

Ehab Galal (ed.)

Arab TV-Audiences

Negotiating Religion and Identity

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Today the relations between Arab audiences and Arab media are characterised by pluralism and fragmentation. More than a thousand Arab satellite TV channels alongside other new media platforms are offering all kinds of programming. Religion has also found a vital place as a topic in mainstream media or in one of the approximately 135 religious satellite channels that broadcast guidance and entertainment with an Islamic frame of reference. How do Arab audiences make use of mediated religion in negotiations of identity and belonging? The empirical based case studies in this interdisciplinary volume explore audience-media relations with a focus on religious identity in different countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Great Britain, Germany, Denmark, and the United States.

The Editor

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Bibliographic Information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.



An electronic version of this book is freely available, thanks to the support of libraries working with Knowledge Unlatched. KU is a collaborative initiative designed to make high quality books Open Access for the public good. More information about the initiative and links to the Open Access version can be found at www.knowledgeunlatched.org

This publication has received financial support from the Danish Council for Independent Research – Humanities (FKK).

ISBN 978-3-631-65611-2 (Print)
E-ISBN 978-3-653-04835-3 (E-Book)
DOI 10.3726/978-3-653-04835-3



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Peter Lang – Frankfurt am Main · Bern · Bruxelles · New York ·
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This publication has been peer reviewed.

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Ehab Galal

Where has the authority gone? New imperatives and audience research

Shared, mediated experiences come to define the terms and outlines of social and political discourse. Through such trends, *culture* increasingly functions with a kind of autonomy that is in many ways unprecedented. At the same time, practices of religion are changing, with *individuals* assuming more responsibility for the direction of their own spiritual quests. Through their “seeking”, the influence and legitimacy of formal religions of all kinds has increasingly come into question. The *power of legitimation* is more and more in the hands of the seeker as she looks to a wider and wider range of sources and contexts – beyond the traditional ones – for religious or spiritual insight. This has all served to center the media in these trends and in our understanding of them. (Hoover 2006: 2)

This quote from the introduction to Stewart Hoover’s book *Religion in the Media Age* (2006) points to a number of aspects that characterises media’s role in the individual believer’s pursuit of religious meaning today. First, traditional and formal religious institutions are increasingly challenged by the media as an alternative place that can provide believers with resources for making meaning of faith. Second, it is up to the believer and media user more than ever to navigate and negotiate the many offers currently available. Third, accessible mediated symbolic resources are no longer restricted to one religious context or authority, but are embedded in not only different religions and different transnational, national and local contexts, but also in different media genres. All of these changes are important in understanding the relationship between audiences and mediated religion.

This volume explores part of this relationship by examining how Arab audiences respond to religion in Arab media. The focus is on mediated religion as it is *transnationally and globally* practiced and consumed by Arabic-speaking audiences. The chapters of this book explore how Arab Muslims and Christians in different contexts make use of religious, cultural, and political narratives offered by Arab media to construct ideas about believing and belonging within and across national borders. The volume presents six case studies examining audiences from various perspectives offered by scholars with different research interests and theoretical approaches to the Arab audiences. In terms of both theory and analysis, the approaches employed in these contributions are cross disciplinary and qualitative. In order to introduce the theoretical and analytical

approaches that frame these contributions, I discuss the role and position of religion in the media along with the dynamics of the media-audience relationship in this chapter.

Mediated religion in Arab media

Religion has always an omnipresent topic in the media. However, the ways in which the media addresses religion differs widely across nations and across public and private media. In general, though, media researchers tend to agree that over the last twenty to thirty years, religion has become an increasingly popular subject (Clark 2007; Hoover 1997, 2006). Terms like re-sacralization or re-enchantment of public spheres have been suggested and refer to the current presence of religion in primarily western media as reflecting a *return* of religion into the public sphere. The use of the term 're-enchanting' of the public challenges Weber's idea of a disenchanted public as result of modernisation (Martín-Barbero 1997; Murdock 1997). The term re-sacralization likewise refers to the return of the sacred or holy to the public – contrary to modernisation's assignation of the sacred to traditional religious institutions and private spheres. The introduction of concepts such as re-sacralization or re-enchantment reflects an interest in the position of religion in public spheres and hence in the media.

One may, however, question the emphasis on the 'return'-perspective, claiming that religion has always been present in the media, but in different ways. It is precisely these 'different ways' that are the focus of my attention. Although analyses and discussions of re-sacralization or re-enchantment have mainly derived from the specific processes of secularism and post-secularism in western countries (cf. Clark 2002; Mitchell & Marriage 2003), in Arab countries similar – but different – changes have also been prevalent. Since the 1950s, a number of Arab states have restricted religious programming to Koran recitations and Friday prayers as a way of legitimising their own authoritarian power. By clearly demarcating the Koran recitations and Friday prayers from other media programmes and by observing prescribed ritual times, these broadcasts mirror traditional institutionalised religious practices. Thus, it was not the kind of dramatic shift in public religion that Hoover suggests in the quote given at the introduction of this chapter. Over time, however, religion has been succeeded in obtaining new spaces in Arab media due to a number of political, technological and social factors. Koran recitations and Friday prayers have been met with competition from a wide variety of different religious programming from religious teaching to reality shows. Some of these are broadcasted by 'ordinary' channels that embrace both religious and non-religious programming. Others are broadcasted by

the numerous religious channels that have been introduced since the late 1990s. It is also important to note that religious issues and language have also gained ground in non-religious programming. The factors behind this development are manifold. The islamisation of society and public institutions has frequently been cited to explain this trend. While this is surely an important factor, it cannot be separated from the general social development of better educated and more individualised audiences and the advent of and access to new technologies that free the individual from traditional dominant discourse communities (Eickelman and Anderson 1999). Furthermore, the gradual loss of state monopolies over television has resulted in increased liberalisation of Arab media. In addition the growing economic and cultural influence of Saudi Arabia and of Gulf State media tycoons has helped make them important players in the Arab media market (Sakr 2001).

In order to understand the position of religion in Arab media, I focus on three developments. First, I point to the influence of satellite TV on the emergence of new religious channels and programming. The audiences' relation to such channels and programmes are a point of reference in the first four chapters of this volume. As such, the following section provides important contextual background information. The second development of note is that religion has also gained new attention in more popular media genres such as drama series and cinema, a trend which is examined in the last two chapters. Finally, as a result of these two developments, the media has become a battlefield for political and religious positioning vis-à-vis different antagonists, which is a subject in all the chapters to varying degrees.

Arab religious satellite media

An irrefutable aspect of the recent development of satellite media is the intensified transnational character of media production and media circulation; transnational refers here to extending or operating across national boundaries. Compared to previous national monopolies of radio and television production, almost all kinds of media are today influenced by transnationality, whether in terms of ownership, production, transmission, circulation, or as sources for local media. Arab media have also become transnational, not only in their reach but also in their ownership and language. According to the Arab League report from 2013, today there are more than 1,320 television satellite channels broadcasted by Arab satellites and among these, 168 are state owned and 1,152 are private. 16 television satellite channels are owned by non-Arab states broadcasting in Arabic (Itihad iza'at al-Dewwal al-'Arabiya 2013: 20–22). Arab channels transmit via

twelve satellites covering most of the planet (ibid.: 27). Among the Arab satellite channels, there are also about 135 Islamic channels including Sunni as well as Shia Islam (ibid.: 24). However, the majority of the Islamic channels are Sunni. There are also Christian channels offering full-time religious TV.

This development reflects a shift from national monopolies of TV and radio that promoted secular nationalism in which the key role of religion was to support the cultural and moral order of the national imagined community (Abu-Lughod 2005; Rugh 2004). The growing liberalisation of Arab media – to the extent it exists – has supported the emergence of new private media and among these, satellite channels (Sakr 2001). Thus, in the 1990s, a number of Arab satellite channels were launched. Not only were satellite channels introduced by many Arab states, but private initiatives were also commenced – primarily by Saudi princes and businessmen with close connections to the Saudi regime. These included *MBC* (Middle East Broadcasting Center, 1991), *ART* (Arabic Radio and Television, 1993), *Orbit* (1994) and *Rotana* (1995). Since the 1990s new channels have mostly been launched under the umbrella of the large pan-Arab broadcasting groups previously mentioned, thus further consolidating their position. With the establishment of *al-Jazeera* in Qatar in 1996, the Arab media field became even more diverse due to the channel's critical news coverage, which has made it popular all over the world (Mellor et al. 2011). From the very beginning, one of *al-Jazeera's* most popular programmes was the religious programme *al-Sharia wa al-Hayat* [Sharia and the life] with the religious scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi giving answers on basis of Islam to all kinds of questions from the audiences. Without doubt, the success of this programme has inspired others, and the fatwa programme did also get a central place in the Islamic channels that soon became part of the satellite development.

New channels that define themselves as Islamic offer what they themselves define in general terms as 'universal values' based on Islam (Galal 2012). These Islamic channels are characterised by being almost exclusively financed and produced by Arab businessmen, business consortia or financial companies. The first Islamic Arab satellite channel, *Iqraa* (Read)¹, was launched in 1998 by ART. The media group ART consists of several thematic channels, (with *Iqraa* as the only Islamic one) and is owned by Saudi businessman and multi-millionaire Saleh Kamel. Hence, most Islamic satellite channels do not stem from religious institutions or organisations, but from multiple business interests with a sharp eye for market

1 *Iqraa* is the imperative of the word 'to read' which was the first word revealed to the prophet Muhammad according to the Islamic tradition.

share, and thus for audience behaviour and interests. While Islamic satellite television appears to be considered a good business investment by many, most low-cost Islamic websites and pamphlet literature are published by religious institutions or associations. Additionally, most Arab-Christian satellite channels have been launched by churches or religious associations, not media corporations.

As a reaction to the events of September 11, the Islamic channel *al-Majd* was launched in 2003 and later expanded with a number of channels under the common name *al-Majd*. The owner is a Saudi investment company owned by Abd al-Rahman Ashmemri together with other partners. In 2006, *al-Resalah* [The message] was launched by Saudi prince al-Walid bin Talal, who is managing director of 'Kingdom Holding Company.' Another Saudi businessman, Osama Kadasa, was behind several channels (e.g. *Khalijia TV* and *al-Baraka*). In these cases, the owners are Saudi, but businessmen from other Arab countries have also founded Islamic satellite channels. *Al-'Afasi* was launched in 2005 by Kuwaiti businessman and religious scholar Mishari bin Rashed al-'Afasi. Likewise, *Tiba TV* was launched by a Kuwaiti investor in 2007. *Al-Najah* was started in 2006 by Jordanian businessman, Salah Salih al-Rashed. In Egypt *al-Nas* and *al-Rahma* are officially headed by Egyptian religious scholars promoting an Islamic way of life, but are funded by businessmen. For instance, *al-Nas* is funded by Saudi businessman Mansour bin Kidsa. Due to the more restrictive media laws in countries such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, some businessmen establish religious satellite channels with the Egyptian satellite provider *Nilesat*. The motive of obtaining higher revenue makes *Nilesat* agree to a more liberal channel policy and thus offers competition to other Arab satellite providers.

Most of the Islamic channels claim that they are apolitical in relation to internal political affairs (Galal 2011b). However, together with the Muslim Brotherhood channel, *Misr25*, *al-Nas*, *al-Rahma* and *al-Hafez TV* were closed down by the Egyptian military power after the removal of president Morsi on 3 July 2013. Their channelling of emotions and mobilization supporting the Muslim Brotherhood president Morsi and political Islam was obviously a thorn in the side of the military. While *al-Rahma* was only closed down for a short period, the Muslim Brotherhood tried to launch a new channel, *Ahrar25* [Liberators25], for a short time in Egypt. But this was not allowed, and now they broadcast *Rab'a TV* and *Mekamillin TV* [We continue] from Turkey.²

2 Other channels established by brotherhood sympathisers through non-Arab satellites are *al-Shar'ia* [Legitimate], *al-Sharq* [The East], *al-Midan* [The square], and *Misr al-An* [Egypt now]. They can all be seen in the Middle East by satellite dish and internet.

Launching and shutting down channels not only reflects the continuous attempts by Arab regimes to control media and audiences' access to media, but also how different groups or individuals try to influence public debates of political changes. Thus, *Misr25*, whose name refers to Egypt [Misr] and the date of the Egyptian revolution (25 January 2011), was launched shortly after the Egyptian Revolution of 2011. When compared with other Arab countries such as Iraq or Tunisia, the situation is no better. In both countries, many television channels were closed down by the state. In Iraq, ten television channels were shut down in 2013, followed by a few more in 2014. In Tunisia, the state closed down different television and radio channels to a lesser degree since the Arab Spring of 2011. Most recently in Tunisia, nine mosques, an Islamic radio and a television channel were shut down in July 2014. According to the government, they were shut down due to the killing of fourteen soldiers by some terrorists.

Iqraa, *al-Resalah*, *al-Majd* group, *al-Nas* and *al-Rahma* have often been mentioned as the most popular among Islamic satellite channels (Galal 2012). In this volume, the first four chapters also refer to audiences' use of Sunni religious channels and programmes. The most popular – of those mentioned – can be characterised as having Salafi aspirations dominated by a Gulf state and Saudi conservative Salafi tradition. However, Salafi is a broad term denoting the idea of going back to the early tradition of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers and to the Koran and Hadith³ as a basis for interpretation. Thus, in reality the Salafi trend may actually have many variations. What they have in common, though, is what Oliver Roy has defined as a privatisation of religion through economic liberalism that emphasises individual re-islamisation (Roy 2004: 53). Like Hoover in the beginning of this chapter, Roy too argues that with islamisation, religiosity has become the responsibility of the individual, partly depending on the premises of the religious market (*ibid.*). Seen in this perspective, Islamic channels offer symbolic resources to the individual Muslim in order to help him or her become a true believer instead of offering political solutions to societal problems. The question is then: What kind of programmes and symbolic resources do Islamic channels offer their audiences?

The programming on the most popular channels is characterised by a variety of different programmes that reflect how the Islamic perspective is translated into media practices. One group of programmes is based on traditional religious practices that have been moved from an institutional platform into the

3 Hadith refers to the record of the traditions or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (Encyclopaedia Britannica).

media. These kinds of programmes focus on interpretations and recitations of Islamic traditions (Koran, Hadith and Sunna⁴) and are thus a substitute for what could otherwise be found in a mosque or by approaching a Muslim scholar. On *al-Rahma* TV, a well-known programme is the *Usul al-Sunna* [Principles of al-Sunna] with Sheikh Muhammad Hassan, and another is *Usul al-Fiqh* [Principles of jurisprudence] with Muhammad abd al-Wahid. Most channels also broadcast so-called fatwa programmes. On *Iqraa*, one of these is *Fatawi Ramadan* with Abd Allah al-Muslih. The biggest difference of these programmes when compared to traditional religious institutions is that they provide access to many more different interpretations and interpreters. Another popular group of programmes includes talk shows, contests, health programmes and many others, which I characterise as lifestyle programmes because they address daily life and its challenges. One example from *al-Resalah* TV is *Ish bibasata* [Live simple]. The programme focuses on young people and philosophical thinking. Through discussions of different topics related to younger generations, the programme tries to bridge the gap between the classical philosophical way of thinking and its complicated language with the modern mentality and the kind of language used by the younger generations. On *Iqraa*, the programme *Ish illahza* [Live your minute] with *Mustafa Husny* focuses on how young people in particular should live happily by being close to God's call to human beings and understanding him. This group of programmes shares an emphasis on how to live a good and righteous life in accordance with Islam and how Islam helps the individual face life's obstacles. A third, minor group of programmes are those without a specifically Islamic frame of reference. Such programmes may include news, sports, documentaries or shows on social, economic or labour market issues. For instance, *al-Rahma* TV broadcasts educational programmes to secondary school students on subjects ranging from English and Arabic languages, physics and mathematics to geology. *Iqraa* broadcasts general interests shows such as *Matbakhik* [Your kitchen]. Although not explicitly Islamic, these programmes are carefully chosen to promote either ethical or traditional Arab values.

Religion in Arab mainstream media

Despite the tendency to make specific religious channels or programmes, religion also appears to have become a greater part of a general entertainment and consumer culture. Not only does religious programming make use of popular

4 Sunna refers to the body of traditional social and legal custom and practice of the Islamic community (Encyclopaedia Britannica).

media genres such as lifestyle programmes, but also popular media genres including movies, TV drama series, cartoons, reality TV, and television contests, all of which increasingly include religious themes or figures (Clark 2007; Ginsberg, Abu-Lughod & Larkin 2002a; Meyer & Moors 2006). In Arab cinema, religion has always been present, but as argued by Abu-Lughod (2005) and Shafik (2007), the place of religion has been to support the national secular imagination. With processes of islamisation and new religious programming, religion has become an increasingly more popular topic in mainstream media, resulting in a popular culture that mixes religious symbols, rituals and semantics with media genres developed outside religion. Thus, audiences are introduced to new platforms for practicing religion by consuming programmes that are framed as popular media genres (e.g. contests), but the content confirming participants' religious identity. In the Islamic context, contests on Koran recitation or spiritual beauty of Muslim women are examples of these genres (cf. Galal 2010). Religion thus becomes a consumer good alongside other consumer goods that construct alternative spaces to traditional religious institutions for religious practices. Many of these programmes propagate a modern and individualised approach to being Muslim as something one needs to 'achieve' through practice (Galal 2009).

Publics and counter publics

Not surprisingly, these mixtures of semantics and diversity in religious practices have led to an ever more vocal struggle over religious positions, places and representations. In his study of cassette-recorded Islamic sermons, Charles Hirschkind (2006) argues that they are used to create an Islamic counter public that is ethical rather than political defined. The preachers assert that the Western popular culture is contrary to Islamic values; their cassette sermons offer another kind of public (Hirschkind 2006). Islamic channels also present themselves as offering an alternative to Western and secularised culture. Additionally, they emphasise that the global, Western dominated picture of Islam is distorted and they work to present a true picture of Islam (Galal 2012). With the exception of *Iqraa*, no other Islamic channel was launched before the terrorist attacks of September 11, and the number of new channels grew significantly after the Danish Muhammad cartoon crisis of 2006. Without being able to prove a direct casual relation between these events and the increase in number of channels, it appears clear that these channels see themselves as working to correct the distorted picture of the prophet Muhammad and Islam. This positioning between an Islamic and a Western-influenced culture is just one aspect of the field of mediated Islam. Different self-appointed or institutionally associated religious

authorities also struggle over legitimacy and may question each other's authority in public. The media owner may have a position to defend, as may the regime who accepts the broadcast. The media owner might have considerations to make alongside his business interests, and as mentioned, the regime might close down channels for political reasons. Furthermore, most Arab regimes actively censor media products such as film and TV to a much greater degree than print media. When it comes to religious content, regimes censor programmes with the help of traditional religious institutions. Thus, the continuous struggle and fragmentation among traditional institutional authorities, characterises mediated religion in the Arab media. Audiences are invited to participate in the negotiations of true religion and what it means to be Muslim (or Christian) by choosing from among the many programmes, religious authorities and interpretations. This audience participation is the main focus of this volume. The guiding questions are as follows: Who are the Arab audiences? How do they navigate and make sense of the abundance of symbolic resources offered by the diverse range of competing programmes and genres?

Watching religious channels and programmes: fragmented audiences

The development, history, circulation and content of religious channels and religious programming have been gradually gaining more research attention. However, very little has been published on Arab audiences and the relationship between mediated religion in Arab media and its viewers worldwide. In spite of the widely held acknowledgment that the effect of media has to be understood in the encounter between media discourse and audience responses (Hoover 2006; Morley 1980; Hall 1992), Arab television audiences frequently appear to be perceived as a passive, impressionable and homogenous mass. Since the majority of publications on Arab transnational media – particularly satellite television – focuses on programme content, the economic and political gains of television production, or the democratic potential of a civic Arab public, very little is known about the relationships among different channels, their programming, and their audiences. Rikke Haugbølle criticises these studies for having a media-centric focus (Haugbølle 2013). This is even truer for the religious programming, which has remained underexamined until now.

In general, existent knowledge about Arab audiences suffers from a lack of accurate audience measurement systems for TV and audited circulation (Project Team 2010: 21). Speaking of a typical or characteristic Arab audience is extremely difficult, given the fact that the Arab audiences are fragmented 'across a region

of approximately 7.5 million square kilometres, a population of over 250 million people and an extensive number of spoken dialects' (ibid.: 43), as well as major differences, when it comes to literacy, living conditions and generational divides. Market-based studies do, however, give us some general information. In the Arab world, television is still the most popular media outlet despite the global trend towards other platforms. This is supported by a study of audience habits in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which shows that the average number of hours spent watching television did not change between 2009 and 2012 (Project Team 2012: 41). Furthermore, satellite is a much more popular television platform in these countries than in the international television market (ibid.: 43). As for viewership, the larger satellite channels like *Rotana*, *al-Jazeera* and *MBC* are the most popular across the region, with the exception of *MBC*, which is not particularly popular in Egypt (ibid.: 45). None of these are religious channels, and nor do these kinds of generalisations tell us much about the ways in which audiences navigate these programmes or derive meaning from them.

The concept of an audience is a very abstract and broad concept. As applied in this volume, it refers to 'both a product of social context (which leads to shared cultural interests, understanding, and information needs) and a response to a particular pattern of media provision' (McQuail 1997: 2). As for the audiences in the case studies presented, they are more specifically defined by – at least to some degree – being able to speak or understand Arabic and identifying with an Arab ethnic background. They are also defined by their exposure to Arab media, particularly to media with religious content or themes.

The analytical approach of the volume deploys what Stig Hjarvard has called a culturalist approach, considering 'media as religion,' rather than 'religion in media' (Hjarvard 2008a: 4). According to Hjarvard, the approach of 'media as religion' places focus on cultural meaning making in practice and 'a cultural studies approach to media and communication' (ibid.: 4). The effect of television is therefore to be understood as an encounter between media discourse and audience responses. In other words, the mediated messages do not have any influence without audiences' interpretation or decoding efforts. The culturalist approach is based on the understanding that audiences' responses necessarily include performing acts. Audiences are thus seen as agents. One kind of act performed by audiences is interpretive: audiences construct meanings of media messages. Since the act of interpretation is deeply socially embedded, a second kind of audience activity emphasises the audiences' engagement with media in social settings during their consumption, or by sharing interpretations and experiences with media as a continuation of actual use (Croteau & Hoynes 1997). By constructing meaning

and through socially embedded cultural and religious identifications, both kinds of activities can contribute to the audience's formation of identity. There is thus no automatic relationship between a programme being watched by an audience member and the member's identifications. Watching a religious programme, for instance, may result in fortifying an anti-religious attitude. Similarly, one audience may derive more religious meaning from mainstream television than from specific religious programming (Hoover 2006).

As an alternative to the culturalist approach, Hjarvard suggests the 'mediatization of religion' as a concept. This approach 'focuses on the ways that media and popular culture in general both transform existing religious phenomena and come to serve collective functions in society that hitherto have been performed by religious institutions' (Hjarvard 2008a: 4). By introducing the concept of the mediatization of religion (Hjarvard 2008a & b; Clark 2011), I want to emphasise the role of media in religion and religious practices. The mediatization perspective examines media as a new place for religion and as a force that increasingly replaces traditional religious institutions. Thus, not only overtly religious programmes construct media as a religious place, but also use media ritualistically as well as for commemoration and spirituality. I have previously argued that it is possible to see religious programming as 'a lived space' where it is the social practices around the programming and the ascription of meaning to these practices that makes the media a new place for religion – rather than the content per se (Galal 2011a).

The chapters of the present volume are all informed to some extent by both a culturalist and mediatization approach. While several of the chapters take particular and situated human interactions and religious meaning-making that characterise the culturalist approach as a point of departure (*ibid.*: 5), some chapters also raise questions about the role of media as an instrument in practicing and articulating religious identity today in Arab countries or in Arab diasporas. Hence, the main objective of this book is to contribute new epistemic analyses of Arab audiences and to highlight the ways these groups make use of media in their construction, negotiation, and rejection of religious identities and practices. In the following section, I will draw attention to additional qualitative perspectives on how audiences make meaning of what they see by referring to audience studies in general and to the findings presented in this book in particular. One fundamental aspect of this approach is taking the heterogeneity and transnationality of the Arab Muslim audiences seriously. As such, case studies stemming from diverse national contexts are included: Algeria, Denmark, Egypt, Germany, Great Britain, Morocco, Tunisia and the United States.

Audiences: why and how?

A general interest of this book is understanding why or why not Arab audiences watch religious channels and programmes. What do the audiences do with the religion that they watch, and how are various media used in various ways? Consequently, the question of 'why' is closely connected to general media use – the 'how' – and the meaning audiences ascribe to what they watch. By combining the why with the how, it is possible to explore the social aspects of media use as well as the influence of time and space on how audiences choose between different media outlets.

As presented in the prelude of this chapter, one of the general ideas that researchers in the field seem to agree about is that media offers an alternative space to traditional institutions, as well as alternative authority figures to the authorities of traditional institutions. In terms of Islamic programming, the question is to which degree the media substitutes or supplements the mosque, knowing that not only the mosque but also interpersonal communication have played a role in forming religious convictions and interpretations. Looking into the findings of Ehab Galal in his chapter on 'Audience responses to Islamic TV: Between resistance and piety', it appears that Islamic TV, at times, takes over the role of the traditional institution. TV becomes a place for religious learning and for meeting religious scholars whom individual believers can follow. It is also a place for contemplation. Furthermore, this alternative space is characterised by a transnational frame of reference. Although the relevance of the findings are disputed, audiences interviewed in national contexts as varied as Algeria, Egypt, Great Britain and Germany (to mention some of the contexts appearing in the contributions) seem to share a common language and at least a partial knowledge of the religious authorities and practices in Arab media.

Although the number of religious authorities has become manifold, authorities seem to play an immense role in the audiences' use of religious TV. Religious authorities are watched, listened to, challenged and rejected – and as such have not lost their meaning for believers. But authority has become multifarious. Placed within a field of competition in the open media, audiences challenge authorities, and authorities challenge each other. The right interpretation is no longer only guaranteed by institutional belonging, but also by belonging to a specific media or programme. Whereas institutions previously ensured or guaranteed the authority of a specific scholar, it now seems increasingly to be the channel or programme that takes on this role. In the chapter 'Religious media as a cultural discourse – The views of Arab Diaspora in London', Noha Mellor analyses identity negotiations among university students with an Arab-Muslim

background in London. She demonstrates how they renounce the religious television preachers supported by their parents. They reject the programmes as irrelevant because they find that they stem from a context other than the British. In addition, the religious authorities on such programmes generally lack knowledge about the university students' local context and way of life in London. This analysis shows how common references to religious authorities are shared across generations and countries, but the evaluation of these authorities is ultimately dependent on the individual.

In addition to serving as an alternative to traditional religious institutions, religious programming also appears to perform specific social functions related to the quest for religious insight. Particularly in diasporan communities, it appears that first generation immigrants try to make their families watch religious TV together in order to introduce the younger generations to their cultural and religious heritage. As noted by Khalil Rinnawi in his chapter titled 'Cyber religious-national community? The case of Arab community in Germany,' younger generations only reluctantly watch religious programmes together with their families during Ramadan or at the parents' request. Thus, watching Islamic programming is more about fulfilling familial obligations than about personal preferences or motivations. In both cases, some interviewees also point at the problems of understanding the advanced Arabic spoken on some of the programmes. Furthermore, the sharing of programmes within the family seems to create a joint feeling of cultural belonging rather than common belief. This is also the case in Ratiba Hadj-Moussa's contribution titled 'Maghrebi Audiences: Mapping the divide between Arab sentiment, Islamic belonging and political praxis.' She argues that when watching religious programming together, Maghrebi families adhere to shared cultural values and morals. She refers to normative issues regarding the body and sexuality that define what audiences watch when they are put together in the same room. She observes that when families watch TV together, they primarily tend to watch national or Arab TV that lives up to these shared norms. On the other hand, single men or young couples might have their own TV sets in their private rooms where they tend to watch western channels to a higher degree. Overall, the religious discussions that arise from watching religious programming appear primarily to occur between peers and colleagues of similar generational backgrounds. Several of the interviewees that appear in the contributions, especially the younger ones, claim that they often – after having watched a programme on their own – discuss specific issues among friends in order to reach their own opinion.

The question of how to watch religious programming is no longer simply an issue of having a TV set. It is also a matter of having access to several media platforms. The concept of transmediality is useful here in understanding the complexity of media's function today. Elizabeth Evans defines transmediality as 'the increasingly popular industrial practice of using multiple media technologies to present information concerning a single fictional world through a range of textual forms' (Evans 2011: 1). Several media users – as portrayed in the present volume – are very aware of content 'made available simultaneously or near-simultaneously on multiple platforms' as phrased by Evans (2011: 2). When rejecting watching a particular programme with their parents, for example, a young person might claim that will later watch it on YouTube, as exemplified in Mellor's chapter. Or, as is the case in the chapter by E. Galal, they may selectively choose what they want to see using the Internet and YouTube as their main source, partially because they prefer to watch programmes outside of normally scheduled broadcasts use to of work or school. At the same time, this generation also appears to prefer having the option of being able to pick and choose what they like, when they like. The transmediality does make it possible to watch a programme at any time and at any place – whether in their private home, on a public bus (as is the case for one of the Egyptian interviewees in E. Galal's contribution), at work, or together with their family. These choices may create new rituals of media practices, in which watching religious programming is defined by the individual's rhythm of life.

Since the media text or content is not isolated from consumption practices (Ang 1996), the practices described in the case studies of this volume hint at changes in pursuing religious knowledge and insight due to mediatization. As for the relationship between media and religion, it becomes important to explore how media provides the Muslim believer with an alternative space for religious practices and a shared frame of religious references across countries and social divides, along with religious practices and convictions. Likewise, it appears that authority has become a contested category, and that transmediality and media convergence change the social practices of media use. This volume raises the question of how these changes influence religious identity formation.

Identity formation and intersections

As argued by Steward Hoover (2006), religious media and programming may be used by audiences for diverse purposes. One purpose might be to negotiate and identify a personal position towards one's (or others') beliefs; another might be entertainment, and a third purpose could include finding ways to construct

meanings of identity and belonging. The culturalist approach emphasises how the individual actively uses media as an integrated part of his or her social and cultural life. Media participates in the structuring of social consciousness through style, genre, schedule, images and language. When people interact with media, they become involved in a process that simultaneously connects them with different cultures, with remembered and imagined pasts, and with sources of insight and meaning (Hoover 2006: 72). Thus, media offers different sources for audiences' identity formation processes. In this perspective, identity must be understood as changeable, situational and relational. It is the result of continuous and sometimes ambiguous processes of identification (Hall and du Guy 1996; Jenkins 2003). In religious studies, a similar understanding of identity refers to beliefs as achieved rather than ascribed. As argued by Hoover, it is no longer possible to define religion only based on its historical, structural or doctrinal characteristics. Instead, religion should be explored as something that is created on the basis of experiences, practices and the efforts of lived life (Hoover 2006: 39). This is not only a question of personal identity but also of belonging to a collective. As an unavoidable aspect of media's participation in the mediatization of religious identities, it does take part in collective processes of inclusion and exclusion. Media thus becomes a tool for performing religiously motivated cultural and social ways of life, which become symbolic of belonging to a religious group. The performative and participative become central in order to belong, as also argued by Eickelman and Anderson (1999: 2).

The simultaneity and intersection of identity formation processes, as analysed in the chapters of this volume, emphasise how religious identity in a global context intersects with ethnic and national belonging, and more importantly how these intersections are inscribed within negotiations of power relations. Although religious programming may help the believer to practice or learn about his or her religion, it may also help Arabic speaking audiences reject a marginalised, minoritised or colonised position vis-à-vis specific 'Others.'

Viewed from this perspective, audiences use media to negotiate religious, national, regional and many other forms of identity. The negotiations of subject positions are a general aspect of the contributions in the volume. In the chapter by E. Galal, belonging or not belonging to the Salafi tradition appears during several of the interviews. In the chapter by Hadj-Moussa, it is more a question of belonging to an Arab or a French cultural tradition. And in Mellor's contribution, it is a matter of belonging to either a Muslim or Arab tradition. These examples demonstrate the influence of context on how (the same) media are used in creating different strategies for identity formation.

