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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 distancing 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

European Muslim Diasporic Geographies: Media and the Production of Translocality

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

In the age of globalization and of 'time-space distancing' (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 ethnoscapas, 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

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.

1 I think that the broad spectrum of opinion can allow us to identify trends that are
2 developing. Out of a total 735 informants, 149 articulated definitions of being Muslim
3 that emphasized 'culture', values, 'ways of doing things' in a way that echoes
4 Dassetto's designation of part of Europe's population as 'cultural Muslims' (Dassetto
5 1996). A further 82 have opted for what I could describe as a secular 'political'
6 definition, that is, have described themselves and other Muslims as a primarily or
7 exclusively racialized category, as victims of racism and islamophobia, but also as
8 subjected to socioeconomic and political discrimination. Nevertheless, a not
9 insignificant proportion of these would value Islam as a religion and, indeed, they
10 would consider themselves religious albeit in ways that do not always meet the
11 criteria set by Sander (1993) and others that are premised on mosque membership
12 and religious attendance. The fact remains that such definitions of religiosity are
13 rather prescriptive and rigid and thus are incapable to grasp the changing nature of
14 Islam in general, and European Islam and Muslims in particular. Informants were
15 encouraged to talk about their identities, their relationships with close and remote
16 'fellow Muslims' and non-Muslims alike and the means (and media) through which
17 they establish and maintain relationships.
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21 If it is possible to summarize on the basis of the interview findings the ways in which
22 European Muslims inhabit transnational spaces and engage in the formation of their
23 cultures and identities, one could identify two key areas where they play a crucial
24 role.
25

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

27
28 European Muslims actively utilize time/space distancing technologies to
29 cultivate both local and long-distance relations that are crucial in their
30 identification process. Through these they participate in and mobilize
31 processes of reconfiguration of time, space and place.
32

33 (b)The construction and dissemination of shared narratives:

34
35 European Muslims draw upon the opportunities provided by the various forms
36 of collective action and cultural creativity available to them in order to engage
37 in practices of meaning creation, drawing upon diverse life-histories and
38 social-historical backgrounds. In doing so, they often arrive at shared
39 interpretations of social reality and narratives of identity.
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44 Translocal and Transnational Phenomenological Geographies

45 Despite the energy and commitment many of my informants invested in the process
46 of construction of locality and of their local community, it was evident that locality
47 does not generate only positive feelings and attachments. Indeed, many informants,
48 including some of those who chose to participate in the broader community, saw in
49 the ways their local communities are organized powerful inertia of times gone by.
50 Many among the more religious of my interlocutors were skeptical about the
51 authority of their local elders as they considered the Islam they followed corrupted
52 and residual, not a matter of choice but of tedious repetition, marred by selectivity
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57 ² Despite the diversity of the ways 'phenomenological geography' is understood the concept
58 generally refers to the production of place and place-based communities through the
59 practices of social individuals. For a sympathetic yet critical discussion of the concept see
60 Moores 2006.
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1 and incomplete adherence to religious imperatives. Others found these very same
2 structures too strict, associated to bygone eras, stifling and suffocating. With very
3 few exceptions, informants sought spiritual guidance, or attempted to discover what
4 it means to be a Muslim, and a European Muslim for that matter, or, finally, to seek
5 and get to know others 'like them', beyond the confines of the locality. Transcending
6 the boundaries of the *local* was seen by most, for a variety of reasons as a normal
7 act of engagement with what is beyond, with what Peter Mandaville (2001) and
8 Olivier Roy (2002) called 'reimagining' and 'searching' for the Ummah respectively.
9 Both authors have very aptly demonstrated aspects of this process by examining a
10 corpus of texts and resources in cyberspace which reveal a transnational universe of
11 discourse and action. Here, in order to explore this process of translocal and
12 transnational social construction, I adopt a somewhat different approach that focuses
13 on the ways in which informants transcend the boundaries of the *local* and how they
14 articulate their own experiences and aspirations with those of often remote others
15 who share a common identification as Muslims.
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18 Indeed, in my discussions with my informants it became obvious that one way of
19 transcending the confines of one's local community is utilizing technologies of
20 time/space distancing (through the use of digital, mobile and locative media).
21 Similarly, many informants who chose to move away of localities which they had
22 affinities with, resorted to the very same media in order to seek raw material for
23 making sense of who they are.
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25
26 Most informants have been extremely interested in trying to articulate their complex
27 position, straddling, so to speak, the boundary between the local and the translocal
28 but also between being *Muslims* and being *European* at the same time. In their
29 attempt to explore this apparent ambiguity they proved to be voracious media users.
30 Regardless of the type of medium they used, informants expressed their frustration
31 at what they perceived as mainstream media. Their responses largely confirm
32 findings of other minority media users research that reveals that minority and Muslim
33 audiences are deeply dissatisfied with mainstream media (CENSIS, 2002; Millwood-
34 Hargrave, 2002; Poole, 2002).
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37 Among my informants, this dissatisfaction was apparent:
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40 Haroun, a 28-year-old male born in Scotland and living in London characteristically
41 says
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43 I sometimes think that, for television, time has stood still. If you look at
44 television, the world of the studios has nothing to do with what happens
45 outside. Muslims but also other people are hard to spot or can sometimes
46 appear as an excuse, just to provide an alibi for those who ignore our
47 presence and contribution [to society].
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49
50 Ayşe, a 31-year-old female from Frankfurt has a similar experience and comments
51 on her inability to recognize herself on television by drawing links with the dominant
52 political discourse in Germany.
53

