohn, "Persian Sufism in the Contemporary West: Reflections on the Ni'matu'llahi Diaspora" in Jamal Malik and John Hinnells, eds. *Sufism in the West* (London: Routledge, 2006).

[23] Jay Taylor, "The Islamic (Gold) Dinar," *Gold-Eagle* (30 November 1998), available at <http://www.goldeagle.com/editorials_98/taylor112598.html>, last visited, 14.10.05.

bankers are to be stripped of their power.[24] Since 1995, the Murābiṭūn seem even to have a German representative, who publishes the *Islamische Zeitung*.[25]

By circulating the message in the new media, this isolationist discourse attracts Islamists and Western intellectuals, who would like to present themselves as cultural critics. The critical discourse is well received among a section of Muslim youth, looking for a globalised discourse-community on the Internet.[26] These youth sympathise with the de-territorialised and 'pure' Islamist discourse, as it helps them compensate for lacking the cultural capital of their parents and older migrant generations.[27]

New media are, however, not only used in order to exercise specific Islamic authority, promote orthodox behaviour, dogmatise religion or call to *jihād* against capitalism. Within the discourses of alterity, there are young Muslims who, as mentioned above, search unorthodox ways and media for religious articulation, including music, clothing and TV.

Numerous Muslim musicians express their experiences as ethnic and religious minorities in their perceived hostile European or American surroundings through a fusion of Turkish, Punjabi or Arabic hip-hop rhythms, lyrics and instruments. The Dutch "Maroc-hop," for instance, not only expresses fright and hope, but equally exposes mutual stereotypes[28] in order to challenge the exclusion of Moroccans from the Dutch public debate on Islam. These rappers, however, do not emphasise their religious identity, as do the strictly Islamic or Islamist groups, but instead focus on the identity of the rapper or the group they belong to, which proves more prestigious. The Muslim identity thus is relegated to a secondary position, behind many other readily available identities.

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[24] Bill Maurer, "Chrysography: Substance and Effect," *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 3: 1 (2002), 49–74, quoted in Marcia K. Hermansen, "Global Sufism: "Theirs and Ours," " paper presented at the conference "Global Networking and Locality: Sufis in Western Societies," University of Bremen, 30 September – 2 October, 2005 (unpublished paper).

[25] For a criticism of this newspaper, see *Neue Züricher Zeitung vom 20.05.2005*, available at <http://www.nzz.ch/2005/05/20/em/articleCNARV.html>, last visited on 20.10.05; <http://www.sicherheitheute.de/index.php?cccpage=Medien&set_z_artikel=86>, last visited, 20.10.05.

[26] Cf. Jon Anderson, "Wiring Up: The Internet Difference for Muslim Networks," in Bruce Lawrence and Miriam Cooke, eds. *Muslim Networks from Hajj to Hip-Hop* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2005), 256; Eickelman and Anderson, eds. *New Media in the Muslim World*, 9f.

[27] Based on empirical research, see Marcia Hermansen, "How to Put the Genie back in the Bottle: 'Identity Islam' and Muslim Youth Cultures in North America" in Omid Safi, ed. *Progressive Muslims* (Oxford: One World, 2003).

[28] See Miriam Gazzah, "Maroc-Hop. Music and Youth Identities," *ISIM Review*, 16 (2005), 6f.

It is clear that the media of the first and second generations and especially those of the groups motivated by religious convictions tend to promote ascetic behaviour and social and political segregation. The young aspiring elites, however, demand new forms of otherness and participation as alternatives to the normative and intellectualised religious knowledge of the formal institutions and media.[29] Carried by alternative media, this inclusivistic discourse can facilitate their diffusion into the majority society as Western Muslims.

