Islam in its International Context
Islam in its International Context: Comparative Perspectives

Edited by

Stephen Hutchings, Chris Flood, Galina Miazhevich and Henri Nickels
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is the culmination of several years of work to which many individuals and organizations contributed in a variety of ways. We owe a debt of gratitude to all of them. First of all, we must thank the UK’s Arts and Humanities Research Council, the funder of the project of which the book represents one of the primary outcomes, and for which the authors of the book constituted the project team. The AHRC award (grant number AH/D001722/1) was over 3 years (2006-09) and enabled us to run a large international conference in September 2008 at the University of Manchester under the title of ‘Representing Islam’. The chapters of the book are based primarily (though not exclusively) on a selection of the papers read at that conference. We must in this context express our deep gratitude to Dr Oxana Poberejnaia and Dr Shishir Shahnawaz who provided superb support as conference and project administrators, and without whom the volume could not have been written. The Universities of Manchester and Surrey, which jointly hosted the AHRC project, should also be thanked for their valuable contribution to its success. We do not have the space to acknowledge our debt to all of those numerous (and sometimes “anonymous”) individuals whose comments on draft chapters, and on the conference papers from which they derived, helped shape them for the better. Likewise there were many people with whom the co-editors shared (and, as a result, improved) their thinking on the themes covered in the volume. Amongst those from whose advice we particularly benefited are John Eade, Galin Tihanov, Vera Tolz, Tariq Ramadan, Mona Baker, Elizabeth Poole, Kenan Malik, Gyan Prakash and Nina Glick Schiller. Finally, we are grateful to Cambridge Scholars Publishing for agreeing to publish the book, and for their help and support with its production.
PART I:

SETTING THE CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION

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Rationale and Context: Internationalizing Islam

Since 9/11 there has been an incremental growth of concern in Britain and elsewhere about the nature of Islam and its relationship with non-Islamic cultures, faiths and nations. Stances adopted have ranged from those derived from Samuel Huntington’s (in)famous (2002) “clash of civilizations” thesis, to impassioned pleas for an end to the “Islamophobia” perceived by many as endemic in media coverage and governmental policies towards Muslim communities (Saied et al 1997). At the same time, lively debates within Islamic theological circles have generated claims that Islam can and should accommodate itself to perceived “Western” values without compromising its own fundamental principles. Ramadan’s (2003) recent work is one example of how this can be achieved, while the “Euro-Islam” concept is another (Tibi 2002). On the other hand, those same debates have produced defiant critiques of “Western” decadence based on a return to the literal “truths” of the Qu’ran (al-Qaradawi 2004). Paradoxically, the transnational resonance of such critiques is largely attributable to the tools of the same processes of globalization against which they are directed.

Whatever the relative merits of the various competing voices, changing attitudes towards Islam have had a profound influence on political cultures, national identities, and on policies regarding immigration, security and multiculturalism. Indeed, the complexity of the very notion of “Islam” and the varied responses that it elicits are such that there can be no uniform approach to its representation and social construction. Precisely because both Islam itself and responses to it, are becoming increasingly internationalized, it is important that analyses of these phenomena are nuanced, non-reductive, and sensitive to the particular cultures in which
they are encountered, and to the heterogeneity characterizing Muslim and non-Muslim societies. This must include gaining a sense of key parallels, differences and interactions between the various nations and communities affected. The overarching aim of this volume is to give real meaning to the notion of studying Islam in its international context.

Research into Islam itself, of course, is part of a long and venerable tradition. As Tolz (2011) points out, contrary to Edward Said’s (1978) classic account of Orientalism, the heterogeneity and complexity of Muslim societies across the globe was recognized among scholars in Europe and America as early as the 19th century. Significant new impetus to the Saidian critique of so-called “Western” attitudes to Islam was, however, provided by the “War on Terror” declared in 2001. Whilst much research has shown how the presumed existence of an international Islamic threat is not new (e.g. Esposito 1995; Asad 1997; Rich 1999), fears and stereotypes of Islam as “violent, fanatical, expansionist and anti-progressive” (Hafez 2000, 10) have been reinforced by the events of 9/11 and other recent terrorist attacks across the globe justified in the name of Islam. As others have indicated, attacks of this sort strengthen the popular notion that values associated with Islam are “incompatible with ‘modern’ values centred on democracy, personal rights, equality before the law, and tolerance for the views of others” (Emerick 2001, 13; see also Schulze 2000). Ironically, much (though far from all) such research mirrors the phenomenon that it criticizes in treating both Islam and its opponents as relatively homogeneous. To give but one example, Edward Said himself characterized Hamilton Gibb’s (1932) book on Islam as a prime example of Orientalist reductionism. This is the case despite the fact that the book includes numerous statements that, to say the least, sit awkwardly with Said’s own conveniently reductive approach. For instance:

Islam … possesses a magnificent tradition of inter-racial understanding and cooperation. … Islam has still the power to reconcile apparently irreconcilable elements of race and tradition. If ever the opposition of the great societies of East and West is to be replaced by cooperation, the mediation of Islam is an indispensable condition. (Said 1997, 379)