54 When I watch television, I see someone else's country. A country without me,
55 without people like me. It is not that surprising then when I hear [politicians]
56 talk about Muslims in Germany as foreigners.
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59 But it is not only the direct representations or the non-representation of Muslims in
60 the mainstream media that come under scrutiny by many interviewees; the accuracy
61 and truthfulness of reports about Muslims at home and abroad is virtually
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1 unanimously questioned and feeds a substantial sense of injustice as we will see
2 later on. In response to this inability to draw upon raw material to validate
3 themselves as Europeans and Muslims at the same time, to see themselves as
4 stakeholders in their societies through their use of mainstream media, the
5 overwhelming majority of informants have devised a number of strategies of media
6 use.

7
8 When it comes to mainstream media, many informants intimate that, in view of their
9 lack of trust towards the objectivity and representativeness of mainstream media,
10 they rely on a multitude of media that include mainstream, diasporic and 'Muslim'
11 ones (that is, media explicitly addressing a Muslim audience). Reading many
12 newspapers, or going through different channels, persistently trying to analyze
13 stories, looking for plots or conspiracies, were some aspects of the repertoire of
14 media usage modes they resort to in order to get a sense of the information that
15 reaches them. This selective and critical attitude is, for many, necessary in order to
16 enable them compare narratives and identify the 'truth' in what is being offered to
17 them. Almost half of those interviewed described what one could call ways of
18 'reading between the lines' when they encounter local or national stories about Islam
19 and Muslims, or international news involving countries with Muslim majorities or
20 minorities.
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24 However, apart from the deployment of such strategies vis a vis the mainstream
25 media available to them, almost all informants have been turning their attention to,
26 and increasingly using media that they consider more 'appropriate' or more relevant
27 to them as *European Muslims*. These additional media include 'old' print media and
28 radio but also cable and satellite television and, increasingly, new, digital media
29 through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Most
30 interviewees could talk confidently and clearly about their uses of ICTs, mobile and
31 wireless media as well as an array of other media such as satellite television ³ and,
32 their responses to questions on this topic revealed that, regardless of socioeconomic
33 condition, the majority have been early adopters of Information and Communication
34 Technologies (ICTs) and are very skillful navigators of cyberspace, enjoying in this
35 way, access to a host of opportunities to obtain information, news or to be
36 entertained.
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40 This constellation of 'mainstream' and 'alternative' media constitute what I propose to
41 call *European Muslim Mediascape*. This comprises an array of media that are not
42 necessarily intended for exclusive consumption by Muslims alone; its existence
43 relies on continually shifting personal and collective assessments of what is suitable
44 and relevant to, and what is needed by European Muslims. Thus, alongside a critical
45 use of the mainstream media I referred to above, European Muslims increasingly
46 turn to diasporic media that may not address their audience primarily as *Muslims* but
47 as members of an ethnic group – Pakistanis, Egyptians, or Moroccans to mention
48 but a few – although many interviewees who use such media justified their choice on
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53 ³ This relative ease with new media and communications technologies is the product of
54 considerable investment in terms of money and time by many Muslim community
55 organizations, mosques and families. In all major cities that are home to sizeable Muslim
56 communities, young people are offered training courses in a variety of contexts in order to
57 become ICT-literate, partly in order to provide them with a headstart in the job market. But
58 there is evidence that this is also clearly a grievance-driven process, as the frustration with
59 the available mainstream media diet briefly outlined above.
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the grounds that their output conforms to what they would expect from an Islamic broadcaster.

Insert diagram 1 Muslim Mediascapes about here.

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

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'.

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

7 **Insert diagram 2: Muslim Media Space about here.**

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

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28 **Insert diagram 3 about here**

