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European Muslim Diasporic Geographies: Media Use and the Production of Translocality

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Abstract This article, premised on extensive fieldwork among Muslim communities in five Western European countries, explores the ways in which European Muslims 'situate' themselves emotionally, culturally and politically vis-à-vis fellow Muslims in Europe and the Muslim world. Drawing on theories of space, place and identity, the article examines processes that amount to the construction of translocal/transnational phenomenological geographies through the utilization of time/space distanciating technologies to cultivate long-distance relations that are crucial in their identification process. Through these they engage in processes of cultural negotiation and translation, of forging of local and translocal links and solidarities that rest on making cognitive and emotional investments and constructing and dissemination of narratives shared among themselves and other Muslims.

Keywords: Muslim geographies, geographical imagination, European Muslims, translocality, transnational imagination, collective action

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In the age of globalization and of 'time-space distanciation' (Giddens 1984) in which things and people become 'disembedded' from concrete space and time' (Lash and Urry, 1994: 13) localities may no longer be the clear supports of identity, but they still play an important part in the symbolic and physical dimension of our identifications. But in order to integrate localities in such an analytical context, instead of thinking of them as self-contained areas with clearly demarcated boundaries, they can be imagined as articulated movements in networks of social relations and understandings. (Massey 1994: 325). Locality is not static and its boundaries are not impermeable, it is integrated in the global flows making up the complex array of institutions and practices that Appadurai (1996) has called diasporic ethnoscapes, ideoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes and technoscapes. Due, to some extent, to the diasporic nature of Muslim communities in Europe as well as due to the traditionally universalist character of Islam, the former have developed, not only translocal/transnational connections, but also potent transnational imaginaries.

In an increasingly globalized world, interaction across distance is central to a shift from the more static geography of the locality to the fluid topography of the transnational landscapes Appadurai identifies (1996). These landscapes are the building blocks of what, extending Anderson's argument (1983), could be seen as imagined worlds, that is, the translocal and transnational bonds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe (Appadurai, 1996: 27). Community, including its translocal variants, is therefore 'imagined', and mediated through the imageries of the 'mediascape', ideologies of the 'ideoscape', and ever-shifting demographics of ethnicity ('ethnoscape') and information. This process of 'imagining' rests upon the creative engagement of European Muslims, the processes of cultural negotiation and translation which they are involved in and the cognitive and emotional investments they make.

In order to explore these processes, this article draws on group and individual interviews with 735 European Muslims from five Western European countries.[1] Although this sample is not statistically representative of Europe's Muslim population

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[1] In total, 390 men and 345 women between the ages of 16 and 45 years, who described themselves as Muslim or of Muslim background were interviewed. Of these interviewees, the majority (595) were residents or citizens of Belgium (90), France (130), Germany (115), Netherlands (90), UK (170). A further 145 interviews were conducted online with interviewees from other European countries, notably, Italy (20), Spain (15), Denmark (22), Norway (16), Sweden (22), Switzerland (20) and Austria (25).

The discussions took place between April 2007 and February 2011, mainly in the form of group interviews (or focus groups) and a small number of individual interviews. Repeat interviews were also conducted in cases where particular topics were not adequately covered in the first instance. The sampling design was intended to avoid replicating preset definitions of what it means to be a 'European Muslim' and to reflect and 'capture' instead the polysemy of the terms Islam and Muslim and the diverse experiences and practices that comprise Islam in Europe, using a combination of non-probability sampling techniques that had the potential of better capturing the internal diversity of experience and opinion this paper intended to chart and analyze.

I think that the broad spectrum of opinion can allow us to identify trends that are developing. Out of a total 735 informants, 149 articulated definitions of being Muslim that emphasized 'culture', values, 'ways of doing things' in a way that echoes Dasetto's designation of part of Europe's population as 'cultural Muslims' (Dassetto 1996). A further 82 have opted for what I could describe as a secular 'political' definition, that is, have described themselves and other Muslims as a primarily or exclusively racialized category, as victims of racism and islamophobia, but also as subjected to socioeconomic and political discrimination. Nevertheless, a not insignificant proportion of these would value Islam as a religion and, indeed, they would consider themselves religious albeit in ways that do not always meet the criteria set by Sander (1993) and others that are premised on mosque membership and religious attendance. The fact remains that such definitions of religiosity are rather prescriptive and rigid and thus are incapable to grasp the changing nature of Islam in general, and European Islam and Muslims in particular. Informants were encouraged to talk about their identities, their relationships with close and remote 'fellow Muslims' and non-Muslims alike and the means (and media) through which they establish and maintain relationships.

If it is possible to summarize on the basis of the interview findings the ways in which European Muslims inhabit transnational spaces and engage in the formation of their cultures and identities, one could identify two key areas where they play a crucial role.

(a) The construction of translocal/transnational phenomenological geographies [2]:

> European Muslims actively utilize time/space distanciating technologies to cultivate both local and long-distance relations that are crucial in their identification process. Through these they participate in and mobilize processes of reconfiguration of time, space and place.

(b) The construction and dissemination of shared narratives:

> European Muslims draw upon the opportunities provided by the various forms of collective action and cultural creativity available to them in order to engage in practices of meaning creation, drawing upon diverse life-histories and social-historical backgrounds. In doing so, they often arrive at shared interpretations of social reality and narratives of identity.

Translocal and Transnational Phenomenological Geographies

Despite the energy and commitment many of my informants invested in the process of construction of locality and of their local community, it was evident that locality does not generate only positive feelings and attachments. Indeed, many informants, including some of those who chose to participate in the broader community, saw in the ways their local communities are organized powerful inertia of times gone by. Many among the more religious of my interlocutors were skeptical about the authority of their local elders as they considered the Islam they followed corrupted and residual, not a matter of choice but of tedious repetition, marred by selectivity

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[2] Despite the diversity of the ways 'phenomenological geography' is understood the concept generally refers to the production of place and place-based communities through the practices of social individuals. For a sympathetic yet critical discussion of the concept see Moores 2006.

and incomplete adherence to religious imperatives. Others found these very same structures too strict, associated to bygone eras, stifling and suffocating. With very few exceptions, informants sought spiritual guidance, or attempted to discover what it means to be a Muslim, and a European Muslim for that matter, or, finally, to seek and get to know others 'like them', beyond the confines of the locality. Transcending the boundaries of the *local* was seen by most, for a variety of reasons as a normal act of engagement with what is beyond, with what Peter Mandaville (2001) and Olivier Roy (2002) called 'reimagining' and 'searching' for the Ummah respectively. Both authors have very aptly demonstrated aspects of this process by examining a corpus of texts and resources in cyberspace which reveal a transnational universe of discourse and action. Here, in order to explore this process of translocal and transnational social construction, I adopt a somewhat different approach that focuses on the ways in which informants transcend the boundaries of the *local* and how they articulate their own experiences and aspirations with those of often remote others who share a common identification as Muslims.