The same is largely true of the growing body of scholarship that has served a valuable function in focusing on the cumulative effect of media treatments of “Islamist terrorism” (e.g. Cram 2006; Jackson 2005; McNamara 2009; Nacos 2007; Nelson 2008; Sanz Sabido 2009; Norris, Kern and Just 2005; Russell 2005; Hess and Kalb 2003), or of Muslims in general (e.g. Deltombe 2007; Poole and Richardson 2006; Lyon 2005, Sanadjian 2002; Qureshi and Sells 2001; Hussain 2007; Nisbet et al 2004; Poole 2002;
Freitag-Wirminghaus 2000; Hafez 2000; Hippler and Lueg 1995). Much of this body of work is predominantly focused on single-country studies, or else it treats “Islam” and “the West” as monolithic entities, which inadvertently replicates the very “Clash of Civilizations” rhetoric it seeks to undermine.

Even when attention turns to Islam’s relationship with particular regions, the approach often tends to be nationally undifferentiated, to be oriented towards identifying the nature and impact of perceived bias against Muslims and Islam, or to continue to be tainted by Huntington’s thesis (e.g. Brass and Shumilin 2004; Sifaoui 2002). Of course, as Bennett (2010, 16-17) indicates, awareness of the multiplicity of Islam is by no means absent from academic research. Indeed, he argues that in a sense the “there are many different Islams” approach can be as condescending to Muslims, for whom, despite multiple tensions between Sunnis, Shites, Deobandis, Wahhabites, etc. Belief in a coherent set of Islamic principles is what unites them and defines their faith, just as differences and (as in the case of Northern Ireland) conflicts between the various Christian denominations does not detract from their common adherence to a set of common theological precepts. Bennett (2010, x-xxiii) argues that there is a fine line between taking an “insider’s position” that uncritically accepts the Muslim view of the unity of the Islamic faith, and adopting an “outsider’s position” where that unity is seen either as an immediate menace or as a fiction masking fragmentation and discord, which will eventually result in menace. It is also true that some of the most eminent specialists in the field have addressed Islam in its global, or wider international, dimension. Roy (2009), for instance, discusses the importance of transnational currents in explaining the rise of radical Islamism. However, his book has a narrow political focus and does not engage in comparison as such. Cesari (2006) draws on both European and American experiences of “Muslim immigration”, yet she still adopts a single viewpoint: that of Muslims in Western countries. This leads to treating Europe and the USA as a unit, rather than as objects of comparison. Similarly, in Sabet (2008), the comparison made is between Islam writ large and the West, rather than between specific Muslim and/or Western cultures. The generalizing tendency is reinforced by the mono-disciplinary, international relations angle adopted.

Just as it is an oversimplification to accuse scholars of ignoring heterogeneity amongst Muslims altogether, so too it would be wrong to suggest that there is a lack of comparative perspectives on Islam, or of work which situates it in its European context. A special issue of the Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs in 2008 (28, 1) focuses on Islam in
Europe, it largely consists, however, of a collection of single nation perspectives. Rath (2002), by contrast, has a strong comparative focus, and takes an interdisciplinary approach, but he treats a single issue – the institutionalization of Muslim migrants – within three broadly similar societies. Haddad (2002), too, studies several European and North American societies, but in the context of a single issue: that of the relative success with which Muslims have integrated into Western societies. Meanwhile, Saeed (1994) compares modernization processes in three Muslim states, but likewise maintains a narrow, single-issue focus and was written over 15 years ago. Perhaps one of the most significant attempts to assess the mutual relationship between Islam and Europe is AlSayyad and Castells (2002), much of which was penned before 9/11. Their book provides vital insights into how recent “Muslim migration” has changed European identities and the status of European nation states, and how it has led to the development of Muslim diasporic communities. It offers specific case studies from Britain and France, but, like other works we have considered, tends to discuss plurality within Islam and within Europe as abstract truths unaccompanied by concrete exemplification.

The current volume aims to bolster the growing corpus of research which, in “internationalizing” Islam, does so by juxtaposing multiple concrete, national case studies. Whilst many of those case studies are Europe-based, the scope of the book extends to the United States and to Muslim cultures of the Middle East. We hope, therefore, to challenge homogenizing tendencies on both sides of a public discourse on Islam still broadly polarized between those who refuse to acknowledge heterogeneity within Muslim communities, those who use that heterogeneity to belittle Islam’s significance, and those who paint a uniformly “Islamophobic” picture of Islam and Muslims. The range of contexts we treat is broad, and will thereby provide an unprecedented basis for the conversion of plurality from an abstract concept into real, intercultural difference.

**Themes, Approaches and Contexts**

The multiplicity of contexts is complemented by a heterogeneity of approaches, which enables us to move between disciplinary perspectives and different formulations of Islam, thereby conveying the multi-faceted complexity of the issues we treat, as well as their deep interconnectedness. The chapters in this volume draw on both the Social Sciences and the Humanities traditions of research. Since both traditions have their blind spots, the inclusion of examples of each renders them complementary. The approaches range from media studies, sociology, gender studies and
Introduction

politics, to cultural studies, art history, and translation studies. In addition to scholars specializing in all these fields, our authors include a practicing journalist, an NGO researcher, a museum curator and a professional translator, allowing us to move beyond the narrow confines of academia to engage with our topic from the viewpoint of those who encounter it in their daily work. All of these approaches are targeted at a single set of issues that cohere into four overlapping themes. These themes constitute the core of our volume.