Parallel to increasing access to Arab satellite TV in Maghreb, Hadj-Moussa argues that Maghrebi audiences have gradually come to identify more with a Muslim-Arab identity than a French one. According to Hadj-Moussa, Arab TV has helped Maghrebi audiences to 'recover a positive self-image' by offering a counter colonial power. She demonstrates how Arab coverage of the Gulf-war in 2003, particularly by *al-Jazeera*, has strengthened the emotional ties and degree of identification with Arabness and the Islamic world among Maghrebi audiences. She argues that political identifications intersect with more individual senses of belonging and points to Muslim TV preachers, such as the Egyptian Amr Khaled, as having had a profound influence, especially on younger Maghrebi audiences.

Like Hadj-Moussa analysis of Arab TV as a counter public in the Maghreb, Rinnawi suggests a similar perspective, though with generational differences. Rinnawi argues that Arab TV is a place for leaving the position of a marginalised minority in German society to become part of a transnational Arab-Muslim imagined community. Not only does Arab TV offer practical guidance on how to live as a righteous Muslim, but it also becomes the place where viewers can connect to their religious leaders and celebrate religious festivals. Thus, media offers a function similar to a mosque. For the younger generation, Arab media is more of a supplement to German TV. Arab TV serves as a space in which audiences can experience and construct an emotional and patriotic sense of belonging and solidarity with the religious and cultural heritage of their parents. For the younger generation, these feelings are closely connected to an experience of not feeling fully accepted in German society.

In Great Britain, Mellor shows how young Muslims struggle with the overly inclusive category of British Muslims. Young Arab students do not like to identify with this category because they do not feel an affinity towards Asian Muslims who constitute the majority of Muslims in Britain. They thus use Arab programming to help negotiate a specifically Arab Muslim identity as along with morality and values. However, interviewees reported finding most of the Islamic programming out of context or political biased – and therefore irrelevant to their purposes. In this case, the interplay between religious (Muslim), ethnic (Arab) and diasporan identity in Britain comprise young Arab students' negotiations and use of Arab media.

Vivian Ibrahim also writes about the intersections of national and religious identity in her chapter titled 'Watching the history of the 'present': Religion and national identity in the Egyptian diaspora.' This chapter analyses diasporan responses to an Egyptian *musalsalat* [drama series] on the Muslim Brotherhood.

The diaspora groups interviewed by Ibrahim consist of Copts (Egyptian Christians) living in United States, along with both Copts and Muslims living in Great Britain. She particularly notices that the types of interpretations given on the religious and national identities represented in the series depend on the length of time the interviewee has lived outside of Egypt. Thus, while the U.S. group rejects the representation of a united and national brotherhood between Copts and Muslims in Egypt (as propagated by the series), British interviewees tended to support the show's narrative by contributing own experiences of brotherhood across religious divides.

Resisting representation

As media can be used by its audiences to negotiate or resist unwanted subject positions by choosing particular programmes or channels, access to diverse media also activates a growing resistance to and critique of media representations. Resistance refers to the possible rejection, mediation, and negotiation of hegemonic discourses and power inequalities, which is to some degree a central part of current discourses on Islam. In other words, using media is not only a matter of audiences' personal or private meaning making; it has also become part of global as well as local struggles over representation. Thus, private meaning making converges with public meaning making. Often public meaning making is influenced by responses from political or faith communities contesting media's positioning of these groups. As argued by Lise Paulsen Galal in her chapter on 'Minority religion mediated: Contesting representation,' with a reference to Eugenia Siapera (2010), 'it is differentiations that make the struggle about representation a crucial aspect of globalization.'

When looking at representations of religious differences (across and within different religions), the increasing number of religious programmes and the inclusion of religion in popular culture media such as film and television dramas have contributed to an increased responsibility for the individual to make up his or her own mind about their religious identity. However, the diverse positioning of believers within religious programmes has also lead to increasing numbers of accusations of blasphemy or disrespect of religion. This trend compromises the ability of the individual to decide what is religiously legitimate. While the new diverse trend of religion as a topic and frame of reference in the private realm encourages individualised meaning making and negotiation, in the public space it appears to invite to struggle, rejection and contestation. The Danish Muhammad cartoon crisis has already been mentioned as an example that transformed a local Danish news story into a global struggle over representation. Mediatized religion

is not just approached as a cultural or religious message by audiences, but also at times as politically motivated (mis)representation. The interpretation(s) of a programme by audiences may be unforeseen or unintended by the programme's producers; as Ibrahim's analysis in this volume demonstrates, the context of migration may play a crucial role in determining an audience's interpretation. And given the global scope of most media today, contexts may be manifold compared to the past. In the chapter by E. Galal, one of the interviewees reports believing that the Islamic channels owned by Saudis are untrustworthy since they, according to him, have a political agenda influenced by the United States. Furthermore, what may by some be evaluated primarily for its entertaining quality (such as the drama series broadcasted during Ramadan, as described by Ibrahim), may be interpreted by others as a political discourse of national identity promoted by the Egyptian State and rejected for its silencing of inequality and discrimination.

The chapter by L.P. Galal focuses on public contestations of representation of religion that draw on global discourses of rights and equality. Perhaps not surprisingly, it is not only Muslims who challenge representations of their religion or religious authorities. The chapter analyses public – mainly Christian Coptic – responses to cinematic representations of Copts and Muslim-Coptic relations. L.P. Galal demonstrates how the responses are inscribed within different converging discursive orders. The argument is that public (audience) responses are never isolated from existing struggles over difference and sameness. Thus, it does not make sense to see the return of religion into the public sphere via the media as merely a decline of traditional religious institutions' power. Instead, it can be viewed as a new revival of religious practices through media. By changing or extending its platform by the help of the media, religion has also altered discursive orders due to new potential convergences with other discourses, such as religious freedom, human rights or national unity.

As previously mentioned, several Islamic satellite channels and programming have been launched in order to oppose existent representations of Islam in a global context. Looking across the different contributions to this volume, it is obvious, however, that the struggle springs from different contexts at different times and places. As for the Egyptian audiences interviewed by E. Galal, the key struggle has to do with what form of Islam is going to dominate the Egyptian public. Thus, when Muslim audiences watch religious TV, for example, it is not only in order to confirm their personal beliefs, but also to challenge on-going discursive imaginaries and to position themselves within a socio-religious context.

With its cross-disciplinary contributions, this volume offers an explorative and qualitative approach to the relationship between media, religion and audiences. The essays draw on analytical perspectives from media, religious, cultural, Middle Eastern, global and diasporan studies. Each case study contributes to knowledge of religious TV and religion in media, the understanding of audiences, identity formation and the influence of regional verses global contexts. The contributions demonstrate how media has taken over some of the functions of traditional religious institutions, but they also show that religious institutions are still influential – not only in the individual believer's life, but also in the struggle over the true religion. The role of religious authorities is a key aspect of this struggle. The essays point to a development that places more religious responsibility in the hands of the individual believer. However, they also show how identifying and evaluating different religious authorities appears to be important for audiences. The explosion in the number of religious programmes seems to help explain the sudden increase in the number of authorities. Thus, traditional structures of authority are to some degree reproduced, although the large number of available authorities is challenging for audiences to navigate and evaluate. Another finding of this volume that deserves more attention in future research is the influence of context on audience responses. Each case study is situated in a particular time and place. This specific context is potentially always in a state of flux, since audiences may identify simultaneously with different contexts. Sometimes the interpretations are located within a global context; others are figured within a local or regional context. As the context is interchangeable, the need for exploring the situated practices of media use becomes even more important.

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Ehab Galal

Audience responses to Islamic TV: Between resistance and piety

Introduction

Most individuals of a Muslim cultural background today have probably experienced being confronted with questions of his or her beliefs, or how he or she perceives the role of Islam. For some, these may be more indirect questions embedded in global media discourses; the reality is, however, that for more than twenty years Islam as religion and being Muslim as a way of life have not primarily been solely private matter of belief. Instead, Islam and being Muslim have been globally contested, imagined and negotiated by both Muslims as well as non-Muslims. At the same time, this global struggle is paralleled in regional, national and local religious and political discussions over the role of Islam. The increasing number of Islamic television channels does not only participate in this ongoing struggle over how to interpret and understand Islam, but may also be seen as a consequence of the global and local attention placed on Islam. Regardless of whether Islamic channels are seen as voices of resistance, voices of piety, or both, they are – together with their audiences – contributing to and indeed shaping global and local discourses of Islam.

Over the past 25 years, the domination of national broadcasting outlets has been weakened due to commercialisation, internationalisation, and liberalization. The result has been a destabilization and decentralization of the institutional and technological arrangements of television (Ang 1996: 9). These changes have altered both the way scholars and the media industry approach audiences. A deeper awareness of audiences as being fragmented and often unpredictable has become the basis of strategies used in the media industry, as well as a point of departure for audience researchers (*ibid.*).

Despite increasing competition and fragmentation within the media, television has not lost its role as a key disseminator of knowledge. Much to the contrary, television and other media do offer a variety of authoritative forms. When it comes to Islamic TV in particular, religious knowledge has become fragmented and compartmentalised, and thus contested due to the many different programmes and different scholars who convey religious knowledge (Eickelman and Anderson 1999; Zubaida 2005). On the other hand, Islamic television also

offers audiences a space for (ostensibly) authoritative interpretations of religious knowledge and belief. Thus, the question is: what do audiences make of these many different programmes, scholars and interpretations? It is widely accepted that audiences actively participate in the interpretation of media messages and are not just passive subjects. This assumption, however, has limited what we know regarding audiences' use of television. For instance, what do audiences do with religious truths given in Islamic programming? And how do audiences ascribe authority to the different religious scholars?

In an attempt to answer these questions, I will present an analysis based on fieldwork conducted on Arabic-speaking audiences in Copenhagen, London and Cairo, which focused on their responses to religious programming. The aim is to shed light on the ways in which Arab audiences make use of Islamic programming in the construction, negotiation and rejection of religious identities and practices. In turn, this information will help us better understand the influence of Islamic programming on current conversations about Islam. By choosing audiences from widely different national and urban contexts, my research strongly acknowledges the reality of transnational media. Whereas many Islamic channels and scholars did emerge from national settings, they have in the meantime become transnational commodities, as will be demonstrated in the following analysis. On basis of a comparative approach to in-depth interviews with individual audience members, I discuss and critically reflect on how constructions of religious truth, knowledge and belief in Islamic programming are becoming more influential in audiences' own interpretations, uses and practices of watching Islamic TV. My analytical approach is inspired by media ethnography and an interest in how people relate to media in their everyday lives, along with how media provides symbolic resources for meaning making (Ang 1996; Croteau & Hoynes 1997; Gillespie 1995; Hoover 2006; Morley 1980).

The chapter is structured as follows: first, I will introduce the methodological and theoretical approaches that are central in my analytical argument. Second, I present the analytical findings focusing on the following three issues: how to characterise Islamic media, how to watch Islamic television, and how to make use of the discursive resources offered by Islamic television. In the end, I discuss the relevance of my findings and offer some concluding remarks.

Audiences, meaning making and everyday life

My analytical argument is based on data collected as part of a research project on ‘Muslim and Arab audiences responses to new programming at Arab Television.’¹ The project was a qualitative study of how audiences relate to and make use of Islamic TV and how this relation becomes formative in the construction of identity. In this chapter, I draw on findings from fieldwork and interviews with audiences in Copenhagen, London and Cairo. The aim of the interviews was to gain qualitative insight into how interviewees produce meaning on basis of what they watch on TV. While several of Muslim television preachers and programmes may be thought of as either liberal or conservative, radical or moderate, *salafi* or Islamist, I wanted to better understand how ‘ordinary’ Muslims interpret and use what they see when watching such preachers and programmes. ‘Ordinary,’ however, is an imprecise and empty term. It is therefore not useful in identifying interviewees. Instead, I sought the ‘widest possible differentiation’ among my interviewees, drawing upon a wide spectrum of middleclass individuals who identified Arabic as their mother tongue. Additional inclusion criteria stipulated that interviewees saw themselves as belonging to an Arab and Islamic culture, identified themselves as belonging to the Muslim *Umma*², and desired to learn and practice Islam in the right way.

The aim of using the widest possible differentiation, as argued by Neergaard in her book on qualitative method, is first to gain access to ‘the typical’ by cutting across all differences. Second, it helps identify difference and nuances through comparison. Third, it provides access to ‘the variations’ within ‘the typical’ in order to get knowledge about the influence of a context (Neergaard 2007). Included within the group of interviewees were therefore both women and men, socially positioned between middle and lower middle classes who lived in urban areas. Furthermore, I roughly distinguished between two groups: one group was comprised of Muslims who actively attended a specific mosque or religious community; the other group included Muslims who were believers, but who mainly practised religion on a personal level. This distinction was difficult to maintain at different field sites, as it became apparent that attending a specific mosque meant something different in the United Kingdom than it did in Egypt. However, the reason for starting out with this distinction was to get a wide and differentiated spectrum of believers, and thus presumably also distinct ways of relating to Islamic TV. I did not establish specific criteria for how much Islamic TV the

1 The project was financed by the Danish Council for Independent Research, Humanities.
 2 *Umma* refers to the community (or nation) of Muslim believers.

interviewees watched. Instead, I wanted to explore how interviewees used Islamic TV as an element of their general television consumption. Thus, I ended up having interviewees who reported that they liked watching Islamic TV once in a while, but would tune into programmes rather accidentally. On the other end of the spectrum, some interviewees reported that they mainly watched Islamic TV, but admitted that they sometimes watched other channels and programmes as well. In 22 interviews conducted in Arabic in three different countries, I examine the specificities in and similarities across each interviewee's narrative about their television viewing habits.

The aim is not representativeness in sociological terms. Thus, I am not specifically looking for nationally or ethnically defined specificities. Given the number of interviews conducted, I cannot definitively evaluate the influence of sociological conditions. As such, in addition to anonymising participants by changing their names, I have also left out the national or ethnic origin of interviewees. This is done in part for anonymisation and in part to avoid speculation on the meaning of differences without sufficient evidence. Instead, I examine diverse cultural narratives that might come from different life circumstances and contexts. I am interested in narratives of watching TV and how it becomes meaningful to an individual audience member. With interviews lasting from two to eight hours in length, the aim is to gain in-depth insight into the interviewees' interpretations and negotiations of meaning and identity and how these could be related to their specific life circumstances and context.

My approach to audience research is influenced by Jen Ang and her attempt to bridge a sociological and semantic approach to audience studies (Ang 1996). By doing so, Ang challenges the widespread understanding of audiences as driven by choices as an insufficiently critical approach. Rather than looking for discrepancies between the preferred reading of the media text and the audiences' decoding of it, Ang suggests looking at the interaction between the particularities of the text (e.g. fatwa programmes or *musalsal* [drama series] and specific viewers (in sociological terms). The approach to finding the relationship between media and audience becomes more dynamic by acknowledging that there are other factors outside the text that influence the way an audience makes sense of it (Ang 1996: 19). Furthermore, I want to evaluate television viewing as a certain kind of practice that can be analytically addressed as well. Querying television-viewing habits by asking questions about 'when' and 'where' allows us to place the meaning of watching TV within the context of everyday life of the interviewee, thus enabling us to emphasise the influence of factors outside the text.

With a focus on watching Islamic programming, the construction of meaning and identity is not only influenced by programme content, but also by the global and local discourses on Islam, as presented above. Inspired by Stewart Hoover's work on religious identity formation through the use of TV (2006), I explore how individual audience members make use of what they watch in ongoing identity formation. As Hoover states, there is not necessarily a correlation between what people watch, what they believe in and how they identify (Hoover 2006). Islamic TV offers audiences a wide range of programmes and narratives within what they define as an Islamic framework. Channels like *Iqraa*, *al-Majd*, *al-Rahma*, *al-Nas*, and *al-Resaleh* are all owned by either Saudi or Egyptian businessmen.³ They broadcast a mixture of fatwa, fiqh [Islamic jurisprudence] and lifestyle programmes. Most of them ascribe to a Salafi trend, which refers to the idea of going back to the early tradition of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers and to the authentic texts (the Koran and Hadith) as a basis for interpretation. As described in the introduction to this volume, the spectrum of Salafi is varied across different Islamic channels, but what they have in common is the goal of re-islamisation and the recurring use of references to religious texts and the Sunna (Galal 2012a). Thus, Salafi discourses are not easy avoidable when watching Islamic programming. The question is, then, how audiences relate to these Salafi narratives, along with how such narratives influence audiences' media use and formation of identity.

Contexts and their influence

The development of Salafi trends within current Islamisation is not only influential in the Middle East, but also among Muslims globally. However, adopting a Salafi discourse in Egypt, Denmark or in United Kingdom has different repercussions due to the varied religious and political contexts. Though the Salafi trend is neither popular among the majority of Muslims in Egypt, the consequences are different in Europe because the Salafi trend there is inscribed within a broader anti-Muslim discourse. Consequently, asking about religious television habits may invoke different associations among interviewees, depending on their context. This was often the case before even conducting the actual interview. When identifying interviewees and meeting with them for the first time in London and Copenhagen, I was often met with a certain amount of mistrust and scepticism. Although I had presented myself, the project and its aim before meeting with the interviewees, I was asked again rather suspiciously during the interviews for

3 Read more about Islamic channels in chapter one of this volume.

whom I was conducting the project and for what purpose. I did not experience the same kind of mistrust in Cairo.

The method of using gatekeepers to identify interviewees in Egypt might be part of the explanation for what seemed to a greater sense of trust in the researcher. However, when analysing the content of the interviews, the attitudes displayed towards me also seem to be reflected in various ways interviewees' positioned the discussion of Islamic television. Because watching Islamic television is embedded in different socio-religious and political contexts, they appeared to take part in different dialogues on the role of Islam in society. Thus, as will be argued in the following section, interviewees in Egypt were preoccupied with local or regional disputes over Islam's role in society. Interviewees in United Kingdom and Denmark, on the other hand, inscribe their use and interpretation of Islamic TV within a global struggle over the securitisation⁴ of Islam along with local and national discourses of Muslim minority group issues. Several studies conducted in Northern Europe show that Muslims, particularly Muslim youth, do find themselves in a position in which they are constantly confronted with their 'Muslimness' by members of the majority society group. As a result, they are compelled to reflect on and defend their Muslim identity (Jacobsen 2011; Khawaja 2010). In *Transnational Muslim Politics*, Peter Mandaville also observes that the Muslim minority in diaspora is becoming more aware of their religion. As he argues, 'travelling Islam becomes travel *within* Islam' (Mandaville 2001: 115). The encounter with the Danish researcher may be seen as part of this travelling, which potentially causes the interviewee to think of existing European discussions of integration and mistrust towards migrants' use of satellite television and religious programming.

The way in which interviewees positioned me strongly speaks to the influence of the context: as a researcher, I too am inscribed by the interviewee. Thus, the data produced in these interviews are not merely an account of facts, but rather of narratives produced and negotiated during interactions with the researcher (Järvinen 2005). The interviewees were not only responding to me and to my questions, but also to existent discourses associated with the interview topic. In terms of the discussion of Islam, this was very clear, but their awareness of ongoing discussions on the influence of television on viewer's beliefs also came out during the interviews. As Hoover argues, peoples' accounts of the media are

4 With the term securitisation, I refer to policies that legitimise the use of extraordinary means in the name of security.

informative because they present images and ideas about how people understand themselves within social and cultural contexts (Hoover 2006: 88).

Several of the interviewees argued that they were able to critically engage with different kinds of programming and therefore allowed themselves to watch these. They asserted, though, that other people were not as educated and therefore not as able to distinguish between television with good or bad influence. Thus, in the interviewees' self-perception, they believed they themselves were able to objectively judge their beliefs and values and were not subject to the media's power. While this is very much in accordance with fieldwork conducted among Christian Americans in Hoover's study (2006: 260), my interviewees differ from Hoover's due to the fact that they did not trust the majority of others to be able to be critical towards what they watch. Due to this line of thought, they found the idea of censoring different kinds of broadcasting as reasonable.

In the following analysis, similar examples of the interviewees' active participation in existing discussions regarding the content and the viewing habits of Islamic TV will be further explored. As also argued by Ang, this kind of participation emphasises, that 'the relation between television and audiences is not just a matter of discrete 'negotiations' between texts and viewers' (Ang 1996: 51). The culture of modernity and the consumption of television have a much more profound influence in offering new possibilities for social relations, identities and desires (Ang 1996: 51). How do these new possibilities, then, manifest in audiences of Islamic TV?

Islamic TV: negotiations of definition

Islamic TV is a contested category by both researchers and media producers. The most popular Islamic channels have been *Iqraa*, *al-Nas*, *al-Rahma*, *al-Resalah*, and *al-Majd*.⁵ They all define their purpose with very general statements about

5 The extent of their popularity is difficult to determine, not least in relation to viewers' priorities among different types of channels. There are only a few audience studies dealing with religious channels. While one study by Amin suggests that *al-Majd* Koran TV is the most popular, *al-Nas* is the second and *Iqraa* the third most popular channel, *al-Dagher* identifies *Iqraa* as the first, *al-Resalah* as the second, and *al-Nas* as the third most frequently viewed Islamic channel. Shalabieh suggests that *Iqraa* is the most popular channel followed by *al-Majd*. The popularity of *Iqraa* may be related to its status as the first Islamic channel but also to the fact that the channel transmits through different satellites (Arabsat A5, Arabsat 4 Bader, Nilsat 101, Hotbird 8, Intesat 19, Yahsat HD, Asiasat 5, CanalSat ESE 4 and Intelsat 21), thus reaching a potentially wider audience. Several Islamic channels have since been introduced and also been

Islam as a universal value that unites all Muslims and claim to facilitate knowledge about religious, cultural, social, educational, economic and political issues based on the Koran and the Prophet Muhammad's Sunna [traditions]. Furthermore, they want to strengthen Muslims' belonging to 'the Arab-Islamic nation and culture.' While interpretations vary between different programmes broadcast on the same channel, the channels generally stress a view that there exists 'an Islamic perspective on all aspects of life.' As Tash argues in an article about Islamic media, they are 'a comprehensive and total system' (Tash 2004: 3). At the same time, however, the concept of Islamic television is challenged by others, particular secularists, who claim that all television produced by and directed at Muslims could be considered Islamic, and therefore there is no need to establish specific Islamic channels.⁶

In this approach of exploring the relationship between the media and its audiences along with the factors influencing this relationship, the question becomes: how do audiences define and relate to Islamic TV as a specific genre? From the conversations with the interviewees, it became evident that they display a certain affinity towards particular elements of Islamic TV either in the form of a specific preacher, a particular channel or a specific kind of programme. On the other hand, when directly asked how to define Islamic TV, most definitions suggested were abstract and ideal – thus, not far from the channels' own definitions.

When asking Noura – a recently retired Egyptian lawyer living in Cairo – about her use of Islamic TV, she mentioned the name of *Azhari* TV and later *al-Rahma* TV, but immediately proceeded to mention a list of the names of scholars from Islamic programming she preferred. She liked Khaled al-Gindi, Mo'ez Mas'oud and Mustafa Husny. And among non-Egyptians, she liked 'Ai'd al-Qarni from Saudi Arabia and al-Habib al-Jifri from Yemen, while she disliked 'Atia Saqr and Mongi Farahat from al-Azhar in Egypt. Obviously, she was able to juggle a lot of names of specific scholars known from television without problem. From her way of addressing Islamic television, it appeared that she identified religious programming with religious scholars. In other words, Islamic TV for her was first and foremost characterised by the teachings of religious scholars. Indeed, Islamic channels do present a large number of religious scholars who either have their own programmes or are invited guests in their capacity as religious authorities

forced to close. Thus the Muslim Brotherhood's channel *Misr25* as well as *al-Nas*, *al-Rahma* and *Hafez* channels have all been shut down by the Egyptian regime in the aftermath of the removal of president Mursi from office in July 2013.

6 Nabil Fayad argues for this secular position as a guest on *The Opposite Direction* (al-Jazeera, 27 February 2011).

on different kinds of shows (cf. Galal 2009). They offer religious-based guidance and answers to different kinds of questions on topics ranging from religious to personal issues. Rather than seeing their media presence as a result of the position they enjoy in the society as large, it is very often their presence on television that makes them recognized, which in turn strengthens their authority. In order to understand their influence, the audiences' and in this case Noura's recognition of their authority is therefore crucial.

To Ibrahim, religious authority is everything when it comes to choosing what to watch. Fifty-year-old Ibrahim, an Egyptian school teacher since 1997, watched Islamic television in order to learn about religion from an expert. His preferred one particular Salafi sheikh, Sheikh Muhammad Hassan. Since Sheikh Muhammad Hassan endorsed the teachings and religious scholars on the *al-Rahma* channel, Ibrahim chose to watch this channel. Thus, to Ibrahim, Islamic TV was Sheikh Muhammad Hassan and what he defined as *ansar al-Sunna* [followers of al-Sunna].

Another way of identifying Islamic TV is by referring to a specific way of dealing with a topic. Samir is an Egyptian judge in his mid-fifties posted together with his wife in Dubai. He explained that he preferred to see a programme that deals with a topic in depth, rather than the fatwa programmes with their all too often absurd questions and answers. Mohsen, a newly educated engineer of twenty two living in Cairo, had a similar approach. He asked for knowledge, and like Samir, he explained that he would prefer that religious programming were broadcasted on normal channels in between other programmes, instead of on specifically religious channels. They both thought that the so-called Islamic channels were influenced too heavily by self-appointed scholars from the Salafi tradition. Contrary to Noura and Ibrahim, both Samir and Mohsen questioned the religious authority of the television preachers.

Seen as symbolic resources offered by Islamic TV, Noura and Ibrahim cited names of scholars as powerful resources and models for them, whereas Samir and Mohsen identified substantiated arguments and in-depth discussion of specific topics as interesting and relevant to them. More variations of these two tendencies are present in my material, but what is important in this context is that these differences do not mean that the four of them do not agree at all. Surprisingly, they all said that Sheikh Muhammad Hassan was okay, although neither Samir nor Mohsen identified as Salafi. On the contrary, they made a point of distancing themselves from Salafi. But they liked Sheikh Muhammad Hassan, though they both claimed to prefer the late Egyptian sheikh al-Sha'rawi, who

became famous for his TV lessons in the 1980s and 1990s long before Islamic channels were introduced.

When asked directly the question of what Islamic media is, the interviewees turned to identical kinds of explanations, despite their apparent differences in other respects. Ibrahim, the school teacher, answered:

They are media that may save the poor ones [non-practicing Muslims]. And pray to God to meet them in heaven in one way or the other and get points for their good works.

In his answer, Ibrahim's description of Islamic media is abstract and is presented in the form of a religious phrase, rather than as an attempt to explain or define Islamic media. Another kind of general statement was given by Samir, the judge:

They have to be guided by Islamic rules and education to be named Islamic media. The programming has to follow Islamic ethics, as for instance in dress.

He continued that Islamic TV does not lie or bring harm. Although this answer is more specific, it is also a very general statement that makes Islamic equivalent with ethical rules.

Karim is a young man in his twenties, who had been living in London for three years. He holds a Bachelor's degree but currently works in a supermarket in London at night. He is married to a British-born Muslim. He gave the following reason for watching Islamic TV:

It is God's sharia that God has send to us to live it.

All in all, when asked directly about Islamic television, the audiences' answers were very close to how Islamic channels define themselves using Islamic terminology and referring to what the channel Iqraa has named 'an Islamic frame of reference'. They did not challenge the notion of an Islamic frame of reference despite their very different opinions about the consequences of the channels. Rather, an abstract and general definition made it possible for the audiences to make use of the same Islamic channels for different purposes, as will be examined in the following section.

Between filling up time and filling in religion

Watching television in a western context has often been associated with the living room, as implied by the title of Ien Ang's book *Living room wars*. In Egypt, watching television has from the start also been a public activity – in a café or village, for example (Abu-Lughod 2005). Today, the places and hours for watching television has increasingly become just as varied as the number of channels and devices used to access television. For both researchers and producers, the

possibility of choice has an unavoidable impact on analytical as well as commercial interests (as also pointed out by Ang 1996). However, choice does not equate to lack of structure, as the data from my fieldwork demonstrate. The choices made by my interviewees are deeply embedded in daily routines of work, religious duties, and leisure, on the one hand, but also in existing discourses. Thus, the structures of everyday life influence the manner in which Islamic TV is consumed; watching it becomes a matter of organising time and space.

Opportunity and intellectual relevance

When asking the interviewees about their television watching routines, it was not a surprise to find that watching Islamic television had very different functions in their daily lives.

For Mohsen, the young Egyptian engineer, the choice of watching Islamic programmes seemed to be one possibility among many different programmes he could choose to help pass time. He repeated that he normally watched the Islamic programmes in Super-Jet, referring to travelling by bus. Thus, he emphasised that it was a way of passing the time while travelling, which is often a frustrating and time-consuming experience in Egypt. While he mentioned the Super-Jet as a place for him to watch Islamic channels, he also explained that some other buses showed movies. As such, the choice of watching Islamic channels became a matter of accident rather than a deliberately planned activity or choice. However, his comment also reveals that Islamic channels are available in buses and must therefore be acceptable in public spheres. Time scheduling was another issue stressed by Mohsen, who explained that another way for him to watch Islamic channels is by finding them on YouTube or Facebook. His explanation revealed that he was motivated by discussions with friends and in public about specific preachers and programmes. He found and watched them on the Internet in order to form up his own opinion. Both opportunities to watch and social input were the striking features of Mohsen's use of Islamic television.

In London the young man, Karim who works in a supermarket, had similar concerns about finding time for watching Islamic television. Like Mohsen, the young Egyptian engineer in Cairo, Karim was a huge consumer of media – not only religious programming, but all kinds of shows including sitcoms, business and news:

I watch my TV channels via YouTube. I watch them before noon. When I come home [from my night shift work], I go online and watch it. In 10 minutes I can get a quick overview about what happened the last 24 hours. Usually, I stay online until around 2pm.

I talk to friends, watch the news, play games, see my relatives [who live abroad] during 4–5 hours; all of it through the Internet.

Though Karim was attracted by Salafi thinking, he was a very different media user from, for instance, the Egyptian school teacher Ibrahim. He consumed a lot of media from a wide range of programming, but mainly in small portions. As he said:

... soon we don't need television, because you can find clips of the programme or the whole programme on YouTube, or even recorded lessons [religious] uploaded on YouTube.

Easy access was an important factor in Karim's media use. When he explained that he preferred specialised programmes rather than a mixture of religious and non-religious programmes, he explained that it is not nice to have non-religious programming playing in which people are kissing, drinking alcohol, or making love, which is then interrupted with the call to prayer, after which the broadcast immediately comes back on. But his desire for specialised programmes may also be seen as a platform for easy access to the precise kind of programmes he would like to see at a particular moment. He can be categorised as an eclectic and consumerist media user.

Samir, the judge living in Dubai, is another example of a user who stressed that his watching of Islamic TV was relatively accidental, occasional and arbitrary. Very often, he came across religious shows by accident while channel surfing and tuned in if it seemed to be an interesting topic. As mentioned, he preferred programmes that examine a specific topic in depth. He did not have any specific religious programmes he watched regularly, and he preferred watching religious programmes on mainstream channels. As he said, he can easily enjoy a day without watching religious television, although he actually watches some religious programming every day. In his opinion, TV is not the best place to gain religious knowledge. Thus, for Samir, Islamic programming is a potential resource – so long as it is intellectual stimulating.

Purposeful teaching and contemplation

In contrast to Samir, the judge, the retired lawyer Noura watched Islamic television as a way to have a bit of religion on a day-to-day basis. She argued that it had become a necessary part of her life. Noura mostly watched TV after lunch (after 2pm) and in the evening. She explained that after lunch she would lie down on her bed and also in the evening after a long day to relax. Every day at 5pm, she would watch Mo'ez Mas'oud, who is a young Egyptian educated from the

American University in Cairo, but has made a living out of his Western style of preaching. Watching TV and specific Islamic programmes had become an important element in structuring and providing meaning to Noura's daily life and routines after retirement.

Amira, a 35-year-old single mother of three who immigrated to London seven years earlier, also used Islamic TV as a way of structuring her day while making room for religion. She argued that Islamic TV is a positive force:

We are very preoccupied with material life. Our soul does also need a little spirituality. We need words to help us getting closer to God. Life makes us too busy. We run, we are running all the time. Many people don't find time to read the Koran. These programmes make it easier for me. You feel your soul relaxing. And, you feel recuperated and ready to continue working.

By referring to the need for words, Amira very clearly saw Islamic programming as a resource for a specific spiritual language. But like Noura, she also liked to watch other kinds of programmes. Her situated use of Islamic TV as a symbolic resource among others was revealed when she said that if she had had a big argument with her ex-husband, she would only want to pray and listen to the Koran. Though, on another day she added that she would want to go out, listen to music, and would not do much else – except for observing the daily prayers, as she added.

