

9/11 as a new temporal phase for Islam

The narrative and temporal framing of Islam in crisis

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Abstract Since the bombing of the twin towers, ‘Islam’ as a cultural narrative has entered a new temporal phase which in many ways signifies the re-imagining of a religion through the visual imagery of 9/11 and the global events which have unfolded since the apocalyptic images were first witnessed by the world. The distant proximity of 9/11 and the relocation of the perceived Islamic ‘resurgent atavism’ within the heartlands of power in Western soil constitute the formation of a new sociological imagination of Islam and 9/11 as a new liminal temporality. The association of the religion with a new category of risks in urban sites and the constant state of insecurity in seemingly secure spaces represents a new narrative phase of geo-politics in which the locus of this re-imagining mediated through ICTs, is one that happens not just in faraway places but within the ‘ontological securities’ of Western modernity, posing a liquid threat which is impervious to territorially bounded spheres.

Keywords Risk discourse · Postmodern · Temporality of Islam · Globalisation

Introduction

Edward Said in *Covering Islam* points out that ‘Islam scarcely figured in the media before the sudden OPEC price rises in early 1974’ and that it entered geopolitical consciousness through instability and turmoil, ‘particularly if not exclusively because it has been connected to newsworthy issues like oil, Iran and Afghanistan or terrorism’ (Said 1997: 16). In 1979, the crisis in the Middle East was conjured through phrases such as ‘the crescent of crisis,’ ‘the arc of instability’ or the ‘return of Islam’ (Said 1997: 16), thus narrating the story of Islam as one which is volatile and prone to a militant revival within the turbulent politics of the Middle East. The

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events of 9/11 signify Islam's de-centring from the Middle East and its narrative transcendence into the urban centres of power in the West. The powerful imagery of 9/11 binds the recent past and the present into a 'new memory' (Hoskins 2001), which is ritualised and memorialised through the media landscape. It constitutes a new historicity of Islam imagined through the spectacle of 9/11.

The attacks of 9/11 have reconfigured the spatial dimensions of Islam's narrative engagement with the West and its cultural signification in the world. It represents a physical disembodying of Islam from its 'faraway locales' into urban sites of security and power in the west. This geo-political dislocation of Islam and its re-embedding into Western sites of power embody a new temporality which subsumes the risk discourses of the postmodern society and its dialectical struggle to exhibit rationality and reflexivity in dealing with the threat of 'others' while engaging in armed conflict. It sustains the trajectories of Orientalism but inversely it invariably also frustrates Said's project which sought to highlight the prejudices inherent in the Western gaze of the Orient in which Islam is an intrinsic part of that imagination. The recent memory of 9/11 and the chain of events which have ensued since this catastrophic event constitute a dismantling of Orientalism's plea for reflexivity. Additionally, the attacks of 9/11 also illuminate the distributed globalized risks which emerge through globalization and the use of technology, particularly with the growth of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the perceived threats which can emerge on the global dimensions with the shared media spaces.

This paper investigates how the attacks of 9/11 mark the emergence of a new temporality in which the ideological reframing and sociological imagination of Islam as well as its association with the politics of discontent, desperation and terrorism positions it as a global risk and a threat to Western modernity and civilization. The destruction of the World Trade Centre on Sept 11 2001 remains one of the most iconographic images of the world. This visual imagery and the various readings of this devastation have wider implications for the emergence of a new temporality which narrate Islam in a state of physical dislocation where its presence and absence are concocted through the vernacular of risk and terrorism. The apocalyptic impact of Sept 11, rammed home by real-time visual coverage on international networks, was seductive in conjuring up the sense that we are living in a new era of ubiquitous and even world-ending violence by collapsing time into the present reinforcing the experience of epochal change (Humphrey 2004: 3). The development of information and communication technologies makes the world a 'global village' in which not only economic and industrial production and exchanges take place but also the sharing of visual images and text which are circulated and consumed, creating new forms of symbolic meanings as well as risks. Both the notions of risk society and the 'War on Terror' are located through the concept of globalization and the vulnerabilities of an interlinked world.

The attacks of 9/11 place both the trajectories of Orientalism and Western self-identity into a double bind. The Orient is often considered backward and static and is envisioned as a mystical place, according it infinite power. Islam as the religion of the Orient is associated with these essentialist qualities. As such, 9/11 reinforces the mystical powers of the Orient while shattering the stereotypical image of America as a superpower. This double articulation of 9/11 both subverts and reinforces the mythical and sociological imagination of both the 'West' and the 'Orient.' This

double bind also places the ‘reflexive modernity’ of postmodern states in a crisis where the discourses of ‘War on Terror’ have to appropriate the veneer of rationality and reflexivity in dealing with the ‘uncouth’ other. According to Gilles Kepel (2006: 1), ‘9/11 exposed the fragility of the United States’ empire, exploding the myth of its invincibility, calling into question all the certainties and beliefs that had ensured the triumph of American civilization in the twentieth century.’