Integration

One of the key challenges to have arisen as a result of the arrival of Muslim migrants in post-colonial Western Europe is the emergence of multicultural, multi-faith societies and the need to articulate policies facilitating the integration of those migrants. The difficulties posed by that task have been exacerbated by the rise of (violent) extremism, fostered in part by the ideological vacuum left by the collapse of Communism, and in part by perceived Western imperial arrogance and prejudice against (nominally) Islamic countries and Muslim diasporas. The entire volume is, of course, written under the shadow of the so-called “War on Terror”, which, although its name, parameters and definitions have changed and continue to change, and despite claims that the priorities of those fighting it have shifted, continues to dominate public discourse (Altheide 2006; Furedi 2007). In each national situation, however, the combination of socio-economic and cultural circumstances is unique; the problems and the strategies adopted in response, different. Turkish guest workers in Germany are a world apart from Muslims who have inhabited the area covered by the Russian Autonomous Republic of Tatarstan for over five centuries, and from North Africans in France, or Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in the UK. Likewise, France’s insistence on laïcité (secularism), its opposition to communautarisme (separatism) and its emphasis on the principles of equality enshrined in the French constitution contrast sharply with Britain’s albeit waning commitment to multiculturalism (Hutchings et al 2008). We dedicate one section of our book to issues related to integration, providing analyses of the situation in France, Germany and Russia. But the theme also occurs elsewhere in the volume, in chapters dealing with the USA, the UK, the Netherlands and Italy.
Gender/Sexuality/Class

Close attention to national contexts reveals that issues rightly or wrongly associated with Islam and Muslim communities interact with a range of other issues in sometimes surprising ways. We look in particular here at how discourses of national identity, gender and sexuality articulate with Islam. In the latter case, we focus upon the perceived attitudes of Islam and Muslims towards women and sexuality and disruptions they cause within the self-proclaimed coalition of “progressive” forces opposing perceived “backward” aspects of Islam. On a national level, this relates to debates raging in Europe with regard to the threat posed to gender equality by the dress codes of Muslim women, with the chapters by Deltombe and Crone (Chapters Two and Six) touching upon this. Haritaworn and Petzen’s chapter (Chapter Three) discusses these disruptions in relation to Islamophobic tendencies that have developed within German gay rights communities. Meanwhile, Ali’s contribution (Chapter Seven) introduces the class dimension to the mix, examining how television portrayals of Muslim men reveal changes to the political identities of middle class women, in an American content. However, as Scalvini argues elsewhere in the volume (Chapter Nine), disruptions are not restricted to left-wing coalitions; they also shape the direction of movement within the xenophobic right.

The Media

The role and responsibility of the media in promoting as well as hindering integration is inestimably high. In this volume, we examine this process from the perspectives of the UK (Poole and Holohan, Chapter Five), the Netherlands (Crone, Chapter Six), and the USA (Ali, Chapter Seven), focusing particularly on the post-9/11 period. These analyses are tied to national circumstances with international relevance: the shift in media attitudes to Muslims that followed the July 2005 bombings in London; the complex case of Ayaan Hirsi Ali; and the refraction of post-9/11 fears of Muslims through American television comedy. Each of these national contexts is characterized by a particular configuration of cultural forces and, contrary to common notions of a uniformly anti-Muslim disposition, these chapters demonstrate that popular media representations of Islam cannot be separated from the culture-specific ways in which such representations articulate with attitudes to gender, sexuality, class, and religion.
Nation

Our discussion logically implies close consideration of the dilemmas that the “Muslim question” poses to nationhood itself. We devote two chapters to these dilemmas (Modood, Chapter Eight, and Scalvini, Chapter Nine). One advances a view on citizenship in multicultural nations which can accommodate Muslim protests whilst encouraging the integration of Muslim voices into national discourse. Though grounded in the British experience, the proposal has strong resonance for other multicultural nations with sizeable Muslim communities. The other chapter looks at the role played by a key national institution, the Catholic Church, in shaping the direction of xenophobia in Italy more generally. This foregrounds the fact that, if Islam’s impact on nationhood can be differentiated by nation, then, conversely, national contexts impact differentially upon Islamophobia (a point reinforced in Chapters Three and Six by Haritaworn and Petzen and by Crone).