Indeed, in my discussions with my informants it became obvious that one way of transcending the confines of one's local community is utilizing technologies of time/space distanciation (through the use of digital, mobile and locative media). Similarly, many informants who chose to move away of localities which they had affinities with, resorted to the very same media in order to seek raw material for making sense of who they are.

Most informants have been extremely interested in trying to articulate their complex position, straddling, so to speak, the boundary between the local and the translocal but also between being *Muslims* and being *European* at the same time. In their attempt to explore this apparent ambiguity they proved to be voracious media users. Regardless of the type of medium they used, informants expressed their frustration at what they perceived as mainstream media. Their responses largely confirm findings of other minority media users research that reveals that minority and Muslim audiences are deeply dissatisfied with mainstream media (CENSIS, 2002; Millwood-Hargrave, 2002; Poole, 2002).

Among my informants, this dissatisfaction was apparent:

Haroun, a 28-year-old male born in Scotland and living in London characteristically says

> I sometimes think that, for television, time has stood still. If you look at television, the world of the studios has nothing to do with what happens outside. Muslims but also other people are hard to spot or can sometimes appear as an excuse, just to provide an alibi for those who ignore our presence and contribution [to society].

Ayşe, a 31-year-old female from Frankfurt has a similar experience and comments on her inability to recognize herself on television by drawing links with the dominant political discourse in Germany.

> When I watch television, I see someone else's country. A country without me, without people like me. It is not that surprising then when I hear [politicians] talk about Muslims in Germany as foreigners.

But it is not only the direct representations or the non-representation of Muslims in the mainstream media that come under scrutiny by many interviewees; the accuracy and truthfulness of reports about Muslims at home and abroad is virtually

unanimously questioned and feeds a substantial sense of injustice as we will see later on. In response to this inability to draw upon raw material to validate themselves as Europeans and Muslims at the same time, to see themselves as stakeholders in their societies through their use of mainstream media, the overwhelming majority of informants have devised a number of strategies of media use.

When it comes to mainstream media, many informants intimate that, in view of their lack of trust towards the objectivity and representativeness of mainstream media, they rely on a multitude of media that include mainstream, diasporic and 'Muslim' ones (that is, media explicitly addressing a Muslim audience). Reading many newspapers, or going through different channels, persistently trying to analyze stories, looking for plots or conspiracies, were some aspects of the repertoire of media usage modes they resort to in order to get a sense of the information that reaches them. This selective and critical attitude is, for many, necessary in order to enable them compare narratives and identify the 'truth' in what is being offered to them. Almost half of those interviewed described what one could call ways of 'reading between the lines' when they encounter local or national stories about Islam and Muslims, or international news involving countries with Muslim majorities or minorities.

However, apart from the deployment of such strategies vis a vis the mainstream media available to them, almost all informants have been turning their attention to, and increasingly using media that they consider more 'appropriate' or more relevant to them as *European Muslims*. These additional media include 'old' print media and radio but also cable and satellite television and, increasingly, new, digital media through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Most interviewees could talk confidently and clearly about their uses of ICTs, mobile and wireless media as well as an array of other media such as satellite television [3] and, their responses to questions on this topic revealed that, regardless of socioeconomic condition, the majority have been early adopters of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and are very skillful navigators of cyberspace, enjoying in this way, access to a host of opportunities to obtain information, news or to be entertained.

This constellation of 'mainstream' and 'alternative' media constitute what I propose to call *European Muslim Mediascape*. This comprises an array of media that are not necessarily intended for exclusive consumption by Muslims alone; its existence relies on continually shifting personal and collective assessments of what is suitable and relevant to, and what is needed by European Muslims. Thus, alongside a critical use of the mainstream media I referred to above, European Muslims increasingly turn to diasporic media that may not address their audience primarily as *Muslims* but as members of an ethnic group – Pakistanis, Egyptians, or Moroccans to mention but a few – although many interviewees who use such media justified their choice on

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[3] This relative ease with new media and communications technologies is the product of considerable investment in terms of money and time by many Muslim community organizations, mosques and families. In all major cities that are home to sizeable Muslim communities, young people are offered training courses in a variety of contexts in order to become ICT-literate, partly in order to provide them with a headstart in the job market. But there is evidence that this is also clearly a grievance-driven process, as the frustration with the available mainstream media diet briefly outlined above.

the grounds that their output conforms to what they would expect from an Islamic broadcaster.

A number of Arabic language news media such as *Al-Jazeera* or *Al-Manar*, are also fairly popular, favored even by many informants who may not speak or understand Arabic. Echoing the views of several of the people who had resorted to such practices, and commenting about his use of *Al-Jazeera Arabic* prior to the launch of an English language counterpart,

Aadil, a thirty-year-old bank clerk from London suggested that although the language was obviously a barrier to fully comprehending the station's news output, tuning to the channel allowed him to get a glimpse of an alternative, more credible representation of the world, even through his out of necessity reliance mainly to the visual dimension of the programs. This, and a number of similar responses suggest that broadcasters such *Al-Jazeera Arabic* are able to provide a perspective that resonates with many of their Muslim viewers and establish a relationship of trust. This relationship between these media and their audiences relies on their ability to articulate what Hollander and Stappers (1992: 21) call 'structures of relevance' which provide the crucial links that make communication an important means for the forging of community culture and solidarity.[4] Clearly such media appear to 'make sense', speak with a voice they recognize and relate to.

Other alternative media, such as a host of indymedia not necessarily built with the needs of European Muslim audiences in mind, have also been quite popular among those who can access them. Many interviewees involved in community or political activism stressed the importance of these independent media in counterbalancing the bias or indifference of their mainstream counterpart and their usefulness in providing a more sensitive and trustworthy version of social and political realities as well as vital information. Clearly the trust deficit that is obvious in the case of mainstream media is substantially reduced here and many informants see in such media a much more inclusive regime of representation and narration, despite their 'western' credentials.