Confirming truth and safeguarding piety

The schoolteacher Ibrahim represents yet another kind of audience. Like the retired lawyer Noura, an important element of his daily routine included religious activities both in the mosque and by watching television. Ibrahim was a keen follower of Sheikh Muhammad Hassan, and he watched his programme every Wednesday. He emphasised his exclusive media use. The scholars he watched had to have a Salafi approach before he trusted them. For that reason, he did not like to watch films, drama series or even talk shows that mix the genders, because this is *haram* [sinful]. However, he did watch news and programmes on non-Islamic TV channels in which political and social problems were discussed, for example 'Amr Adib's and Mona al-Shazli's programmes. Confronted with the issue of watching a woman, he defended himself by arguing that he was not watching her in order to flirt with her, and he usually was very conscience not to stare at her. In any case, the people who rejected watching her were a million times better than him, he added. It also happened that he would watch part of a film, if he came home and it was playing in the living room where his twelve year old daughter was watching it. He argued that he did not want to make things too complicated

for his daughter by denying her the option of watching content he himself would prefer not to watch. As a media user, Ibrahim was an ideological exclusivist and an authority-based viewer.

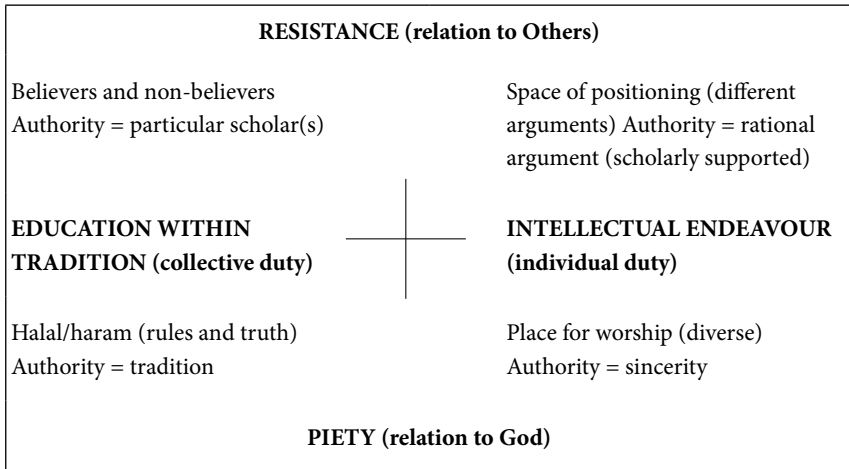
Another kind of exclusivist was Maher, who had been living in Denmark for about 20 years. He was in his late fifties and did unskilled work at his son's company. He volunteers for many hours a week doing administrative work at a mosque. He watched all kinds of programmes, also those he believed to have been built on 'lies,' such as secular Arab channels like the Saudi-owned *MBC TV*. Maher placed his viewing habits in two contexts. One context comprised his daily routines; he watched television in the morning and the evening. The other was the context of what was happening in the world. The interview with Maher took place in the autumn 2011 during which time the events following the January revolution in Egypt were still in the world news. He argued that he watched much more television than normal, particularly the news stories on the events in Egypt. As for Islamic channels, he watched them at home since they require concentration, as he argued. Regardless of the channels and programmes he watched, Islamic or not, he used them as proof of his worldview. Television corrupts and misleads most people, he argued, and while he had the capacity to distinguish between right and wrong television, he therefore could watch all kinds of programmes, but believes that most viewers do not have this capacity. While Maher was exclusivist in his judging of what constitutes good television, this was not motivated so much by a religious position as a political one, much in contrast to the schoolteacher Ibrahim. Thus, for Maher, watching Islamic TV was not motivated by a specific authority, although he praised *al-Rahma* and Sheikh Muhammad Hassan. It was a way of confirming his faith and his political position in the world.

As result of this section of the analysis, it has been possible to identify three different ways that people make use of the symbolic resources provided by Islamic programming: (1) Opportunity and intellectual relevance; (2) Purposeful teaching and contemplation; and (3) Confirming truth and safeguarding piety. In the following section, I will further examine how these strategies of television use are embedded in the different negotiations and contestations of the role of media and how the interviewees made meaning of what and how they watched Islamic TV. By looking more closely at their articulations, it becomes possible to further evaluate how their routines are related to the use of Islamic programming as symbolic resources.

Making meaning from Islamic television: between resistance and piety

Watching TV in specific ways, as explored in the preceding section, cannot be isolated from the meaning that audiences make of what they watch. None of the audiences interviewed came up with one single interpretation of Islamic TV. Instead, they appeared to oscillate between Islamic TV as a protector and educator of tradition and as a basis for making up one's own mind about religious issues. Or, they went back and forth between perceiving Islamic channels as providing a foundation for differentiating right from wrong and as a place of worship. Despite the equivocations, it is possible to identify some dominant discourses that cut across the interviews. They are characterised by what I would call four ways of striving to be a Muslim, and therefore also four different variations of convergence between Islam and media in social practice. As I have argued elsewhere, one must do something to 'achieve becoming Muslim' (Galal 2012b). Thus, by watching Islamic programming, Muslims 'achieve becoming Muslim' by emphasizing different values, interpretations, and religious activities. It is important to note that these should not be taken for categories of Muslim audiences, since they oscillate between different interpretations. More precisely, the different 'activities' may be seen as clusters of symbolic resources that emerge from the encounter between Islamic TV and its audiences.

The four positions are: (1) Resistance against others' understanding of Islam; (2) Spiritually striving for piety; (3) Education and protection of tradition; and (4) Intellectually striving for new knowledge. In the model below, the four positions are also placed in relation to each other. I provide examples of the positions as exhibited by the interviewees and at the same time elaborate on the meanings of each of the four positions (Figure 1).



Above the horizontal line, the relationship to various Others is at stake. These may be infidels or secularists (on the left side), or they may be without rational argumentation (on the right side). Below the horizontal line, the relationship to God is what audiences find the resources which with to strengthen through Islamic TV, either in the form of tradition including rules (on the left side) or in the form of places for worship and remembrance (on the right side). Another analytical distinction of the model is between those who argue within an individual perspective (right side of the vertical line) and those who focus on Islam as a clearly defined tradition and thus collectively legitimated (left side of vertical line). Additionally, the different positions are reflected in different approaches to authority, as indicated in the model and elaborated in the following section.

An arena of cultural struggle and resistance (above the horizontal line)

Several of the interviewees read media texts within the context of current political struggles. By doing so, their evaluation of Islamic TV was inevitably and simultaneously a positioning of themselves within the socio-religious political field. This political field is not only characterised by contradictions and tensions when it comes to religious feelings and values, but is also embedded in on-going societal changes on both a global and local level. However, the interviewees did not subscribe to identical kinds of differentiation, as the following examples show.

Maher, from Denmark, was critical towards television in general from the beginning of the interview. According to him, all Arab channels were potentially an extension of the power of the United States. Thus, he differentiated between American-influenced, secular, and liberal channels such as *MBC TV*, and those he was able to trust, which included mainly the Egyptian Islamic *al-Rahma TV*. Thus, Saudi owned channels in general were not to be trusted, regardless if they were defined as Islamic or not. He explained that many Islamic channels were created to fulfil the interest of their owners and to spread what he denoted as 'Islam light' ('light' referring to diluted version). Maher's differentiation of right and wrong Islam is embedded within the global struggle between a western liberal discourse on secularism and a religious conservative discourse that in its Muslim version has been fed by anti-Muslim discourses that have swept western countries after the terrorist attacks of September 11 (Galal 2012a).

Among the Egyptian interviewees, the differences articulated were of a more internal, regional kind. The dominant divide was that between a pro-Salafi and anti-Salafi orientation. While Salafi seemed to be a reference point for both pros and cons, quite often the opposite of Salafi was denoted as *wasatiya* (meaning 'the middle way' and is referring to a moderate version of Islam). The retired lawyer Noura stated this preference very clearly when she explained how she preferred specific scholars because they represented a spiritual and moderate [*wasatiya*] approach to Islam, much in contrast to overly strict channels, like *al-Nas* (a Salafi TV channel), "which make people hate everything", as she said. Hence, viewers like the schoolteacher Ibrahim, the young engineer Mohsen, the judge Samir, and the retired lawyer Noura interpreted their preferences into a regional discourse on Salafi versus moderate Islam. They positioned themselves clearly as pro Salafi (Ibrahim), or against Salafi (Samir and Noura), or as someone who previously subscribed to Salafi (Mohsen).

The symbolic resources provided by Islamic TV offer viewers particular positions to adopt within the Islamic landscape and the means to respectively challenge them. However, Ibrahim, Samir and Mohsen, who were all preoccupied with positioning themselves, did not use the same strategy in order to reach a conclusion regarding the best or truest position. Here the understanding of authority played a role, which was again motivated by the interpretation of the resources offered by television. Ibrahim made it very clear that he only accepted knowledge about Islam communicated by self-declared Salafi scholars or by scholars recognized by Sheikh Muhammad Hassan, whom he followed. That was why he preferred *al-Rahma TV*, because Sheikh Muhammad Hassan guaranteed its quality. Thus, Sheikh Muhammad Hassan was his chosen authority

on Islamic matters. While Samir and Mohsen also occasionally watched Sheikh Muhammad Hassan, their argumentation for the right interpretation was quite different from Ibrahim's. Mohsen required clear references and arguments; Samir preferred well-argued and well-documented proof. They both also stressed that it was a question of making up one's own minds on the basis of reviewing and thinking about information presented. This was reflected in their media use, which was much more inclusive than Ibrahim's. For them, choosing trustworthy programming was their responsibility – not something to be left to one authority or scholar.

An arena of piety (below the horizontal line)

Islamic television is not only used as a basis for differentiation. Just as much, it is perceived as a resource for coming closer to God. The need to be reminded of the message of Islam, as well as involve oneself in a religious space also seem to be important aspects. This mode of using Islamic programming is thus very similar to what Charles Hirschkind describes in his book on how cassette sermons are used to create Islamic counter publics (2009).

For the twenty-two year old university student Khatib, who is born in England, the Islamic programmes helped him to remember. As he phrased it:

I think that the stories about the prophet and his followers or a programme on education within Islam may influence me. Although I may have heard about these things before, we human beings easily forget. Therefore, I find that these channels are fine, because they encourage us and remind us of the right things and about being decent.

Khatib was convinced that religious space should not be contaminated by secular topics; he thus preferred the separation between religious and non-religious channels. As with other interviewees, his interpretation was closely related to his use of Islamic programmes, which he only watched when he stayed with his parents, mostly during Ramadan. The Islamic channels offered him a specific religious space of worship that was private and safeguarded tradition in a moderate version.

As previously mentioned, Amira, the single mother from London, also found emotional and spiritual support through Islamic programming. Like Khatib she emphasised the importance of protecting and handing on Islamic traditions to the next generation. Noura's use of Islamic programming also reflected her need for specific spiritual spaces. But in contrast to Amira and Khatib, it was Noura's own space – one that was not shared with her family. At the same time she was a critical user who stressed that one should not believe everything:

You have to listen to your heart and choose, what is the easiest to you, as the prophet Muhammad has prescribed”, she argued.

Thus her spiritual needs were connected with the quest for sincerity and intellectual fulfilment.

Ibrahim and Maher also perceived the channels as a way to teach their children about Islam or the (Salafi) tradition. They tried to watch religious TV together with their children in order to influence them without pressure, as they said. Furthermore, Ibrahim gave the impression that he would like to watch even more, if possible. Islamic TV became like prayers and lessons in the mosque: something to continuously strive for, a place for living in accordance with Islam. The authority, though, is still tradition. Contrary to Ibrahim, Karim, the eclectic user, argued that he himself would decide what was useful. He did not want to become a parrot, just repeating what the scholar said. Instead, he sought to find out and experience himself what was right. In other words, he found answers through argumentation and what he considered authentic or sincere.

Conclusion

It is worth noting that several of the interviewees mentioned said that they watched the Salafi Sheikh Muhammad Hassan (Samir, Ibrahim and Karim). Considering the context in which they watched him and how they ascribed meaning to what they watched helps depict a much more complex picture of how audiences make use of the symbolic resources offered by programmes such as Sheikh Muhammad Hassan’s. Though they reported watching the same sheikh, they differed in how much they liked him. For Samir, Sheikh Muhammad Hassan was just one television scholar he saw by chance and found okay. To Ibrahim, Sheikh Muhammad Hassan was his religious Master. Karim found him charismatic and strong in his way of speaking. Thus, Sheikh Muhammad Hassan influences audiences, but in very different ways. For an Arab user of Islamic television he appears to be difficult not to come across and have an opinion about between 2011 and 2014. Since my material is qualitative and I make no claim of representativeness, I do not argue that this most likely would be the case for all audiences. The point is that across different countries and across different beliefs, it is possible to identify shared frames of reference among Arabic-speaking audiences of Islamic TV.

Furthermore, audiences from different countries in general appear to use Islamic TV to differentiate and position themselves in terms of religion and identity. What differs is how these articulations of difference converge with other discourses. For the Danish interviewee, they are part of a global discourse on

Islam, while Egyptian interviewees, for the most part, took part in a national or regional discourse for and against Salafism. Again, it is interesting that possible clusters of positioning and identification made available with the help of the symbolic resources of Islamic TV. While to some degree a viewer's place of residence may influence his or her interpretation of Islamic television, it is just as relevant to consider the everyday circumstances that influence the use of Islamic TV. As judged by the interviewees, access and technology, combined with social practices of work, leisure time, family life etcetera are just as important.

It is also noteworthy that British and young Egyptian interviewees were more likely to use the Internet or YouTube to view Islamic programming, which may clearly be related to easy access or programmes on demand. The findings could indicate that the more an audience depends on the Internet and YouTube, the more likely the possibility is of eclectic and situational interpretations. As for symbolic resources on spirituality, the greatest differences seem to be between those who largely accept the symbolic inventory of well-defined rules, rituals and practices made available to them by Islamic programmes, and those who appreciate the inventory of symbolic resources, but ultimately insist on making them their own.

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Khalil Rinnawi

Cyber religious-national community? The case of Arab community in Germany

Introduction

Since the 1980s, Arab diasporas in Europe and elsewhere have been connected to the Arab World through Arabic newspapers such as *al-Hayat* or *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, allowing for the creation of a kind of primordial virtual community (Kraidy 2008). This tendency was further strengthened during the 1990s and the beginning of this century by the consumption of the Arabic satellite television channels and the Internet among these diasporas in the shadow of the globalization process. The main assumption here is that the process of globalization, which is inevitable and unavoidable one, has become an integral part of our world experience regardless of our location, means (e.g. satellite TV or Internet), or time (Appadurai 1996). A central claim of this approach is that globalization changes the 'rules of the game' because of the way it facilitates basic communication and cultural exchange (Fiske 1987).

One important phenomenon of globalization is the cultural isolation of ethno-national minorities living in different countries from the cultural majority of the general population (Aksoy & Robins 1997; Rinnawi 2010). This is evident not only in the case of Arabs in Germany, but also in other places in Europe and elsewhere (Miladi 2006; Harb & Bessiaso 2006; Matar 2006). It is also evident among other minorities living in Germany – particularly among the Turks and Kurds (White 1997; Robins & Aksoy 2000). Continuing the research in this field, this study highlights the effects of the Arab transnational media, particularly satellite television and the Internet, among this community. The focus in this study is to determine to what degree a Berlin-based Arab community – mainly of Palestinian and Lebanese origin – is exposed to Arab transnational media. This study is also interested in how exposure to transnational Arab media influences this community. This chapter addresses two main questions: first, how do members of this community consume media? Secondly, what are the implications of this media consumption among this community and across generations in terms of their relationship to German society and with their Arab homeland?

Arab Community in Germany

Compared to the Turks who have been in Germany since the 1950s and 1960s, the Arab community of Berlin I refer to in this study is considered a 'new' collective as (Aksoy & Robins 1997). The majority of them are of Palestinian or Lebanese origin and came from Lebanon between 1973 and the mid 1980s during the civil war. Most of them entered Germany under the auspices of the German Asylum Law (1980). The exact number of Arabs in Germany is not known, but according to a report by Susan M. Akram and Terry Rempel, in 1999 there were approximately 45,000 refugees of Arab origin – most of whom reside in Berlin (Akram and Rempel 2003). Unlike Arab communities in other parts of Europe, the Arab community in Berlin lacks local supporting institutions that deal with culture, welfare, etcetera. Since they have refugee status, they are a social minority who is, to a certain degree, not really accustomed to being supported by local cultural and social institutions. A further distinguishing feature of Arab communities in Berlin, particularly since the 1990s, is their high degree of politicization relating directly to cultural and ideological divisions and struggles within the Arab world. The impact of these cultural and ideological dynamics has been reinforced by the consumption of Arab media among this community.

Theoretical considerations

This study is based upon two main theoretical points of departure. The first is derived from socio-political literature and addresses this topic from the collective dimension, while the second theoretical approach originates from psychological research and places an emphasis upon the individual dimension.

The concept of multiculturalism is important to the first theoretical approach. Population exchange and massive immigration resulting from the reconfiguration of national borders has occurred in many countries around the world since the 1970s. These movements and migrations of populations have led to the creation of ethno-national minorities who seek to preserve their respective identity, cultural heritage, and mother language (Morley & Robins 1995; Geertz 2000). In the framework of the postmodernist intellectual and global climate since the late 1980s, this cultural segregation has gained a significantly large degree of legitimacy (Kellner 1988; Featherstone 1995). This legitimacy is not only evident to social scientists who argue against the melting pot paradigm (Kimmerling 2004). It was also recognized by the legislative community, who has accepted the principle that the bond with one's culture, and in particular with the language people use to express and understand themselves, can be so strong that individuals cannot relinquish it (Rawls 1993). Therefore, the notion of multiculturalism

becomes the most important force in this reality. In this context, Grillo (2001) classifies two kinds of multiculturalisms: weak and strong. Weak multiculturalism refers to the idea that ethnic minorities share the same fundamental values and norms, employment patterns, health care and welfare and education systems with the mainstream population. Cultural differences, distinct beliefs and practices, religious traditions and language are permitted in the private sphere. Strong multiculturalism, on the other hand, recognizes cultural differences in the public sphere, such as providing separate schools or hospitals for Muslims in some European countries. The weak version of multiculturalism is widely held as the Western ideal and has served as the foundation for French policies, while Britain has tended more towards a programme of strong multiculturalism.

The second theoretical point of departure is derived from psychological research, and places emphasis upon the individual dimension. This consists of strategies that individuals who belong to minority and immigrant groups use in their daily lives within their host societies (Pfetsch 1999). The cross-cultural psychological approach, for instance, considers the links between cultural context and the behaviour of individual members of minorities, particularly immigrant communities (Berry 1997). According to this approach, the immigrant minority group faces two problems: (1) participating in the host society and (2) maintaining their original identity and cultural heritage. Berry offers a model of this dynamic based on dichotomous attitudes towards two issues: the value of maintaining one's distinct identity and the value of maintaining relationships with the host society. As a result of such potentially dichotomous attitudes, minority group members may develop acculturation strategies including: assimilation, separation, marginalization and integration (*ibid.*).

Within the framework of this discussion, transnational media plays a crucial role in these processes by connecting minorities to the culture and heritage emanating of their countries of origin. This connection has both collective and individual aspects. The main outcome of these tendencies is threatening and challenging the nation-state formula by strengthening sectarian tendencies among the various communities that comprise the nation-state. On the other hand, many democracies work to promote policies that enhance the social integration of different national-cultural minorities into the mainstream culture of the nation-state.

Transnational media and new cultural order

This brings us to the role of the media, cultural organisations, and cultural practices in the transformation of cultural spaces and identities. Studying the media

can provide rich insight into what is happening to these two dimensions in their various contemporary manifestations.

First, it is worth considering the wider transformations that are occurring in contemporary media industries and markets, such as changes associated with the development of new 'space-transcending' technologies like satellite TV and the Internet. An important consequence of this has been the construction of new transnational communicational and cultural spaces in and across continents. In the new media order, audiences who were once marginalized as 'minority interests' to national broadcasting regimes may now be transformed into significant elements for transnational services that embrace diaspora interests and identities.

The landscape of the Arab media has undergone revolutionary changes since the 1990s as a result of globalization and trans-nationalism. The most crucial development has occurred in Arab television, where the historical monopoly of the state broadcasting organisations was undermined in the early 1990s due to both private broadcasting companies and new liberal economic policies (Sakr 2001; Rinnawi 2006). Consequently, there was a proliferation of commercial channels in the Arab world. Additionally, Pan-Arab television channels such as *al-Jazeera* and *al-Arabiya* and, of course, new religious channels such as *Iqraa* were also launched. As of 2014, there are hundreds of channels. These channels have actively sought to make their programmes available to Arab communities throughout the world by using satellite and Internet links. Programming to this diaspora has now become integral to channel scheduling practices. This new logic of transnational marketing has also become apparent in other forms of production, such as television entertainment and general informational programmes.

Essentially, Pan-Arab media enables Arab TV audiences and web users in the Arab world as well as in the diaspora to engage in cultural, religious and nationalistic issues. This engagement is particularly important to Arab diasporan communities, who generally live in Western, non-Muslim, non-Arab environments (Kraidy 2002). Through the Arab transnational media, all Arabs throughout the world can become members of an invisible, imagined virtual community (Rinnawi 2006). Field research indicates that members of this virtual community are no longer a marginalized minority, but because they are members of a virtual community via TV and the Internet, they also belong to a majority. These groups are no longer marginal and remain less assimilated in their host societies. Being significantly exposed to these virtual communities somehow deepens their own societal marginality. Mark Sedgwick, for example, argues that the Internet makes Western Muslims less of a minority by increasing both the frequency and range of their contact (1998). Contact with Arab issues, which was previously limited

to their local mosque, may now extend across continents. Furthermore, information is widely disseminated and sometimes acted upon quickly. In making Arabs and Muslims in the West less of a minority, the Internet increases not only their own sense of identity as Arabs and Muslims, but also their self-confidence (ibid.). Several field studies on Arab diasporas in Europe have reached the same conclusion regarding the crucial influence of Arab transnational media on Arab diasporas in the West since the 1990s (Miladi 2006; Harb & Bessiaso 2006; Matar 2006; Rinnawi 2010).

In this context, Pintak (2009) argues that media plays a fundamental role in the formation of national identity, most famously detailed in Benedict Anderson's theory of the imagined community. Consequently, we argue that the widespread displacement of people and the re-creation of communities with shared ethnicity and/or language through transnational media has blurred social and national identities. It has opened up possibilities for 'multiple affiliations and associations outside and beyond the nation state and the state where they live,' giving rise to something Robin Cohen has described as a 'diasporic allegiance' – a proliferation of 'transnational identities that cannot easily be contained within the nation-state system' (1997). Arjun Appadurai uses the same terminology to describe, among other things, the displacement of people and the creation of 'invented homelands' (1996).

The main thesis of this study is based on what Rinnawi (2006) calls 'McArabism.' According to Anderson, a nation is an imagined community despite the fact that not every imagined community is a nation, and nation is not synonymous with nationalism (Anderson 1993). In this context, we can argue that globalizing effects of transnational media on the Arab community in Germany can be traced to the concept of an 'imagined community,' at both in terms of the nation and the Islamic religion. This suggests that instant nationalism, such as 'McArabism' can be a form of an imagined community, composed mainly of Arabs within the Arab world, as well as Arabs in the diaspora. According to Anderson, 'the emergence of new nationalism is the result of a process of "re-imagination" conditioned by drastic transformations in the conscience and media within a modern framework' (ibid.). The 'imagined' nations resulting from the process of re-imagining, positioned within the rise of contemporary nationalism are based upon philosophies of ethnic solidarity. This process of imagination occurs within the framework of radical social changes that have taken place following the industrial revolution (ibid.). In the case of the Arab community in Germany, the introduction of Arab transnational media has strongly impacted the process of re-imagination in the national context as well as in the Islamic-religious one,

built upon people's nostalgic longing for the past in their homeland. Finally, it is imagined as a community because regardless of the actual prevailing inequality and exploitation, the nation is conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship (ibid.). In effect, the thing that is imagined here in Anderson's analysis is the nation. However, in this study we apply the term 'imagined nation' to the Arab community in Germany in order to try to explain the effects of consuming Arab satellite media, which is conceived by Anderson as limited, sovereign comradeship. This will be elaborated later in this study, where we will empirically show the limits of this imagined community.

In light of the above discussion, it is interesting to explore how and if the effects of transnational media differ according to generational lines in general and, more specifically, in our case study. Therefore, we theorize that first generation immigrants formulated an 'Imagined Coherence' or 'Cyber Nationalism and Islamic-religiousness' of a Pan-Islamic and Pan-Arab nation by interacting with Arab media; their children, in turn, must demonstrate a 'schizophrenic situation' that differs from their parents' experience and is evident in their media habits. These differences are explained in the following section.

Methodological considerations

This study involves an analysis of media consumption and cultural practices by the Arab community in Berlin. Media and cultural practices were considered from two perspectives:

1. In-depth, qualitative survey of the use and consumption of Arabic and non-Arabic media by was conducted on 50 randomly selected Arab families living in Berlin.
2. An analysis of the impact of these modes of media consumption on their identity in different members and subgroups within the Arab community.

Studying media helps gain insight into wider questions regarding culture, identity, segregation, integration, and assimilation. In keeping with this focus, the study data is based on 197 face-to-face, open-ended question interviews conducted among 50 families in Berlin during a four-month period in the summer of 2009. 197 participants were randomly chosen and all participating families were Palestinian and Lebanese refugees. Most of the interviews were done in Arabic. Finally, it is important to mention here that we have asked the interviewees about their general use of TV, thus enabling us to also find out about their use of religious TV.

Media consumption among the Arab community in Berlin

General modes of media consumption

In general, the data shows that for most of the interviewees, mass media plays an integral part of their lives and serves as a vital tool. Participants reported feeling that the media is not only an important pastime, but it is also the main tool that connects them to their homeland and Islamic religion. It also helps them retain their sense of belonging to their heritage, both at a national level and religious level. The interviewees revealed a high degree of adaptation to the media. Almost all the interviewees, particularly the parents, reported extensive television viewing, while the younger generation reported long hours of Internet surfing. Most parents belong to the first generation, which is characterized by high rates of unemployment; many live off welfare assistance they receive from the state authorities as refugees. Consequently, they have a great deal of leisure 'time to kill.' Most important is their strong and clear tendency to consume national and religious media content broadcast on Arab transnational media, such as the 'all-news' television channels, as well as the religious ones. All families interviewed mentioned that electronic media, rather than written media, is their sole source of information. This is due to several reasons. There is no local Arabic written media source available in Berlin. Arab newspapers were available in the past, but most of parents are illiterate and/or are not accustomed to reading German newspapers. School-aged children reported that they sometimes read German newspapers, but are unable to read fluently in Arabic.

Television is the first media form that interviewees rely upon in order to keep updated on what is going around them and, more importantly, what is going on in their homeland. They rely on television for news, Islamic-religious programmes as well as entertainment, and are accustomed to entertainment from their homeland rather than the other mass media. Ghassan, a 54-year-old Palestinian, said:

Normally almost all of my media consumption is TV such as al-Jazeera and al-'Arabiya and other Arab entertainment TV channels like MCB and MBC. Sometimes I watch the German Channel ARD and ZDF. I have no access to Arabic newspapers because they do not exist here or to the German ones since I cannot read German well enough to read them. As for the Internet, it is very far from my world except when I talk on Skype to my relatives in Lebanon.

Adult female interviewees reported spending even more time watching TV due to the long hours they spend at home during the day. 'Aysheh, a 47-year-old woman, stated that:

Television became my best friend. I spend hours and hours watching, moving from one TV channel to another, from one Arabic Drama to another Turkish one.¹ When there is nothing interesting I move to Rotana Channel to watch Arabic video clips or to Rotana Tarab to be connected to my favorite nostalgic [Haneen] Arabic singers such as Umm Kulthum and Warda.

Similar sentiments were also expressed in a study conducted by Miladi (2006) among Arab community members in Britain.

The second general finding is 'dual modes' of media consumption. On one hand, our interviewees consume German media received through local cables. This includes German television channels such as ZDF, ARD and SAT1, which keeps them updated on the economy, weather, transport, and other issues in their daily lives in Germany, as well as entertainment programmes such as movies and TV dramas. This tendency is more evident among the young generation. On the other hand, interviewees extensively consume media in Arabic, which they receive through private satellite dishes (Nilesat and/or Arabsat). Hussein, a 35-year-old man originally from Lebanon, explained:

Almost all of the Arab families I know have access to both German media and Arab satellite media. The German media helps me feel more updated with what is going on here in Germany and makes my daily life here easier. But, at the same time, without satellite TV channels coming from the Arab World I would feel bad, strange, and alienated.

Generational-cultural gaps

These findings indicate important generational gaps. While television is considered the main media outlet for the parents, the Internet is the most important medium for the younger generation. This finding can be partially explained by differences in the education levels between both generations. Most of the parents arrived in Germany with low levels of education, which has prevented them from learning to use a computer to surf the Internet. The younger generation, on the other hand, has received a higher level of education since they attend schools in Germany. The second reason for these differences can be attributed to the fact that the younger generation is as 'computer oriented' as their peers in Germany and elsewhere. Mohamed, a 19-year-old, stated:

Most of the young Arab people my age and younger, including children, are familiar with the Internet. We get most of our news about the Arab World through the Arab news websites as well as through chatting on the web with our relatives and friends in our homeland. We know almost everything that is happening there. Our parents have

1 Turkish television drama is dubbed when broadcasted at Arab TV.

almost no idea about the Internet; they prefer to watch TV rather than Internet which they perceived as a very sophisticated machine.

These differences indicate deeper generational gaps, which have different implications for both generations.

Another significant finding within the context of generational-cultural gaps is in the modes of television consumption between the two generations. Among the first generation, there is a kind of 'collective viewership': parents frequently reported watching TV together and sometimes watching with their children in the living room, where the TV is connected to Arab satellite channels. However, their children display a kind of 'individual viewership,' as they reported normally watching television alone in their bedrooms – where the television is connected to German channels. This shows significant generational-cultural gaps between the two generations (Rinnawi 2012). These generational-cultural gaps are also evident at another level of television viewing, in terms of the type of television content that each of the two groups normally watches. The interviews revealed that parents watched mostly Arab channels and seldom viewed German channels, primarily because they do not understand German well, and do not feel the same cultural affiliation. The opposite was observed among the children, who viewed more German television and less Arabic television. Importantly, the parents also felt that Arab channels had more credibility regarding news on Arab issues, as opposed to the German channels. To this point, Miladi (2006) and Harb and Bessiaso (2006) reported the same findings among the Arab diaspora in Britain. Viewing Arabic channels, particularly news and current affairs, was also difficult for children due to the formal, classical Arabic dialect that is used instead of the colloquial spoken Arabic language – making it extremely difficult for these children to understand and remain interested in Arabic programming.

Unlike their parents, the children who arrived in Germany were quickly integrated into German culture through schooling, and learned the language rapidly. They are immersed in German culture for a large part of the day, and are in continuous contact with the German language and culture. Most of the children have difficulties reading or writing in Arabic. Many even have difficulties speaking Arabic well, particularly those between 4–18 years. The first generation is highly interested in *al-Jazeera* regardless of gender, while Western channels are more popular among the younger generation (Miladi 2006). Our interviews revealed that television-viewing habits of the children included mostly German programmes. When they did watch Arab TV, it was mostly for entertainment – particularly music. Abed, a 13-year-old youth stated:

I only watch Arabic music, especially Arabic music video clips that I am familiar with.

The immersion in German culture and way of life for the young Arab generation is similar to the immersion other foreigners in Germany, such as Turkish or Kurdish youth, who feel some degree of alienation from German society (White 1997). On one hand, they are like their German peers in terms of their daily media use, consuming German media content and culture (TV dramas, movies and video clips on MTV). They are also integrated in the societal modern youth lifestyle in terms of clothing, foods, and so on. However, these young people expressed having special concerns as outsiders living on the margins of German society due to their religious, cultural and political identity, resulting in significant differences between them and the majority culture.

Many children claimed they watch Arabic programs with their parents if previously told the programme would be interesting. Rasha, a six-year-old girl revealed:

I sometimes watch Egyptian films or shows with my mother, but I don't always understand what is said and my mother has to translate or explain for me.

Children and youth also reported watching some news with their parents, particularly during crises in Palestine or Lebanon, along with some religious programmes. They usually asked their parents for explanations and translations, although Arab channels usually show a great deal of pictures and footage, which help the children to understand visually. Most of the second generation said that such interactions help them to understand their heritage, religion and culture, while also making them feel part of the Arab and the Muslim world. Haitam, a 17-year-old boy stated:

After watching only German for two consecutive days, I feel like watching Arabic in order to understand what is happening in the Arab world and to improve my Arabic language skills while viewing a bit of my heritage.