Dialogue

The intertwining of national and global perspectives indicates that no truly international approach to the issues at the heart of this volume can be defended that does not give some consideration to the perspective of the Muslim Other(s). Indeed, it is partly to address this need that we include amongst our contributors authors from both inside and outside the Islamic faith. For the same reason we include a section of three chapters that treats aspects of Islamic culture and its interaction with that of non-Muslim societies (Downey, Chapter Ten; Achrati, Chapter Eleven; Moir, Chapter Twelve). They attempt to answer a number of questions: How have the contemporary visual arts in Islamic societies accommodated themselves to global aesthetic trends and currents, and in what ways do they respond to the representation of Muslims by non-Muslims? Are there fundamental differences in the epistemological foundations of Islamic and Christian art and what are their implications for contemporary Islamic aesthetics? How distinctive are approaches to the translation of holy texts in Islam and Christianity, and what do these differences mean for mutual understanding between the faiths?
Structure and Chapter Outline

The volume is divided into five sections where the four themes outlined overlap: Setting the Context (Introduction, Chapter 1); The Challenges of Integration (Chapters 2 to 4); Muslims and the Media (Chapters 5 to 7); Muslims and the Nation: Multiple Dilemmas (Chapters 8 and 9); and Islam: The (Inter-)Cultural Dimension (Chapters 10 to 12). The overlap between the sections helps convey a sense of the interrelationship of Media, Nation, Multiculturalism and Dialogue so crucial to an understanding of how to situate Islam in its international context. Setting the Context, consisting of the present Introduction and Chapter One, frames the overarching concerns of the volume by discussing specific challenges that arose in the course of research the editors of this volume carried out comparing television news reporting of Islam as security threat in British, French and Russian primetime television news. Section One thereby traces the relevance of comparative research for our topic. But in doing so, it attempts to answer the question of how it is possible to pinpoint similarities and differences between mono-national Islams (and Islamophobias) that are now at all levels traversed by intercultural flows. We conclude with a vigorous defence of the comparative enterprise, suggesting that, when recalibrated to take account of the new situation, it offers the best means of identifying the transnational forces at work in shaping representations of Muslims in all their heterogeneity.

Deltombe (Chapter Two) opens Section Two, by addressing the theme of Islamophobia in France through a detailed examination of public discourses produced in France in the last 30 years. From the 1979 Iranian “Islamic Revolution” to the 2004 banning of the “Islamic veil” in state schools, French opinion makers have forged what Deltombe calls an “imaginary Islam” thanks to which elites could define a new political consensus and assert a conservative conception of national identity. Deltombe suggests that, with the emergence of the misleading concept of “Islamism” in the 1990’s, this “imaginary Islam” jointly constructed by the media industry and the political forces turned into an ideological instrument that served to cast suspicion on various segments of the French population, which created dangerous censorship effects and rendered the integration of Muslims into French society much more difficult.

In Chapter Three, Haritaworn and Petzen address a neglected, but crucial, aspect of the integration dynamic: how the perceived “conservative” beliefs of some “Muslim migrants” have thrown other marginalized communities (that traditionally tended to identify with the so-called “progressive European left”) into disarray. They focus in particular on the
homosexual community in Germany, within which there has been a proliferation of “sexual knowledges of Islam”, both in the gay media (which traditionally did not treat religion as part of their remit) and the wider media, which increasingly report on sexual topics, often in the framework of Islam. These representations tend to re-inscribe a “sexual exceptionalism” that constructs dominant and migrant cultures as essentially different and diametrically opposed to one another on questions of sexual rights and freedoms. Haritaworn and Petzen point to the rise of a moral panic in Germany since 2007 in relation to “migrant homophobia” through an analysis of the role of spatial and affective discourses in the construction of an uncivilized and backward “Muslim” subject in need of state control. In doing this, they attend to the contradictory ways in which migrant spaces are constructed as imagined as sites of diversity, or as Auslander ghettos where “dangerous Muslims” attack “vulnerable gays”.

In a marked but instructive contrast in Chapter Four, March and Dannreuther take us onto the very different territory of contemporary Russia, which is grappling with challenges of integration in the form of separatist tendencies in its outlying Islamic regions. They note that many analysts now predict the inexorable spread of “radical jihadism” throughout Russia, thereby contesting the official state rhetoric of inter-confessional harmony. March and Dannreuther challenge such bleak forecasts by providing an analytical overview of dynamics among Russia’s Muslim communities. They argue that, while pessimistic prognoses are exaggerated and ignore the varieties of Muslim expression in Russia, Vladimir Putin’s policies relating to the securitization of the Islamic threat in pursuit of the “War on Terror”, his recentralization of power, and the associated search for a new, more assertive, post-Soviet Russian identity have all had potentially negative impacts on Russia’s Muslims. However, these are impacts the authorities are belatedly coming to acknowledge and engage with. The common and unique qualities of Russia’s Muslim community are illustrated by three case-studies, covering Dagestan, Tatarstan and Moscow.

Naturally, questions of integration also impinge upon the theme of the relationship between Muslims and the media, the focus of Section Three. Poole and Holohan open this section with an examination in Chapter Five of three distinct phases in the media representation of British Muslims in the British press between 1994 and 2008. They demonstrate the importance of analyzing the political and social contexts of reporting given the significant shifts in the representation of Muslims and Islam there have been over this time. The first period of analysis is one in which Islam had become more politicized and came to be represented as a global violent
aggressor. Poole and Holohan argue that the reporting of British Islam is complex, relating as it does to a situation based on national concerns about segregation and cultural difference. The events of 11 September 2001 changed this, providing the opponents of Islam with “evidence” for what had previously been an “imagined threat”. Then came the July 2005 London bombings. The real physical threat of terrorism in the UK brought home a new reality, while also leading to an active distancing of Islam from violence in order to maintain positive relations within the national context. Poole and Holohan explore these complex relationships by revisiting the representation of British Islam over a highly volatile time.