Additionally, the attacks on American soil splinter the temporal dichotomy between the Orient and West. It symbolically emptied out the time of the Orient as a faraway and static entity and placed it in the same temporal spaces of the Western world thus shattering the temporal dichotomy of imagination which places the West and the Orient as separate entities. Most of the commentary of 9/11 is that events of the day ‘changed everything’ or has carved out ‘a new normalcy’ (cf. Luke 2003: 2) signifying a new temporality both in the global political landscape as well as in the West’s engagement with Orient and subsequently Islam.

Islam in a new narrative phase

Since Sept 2001, there is a thread that runs through the global political landscape. A thread which seemingly links the Iraq war, the Madrid bombings, the Bali bombings, the 7/7 bombings, the angry outbursts against the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad, to the invasion of Lebanon and to the recent security threats in London in the summer of 2006. A thread in which war, controversy and strife convey a new temporal dimension in which events since 9/11 appear interlinked. The textual narrative of this temporal Islam is sustained through discourses such as the ‘War on Terror’ which assemble a continuity and resonance to the stream of events which have ensued since 9/11. A temporality in which 9/11 marks the onslaught of a new form of ideological tension on the global political landscape which manifests itself through the discourses of terrorism in urban and metropolitan spaces constructing a new form of postmodern risk in which one’s life could be at threat anywhere, at anytime. This textual leitmotif is crucial to the re-imagining of Islam in this temporal phase for it is a constant signifier of the new memory of Islam since 9/11. This absent presence of Islam in global discourses of risk lapses into the trajectories of Orientalism where Islam is accorded monumental and infinite power creating a visible shadow in the politics of worldwide stability.

This temporality is heightened through the mediated politics of the new information and communication technologies, or ICTs, creating a new form of global consciousness which perceives risk as inherent in every context of modern existence. Since 9/11, Islam has been re-framed as an ideological narrative which threatens the security of a modern world, infusing unknown risks which are pervasive and all consuming through a mediated landscape with its lingering visual imagery of horror in urban spaces. The urban space is a metaphor for modernity and progress as well as a performative space for its manifestation. A stage where there is a celebration of secularity and where religion is perceived as corroding rationality. The sustained staging of the discourses of Islam on this platform means that these narratives are framed and judged through the props and pathos which depict Western civilizations as being under siege by a malevolent other. This shift in the locus of the

imagination of Islam from the East to the West is a distinctive feature of this new temporal phase of Islam where the fear is enhanced through the proximity of this relocation. Secondly, the ‘atavism’ which is often viewed as a persistent strain of Islam (Said 1997) is manifested through powerful visual images which are not staged in faraway deserts and remote corners of the world but in urban centres of power. The mythologizing of Islam in the past centuries and decades through narratives, be it novels, epics or history accord it with inexplicable powers and this mysticism often sets pre-conditions for West’s engagement with Islam in the postmodern world.

Islam’s re-imagination through the visual imagery of 9/11, subsumes both the trajectories of Orientalism and the risk society where the ‘decoupling of time and space’ in the digital age help create not only new forms of ‘abstract knowledge’ (Giddens 1991a) but also new anxieties. The dialectical struggle between the ‘discursive reflexivity’ and risk culture is one which recognises the prejudices and stereotypes evident in the trajectory of Orientalism as well as one that grapples to reconcile it with the perceived threats of the postmodern world where the non-stop visual imagery, expert knowledge and narratives of ICTs construct, mediate and temper this local knowledge. Both these dialectical strains have to integrate the ‘ontological securities’ of the modern nation state where risk and anxiety is articulated through the routines and practices of the everyday life. It is within these dialectical struggles and everyday practices that the ‘re-imagining of Islam’ occurs.

The iconographic images of 9/11 in the context of ‘festive viewing’ (Dayan and Katz 1992), where the audience perceive and comprehend themselves to be viewing an event which is out of the ordinary from their everyday existence, re-negotiates the construction of reality where the visibility of evidence (Kuhn 1985), or absence (of the towers) as in the case of 9/11, and the global communion of that consumption infer a re-configuration of the West’s engagement with Islam. This ‘re-imagination’ of Islam is a mediated discourse within the geopolitical landscape for it appropriates both the ‘expert knowledge’ of the postmodern societies and one which is also reactive to the abjection felt in the aftermath of attacks which have happened around the globe. The re-imagining of Islam after 9/11 is emotive, rational as well as irrational, and is symptomatic of ‘reflexive modernity’ reconfiguring the complex conditions in which the image of Islam is negotiated in the contemporary world. This imagination is incessantly stroked by a media landscape with its archive of digital images and sound bites which construct and re-construct both memory and reality. The re-embedding of Islam in urban spaces reframes risk ‘where cities known historically and conceptually as the metonyms of security’ are transformed into ‘sources of threat and violence’ (Mendietta 2005).