But what is probably quite significant is the emergence over the past couple of decades of a host of media that are addressing Europe's Muslims as precisely that. Rapidly increasing in importance these comprise what one could call a *Muslim Media Space* (see diagram 2). Research findings indicate that this is a highly diverse and polyphonic sector based on a host of different platforms (television, internet, locative media) that provides considerable choice for Muslims worldwide and European Muslims in particular, serving a host of needs that extend from spirituality, or dealing with discrimination at work, to lifestyle propositions or to finding a spouse, or to

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[4] Studies of diasporic radio (Echchaibi 2002, Hargreaves 2001, Tsagarousianou 2001) reveal that listeners often appreciate the psychological proximity and immediacy the medium can have. Interactive content in the case of Beur FM (Echchaibi 2002), one of the most prominent French radio stations catering for the country's large Maghrebi/Maghrebi-descended community, or of Ramadan Radio (Tsagarousianou 2001), has been identified as particularly significant as audiences often found that they reflect an intimate knowledge of the community they address or, according to Drijvers (1992: 199), 'a clear insight into the social stratification of the communities they are attempting to serve'.

practicalities such as information on fasting or prayer times, religious festivals and other occasions in the calendars of the various Muslim communities. Although much of the content is available in Arabic and English, and, to a lesser extent, Turkish and Urdu, the sector is increasingly undergoing a process of 'vernacularization' as it is becoming multilingual in an attempt to become accessible to Muslims in various European countries and other parts of the world.

Insert diagram 2: Muslim Media Space about here.

What is more, an examination of the media available for European Muslims over time reveals the shift in the provenance of what European Muslims consume. For example, the traditional publishing centers of the Muslim world, primarily located in Egypt and Lebanon, complemented by newcomers in digital publishing and design Syria and Jordan have seen their share of the Islamic media products squeezed by new media production companies situated in Europe and North America (see diagram 3). This, shift, combined with the increased use of European vernaculars spoken by many of the younger generation of Europe's Muslims, partly signifies a response to the needs of European Muslims and reflects the transformation this Media Space has been undergoing towards a polyphonic, multilingual and, in many respects, 'multicultural' space. This is a space where cultural products from all over the Muslim world, targeted towards meeting the needs of considerably diverse audiences situated in different localities which therefore, brings diverse experiences of being a Muslim, to Muslims throughout the globe, including those living in Europe.

Insert diagram 3 about here

It is this, last, feature that is highly significant as this constitutes an accessible space that addresses them as Muslims and caters for their various information, entertainment and social needs. For many of my informants that use such media, cultural consumption and social interaction is often seen as a process of discovery of, and encounter with other Muslims, nearby as well as further afield. In many ways, these media provide the raw material to them to explore their Muslim identities and to become aware of or connect with other Muslims in their, or other, more remote localities. As we will see, they give opportunities to their users to empathize and develop solidarities with other fellow Muslims. What is more, the technologies of time-space distanciation employed by satellite television, the various internet-based and wireless and locative media have the capability to bring to their users that are situated in remote locations almost instantaneously news from other parts of Europe and further afield. Being in a position to enable instantaneous communication, the media that make up this *Muslim Media Space* constitute part of the technologies and infrastructures that give rise to, and sustain what Mandaville calls 'translocal space' (2001: 49). They have the capacity to bring about and sustain a sense of immediacy, contemporaneity and synchronicity to the dispersed populations that they link. This temporal convergence and sense of co-presence is very significant as it brings a qualitative change to the experience of being a European Muslim and the dynamics set in motion by it. Temporal convergence makes possible, and much easier, the convergence of experience: whereas earlier forms of socio-cultural distanciation were inextricably linked with temporal distance, making it very difficult for dispersed populations to share experiences at more or less the same time and form common

frames of making sense of these, the sense of contemporaneity and synchronicity made possible through the use of such *Muslim Media* enables new ways of co-existence and experiencing together, of constructing shared experiential frames between hitherto remote and, often unconnected, fellow Muslims.

Drawing on Scannell's discussion of the significance of electronic media in the formation of their audiences' experience, it could be argued that, apart from facilitating the compression of time and space, they bring about new possibilities of being; in particular, 'new possibilities of being in two places at once' (Scannell, 1996: 91) – referring to the place where they experience an event and the place where an event 'actually' takes place. It is not however only media events that have this quality as their capability of doubling is inextricably linked to 'the liveness of radio and television' (Scannell: 172). Although broadcasting – and not only its live variants – revolves around the production of a sense of immediacy, this is by no means exclusive to it but extends to, more or less, most electronic media as they share both the capacity to produce a sense of immediacy and time-space distanciation that broadcasting has. Despite their often notable differences, various contemporary electronic media and information and communication technologies, have a profound effect in our sense of space as they produce at least 'two places'. In this sense, the physical remoteness of European Muslims from each other, as well as from other Muslims no longer prevents individuals in remote locations to coexist and interact in ways that we can effectively describe as co-presence.

It is this experience of co-presence that many informants singled out as highly significant in the context of their media usage. Rasha, a twenty-three-year-old French hairdresser, who has been trying to distance herself from Islam as a religion, stressing that she is highly secular but chose to participate in our discussion group because of her heritage, admitted that she was fascinated by being able to glimpse into the lives of other Muslims in other parts of Europe through participating in various online discussion on Islamophobia, relationships and culture, especially as she could talk to them almost as she would face-to-face. Similarly, Waqas, a thirty-five-year-old West Londoner recounted his experience of watching live Al-Jazeera Arabic and being at the receiving end of what he called 'the raw truth of the Iraq war'. He pointed out that what sensitized him and his friends who were watching with him was the fact that the television set was like a window that allowed them to stare 'directly' at the misery the West was inflicting, 'to understand the horror of it'. And, finally, Cem, a forty year old taxi driver from the Frankfurt area who has been involved in the local Palestine solidarity campaign also uses internet-based media to learn about his fellow Palestinian Muslims and finds the immediacy of internet-based news media welcome yet overwhelming.

> I feel I need, we all need to know what is happening over there, the suffering of our Palestinian brothers … but I find what is happening very painful. And sometimes, it is unbearable to watch the atrocities almost live; as they happen. You suffer together with the families that lost their children, their loved ones, their homes …

Although considerably different in some respects, these three justifications of the use of Muslim media, indicate the importance of the potential of encountering others 'like us', that is, Muslims in similar or different situations. But what is also significant here is the fact that such instances of media uses can essentially be seen as map-making exercises, cognitive attempts to create a translocal topography of local and remote

fellow Muslims. These, indeed, constitute attempts to 'populate' the translocal/transnational space, to imbue it with meaning.

The sense of connectedness and simultaneity and the sharing of views and narratives across boundaries with everyone who experiences this transnational interaction, provide a unique opportunity structure for dispersed populations. It enables them to observe and interact with others, to imagine themselves as people who share experiences with others who may be living far away to engage in processes of exchange, translation and hybridization. In this context, processes of mediated interaction across space (such as the ones unfolding in the course of such encounters) where these parameters of social experience are reconfigured are of paramount significance. European Muslims live complex lives situated within locales, in very specific places – such as the neighborhood – where aspects of their experience are grounded, and in national and transnational spaces that comprise different interconnected localities at the same time. Actual, physical places co-exist with 'virtual' places, or 'non-places' (Urry 2000, Augé 1995).