In Chapter Six, Crone examines the important and controversial role played in Dutch media discourses on the multicultural society by self-proclaimed “Muslim infidel”, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who went from a Somali upbringing to being named in 2005 as one of Time magazine’s 100 most influential people in the world. Crone posits an explanation for Hirsi Ali’s prominence in the debate concerning the role of Islam in Dutch society by investigating the pillars on which her status as a spokesperson rested, and asking what entitled her to this role. Crone analyzes a selection of current affairs television programmes to this effect, following critical moments in Hirsi Ali’s career that are representative of her shifting positions in the debate on multiculturalism. He shows how the collapse of the pillars on which Hirsi Ali’s status as a spokesperson for Muslim communities in the Netherlands was built eventually rendered her position in the debate untenable.

In Chapter Seven, Isra Ali takes us across the Atlantic to the USA and beyond the news media to popular television comedy. She treats the genre as a significant arena for the cultivation of complex post-9/11 discourses that incorporate social and political anxieties, ambivalences, and maladies in multiple configurations. Ali shows how, in their representation of Muslim men, the sitcoms 30 Rock and Aliens in America position white middle-class women within post-9/11 discourse, thereby casting new light on the reconfiguration of class, gender and sexual identities treated by Haritaworn and Petzen (Chapter Three). Ali perceives a public accounting for the unease that accompanies the consumption of a dual rhetoric espousing moral superiority while contending with the material motivations for, and the consequences of, the American military invasion of Iraq in the portrayal of interactions between Muslim males and Anglo-Saxon females. Depicted here are acknowledgements of the fear that permeates US political culture and a simultaneous questioning of “War on Terror” policies. In the midst of this uncertainty, Ali concludes that representations
of Muslim men in popular television comedy function as mediators for white, middle-class, female political identities.

Chapter Eight, which opens the section *Muslims and Nation*, retains the focus on identity, but shifts it to the arena of citizenship and to the British context. In this chapter, Modood proceeds from the observation that the July 2005 London bombings raised questions as to the limits of Britain’s multicultural society. Modood points out that citizenship involves ways of imagining and remaking ourselves as a country and expressing our sense of commonality and difference. He argues that it is crucial to bear in mind that most forms of protest by Muslims are grounded in British political discourses and notions of citizenship. The danger of separation, he shows, is even less of a threat if representation is understood as being “a democratic constellation of organizations, networks, alliances and discourses”. Furthermore, though some argue that the *multicultural* and the *national* are incompatible, it is necessary to offer something “strong, purposive and inspiring to integrate into” when integration is the aim. Meaning-conferring identities will otherwise be found elsewhere. Integration, Modood concludes, is not just a minority problem.

In Chapter Nine, Scalvini explores how elite groups have initiated a gradual reformulating of prejudice against Muslims in Italian national discourse. Although the European continent as a whole saw a rise in anti-Islamic discourses in many cultural sectors post-9/11, Scalvini suggests that Islamophobic prejudices in Italy were already at work throughout the nineties, when discourses on immigration became closely linked to a fear of Islam associated with Muslim migrants. In the space of almost a decade, these initial arguments shifted to concerns regarding a general risk to the perceived “Western” values of Democracy, Freedom, and Equality. At the same time, some leaders of the Italian intellectual elite rediscovered their identity, and especially their Catholic roots, in opposition to Muslim identity. Scalvini discusses how this process affected the political agenda of xenophobic political groups, documenting linkages between official anti-Muslim discourses and the *Lega Nord*’s success in re-injecting Islamophobia into mainstream political debate in Italy.

The final section of the volume deals with intercultural dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims. In Chapter Ten, Downey first reminds us of the legacy of Orientalist representations of a homogenized “Islamic World” in which Islam, Arabs and the Middle East are misleadingly conflated. He turns his attention to an examination of contemporary artistic responses to that legacy within Middle Eastern and Iranian art, looking at critiques of the stereotyping of Arabs, the elision of
Islam and terrorism, the role of the veil in Islamic societies, and western media coverage of conflicts in the region. Although such art emanates from multiple geographical sites of production, and reflects radically different aesthetic principles, it shares an acute consciousness of how Islamic culture is portrayed in Europe and America. Exploring the works of a number of (Muslim) artists, Downey demonstrates how they intervene in the process of representing and constructing Islam and the Middle East by subverting, disputing, and ridiculing neo-Orientalist aesthetic practices.