It appeared that the children of Arab refugees in Berlin in their teenage years tended to feel a need to relate more to their Arab and Islamic heritage, and became more interested in mastering Arabic. This appeared to occur simultaneously with their transition from school into the workforce, where many mentioned how Germans treated Arabs. Moreover, following the events of September 11, many revealed that they were treated differently or met with suspicion. This leads some children to seek answers from Arab transnational TV. Rula, an 18-year-old participant mentioned:

As foreigners we never experienced any problems from the German students prior to the events of September 11, especially from my friends in the school. Now, during recess,

the German students form one group and the Arab students form another separate group and they do not associate with us.

The Second Intifada (October 2000), the Lebanon War (2006), and the Gaza War (2008–2009) have also played a significant role. Children, as well as their parents, watch more TV. As Germans get their information from German newscasts, which communicate a primarily Israeli perspective, Arab youths feel that they have to get the Arab perspective as well. A 15-year-old youth stated:

I am now more interested and concerned with the Palestinian news and affairs because above anything else, I am a Palestinian. And when the German students accuse us Palestinians of attacking Israel and committing terrorism, it is important for me to have the real facts, which are usually the opposite of what the Germans hear. I want to argue and defend the Palestinians.

Implications of the New Modes of Media Consumption

The findings of this study indicate two main tendencies among the Arab community in Berlin concerning the effects of new media consumption, particularly those from the Arab World. The first is an impulse to return to Islam, Islamic traditions and ways of life. The second is a strong expression of a feeling of greater belonging to the Arab nation, culture and heritage known as ‘imagined coherence,’ which was observed in most of the interviews. These processes are due to many factors. The first factor consists of the political and military events that have occurred in the Middle East during the last decade, such as the Second Intifada of 2000, the War in Afghanistan, the Iraq War (2003–2011), the Lebanon War of 2006, and the Gaza War of 2008–2009. The second factor is the antagonistic attitude among some of the population in Western countries towards Arab and Muslim minorities, which has become more evident in daily life spheres for diasporans. A third factor in this process comprises the antagonistic and biased-coverage of Arab and Islamic affairs in Western mass media, leading to suspicious attitudes among Arab and Muslim populations in the West, as well as in the Arab and Islamic World. Finally, the emergence of Arab transnational media such as *al-Jazeera*, the large number of religious television channels and the Internet revolution, together with new global media technologies, have allowed Arabs in the diaspora to access media coming from the Arab world.

‘Back to Islam’

Given the media’s transnational and independent character, media theorists have been argued that ‘digital Islam’ has unevenly broken the authority of institutions controlled by clerics, as the new generation is no longer dependent

on traditional sources for knowledge of Islam (Schleifer 2007; Galal 2008; Field & Hamam 2009). New contours of Islamic knowledge are being mapped due to these mediums (Mandaville 2001). Anti-media statements by religious authorities can be traced their increasing marginalisation within their societies. This 'unprecedented access' to Islamic sources of knowledge for common followers through the Internet and TV has prompted Jon Alterman to predict the following scenario: 'the days have gone when governments and religious authorities can control what their people know, and what they think' (Alterman 1998: 14).

Therefore, in terms of Islam as an '*Umma*' (a collective with high degree of coherency), I argue here that transnational digital media can be understood, to a certain degree, as liberating believers from religious and the other forms of traditional leadership. This happens due to increased access to new media; furthermore, new content horizons allow for a higher degree of individual media consumption with greater variety of ideas and 'modes of thought' in the religious as well as in other realms (Alterman 1998; Schleifer 2007). However, digital media has become a very effective instrument that connects believers to their authorities regardless of geographic location, giving them more access and opportunities to be connected to forms of religious education which was not previously available to them (Rinnawi 2012). Digital Islam has been adopted by global muftis, such as the famous Islamic preacher Amr Khaled, different Islamic websites such as Islamonline.com, bloggers, and the large amount of Islamic satellite television channels such as *Iqraa* and *al-Huda*, among others. This is happening both in the Arab and Islamic world as well as in Arab-Islamic diasporas. Most research concerning the Arab-Muslim diaspora in the West concludes that one of the main effects of their exposure to the Islamic religious media in the last two decades has strengthening their sense of Islamism and Pan-Islamism through more involvement in Islamic affairs at both ideological and practical levels (Rinnawi 2010).

In general, our findings indicate a very strong tendency among the Arab/Muslim community in Berlin to consume Islamic media content via satellite television stations such as *Iqraa* and around 135 other Islamic channels, including those broadcast via the Internet (cf. chapter one of this volume). As a result of this pattern of consumption, a 'back to Islam' sentiment has emerged, which is a kind of religious conservatism in terms of values and daily life affairs. During the interviews, interviewees exhibited more Islamic attitudes towards different social, cultural and even political issues raised during the discussions, which indicate a kind of 'Islamic values ghetto' within the Western German-Christian environment. By better understanding their daily routines, the effects of Islamic

principles on their daily life practices become particularly visible. These relatively new religious trends are partially a result of their exposure to the religious television programming from the Arab World.

Moreover, our findings indicate two aspects of the 'back to Islam' sentiment among this community. The first is a 'Fundamental practical back to Islam,' which was more noticeable among the parents. However, among the younger generation we noticed a more 'emotional back to Islam' sentiment. While the first generation emphasised the content and structural dimensions of watching Arab satellite media, especially Islamic channels on the religious level, the younger generation tended to emphasise the emotional dimensions. Younger interviewees stated that they felt a greater sense of belonging to the Islamic community, culture, and heritage than before. These feelings are based primarily on their need to experience the principle features of Islamic religion, and largely result from antagonistic attitudes expressed towards them by the host society. However, their parents felt the need to practice the Islamic religious way of life and to learn about it in a more nostalgic manner.

In general, for Muslim Arabs living in a primarily Christian environment, the interviewees do not have the opportunity to experience the Islamic way of life from a religious aspect or, more importantly, from a social and cultural aspect. They do not necessarily experience the festive atmosphere of Muslim holidays and Ramadan or other social-religious ceremonies and traditions the same way they would if they were living in the Arab World. Prior to the introduction of the Arab satellite TV to Germany, Arabs could not experience holidays or cultural events to the degree they now can with television. In fact, sometimes holidays would come and go without people realizing it. This is evident in Hussein's statement:

One of the reasons I connected to the Arab satellites is so that my children would get a sense of their Islam, especially during the holidays and Ramadan.

During holidays, Arab satellite TV bases a large percentage of its programming around the festivities; German media agencies at best only briefly mention the Muslim holidays. Indeed, particularly during Ramadan, competition is strong to hold viewers' interest during fasting hours with entertainment shows. Ameera, a 35-year-old participant explained:

I watch Arabic only during the period of Ramadan or other holidays because they broadcast many entertaining programmes like 'Jameel and Hanaa' or 'Abu al-Hana' and, of course, 'Bab al-Hara'² and the other Turkish Telenovelas on MBC4.

This tendency was even more evident among the younger generation. For example, Ahmed, a 19-year-old participant stated:

I was never religious and I rarely prayed before. Now, I understand Islam especially through the Arab TV stations and I have somehow returned to it. I can pray and I understand its implications and meanings from many things in my daily life. But at the same time I continue to practice the German daily life style.

Furthermore, Arab satellite programming not only creates a pleasant environment for the Arabs in Berlin during holidays, especially Ramadan, but it also draws people closer to their religion and their heritage. Arab satellite programming has made it easy for people in Germany to feel the Ramadan atmosphere – to follow prayers during Ramadan and to know when to break their fast. Prior to being able to access Arab satellite programming, it was not easy for believers to fast during Ramadan because prayers and fasting had to be individually scheduled. As such, it seems that by guiding viewers, television channels may also enable more individualized religious practice. This point was observed more among the first generation who returned to Islam, as was clearly indicated by this mother's remark:

Since the introduction of the Arab satellites I have been able to create a festive environment for my children during the holidays, especially during Ramadan. I can also teach them the customs and prayers of Ramadan and how to enjoy it. Also, now I know the precise times for prayer and fasting and can respect them.

Arab satellite programming also plays a role in educating viewers of the values and traditions of Islam, especially for parents. The majority of interviews indicated that families, primarily parents, follow a great deal of religious programmes. This point is clearly evident in 64-year-old Ibrahim's comment:

I always follow religious programmes on the Arab channels, especially on Munajah TV and Iqraa TV, such as the Friday sermon, or other religious programmes on al-Jazeera where they discuss religious issues and questions. This way they provide us with answers

2 One of the highest-rated, bestknown Syrian dramas in the history of Arab TV. This socio-political drama, which began to be screened on MBC during Ramadan in 2007 and continued to be screened through 2010 with new episodes, tells the story of the Syrian and the Palestinian resistance to Western colonialism in the Arab world at the political level, while at the social level it emphasises the authentic and nostalgic Arab lifestyles and values at that time in a positive way.

to our daily problems through religion, which we can't find here because there are no religious authorities.

Arab satellite programming also teaches Arab families, especially the parents, what is allowed and what is not from a religious perspective. They learn about their religion not only as passive viewers, but also as active viewers. The term active refers to some of the talk-show style programmes in which a Sheikh comes to answer questions from the audience, including those who can call in. The 'Awad family stated,

We [the mother and father] follow religious programmes that teach us what is right and wrong according to the Sharia [Islamic law] and we can now also teach this to our children.

Consequently, Arab satellite programming empowers parents to teach their children about Islam (Harb & Bessaiso 2006).

'Imagined coherence': cyber-instant nationalism – McArabism

As was mentioned above, most research in this field concludes that one of the main effects of this phenomenon is a strengthening of the sense of Arabness and Pan Arabism due to greater involvement in Arab affairs afforded by new media (Sakr 2001; Alterman 1998). Others go further by claiming that this effect is beyond regular Pan Arabism and, in Andersonian terms, constitutes a kind of instant nationalism. Rinnawi (2006) calls this 'McArabism' and explains that it is based on an 'imagined coherence' or 'cyber-instant nationalism,' while Pintak (2009) calls it 'imagined watan' [Imagined nation], referring to the instant influence that Arabs elsewhere experience when they consume Arab satellite broadcasting, the Internet, or other transnational media.

To be more specific, we can argue that our findings demonstrate two kinds of 'imagined coherence.' The first is 'nostalgic imagined coherence' among the parents, which is a kind of imagined national belonging based more on nostalgic experience. Among the younger generation, we observed a kind of 'patriotic imagined coherence' based on their desire to be affiliated with an imagined national community and culture due to the antagonistic attitudes expressed towards them by the host society. Regarding the effects consuming Arab transnational media, first-generation interviewees stated that they felt a greater sense of nostalgic belonging to the Arab World, culture and heritage than before. Nasser, 55, was very clear about this when she said:

After extensive exposure to the different Arab TV channels, I feel that I went back to my Authentic Arab society. Besides the fact that I now know more about the Arab World, I really feel that I am living there, not here in Germany.

Others went further, saying that these television channels were like a 'breaths of fresh air' that allow them to reconnect with their Arab culture and heritage. Nasreen, 47, said:

During Bab al-Hara Drama, I really feel the really good Arab culture that I always feel nostalgic about.

To conclude, we can argue here that 'imagined coherence' and 'cyber nationalism' among the first generation stems mainly from nostalgia, which they perceive through Arab and Islamic TV dramas and other media content that remind them of their homeland. However, interviews among members of the younger generation reveal a quite different effect: for them, 'imagined coherence' and 'cyber nationalism' are more imagined than among their parents. Unlike their parents, they have never lived in 'real' Arab society and culture –some of them were born in Germany and others came at an early age. For them, information about their homeland, culture, religion and heritage is not based on nostalgia, since the majority of them have lived most of their lives in Germany. For instance, 21-year-old Fatima said:

The reports coming from Arab TV channels bring me back my people which urges me to feel greater solidarity with what's happening in the Arab World, particularly Palestine, Iraq and Lebanon. Sometimes when I watch al-Jazeera or al-Manar news reports from these places I feel the need to go there and fight against the enemies of the Arab nation.

There are now two generations in Germany with varying degrees of fluency in both languages and widely disparate lifestyles. The first generation consumes Western/German physical products together with Arab-Islamic cultural-national products via transnational homeland media. The second generation of the German-Arab community has an identity of its own that has been constructed at one level, set off for and against both German and Arab identities. This coherence is clearly imagined. In other words, new modes of media consumption, along with the antagonist reaction of the host society towards them (especially after the events of September 11) have contributed to a 'schizophrenic situation' among this generation, in which they are exposed to Arab and Islamic content through the media that refers them back to Arab and Islamic traditions on the one hand. On the other hand, the antagonism displayed by the host society prevents them from becoming assimilated or feeling solidarity with the Western way of life. They cannot identify with all aspects of Islamic broadcasting (especially

the traditional and conservative aspects). One path future research should pursue in this context is to conduct a deeper analysis of both generations concerning their integration in and segregation from German society.

Conclusion

We can conclude on basis of this study that the Berlin Arab community's access to Arab-Islamic transnational media content has clearly influenced them as a collective, both on a religious-cultural and a national-cultural level. The findings indicate a very strong tendency among the Arab/Muslim community in Berlin to consume Islamic TV programming and other new media content such as the Internet. Such modes of media consumption result in a tendency towards exhibiting 'Back to Islam' sentiments, which is a kind of religious conservatism both in terms of values and practices. This was observed among the Islamic community, who showed greater Islamic attitudes towards different social and cultural and political issues, indicating a kind 'Islamic values ghetto' within a non-Muslim environment. The effects of Islamic principles guiding their daily routines and practices, especially within their community, were very apparent. These relatively new religious trends are partly an outcome of an exposure to religious television programming from the Arab World. In generational terms, the findings also demonstrate two kinds of 'back to Islam' among this community: parents and adults experience a more 'fundamental practical back to Islam' sentiment, while an 'emotional back to Islam' response is dominant among their children. While the first generation focused on the religious content and structural dimension of the Islamic satellite media, the younger generation emphasised the emotional dimensions, stating that they felt a greater sense of belonging to the Islamic community, culture, and heritage than before. These feelings were strengthened primarily by the antagonistic attitudes expressed towards them by the host society. However, their parents felt the need to practice the Islamic religious way of life and to learn about it in a more nostalgic manner.

Exposure to Arab global media has transformed viewers into an imagined community. While Arab transnational media and its content have become an integral part of the lives for the first generation in Germany, for the second generation, these images are not drawn solely from the Arab World. In other words, we argue that first generation immigrants formulate an 'imagined coherence' of a Pan-Arab nation and Pan-Islam by interacting with Arab transnational media. For the young generation, this 'imagined coherence' stems mainly from their desire to become informed about their culture and religion in order to increase their sense of belonging. The general tendency among this generation is towards

a kind of solidarity not only with Arabness and Muslimness, but also or even primarily with their social class, with a particular regional or non-Arab ethnic origin, with a transnational creole 'third culture,' or as a part of German society.

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Ratiba Hadj-Moussa

Maghrebi audiences: Mapping the divide between Arab sentiment, Islamic belonging and political praxis

Introduction

This chapter attempts to illustrate the ways in which the shift towards Arab satellite television has re/opened a number of questions related to identification, identity affiliation and belonging. Indeed, the advent of satellite television in the Maghreb (Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria) has generated a number of new practices and has led to new identity affiliations, which call for careful analysis due to their impact on the ways people negotiate their beliefs, bring forth their identity affiliations (particularly their Arab and Islamic belonging) and define how to live together. This and other new communication technologies compel us to reflect on the ways identity affiliations are expressed and shaped. I draw on the work of various authors who view identity not as much as a starting point defined by an origin, but rather as multiple stations that the individual takes, or is compelled to take, while dealing with crossroad encounters in his or her daily life (Deleuze & Guatari 1980; Bayart 1996). In his seminal article, 'Ethnicity and Identity,' S. Hall (1991) gives preference to the term 'identification' over 'identity.' The processual functioning of the former prevents any pretention of a given fixed origin, and more importantly, precludes assigning and imposing identity to groups and individuals. This argument, which has gained consensus, is instrumental in supporting my approach toward Maghrebi people and the ways they construct their identity affiliations and belonging in relation to new media technologies.

Few works, if any at all, have been concerned with the intricacies of identity construction of Maghrebi (and Arab) audiences and satellite television. Fewer still have investigated the relationship between these two elements, nor questioned the social and political issues at stake they have generated, as satellite television broadcasting is a relatively recent phenomenon, especially when approached from a sociological point of view. In this study, I argue that new media technology, in particular satellite television and the massive flow of images it has produced, constitutes an unprecedented moment in which a novel space has taken shape and new forms of belonging are elaborated and developed. Through the viewing of satellite images, large sections of the Maghrebi population have

come in close contact with images of people from other nations, particularly Westerners, possibly for the first time since the region's period of independence. This is not to say they had not had representations or images of the West in the past, but rather that they now have continuous and direct contact with Western visual worlds. The main issues studied in this chapter are how, on the one hand, the image of the Self portrayed and produced by Arab satellite channels enables more self-accepted identity affiliations, while, on the other hand, these affiliations release a voice that reinforces the critique of political regimes. Already knowing that neither criticism, even when it is forcibly repressed, nor the issue of identity affiliations are new phenomena, how do Arab satellite channels sketch them out in a novel way in the Maghreb? Finally, how do satellite television programmes highlight the relationships that these audiences construct among themselves and with others?

Elements of Context

To provide some context for my arguments, I will begin by giving some general insights on the introduction of satellite television to the Maghreb. I do not discuss the issues of political economy surrounding the arrival of satellite channels or the power struggles that have accompanied their introduction (and generally oppose them), as a number of books and articles have already documented these aspects.¹ Belkacem Mostefaoui's 'La télévision française au Maghreb' (1995) is the first account of the political economy of the media in the three countries of the Maghreb. The author has documented the initial phases of satellite television and the 'mini cable networks'. The arrival of satellite television in the Arab world prompted a number of research works that highlighted the political economy and the guiding lines of television programming, economic investment and financial strategies. It also led to industry analyses, particularly on insiders such as programme designers and producers, as the connection of satellite television to the political world, particularly to political parties and politicians. Ethnographic work on television viewing, however, remains marginal. Lila Abu-Lughod's book (2005), although not specifically on satellite television, could be considered the first ethnography on state-controlled television and its audience in Egypt. Indeed, a few published research studies have targeted specific audiences (Salamandra 2005) but have remained limited in scope. Despite the importance of this topic, research on Maghrebi audiences is even spottier, almost nonexistent

1 For an updated bibliography, see N. Mellor et al (2011).

save for a few contributions (Chouikha 1995; Hadj-Moussa 1996, 2003; Sabry 2010). The present study is but a modest contribution to this vast, controversial and open field.

Satellite television was introduced in the Maghreb in the 1980s. In Morocco, the King's palaces were the first to be equipped with satellite dishes. People living nearby benefited from being in proximity to the palaces and enjoyed the *de facto* 'foreign images' (Poindexter 1991). In Tunisia, an influential businessman introduced satellite television privately (Benbelgacem 1999: 39), which prompted authorities to try to regulate dishes purchases and attempted to require individuals wanting to have it obtain authorization; however, this restriction soon became meaningless due to the popularity of satellite television and its high demand. In Algeria, it was a high-ranking military officer who installed a dish in a very symbolic site (Hadj-Moussa 1996), called *Makam al-Shahid* [Martyr's Shrine]. In all cases, attempts to regulate satellite television in Morocco and Tunisia have been unsuccessful, and in Algeria the regime was thwarted.

A short history of satellite television in the Maghreb requires taking into account how this technology unfolded temporally and chronologically, its technological changes and the launch and emergence of new (Arab) channels. From the late 1980s to 1996, European and Western channels were predominant², and the only Arab television available during this period was MBC TV, which was broadcast from London. The technology initially employed a parabolic antenna, the 'collective dish or parabola' (called 'la parabole' in the Maghreb), to which groups of neighbours collectively subscribed, sharing the costs and selecting together the channels received. Each subscriber's residence was connected to the 'parabole' through a cable. This collective parabola was used in Morocco and Algeria. In the former, the upper-middle classes were among the first who could afford it, whereas in the latter, the bureaucratic elite acquired it first and then were followed by the other classes. In Tunisia, access to the parabola was individual and required official authorization until the late 1990s. With the later decrease in dish prices, Maghrebi residents began acquiring individual dishes. Although not always explicitly expressed, I believe the main reason behind the keen interest for the dish was the arrival of Arab satellite channels in 1996. In general, Maghrebians had a very negative reaction to Operation Desert Fox, which was orchestrated from the air by the Americans, and cheerfully endorsed by the coalition

2 Due to their knowledge of the French language, Maghrebians watched French channels, such as Antenne 2, TF1, Arte, M6, Canal Plus (a pay channel) and TV5. Tunisians also had direct access to RAI UNO, and Northern Moroccans to the Corporación Radio Televisión Española (RTVE).

which included Morocco. During this period, the ‘foreign channels’ broadcast only ‘bright spots in the sky’ rather than showing Baghdad being bombed. Tunisian viewers living along the Algerian borders and Algerians have indicated in interviews that I conducted with them³ that they were able to see a reality other than that of ‘the war controlled by CNN,’ thanks to Algerian television, which had sent Algerian journalists to the field ‘who did a good job.’ Since then, Maghrebi viewers have had access to hundreds of television channels, in addition to the ones they had before. Parallel to the arrival of Arab channels, another major technological change occurred: the transition from analog to digital broadcast allowed viewers to choose more specialized satellite programming in specific languages. The majority of North Africans have chosen Arabsat (Sabry 2010). The word used by Maghrebians when referring to the selection from the satellite provider is ‘couloirs.’⁴ The wording is significant insofar as it refers less to the house (the known) than to the borders and boundaries that it presupposes. These ‘couloirs’ protect them from seeing anything undesirable. Maghrebi audiences have finally accessed Arab satellite channels and almost all of them have turned their dish in the direction of the Middle East.⁵ Indeed, Arab satellite television arrived at a time when most viewers were deserting national television channels,

3 This research project consisted of a series of interviews I conducted between 1994 and 2009. I first started in Algeria, because at that time I was intrigued by the fierce opposition of Islamic armed groups to the parabola. I extended the research to Morocco and Tunisia in the beginning of the 2000s. Between 1994–1995 and 2009, I interviewed 193 people: 101 women and 92 men. Two thirds of the participants were youths, aged between 16 and 32 years old. The ‘snowball’ was privileged, as I wanted to have access to their houses, i.e., their intimate spaces. The fieldwork was built one element upon the other, and I relied on participants to introduce me to other participants, while being very attentive to not remain in one area or group. However, I was not looking for any representativeness, but rather for a certain interpretative depth from the participants.

4 In the English meaning of ‘hallways’ and not ‘corridors.’

5 The reliability of the surveys on the trends and audience habits is highly problematic in the Maghreb. When they exist, they are incomplete (see http://www.ipsos.com/mediact/sites/ipsos.com.mediact/files/MENA_AudienceMeasurement.pdf) or rely on government statistics. In terms of information and communication, the caricature prize should be given to the Algerian Ministry of Communications whose page ‘communications’ is... blank! (accessed 2 December 2011 and 12 February 2012).

Aziz Douai (2010) has documented the difficulties and pitfalls in doing audience fieldwork in Morocco. His remarks could be applied to the three countries of the Maghreb as well.

and criticizing their programming for having a repressive political stance, as well as for their poor technology and outdated equipment.

Thinking the shift...

The answers to the issues raised above on the ways identity affiliations are being reformulated through contact with Arab satellite channels and in the relationships that television programmes incite among these audiences, are informed, I argue, by social actors' experience of these channels and their discourse – not on conclusions built upon general observations. To better grasp how identity affiliations unfold and what paths they take, the concept of experience appears useful. Experience is central to some disciplines, such as sociology (Durkheim 2003; Goffman 1991). Likewise, inspired by François Dubet (1995), I consider experience as part of the sociology of action, which sees it as the way in which social actors experience their practices and organize them in plural and diffracted environments. In other words, experience is not located in an external relationship to the actors.

Experience is central to the understanding of the relationship between what people say they are and what they *do*. Indeed, identifications are not depleted in the 'saying' [le dire] or representation and they are not contained in or limited to the 'saying.' They are also expressed in acts and practices, however practice is not devoid of reflexivity. Joan Scott, among others, warns against the temptation to seize experience as evidence, that is to say, to subscribe to the idea that factuality has in itself an interpretative virtue, an 'authoritative evidence.' She suggests that experience is produced through historicity, which in its turn allows it to be interpreted: 'It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience' (1991: 779). However, Scott's insistence on the discursive dimension precludes us from reflecting on the importance of small acts and practices in the processes by which experience is constituted. The 'practical aspect of experience' is not a secondary element in the affiliation and identity processes; at times it validates the representational identification, and at other times, it displaces and challenges them. To allow experience to emerge, for example, I privileged the use of open-ended questions while conducting interviews, letting the participants tell their own 'story with television.' Thus, while most of the questions were the same, participants could use their own knowledge and perception of the situation to develop what was important for them. This direction was crucial, as it helped to integrate specific and 'peripheral' information that concerned not only the representation of a given programme but also the acts and practices that parallel its viewing. Given the nature of my fieldwork,

I spent much time in participants' personal spaces, sharing with them their daily chores and discussing all sorts of matters, so that I could acquire in-depth knowledge on what has constituted that experience. However, although the separation of the latter from other types of experience (e.g., hosting a tea/coffee afternoon, working) is not delineated with certainty, there are often moments where 'something from satellite television' springs up. To give an example, wearing the Islamic scarf while being at home with other women was highly intriguing to me, knowing that a little more than a generation ago women went freely 'bare headed' and hardly wore the traditional scarf, which was associated with older and rural women, until I was told 'this is what Islam teaches us,' or 'what I saw' or 'heard' [in the religious television programme].

Political modes of affiliation: On being citizen

The issues of belonging and affiliation are central to my approach because they help us understand how international television programmes inflect their viewers' positioning vis-à-vis the West, local and regional political regimes, as well as cultural politics. By cultural politics, I refer to the ways in which some practices that characterise specific societies – such as television viewing practices, aesthetic preferences, living emotions, the selection of valued artefacts, artistic production, and types of belonging claims, among others – produce a certain kind of 'sensible,' to use Jacques Rancière's term (2000). This 'sensible' is no less political than any political rules insofar as it shows how the distribution of places and positions is organised, what is 'sayable' and not, what is audible and not.

In my analysis, I provide some examples of the ways these viewing and interpretative practices function, as well as their effects on processes of identity affiliations. In so doing, I show how, in the context of the globalization of images, regional identities are emerging and how they coincide with specific national histories, inclinations and regional sensibilities, whether these relate to gender relations, geographical entities, supra-national ideologies or religious identifications. Relying on the elements of the context stated above, one can argue that from the inception of satellite television, the most important constituent relation in the identity process was the positioning of the 'Maghrebi Self' towards the Western world, notably France. The specificity of the relation to France did not only arise from historical and subjective factors, but also from objective ones, as the majority of channels available at that time were French (e.g. Antenne 2, M6, France 1, TV5, Canal Plus). Beyond the vicissitudes of representation conveyed by the French channels and criticism of them by Maghrebi audiences, the challenge, according to participants in my research, relates to the difficulty Maghreb countries experience in overcoming the

political difficulties associated with implementing democratic rules that include their citizens' views, ending their blatant and less visible repressive methods, as well as actively promoting political accountability. Indeed, although France is said to be biased towards the Maghreb, and the West is said to perceive the Arabs only through the prism of 'terrorism,' the West does have democratic political institutions along with transparent and open television networks. The desire for democratic rule among the people I met cannot alone sum up the complexity of their affiliations; these people were made to feel rejected or ignored as citizens not so much at higher political levels but in everyday and mundane situations. The democratic model as implemented in France and in the European Mediterranean countries such as Italy and Spain, with which North Africans feel geographical or linguistic proximity, is more evident in their public spheres, including the relationship between citizens and politics, civility and a certain sense of equality. For example, Murad (29 years old, from Morocco), a translator who works for an international organisation in Tangiers, said:

Inhabitants of Tangiers feel more Spanish than Moroccan.

He adds that he only watches Moroccan television 'when obliged to.' He much prefers Spanish television and admires it for its presenters' finesse and professionalism, and the choice of subjects. He particularly likes 'a show that is broadcast every Monday and hosted by a woman.' He adds:

I found the idea great because the show pays tribute to the people who worked hard in their lives even if they are unknown.

Murad insists on the importance of the shows, which, in contrast to the 'garbage television that focuses on the dating of this and that [celebrity],' teach him 'how to talk to people, and how to frame certain types of questions.' As he elaborates:

I learn that there is no difference between a minister and a vagabond, whose TV host does not distinguish between a celebrity and an ordinary person and who asks them the same type of question about their lives.

Similarly, for Najib (32 years old), a Moroccan participant, who was a sympathiser of the Islamist movement *Jamaa't al-'Adl ou al-Ihsan* [Justice and Charity], said that, for him:

Obviously, [I prefer] the foreigners [the French programmes]. I like watching the debates and the ways that each participants tries to convince the others. [...] This does not exist here. We, the Arabs, are not taught how to respect the other's opinions.

However, without completely disappearing, identification with the French political and social model and those of certain other countries bordering the

Mediterranean splintered in the 2000s and has become more complex since the advent of Arab satellite channels that have given rise to a new constellation of identity without totally overturning the pre-existing one.

Feeling who we are: Images of our own

By referring to the choice of Western channels made by Maghrebi viewers during the first period of satellite television, I have deliberately ignored the normative issue that characterizes the viewing of those channels, that is, the 'prescriptions' that orient the actors' conduct and actions, and whose frames are shaped by the family and the household. At this point, it is important to analytically distinguish between two dimensions in the process of belonging: the first is related to the social level, and the second to the political one. I will dwell upon the first level in discussing the meaning and location of television sets within the home as well as the relation between textual content and an embodied and gendered viewership. Additionally, I will discuss the second level by analysing the processes through which Maghrebians identify themselves with Arabness.

First, if Maghrebians are able to consider themselves, even partially, as pupils eager to conform to the initiation of democratic rule, they could not (and do not want to) see themselves deprived of what constitutes their 'culture and tradition' – in this case, a certain codification of the body and sexuality. Indeed, as stated in the interviews and according to my own observations, it is hardly conceivable to collectively watch underwear items, sexual relations, or even a 'benign' love declaration. However, these restrictions apply less to the body and sexually related signs themselves than to their visibilization and, thus, to their viewing. They need to remain within the confines of privacy and intimacy. The idea that certain things or scenes cannot be seen in a family setting without subverting the gaze one has on oneself and one's relation with others is a starting point in a series of avoidances. But, as stated before, things that should not be watched in the company of others does not mean that they cannot be viewed privately. Viewing, therefore, is a variegated practice that adjusts itself to various situations: time of day, space within the home, gender (there are distinct modes of reception attributed to men and women with regard to various textual genres), selected channels, number of television sets available in a given location, etcetera.

How are such viewing adjustments performed? For example, it is not uncommon to find in each household two, if not several, television sets located in the house according to their use – be a shared set for a family or group, or a separate set used by either the men or the women. In most cases, the television set used by the family is located in a common room, which is also a space for women

and visitors alike. Family viewing is generally geared toward national television channels or Arab satellite TV, but rarely Western satellite channels. The location of the television sets falls under the logic of what can be called ‘cultural proximity.’ Considered to be closer to national channels insofar as they conform to general viewing norms, Arab satellite TV is the most viewed⁶ when watched by the whole family. The television set that serves as a mediator and an agent of cultural proximity is located in the shared spaces of the home. On the other hand, the television set that receives ‘foreign’ television programmes is put in places that are either occupied by couples (often the eldest brother and his wife), or by young men, who do not necessarily use it together. However, the rules that otherwise dictate what ought to be said or kept silent with regard to particular topics related to romance, the body and sexuality, are not, as a matter of fact, followed *à la lettre*, and their ‘implementation’ varies from one family to another, from one individual to another. These rules, nonetheless, situate those who adopt them, even if only partially, within a specific cultural sphere in which they express their belonging and their relative or strong adherence to the ‘values of [their] society.’ The viewing practices that are framed by and integrated in such rules on a daily basis indirectly ‘compel’ social actors to self-identify – that is to proceed to self-recognition while positioning themselves vis-à-vis the others.