I have, in an earlier discussion of diasporas, likened such processes of translocal encounters to 'the experience of pilgrimage' (Tsagarousianou 2007). Like pilgrims who 'leave their own space and join with strangers to whom they have not been connected previously in order to take part in events that are outside the normal flow of daily life' (Dubisch 1995: 38), European Muslims embark on somehow similar, albeit mediated journeys. And although these instances are not sacred as traditional pilgrimages are, their profanity carries with it the aura of the extraordinary character of discovery that is inherent in these emotional encounters with strangers who are 'so much like us'. Indeed, pilgrimage as a practice and its meaning-producing implications have attracted the interest of social anthropologists for some decades now. A prominent researcher and one of the pioneers in the field, Victor Turner has described pilgrimage as a *rite de passage* that gives rise to a sense of *Communitas* among those participating in it, that is, the establishment of a community which is (temporarily) marked by a sense of egalitarian brotherhood among its members (Turner 1974). More recently, drawing upon Turner, and echoing work on the integrative and legitimizing functions of such practices, Benedict Anderson focused on other spatial practices such as the travel itineraries of colonial civil servants from their own localities to colonial administrative centers (1983). Anderson argued that, like pilgrimage (and the trajectories formed by pilgrims in their journeys from their own localities to their sacred destinations), over time these practices produce a geographical reality that provides the raw material for the imagining of national communities in the colonies of European colonial empires. Likewise then, I would argue that these practices of mediated encounters among European Muslims, and between them and other Muslims further afield institute phenomenological geographies and, by extension, support and reinforce processes of construction of European Muslim identities.

From Connectivity to Consciousness

As we have seen, the technologies of time-space distanciation employed by the various media used by European Muslims (as well as similar technologies that make physical mobility much easier and faster) have substantially altered the experiences of presence and absence through their capability to overcome distance and boundaries and to bring remote others together. Situated in remote locations, informants access almost instantaneously news from other parts of Europe and

further afield. Being in a position to enable instantaneous communication, the media that make up what I have termed *Muslim Media Space* constitute part of the technologies and infrastructures that give rise to, and sustain what Mandaville calls 'translocal space' (2001: 49). In other words, they have the capacity to bring about and sustain a sense of immediacy, contemporaneity and synchronicity to the dispersed populations that they link. This temporal convergence and sense of co-presence is very significant as it brings a qualitative change to the experience of being a European Muslim and the dynamics set in motion by it as responses of my interviewees make clear.

Whereas earlier forms of socio-cultural distanciation were inextricably linked with temporal distance, making it very difficult for dispersed populations (such as Europe's Muslims) to share experiences at more or less the same time and form common frames of making sense of these, the sense of contemporaneity and synchronicity made possible through the use of such *Muslim Media* enables new ways of co-existence and experiencing together, of constructing shared experiential frames between hitherto remote and, often unconnected, fellow Muslims.

Having said that, it is important to steer clear of the technological determinism inherent in the assumption that infrastructures and technologies alone are sufficient for the construction of a durable transnational space and, even more so, sustainable transnational identities. It is quite clear that time-space compression and the ensuing sense of immediacy, simultaneity and co-presence are by no means sufficient to provide durability and coherence to a sense of being a *European Muslim* among Europe's Muslim population alone. It is indeed hard to explain how the word *Muslim* could house such disparate populations in terms of culture, language, ethnicity, provenance and socioeconomic position, to mention but a few potential resources for identifications by referring to the existence of technological infrastructure alone.

What is then necessary for the transformation of a geographically and culturally dispersed population into a political (in the broadest sense of the term possible) subject as my research findings seem to indicate? Surely, the answer to this question is complex. One of the factors that seems to emerge prominently in the research findings relates to the extensive meaning creating and disseminating processes that European Muslims are engaged in. As we have already seen, informants have been engaging in processes of exchanging and accessing information from various local contexts, especially in order to connect with or learn about other Muslims 'like them'. It is important to point out that this process of access and exchange does not constitute an end in itself. Indeed, informants, like many other European Muslims they learn about or communicate with, are consistently building what one could best describe as a common repository of experience. In other words, they tend to relate the information they acquire about other Muslims to their own experiences. It is this intersection of the complex connectivity that underpins the translocal and transnational field that European Muslims inhabit and of the processes of cultural reinvention and reconstruction that European Muslims are engaged in, that effectively renders communication and the media technologies I have been referring to, crucial vehicles for the reproduction and transformation of European Muslim identities.

Central in this production of a common stock of experience, in making possible the crucial spaces where different experiences from remote physical and often alien social contexts become intelligible, translatable and relevant to the dispersed

population of Europe's Muslims is what, following Gamson and Ryan, one can term common experiential and, even more so, injustice frames. The notion of frames is derived from symbolic interactionism; in that theoretical context, frames evolve out of collective efforts to make sense of problems; they help people 'locate, perceive, identify, and label' their experience (Goffman 1974, p. 21). In social action research, frames are the product of symbolic and cultural production of political actors. According to Gamson (1992), political actors actively construct their self-presentations so as to draw support from others. The concept of 'frame' therefore, refers to cognitive processes through which people utilize background knowledge to interpret an event or circumstance and to locate it in a larger system of meaning. Framing processes are therefore means through which actors invoke one set of meanings rather than another when they communicate a message, thereby indicating how the message is to be understood.

ARTICULATING AND SHARING GRIEVANCES

Turning back to my informants, it is clear that they engage in processes that make intelligible the experience of 'other Muslims', and integrate it into their own stock of knowledge, memory and experience. Through various personal and institutional networks and, more importantly, through the media used by Europe's Muslims these narratives would often become part of a broader common stock of experience. Local stories, having unfolded in remote localities, are integrated into local vernaculars elsewhere. In this context locality and local experience is framed within a broader translocal and, often, transnational network and the latter is, in turn, localized (made sense in terms of its local manifestations/translations).

However, I focus here on a particular type of frames that is central in the process of defining and framing an injustice and orienting a movement towards its resolution/alleviation as Ryan and Gamson (2006) describe *injustice frames.*

Interviewee discourses quite often raise grievances that range from issues of visibility and representation to those of exclusion and discrimination. Although many of their grievances are related to their local experience, what is interesting and significant for the purposes of this article is the deterritorialization of these negative experiences and their rearticulation in a broader Europe-wide discourse of injustice. In the examples above, information from further afield –other parts of Britain , of France or of Europe – is integrated into the interviewee responses in order to support and generalize their claims.