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33 It is this, last, feature that is highly significant as this constitutes an accessible space
34 that addresses them as Muslims and caters for their various information,
35 entertainment and social needs. For many of my informants that use such media,
36 cultural consumption and social interaction is often seen as a process of discovery
37 of, and encounter with other Muslims, nearby as well as further afield. In many ways,
38 these media provide the raw material to them to explore their Muslim identities and
39 to become aware of or connect with other Muslims in their, or other, more remote
40 localities. As we will see, they give opportunities to their users to empathize and
41 develop solidarities with other fellow Muslims. What is more, the technologies of
42 time-space distancing employed by satellite television, the various internet-based
43 and wireless and locative media have the capability to bring to their users that are
44 situated in remote locations almost instantaneously news from other parts of Europe
45 and further afield. Being in a position to enable instantaneous communication, the
46 media that make up this *Muslim Media Space* constitute part of the technologies and
47 infrastructures that give rise to, and sustain what Mandaville calls 'translocal space'
48 (2001: 49). They have the capacity to bring about and sustain a sense of immediacy,
49 contemporaneity and synchronicity to the dispersed populations that they link. This
50 temporal convergence and sense of co-presence is very significant as it brings a
51 qualitative change to the experience of being a European Muslim and the dynamics
52 set in motion by it. Temporal convergence makes possible, and much easier, the
53 convergence of experience: whereas earlier forms of socio-cultural distancing
54 were inextricably linked with temporal distance, making it very difficult for dispersed
55 populations to share experiences at more or less the same time and form common
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1 frames of making sense of these, the sense of contemporaneity and synchronicity
2 made possible through the use of such *Muslim Media* enables new ways of co-
3 existence and experiencing together, of constructing shared experiential frames
4 between hitherto remote and, often unconnected, fellow Muslims.
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6 Drawing on Scannell's discussion of the significance of electronic media in the
7 formation of their audiences' experience, it could be argued that, apart from
8 facilitating the compression of time and space, they bring about new possibilities of
9 being; in particular, 'new possibilities of being in two places at once' (Scannell, 1996:
10 91) – referring to the place where they experience an event and the place where an
11 event 'actually' takes place. It is not however only media events that have this quality
12 as their capability of doubling is inextricably linked to 'the liveness of radio and
13 television' (Scannell: 172). Although broadcasting – and not only its live variants –
14 revolves around the production of a sense of immediacy, this is by no means
15 exclusive to it but extends to, more or less, most electronic media as they share both
16 the capacity to produce a sense of immediacy and time-space distancing that
17 broadcasting has. Despite their often notable differences, various contemporary
18 electronic media and information and communication technologies, have a profound
19 effect in our sense of space as they produce at least 'two places'. In this sense, the
20 physical remoteness of European Muslims from each other, as well as from other
21 Muslims no longer prevents individuals in remote locations to coexist and interact in
22 ways that we can effectively describe as co-presence.
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27 It is this experience of co-presence that many informants singled out as highly
28 significant in the context of their media usage. Rasha, a twenty-three-year-old
29 French hairdresser, who has been trying to distance herself from Islam as a religion,
30 stressing that she is highly secular but chose to participate in our discussion group
31 because of her heritage, admitted that she was fascinated by being able to glimpse
32 into the lives of other Muslims in other parts of Europe through participating in
33 various online discussion on Islamophobia, relationships and culture, especially as
34 she could talk to them almost as she would face-to-face. Similarly, Waqas, a thirty-
35 five-year-old West Londoner recounted his experience of watching live Al-Jazeera
36 Arabic and being at the receiving end of what he called 'the raw truth of the Iraq war'.
37 He pointed out that what sensitized him and his friends who were watching with him
38 was the fact that the television set was like a window that allowed them to stare
39 'directly' at the misery the West was inflicting, 'to understand the horror of it'. And,
40 finally, Cem, a forty year old taxi driver from the Frankfurt area who has been
41 involved in the local Palestine solidarity campaign also uses internet-based media to
42 learn about his fellow Palestinian Muslims and finds the immediacy of internet-based
43 news media welcome yet overwhelming.
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48 I feel I need, we all need to know what is happening over there, the suffering
49 of our Palestinian brothers ... but I find what is happening very painful. And
50 sometimes, it is unbearable to watch the atrocities almost live; as they
51 happen. You suffer together with the families that lost their children, their
52 loved ones, their homes ...
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55 Although considerably different in some respects, these three justifications of the use
56 of Muslim media, indicate the importance of the potential of encountering others 'like
57 us', that is, Muslims in similar or different situations. But what is also significant here
58 is the fact that such instances of media uses can essentially be seen as map-making
59 exercises, cognitive attempts to create a translocal topography of local and remote
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1 fellow Muslims. These, indeed, constitute attempts to 'populate' the
2 translocal/transnational space, to imbue it with meaning.

3 The sense of connectedness and simultaneity and the sharing of views and
4 narratives across boundaries with everyone who experiences this transnational
5 interaction, provide a unique opportunity structure for dispersed populations. It
6 enables them to observe and interact with others, to imagine themselves as people
7 who share experiences with others who may be living far away to engage in
8 processes of exchange, translation and hybridization. In this context, processes of
9 mediated interaction across space (such as the ones unfolding in the course of such
10 encounters) where these parameters of social experience are reconfigured are of
11 paramount significance. European Muslims live complex lives situated within locales,
12 in very specific places – such as the neighborhood – where aspects of their
13 experience are grounded, and in national and transnational spaces that comprise
14 different interconnected localities at the same time. Actual, physical places co-exist
15 with 'virtual' places, or 'non-places' (Urry 2000, Augé1995).
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19 I have, in an earlier discussion of diasporas, likened such processes of translocal
20 encounters to 'the experience of pilgrimage' (Tsagarousianou 2007). Like pilgrims
21 who 'leave their own space and join with strangers to whom they have not been
22 connected previously in order to take part in events that are outside the normal flow
23 of daily life' (Dubisch 1995: 38), European Muslims embark on somehow similar,
24 albeit mediated journeys. And although these instances are not sacred as traditional
25 pilgrimages are, their profanity carries with it the aura of the extraordinary character
26 of discovery that is inherent in these emotional encounters with strangers who are
27 'so much like us'. Indeed, pilgrimage as a practice and its meaning-producing
28 implications have attracted the interest of social anthropologists for some decades
29 now. A prominent researcher and one of the pioneers in the field, Victor Turner has
30 described pilgrimage as a *rite de passage* that gives rise to a sense of *Communitas*
31 among those participating in it, that is, the establishment of a community which is
32 (temporarily) marked by a sense of egalitarian brotherhood among its members
33 (Turner 1974). More recently, drawing upon Turner, and echoing work on the
34 integrative and legitimizing functions of such practices, Benedict Anderson focused
35 on other spatial practices such as the travel itineraries of colonial civil servants from
36 their own localities to colonial administrative centers (1983). Anderson argued that,
37 like pilgrimage (and the trajectories formed by pilgrims in their journeys from their
38 own localities to their sacred destinations), over time these practices produce a
39 geographical reality that provides the raw material for the imagining of national
40 communities in the colonies of European colonial empires. Likewise then, I would
41 argue that these practices of mediated encounters among European Muslims, and
42 between them and other Muslims further afield institute phenomenological
43 geographies and, by extension, support and reinforce processes of construction of
44 European Muslim identities.
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51 From Connectivity to Consciousness