In Chapter Eleven, Achrati draws attention to the widespread assumption that “Islamic art” has developed as a result of the repressive prohibition of figurative images on the grounds that they create a representational void. This is often argued to have led to the privileging of architecture and ornamentation as media capable of transforming three-dimensional surfaces, thereby filling the void. Such a view overlooks the profoundly, and joyfully, *aural* orientation of early Islamic theology, superseded by the speculative emphasis derived from interactions with “Western” aesthetics and responsible in part for the apparent repression of the feminine within Islam. But the *aural* remains a vigorous and subversive presence in contemporary Islamic art. Achrati traces this displaced aural moment in architecture and calligraphy, and investigates the assertiveness of the voice in postmodern feminist works by Ghada Amer and Lalla Essayadi.

Finally, in Chapter Twelve, Moir develops the theme of Muslim-Christian dialogue within the context of the translation of religious texts. She reminds us that translating religious texts has always been a challenging and ambivalent task; an “impossible necessity”. In her chapter, she questions whether religious texts constitute a distinct genre; whether faith can be communicated through translation; and whether religious texts are really “translatable” and what implications their “translatability” might have on religious thought and practice. Moir suggests that these are the perennial questions that any study of the translation of religious texts must address. In attempting to answer these questions in relation to the Qu’ran and the Bible, Moir proposes a revision of the very concept of “translatability” in order to account for the specificities of the scriptural genre. Such a comparative reappraisal of translatability allows for a deeper understanding of the differential impact of translation upon religious belief, expression and identification in both Christianity and Islam. It can also help foster the potential for interfaith comprehension, to which our volume claims to make a modest, but far from negligible, contribution.
CHAPTER ONE

TRANSNATIONALIZING ISLAM:
THEORETICAL CHALLENGES AND
COSMOPOLITAN POTENTIAL

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to Racism, Belgium

Introduction

Whilst it treats a set of theoretical issues, the argument in this chapter is based around practical questions of interpretation and methodology encountered in a three-year research project entitled “European Television Representations of Islam as a Security Threat: A Comparative Analysis”.¹ It addresses the aspiration outlined in our Introduction: that of translating a general commitment to internationalizing research on Islam into the meaningful juxtaposition (and superimposition) of a plurality of national contexts. Each of the key terms in the title of our project generated issues of definition and viability during the course of working on it. One set of challenges centred on the effect of transnational media flows upon the value of comparative research across national media systems (our project focused on the prime-time news bulletins of BBC1, France 2 and Russia’s Channel 1: The Ten O’Clock News, Journal de 20 Heures, and Vremia, respectively). It is these that form the main focus of our analysis,² though

¹ The project, which ran from 2006 to 2009, was funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (grant number AH/D001722/1).
² We deal not with “transnational media” in the sense of media outlets designed to operate across national borders, but rather with transnational currents of meaning
we begin by linking those challenges to some theoretical issues of a more general nature. In addition to defending the value of, and renewing the case for, such comparative work as a whole, we will also, through the case studies we touch upon, trace its specific relevance for the study of issues around Islam in its security dimension. In this context, in concluding, we project the contradictions between sameness and difference confronting our comparative methodologies onto modes of relating to Muslim “otherness”. We speculate that similar contradictions in, and challenges to, those relationships might yet renew them, transforming them into a dynamic cosmopolitanism in which, “world citizenship” (the conventional understanding of cosmopolitanism) is (re)defined, in Appiah’s (2007) formula, as “universality plus difference”. During the course of our analysis, we touch upon the four specific comparative contexts that provide the structure of our book.

As the review of scholarship in our Introduction revealed, work on media representations of Islam tends to be nation-specific, to be oriented towards identifying the nature of perceived anti-Muslim bias, or to continue to be tainted by Huntington’s “Clash of Civilisations” thesis, and to say relatively little about television. The section of our book focusing on Muslims and the media addresses the lacunae by juxtaposing discrete analyses of the situation in the UK, the USA and the Netherlands respectively and each of those chapters deals to some extent with television. By contrast, the project that we embarked upon in 2006 counters the tendency to reproduce one-dimensional perspectives on both Islam and Muslims by treating three national contexts: the UK, France and Russia. In carrying out our analysis, we respond to the call of Hepp and Couldry (2009, 33) for “a wider internationalization of media and cultural research” through “comparing media cultures”. Moreover, even studies devoted to discrete national media systems ignore transnational meaning flows at their peril since the former are invariably traversed by the latter. As Hepp and Couldry (2009, 43) put it, “Media cultures are by no means limited to ‘nation state cultures’”.

The case for situating a project on the representation of Muslims in a European television environment is compelling, for the imperial and economic legacies of countries like France, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands and Russia have led to an influx of Muslim migrants across a
continent in which television remains the dominant source of news.\(^3\) We undertook our research with this rationale in mind, selecting three European states exhibiting both similarities and key differences in their media systems and their relationships with Islam and Muslims. Similarities include post-imperial contexts involving former colonies, sizeable domestic Muslim populations, and susceptibility to terrorist activity. Differences include Britain’s close identification with the US-led “war on terror”; French and British disapproval of Russia’s policy towards Chechnia; British and French disputes over approaches to multiculturalism; Russia’s long-established Muslim population, which leads it to construct its identity in relation to Islam differently from Britain and France; and Russian television’s legacy of state control. We recorded the main evening news for the three main “establishment” channels over two years. We applied both quantitative and qualitative methodologies ranging from statistical survey, through analyses of political mythology, to narrative and semiotic analysis drawing upon Cultural Studies-inflected close readings of individual news reports. In this chapter, we focus primarily on the latter, leaving aside findings derived from the social scientific methods which accounted for a significant portion of our research. We do so because it is at the Cultural Studies “end” of Media Studies that “the transnational” as a meaning-generating force at work within national cultures rather than/as well as an empirical phenomenon occurring across the borders of defined nation states has been most extensively discussed.\(^4\) We proceed in five closely linked stages, each presented as a problematic, but not, crucially, an insuperable barrier to our research; indeed, it is precisely by working through the issues that we arrived at some of our key insights.