For example, while reflecting on corporate decisions but also on the self-image of French society, 'Jacques', a 20-year-old apprentice from Paris relates his 'French' experience to the experiences of British and German Muslims;

> Normally we do not exist for the bosses of big TV. Their image of France, the one they try to draw through what they show on TV does not have room [for the banlieues]. And if we can be seen, we are seen as criminals, as people without any decency or value. This happens everywhere. The British present us as rapists and wifebeaters, the Germans call us foreigners. They are all telling us we do not belong.

And Rachid, a thirty-seven-year-old Parisian comments on the Mohammed cartoons published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005 and their subsequent publication in France

> they should understand [caricaturists] they are forcing people to take sides. I have no choice because their vulgar and simplistic (intervention) is forcing confrontation, not debate … they single us out and target us and that is not acceptable

Similarly, the sense of injustice experienced by French youth residing in the banlieues is by no means exclusively 'theirs' as its various manifestations are accessible to other European Muslims who incorporate them to their own experiences of injustice. A Pew Global Attitudes Survey (2006) has found that awareness of the 2005 riots in France was relatively high among other European Muslims. But what is more interesting is that European Muslims 'irrespective of their views about the riots per se – say they are sympathetic to the youths from immigrant and working class suburbs in France'. My own findings corroborate this but go a step further as they provide insights into how this sympathy is articulated in the discourse of my informants. Over half of the non-French interviewees when they were prompted to discuss issues of societal fairness and injustice that affect them mentioned into their lists of injustice directly experienced by them the inequalities and prejudice that prompted their French counterparts to riot, even when they did not actually share the living through the social and spatial segregation the French youth involved in the riots have been experiencing. Again, many mentioned in the same context the Mohammed cartoons published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* on 30 September 2005 as well as earlier debates on employment or school bans of Muslim women wearing the headscarf which they interpreted as proof of discrimination even though many had not experienced such bans in their own societies. Similarly, discussions about local acceptance or rejection of plans to build mosques or community centers almost invariably revealed that my interviewees were quite aware of debates and conflicts in other parts of Europe. It soon became obvious that although interviewees' nationalities and countries of residence, their ethnic or cultural differences, diverse occupational patterns, educational attainment and age may have given rise to markedly different experiences and diverse perceptions of discrimination and exclusion, the spatial and social segregation and unemployment experienced by French Muslims, the intense racism felt by many Belgian and Dutch informants are subsumed to an overarching perception of injustice – informants perceived these different experiences as part and parcel of a general feeling of injustice. In other words, through a translocal lens (and here the media they used played an important role). They perceived their distinct local negative experiences as part of a broader injustice that was pertinent to their own everyday lives.

In these instances, it is clear that European Muslims adopt a *European* perspective, not only developing an interest for developments in other parts of Europe that, they feel, affect them, but also integrating this knowledge to their own experiences and worldviews. But the raw material for the construction of injustice is by no means derived from Europe alone. Discussions and interviews with informants revealed a quite widespread sensitivity to suffering in countries where Islam is practiced by the majority or large minorities of the population. Some of the most notable cases are Palestine which has been mentioned in highly emotional terms by the overwhelming majority of the people I talked to, closely followed by Iraq and Afghanistan where Western countries have intervened militarily, Chechnya which has been subjected to several Russian military campaigns, Kashmir which is bitterly disputed by both Pakistan and India and Bosnia, the stage of a bitter military confrontation between

Serbs, Croats and Muslims as Yugoslavia disintegrated in the 1990s and whose Muslim population was subjected to a campaign of ruthless ethnic cleansing. Indeed, the plight of Bosnian Muslims has been a seminal moment that set in motion the process of identifying as Muslims for many older interviewees. Magdi, a thirty-seven-year-old paramedic from Belgium has vivid memories of the news coming from Bosnia through his television screen.

> It is hard to forget the suffering of those people. I remember not bearing to watch the news. And I will never forgive the inaction of the world as a whole people was being subjected to genocide just because they were Muslim. Just because they [their Christian neighbors] decided they did not have the right to be there. I was not, until then, particularly concerned about religion - my father was not that religious anyway - but I thought that this was the moment. That this is some sort of revelation, telling me that others are ready to die and they pay the price for being Muslim.

Asad, a forty-eight year-old West Londoner, an Islamic charity campaigner who had previously been a left-wing activist prior to the Bosnian conflict also recounts the war and how he abandoned his engagement with left politics

> How could they [western governments] turn a blind eye to what was happening. And how could the media present their [Muslims] slaughter day in and day out. We would wait for the news, we would try to find a channel that would say it - that this was a genocide. As we could not stand the apathy around us, we decided to link up with others and start collections for our brothers and sisters. Cash, blankets, medicines, food ... A friend volunteered to drive the stuff but at the end the mosque was better networked and arranged its transportation. Bosnia had a profound effect on me, on my priorities ...

Empathy with other fellow Muslims in such cases has a transformative effect, sometimes as dramatic as that described in Magdi's and Asad's accounts, sometimes subtler and more incremental. It is equally interesting to observe how identification with the suffering of 'fellow Muslims' eliminates the reservations of some interviewees to identify themselves as Muslims.

In a group discussion with members of an Afghan association in London, Naima, a well dressed woman in her late forties, insisted that she and her Afghan friends were highly secular and doubted if our discussion would provide us with any useful information. Although in the course of the discussion, some members of the group acknowledged the importance of Islam in their identity, she remained adamant that this was not the case as far as she was concerned. As the discussion focused on international issues, the group started to discuss the plight of ordinary Palestinians under Israeli occupation. Naima followed silently the discussion and finally decided to intervene.

> I am really sad. When I hear that a child has died, shot by Israeli soldiers or blown by American mines, I realize how little our lives matter. If it is Muslim lives no one cares, no one thinks about them as human beings.

In her intervention, Naima switched from the lives of Palestinian, Iraqi or Afghan children ('they', 'them') to a more inclusive 'we' and, moving on, defined this 'we' as 'Muslims' despite her earlier statement that Islam does not mean anything to her. Whereas she dissociated herself from a religious identity which she seems to reject,

she was much more comfortable with a definition of Muslims (including her) as the victims of a profound injustice and disregard. Although she articulated this in very clear terms, she was not the only one. Many 'secular Muslims' I encountered identified themselves as Muslims by using what one could call political criteria such as solidarity with Muslims whose lives are ravaged by war and violence or those who encounter in their daily lives racism and islamophobia.