The political level⁷ is based on the Arab world’s political history and the meaning given to Arab identity or ‘Arabness’ [al-‘Uroubiya].⁸ An in-depth discussion

6 According to my field observations and the quasi-unanimous interview responses.

7 The political level could be divided into two dimensions: the internal and, for a lack of better word, ‘generic,’ on the one hand, and the trans-historical/trans-regional, on the other. I will not be dealing thoroughly with the former in this chapter, because it would take us away from our primary purpose, i.e., the relationships between identity affiliation and satellite television. The relation of the social dimension, mentioned above, and the ‘internal’ political dimension has been discussed by several authors under the intertwining of women’s locus in national political projects. In this debate, the consensus was that women, specifically their bodies, are subsumed in the national project (among many, see Yuval Davis and Anthias (1989)). Although this approach illuminates several angles of the relationships between nationalism and women, to which I myself have adhered, it seems now limited; in particular when one considers the paradoxes and the various positionings which characterize women and their bodies, whether the latter are integrated within society or marginalized (prostitutes, lesbian, etc.). Film and fiction in general are the most interesting loci to understand this debate (Hadj-Moussa 2014).

8 Arabness is by no means a simple phenomenon. Some Arab speakers refuse to consider themselves as Arabs, while [some] Berbers or Jews claim their Arabness (cf. Naima Bendris 2005).

of this notion warrants more space than possible in this chapter; it is difficult to provide a succinct, intelligible definition. Arabness is indeed reversible and multiple, but it can be approached from two elements, namely the shared history and the common language. Despite the diversity of vernacular languages, the modern Arab language constitutes a cultural and civilization foundation for the Middle East and the Maghreb (Berque 1976). It has been a powerful ideological motive for nationalist and independence movements. Muslim reformist movements have used it as well in strategies to counter colonial powers and to define the specificity of Arab nations. Later, all three countries have adopted linguistics policies and laws that promulgated Arabic as the national language. Furthermore, the Arabic language has played an important role in all nationalist claims, in particular that of pan-Arabism. Historically, the first Pan-Arab political parties (Choueiri 2000; Hourani 1993) emerged well before the rise of Nasserism and Ba'athism, following the political project initiated by England, as early as 1916, to divide Palestine. The anti-colonial sentiment, aroused mainly by the 'Palestinian question' and by English and French hegemonic redeployments in the region, was a major marker of Arabness. Notably under Nasser's rule, radio played an important role in propagating Pan-Arabist thought and claims (James 2006). Radio programmes, such as the *Sawt al-'Arab* [Voice of Arabs], broadcast from Cairo and received via shortwave radio in Arab countries, served as a channel for Arab national movements and as a clarion voice of the then-triumphant Nasserism.

One way to discuss the sentiment mobilizing the concept of *Arabness* is to address the feelings people experience as they watch events unfolding in the Arab world and broadcast on Arab channels. The latter are described as 'efficient, professional, but do not hide their sympathies [as do Western channels]'. Sami (29 years old, Tunisia-TUS) 'senses' these 'sympathies.' He says:

We saw this during the Gulf War. We felt it. Not in the images, which are the same [as on other channels].

Sami uses the word '*hamas*' (enthusiasm, passion) and '*houzn*' (sadness) to express the sentiment conveyed to him not by the image but by the 'texture of the voice,' to use Roland Barthes' expression (1981). *Hamas* is not necessarily located in the content but in, for example, an *al-Jazeera* journalist's voice on 11 September 11 2001: 'The reporter talked about Sept. 11th in '*hamassi* tone.' We also felt *houzn* [sadness] on April 8th, 2003, just before the fall of Baghdad,' to quote Sami again.

The identification with the Arab world hinges on a sensibility that nourishes the political stances participants take. The emotion one feels during a programme

broadcast, be it *hamas* or *houzn*, also leads to an identification with Arab or Muslim worlds. This emotion resembles *baav*, which Purnima Mankekar (1995) pointed out in her work on television in India. Like *baav*, blending emotion and understanding/reason, *hamas* and *houzn* do not undermine the critical stance. In fact, they remain parallel to it by stabilizing the identification and anchoring it within a shared feeling.

Without question, the television station that conveys that feeling is *al-Jazeera*. From its inception, it has positioned itself within a 'double identity' frame: Arab and Muslim (Lamloum 2004: 32). *Al-Jazeera* helps recover a self-image perverted by the Other's gaze. The image produced by this channel is one that comes from inside, from an imagined territory named *al-Umma al-'Arabiya* [the Arab nation] or *al-'Alam al-'Arabi* [the Arab world], which pertain to shared overall categories that 'make a culture.' In François Roussillon's words (1992):

The relation to the historicity that allows the inscription of the Self in an environment defined as a system of proximities and antagonisms, and helps to express the signification of the collective existence.

In this specific relationship to the historicity shaping the Arab world, Palestine occupies the forefront. The 'Palestinian question' is not a banal issue; it is a concern shared by the majority of Arab populations and crosses all social classes, religious and ethnic boundaries. Like culture, Palestine is what remains after all is forgotten. The Palestinian question reactivates affiliations and awakens 'Arabness,' even when the latter is denied, and even among the most distanced Berber who rejects Arab culture and Arab identity (Hadj-Moussa 1996).

The success of Arab satellite television networks, particularly *al-Jazeera*, stems from them giving more in-depth coverage to a question debased and reduced to its simplest expression by the repetition of the same imagery. Marc Lynch shows that the Arab television networks devote considerable airtime to events in Palestine, keeping Arab sentiment and outlooks alive (2006: 79–80). The participants in this research appeared to be very sensitive to the daily images of Palestinian victims. *Al-Jazeera* is seen as the station at the heart of the action, with the live broadcast of 'the abuses experienced by our brothers,' as one participant puts it. The centrality of Palestine, as the principal bonding element of Arabness, is political, in other words a principle based on the will and desire for emancipation and autonomy. Attached to this 'question' in which Arab satellite networks play a major role, a certain ethos is at play, an ethos and feeling accompanying it nourished by 'consciousness' [*wa'y*] and political events, as well as by the idea that Palestinians are abandoned and left under the power of others.

Even if we agree with Olivier Carré (1996) that pan-Arabism, with the defeat of Nasserism and the fatal fall of Ba'athism, is dead and buried, its themes do persist and remain present in people's daily life representations. Thus, the sense of Arabness relies on the concept of an 'Arab people' with a meaning very similar to its role in Pan-Arabist ideology;⁹ at the same time, quite far from it insofar as it supersedes or ignores states. Therefore, identification with Palestine does not rely on recognition of its leaders, with the exception of Arafat as a 'historical' figure. Likewise, Iraqi leaders are also sidelined, while Iraqi people are seen as the victims. A young Algerian activist told me that during the first Gulf War, aid sent to Iraq was clearly meant for the 'Iraqi people'. This was also said, more than ten years later (2003), by a Moroccan high schooler, Dahbiya (16 years old), who explained her participation in the big rallies against the second Gulf War to warn Moroccan authorities against any implications on their part and to show her 'solidarity to Iraqi people and not Saddam.' The ethos is reinforced here by the pathos, the one that considers the 'orphan people.'¹⁰ Solidarity is shown to the people first, and it is a principle shared by participants in this research who addressed the Iraqi 'question.' It is thus based on identification; it relies on analogy ('they are like us') and is defined by 'brotherhood' ('they are our brothers'). Along with this identification process, Arabness is problematic. It is the locus of extremes, of victory ('al-Jazeera is better than CNN') or of defeat (Palestine, Iraq, lack of democracy, corruption, poverty).

However, Arabness is not a myth. It is a shared universe – if only through the use of a common language. It remains an expectation and a horizon, including for those who claim it. As Benedict Anderson (1991) reminds us, the efficacy of the nation concept lies in the imaginary projection that it allows. Anderson argues that fiction is constitutive of the idea of nationhood; it is neither a misconception nor an evanescent idea far from reality. But like the nation, which needs to see its elements reiterated or invented (borders, an ethos, language, politics, culture and identity), Arabness is revived by the return to the stage of the Palestinian

9 In a remarkable article, François Roussillon (1992) highlights the issues raised by pan-Arab ideology in Egypt and its impact on the Egyptian identity.

10 The figure of the orphan produces, especially in popular Islam, a deep compassion, echoing the Prophet who himself was an orphan. Among the younger generation, this biographical element, while still well known is not mobilized in the same way. Indeed, instead of departing from the figure of the 'abandoned,' this generation targets those who abandon and do not care about their people. They are the ones who are fiercely criticized. According to this political critique, it is thus the Arab states and Arab politicians that have failed in their duty of solidarity.

question, Iraq, Maghrebi immigration, etcetera, and reactivated by Arab satellite televisions and news media in general. One imaginary link, writes Anderson, is the relationship established between the media and the market (1991: 33), with a specific stress on readership. The strengthening of Arab identity and its constant reactivation are facilitated by the many messages widely broadcast by satellite televisions and by the 'mass ceremony' dimension (ibid.) of listening to and viewing daily television. In the formation of identity-based affiliation, choosing one television station over another will orient the interpretation that the Self entertains with the Other.

The context in which Arab satellite television emerges globalizes the production of identities more than ever before, but in doing so, it splits them into several layers whose importance is anchored to specific contexts, moments¹¹ and conjunctures. The plurality of identifications does not only occur at the level of representation, but is also carried out through action and practices that may help to better reflect on the formation of social ties at micro and macro levels.

Islamicities: On opening and closure

In the present analysis, I see evidence in the practices and ideas of what Jocelyne Dakhli (2005) has called *Islamicities* (islamicités), which reflect the diversity of thinking of oneself and being Muslim. Although Dakhli's main purpose of the use of the concept of Islamicities is to counter homogenizing and damaging views, this notion has some heuristic value. Indeed, it calls for a transversal of practices that are open to mobility and syncretism, and serves as a link between the context, the structure and the circumstances. Indeed, what is more pervasive than the flowering of these Islamicities? Since the meteoric rise of Islamism (which is, by definition political), all eyes have been focused on the violence it has generated and left in its wake; very little has been said yet about the ways of doing and viewing that have fuelled Islamism and, more importantly, that have been reformulated by contact with it.

Let us review a few key facts: an increasing number of women now wear the *hijab* (headscarf); the phrase *bismillah* [in the name of God] has become commonplace and above all falsely discreet; more and more inscriptions of Koranic verses and religious CDs hang inside cars; Koranic recitation has spread to market days (now daily ones); the *hijab* is often worn even indoors even when women visit one another or perform household chores; women and men of the same

11 I use this term to refer to a configuration that exceeds the event and/or the temporality of an event.

family impose more restraint upon themselves and avoid kissing each other in countries where such contact was not so long ago a sign of decorum or respect; some men wear *khamis*, the outfit 'imported from Afghanistan'; the *djalaba* is worn on Fridays; and finally, the 'common prayer' that 'pleases God and is more rewarded by Him' has become a new practice conducted in homes by a leader who recites the prayers. All these practices are novel, as are composite practices particularly noticeable in choice of clothing. Incongruent combinations, such as young women wearing headscarves with skinny jeans, pregnant women wearing leggings, or veiled women wearing showy 'Lebanese' makeup, reminiscent of the flamboyance of Middle Eastern pop singers. These practices and imperceptible changes will be better understood if we rely on a diachronic interpretation of television viewing.

In Algeria in the mid 1990s, without being invisible, the 'Islam' adopted by the people I interviewed was 'dormant' (Moussaoui 2006), meaning it was integrated, without poorly timed and repeated *bismillah*. The participants did not attempt to make an ostentatious show of devotion. Their Islam was so much part of what they were that they had nothing to show off, but simply to 'be' – often in paradoxical and ad hoc ways. For authors such as Mohamed Benkheira (1997), this quietist Islam is named 'popular Islam.' The Islamicities (Muslimness) reviled and criticized were in fact those of the state and Islamists because their visibility meant constraint and imposition, superficiality and the obligation to abide to them. For one woman I interviewed, Baya (36 years old, Morocco), who rejected the *hijab*, her faith transpired in her behaviour and her beliefs – not in the *hijab*. In my research, this instrumentalisation of Islam was at the heart of participants' concerns, especially for youngest ones. During that period, the new Islamic practices 'imported' by those that Algerians nicknamed 'Afghans,' were considered 'foreign to Algerian customs' (Djamel, 51 years old, Algeria). Afghanistan was far off the map of identifications, as was Iran, with its unusual practice of 'marriages of convenience' [*djaouz mout'á*], performed on women kidnapped by Algerian Islamists who justified it as a Muslim practice. During the Algerian Civil War (1992–1999), some television stories released by official state television, often with the aim of winning people over, documented the distress of helpless parents and the poignant, heart-breaking testimonies of young abducted women. As Hassina (47 years old, Algeria), a feminist and democracy activist told me in 1996, during one of the worst periods of the civil war:

We cannot dialogue with the fundamentalists who call into question the symbols [of the Algerian nation], the State, our way of life, and even our traditions. They introduced garments. They introduced ways of life: rape, 'marriage of convenience' unknown to us

and that we should not know. We are not Shiite, we are Sunnis. Iran and Afghanistan are far away. It is miles away geographically and in every respect.

A few years later, the landscape of geographical affiliations changed. With the events of September 11 and the Iraq War (2003), not only were the events in Afghanistan watched closely, thanks to *al-Jazeera*, but that country had become, as stated by most of the participants to my research, a 'Muslim country we care about and whose events trouble us,' as became Iran once it was threatened by U.S. aggressions. The interviews I conducted in Morocco already showed a concern for Iran and above all, a visionary reading of developments in this country's relations with the West. Lalla (56 years old, Morocco) evokes the region's future after Iraq:

They attacked Iraq and Afghanistan. Now, it is Iran's turn, to ensure Israel's security. Afterwards, they will attack Syria, protect Israel from all sides... They kill people to ensure Israelis live in peace. And other people, don't they have the right to live too?

With the shift in news reporting carried out by Arab satellite television networks, in particular by the channels that are considered to be more politically charged, the Islamic world has become more visible to Maghrebi audiences who consider that their understanding, closeness and shared experiences solidify their ties to the rest of the Islamic world. As I will show it in the next paragraphs, this 'political' identification intersects with the more individual sense of belonging. Afghanistan and Iran, like Bosnia and Chechnya, are now included within the identity-based Self, fuelled by emotion and memory of the colonial experience in the Maghreb. My aim in this chapter is not to provide an exhaustive list of the reasons which contribute to increasing affiliation with Islamicity or Arabness, but rather to trace how certain practices and representations are related to the rise of Arab satellite television.

The wind from the East

The present study demands deeper reflection on what viewing audiences make of the Arab satellite channels and their programmes in order to follow their identifications, often contradictory and saturated with tensions as they are, and to understand the ways in which individuals define their place within their societies. Ten years after the arrival of satellite television to the region, the Islamicities of our research participants were no less quietist. This quietism, however, was no longer located in the same register. It had lost its innocence or naivety, so to speak. It pervaded other common areas that were, and are still, louder and more visible than the quietist version of Islam. In Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, practices

and beliefs are now not only justified 'by the customs and traditions,' but also by sermons watched on television or listened to on cassettes or CDs. In these three countries, popular Islamicities have become globalized and have turned more towards the Middle East. In terms of satellite television, the Maghrebi public, especially its younger age groups, choose to watch religious programmes such as those by Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Amr Khaled, who had dazzling success before being surreptitiously censored by the Egyptian authorities and forced into 'exile' in London. Indeed, religious figures and new preachers mobilize an extremely varied and vast audience.

Star preacher Amr Khaled's programmes have many viewers and a strong following among young people, particularly young women, in the three countries in question. Amr Khaled is young and modern, in stark contrast to traditional sheikhs schooled at al-Azhar, such as the very famous above-mentioned Yusuf al-Qaradawi. Amr Khaled has managed to gather a following among youth from various social backgrounds (especially the urban middle classes and women) and convinces them that Islam can be modern. His fame and influence astonished, for example, the three female professors I interviewed in Rabat, who described his reach as 'the sudden contagion.' A high school teacher voiced her alarm off the record that her pupils were increasingly wearing the *hijab*. The impact of Amr Khaled is so strong that it has encouraged young girls to defy their parents' advice by wearing the veil. The 'newness' of Amr Khaled, who presents himself as an ordinary person, is based on the distance he takes vis-à-vis the Islamic establishment, both in terms of the language he uses, which is closer to spoken language, and his clean-cut, 'modern' look. On the other hand, his language and look distinguish him from the austerity and the intransigence of radical Islamists. His commitment is not political; he refuses to issue *fatwas* unlike sheikhs, limiting his contribution to merely encouraging his supporters to 'love Islam.' The runaway success of his first video, *Kalem al-Qalb* [the words of the heart] propelled him from Cairo sidewalks to *Iqraa* (Wise 2006). In a nutshell, unlike the other rhetoricians, he speaks more of heaven than hell, avoiding doctrinal political Islam and focuses on everyday Islam, the Islam of the heart and brotherhood.

A novel development is that more women are watching *Iqraa*, an Islamic television channel, as well as other Islamic television networks.¹² Religious television programmes have superseded religious programmes broadcast on the radio. Some women told me that while in bed, they 'listen to Koranic recitations [broadcast] on satellite television programmes.' However, it is among the younger

12 For an overview of these channels, see Kraidy and Khalil (2009).

ones that the attraction is more visible. Nawal, a 23-year-old woman whom I interviewed in Tunis, had been wearing the *djilbab* for 'a year and a half,' and practically only watched *Iqraa*. She was first 'convinced' by Amr Khaled, but she subsequently favoured the 'lessons' provided by *Iqraa*. Nawal, 'who does not like reading,' built much of her religious knowledge from television by comparing the programmes of various television channels. She learned how to 'behave with her parents [and] in [her] religious conduct.' She did not like *al-Manar*, Hizbollah's channel, because they asserted that 'the Koran could not be held by a woman during her period,' while 'many people [on other channels, including *Iqraa*] stipulate that a woman may hold the Koran if she covers her hands with a tissue or gloves.' She watches *al-Jazeera* with her parents, but refuses to watch films and other programmes 'where women are naked,' including when she is alone. Even when it comes to music programmes, if she watches *Melody* (an Egyptian music channel), she prefers the videos of the young religious singer Sami Yusuf. Nawal's life is almost totally orientated towards a religious ethic fuelled mainly by satellite television. Her positioning and the learning she acquires from religious channels bear similarity to the experiences of those encountered by Hirshkind (2006) who have adopted the ethic of *Da'wa* and whose main medium is the audiocassette. Nawal started wearing the veil after having 'heard' tapes and 'viewed' sermons on CDs and CD-ROMs. Neither Nawal nor other interviewees ever referred to the *Da'wa* movement. Nevertheless, their behaviour and discourse have remarkable similarities to it. Nawal did not just watch but shared and 'discussed' her discoveries and questions with her brother and 'some friends,' who provided her with cassettes and CDs. The identification with the ideas of what I believe to be a *Da'wa* 'ethics,' in Hirschkind's sense of the term, supposes that both individual practices and conduct are projected onto the public sphere. Indeed, having noted that the movement merges 'two types of agency' – an ethical one based on Koranic moral psychology and a political one – the author recalls that the teachings of the *Da'wa* 'have come for many to provide a model for the attributes of Muslim-Citizen' (2006: 116). Thanks to media technologies, as exemplified by Nawal's case, ways of doing and the identifications that accompany them have shaped and inflected a shift to individual interiority or to shared spaces.

More so than in Algeria and Morocco, where Islam has been greatly instrumentalised and where wearing the *hijab* is accepted in public institutions, it is liberal Tunisia that seems to shed a clearer light on the issues surrounding the new forms of Islamic affiliations. Two newly veiled Tunisian girls told to me that in adopting the Islamic veil, not only were they obeying God's law, but also were also qualitatively 'better Muslims.' As one interviewee said, 'Watching *Iqraa*

allows me to be a better Muslim and helps me to think as a Muslim,' (Nadya, 23 years old, Tunisia). They knowingly practise a certain Muslim ethic without which they cannot claim to have found their 'Islam.' In other words, they construct their Muslim identity and are appealed to on this basis. Charles Taylor (2001) argues that this operation is typically modern. Indeed, just 'being' does not suffice; it requires that the subject proceed to a self-reflection that is more ethical than psychological. This posture does not resemble New Age teaching, but is closer to the practices advocated by the supporters of the *Da'wa* movement (ibid.) whose aim is to establish a just society based on the precepts of good and virtue. The introspection is at once a desire and an obligation to project oneself into society, as we have just seen. But, unlike the *Da'wa*, this projection is not followed by action, however minimal. Watching *Iqraa* and other religious television channels consists of both connecting themselves to others and feeling that their faith is shared. These women are involved in on-going self-revision. They make their piety visible and audible, but, more importantly, they do not do so based on a comparison between what is said and heard with what is written. They relate mainly to television and discussions they have with their friends.

In her work with young Muslim women (and men) in France, Jocelyne Cesari (1998) contrasts traditional 'Islam of the parents' with 'Islam of youth,' as one of 'scriptural reference' (see also Benkheira [1997]) in which knowledge and adherence to Islam are based on autonomous individual interpretation. The Islam of youth is ultimately scholarly driven but is not generated by a body of established knowledge. Individual knowledge forms the basis of the identification to which these young people aspire. In my case study, the Koran is hardly consulted, as the sources for these young women are mainly television programmes on Islam or Islamic television channels. These present either 'on-trend Islam' as promoted by Amr Khaled, or 'orthodox Islam' as conveyed by the sheikhs. But the divide between the latter two sources is not clear-cut. Indeed, these women could either compare them, oppose one to the other, or they could successively rely on one and the other, depending on the circumstances.

Alongside this adherence to religious discourse, especially of young girls, a plethora of other channels is also part of their daily viewing. These broadcast loops of Arabic classic films (e.g. *Rotana Cinema*), Arab soap operas, music videos (*clippettes* in Tunisia), reality shows, and other popular programmes, such as *Star Academy*. It would be misleading to claim that only young people watch these religious programmes, because that would arbitrarily divide a very complex dimension that crosses the various generations with subtle distinctions and unduly homogenize them. The 'we,' fed by Arab satellite channels (one might say

the political 'we') is also based on new forms of religiosity and beliefs, although we must stress that these televisions only accentuate an existing movement supported by old media, such as audiocassettes (Hirshkind 2006), videos and book publishing (Eickelman and Anderson 1998; Mermier 2005). These new forms of religiosity are relatively unstable phenomena and are constantly being redefined and reframed. Thus, some behaviours, such as wearing the veil, are threatened and challenged on all sides, even among those involved in them as was the case with Nabila, a 21-year-old Tunisian student. Nabila wears the headscarf despite her parents' opposition and is reluctant to comply with the guidelines of the university where she studies that stipulate she covers her hair with a 'cap' (sic). Nabila is not a devout shrouded in the multiple folds of the so-called Islamic dress. She was dressed very 'young and trendy' when I met her, wearing a beautiful headscarf that enhanced her facial features, and stated:

By God, I, for example, for clothing... I like... I wear what is original, what is new. [...] I mean, fashionable, contemporary, of our time. I'm not going to wear something archaic or time... or something that does not fit... I still love fashion. But fashion is my fashion. I am the one who designs things for myself, that go with what I wear. Something new, that is not worn by too many people, and that is modern.

Nabila sees her salvation in Amr Khaled, as if she was 'a born-again Muslim,' discovering Islam for the first time, as if her spirituality or her deep belief was faulty and had to be constantly regenerated. Recognizing that satellite television has changed her life, she adds,

Nabila: For me, [it is] in the field of religion. It [television] changed my life a lot. It has taught me many new things. You can see in my country, wherever you turn [your eyes], you see nudity. [...] It is television and people on it... For example Amr Khaled, I do not know if you've heard of him? [...] Amr Khaled, by God the Almighty, thanks to him, [I got to wear the hijab]. He guided me in the right way, as he did with many others. Without television, without digital [television], without Iqraa, I would... Without Iqraa and al-Majd [another religious channel], I would be myself... I do not know...

Ratiba: Ignorant?

Nabila: Exactly! You understand that? It changed my thinking a lot.

Ratiba: What do you find in Amr Khaled?

Nabila: His ambition. [...] Yes, his ambition because he wants to reform an entire nation. The Muslim nation. [...] Khaled for me and for many others, is like the charger. I speak on behalf of those who listen [to him], like me, he gives you a charge. He will recharge you inside. By God, yes! God bless him! [...] He made arrangements in several countries. Because there are several... For example, in Egypt, the khemar [another name of the veil] is not banned, in Lebanon neither. It is only Tunisia [that it is prohibited]. And they say it is a Muslim country! You understand? It is a Muslim country in name alone... And you see, even at the university, they will not let you wear the hijab!

The 'Muslim nation' extends without doubt beyond the Arab world, but in terms of comparison it is very strongly centred on Egyptian and Lebanese shows. If it is difficult to divide world outlooks into exclusive categories, it is nevertheless possible to point out that in identity configuration, the 'regional,' (e.g. the Eastern Mediterranean region) has become an important referent of youth identifications. This process is not strictly endogenous, especially if we consider Arab channels' mimesis of European and American programmes (Kraidy 2008), however the referring forms need to be from the region. Indeed, it does not matter that the dances in the clips (hip hop and R&B especially) are Western. What matters is that they are performed by young dancers who are recognized as local people. These young people are from 'our part of the world,' despite their non-conformity to normative behaviours. This is not the least of many paradoxes.

Conclusion

Arab satellite channels have undeniably reactivated a sense of 'regionality' that calls into question the concept of global images. It is within this very frame that Arab satellites television reaffirms Maghrebi audiences' affiliation to their Arabic roots and culture. How does this appropriation occur? What does it allow us to understand in terms of Maghrebi identity affiliations and political culture? These are the central questions that the present chapter has addressed in a field that is vast, controversial and open.

It is presumptuous to think that the advent of Arab satellite television has completely changed the spectrum of the identifications of Maghrebians to Arabeness and Islam. This would be a terrible blindness to the historical reality that binds the Maghreb to the Arab and Islamic worlds. Similarly, it is methodologically difficult to assert any strong causal relationship between media content and identity affiliations. Yet, in this chapter, I have shown that the unprecedented exposure of Maghrebi audiences to the images broadcast by the Arab satellite channels has produced a new awareness of Islamness and Arabness, along with new ways of thinking about the self and the collective. The fact that it is no longer the enemy, for example, a colonial power, who dissects the information and interprets it for them, or shows 'negative' or 'distorted' images of themselves. Now, Arab satellite television enables not only an indigenous creativity of the Self, but it also helps to shape the parameters of being Muslim and/or Arab. Needless to say, these parameters vary according to the subject matter and the actors that are involved (e.g. an admirer of Amr Khaled could also like and apply the teachings of the more conservative Sheik Yusuf al-Qaradawi and wear, if she is a female, a very trendy hijab or a combination of what a Moroccan participants to this research

called the ‘Nancy Ajram sister’). While religious channels have had an impact on religious practices, as shown in the audience ‘awakening’ to Islam (see especially Nabila’s case), its major effect is the public visibilization of the social arena.

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Noha Mellor

Religious media as a cultural discourse: The views of the Arab diaspora in London

Introduction

This chapter aims to contribute to the debate surrounding media as a cultural practice, focusing on Islamic channels and how they might contribute to enforcing the cultural identity of a selected sample of Arab diaspora in London. The term diaspora here is not a term that can be applied to any dispersed population who may be bound by the same ethnic identity. Rather, diaspora can denote a process that binds several communities around the world who engage in building an imagined community based on their ethnic or religious identity (see e.g. Brubaker 2005; Cohen 1997). This process of building a certain diasporan identity is communicated through debates about the characteristics of this identity and what it means for these communities across the world. Diaspora can be defined as ‘any minority community within a multi-ethnic polity’ and this community seeks ‘to reproduce inter-generationally a sense of identification within this group...Diaspora suggests a commitment to maintaining a sense of roots that lie outside of the country where one lives’ (Cheng and Katz 1998:72). Thus, diaspora is usually seen to rest on two coordinates: homeland orientation and boundary maintenance (Brubaker 2005). Muslim communities provide a good case in point in analysing diaspora communities of Muslims scattered all over the world, who are bound by one religious identity.

Media here plays a crucial role in articulating this identity through the subjective narratives of members of these communities. In these narratives, subjects engage in the process of (re-)identifying their own cultural boundaries vis-à-vis other cultural groups in their host societies (see e.g. Hall 1990). In so doing, they enforce a collective identity with their homelands by invoking memories of common history and geography in their cultural practices, such as consumption of ethnic and transnational media. Such media can indeed provide alternatives to mainstream media (see e.g. Ahmed 2003) while facilitating new venues to discuss identity and belonging. For instance, Chong examines the relation between religion and ethnic identity and argues that this relationship has not always been clear; religion can be ancillary to ethnic identity while serving ethical and legitimating functions (1998: 264–265). In addition, recent scholarly analyses of the proliferation of Islamic media, whether on satellite or digital media, such

as Salvatore and Eickelman (2006) and Eickelman (1999), argue that the present times witness a new Islamic public sphere characterised by its open debates through the use of new media including the Internet. In particular, Salvatore and Eickelman define the Islamic public sphere as ‘public Islam,’ where Muslims scholars and intellectuals can engage in open debates and discussions about issues of common interest (2006). Indeed, the Internet technology has contributed to enforcing this conceptualisation of Muslim public sphere, particularly on the Internet. Gary Bunt, for instance describes this space as digital *umma*, referring on particular to the Muslim community debate online (2000: 17). Although this openness should reflect the egalitarian status of participants in this dialogue whose aim is to seek consensus on what is good for the whole *umma* [nation], it is by no means given that the Habermasian (western) concepts of dialogue and consensus, let alone common good, can be applied wholesale on the diverse Muslim populations spread across several continents around the world. These concepts are rather fluid and dynamic, i.e. what can be characterised as ‘common good’ may change through times and continuous debates (El-Nawway & Khamis 2010: 233). Peter Mandaville also argues that the Muslim *umma* has emerged as a re-imagined community where members engage in discussion through mediated communication across geographical boundaries. But he also argues that ‘we need to understand these media as spaces of communication in which the identity, meaning and boundaries of diasporic community are continually constructed, debated and reimagined’ (Mandaville 2001: 169).

Indeed, the analysis of the communication, facilitated by this technology, can also reveal the diverse needs and demands of these audiences. For instance, it is by no means given that Arab Muslim audiences in the diaspora share the same concerns, problems and demands of Arab Muslims within the Arab region, yet recent scholarship does not give enough scrutiny to such comparative approaches analysing the voices and topics in this virtual sphere. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate this difference through an exploratory study among a selected sample of young Arabs in London by focusing on their views about religious programming.

In the following, I argue that Arab-Muslim communities in London constitute unique diasporan communities that seek to foreground their multicultural identity, which serves a two-fold role: it helps enforce virtual boundaries between those Arabs and other ethnic Muslim communities in London while accentuating the difference between their unique situational contexts (in Britain) vis-à-vis other Arabs within the Arab region.

In line with Hoover (2006), I argue that media here constitute spaces of cultural and social practices integrated in the cultural discourse, and as such, cultural identity is not just a variable separate from religion. Instead, cultural identity is the sum of the interaction between media and religion. Because Islam as a religion is a mediated practice (see e.g. Galal 2006), it is important to analyse religious identity in relation to the unique surrounding social and cultural context of the audience. I begin by defining the concept of audiences, before I discuss this case study.

Diaspora audiences joining the *umma*

Audience as a word denotes a collective mass of receivers, although it is more fruitful to acknowledge the diversity and fragmentation of media audiences (McQuail 1997). Several scholars (e.g. Moores 1993) enforce the latter allusion, arguing for analysing audiences in the plural based on the diversity of their socio-cultural positioning. In his overview of audience studies, Webster divides this body of literature into three models according to the definition of audience, namely audience as mass, as outcome and as agent (1998). Seeing audience as mass is more about patterns of consumption than the interpretation of this particular consumption. Clearly, such a model undermines the heterogeneity of audiences, not to mention its connotation of audiences' passivity. The second model sees audience as an outcome and is concerned with the effect of media on people, while the third model scrutinises people's use of media and how they freely interpret media texts.