The rich Islamic symbolism can prove to be decisive in the formation of identity and solidarity in the cultural imagination of modern Muslims, for instance when traditional values are re-interpreted: The Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) appears as a financial and trading tycoon; Muslim missionary activity is no longer viewed simply in religious and moral terms, but becomes the display of personal success. The emigration, the *hijrah*, is primarily seen in an economic light, as when "Mecca Cola" 'migrates' from France to Dubai, or when McDonalds is branded un-Islamic because of American foreign policy. Equally, when an advert emphasises that the alms tax stipulated by the Qur'ān is included in the price of an item, it appeals to traditional Muslim values. The profit of the ensuing ventures is meant to help youth, community and missionary projects for the Muslim population. Such ventures and programmes turn around the stigma of the needy and suppressed Muslim to a more positive image. In addition to attempting to re-establish the dignity of Muslim cultures, especially after 9/11, these ventures aim to reach a wide audience and conquer a large market. They encourage participation in the global culture through 'cool' and modern products. In this process, they are able to orient their economic and artistic activities towards Islamic ethical ideals and at the same time be part of the global culture. 'Ethislamic' products,[30] including Islamic clothing, beverages, pop-idols, religious music, Muslim rappers and comedians, often strongly identifying with American aesthetic ideals, are means to this end.

Consumption and success are at the forefront of all these new ventures. Muslimhood is not central, but the emphasis is rather on competitive faculty and competency. Consequently, the formerly common Islamist vertical structures of organisation are replaced by horizontal power structures. The

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[29] Cf. Gary Bunt, *Virtually Islamic: Computer-Mediated Communication and Cyber-Islamic Environments* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000); Jon W. Anderson, "The Internet and Islam's New Interpreters," in Eickelman and Anderson, eds. *New Media in the Muslim World,* 41–56.

[30] Cf. Amel Boubekeur, "Cool and Competitive: Muslim Cultures in the West," *ISIM Review,* 16 (2005), 12–13.

focus of the discourse is changed from classical religious themes like religious purification and Muslim identity towards socio-economic disadvantages and creative solutions to overcome them. Within this positively transmitted image, economic success serves the aspiring elites as a confirmation of their religiosity. In other words, religion is instrumentalised for this purpose and transforms into non-religious communication, oriented also towards non-religious institutions. Advertisement takes on religious language.

Between Singularization and Pluralism: Some Examples

The garment company "Muslim Gear," founded in 1997 in Montreal in Canada, reorganised in 2002 and with a growing popularity, is an excellent example of such an innovative religious medium. According to the company, the clothes they offer are backed up by the Islamic faith itself. They thereby make Islam a competitive religion in a free religious market. Their logo reflects this attitude: 'believe in what you wear,' similar to the slogan of "Mecca Cola": 'drink with commitment.' "Muslim Gear" wants to support the Islamic faith with Muslim modesty. It is proud to be a Muslim company, and consciously uses this identity in the sales strategy, when its website for instance claims:

> Islam touches on every aspect of a believer's life, encouraging us to be constantly aware of God, of our identities as Muslims, and of our duties to the world we live in. The desire to strengthen such qualities within the Muslim *Ummah* is the driving force behind Muslim Gear.

Since 2002, "Muslim Gear" is expanding across North America to Europe and South Asia "and aims to reach every corner of the globe inshaAllah." The company no doubt wants to emphasise the positive, peaceful and socially engaged side to Islam. And "with the help of Allah (swt), we pray that our common aspiration will be achieved. Ameen!"[31]

In these examples, we observe Muslim youth using religious media innovatively, in order to present a positive image of the faith, rehabilitate it, and thereby aim at legitimising their profit through Islam.[32] This Calvinistic perspective does not please all Muslims, and dislike actually originates mainly within diasporic Muslim groups.

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[31] See <http://www.muslimgear.com/page.aboutus>, last visit on 21.01.06.

[32] Even if no monolithic group of youth is meant, these youth seem to share a certain habitus. See Asef Bayat and Martijn de Koning, "The Making of Muslim Youth," *ISIM Review*, 16 (2005), 60f.

Young second and third generation migrants in Europe also find similar ways to express alternative cultural articulation. The popular English TV-series "Goodness Gracious Me," which has been transformed from originally being a marginal series to becoming a hit, exemplifies this other category. Also the German "Was guckst du?" ('What yer (you) starin' at?'), which has a prime time slot on SAT1, a major TV station in Germany.[33] In this personality-show created by Kaya Yanar, born in Germany, but of Turkish-Arabic descent, the viewers are told everything they ever desired to know about foreigners: their habits, their in-group behaviour and obviously their relation to Germans. Kaya expresses the new hybrid, creolised culture; he seamlessly switches between nationalities and ethnic groups, in order to turn the German reality of foreigners and Germans living together into a caricature; as a Turkish bouncer, an Indian taxi-driver or an Italian petty criminal.