Yasmin, a twenty-two-year-old student expresses this eloquently as she describes the way she experiences racism.

> I do not have time for mosques and prayers. I do not even know if I believe in anything. But I experience the prejudice. It is how people stare at us, it is the police stopping you in the street, it is the comments that people make. We are Muslims because that's what we are. We cannot escape it.

In Yasmin's discourse 'us' refers to European Muslims, not as a religious group, but as a minority that is subjected to prejudice and racism. And Rupa, a twenty-six-year-old college tutor from West London echoes Yasmin's definition by suggesting that 'being Muslim' constitutes a meaningful and, at the same time pragmatic, political act that enables her to cope with an adverse political and social environment.

> My parents wanted us to go to (a white school). We had to cross the town every morning. They wanted us to fit in. But you pay the price as at the end of the day people still call you Paki this and Paki that. I understand their choices but at the end of the day, I am Muslim and only by embracing this I can resist (racial harassment)

In all these instances, the various forms of discrimination experienced by Muslims elsewhere, the suffering of Muslims in war zones and occupied territories as well as the immediate experience of racist violence described when discussing the topographies of fear sketched by informants, or more mundane experiences of being made to feel out of place amount to what Glenn Bowman calls constitutive violence (Bowman 2003: 319-20). Examining the emergence of Palestinian and Yugoslav nationalisms and trying to make sense of how national identities emerge and are crystallized in the context of conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian and the Bosnian one, Bowman argues that

> violence is not simply a device nationalists of certain persuasions take up strategically in pursuit of ends ... but something that plays a constitutive role in the formation of all nationalisms. The violence which engenders nationalism is not the violence the imagined community of the future nation turns against its 'enemies', but the violence members of that not-yet-existent nation perceive as inflicted upon them by others ... . An antagonism, rather than threatening a pre-existing and self-conscious entity, brings the community it threatens into being through that threat, and gives shape and identity to what it threatens through placing it at risk. Perceptions of a violence afflicting a diverse range of persons give rise to a concept of a 'national enemy' and, through that concept, to the idea of solidarity with those whom that enemy opposes (320).

Despite the explicit link Bowman's definition of 'constitutive violence' introduces to nationalism, his argument remains quite a potent and pertinent one even if the processes we are exploring do not culminate in the development of a nationalist movement. In the case of European Muslims, what Is clear is that, through the translation and domestication of narratives produced in remote locations and through

diverse experiences, a common stock of experiences of injustice, even of constitutive violence becomes intelligible, accessible, meaningful and, more importantly, relevant to many. This sense of injustice and the narratives that underpin it make possible the imagination of a 'we', of all those who suffer 'the same' injustice. This collective sense of injustice, and the 'cultural trauma' that it entails draw together the 'multiplex strands of violence, risk and threat afflicting people's everyday lives' (Bowman: 320), to mobilize those who perceive themselves as affected. This mobilization is crucial to setting in motion processes of 'reinterpreting the past, narrating new foundations' (Hale 1998: 6), effectively instituting, reconstituting or reconfiguring a collective identity through collective representation, as a way of repairing the tear in the social fabric caused by 'injustice' and 'inequity'. Associating their identities as Muslims in Europe with the traumatic experiences of others entails therefore adopting a perspective derived from mediated experience. To be more clear, the suffering of young Afghans due to the war in Afghanistan's Helmand province and the repercussions of a headscarf ban in some municipality in Spain which are experienced through various media by a young Muslim woman in Britain, combined with the immediate and direct experience of racism in her school, neighbourhood or workplace are some of the possible ingredients of how she experiences herself being a Muslim in Europe today.

There are ample indications that the construction of a Muslim identity drawing on a sense of injustice and trauma is well underway and is proving to be enduring. Clues to its durability are provided by Neal's analysis of 'national trauma' (1998) – a concept closely related to that of 'cultural trauma'. Neal refers to its 'enduring effects', as it relates to events 'which cannot be easily dismissed, which will be played over again and again in individual consciousness,' and which, with the passage of time become 'ingrained in collective memory.' In the case of my informants, the mediated experience of suffering and discrimination becomes the subject of reflection, discussion and emotional investment. They described how such news become the focus of collective endeavors of search, of discovery, of anxiety and, eventually of exchange and discussion. Peer groups in the context of face to face daily interaction, but also in virtual space often constitute a space for such exchanges, as do more formal settings such as the mosque, the community associations, the university or college. It is in these spaces that the notion of injustice but also those of agency and identity (Gamson 1992) are understood, explained, and made coherent through the means of public reflection and discourse. As Smelser (in Alexander et al. 2001) suggests, 'cultural trauma' constitutes 'a memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is (a) laden with negative affect, (b) represented as indelible, and (c) regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions'. It is also clear that the impact of the experience of trauma is not exhausted in the articulation of notions of injustice and harm, or the (re)articulation of identity as Alexander suggests. Agency springs out of the realization that something needs to be done, that 'brothers and sisters' need to be supported, or that voice needs to be gained.

Conclusions

Over the past few pages, I have explored in an admittedly cursory way how the experiences of remote others become part of the complex narrative fabric that constitutes the experiential and, in particular, injustice frames through which European Muslims situate themselves in European societies. This weaving of narratives that integrate various localities in a complex translocal and transnational web of relationships, encounters and exchanges is the product of the collective action of Europeans who identify themselves as Muslim in a variety of ways and engage in the construction of cultural and political networks. This is a fluid and continuously evolving terrain, whose contours and morphology are constantly redefined through complex processes of negotiation, interaction, and contestation. In this space, as we have seen, locality and local experience are interweaved and framed within a broader transnational network of flows of people, information, ideas and action. At the same time, the experiences of remote others and the translocal sites of narrating Muslim identity are localized and domesticated, made sense of in terms of their local manifestations and translations. This is a space where participants are agonizingly seeking ways of overcoming what they perceive to be under- and mis-representation and, ultimately, marginalization. It provides the means for 'inhabiting' local & translocal/transnational domains by rendering these familiar in terms of sounds, images, negating and overcoming absences and silences.

I am clearly talking about a locus of encounters, exchange & imagination. A public space that hosts multiple voices, multiple narratives which provides the raw materials for new articulations of identity, for testing boundaries and providing frameworks of experience and memory. Interviewee responses to relevant questions provide clear evidence that the solidarity felt towards other Muslims is reminiscent of what Mandaville has very aptly termed *reimagining the Umma* (2001). This reimagining entails processes of construction of a space depending on cognitive and emotional processes. As Yi-Fu Tuan (1996: 455) points out place, the phenomenological geographies I have discussed, 'can be as small as the corner of a room or large as the earth itself', depending on the emotional 'field of care' that constructs it while Seamon argues that senses of place are fostered by 'place-ballets' (Seamon 1980), which involve an interpersonal mixing of body ballets and time-space routines, and serve to transform spaces – creatively and collaboratively – into significant places (Moores 2006).