There is also a range of studies that cannot be neatly categorised in these three models and are instead based on a creative combination of these models. Other scholars, however, problematize the simple definition of media, including diaspora, as addressing mass audiences across different geographical spaces. For instance, Abercrombie and Longhurst suggest the concept of 'diffused' audiences to denote the new category of audiences who no longer share a 'mass' experience consumed in domestic surroundings, e.g. living rooms (1998). Rather, audiences are now likely to consume media in an individual setting such as personal computers, and hence form their own personal experience as media consumers, in contrast to mass audiences who are exposed to a certain medium such as printed newspapers. Couldry develops this argument by suggesting that audiences can now be characterised as "extended audiences" who draw on various media including speech and thought where boundaries are rather blurred between media and audiences (2005). Here, Muslim Arab communities in Britain are a case in point: they arrive in European cities only to find themselves grouped with other

ethnic groups into Muslim communities, which forms a ‘virtual reality’ which ‘exists above all in the minds of western politicians, ‘experts’ and journalists ... [although] no one would consider immigrants to western Europe from two strict Catholic countries such as Poland and the Philippines as belonging to a single ‘Christian community’” (Bechir and Saghieh 2005). Also, Nagel and Staeheli’s study among selected groups of Arab youths in Britain shows a significant contradiction: while the youth stress that religion is important for their identity, they reject the priori British categorisation of them as ‘British Muslims’ thereby equating them with other Muslim communities such as the Asian. For them, such categorisation is a politicized classification that glosses over inherent cultural and ethnic differences. And while they work hard on “validating” their own Arab identity, they end up validating Islam as well in an attempt to educate the British society about Islam (Nagel and Staeheli 2009: 6–9).

Arabs in London

There are large groups of Arab and Arabic-speaking communities living in the UK and different countries across the European Union. The word ‘Arab’ as an ethnic classification usually refers to residents whose country of birth is an Arab State (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Sudan, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestinian Territories, Yemen, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain and Iraq). Two other countries, however, namely Mauritania and Somalia, and particularly the latter, are sometimes classified as Arab states due to the intelligibility of Arabic in these countries. It is also worth mentioning that Somalia and Mauritania have been members in the Arab League since the 1970s.

According to the 2011 census in the UK, the number of Arabs living in the UK is estimated to constitute approximately 0.5% of the total population, with the largest concentration in London, where 1.5% of all inhabitants come from an Arab background. Yet, these are not exact figures that reflect the actual number of the Arab community in the UK, and this is because the ethnicity census usually does not classify all ethnic groups, which makes the Arabs more inclined to choose between *White*, *Black* or *Others* (Georgiou 2002). For instance, according to the UK national statistics, one in ten Muslims in the UK is classified under the *White* ethnic group, e.g. those from Turkey, Cyprus and North Africa. Although Britain dominated large parts of the Arab world from the nineteenth century until the independence of these states in the mid twentieth century, the Arab world was not considered part of the British Commonwealth and thus Arabs did not have the right to move to Britain in the same way Algerians were able to move

to France under the French rule (Nagel 2001: 387). Instead, Arabs migrated to Britain for purposes of work, trade and education. Still, their status in Britain remains that of 'foreign' nationals rather than an integrated minority (*ibid.*). The Arab influx to Britain can be dated back to the 1950s when immigrants came typically from Egypt and Algeria. Palestinians, Somalis and Lebanese have also increased in number since 1989 (Georgiou 2002). The oldest Arab communities are the Yemenis in Cardiff and the Syrians in Manchester. Increasing trade, moreover, attracted Yemeni and Somali labourers, in particular, to the British cities of Cardiff and Liverpool.

In addition, there are a large number of Arabian Gulf nationals who consider London an important business site. Indeed, London has become an international centre of Arabian Gulf enterprises. Particularly since the mid 1970s with the oil boom in the Arabian Gulf, nationals from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) counties (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates) have chosen London both as a tourist destination but also more importantly as a place for investment. There are several reasons for this: the historic link between the Arabian Gulf and Britain, the importance of the English language to the labour market in the GCC countries, the perception of the UK as a friend and ally to Arab states, the position of the UK as a link between Europe and the USA, and the increasing number of Arab immigrants in the UK (Salamandra 2002).

The extent of Arab communities' integration in British society differs across age and socio-economic groups. For instance, Caroline Nagel (2002) provides a comprehensive study among Arab communities¹ in London, dividing them into three types. The first type is what she called 'middle class negotiators,' who seek to show their assimilation to mainstream culture while in public spaces but nurture their distinct Arab identity in private spaces. In so doing, they accommodate for the mainstream construction of a British or English identity while negotiating their group identities as Arab, English and ethnic (*ibid.*: 274).

The second type is referred to as Arab multiculturalists, who are mainly first-generation Arabs, some of whom have moved to Britain as refugees. They generally belong to a lower-income group than the middle class negotiators. Unlike the latter group, Arab multiculturalists frame their ethnic identity within the discourse of multiculturalism, in an attempt to assert their Arabness as a visible minority group. In so doing, they sustain an identity 'situated in the political

1 It is worth noting that Nagel's study was aimed at Arab activists, but I find her categorization also relevant to the present study.

context of the host society' while accentuating their cultural differences vis-à-vis white mainstream groups (ibid.: 274).

The third group is coined 'young cosmopolitans,' a group of Arabs who share the socio-economic status of the middle-class negotiators and enjoy a comfortable socio-economic background. They are also generally mobile in terms of education and employment. Although this particular group does not reject their Arab identity, they tend to distance themselves from Arab networks, preferring not to mingle with other Arab groups. In so doing, they do not seek to assert an English mainstream identity, as is the case with middle-class negotiators, because they still share the feeling of being generally excluded from mainstream. Instead, this group seeks to identify themselves as cosmopolitans or citizens of the world, with a home base in London.

These communities have ample opportunities to remain connected with their homelands thanks to the technological leap that facilitated the use of Direct Broadcast Satellite (DBS) in the transmission of satellite channels. Arab communities have now the choice of a few hundred free channels, not to mention subscription channels. One British-Iraqi expressed contentment with this new choice, saying:

We used to watch only BBC TV channels. There was a scarcity in news. We got news about the Arab World by listening to Arab radio stations on short waves, [which] did not have a good reputation, except the Arabic service in the BBC World Service. We used to stay late in the night to listen to this channel. (Ben Moussa 2004)

There are also a few studies about Arab diasporas and their media consumption, primarily with news. For instance, Miladi provides an audience analysis among selected Arabs in Britain focusing on their viewership of *al-Jazeera* Arabic in comparison with the *BBC* and *CNN*. His main conclusion is that Arabic-speaking viewers turned to *al-Jazeera* after 11 September, because they found it more credible (2006). Similarly, Matar considers the mediation of the events of 11 September in UK and Arab news media with focus on the Palestinians in Britain, as an ethno-national minority and diaspora (2006). Clearly, such analyses tend to see Arab diasporan communities as members of a global Arab public sphere due to their political interest in Arab news and hence their solidarity with the Arab nations. Although this literature acknowledges the complexity of generalising the identities of these communities, it is yet to be acknowledged that diaspora indeed "is constituted as much in *difference and division* as it in *commonality and solidarity*" (Anthias 1998: 564, emphasis in original). In other words, Arab transnational television here represents a new site for resistance, contestation and negotiation of their identities as diaspora Arabs rather than unquestionably

accepting the subject positions offered on TV. For instance, Arab communities in London are diverse in terms of their nationalities, religious orientations, religious and cultural practices and degree of integration in the British society; their interpretations of religious programmes are manifold rather than uniform.

In the following sections, I present an exploratory study into these communities, focusing on a small sample of young Arab-British students (between 20–36 years old) who study at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in London. The overall aim is to explore how their views of religious media may differ from the views of their counterparts within the Arab region.

Analysing narrative

The following analysis is based on ten interviews with young Arab university students in London. I have chosen the interview method based on my belief that we construct the world through stories and verbal interaction. As such, these interviews were analysed as providing practical insights into the interviewees' perception of religious media and the way they understand, explain, and organize experiences (Cortazzi 1993). Thus, interviews can be analysed as discursive acts (Mishler 1986) in which the interviewer and interviewee are engaged in creating the narrative framework (Riessman 2001).

The following sections are based on the analysis of collected interviews, where each interviewee was encouraged to elaborate as to how they perceive themselves as Arab and Muslim in Britain. I collected these narratives through semi-structured interviews with these ten young Arabs, relying on the snowball technique, where one contact leads to another. All interviews were conducted in Arabic and transcribed. The analysis is based on thematic coding of the interviews based on the research questions. Because the sample is rather small, I do not aim to generalize any themes here, but instead, I identify issues of interest for future studies. Interviews were analysed as samples of personal narrative, and thus a tool to understand people's perspectives and perceptions (Clandinin & Connelly 2000). As people use narratives to tell about their lives, they also use and draw on such narratives to make sense of the world as they perceive and experience it, or as Clandinin and Connelly put it, 'Stories are the closest we can come to experience as we and others tell our experiences... is the stories people live. People live stories and in the telling of them reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones' (Clandinin and Connelly 1994: 415). The following sections build on my informants' narratives and views of religious programming.

The interviews were conducted between January and April 2011², with ten students: three of Iraqi origin, five of Egyptian origin, one Saudi citizen and one Jordanian citizen. The latter two informants did not have British citizenship, while the remaining interviewees were British citizens either by birth or naturalisation. All informants were at that time enrolled in different universities in London, either as undergraduate or postgraduate students. In terms of age, they were all between 20 and 25 years old, except the two non-UK citizens who were postgraduate students aged between 35 and 36. Although the sample is by no means representative of the Arab populations (or youths) in London, it can still serve as an illustrative case study of this group's sense of belonging to a virtual Islamic public sphere.

Scrutinizing religious media content

The past decade has seen an increase in the number of Islamic satellite channels and an equal increase in the number of young Muslim preachers using such channels to promote a moderate vision of Islam in an upbeat preaching style. These new talk shows mark a significant break from the old style preachers, who cited the holy Koran in white robes and preached in eloquent, classical Arabic while warning his audiences of the punishment in hell if they do not live by the Koranic texts. Two prominent preachers have claimed a vast audience inside and outside the region: Amr Khaled and Mo'ez Mas'oud.

Amr Khaled, 48 years old, was dubbed by the *Time* magazine as one of the 100 most influential people in the world. His message is of tolerance and love, or as he put it in one of his early lectures, 'It would break your heart to know how much God loves you. No matter how sinful you are, God will forgive all if you repent. Isn't it time to give up your sins?' (quoted in Shahine 2002). Moez Masoud, 33 years old, also comes from an affluent background and is conversant in English and life in Europe. His shows centre on messages of love and compassion to others including homosexuals and non-Muslims (Sullivan 2007).

When I asked my informants whether they watch talk shows such as those hosted by Khaled or Mas'oud, they said that their parents usually follow religious broadcasting, particularly *Iqraa* channel, whose content was deemed as rather 'irrelevant' to their particular situation as Arabs in London. Mahdi (m, 23), for

2 Although the Arab uprisings broke up during that time, I chose not to make those events the main topic of the interviews. Suffice to say here that the interviewees, particularly those with Egyptian background, expressed their pride in the uprising and the fact that Egyptian youths were credited for it.

instance, said that he would rather spend his time attending to his university lectures than watching this kind of programmes. He would also rather follow the Arab news such as *al-Jazeera*, *BBC Arabic* and *al-Arabiya* than religious channels. For many of my informants, religious channels are mostly relevant during Ramadan when families stress the importance of fasting and prayers. When asked about Amr Khaled's programmes in particular, the majority of my informants expressed disengagement with these programmes and rather disengagement with a preacher like Amr Khaled. Amani (f, 21) for instance, said that Amr Khaled's presentation style is rather undemotivating for her to follow him:

Amr Khaled shouts a lot, and this can scare young people like me...his talk about the torment of the grave is also scary...I want [programmes that]...tell young people about the good things in Islam...that we are all going to paradise...they [youths] need to know God can help them be good.

Tariq (m, 23) reported that he sometimes finds the language of such programmes too difficult to understand, especially when the preachers cite references to Koran and Hadith that he did not learn by heart. He would rather have programmes in English targeting people like him in diaspora communities. Nonetheless, an English-speaking channel like Islam TV, broadcast from London, is not an attractive option, as he affiliates it with the 'Asian Muslims.' Although his parents are fervent followers of Amr Khaled's programmes, Tariq thinks that this preaching 'does not concern [him].' Also, Marwa (f, 25), agreed that Islam TV is not a viable option although her family tunes into it in Ramadan just to know the time of the evening 'adaan' [call for prayer].

Likewise, Amani (f, 21) said that her parents regularly watch Amr Khaled's programmes and they would urge her to watch with them, especially when there is an episode about family in Islam:

I watch with them whenever there is a preach about family...it's boring stuff for me...and I'd usually tell them that I'd watch it online later...I don't know why I was supposed to watch this...I knew all of this stuff already...I know what is right and wrong.

She also stated that she finds this type of programming rather irrelevant for young women like her who live in different cultural context:

They say things that are not very relevant for my life here...for example they always say that women should wear an 'Abaya-like dress...maybe this is relevant in Egypt but not here in London...I could wear a top and jeans here [in London], and I'd still look decent and no one would look at me...in some programmes, people talk about their own personal problems and ask for fatwa, but I cannot see how relevant these fatwas are to my life here.

Moreover, Amani wishes there were programmes for people of her age; for her, Amr Khaled and other similar preachers address people in their 30s and older. Yasmine (f, 20) shared this view and recalled a programme that used to be broadcast on *MBC* (The Middle East Broadcasting Center), entitled *Yalla ya Shabab*, co-hosted the Egyptian actor Ahmed al-Fishawi with a group of young people:

I liked Fishawi's programme...I felt like I learned something out of it...but I do not like Amr Khaled...his language is hard...and I do not like his style...why should I listen to someone on such channels everyday for a whole hour...I already know the difference between right and wrong...I do not know why my parents ever watch this boring stuff.

Similarly, Hany (m, 21) was not attracted to preachers like Amr Khaled but reported seeking out younger generations such as Mustafa Husny, who present programmes on the Islamic channel *Iqraa* TV targeting young audiences. If given the chance, Hany said he would like to revamp those religious channels' websites and make them more informative for youths in the diaspora. Marwa (f, 25) also saw such religious channels as a political tool: 'I think such channels have political agendas and they target more people inside the region.'

On the other hand, the older students expressed more critical views about such religious media. For instance, Mohamed (m, 36) believed that some of these Islamic talk shows are moulded after Christian televangelists' programmes, particularly in matters related to personal development and positive thinking. But preachers like Amr Khaled, according to Mohamed, 'jump on the moral bandwagon of religion rather than religion itself' rather than creating a new programme concept that teaches Islam in relation to 'western' concepts such as socialism, racism and tolerance.

Another older student, Najat (f, 36) described the real problem in religious programming as the fact that audiences tend to nearly 'sanctify' the preachers on TV:

In Saudi Arabia, life is based on religion...one of my friends there holds a degree in Finance but does not want to work in a bank because she heard a fatwa that says it'd be haram for a Muslim to work in a bank....the problem is that those preachers have become experts in everything in life...and the audiences almost sanctify them...but I think they [preachers] shouldn't be given more than they deserve...people should ask them about religion only...not economy, banking or politics.

Indeed, she echoes the Islam scholar Ahmed Ben Baz' arguments, whose recent statement to *al-Arabiya's* flagship programme *Ida'aat* [Spotlights] made headlines in the Kingdom. Ben Baz said that the Islamic world need more intellectuals than fatwa-issuers, and that right and wrong are clear in Islam, but

audiences tend to ask about everything in life, and television preachers may take advantage of this to promote themselves in fatwa-programmes (*Ida'aat*, episode aired on 18th January 2010 on *al-Arabiya*). This critique of religious channels and preachers should be seen in contrast to the views of other youths within the Arab region. For instance, the latter group feels that television evangelists like Amr Khaled and Tarek Swidan address their particular issues and sees them as figures that 'are knowledgeable and humble...[and] would like to help heal the society' (Karam 2007: 156). This cohort of youths within the region sees these programmes as having a positive influence on their lives. As expressed by an 18-year old Emirati man, 'some religious programmes helped me change some of my bad habits' (ibid.).

In summary, this cohort negotiates and (re-)interprets the teachings of Islam to suite their particular demands and circumstances; this is in line with previous studies (e.g. Mandaville 2001: 107). This cohort of young people in London is critical of the linear communication in preaching styles and they offer up a new vision for new programmes directed at young diaspora communities, who long for more engaging programming when compared to youths residing in the Arab region.

Muslim identity as a tool for resistance

For Arab Muslims in Britain, it is rather difficult to strongly affiliate with existing Muslim networks and societies. The main reason for this is the tendency to conflate Muslims with 'Asian Muslims,' rather than seeing the nuances and diversity of Muslim communities in the UK (Nagel 2009: 14). In fact, Arab Muslims feel strongly that ethnic differences distinguish them from Asian Muslims, particularly Pakistanis, in terms of both lifestyle and faith practices. As a Yemeni-British young man put it, 'I'm not entirely sure I believe in what they [Asian Muslims] do. Every time I have a chance to talk to them about what they do, the response I get is not convincing to me. But I am a Muslim, a Yemeni, an Arab, and I associate myself with that' (quoted in Nagel 2009: 14–15).

For one of my informants, Mahdi (m, 23), for instance, being Muslim was not a criterion to use when it comes to choosing friends. He preferred to define himself as 'conservative' rather than Muslim, thereby stressing the moral aspect of his identity. When he first moved to London as a young boy, it was important for his family to surround him with Iraqi and Arab-Muslim children, but this changed as he grew up and moved out to live near his campus. For him, religion is the sum of moral values that can guide his life, such as not drinking alcohol or indulging in a relationship out of the wedlock. The ethnic identity of Mahdi as an Iraqi is

by far more pronounced in his life, his future plans, for example, include raising his own children as Iraqis and teaching them the Arabic language.

For other young people, being Muslim was a fact they sought to hide rather than proudly boast about. For instance, Tariq (m, 23) remembered how he was teased during primary and secondary school by other children whose curiosity about Islam added to Tariq's pressures: 'for instance, they would ask me why I didn't eat pork, and I felt like I had to answer on behalf of all Muslims.'

It is especially after the events of 11 September that young people like Tariq felt the pressures of being both Arabs and Muslims. This view was shared by Yasmine (f, 20) who lived with her family in Kent county where they had very few Arab neighbours:

I did not tell anyone at school that I was Muslim...because I felt other pupils were surprised in the RE classes every time the teacher explained something about Islam, and they even said negative things...they also asked me strange things... like if those fundamentalists were demented...so I was not proud of my background... as I am now. It started to change in the high school where there were girls from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds.

When Tariq and Yasmine entered the university, they found new friends of similar ethnic backgrounds and it was particularly then that they felt proud of their identity as Egyptians and Muslims. Both of them identify themselves as Muslims even if they do not pray or fast on a regular basis: 'I do not go to mosques, but I still feel Muslim...I know what is right and wrong,' said Yasmine. For them, religion is more about morals and a 'good lifestyle' in which they would not drink alcohol and refrain from promiscuity. Moreover, Tariq proudly recounted of his intention to raise his children as 'Egyptian Muslims' lest they would be 'too westernised.'

Indeed, both Tariq and Yasmine do not deny their British identity, preferring to highlight a multicultural view that reconciles their Egyptian Muslim roots with their British/Western life. Embracing both British and Egyptian/Muslim identities equips them with this strong sense of ethics and virtue and confidence in understanding both Western and Muslim values.

Both male and female informants confirm their gender differences, which have marked them since childhood and which are now more obvious in terms of the degree of freedom allowed by their parents. Both Yasmine and Amany (both of Egyptian origin, aged 20), for instance, complained that their brothers seem to enjoy more freedom than they do. Their brothers could club or party late into the night, while their sisters could not claim the same right. Parents also do not pressure the boys to show religiosity in the same way they do with the girls.

For instance, Yasmine said, 'I used to tell my friends that I'd pray in front of my mum so she could let me go out with them,' thereby using religious practices as a means to gain her parents' trust. Although her parents took a decision to live in a 'non-Arab' neighbourhood, they are still cautious about their social image as a conservative family, which is why Yasmine's mum restricts Yasmine's outings: 'I tried to explain to my mum that the [British] neighbours would be more surprised if I didn't leave the house than if they see me going out with my friends.'

Amany also admitted to frequently arguing with her parents because they overlook her brother's negligence of his religious duties outside the house: 'my brother only prays when he is at home... but when he's out of the house, you can't tell that he is Egyptian at all.' While Yasmine had not gone so far as to adopt the hijab (headscarf) in order to gain her family's trust, Amany adopted the headscarf at the age of 14, much to the surprise of her school mates, who made rather sarcastic remarks that expressed they believed she was forced by her parents to wear the veil. Amany insisted that she was not forced to wear it to follow her mother's example, but she spoke about her extended family in Egypt and how proud they are of her for wearing the hijab.

Moreover, Amany sees Islam as 'part of her ethnic identity':

Islam is important for my family to understand our cultures and ethics, what is haram and halal [wrong and right] not to stay out the night, girls should not do things, so they favoured me mixing with other Muslim girls. Although they allowed my brother to mix with English boys and come late at night, and this is a source of dispute between me and them.

She is proud of her Egyptian relatives' praise, which for her symbolises her success in embracing British and Egyptian Muslim values. In so doing, she illustrates successful multiculturalism that combines British values and education with the traditional veil.

Macleod's study in Egypt showed that Muslim women in the lower middle classes may adopt the hijab for economic and cultural reasons rather than for religious or political motivations (1991). For instance, wearing the hijab may mean that women spend less on doing their hair or buying fashionable clothes. For others, it can mean avoiding sexual harassment in public spaces. Thus, the meaning Muslim women attach to the hijab, or any religious practice for that matter, is a multifaceted act resulting from each woman's particular social and cultural surroundings. Macleod also argues that these women's choices regarding adopting the hijab indicate their active negotiations of rigid dichotomies such as religious and cultural, or public and private. Likewise, Arab-Muslim women in London may engage in similar negotiations and challenges. Arab-British women

may choose the hijab as a symbol of their rebellion or disagreement with western (foreign) policies. In this case, the veil can be a decision that can be taken rather abruptly to express this disagreement, e.g. following news about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Nagel and Staeheli 2009: 12–13), or it can be an interactive tool of political commentary (Tarlo 2010: 41).

In summary, this cohort has strong perception of prejudice in London, due to their ethnic identity as Arabs particularly in the post 9/11 era. This awareness began early in primary and secondary school, but seems to have shifted during their university years partly because of the multicultural nature of London universities and partly because they began to surround themselves with likeminded young Arabs. Nonetheless, this perception confirms their feeling of being noticeably distinct from native (white) Brits – hence their passionate plan to pass on the Arabic language and Islamic teachings to their children.

Religion as cultural practice

For my informants, being Muslim is not only a religious matter but also, or more importantly, a cultural issue. They define their religious identity through their national identity and in so doing conflate the religious with the cultural practices and values. Some of them, however, are aware of the distinction between religious and cultural practices, such as Mahdi, who deliberately avoid social gatherings with Arab youths who appear to be ‘very religious’ as he called them:

I don't want [them] to tell me I should pray and fast...they have to realise that other Muslims and non-Muslims are also fine people...they are like the old generation who kept telling us that we ‘the best nation to have been raised up for humankind.’

Mahdi prefers to cling to a multicultural identity to define himself and he also would rather call himself conservative than religious referring to his respect of Iraqi values and traditions, not necessarily of the Koran and Hadith. He spoke fervently about the need to adopt a sense of multiculturalism in London that does not favour certain religions or racial backgrounds but sees diversity as enriching.

By seeing religion as part of their ethnic identity, my informants clearly distinguish themselves from other Muslim youths in London, such as Asian Muslims, or as Mohamed put it:

We do not belong to the same tribe or culture, we share religion but it is not enough to classify us as one group...I would rather identify myself as Arab...they [Asian Muslims] are different...even their way of practising Islam is quite different from the Arabs.

Moreover, Mohamed (m, 35) equated religion with ethics:

Religion teaches me about ethics...like fasting to feel with the poor....it can relieve you from depression...it can make you live at peace...give you good ethical standards...so we shouldn't lie or cheat.

Likewise, Yasmine does not necessarily pray five times a day or fast all Ramadan, but she still described herself as a practising Muslim because she knows the 'basics':

I know the basics, like we should not drink wine, no sex out of wedlock and so on, so I don't need someone [Amr Khaled] to tell me how to become Muslim.

Also, Marwa (f, 25) reported praying daily and fasting during Ramadan, but she does not wear the veil and she does not like attending Shiite gatherings. She also deliberately chooses not to mingle with other Iraqi girls, especially those who wear the veil just to make their parents happy:

I think I am responsible girl and this proves my religiosity more than wearing the veil. I know what's right from wrong.... they [Iraqi veiled girls] make sarcastic comments if I tell them that I'm going home early...they'd sarcastically say, 'really? Are you going home or somewhere else?' if I wore the veil, they'd not tell me this stuff.

Thus, Marwa, like Yasmine and Mahdi, prefers to cling to a multicultural identity to justify her unease in mixing with other Arab nationals or with other religious factions, e.g. Sunni Iraqis.

For Hany (m, 23), religion is important 'to go to paradise', as if it is a criterion one needs to fulfil rather than an integral part of his identity. Yet, he noticed that many of his peers exaggerate their religious practices compared to Muslim youths in his native Egypt; for instance, he recalled one of his friends who changed his lifestyle rather radically by praying daily and refusing to shake hands with girls or join social gatherings. For Hany, this is because of the parents' failure to specify his friend's ethnic and national identity at fairly young age. A similar example was cited by Mohamed (m, 35):

[A] talented man...a graduate of the best universities in the world...but suddenly he quit his job and left for Egypt to learn Arabic and was very angry with his parents that they did not teach him when he was a child.

The moral here is that language and ties to homeland are important ingredients for a balanced life in the diaspora. And it was perhaps therefore that all my informants stressed the importance of learning Arabic and passing it on to their children. Moreover, Marwa (f, 25) saw the problem with rigid religiosity to a

greater degree in the second generation, who never really grew up in an Arab country:

[Y]oung women here who have not lived in Iraq tend to overdo it...they wanted to make a point [by wearing the veil] or to prove something, but I lived in Iraq and I know it was not like this.

Thus, this cohort conflates their Muslim identity with their ethnicity in that they see in Islam a set of core values bound to their ethnic origin, e.g. abstaining from alcohol or having sex out of wedlock. This is so even if they could not express deep knowledge about Islam beyond 'the basics' of praying five times a day and fasting during Ramadan. Clinging to their religious identity may be a defensive response to feeling different (as non-white) in a society that may politicise Muslims, regardless of their ethnicity (Nagel 2002). As such, the religious identity can appeal to this generation as a source of support and group empowerment. On the other hand, they cling to a multicultural identity in situations where they need to justify their unease with other Arab nationals.

Conclusion

In summary, religious channels may contribute to the reproduction of the cultural identity of the second generation Arabs in London. This process also supports the transmission of Arab-Islamic values through the identification with Arab-Islamic morality and views. The above case study also illustrates the heterogeneity of the Islamic views, as shown in the need of some audiences to distinguish themselves from other Muslim communities in London, such as the Asian communities.

Indeed, Arab communities may see their ethnicity as a tool to distinguish them from other Muslim communities in the diaspora, such as Asian Muslims in Britain. Nonetheless, it is equally important to see Arab communities as a complex cohort characterised by their differences rather than similarities, which speaks to the difficulty of grouping them under one single community or equating them with youths in the Arab region or even with youths in other European societies. The fact that they share the same ethnic attribution is not in itself a proof of any similarity (Anthias 1998: 565). For instance, Lewis illustrates this point in her examination of the role of religion and nation in diasporic imagination. Her study argues that Iraq Sunni women in Toronto prefer to maintain strong class and national ties, thereby overshadowing ties to other Muslim and Arab communities within Toronto (2008).

Moreover, this cohort of youths has been made more aware of their religious identity after the events of 11 September, and they conflate it with their ethnic identity as a tool to demarcate the differences between them and other British Muslims (e.g. Asians). In addition, watching religious programming makes this cohort aware of the fissure within Arab communities inside the Arab Region and the generational differences between this cohort and their parents.

Future studies could investigate the degree of religiosity, which seems to vary among young Arabs, ranging from a “westernised” life-style to very conservative Muslim practices. Could religious media, in any format, play a role in nurturing either extreme? Recent scholarship on religious media tends to highlight the role of such media as a source of information about Islam, but it would be also fruitful to consider the role of other media genres such as TV soap operas [musalsalat] as equally viable sources of such information. There is still place for more studies to unearth the subtle differences within the multiple layers of the Muslim public sphere.

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Vivian Ibrahim

Watching the history of the ‘present’: Religion and national identity in the Egyptian diaspora

Introduction

During the Muslim holy month of Ramadan in 2010, an Egyptian drama series or *musalsal* entitled *al-Gama'a* [The Group] aired in Egypt and the Arab World focusing on the *Ikhwan al-Muslimeen*, the Muslim Brotherhood. The series, which was partially sponsored by the state-run television, was initially perceived by commentators to delegitimize the contemporary leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood while highlighting the important – if not misguided – role of the founder of the group Hassan al-Banna in the 1920s. The 2010 *musalsal* was set between two time periods: the first, took place in 2006, only a year after the Brotherhood's gains in parliamentary elections, while the second time period historicised the roots of the organisation, narrating the life of the founder and its spiritual guide [murshid], Hasan al-Banna. Like many *musalsalat* [plural form of *musalsal*] before it, *al-Gama'a* caused great controversy, which outlasted its 28 episodes and the duration of Ramadan.

By 2010, the Brotherhood, an eighty-year-old organisation, had pragmatically negotiated a public space for itself in the political arena, despite being banned since 1954. The turbulent image that had dominated the Brotherhood in previous generations was slowly being eroded and under President Hosni Mubarak the organisation actively played an important and vibrant role in the social, economic and political life of Egypt (Fahmy 2002: 86–87). In the parliamentary elections of 1984 and 1987, the Muslim Brotherhood, though officially still a banned party, ran ‘independent’ candidates who won a significant percentage of seats. During the 2005 parliamentary elections, the Brotherhood won 20 percent of the total number of seats, gaining 88 seats in parliament for the organisation. While the elections were widely dismissed as extremely fraudulent and corrupt, they were also a significant indicator of the potential support the Brotherhood could muster, should free elections take place (Blaydes 2010: 150). The elections positioned the Brotherhood as the largest opposition group with an unprecedented victory of seats.

The series was aired approximately six months prior to the unexpected Egyptian uprising of 2011, which toppled Mubarak's presidency. According to Berenger and Labidi, most serials tend to focus on issues relating to societal

problems. They argue, however, that strictly speaking, musalsalat are not social critiques that seek to analyse past or present failings in order to suggest brighter solutions for the future (2005: 90). In 2012 Muhammad Morsi, a formal member of the Muslim Brotherhood, became the first civil president to be elected in Egypt under free elections. It is impossible to know how the musalsal would have been received had these events taken place prior to the airing of the series. This chapter will argue, however, that the content, format and timing of *al-Gama'a* were all deliberately considered issues that effectively render a social critique of the organisation, particularly since it was aired only two months prior to the scheduled (and known) parliamentary elections that took place in late 2010. The series tackled several key themes prevalent in contemporary Egyptian society, including the issues of acceptable religiosity and national identity.

At the centre of this chapter is an examination of whether, as Berenger and Labidi argue, soaps set the agenda for public discourse (ibid.: 90), and if so, to what extent. Two small diasporan groups were interviewed immediately after the airing of the musalsal in 2010. The case studies investigate whether religion, time or reasons for emigrating from Egypt played a role in their interpretation and engagement with the musalsal. The results highlighted that the subject matter of the series often served as a commentary for the groups' own diasporan narratives. Like most other groups in society, the two groups interviewed for the diasporan case studies were constantly [re]positioning and [re]negotiating their own identities, histories and reflections on Egypt and the nation based on their own experiences, while also projecting their own interpretations and narrations on to the musalsal itself.

Narrating the story

The musalsal is divided over two time periods, using the turbulence of mass student arrests in 2006 to introduce viewers to the Muslim Brotherhood. Ashraf Helal – played by Hassan al-Radad – is the main protagonist in the contemporary period, a prosecutor who is unfamiliar with the Muslim Brotherhood, their aims and ethos. He is abruptly shaken from his sheltered upper-middle class Cairene haze, when he unexpectedly investigates a number of student supporters of the Brotherhood detained for their activities on university campuses. Amongst those who are arrested is Taymor 'Abdul-Hamid Yunis – played by Karim Kassem – a medical student who lives in the lower socio-economic neighbourhood of al-'Abbasiyah. Ashraf, who is largely unexposed to the economic realities of Cairo due to his fairly privileged upbringing, is shocked by testimonies from the young Ikhwan or Brotherhood supporters concerning why they joined. The result of

this is a quest led by Ashraf to search for the roots of the Brotherhood and learn more about its ideas and teachings. Introduced to the life of Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the movement, through the narrative and books of his fiancée's grandfather ('Abdullah Kassem—played by 'Ezzat al-'Alayli), the musalsal alternates between the events of 2006 and the early years of Hassan al-Banna and the Brotherhood in the 1920s.