Referring to examples from our project, we begin by noting parallels between the challenges presented by television to text-based theories of analysis, and those posed by transnational issues to the integrity of nations. Textual approaches to television have a long history and have provided some of the “seminal” media studies works (e.g. Fiske and Hartley 1978). Criticisms of the limitations of such approaches are also long-standing and tend to focus on their “subjectivism”, their inability to deal with the scale

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\(^3\) A Harris poll conducted in 2007 shows that “in a survey of adults in five European countries, Australia and the United States, the number one source for each country is TV network news” (Harris 2007; http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=768, accessed July 31, 2010).

\(^4\) Ien Ang and Jon Stratton raised this issue to the fore of the field as early as 1996 (Ang and Stratton 1996).
of media output, and the lack of attention they pay to empirical audiences. But, given the complexity and elusiveness of its object, television studies have always had to negotiate between positivist and nominalist extremes, a path that Fiske and Hartley themselves navigated in their later work (e.g. Hartley 1999). What we are interested in here are specific tensions connected with the applicability of text-based narratology to the specificities of television news as a narrative form. We point to how similar tensions disrupt both terms in the “sameness/difference” dialectic that defines comparative analysis, clarifying the particular implications for coverage of issues relating to Muslims in the European security environment. Next, we link the disruption to the fragmentation of national subjectivities occasioned by cross-border migration and information flows, and exacerbated by the performative, “nation-building” roles of Public Sector Broadcasters. In what is the key stage of our argument, we summarize our response to the issues raised, mounting a defence of the principles of comparative analysis on the strength of their capacity for uncovering the very transnational flows which appear to undermine it. We conclude by contending that those same principles provide the core values of a cosmopolitanism which might, ultimately, serve to enhance Muslim/non-Muslim relations.

**Televising Muslims and Nationhood “After” Narrative**

Cultural Studies, including its media branch, is still influenced by models grounded in literary analysis with its emphasis on self-sufficient, discrete narrative texts. But there is a powerful argument from Raymond Williams’s notion of “flow” onwards (Williams 1974), that the televisual unit of analysis is not equivalent to text or narrative. This is especially true for news bulletins with their insertion into ongoing *eventness*, their fragmentation into multiple sub-genres, the sequencing of those sub-genres over multiple broadcasts, and their authorial hybridity. This is not, of course, to say that news lacks a narrative dimension; to the contrary, news editors insist on individual news stories having a beginning, a middle

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5 For a discussion of the pros and cons of various approaches to television, see Hutchings and Rulyova (2009, 15-25).
6 See also Ellis (2001) for further elucidation of the non-textual nature of television as a medium.
7 For a discussion of the unique temporality of television applied specifically to the reporting of security issues, see Hoskins and O’Loughlin (2007).
8 Even a single news report is the work of a team of people, rendering the question of authorship problematic.
and an end. But we must distinguish between the mere presence of linear, “story-telling” features inherent to all human communication, and the ability to confer finality and meaning associated with traditional epic forms with single authors, defined boundaries and claims to general significance (even the most seemingly incomplete, “meaningless” and ambiguous of post-modern novels possess these attributes). John Ellis (1992, 145) argues that television embraces a radically new approach to narrative, citing the news bulletin with its “endless updating” and “never synthesizing” approach to events, and its preference for the episodic “segment” with internal coherence but with only tangential links to other such segments. This does not mean that narratological tools are redundant, but that they must be adapted to account for television’s different temporality and approach to narrative integrity. Narrative and national integrity are closely linked. Like traditional nationhood, classic narrative form features the clear boundaries and overarching trajectories to which news reporting is largely alien. As we saw both within the coverage of single news events and across multiple stories, narrative sequences emerge, overlap, then disappear (often to reappear much later), whether within the coverage of single news events or across multiple stories. For example, *The Ten O’Clock News*’s account of the failed Glasgow airport bombing in 2007 embraced first a domestic radicalization narrative, then that of infiltration by overseas Islamists (see also Poole and Holohan, this volume). Reports on the attempted bombing spanned five successive nights from 29 June 2007 to 3 July 2007, and then sporadically throughout July as the suspects were identified, pursued and investigated. The “radicalization” narrative (revolving around fears of the British-born Muslim youth who, under the influence of extremist preachers, has become infected with alien Islamist ideology) was rapidly supplanted by that of the “sleeper cell” (invoking visceral images of “the alien doctor who has infiltrated our collective body”). Similar shifts can be identified in coverage of Islam-related news on the *Journal de 20 Heures*, and on Channel 1’s *Vremia*, which switched over the course of the period covered by the project from adherence to the War on Terror narrative, to that of multiple battles with internationally coordinated criminal bands. To

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9 For Burman (2010, 204) the “sleeper cell” narrative works via its “affective recircuitry”, its ability to redraw vectors of trust and suspicion in all directions, temporal and spatial, so that long-term neighbours “might retroactively imagine each other as possible ‘sleepers’, religious extremists or frauds with fake identities and secret lives”.