I have argued that the phenomenological geographies of Europe's Muslims rest on both sets of processes. Apart from the various controversies that have developed in the domestic sphere of the various European societies, we have seen that the perennial issue of the fate of the Palestinian Muslims and the two intifadas, the Russian treatment of the Chechen people and the plight of the Bosnian Muslims during the war in Bosnia have functioned as instances of *constitutive violence*, moments of profound injustice not only towards the Palestinian, Chechen or Bosnian Muslims but towards all Muslims according to just under eight out of ten informants, including those residing in Europe. What is more, this narrative is reproduced in the various public spaces that European Muslims have established such as the Muslim media, offline and online, the international charities that have been founded primarily during the Bosnian war, and everyday discourses and practices of European Muslims. A key role in these processes is indeed played by what I called *European Muslim mediascape*. This includes "alternatives" to the mainstream media, media that are not necessarily intended for exclusive consumption by Muslims alone; I have argued that its existence relies on continually shifting personal and collective

assessments of what is suitable and relevant to, and what is needed by European Muslims. Indeed, as I have pointed out, this may include diasporic media, or Arabic language transnational news media are seen by informants as able to provide a perspective that resonates with them. Clearly, as I suggested, such media appear to "make sense", speak with a voice European Muslims recognize and relate to. Indymedia, counterbalancing the perceived bias or indifference of their mainstream counterpart are also seen as providing a more sensitive and trustworthy version of social and political realities as well as vital information. But most significant is the emergence over the past couple of decades of a host of media that are addressing Europe's Muslims as precisely that, comprising what I called *Muslim Media Space*, a highly diverse and polyphonic sector providing considerable choice for European Muslims as my interviewees suggested.

Through these spaces the *ummah* is reimagined, as one coexisting with a sense of European Muslim particularity that assumes the form of challenges as well as opportunities arising from residing in the sociopolitical and cultural space that is called Europe, by interacting with European societies and institutions and having to develop appropriate strategies of discourse and action. In this context, we can therefore argue that the sense of a European Muslim identity is very much a project in progress, one that is largely premised on empathy and the mediated *witnessing* and *remembrance* of the suffering of fellow Muslims throughout the world.

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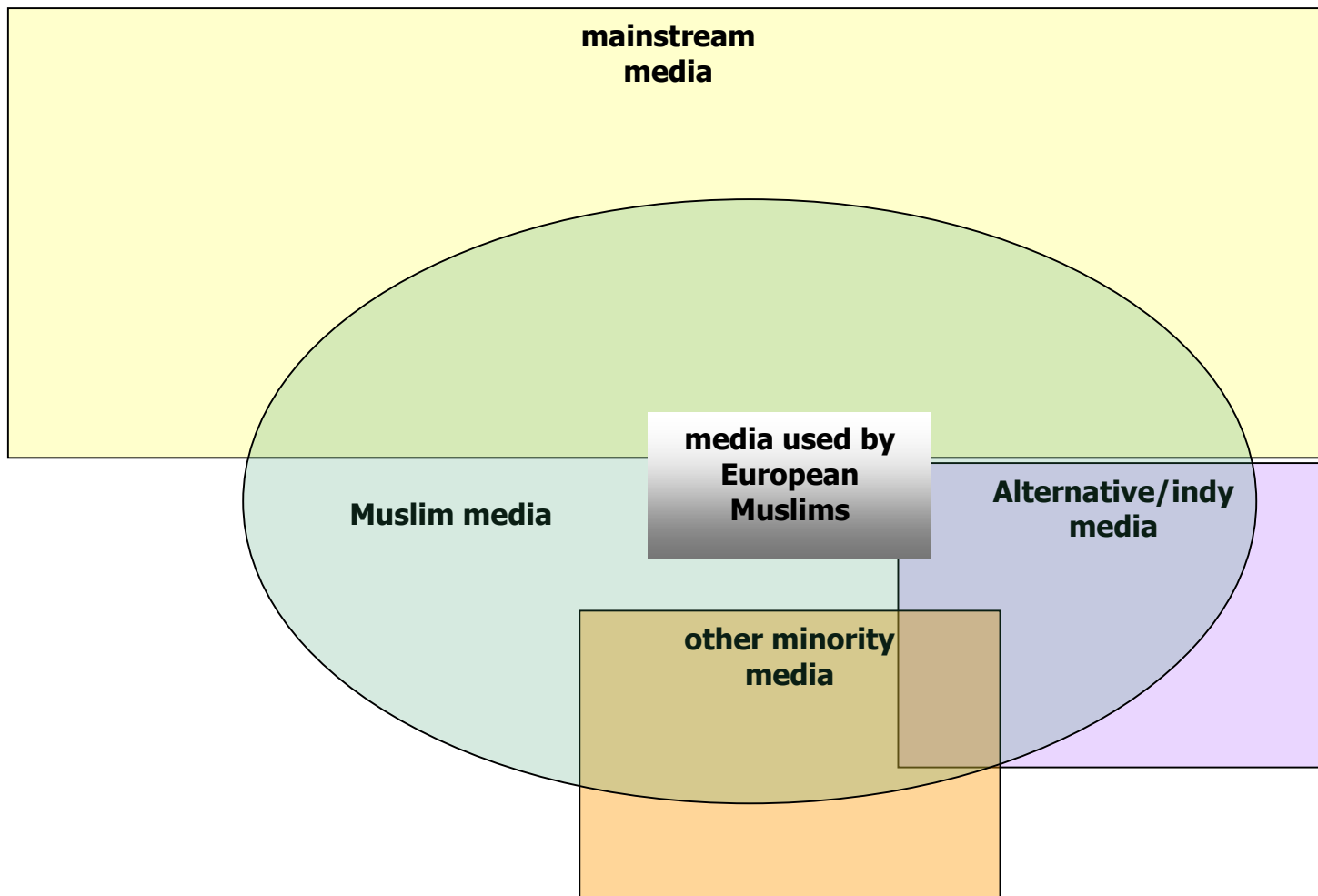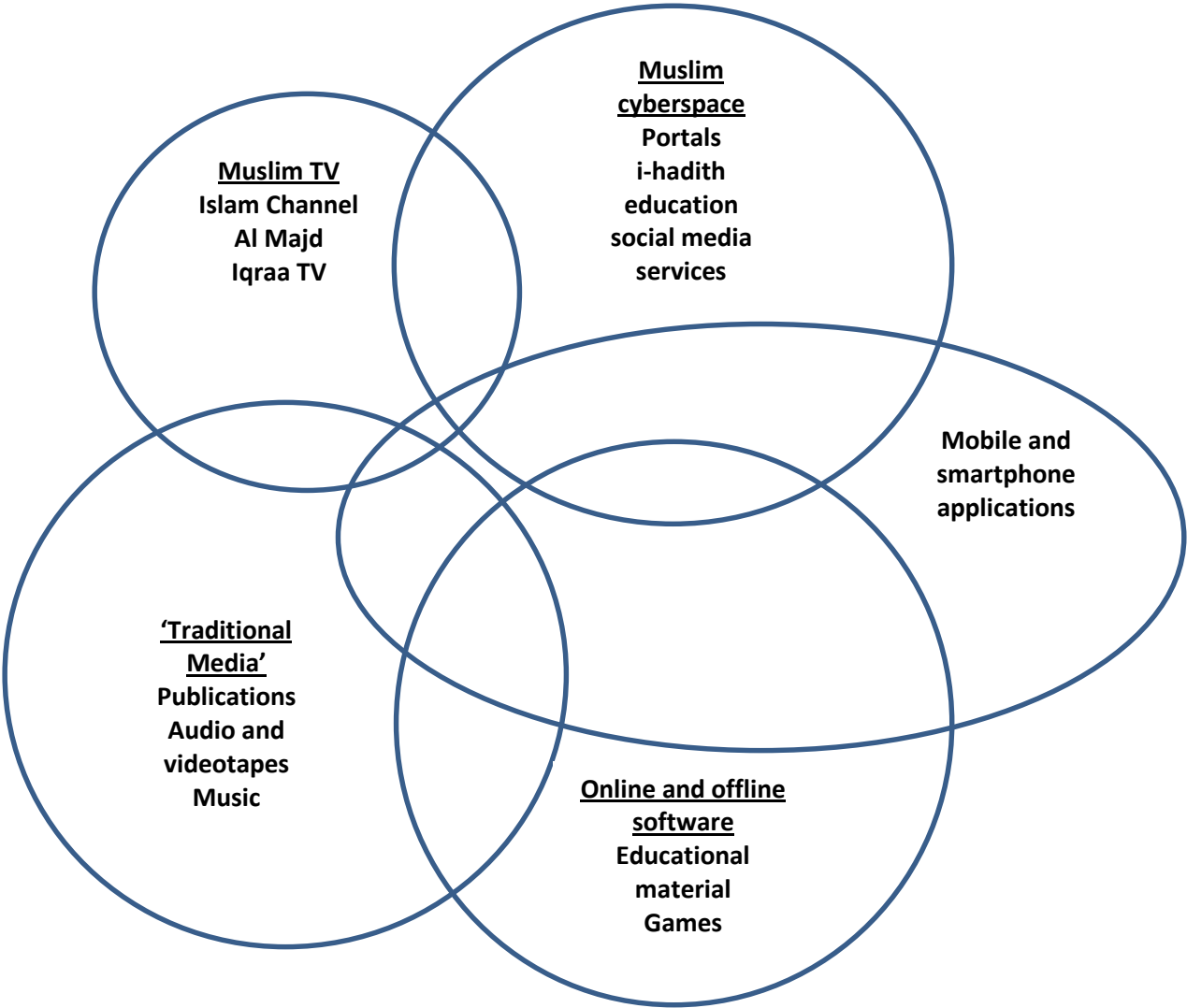
Figure