52 As we have seen, the technologies of time-space distancing employed by the
53 various media used by European Muslims (as well as similar technologies that make
54 physical mobility much easier and faster) have substantially altered the experiences
55 of presence and absence through their capability to overcome distance and
56 boundaries and to bring remote others together. Situated in remote locations,
57 informants access almost instantaneously news from other parts of Europe and
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1 further afield. Being in a position to enable instantaneous communication, the media
2 that make up what I have termed *Muslim Media Space* constitute part of the
3 technologies and infrastructures that give rise to, and sustain what Mandaville calls
4 'translocal space' (2001: 49). In other words, they have the capacity to bring about
5 and sustain a sense of immediacy, contemporaneity and synchronicity to the
6 dispersed populations that they link. This temporal convergence and sense of co-
7 presence is very significant as it brings a qualitative change to the experience of
8 being a European Muslim and the dynamics set in motion by it as responses of my
9 interviewees make clear.

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

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

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

53 Central in this production of a common stock of experience, in making possible the
54 crucial spaces where different experiences from remote physical and often alien
55 social contexts become intelligible, translatable and relevant to the dispersed
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1 population of Europe's Muslims is what, following Gamson and Ryan, one can term
2 common experiential and, even more so, injustice frames. The notion of frames is
3 derived from symbolic interactionism; in that theoretical context, frames evolve out of
4 collective efforts to make sense of problems; they help people 'locate, perceive,
5 identify, and label' their experience (Goffman 1974, p. 21). In social action research,
6 frames are the product of symbolic and cultural production of political actors.
7 According to Gamson (1992), political actors actively construct their self-
8 presentations so as to draw support from others. The concept of 'frame' therefore,
9 refers to cognitive processes through which people utilize background knowledge to
10 interpret an event or circumstance and to locate it in a larger system of meaning.
11 Framing processes are therefore means through which actors invoke one set of
12 meanings rather than another when they communicate a message, thereby
13 indicating how the message is to be understood.
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18 ARTICULATING AND SHARING GRIEVANCES

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20 Turning back to my informants, it is clear that they engage in processes that make
21 intelligible the experience of 'other Muslims', and integrate it into their own stock of
22 knowledge, memory and experience. Through various personal and institutional
23 networks and, more importantly, through the media used by Europe's Muslims these
24 narratives would often become part of a broader common stock of experience. Local
25 stories, having unfolded in remote localities, are integrated into local vernaculars
26 elsewhere. In this context locality and local experience is framed within a broader
27 translocal and, often, transnational network and the latter is, in turn, localized (made
28 sense in terms of its local manifestations/translations).
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31 However, I focus here on a particular type of frames that is central in the process of
32 defining and framing an injustice and orienting a movement towards its
33 resolution/alleviation as Ryan and Gamson (2006) describe *injustice frames*.
34

35 Interviewee discourses quite often raise grievances that range from issues of
36 visibility and representation to those of exclusion and discrimination. Although many
37 of their grievances are related to their local experience, what is interesting and
38 significant for the purposes of this article is the deterritorialization of these negative
39 experiences and their rearticulation in a broader Europe-wide discourse of injustice.
40 In the examples above, information from further afield –other parts of Britain , of
41 France or of Europe – is integrated into the interviewee responses in order to
42 support and generalize their claims.
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45 For example, while reflecting on corporate decisions but also on the self-image of
46 French society, 'Jacques', a 20-year-old apprentice from Paris relates his 'French'
47 experience to the experiences of British and German Muslims;
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50 Normally we do not exist for the bosses of big TV. Their image of France, the
51 one they try to draw through what they show on TV does not have room [for
52 the banlieues]. And if we can be seen, we are seen as criminals, as people
53 without any decency or value. This happens everywhere. The British present
54 us as rapists and wifebeaters, the Germans call us foreigners. They are all
55 telling us we do not belong.
56

57 And Rachid, a thirty-seven-year-old Parisian comments on the Mohammed cartoons
58 published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005 and their subsequent
59 publication in France
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1 they should understand [caricaturists] they are forcing people to take sides. I
2 have no choice because their vulgar and simplistic (intervention) is forcing
3 confrontation, not debate ... they single us out and target us and that is not
4 acceptable

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

38 In these instances, it is clear that European Muslims adopt a *European* perspective,
39 not only developing an interest for developments in other parts of Europe that, they
40 feel, affect them, but also integrating this knowledge to their own experiences and
41 worldviews. But the raw material for the construction of injustice is by no means
42 derived from Europe alone. Discussions and interviews with informants revealed a
43 quite widespread sensitivity to suffering in countries where Islam is practiced by the
44 majority or large minorities of the population. Some of the most notable cases are
45 Palestine which has been mentioned in highly emotional terms by the overwhelming
46 majority of the people I talked to, closely followed by Iraq and Afghanistan where
47 Western countries have intervened militarily, Chechnya which has been subjected to
48 several Russian military campaigns, Kashmir which is bitterly disputed by both
49 Pakistan and India and Bosnia, the stage of a bitter military confrontation between
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1 Serbs, Croats and Muslims as Yugoslavia disintegrated in the 1990s and whose
2 Muslim population was subjected to a campaign of ruthless ethnic cleansing. Indeed,
3 the plight of Bosnian Muslims has been a seminal moment that set in motion the
4 process of identifying as Muslims for many older interviewees. Magdi, a thirty-seven-
5 year-old paramedic from Belgium has vivid memories of the news coming from
6 Bosnia through his television screen.