10 The Kremlin’s attempt to legitimise its Chechnia campaign by inscribing Russia into the global War on Terror has been overshadowed by efforts, motivated by
attempt to account for these reconfigurations within a narrative model whose origins lie in epic, with its discrete boundaries, self-identical, nationally specific, authorial sources and sweeping trajectories, is clearly unwise.

In an audio-visual context we must likewise question the consistency that we crave from traditionally plotted narrative texts (Brooks 1992). When close readings of multiple reports reveal inconsistencies between them, we must remember that television news is neither produced, nor viewed, as though it were a novel representing events fixed in the past and framed from a privileged authorial viewpoint in an eternal present. Thus, whilst news stories certainly tend towards internal consistency, Ellis’s notion of segmentation alerted us to the contrast between the BBC’s meticulously non-committal tone in covering initial speculation over the perpetration of bomb plots with its unashamedly vitriolic treatments of radical Muslim preachers arrested for inciting racial hatred. In the opening words of a news broadcast coinciding with the uncovering of a plot to kidnap a British Muslim soldier in January 2007, the newsreader announces:

Police arrested eight men under the Terrorism Act. Tonight they have all been questioned about an alleged plot … they went in through the window and arrested a young man … It would be a new style of terror tactics in Britain if that is what is planned by these alleged plotters. (The Ten O’Clock News, 31 January 2007)

This calculated neutrality contrasts vividly with the words of a reporter “celebrating” the conviction of an extremist preacher:

The Islamic cleric who preached racial hatred … has been deported … He’s being blamed for brainwashing British men … el-Faisal preached his messages of hate … But the worshippers kicked him out … he used meetings to indoctrinate susceptible young men… he had a place at the heart of Britain’s terror network … His poisonous lectures are still available. (The Ten O’Clock News, 25 May 2007)

Notions of consistency, whilst far from irrelevant to television news production and consumption, must be adapted to the context of audiences which do not treat their broadcasters as omniscient “authors”, seeking coherence across the entirety of news output from year to year, or even fears of inter-ethnic tensions, to downplay the Islamic dimension to the problems in the Caucasus.
day to day, and of broadcasters, who, situated in an ever-changing present, cannot afford to over-prioritize long-term consistency, unless operating under a totalitarian regime with a guiding eschatology (Soviet news broadcasters forever struggled to accommodate the unpredictability of ongoing eventness to Marxist-Leninist views of history). We must therefore exercise caution when deeming news output “Islamophobic” (or “Islamophilic”) since such designations tend to imply a coherent, self-identical “position of enunciation” largely alien to news (to describe it as “conducive to Islamophobia” is another matter entirely, however).

Nor can methods designed primarily for the printed text be applied to television news unless modified to take account of the audio-visuality which accompanies television’s temporality of the live, and which has a clear transnational dimension. To cite one instance, a France 2 report on the trial of the Charlie Hebdo magazine for reprinting the infamous Danish cartoons of Mohammed, images repeatedly circulated across a Euro-media zone, included a voiceover articulating the issue at stake in terms of a debate between proponents of freedom of expression and those calling for respect for religious difference. However, the summary was immediately preceded by a visual sequence in which several of the offending images were displayed to camera. By re-showing the cartoons, France 2 visually performs national specificity, replicating the very provocation against which Muslim community leaders in France railed, privileging one side of the debate, even as its verbal rhetoric, effort to include voices “for” and “against”, and citing of previous cases in which Christians were the offended party, claims transcultural neutrality (operating in societies with less aggressively secular orientations, both BBC One and Russian Channel 1 generally avoided reproducing the cartoons). The implicit privileging of the Hebdo position is revealed in the report on the trial when the journalist, commenting on the bizarre court scene, jokes innocently, no doubt, and in the broader context of a commentary on French presidential hopefuls attempting to capitalise on the event, but nonetheless ill-advisedly, “The scene almost warranted a cartoon” (Journal de 20 Heures, 7 February 2007).

Similarly, a vox pop sequence in a special report on minority communities on The Ten O’Clock News (24 January 2007) showed a black English man, a Chinese Scottish woman and a white Welsh female identifying with England, Scotland and Wales respectively, extolling the UK as a multinational state, thus simultaneously inscribing ethno-cultural minorities into a “safe” variant of multiculturalism and reassuring an “indigenous” Anglo-Saxon population suspicious of separatism. It was only seeing the interviewees’ ethnicity and placing it in the context of the