The audience is first introduced to Hassan al-Banna as a young boy in the idyllic countryside village of Mahmoudiyya. The young Hassan al-Banna is a likeable but slightly zealous character who, from early on highlights his religious fervour in a game of *mo'miniyn wa kufar* [believers and heathens]. Surveying his friends, he tells them that he will decide who is in each group and when challenged by the 'heathens' that they should swap roles after a while so that they too can become 'believers' Hassan al-Banna replies: 'No! A *mo'min* [believer] can never become a *kafir* [heathen], but if a *kafir* becomes a *mo'min* then it is God's will' (Episode 4). This continued religious fervour of the young Hassan al-Banna is highlighted sporadically as we see him confronted with a number of situations, which range from the difficulties of obtaining a secondary education after leaving the traditional *kuttab* [religious school], to the creation of his first secret society (Episode 5).

A week into the musalsal, the audience are introduced to the older Hassan al-Banna, played by Jordanian-Palestinian actor Iyaad Nassaar, as he embarks on his higher education in *Dar al-'Ouloum* in Cairo (Episode 7). It is at this juncture that the musalsal transitions its focus from the mobilisation of the misled Brotherhood youth of 2006, to Hassan al-Banna and the ideals in the formation of the early Brotherhood which largely takes place in rural settings. In contrast to the dark faced, plump and sinister Muhammad Mahdi 'Aakef – played by Sami Meghawri – who was the *murshid* [spiritual guide] of the Brotherhood from 2004–2010, Hassan al-Banna of the 1920s is a handsome and well-groomed character, thoughtful and multi-dimensional. While the modern structure of the organisation is portrayed as bleak, the past is romanticised with bright natural cinematic landscapes.

Following Hassan al-Banna through his journey first as a teacher in the city of Isma liyya where he formally created the Brotherhood in 1928 after preaching in coffee shops across the city, the audience is led through some of the early challenges that meet the organisation as it undertakes its stated role of *da'wa* [spreading the message]. The struggle against colonialism, funding the organisation and the emergence of different ideas are all battles that Hassan al-Banna needs to face. As the series continues, a darker side—literally and figuratively speaking—

emerges of the Brotherhood. For instance, the audience slowly witnesses Hassan al-Banna's sporadic outbreaks despite his usually calm portrayal. The actor Nassar provides both serenity and yet intensity to Hassan al-Banna's character that has led Lamis Gabir – the writer of another historical musalsal *al-Malik Farouk* [King Farouk] aired in 2007 – to comment:

One moment I would watch and get infuriated at Hassan al-Banna and at other times I would feel sympathy, this is the role of real drama. (Masr al-Naharda 23 September 2010)

It is precisely this unpredictability of Hassan al-Banna's character and his outbursts that make him a volatile hero/villain. This is particularly the case in the final few episodes where the director and writer cleverly highlight Hassan al-Banna's role in creating a militia/secret military wing while simultaneously insinuating that he was unaware of orders that were issued to assassinate key political figures including Prime Minister Ahmad Mahir (1888–1945), Judge Khazindar (d. 1948) and Prime Minister Nuqrashi (1888–1945) (Episodes 24, 25 and 27). Here we see the humanised, as well as semi-historicised Hassan al-Banna struggle over the nature of his organisation in addition to its fight against British colonialism. *Al-Gama'a* ends abruptly at Episode 28 with a dejected Hassan al-Banna in an apartment alone, while most of the major Brotherhood members have been imprisoned. The closing credits point to a second series, presumably to be aired in Ramadan 2011, although this never materialized.

Cultural production and telling history/ies

If one is to regard the specific historical association of radio, television and drama with national pedagogy – the ultimate goal being the encouragement of cultural literacy and information – *al-Gama'a* can be viewed as an educational exercise in Egyptian history and contemporary society. The musalsal serves to substantiate and re-assert nationalist [re]constructions of Egyptian history, in addition to reinforcing paradigms of social, political and religious state defined 'norms' in contemporary Egypt. In doing so, the series converged the interpretation of an historical moment with social myths.

To begin with *al-Gama'a* blurred the line between fiction and fact. For instance, speaking on the popular evening programme *Masr al-Naharda* ['Egypt Today'], presenter Khairy Ramadan said that:

al-Gama'a had entered people's discussions and had a tangible impact as a historical document. (ESC TV, Masr al-Naharda 23 September 2010)

For Khairy, the musalsal clearly served a more important role than entertaining the population during the month of Ramadan: it had educational value. Moreover, evidence that the musalsal was interpreted as a living, breathing historical document, can be seen by the Brotherhood's response.

Gamal al-Banna, Hassan al-Banna's youngest brother and a critical thinker on Islam was disappointed with the outcome, criticising the writer, Wahid Hamid, for an inaccurate historical portrayal of his brother (Ash 2007). Concerning the controversial scene of Hassan al-Banna, who repeatedly banged his head against his desk upon hearing of the news of the dissolution of his organisation and the arrest of the main party members by Prime Minister Nuqrashi Pasha in 1942, Gamal al-Banna commented, 'this didn't happen. Hassan al-Banna may have cried...but this was due to the responsibility of [being in charge of] so many families.' (ibid.). Gamal al-Banna was also critical of the way that his brother's philosophy and actions were portrayed, claiming that the musalsal purposely blurred his brother's vision of *wataniyya* [nationalism], *siyasa* [politics] and *hizb* [party], three distinct concepts and tools to serve state propaganda aims (*Dream TV*, 24 September 2010). Gamal al-Banna's interpretation of his brother's role in Egyptian history therefore firmly places Hassan al-Banna within the camp of a nationalist, fighting British colonialism whilst also practicing his religion. More broadly, the Muslim Brotherhood as an organisation was also angered by the series, issuing a statement before *al-Gama'a* had even been aired. Ahmed Seif al-Banna, son of the founder and active member of the Brotherhood, filed a lawsuit against scriptwriter Wahid Hamid. Ahmed claimed that as a member of the family and a representative of the organisation he had a legal right to view what would affect his father's image as a public and historical figure (al-Youm al-Sabi', 7 August 2010).

In addition to blurring fact and fiction, the musalsal also served to reinforce the historical grand narrative of 'great men,' or at least potentially great men in a bygone era of Egypt under British occupation. According to John Tulloch, television typically represents history either as nostalgia or as epiphenomenon: 'on one hand, history [is the] radical other, the sealed past—a lost Eden of traditional values...on the other hand, history as utterly familiar, the banal quotidian' (Tulloch 1990: 91). Indeed, Tulloch correctly argues that in addition to their specific ideological functions at particular historical moments, 'TV histories have more deeply based and systematic connections with conservatism, they reproduce an empiricist notion of history' (ibid.: 96). Put differently, TV histories often replicate the narrative of the politics of 'great men,' a romantic notion seen in *al-Gama'a*, in which Hassan al-Banna is portrayed as a fallen and potential great

leader. Here television serials, and in particular their producers, betray their own fact 'fetish' analogous to the historians 'source' (ibid.: 97).

Al-Gama'a served a dual role: it was not only a historical drama but a contemporary commentary on Egypt in 2006, but also of the near past. Abu-Lughod emphasises the importance of producers and makers of musalsalat as 'representatives that define and redefine the Egyptian Nation' (2005). Lughod has argued that television is a key instrument for the production of national culture. Borrowing Benedict Anderson's model of imagined communities, she states that TV plays an important role in the production of nations and national feelings as well as shaping the imaginaries (ibid.: 8). Anderson alone however does not explain the importance of power and hegemony and, as a result, one should also consider the 'power that is used to keep citizens in line and regimes in control and the ideologies that mask inequalities and force national homogeneity over deep cultural differences' (ibid.: 9).

Abu-Lughod's work makes a serious contribution to how the nation has been systematically defined in and by television and *al-Gama'a* highlights both the nostalgic history of the nation, as well as the grand empiricist narratives of 'great men.' Popular television presenter Khairy Ramadan commented that 'the musalsal gave the impression that Hassan al-Banna was the single most important person in modern Egyptian history' (ESC TV, Masr al-Naharda 23 September 2010). Public media personalities, from television academics to actors focussed their critiques on the character of Hasan al-Banna: 'Hasan al-Banna is equal to Hitler and Mussolini' (Actor Hussein Fahmy); 'Hasan al-Banna collaborated with the English against the Egyptian people' (Nabil Zaky) and so on.

The musalsal, while broadly discussing the contemporary political activities of the Brotherhood – against the main backdrop of the historical emergence of the religious group – links the modern political activities of the group with its long historical roots. It presents the complicated history of the Brotherhood not only as 'fact,' but also attributable wholly to one man, Hasan al-Banna. Thus, according to these interpretations, a linear historical trajectory of the Brotherhood could be traced from the early roots of the organisation. During the month of Ramadan and the immediate following months, Hassan al-Banna – who had died over sixty years earlier – was one of the most divisive and controversial characters of discussion in Egypt through an ahistorical interpretation of events.

Despite this ahistorical interpretation, programmes including musalsalat, are polysemic—they are capable of bearing multiple meanings for the individual viewer (Mullan 1997: 17). Serials vary in content and style, which are both issues that the audience can easily identify with, and in turn may or may not influence

their perspective. In the case of *al-Gama'a*, the musalsal was distinguishable from its counterparts by its cinematic quality. For instance in an interview, Muhammad Yassin, the director of the series laughed at reports that the musalsal only cost 15 million Egyptian pounds. Production costs for the serial aired in the holy month of austerity and prayer, was actually between 40 and 50 million Egyptian pounds – approximately 6.5–8.5 million U.S. dollars (*Masry al-Youm*, 10 September 2010). This placed *al-Gama'a* as one of the most expensive musalsalat in Egyptian television history, marking Yassin's television directorial debut. Appraised for its beautiful cinematic quality, the musalsal in many ways broke with the tradition of low quality shooting which characterised many previous Egyptian serials. Shot at various locations, the cinematography depicted sweeping natural landscapes, which helped the musalsal communicate the importance of space as a symbol. Both Hassan al-Banna's childhood and the discussions between Ashraf and 'Abdullah during the contemporary period, were shot against unspoilt acres of farmland. The greenery, soil and hard-working peasants in the background complimented and reasserted the traditional nationalist discourses of early twentieth century writer Tawfik al-Hakim in *'Awdat al-Ruh* [The Return of the Spirit]. The novel was famed for its usage of rural setting as an allegory of the Egyptian nationalist spirit. In contrast, the oppressively dark and confined nature of the modern Brotherhood, who meet in closed quarters and dimly lit offices, is carefully pitched to highlight the organisation and its ethos as dark, foreign and often urban.

The direct impact of this polysemic approach is that numerous genres of serials, television programmes and media outlets have given audiences the tools to be more sophisticated and to hone their own perspectives. This is the case even if audiences do not consciously embrace or choose to embrace the reading of the programme intended by the producer. As a result, the question becomes: are audiences passive receptors or do they possess agency to consume, interpret and feign opinion? Mullan has argued that viewers often, but not always, engage in meaning making: 'they do not always sit there empty minded awaiting edification. When a viewer watches TV they do not leave their histories at the living room door: neither do they abandon their cultural, class racial, economic or sexual identities' (Mullan 1997: 18). Further classifications can be added to this list including the importance of religious identity, an issue that is raised continuously in the musalsal.

Émigrés and exiles

Informal interviews were conducted with upper-middle class and/or professional Egyptians in two diasporan communities in the UK and the US during, and shortly after, the airing of the musalsal in 2010. Two key themes were of importance during the interviews: perceptions about religion and ideals of the nation and national identity in the musalsal. The subject matter of the series, as will be demonstrated, served as a commentary of the groups' own diasporic narratives. Views on religion and on the nation varied in the two groups interviewed, one of which predominately Muslim and well established, the other Coptic and largely composed of new migrants to the US. The analysis of the case studies below examines whether religion, time or reasons for emigrating from Egypt played a role in their interpretation and engagement with the musalsal.

In the UK, interviews were conducted with eight families (33 persons in total); six families were 'practicing' and/or considered themselves 'cultural' or sociological Muslims (Kuhle 2010: 5). In addition, interviews were conducted with two families who were Copts. All interviewed subjects in this group were long-term migrants to the UK, having lived in the South of England for between twenty-five and forty years. Many had children who were born and raised in their adopted country, who were also interviewed. The serial was watched in the evenings on satellite television. Interviews and informal discussions were also conducted in the US, with a smaller and more vocal diasporan group. Conducted over a relatively short time period, all of the four families (20 people) spoken to were regularly practicing Copts who self-identified as the 'true Egyptians' and frequently mentioned their persecution and their former life with 'Muslims.' Unlike the UK-based group, the Coptic families in the US were more recent migrants, having arrived over the last ten years. Due to the time differences, these individuals watched the musalsal in a downloaded format from the Internet or and circulated the DVD to one another. All interviews were conducted in Arabic, English or a mixture of both languages. All names given below are pseudonyms.

These two particular diasporan groups vary from one another considerably, as will be discussed in more detail. These differences are not only due to their demographic backgrounds and length time in diaspora, but are also due to the ways in which both groups defined their experiences and understandings of the concept of 'diaspora.' Edward Said's distinction between exile, refugee, expatriate and émigré is a useful tool here in better understanding the differences of these two diasporan communities (Said 2000: 178). All UK interviewees, irrespective of religious affiliation, identified themselves as émigrés, largely due to economic, employment or educational purposes. Having worked in the UK for a quarter

of a century or longer, they all actively contributed to society via taxation to the state. Many vocalised their respect for the efficiency and bureaucracy of Britain, in contrast to their native Egypt. Several noted their opposition to the 2003 Iraq War and in particular their opportunity to publically protest in opposition to Blair's government. For them, this served as evidence of democracy in practice. Here there seems to be no contradiction between being an active member and contributor to society and opposing the state on certain issues. This, however, stands in contrast to the Coptic group based in the US, who rather than viewing themselves as émigrés, regarded themselves as exiles. Unlike the most common usage of the word exile, which denotes being forced out of a country of origin (this is often associated with Palestinians when used in an Arab context), members of this diasporan community articulated their chosen exile out of fear of religious persecution and discrimination based on practising Christianity in the predominately Muslim country. Only one family in the US-based group, who had emigrated in the early 1980s, discussed economic and employment issues as their reason for emigration. Interestingly, several individuals within the U.S. group emphasised the importance of being a 'good citizen' by adopting 'civilised ideals', unlike what they perceived to be the case in Egypt, which was often spoken in terms of the 'backwards East'.

Zahia Smail Salhi has argued that regardless of reasons of 'exile,' communities keep 'an idealised image of home as a paradise they were forced to flee' (2006: 3). While individuals in the U.S. group did not always view Egypt as 'paradise,' as the case studies reveal, they nonetheless maintained a longing for an idealised nation, even if they did not or indeed could no longer claim it to be 'home.' Emphasis on a micro-community in the diaspora is evident in both groups. This manifests itself most clearly during special celebrations, where a sense of belonging to this artificial entity induces solidarity and consolidates the group sense of identity. In considering this, the following section examines some of the key themes of *al-Gama'á*, looking at state and religion while analysing how certain scenes in the musalsal were interpreted by specific diasporan audiences. For both the British and the American groups, their own national and religious identities are constantly being scrutinised and re-negotiated in light of their diasporan lives, adding an additional interesting dynamic.

'Religion is for god and the nation is for all'

If we are to accept a variation of Anderson's model of nations as constructions of imagined communities, it follows then, that representations of Egypt in written, oral or visual format are also a product of the same process. They are imagined,

mythical or constructed to create a national narrative. For instance, Egyptian and Western historiography has portrayed the 1919 revolution as a moment of Egyptian national unity between religious communities against British hegemony (Al-Bishiri 1980: 133–163). Writing on the revolution, Coptic historian Milad Hanna argues that: ‘March 1919 instilled feelings that are prevalent in the conscience of every Egyptian until today and these are that ‘religion is for God, and the nation is for all’ [as well as] the slogan ‘long live the crescent [entwined] with the cross’ (Hanna 1980: 77). While the 1919 revolution is not covered in the *musalsal*, the ongoing propagation of the nationalist myth that Egyptians in a united and monolithic manner put the country first and foremost above religion, and that Muslims, Copts and indeed Jews lived harmoniously side-by-side in Egypt, is a theme frequently portrayed. Consciously or not, there is a national ‘narrative of unity’ that is repeated by the state as well as some Egyptians. An example of this could be seen during the 2011 uprising when banners of the cross and crescent were held in Tahrir Square.

In an early episode of the series this narrative of unity is emphasised. A young Hassan al-Banna while working in his father’s watch repair shop reminds the viewer of the amicable relations where each religion is able to practice its faith freely, so long as it is clear which community one belongs to, and that one does not infringe on the other. Hassan al-Banna tells a man who has asked for his watch to be repaired to go and perform his evening prayers, after which the watch will be ready. The man awkwardly replies he has not performed his ablutions, to which Hassan al-Banna rebukes the man and tells him that he should not neglect his Islamic duty. Upon finding out that the man is in fact a Copt, Hassan al-Banna replies, ‘Why didn’t you say?! Sit down and I will put some music on by Daoud Hosni,’ a Jewish Musician (Episode 5). The theme of religious freedom of practices within the nation continues throughout *al-Gama’a*, when in 1948 a series of bomb attacks are carried out against the Jewish populations living in Egypt, most notable in *Harat al-Yahud* [the Jewish alleyways]. This leads Prime Minister Nuqrashi Pasha to state:

these are Egyptians [referring to the Jews] that are killed, go to Israel if you want a war.
(Episode 25)

A distinction is clearly being made between Egyptian Jews and the political reality of the new Zionist state of Israel. This is the portrayal of national unity in the face of discord at its best.

For Samiha and her husband, however, who have lived in the US for seven years, these scenes prompted a tirade of commentary explicitly highlighting the unlikelihood of this scenario. Instead she recalled how she as a Copt had

frequently faced insults in the streets during Ramadan for entering a coffee shop while the Muslims were fasting:

Who are they kidding when they try to present an image of tolerance?

When asked what Samiha meant by 'they', she explained 'the makers, society, the Muslims,' all three parties here are pitched as a cohesive 'other'. Samiha, while aware of the role of production, which she later mentioned specifically, saw no reality in the scene, and no romanticisation of tolerance. More importantly, this scene was not interpreted as a possible scenario of a 'by-gone era', but instead a metaphor for contemporary Cairene life – one which she did not agree with. A recent spate of films and musalsalat in Egypt, the most famous of which is the 2008 box office hit *Hassan wa Murqus* [Hassan and Marcus], starring 'Omar al-Sherif and 'Adel Imam, as a Muslim and Copt who switch places in order to avoid religious extremists who threaten their lives, have appeared. The final scene of the film is an image of Alexandria in sectarian flames as Hassan and Murqus walk through the city hand in hand in an image of national unity. Lina Khatib has argued that there is a tendency in recent discourse, be it film or rhetoric, to highlight 'selective integration, celebrating the nationalism of the Copts while portraying Islamic fundamentalists as intolerant of people from other religions' (Khatib 2006: 68). Interestingly, *Hassan wa Murqus* was one of the first attempts which places equal emphasis on both the Muslim and Coptic communities as responsible actors that possess agency to hate, whilst also alluding to 'invisible hands'. These non-specified entities, or 'hands', are often depicted as foreign – a theme also apparent post 2011 – and are the primary instigators of general intolerance. Thus, both communities according to the film's portrayal could be celebrated as nationalists who, occasionally disagreed, just as brothers often do, but were united against the extremist invisible threat/s. Interestingly, while *al-Gama'a* invokes the importance of Jews in Egyptian national unity and memory, *Hassan wa Murqus* – which was loosely based on the 1954 play *Hassan, Murqus wa Cohen*, erases the memory by leaving Jews out.

Examining interpretations and the theme of unity and national brotherhood, the UK group was quick to accept the images and interpretations revealed in *al-Gama'a*. Significantly, more than one Muslim and indeed both Coptic families interviewed in this group recalled a story which involved a neighbour who was a Copt/Muslim and who "was like a brother/sister". As Fouad, a Copt who lives in the UK recalled:

[W]e lived through the heyday of Nasser – he educated us, we were schooled, we stood on the international stage and held our head up high, there was no difference made between religions.

Fouad's interpretation of religious tolerance is underpinned by his own sense of patriotism and nationalist sentiment. At 67 years old, he asserted that he was a child of Nasser, the fight against imperialism and an Arab socialist. For Fouad, *al-Gama'a* and in particular the image of communal national unity against the British were familiar, part of an earlier struggle which continued through a straight trajectory to the time of his hero Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser (another 'great man'). Fouad's view as a Copt found resonance with the UK group regardless of faith. When asked how Fouad accounted for a very different interpretation of the watchmaking scene in *al-Gama'a* by U.S. Copts he shrugged and replied:

[T]here is a lot of politics involved, I don't understand the reasons.

The mention of 'politics' by Fouad in relation to Samiha's experience is worth noting. As Samiha claims those who had left Egypt in an earlier phase never saw the real suffering that Copts recently underwent. This is a reference to the systematic policies of discrimination that increased under Anwar al-Sadat and continued into the reign of Mubarak. These measures ranged from difficulties in gaining repair and church building permits, to attacks on the Coptic community (Ibrahim 2010: 175–179). In turn, many Copts, both within Egypt and abroad in diaspora, increasingly viewed their patriarch, the late Shenouda III (1971–2012), as the spiritual but also communal representative of the community. It is precisely this community politics that Fouad is presumably talking about. Yet, interestingly – and in contrast to the standardised historiography on communal discord in Egypt – discrimination also occurred under the reign of Nasser. Traction for the discourse of systematic discrimination only really occurred during the reign of Sadat and Shenouda. For Samiha, it was difficult to identify with the portrayal of tolerance as her own experience, one born out of the 1970s and 1980s is in contrast to Fouad's romantic nationalism. Here, the storyline of *al-Gama'a* in the interpretation of Samiha and Fouad is linked to generation, time and place in diaspora.

Good Islam, bad Islam

'Although the Egyptian state sometimes presents itself as 'secular', its domestic political strategy employs a mixture of both appropriating and excluding religious discourse' (Armbrust 2002: 923). Evidence of this can be seen post–2011 when Salafis benefited from the confrontation between the Mubarak regime and the Muslim Brotherhood. According to al-Anani and Malik, 'To diminish the political and social appeal of the Muslim Brotherhood, the regime gave more space and venues for the Salafis to spread their views and expand their social

network. Moreover, Mubarak employed the political quietism of Salafism to counter-balance the Muslim Brotherhood' (al-Anani and Malik 2013: 61). Traditionally many Salafi scholars prohibit revolt or rebellion against a Muslim ruler (*Khurooj*), even if he is unjust. While Salafi Islam was not being promoted in the case of *al-Gama'a*, viewers were nonetheless presented with two extreme examples of Islam: state endorsed 'moderate' practice and 'unacceptable' Islam.

As a result, there was no evidence of the plurality of Islamic practises and political Islam. For instance, early on in the series 'Abd al-Hamid Yunis, played by Salah 'Abd Allah, asks his son Taymour, the medical student who has been arrested by *Amn al-Dawla* [State Security Investigations Service]: 'Why my son? What did we do to you to deserve this treatment? Wasn't the house you were raised in Muslim?' (Episode 3). Here, all groups interviewed expressed their emotional solidarity with 'Abd al-Hamid Yunis, who from the opening scene in the musical highlighted his 'acceptable' level of piety as he was portrayed reciting the names of Allah to himself while driving along the side of the road (Episode 1). For one of the Coptic interviewees, this reminded him of the Coptic folkloric songs evoking saints, which he regularly played in his own car. 'Abd al-Hamid Yunis is portrayed as the hard-working father, humble and self-reflective, a pillar of his 'Abassiyah community with a quiet pride in his children. This image of a father is highlighted when Assad from London commented that 'the man ['Abd al-Hamid Yunis] is good – he performs his duty to God and his family' in reference to the scene where we see 'Abdul-Hamid performs his morning *fajr* prayers followed by standing in a bread queue (Episode 2). 'Abd al-Hamid Yunis is the perfect head of the family. These comments stand in contrast to the startling scenes of young Brotherhood members who menacingly storm the university campus dressed in militia outfits. There is a generational gap here: 'Abd al-Hamid Yunis's piety is traditional and peaceful; the youth are modern and vengeful, which was described by one interviewee in London named Assad as such: 'the young are *mutishadiyyn* [hardliners]'. Unlike the perfect paternal character, the traditional embodiment of the Egyptian father, the youth do not perform their role as the perfect obedient and subservient child.

This discussion of 'good Islam', or at least acceptable Islam, is – in addition to quiet piety – also linked to nationalism. *Al-Gama'a* clearly portrays Egyptian Islam, as a 'moderate' version, which does not follow a particular *madhhab* [school], but rather is an amalgamation of traditions. As a result, on several occasions Hassan al-Banna's relations with the Levantine scholar and Islamic reformist, Rashid Rida (1865–1935), a disciple of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani are highlighted. Links and regular citations of Hassan al-Banna's relationship with 'Abd al-'Aziz, later

to be the king of Saudi Arabia are also made. These foreign influences highlight the corruption of the 'good' Egyptian Islam, exemplified by Hassan al-Banna's old teacher, the blind Shaykh Zahran who regularly checks Hassan al-Banna's zealous streak in the early episodes. Whereas Shaykh Zahran's Islam is portrayed in the village of Mahmoudiyya against the backdrop of a rural setting, the foreign Rashid Rida is always met in a dark office in urban Cairo. Once again, Shaykh Zahran, like 'Abd al-Hamid Yunis, is portrayed as the simple but Egyptian paternal figure; stern on occasion but also loving. In contrast, Rashid Rida's character, which is never fully explored, represents, like his 'menacing Islam,' quick appearances of a foreign intruder to remind the audience of a dark undertone.

For several interviewees from the Coptic diaspora community, the links portrayed between Hassan al-Banna and 'foreign Islam,' particularly with Rashid Rida and the association, serves as evidence of the long-established roots of what the Coptic interviewee Monika termed as 'terrorism.' For her, a straight trajectory can be drawn between Hassan al-Banna's portrayal and interactions in the 1930s, and the militia of 2006. All of this underlies the menacing tones of the organisation. Interestingly, when Monika is asked about her opinion of 'Abd al-Hamid Yunis she, while holding sympathy of him as a father and recognising that 'he seems like a nice man,' was unable to reconcile the fact that his son was a terrorist. For her, Taymour's actions were logically linked to a failure in 'Abd al-Hamid Yunis's upbringing of his son. In contrast, her interpretation of the blind Shaykh Zahran was one of acceptability: 'he is a simple traditional teacher.' For Monika, therefore, there is a discourse of good or acceptable Islam as much as there is a discourse of bad Islam.

Conclusion

A reading of the *al-Gama'a* would be very interesting in light of the Egyptian uprisings of 25 January 2011. It is likely that the on-going demonstrations in Egypt and the election of a Muslim Brotherhood president in June 2012 may have contributed to the failure of a second series of *al-Gama'a*, materialising as expected during Ramadan 2011. *Al-Gama'a* as both a semi-historical document, but also a fictitious critique of contemporary Cairene political life, cleverly navigates a trajectory in which the early, legitimate and acceptable role of Hassan al-Banna and his piety could be linked to the nationalist cause: the struggle against the British. Both diasporan audiences interviewed engaged with the production, sometimes consciously as fiction but also as a commentary of their own identification with socio-political life in Egypt. The main themes considered – religion and nation – revealed some interesting tendencies throughout the diasporan

communities. As argued, the US-based group (all Copts) were more likely to be critical of national unity, while in contrast the UK subjects identified strongly with images of unity through tolerance. This is particularly of interest since the British group was not made up of one religious group but contained both Copts and Muslims. Thus, it is not possible to make definitive statements concerning religion and reaction to the *musalsal*. It is far more likely that time in diaspora, including reasons for leaving Egypt, as well as socio-economic standing, play a significant role in the responses. This is a notion which the American diaspora group largely dismissed as romanticisation. Regarding piety and acceptable levels of practice, all groups identified a 'legitimate' Islam in contrast to that which was unacceptable. The clever production of dark confined spaces, offered in large part contempt for the practise of organised/politicised Islam, while in contrast unorganised or private piety was acceptable. Allusions to foreign interventions were keenly picked up by the U.S. group as potential 'terrorists.' For the two diasporan groups, the *musalsal* clearly served as a benchmark to which their own identities, memories and negotiations of self could be weighed against.

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Lise Paulsen Galal

Minority religion mediated: Contesting representation

Introduction¹

In 2004, *Baheb el-Cima* [I love cinema] was screened in Egyptian cinemas as the first Egyptian commercially produced feature film that placed its story in a solely Coptic environment. *Baheb el-Cima* was inspired by the globally praised Italian movie *Cinema Paradiso* (1988) and with its Egyptian mainstream film language and its unique story, the film was likely to expect some success. However, the choice of a Coptic environment led to protests and legal proceedings. A Coptic priest filed a lawsuit to stop the film for ridiculing the Christian doctrine and Christian believers, and secular Copts protested against what they saw as a uniform representation of Copts as religious fundamentalists (Lindsey 2004). A few years later, another commercially produced film, *Hassan wa Murqus* ([Hassan and Marcus]; 2008) holding a Coptic key figure was released. Contrary to *Baheb el-Cima*, it did not stir up any larger controversy among Copts despite its humorous depiction of Coptic religious practices, among other things. However, some Facebook groups called for a boycott of the film, accusing the leading actor, Adel Imam, for apostasy from Islam because he played – and thus embodies – a Christian theology professor in the film.

In order to understand why many Copts – at least in public – did not welcome *Baheb el-Cima* in comparison to *Hassan wa Murqus*, I look at how the narratives of the films collide and become inevitable zones of struggle in the local political and cultural contexts related to Copts' precarious situation. By examining the story in its context(s) of reception (Siapera 2010: 111), we can better understand how Copts use public imaginaries in negotiating identity and belonging.

In this chapter, I will analyse the local narratives of and responses to the two films in order to identify contested places of minority religion and religious identities in Egyptian public. At the core of the analysis is the ascription of meaning to differences by the films and by the public and how these converge and create

1 I want to thank the editor Ehab Galal, two anonymous reviewers as well as my colleagues Birgitta Frello and Sara Lei Sparre for valuable comments and suggestions for revisions. Part of this chapter's argument has previously been published in Danish in the online journal *Akademisk Kvarter*.

unforeseen responses. Mediated representations of Copts in Egypt have regularly led to public protests (cf. Elsässer 2010; Iskander 2012a). Thus the protests against *Baheb el-Cima* are part of ongoing negotiations of the display of religion and of Muslim-Copt relations in public, which has led to what Samia Mehrz (2010) has defined as ‘culture wars.’ In order to examine the ascriptions of meaning to differences, the chapter will proceed as follows: First, I give a short introduction to the historical background on the mediations of Copts in Egyptian media leading to the analytical approach of regimes of representation. Second, I introduce the two films followed by an analysis of public responses. The analysis reveals how the films’ narratives of freedom conflate with narratives of the nation, the minority and religion.

From silence to noise: the place of Copts in Egyptian media

Baheb el-Cima broke the cinematic silence that until then had characterised the depiction of Copts in film. Despite a huge Egyptian film production of around 2,500 movies from 1920s until the middle of 1990s, almost no movie seriously deals with a Coptic figure (Shafik 1998). In her book on Egyptian cinema, Shafik argues that Copts were represented in rather stereotypic roles until national independence in 1952. After independence they were though more or less non-existent in Egyptian movies. For instance, representations of religious rituals, feasts, weddings and funerals used pictures and words from the Islamic tradition. Depiction of Christian religious rituals and feasts were lacking, as were movies about the Coptic history in Egypt. According to Shafik, the film *Broken Images* (1986), which showed an old Coptic woman’s funeral, was the first Egyptian movie to depict a Coptic ceremony (Shafik 1998: 25).

The silencing of Coptic figures and traditions reflects the attempt by the state to create a national narrative and imagined community by promoting the idea of a secular and modern national citizen (Abu-Lughod 2005). When religion was depicted in Egyptian film and TV, it was as Muslim traditional values and ritual practices, which constructed an image of the Egyptian as being Muslim, although secular (Abu-Lughod 2005; Shafik 1998). With islamisation, the struggle over religion and religious differences also became an issue of the media. Religious conflicts (between Muslims and between Muslims and Christians) became a prevailing issue in the media due to increasing violence in the 1980s and beginning of 1990s (Zaki 1995). After 1994, however, when the religious conflicts peaked, the Mubarak government in Egypt tried to restrain controversial representation, followed by a strategy of positively recognizing the presence of both Muslim and Coptic religious communities (Ibrahim 1996: 26).