7
8 It is hard to forget the suffering of those people. I remember not bearing to
9 watch the news. And I will never forgive the inaction of the world as a whole
10 people was being subjected to genocide just because they were Muslim. Just
11 because they [their Christian neighbors] decided they did not have the right to
12 be there. I was not, until then, particularly concerned about religion - my father
13 was not that religious anyway - but I thought that this was the moment. That
14 this is some sort of revelation, telling me that others are ready to die and they
15 pay the price for being Muslim.
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18 Asad, a forty-eight year-old West Londoner, an Islamic charity campaigner who had
19 previously been a left-wing activist prior to the Bosnian conflict also recounts the war
20 and how he abandoned his engagement with left politics
21

22 How could they [western governments] turn a blind eye to what was
23 happening. And how could the media present their [Muslims] slaughter day in
24 and day out. We would wait for the news, we would try to find a channel that
25 would say it - that this was a genocide. As we could not stand the apathy
26 around us, we decided to link up with others and start collections for our
27 brothers and sisters. Cash, blankets, medicines, food ... A friend volunteered
28 to drive the stuff but at the end the mosque was better networked and
29 arranged its transportation. Bosnia had a profound effect on me, on my
30 priorities ...
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34 Empathy with other fellow Muslims in such cases has a transformative effect,
35 sometimes as dramatic as that described in Magdi's and Asad's accounts,
36 sometimes subtler and more incremental. It is equally interesting to observe how
37 identification with the suffering of 'fellow Muslims' eliminates the reservations of
38 some interviewees to identify themselves as Muslims.
39

40 In a group discussion with members of an Afghan association in London, Naima, a
41 well dressed woman in her late forties, insisted that she and her Afghan friends were
42 highly secular and doubted if our discussion would provide us with any useful
43 information. Although in the course of the discussion, some members of the group
44 acknowledged the importance of Islam in their identity, she remained adamant that
45 this was not the case as far as she was concerned. As the discussion focused on
46 international issues, the group started to discuss the plight of ordinary Palestinians
47 under Israeli occupation. Naima followed silently the discussion and finally decided
48 to intervene.
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52 I am really sad. When I hear that a child has died, shot by Israeli soldiers or
53 blown by American mines, I realize how little our lives matter. If it is Muslim
54 lives no one cares, no one thinks about them as human beings.
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56 In her intervention, Naima switched from the lives of Palestinian, Iraqi or Afghan
57 children ('they', 'them') to a more inclusive 'we' and, moving on, defined this 'we' as
58 'Muslims' despite her earlier statement that Islam does not mean anything to her.
59 Whereas she dissociated herself from a religious identity which she seems to reject,
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1 she was much more comfortable with a definition of Muslims (including her) as the
2 victims of a profound injustice and disregard. Although she articulated this in very
3 clear terms, she was not the only one. Many 'secular Muslims' I encountered
4 identified themselves as Muslims by using what one could call political criteria such
5 as solidarity with Muslims whose lives are ravaged by war and violence or those who
6 encounter in their daily lives racism and islamophobia.

7 Yasmin, a twenty-two-year-old student expresses this eloquently as she describes
8 the way she experiences racism.
9

10 I do not have time for mosques and prayers. I do not even know if I believe in
11 anything. But I experience the prejudice. It is how people stare at us, it is the
12 police stopping you in the street, it is the comments that people make. We are
13 Muslims because that's what we are. We cannot escape it.
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16 In Yasmin's discourse 'us' refers to European Muslims, not as a religious group, but
17 as a minority that is subjected to prejudice and racism. And Rupa, a twenty-six-year-
18 old college tutor from West London echoes Yasmin's definition by suggesting that
19 'being Muslim' constitutes a meaningful and, at the same time pragmatic, political
20 act that enables her to cope with an adverse political and social environment.
21