Just preceding the German parliamentary elections of 2005, on September 16th, Kaya quipped:

> Some claim that it's time for somebody coming from the former East Germany to become chancellor. But actually why one of these 'Ossis' (derogatory term for Germans from the former GDR, i.e. 'Easties'; J.M.). We Turks have been here in Germany for longer than them! That's why I found the following piece of news so great: 'The Turks can decide this election: 600,000 Germans of Turkish origin now have the vote, and 77% of them will vote for the Social Democrats.' But does this not invalidate the election? It would have to count as '*Turkicised*'!" (The expression 'to play a Turk' is colloquial German for 'faking it'; J.M.).

And he continued:

> The poll actually shows that 77% of German Turks will choose the Social Democrats while the remaining 23% prefer 'a kebab with everything on.' Also, in cities like Cologne, the authorities are even setting up separate polling stations for us Muslims; the booth for men in front and the one for women two meters behind.[34]

In this way, prejudicial perception and stereotypes of both the Muslim minorities and the non-Muslim majority are exposed satirically, and such clichés are reflected in a refreshing manner.

Obviously, all this is a far cry from the time of Bilāl and the Prophet (peace be on him) when these highly complex development were not even

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[33] See <http://www.sat1.de/comedy_show/wasguckstdu/kaya/content/03041/>, last visit on 10.10.05.

[34] See ibid.

imaginable. The distinctive call to prayer initiated by Bilāl — as the smallest common denominator of the diverse and contesting manifestations of Muslim cultural articulation and public presence — is still heard in all directions of the compass, precisely because of migration and the religious media that come with it. This common denominator mediates among the Muslims a sense of belonging to the more or less decentralised contemporary Muslim faith.

Migration transforms thoughts, values and styles from the country of origin to new territories, where it can innovatively and imaginatively fuse with the existing cultural expressions. Religious media among migrants create a diasporic public sphere, which is characterised by a non-spatial, de-territorialised culture. Hence, diasporas are 'imagined communities' par excellence, as they have to be continuously produced and reproduced. They are heterogeneous and undergo endless transformations. They are equally present in both virtual and actual spaces, which are continuously expanding, representing bridges between the adopted homeland and the country of origin.[35] In this process, religious media often provide a useful channel. Minorities in Western countries seem more than average to make use of new media, mainly for three purposes. These include, firstly, accessing information and enjoying entertainment from their countries of origin. Secondly, they are used to maintain or overcome ethnic, national or religious identities, and thirdly, to raise awareness about specific minority issues.

Concluding Remarks

Religion is without doubt a multimedia event: it simply cannot exist without the media. Especially new technologies enable a virtual hybrid world, which can exist at the same time both here and there, and therefore allows for the maintenance of a sense of collective identity. This can perpetuate and intensify the already existing patterns of identity safeguarding or the perennial discourses of Difference and Othering, and can thereby end in fundamentalist conceptions of identity. The new technologies, however, also clear the way for hybrid and creolised discursive spaces, thus not only opening up for new, critical perspectives on normative Islam, but equally establishing in the periphery — in the Diaspora — multi-polar centres equipped with powers of definition and of agency. The Muslim discourse is decentralised across a number of media and fed new, temporally limited and constantly changing contents. It promotes a subjectivity suggesting transparency, independence and wealth, maintained and reproduced by a vast network of businessmen and

[35] Cf. the hopeful perspective of Karim H. Karim, "Mapping diasporic mediascapes" in Karim H. Karim, ed. *The Media of Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2003), 1–17, quote from p. 8.

activists. This neo-liberal discourse is embedded in a global network of trade and activism, which is in turn attracted by that same discourse. The dynamics of the market, together with sales strategies, are utilised fully to achieve success. The resulting networks are multi-vocal and flexible, and are grounded in a number of media forms and channels of understanding as well as mutual obligations; obligations which are often based on a framework of informal networks of trust and responsibility.

Within these multifaceted patterns of relationship, the agency of even the long established Islamic religious authorities is questioned. In addition, Muslim plurality and pluralism invite the question as to where in this de-territorialised context one is to draw the borders of the all-encompassing *ummah*, especially when the question of being Muslim in non-Muslim contexts is being tackled by diasporic media, and the myth of the eventual return is dismantled.