In the new millennium, the Mubarak regime increasingly liberalised the media field. As a result, the so-called Coptic issue transformed from being taboo in the Egyptian public to becoming a popular topic (Elsässer 2010: 131). Furthermore, film producers were encouraged to include Copts as cinematic figures (Abu-Lughod 2005; Mehrez 2010; Shafik 2007).² This break with silence has resulted in creating and expanding a Coptic public, as argued by Elsässer (2010: 132). This expansion has led to negotiations of the borders of such a public; the contestations over *Baheb el-Cima* can be seen as a consequence. Contestations over representation prevail and are deeply embedded in dominant discourses on Egyptian national identity and belonging that defend a united Egyptian public. In her analysis of the Egyptian state-owned newspaper *al-Ahram*'s coverage of sectarian violence from 2005–2010, Elizabeth Iskander demonstrates how *al-Ahram* reconstructs the Egyptian public as united through different discursive strategies (Iskander 2012a). These strategies are well known in constructions of nationalism, as displayed by Anderson (2010) and Billig (1995). First, the strategy is to choose events from history that confirm the narrative of unity, such as the 1919 Revolution in Egypt, while leaving out the events that challenge this narrative. The second strategy is to blame 'outsiders' for any conflicts between Muslims and Copts by referring to their interference, effectively constructing a 'true' national 'Us' versus 'the Others'. A third strategy is to point at extremists (versus moderates) among Muslims as well as Copts as those who ruin an otherwise harmonious relationship (Iskander 2012a: 33). These strategies are also supported by Coptic actors, such as the Coptic-Orthodox Church, as argued by Galal (2012).

The Coptic Orthodox Church has been a key player in the on-going cultural struggle to define Coptic faith and life. Since the late nineteenth century, this has mainly been a struggle between the Coptic Church and the Coptic lay people (Carter 1986), and with the revival of the Coptic Church in the second half of the twentieth century, it has been the winner of the internal Coptic struggle (Galal 2012). Under the Mubarak regime, the social-political context with regard to Copts' position was generally defined by the regime's and the Coptic Orthodox Church's shared desire for stability. It was thus in their mutual interest to play

2 Since the beginning of the new millennium, the liberalisation of the Egyptian media market has especially changed TV and film production. Hence, there are now more private Egyptian television channels and production companies. Still, state censorship and different institutionalised forms limiting the freedom of speech and political opposition are still alive (see e.g. Mehrez 2010), as the events of 25 January 2011 and 30 June 2013 have confirmed.

down religious conflict while emphasising sameness in nationality (Fawzi 1998; Hasan 2003; Ibrahim 1996). This arrangement between the state and church played a crucial role in Coptic identity politics and the revival of the Church, of which the late Coptic Orthodox pope Shenouda was the principal architect. Internally within the Coptic community, the key element of the revival was the strengthening of various religious and social practices such as Sunday schools, theological seminars for laypeople, Coptic language instruction, as well as the resurgence of monasteries – all elements that brought the individual Copt closer to the church. As a consequence, institutional changes also provided Copts with a space – or counter public – for being Christians: the Church. The successful institutionalisation explains why the Church has – despite the existence of other Coptic voices and through the state-loyal strategy – succeeded in obtaining an officially legitimate role of defining what it means to be Coptic, and thus how Copts are different from and at the same time the same as the majority of Egyptians (Galal 2012). In constructing narratives on the generic Egyptianness of the Church and by rejecting the interference by people outside Egypt, the Church confirms as an overall approach the unity-discourse (ibid.). However, responses such as those against *Baheb el-Cima* also demonstrate that Copts are placed in an ambiguous double bind between promoting unity while at the same time using increasing public awareness to fight against prejudices and discrimination. As Elsässer argues, the liberalisation has led to acknowledgements of the problems that Copts face but also to increasing sectarian tensions that leave the Copts in a precarious situation (2010: 132). The development illustrates how global media pluralism has strengthened the reach, spread and movement of narratives across borders and diverse media. Thus, full-length versions of both *Baheb el-Cima* and *Hassan wa Murqus* can now be found on YouTube. The transnationality and transmediality (cf. Chapter one of this volume) has led to the circulation of mediated narratives in unstable, multiple and unpredictable directions (cf. Robertson 1993; Hjarvard 2009). As in the case of *Baheb el-Cima*, which is produced by an independent production company (Arab Production and Distribution Company), global media is increasingly released, detached and less embedded in state or other national established cultural institutions than national media traditionally has been (Hjarvard 2009). The advent of pluralistic media not only fosters the freedom of plural representation, but also the freedom to contest and reject representations. Consequently, the role of the Church is increasingly being challenged, not only by filmmakers but also by oppositional forces among Coptic civil society (Rowe 2009; Soliman 2006).

Media researcher Eugenia Siapera argues that it is constructions of difference – or as she phrases it, ‘differentiations’ – that make the struggle about representation a crucial aspect of globalization. As far as representations have the potential to produce sameness as well as difference, it is these differential representations that feed religious, cultural and political struggle (Siapera 2010). Both *Baheb el-Cima* and *Hassan wa Murqus* produce sameness and differences between Muslims and Copts, however very differently. In order to gain access to multiple constructions of differences, Siapera suggests analysing the ‘regimes of representation.’ The term is inspired by Foucault’s ‘regimes of truth,’ referring to ‘certain ideas and discourses with certain power structures and mechanisms which then sustain these as the ‘truth’ (Siapera 2010: 131). The use of the concept ‘regime’ stresses its degree of regularity and power.

In the following I will look into how different regimes of representation of Coptic-Muslim relations are produced and consumed in specific political and (inter)discursive contexts, and how mediated narratives become combat zones in local (and global) political and cultural contexts. While audience research to a large extent has privileged private and individual negotiations of identity stemming from watching TV and films, I focus on the public struggle over representation and hence identity politics in contemporary Egypt. The Coptic criticism, regardless from which side, is a criticism of what they consider the film’s differentiation of the Christian Egyptian as ‘the Other.’ I do not present a full analysis of the two films. Instead I highlight how the relationship between Muslims and Copts is presented and how Copts, on the basis of multiple difference regimes, are constructed and interpreted as different or/and the same. The public audience responses that are included in the analysis are from newspaper articles and TV debates, as well as from researchers, primarily Mehrez (2010) and Shafik (2007).

Two movies, two stories about freedom

The movies *Baheb el-Cima* and *Hassan wa Murqus* are both stories about political and religious freedom. *Baheb el-Cima* tells the story of a Coptic family in a Coptic environment in the 1960s in Cairo. *Hassan wa Murqus* tells the story of a Muslim and a Coptic family who cross each others’ paths during a time of religious radicalisation and terror threats in Egypt. Both films particularly ridicule and criticise religious fanatics.

Baheb el-Cima

The main figure in *Baheb el-Cima* is the six-year-old boy, Na'im, who is deeply fascinated by the cinematic world. To him, movies are the entrance to a world with music, love, sorrow, loss, and sexuality – all things that he starts realizing are part of his family's life. Na'im lives together with his parents and sister in Shubra, a big and popular neighbourhood in Cairo with a large number of Christian residents and churches. By presenting its story in a realist and humoristic form, *Baheb el-Cima*³ is inscribed in a popular and dominant tradition within Egyptian film production (Shafik 2007). The story of *Baheb el-Cima* is first and foremost a story about the struggle for freedom, especially the artistic freedom, but also the political and religious freedom. The film is also the result of increased freedom, since it would most likely not have been permitted to be screened in Egypt a few years earlier.

The introduction to *Baheb el-Cima* is a kaleidoscopic view of the neighbourhood and the key figures of the film. The view is followed by a voice revealing that the film narrative, as in *Cinema Paradiso*, is the scriptwriter looking back on his childhood from adulthood. The time of the film is 1966–67 and ends with the defeat to Israel in 1967. The pictured memories of Na'im, which include autobiographical elements from the screenwriter's (Hani Fawzi) life, are sweet and nostalgic – an interpretation of the historical past of Egypt. A key topic is that the family is struggling with the father's religiosity. One of the first scenes in the film shows how the father threatens Na'im with Satan and the fire of hell, because he is watching movies and they are according to the father *haram* [sinful] and therefore forbidden. Also the mother suffers due to the religiosity of her husband that makes him reject enjoying life together with his family. An example is that he is keeping the Coptic Orthodox fast, which according to the father means that he cannot have sexual relation with his wife.⁴ The mother is a headmaster at a public school, but was previously a keen painter. When by accident an artist discovers her talent, he encourages her to seek freedom and leave the public

3 Furthermore, the title of the film addresses a broader Egyptian audience, given that the kind of spelling is taken from Egyptian dialect instead of using the more correct form '*al Cinema*'.

4 The Coptic Orthodox Church is the original Church in Egypt and was established in the year 42. More than 90% of Egyptian Christians are Orthodox Copts. One of the dogmas of the Church is fasting, which means that the believer has to abstain from eating animal products for 210 days yearly.

school's Nasserist, oppressive and patriarchal lack of imagination. They end up having an affair.

Na'im represents the child's honest and open-minded view of the world. He watches his father praying and laughs at his anxious and heartfelt prayers. He watches people quarrelling and fighting in the Church. He watches his young aunt kissing her boyfriend, and he laughs again and again. On his birthday, the father forbids the visitors to sing the birthday song and forbids the boy to go to the cinema, well knowing that this is the only thing he wants. Na'im angrily yells: 'kullu haga haram haram' [everything is sinful, sinful]. Thus, free fantasy, art, and human relations are presented as in opposition to religion in its fanatic form as displayed by the father's manner of practicing religion.

The father abandons his way of practicing religion when he is told that he is seriously ill. He then takes his son to the cinema and goes with the family on holiday. He once again shows interest in his wife and after a short while dies in his home. As Shafik also argues, the film can obviously be interpreted as a critique of every form of religious fanaticism and fundamentalism, and hence, also of the increasing islamisation of Egyptian society since 1967 (2007). Those who worked on the movie also suggested this line of interpretation. The director, Osama Fawzi, emphasises that the film is not against the Christians or specific groups, but against extremism of any kind (El-Rashidi 2004a).

Seen in the perspective of what film creators such as scriptwriter Hani Fawzi and director Osama Fawzi face in Egypt, the film may also, as also argued by Mehrez (2010), be seen as a critique of oppression in a much broader sense: the oppression of artistic and individual freedom, as well as of political, cultural, social and religious freedom. Hani Fawzi had previously written the film *Film Hindi* [Indian Film] released in 2003 about the friendship between a Muslim and a Copt and how they discovered that their friendship was more important to stand up for than their engagements to each of their dishonest fiancées, who have the same religious background as them. It took nine years to obtain permission to screen it (Mehrez 2010: 194). During these nine years, the script had gone through an absurd numbers of censorship committees and so many scenes had been removed or rewritten that not much of the original film was left. Mehrez argues that *Baheb el-Cima* might be seen as the writer's critique of the artistic limitations put on Film Hindi (ibid.). Moreover, in the film, it is not only the religious authorities (father and Church), who are criticised. It is also the 'father' of the nation: President Nasser, the authoritarian state and any other kind of patriarchal authority. Na'im literally urinates at the family doctor and later at the church, when he urinates on the priest and the congregation from the gallery. As

for Na'im's father, he gets fired, after which he is interrogated and beaten up by the security police because he as a civil servant had tried to help a poor family. Thus, the father ends up becoming both religious and political disillusioned.

Hassan wa Murqus

In 2008, the film *Hassan wa Murqus* was released. Taking the title of a famous play first introduced in 1945 called *Hassan, Murqus and Kuhein* (cf. Galal 2003), it depicts the difficult friendship between a Muslim and a Coptic man, leaving out the Jewish Kuhein in the original play.⁵ The film was directed by Rami Imam⁶ and is a screwball comedy with two of the most famous actors in Egypt as well as in the Arab world in the leading roles: Adel Imam and Omar Sharif. As such, it can be considered part of mainstream and commercial Egyptian film production. The two protagonists include a Christian theology professor (Adel Iman) and a faithful Muslim man (Omar Sherif), who independently of each other are asked to change identity due to Islamist terrorists treat against them by the security police. Thus the Christian Adel Iman becomes a Muslim sheikh with the name of Hassan, and the Muslim Omar Sherif becomes a faithful Christian with the name of Murqus. After various complications, they end up becoming neighbours in Alexandria. Since they don't know the other man's change of identity, they take each other's identity as face value believing that they are both either Christians or Muslims. Therefore they meet each other with grand politeness, friendship, and they do not mind that their son and daughter become friends, since they also believe they are the same behind their cover. When they find out that 'they are not the same,' they start to despise and avoid each other. In the end they reconcile and the movie ends by the Muslim and Christian family joining hands walking without being hurt in the midst of a violent uprising against the government in the street.⁷

According to screen writer Yousef Maati, one of the messages he tried to convey is of love (Kneil 2008). Although the movie pictures the mutual mistrust between Christians and Muslims, none of the parties are particularly demonised. Rather it is the religious fanatics who are pictured as hypocrites because they

5 See also Ibrahim's chapter in this volume.

6 Rami Imam is director and actor and son of Adel Imam. He also directed the TV-serial *Ayza Atgawez* ([I want to marry]; 2010).

7 This was the narrative being true during the 25 January uprising in 2011 in Egypt. Worldwide, the media transmitted pictures of Copts and Muslims joining a common cause at Tahrir place.

support national unity in public but otherwise slander each other. Muslim fanatics accuse Christians of committing treason, while the Christians blame Muslims for discrimination. The security police are also ridiculed as incompetent and a danger to national unity. Since the main message of the film is national unity, and the conflicts are inscribed within human greed and suspicion and not in sectarian strife per se, picturing the conflicts is primarily non-controversial.

Contesting narratives of Us and Them

The lawsuits filed against *Baheb el-Cima* from both a Coptic priest and secular Copts may, as argued by Shafik (2007), be the result of an allegorical reading of the film. The family and the family's way of life are interpreted by the critics as a stereotypical and generalised presentation of all Christian Egyptians' way of life. By presenting the adultery of the mother as the result of the father's stubborn and fierce observance of the fast, including his sexual abstinence, observing a religious tradition is presented as the direct catalyst for sinful behaviour. Beside the mother's adultery, the more indelicate scenes provoke the critics – for instance where Na'im pees from the gallery of the church and when the young lovers kiss in the church tower (Mehrez 2010; El-Rashidi 2004a).

Paradoxically, the critics on one hand criticise *Baheb el-Cima* for presenting a stereotypical and generalised 'Other.' On the other hand, they reject the family as representative of all Coptic Orthodox Christians, since the marriage is atypical and against Orthodox doctrine because the mother is a Protestant and the father Coptic Orthodox. As for the more secular Copts, they criticise the film from the opposite perspective, rejecting the presentation of Copts being religiously conservative. So, while both groups criticise the film for giving the wrong picture of believers, Church-affiliated spokesmen condemn the lack of true belief, while the seculars rebuff the imagery as too religious. These groups of Copts seem to read the film *oppositionally* – that is in opposition to the dominant narrative of freedom presented in the film. The oppositional reading is one of three decoding positions, suggested by Stuart Hall (1980), who put forward an analytical distinction between the dominant, the negotiating, and the oppositional decoding of audiences. The oppositional reading must be examined in the context of minority-majority relations in Egypt to understand why the dominant position as in the case of *Baheb el-Cima* is rejected.

The lack of Coptic protests against *Hassan wa Murqus* add to the understanding of the potential dominant readings as well as of the influence of the context. A crucial aspect is how the Muslim-Coptic relationship has been defined and attempted to be managed by state, Church and other players. *Hassan wa Murqus*

embodies the dominant unity narrative of national brotherhood between Muslims and Copts in accordance with the narratives of the most powerful players, the regime and the Church. Thus, Coptic religious players do not find reason to object. Neither the Muslim protesters challenge the dominant reading of national unity, but rather question the secular role of religion in society. To understand this contextual embeddedness, I suggest exploring the protests as diverse readings of the two films and their convergence with other narratives. According to Siapera, rejections and acceptances are closely related to how the representation of difference and sameness is interpreted by the audience (2010). In the following, I identify three narratives that are strongly connected with constructions of difference: the right to difference, the right to equality and the right to religion. Obviously, these three narratives are mutually connected, but the focus changes in accordance with displacements between them.

The right to difference

The reason for protesting may be explained not only by resistance to the emergence of new forms of representations, but also by a change in a minority's power of definition. The very limited filmic representation of the Coptic minority in the twentieth century seemed to assign the Copt with folkloristic characteristics and/or depict him or her as a comical, laughable figure (Shafik 2007: 24). These stereotypical portrayals can be seen as stemming from a domesticated difference regime. Siapera suggests three principal strategies for media representation of difference emerging from majority or mainstream media: the domesticated difference regime, the racist difference regime, and the commercial difference regime (Siapera 2010: 147). The domesticated difference regime pictures differences as superficial, reassuring and not threatening to the order of things. Differences are mostly depicted as folkloristic aspects or as elements that denote sameness, or as unthreatening mixtures or hybrids (*ibid.*). The protests against *Baheb el-Cima* suggested that the opponents did not interpret the film as representing a domesticated difference regime, but rather a racist difference regime. The racist difference regime constructs differences as determined by essential biological or cultural characteristics that are unchangeable. Differences within this regime are a threat to the order of things, since 'racial' characteristics of the 'Others' are considered irrational or even violent (Siapera 2010: 147). Thus, whereas the state had aimed to encourage inclusive narratives, Coptic opponents saw a regime that constructed Copts as members of a specific group, whose religion was not only ascribed to the group as an essential characteristic (as criticised by liberal Copts), but also was demonised (as criticised by more religious opponents). Thus, while

the state saw the narrative about the heterogenic Egyptian population as inclusion, Coptic opponents saw the story about the Christian Egyptians as exclusion, and consequently the basis for further suppression, dominance and misrecognition of the right to difference.

The depicting of differences in *Hassan wa Murqus* subscribe to a domesticated difference regime by presenting the differences between Copts and Muslims as a difference in faith alone. This difference is even interchangeable, as the switch between the Muslim and Christian figure symbolises. Moreover, joking over misunderstandings and mutual suspicion supports the reassuring reciprocity, whereas the popular stereotypical representations of Islamic fanatics as laughable and idiotic repeatedly keep 'ordinary' believers free of charge (Abu-Lughod 1993; Galal 2006). Thus, differences are characterised by not being inherently dangerous for society. The lack of predominant Coptic protests suggests that Copts identify with this dominant decoding position. Although the farcical depictions could potentially be decoded as racist, these kinds of depicted differences did not motivate Muslim opponents to accuse the film actor Adel Imam of apostasy for his role in *Hassan wa Murqus*. They did not challenge the represented difference regimes as such, but insisted on the inviolability of religious differences. Religious differences may not be transgressed, not even in the embodiment of an actor. Thus, whereas the *Baheb el-Cima* protesters challenged the representations themselves as misleading or discriminating, the *Hassan wa Murqus* campaigners appeared to challenge principles of representation as such.

To understand the responses it is, as argued, necessary to look at the context for representation. Since the national revolutions in 1919 and 1952, the dominant narrative about the relationship between Muslims and Copts has been one of national unity (Galal 2012; Iskander 2012a and 2012b). The secular and liberal ambitions of the regime have fed this narrative. However, with increasing islamisation since the 1970s, the narrative under Mubarak's regime developed into statements that reflected the state's and the Church's shared interest in playing down and opposing sectarian unrest between Muslims and Copts. This strategy has, on one hand led, to an apparently widespread acceptance of the Church and Christianity as a religion. On the other hand it has made the Copts invisible and hence has also silenced the institutionalised exclusion and general discrimination (ibid.).⁸ The difference regime of domestication silences the power relations

8 In general, it is possible to point at the following areas of discrimination of Christians in Egypt: lack of access to certain offices in the state administration and military; lack

as it has a taste for the exotic. As argued by Graham Huggan, exoticism describes 'a particular mode of aesthetic *perception* – one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery' (Huggan 2001: 13). Thus, exoticism is not only aesthetic, but also political. It is not only about strangeness, but also about familiarity. It is a symbolic system that domesticates the cultural difference by inscribing it with a familiar vocabulary that makes the strangeness comprehensible. The curiosity that the difference arouses functions as 'a decoy to *disguise*' power (Huggan 2001: 14). In other words, the domestication of the exotic 'Others' involves a disregard for the context and its power relations.

Elsewhere I have argued to name this strategy 'conspiracy of silence' because both parties of different reasons to some degree share an interest in silencing an unequal power relation (Galal 2009: 82). Not only is the recognition of discrimination and marginalisation linked to a feeling of shame, but the Coptic Orthodox Church has also supported the national unity narrative in exchange for maintaining a certain degree of autonomy for itself and the Coptic community (Galal 2009; Hasan 2003). The Church has become the official representative of the Copts vis-à-vis the state and has at the same time become a space for a counter-public, in which the minority has been able to practice and live their particular identity as Christians, while they live in the national public as Egyptians. Consequently, the power to define Coptic identity has been left in the hands of the Church, while secular and liberal Coptic voices have been marginalised. Being Coptic has been something practiced within the church, and as Mehrez stresses, Copts have generally been hesitant to present themselves in their particularities outside the church (Mehrez 2010: 192).

The success of the Coptic-Orthodox Church's hard-won certain degree of autonomy for Copts is closely related to the narrative and thus the construction of Copts as being different from only when it comes to religion, but the same in relation to national loyalty and identity. In this way, autonomy is legitimised by an essentialised religious identity defined by religious authorities. In this perspective, *Baheb el-Cima's* criticism of religion is not only reprehensible because of its stereotyping, but also because it implicitly challenges the Church's power of definition. The Church sees this power as the foundation for fairness and

of representation in parliament; obstacles in connection to building and repairing of churches; and invisibility in the national curriculum as part of the Egyptian history as well as in the media (Fawsi 1998; Ibrahim 1996).

tolerance between the majority and minority. The protests of religious Copts can therefore be understood as stemming from the division of power between state and Church, which during Mubarak had been promoted in the Egyptian public. The narrative of the right to difference is inscribed by Coptic opponents in what could be called a specifically Egyptian form of the modern national state's multiculturalism that has been supported by the state's continuous assertion that Copts are an indissoluble part of the Egyptian national totality. By allowing a film like *Baheb el-Cima*, the state broke – so to speak – the conspiracy of silence. On one hand, *Hassan wa Murqus* also broke the conspiracy of silence by addressing Muslim-Coptic relations. On the other hand, however, it confirmed the hegemonic discourse of national unity despite all disagreements and depicted Copts and Muslims as facing the same challenges. The Copts were not singled out, as the opponents claimed was the case in *Baheb el-Cima*. Instead *Hassan wa Murqus* may be seen as successfully inscribing Copts as a commercial difference regime that embraces differences as long as they can be made into consumables. Differences in the commercial difference regime are seen as style and appearance, which might be sold as a particular ethnic or cultural kind. But can be consumed by anybody (Siapera 2010: 147), as in the case of *Hassan wa Murqus*, which was seen by both Muslims and Copts.

The Coptic criticism of *Baheb el-Cima* may appear paradoxical, since the film wanted to make visible an otherwise cinematically neglected minority. The film portrays a struggle for liberal ideas of freedom, including recognition of religious pluralism, hence promoting the right to difference. However, disagreement occurred over the right to define 'the difference.' Part of the Church establishment did not have any intention of giving up this right; some of the liberal Copts saw this as their chance to maintain their rights. The internal dispute within the Coptic community furthermore stresses that the issue at stake is about how to organise differences in a multi-religious Egypt. Whereas the Church insisted on a multiculturalism that essentialised differences, protecting the Church's legitimate right to define 'its essence,' liberal Copts wanted a form of multiculturalism that left room for the individual to define his or her religious identity. As for the protesters against *Hassan wa Murqus*, the multiculturalism they defend is a multiculturalism that not only essentialised differences, but was also based on an extreme interpretation of Islam as constitutive for organising differences.

The right to equality

Whereas the protesters against *Hassan wa Murqus* did not defend the right to equality, it was a vital element in the protest against *Baheb el-Cima*. The

accusations towards the actor Adel Imam in *Hassan wa Murqus* for apostasy articulated a discourse of purity and superiority of Islam over Christianity. No claim of equality was put forward by Muslim protesters, who rather claimed privileges for Muslims. The protests against *Baheb el-Cima* also addressed Coptic relations to Muslims. Thus, the religious Copts found that the film was subscribing to the global narrative of the clash and contrast between Islam and Christianity, as elaborated in Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilisations* (1996), which posits that the chief sources of conflict in the contemporary era will be cultural and religious reasons. While this narrative contradicts the Egyptian story of national unity and close ties between Muslims and Copts, it seems to be activated by suspending the conspiracy of silence. Paradoxically, loosened control in the media has created room for an increasing number of racist statements about each other's religions (Hulsman 2010). In the eyes of the Coptic opponents, Muslims – and not only the state – have not demonstrated mutual understanding and respect for each other's religion. Hence, critics argue that the film's director, Osama Fawzi, who is a convert from Christianity to Islam, had 'abandoned his roots and adopted a staunchly anti-Christian stance' (El-Rashidi 2004a). Characteristically, the individuals behind the film were accused of aiming to deepen the gulf between Muslims and Christians. At the same time, this narrative was particularly vigorous because it addressed a Western audience. Thus, another of the protesters' lawyers, Gabriel, stated:

[...] given the image it is portraying to the world. The last thing we need at this time in political history is a negative, and false, portrayal of sectarian relations in this part of the world. The director is clearly trying to stir things up in the West – to create even more antagonism than there already is. The West is ignorant, and would swallow this as fact in an instant. (El-Rashidi 2004b)

Seen from this perspective, the film appeared as an example of Muslims' hateful representations of Christians. The danger of this representation was explained by referring to western ignorance and thus possible misplaced intervention. Consequently, the narrative of religious conflict appeared double-sided. As for internal relations in Egypt, it was used to claim equality for Muslims and Christians alike when it came to religion. Vis-à-vis external relations with the West, it was used to emphasise the national risk of mediating such narratives. Particularly since the 1990s, this kind of mobilizing the risk-of-western-intervention narrative has been a widespread strategy among supporters of the conspiracy of silence as soon as specific violent clashes between Christians and Muslims have taken place (Galal 2009: 145). Evidently, the objection of the lawyer is embedded in the dominant discourses also presented by Iskander (2012a: 33), which construct

outsiders (the West) and extremists as the actors who potentially steer up sectarian conflict. Thus, the message appears to be that Egyptian media and film should not feed into this.

The right to religion

Narrating the right to difference and the right to equality inevitable converges with the narrative of the particular status of religion. As the Coptic lawyer, Morcos Aziz, who filed the lawsuit against *Baheb el-Cima* on behalf of the protesters, stated:

We are not against freedom but it should not be against the doctrine. This movie mocks the Christian doctrine (El-Rashidi 2004a).

This idea of the exceptional position of religion is not – as in the statement given above – about bringing Copts into opposition to Muslims. On the contrary, according to Mehrez, protesters tried to mobilize ‘our Muslim brothers’ against the film (Mehrez 2010: 204). Once again, the narrative of the religion’s inviolability is introduced, as seen in several Egyptian court cases on literature, films or practices filed by both Muslims and Christians. A Muslim lawyer, Nabih Ahmed El-Wahsh, who supported the Coptic protesters, stated ‘even as a Muslim I don’t accept this movie. The slamming of any religion is wrong, and we reject it. There is no difference between extremism in Islam, in Christianity, in Judaism. The film reflects a condemnation of Christianity’ (El-Rashidi 2004b).

The protests against *Hassan wa Murqus* also arose from an alleged attempt to protect religion, as protesters encouraged people to boycott Adel Imam, because ‘[t]his man is promoting conversion to Christianity’ (El-Hennawy 2008). Without being particularly articulate, they were referring to Islamic law on apostasy, thus maintaining the superiority of religious law (or doctrine) over practices of modern popular culture. In other words, the right of religion trumped the actor’s right to the role he was casted to play.

This fear of transgressions in the form of Muslims becoming Christians (even if only as actor playing a role) or Christians becoming Muslims was also the reason for protests against the *musalsalat* [drama series] *Awan al-Ward* [Time of the Roses] that was broadcast during Ramadan in January 2000. The television serial was a result of the state’s encouragement to include Copts as mediated figures and presented a Coptic leading figure (Abu-Lughod 2005: 176ff). However, instead of creating tolerance towards diversity, a Coptic lawyer filed a case in order to get it prohibited, because the female main character converts into Islam in the end (ibid.). Since Coptic Christianity doctrine does not condemn apostasy,

the protest reflected the convergence between the right to difference and right to religion. Religious differences are not to be touched; they should stay as they are and people converting – even only as fictional figures – is perceived as a threat towards the order of things.

In the eyes of the religious protesters, issues of human and minority rights are a question of the right to religion more so than the individual's right to religious freedom. It is the right to establish authority or authoritative interpretations legitimated by religion.

In this context, it is crucial that the legitimacy of this claim is strengthened by the state surrendering the power of definition to the Church, as well as keeping up religious-based laws on apostasy. Moreover, the state censorship appears to support such claims by its reluctance to deal with these issues. All films in Egypt face state censorship, but when the topic refers to religion, the sensitivity of the censors in order to avoid public protests is bigger than when it comes to other subjects. For such cases, Mehrez describes how the state censorship committee hands over the case to a specific committee set up for the purpose of avoiding problems itself (Mehrez 2010: 205). The argument is that the religious question may create religious responses, and in the case of *Baheb el-Cima*, the last committee of many included religious authorities from the Coptic Church. This last committee, however, never came into function (ibid.). My argument is that in order to understand such diverse public responses to mediated representations of Copts and Muslim-Coptic relations, it is necessary to examine the influence of hegemonic discourses institutionalised by powerful institutions like the State and the Church. Furthermore, it is vital to look into how the same institutions legally or bureaucratically support protests of the kinds examined in this chapter.

Conclusion

The portrayal of united Muslims and Christians against the backdrop of the country going into pieces in the end of *Hassan wa Murqus* is very similar to the images that have been broadcasted by Egyptian state television since the Egyptian Revolution of 2011. Thus, hegemonic discourse is very much alive and has been used in particular sensitive situations to calm down conflicts. Thus videos celebrating a diverse and unified people were transmitted during and after the Maspero tragedy in October 2011 in which 28 people, among them two Copts, were killed in clashes between Coptic demonstrators and military in Cairo. After the removal of the Egyptian president Morsi in July 2013, the same images were also in use. During this same period, violent clashes between or attacks on Copts have increased without any serious attempts by the state to restrain such

sectarian clashes. The most serious attempt has been to elect the former field marshal Sisi as the country's new president in June 2014, by the support of the State. Consequently, it is likely that official and publically legitimate portrayals of the relationship between Muslims and Copts in Egypt will follow the same lines as previously by emphasising unity. The Maspero tragedy furthermore constructed one of the victims, *Mina Daniel*, as a victim of the people's revolution and not as a victim of persecution of Copts. Thus, the tragedy was inscribed in the unity discourse. At the same time, however, another Coptic victim was given his own Facebook site in memorial. On the site, he is depicted as a Coptic martyr, thus associating him with other Coptic martyrs who historically have been victims of Muslim persecution.

In addition to these examples and the two films *Baheb el-Cima* and *Hassan wa Murqus* illustrate how the liberalisation of media and detachment from state institutions invites for diversity in media use as well as media representations leading to negotiations of power of definition. The pivotal point for the protest against *Baheb el-Cima* was the struggle for the power to represent Egyptian cultural, religious and current identity. It was definitely not only a struggle for a specific representation of the minority; it was also a struggle for the authority to represent and define. What I have tried to argue is that the Coptic opposition against *Baheb el-Cima* is not just a matter of a clash between global liberal narratives of freedom against local regressive narrative of religions. Narratives of difference, freedom and religion converge in the mobilisation of support from particular others. In this process, different pairs of differences are produced: minority versus majority, Muslim versus Christian, non-religious versus believer. Because of the displacements between them, the Coptic Orthodox Church is able to ignore that the film primarily depicts Protestant Christians when it refers to the clash-of-religion narrative as valid for all Christians who are victims of the same narrative. At the same time, within the ontological narrative of religion, it may claim that the marriage between protestant and orthodox Christians is against the doctrine and hence non-representative.

The different narratives of difference and sameness used by the opponents are embedded in an on-going struggle over Egyptian identity. The filmic representation illustrates that the narrative about a culturally pluralistic Egypt does exist, but the extent to which this story can be told or must be silenced faces difficulty as long as it is considered to contest the national narrative of unity and religious ontological narratives.

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