22 My parents wanted us to go to (a white school). We had to cross the town
23 every morning. They wanted us to fit in. But you pay the price as at the end of
24 the day people still call you Paki this and Paki that. I understand their choices
25 but at the end of the day, I am Muslim and only by embracing this I can resist
26 (racial harassment)
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29 In all these instances, the various forms of discrimination experienced by Muslims
30 elsewhere, the suffering of Muslims in war zones and occupied territories as well as
31 the immediate experience of racist violence described when discussing the
32 topographies of fear sketched by informants, or more mundane experiences of being
33 made to feel out of place amount to what Glenn Bowman calls constitutive violence
34 (Bowman 2003: 319-20). Examining the emergence of Palestinian and Yugoslav
35 nationalisms and trying to make sense of how national identities emerge and are
36 crystallized in the context of conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian and the Bosnian
37 one, Bowman argues that
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40 violence is not simply a device nationalists of certain persuasions take up
41 strategically in pursuit of ends ... but something that plays a constitutive role in
42 the formation of all nationalisms. The violence which engenders nationalism is
43 not the violence the imagined community of the future nation turns against its
44 'enemies', but the violence members of that not-yet-existent nation perceive
45 as inflicted upon them by others An antagonism, rather than threatening a
46 pre-existing and self-conscious entity, brings the community it threatens into
47 being through that threat, and gives shape and identity to what it threatens
48 through placing it at risk. Perceptions of a violence afflicting a diverse range of
49 persons give rise to a concept of a 'national enemy' and, through that concept,
50 to the idea of solidarity with those whom that enemy opposes (320).
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55 Despite the explicit link Bowman's definition of 'constitutive violence' introduces to
56 nationalism, his argument remains quite a potent and pertinent one even if the
57 processes we are exploring do not culminate in the development of a nationalist
58 movement. In the case of European Muslims, what is clear is that, through the
59 translation and domestication of narratives produced in remote locations and through
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1 diverse experiences, a common stock of experiences of injustice, even of
2 constitutive violence becomes intelligible, accessible, meaningful and, more
3 importantly, relevant to many. This sense of injustice and the narratives that
4 underpin it make possible the imagination of a 'we', of all those who suffer 'the same'
5 injustice. This collective sense of injustice, and the 'cultural trauma' that it entails
6 draw together the 'multiplex strands of violence, risk and threat afflicting people's
7 everyday lives' (Bowman: 320), to mobilize those who perceive themselves as
8 affected. This mobilization is crucial to setting in motion processes of 'reinterpreting
9 the past, narrating new foundations' (Hale 1998: 6), effectively instituting,
10 reconstituting or reconfiguring a collective identity through collective representation,
11 as a way of repairing the tear in the social fabric caused by 'injustice' and 'inequity'.
12 Associating their identities as Muslims in Europe with the traumatic experiences of
13 others entails therefore adopting a perspective derived from mediated experience.
14 To be more clear, the suffering of young Afghans due to the war in Afghanistan's
15 Helmand province and the repercussions of a headscarf ban in some municipality in
16 Spain which are experienced through various media by a young Muslim woman in
17 Britain, combined with the immediate and direct experience of racism in her school,
18 neighbourhood or workplace are some of the possible ingredients of how she
19 experiences herself being a Muslim in Europe today.
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25 There are ample indications that the construction of a Muslim identity drawing on a
26 sense of injustice and trauma is well underway and is proving to be enduring. Clues
27 to its durability are provided by Neal's analysis of 'national trauma' (1998) – a
28 concept closely related to that of 'cultural trauma'. Neal refers to its 'enduring
29 effects', as it relates to events 'which cannot be easily dismissed, which will be
30 played over again and again in individual consciousness,' and which, with the
31 passage of time become 'ingrained in collective memory.' In the case of my
32 informants, the mediated experience of suffering and discrimination becomes the
33 subject of reflection, discussion and emotional investment. They described how such
34 news become the focus of collective endeavors of search, of discovery, of anxiety
35 and, eventually of exchange and discussion. Peer groups in the context of face to
36 face daily interaction, but also in virtual space often constitute a space for such
37 exchanges, as do more formal settings such as the mosque, the community
38 associations, the university or college. It is in these spaces that the notion of injustice
39 but also those of agency and identity (Gamson 1992) are understood, explained, and
40 made coherent through the means of public reflection and discourse. As Smelser (in
41 Alexander et al. 2001) suggests, 'cultural trauma' constitutes 'a memory accepted
42 and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event
43 or situation which is (a) laden with negative affect, (b) represented as indelible, and
44 (c) regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its
45 fundamental cultural presuppositions'. It is also clear that the impact of the
46 experience of trauma is not exhausted in the articulation of notions of injustice and
47 harm, or the (re)articulation of identity as Alexander suggests. Agency springs out of
48 the realization that something needs to be done, that 'brothers and sisters' need to
49 be supported, or that voice needs to be gained.
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57 Conclusions