Diagram 1:
European Muslim Mediascapes

Diagram 2: European Muslim Media Space

Muslim cyberspace
Portals
i-hadith
education
social media
services

Muslim TV
Islam Channel
Al Majd
Iqraa TV

Mobile and smartphone applications

'Traditional Media'
Publications
Audio and videotapes
Music

Online and offline software
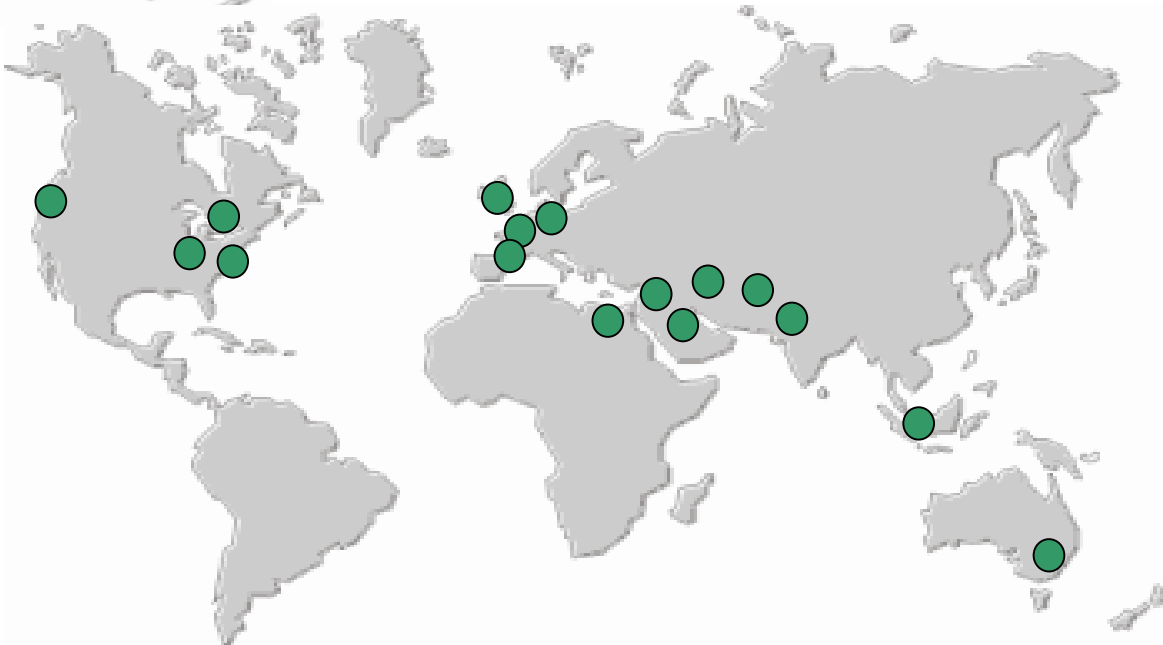Educational material
Games

Diagram 3 The Shifting Geography of Muslim Media Production
(premised on a survey of the provenance of 100 digital media products sold in London's Islamic bookshops)

2010

1990