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1 Over the past few pages, I have explored in an admittedly cursory way how the
2 experiences of remote others become part of the complex narrative fabric that
3 constitutes the experiential and, in particular, injustice frames through which
4 European Muslims situate themselves in European societies. This weaving of
5 narratives that integrate various localities in a complex translocal and transnational
6 web of relationships, encounters and exchanges is the product of the collective
7 action of Europeans who identify themselves as Muslim in a variety of ways and
8 engage in the construction of cultural and political networks. This is a fluid and
9 continuously evolving terrain, whose contours and morphology are constantly
10 redefined through complex processes of negotiation, interaction, and contestation. In
11 this space, as we have seen, locality and local experience are interweaved and
12 framed within a broader transnational network of flows of people, information, ideas
13 and action. At the same time, the experiences of remote others and the translocal
14 sites of narrating Muslim identity are localized and domesticated, made sense of in
15 terms of their local manifestations and translations. This is a space where
16 participants are agonizingly seeking ways of overcoming what they perceive to be
17 under- and mis-representation and, ultimately, marginalization. It provides the means
18 for 'inhabiting' local & translocal/transnational domains by rendering these familiar in
19 terms of sounds, images, negating and overcoming absences and silences.
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24 I am clearly talking about a locus of encounters, exchange & imagination. A public
25 space that hosts multiple voices, multiple narratives which provides the raw materials
26 for new articulations of identity, for testing boundaries and providing frameworks of
27 experience and memory. Interviewee responses to relevant questions provide clear
28 evidence that the solidarity felt towards other Muslims is reminiscent of what
29 Mandaville has very aptly termed *reimagining the Umma* (2001). This reimagining
30 entails processes of construction of a space depending on cognitive and emotional
31 processes. As Yi-Fu Tuan (1996: 455) points out place, the phenomenological
32 geographies I have discussed, 'can be as small as the corner of a room or large as
33 the earth itself', depending on the emotional 'field of care' that constructs it while
34 Seamon argues that senses of place are fostered by 'place-ballets' (Seamon 1980),
35 which involve an interpersonal mixing of body ballets and time-space routines, and
36 serve to transform spaces – creatively and collaboratively – into significant places
37 (Moore 2006).
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42 I have argued that the phenomenological geographies of Europe's Muslims rest on
43 both sets of processes. Apart from the various controversies that have developed in
44 the domestic sphere of the various European societies, we have seen that the
45 perennial issue of the fate of the Palestinian Muslims and the two intifadas, the
46 Russian treatment of the Chechen people and the plight of the Bosnian Muslims
47 during the war in Bosnia have functioned as instances of *constitutive violence*,
48 moments of profound injustice not only towards the Palestinian, Chechen or Bosnian
49 Muslims but towards all Muslims according to just under eight out of ten informants,
50 including those residing in Europe. What is more, this narrative is reproduced in the
51 various public spaces that European Muslims have established such as the Muslim
52 media, offline and online, the international charities that have been founded primarily
53 during the Bosnian war, and everyday discourses and practices of European
54 Muslims. A key role in these processes is indeed played by what I called *European*
55 *Muslim mediascape*. This includes "alternatives" to the mainstream media, media
56 that are not necessarily intended for exclusive consumption by Muslims alone; I have
57 argued that its existence relies on continually shifting personal and collective
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1 assessments of what is suitable and relevant to, and what is needed by European
2 Muslims. Indeed, as I have pointed out, this may include diasporic media, or Arabic
3 language transnational news media are seen by informants as able to provide a
4 perspective that resonates with them. Clearly, as I suggested, such media appear to
5 “make sense”, speak with a voice European Muslims recognize and relate to.
6 Indymedia, counterbalancing the perceived bias or indifference of their mainstream
7 counterpart are also seen as providing a more sensitive and trustworthy version of
8 social and political realities as well as vital information. But most significant is the
9 emergence over the past couple of decades of a host of media that are addressing
10 Europe’s Muslims as precisely that, comprising what I called *Muslim Media Space*, a
11 highly diverse and polyphonic sector providing considerable choice for European
12 Muslims as my interviewees suggested.
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15 Through these spaces the *ummah* is reimagined, as one coexisting with a sense of
16 European Muslim particularity that assumes the form of challenges as well as
17 opportunities arising from residing in the sociopolitical and cultural space that is
18 called Europe, by interacting with European societies and institutions and having to
19 develop appropriate strategies of discourse and action. In this context, we can
20 therefore argue that the sense of a European Muslim identity is very much a project
21 in progress, one that is largely premised on empathy and the mediated *witnessing*
22 and *remembrance* of the suffering of fellow Muslims throughout the world.
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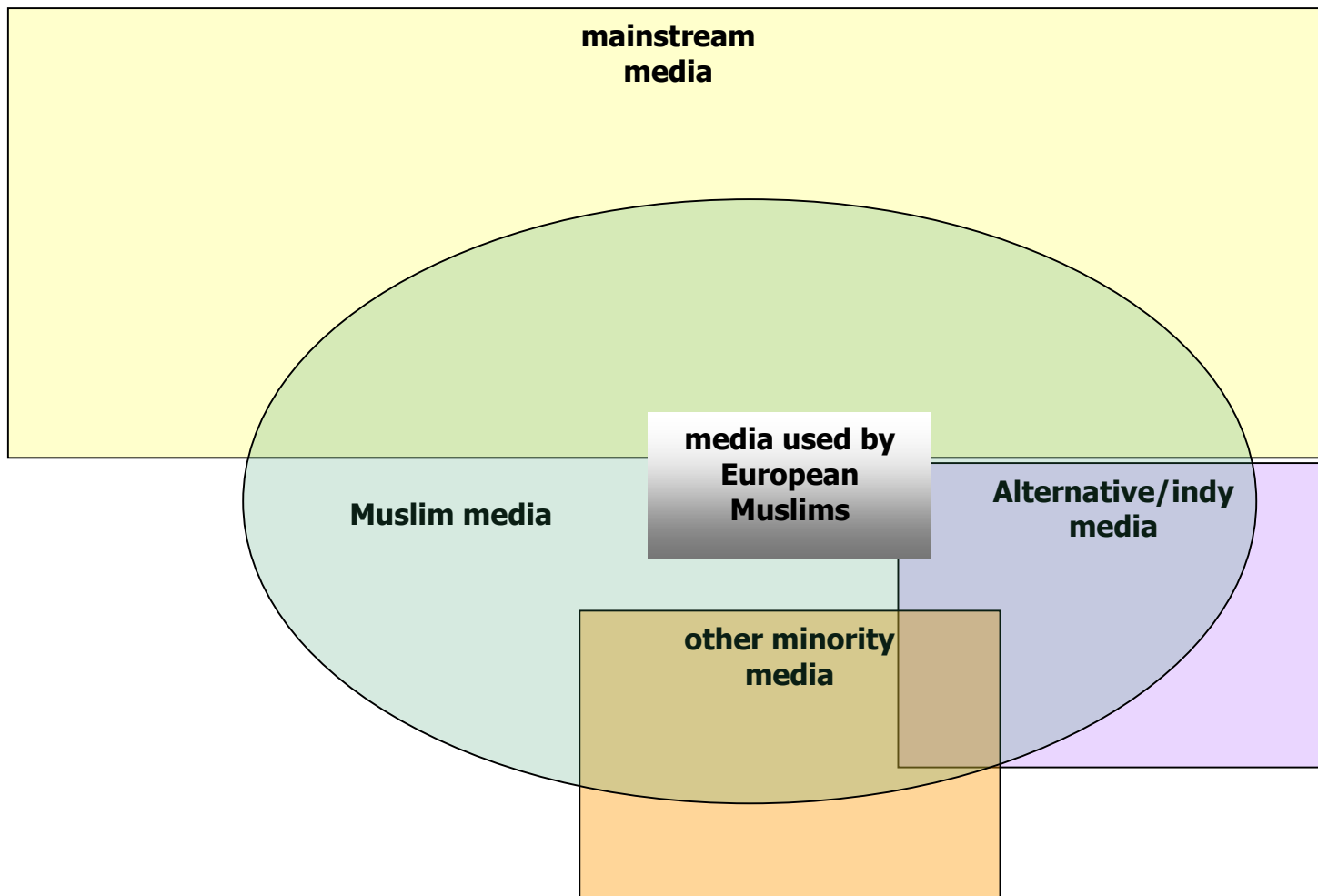
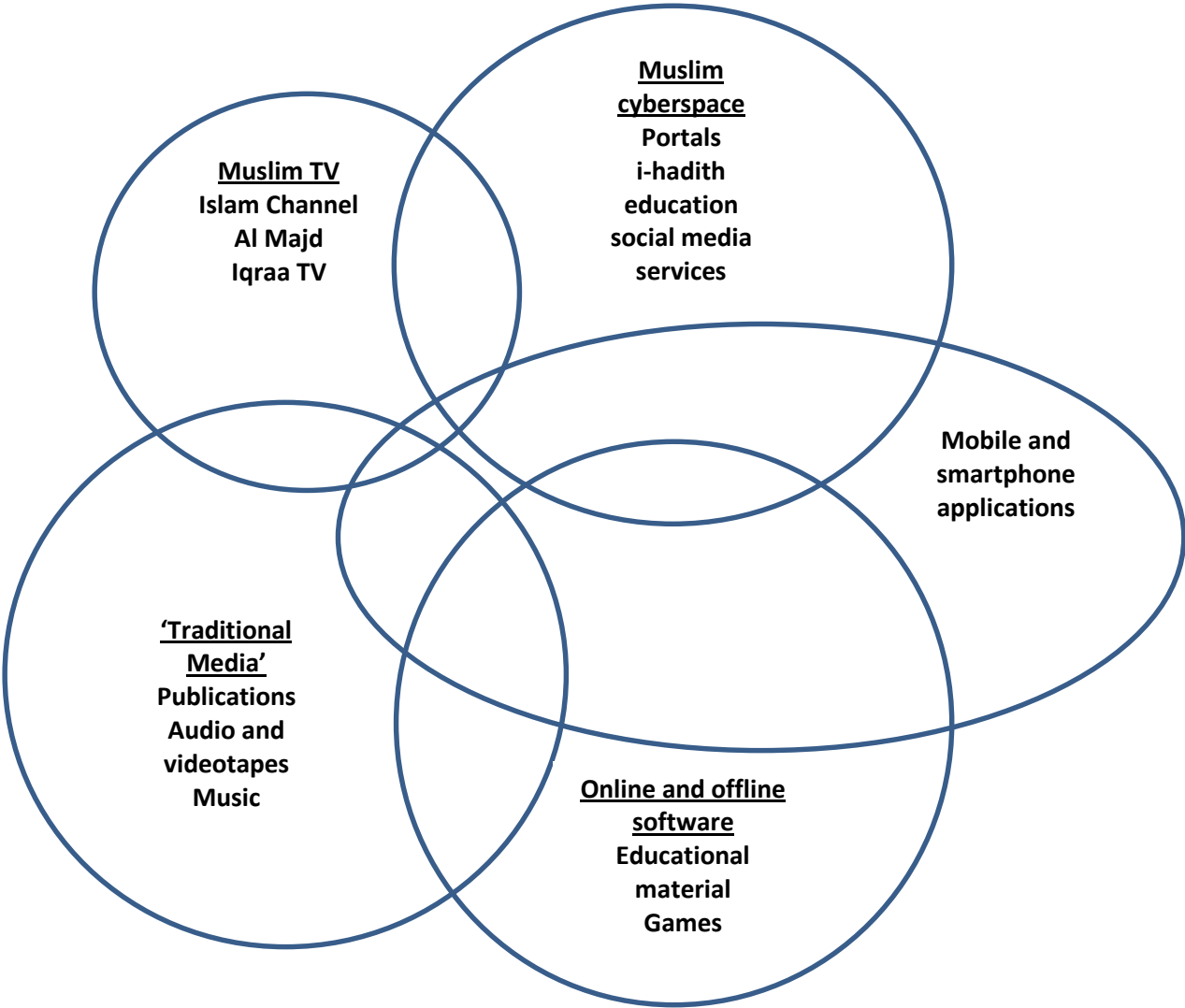


Diagram 1:
European Muslim Mediascapes

Diagram 2: European Muslim Media Space



**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)



1990

2010