Risk, religion and modernity

According to Anthony Giddens (1991b) and Ulrich Beck (1992) we live in a risk culture. Risk is a fabric of our modern condition and as such risk culture emerges from the recognition that the nature of risk is global. With increased industrialisation, capitalism, globalisation and the sharing of production and technologies across the globe, new forms of risks are shared unequally by countries. Modern nation states

are then forced to contain and manage various forms of risks on a regular basis through the use of expert knowledge, technology and surveillance. According to Ulrich Beck risk has become an organising principle of globalized world where the perception of risk determines thoughts and action. For Giddens (1991a,b) risk is closely linked to the notion of security and there is a globalization of risk in terms of its intensity (e.g. nuclear disasters) and in the number of contingent events which affect large numbers of people in the world.

This metanarrative of modernity implies a constant struggle with the notion of threat. Unequivocally, this notion of threat has been manifested in many ways and at a fundamental level it often revolves around the issues of an ‘Otherness.’ According to Mary Douglas (1992), risk can be both scientific and elusive and they affect the way in which risks are dealt with in different societies. Zygmunt Bauman (2006: 125) contends that the ‘machinery of the nation-state, invented and groomed to guard territorial sovereignty and to set insiders unambiguously apart from outsiders has been caught unprepared by the wiring up of the planet’ where boundary construction becomes futile and the fluidity and permeability of borders become the norm. Nevertheless, the threat of ‘Otherness’ in modern societies takes many forms and various discourses to assuage the fears and anxieties of the postmodern world. The terrain of rationality is a by-product of enlightenment and modernity where there is a deliberate attempt to approach the irrational fear of the ‘other’ and ‘otherness’ through rational debates and intellectualisation of anxieties.

Often the need to subsume and to extract patterns of similarities from outsiders in modern societies has resulted in discourses ranging from ‘assimilation,’ ‘integration’ or ‘multiculturalism,’ highlighting a fundamental need to create new discourses of citizenship to accentuate one’s belonging to the modern nation state. A need to exorcise this otherness through schemes which profess a new sense of belonging while downplaying the differences to form a new communion through the apparatus of the state and its constructed identity. Kenan Malik (2002: 3) postulates that ‘in place of progressive universalism western societies have embraced a form of nihilistic multiculturalism in which the world has been divided into cultures and groups defined largely by their difference with each other.’

The emotive elements (as opposed to the rational) assigned to religion and the rise of the secular state, in itself a condition of modernity, has problematised religion and religious discourses re-framing them as risks. As such within the discourses of the secular, religion is viewed as destabilising and often for the modern nation state it has been a struggle to relegate religion outside the parameters of state administration. The West’s co-optation of the construct of enlightenment has had lasting consequences for its self-perception and its engagement with others.

The construct of Enlightenment has invariably come under much criticism and scrutiny and has been viewed as exclusionary and seeking to impose Euro-American ideas on the rest of the world (cf. Malik 2002; Said 1997). For Said there is a need to guard against this reductive binary opposition and the ‘need to step back from the imaginary thresholds that supposedly separate people from each other into supposedly clashing civilization and re-examine the labels,...’Islam’ and the ‘West’. (cf. Li 2004). Roxanne Euben (cf. Cavanaugh 2006) in writing about Islamic fundamentalism describes that opposition is an intrinsic part of the Enlightenment narrative in which defining reason needs an irrational other;

‘...along with the emergence of reason as both the instrument and essence of human achievement, the irrational came to be defined primarily in opposition to what such thinkers saw as truths of their own distinctive historical epoch...Thus the irrational came to mean the domination of religion in the historical epoch that preceded it.’

Kenan Malik in citing David Goldberg (1993: 29) defines Enlightenment as subjugation of nature by human intellect, colonial control through physical and cultural domination and economic superiority through mastery of the laws of the market. Kenan Malik (2002) points out that the very control of nature and rational organisation of society which was viewed as human emancipation is now seen as problematic. The failure of the Enlightenment project and the weaknesses in Western rationality is evident in its inability to reconcile morality and politics. It perpetuates new forms of crisis where politics is forced to exist outside religious convictions where norms can differ from private morals.

Reinhart Koselleck's (cf. Haikala 1997) study of Enlightenment which uses Hobbes' *Leviathan* as the starting point analyses the separation of politics and morality and the subordination of the latter to the former. This resurrects barriers between the private and public spheres and in order to retain societal harmony the individual was pushed out of the political sphere and consigned to the private. This meant that while he had the exercise of free will in the realm of morality, he lacked the power and right to criticise the sovereign in the political space.

Koselleck (cf. Haikala) argues that this division between politics and morality was a precondition for Enlightenment and with the advancement of secularization there was a preoccupation with the 'criticism of earthly matters' especially with the bourgeois elite who replaced religious questions of conscience with moral evaluations (cf. Haikala). Here philosophies of history at once become tools of self-deception and as forms of indirect political power. They impose a judgement upon the existing political and social conditions and in the process highlight the conflicts between politics and morality, between state and society, depriving individuals of the ability to put their own certainties of faith into relative terms.' (Koselleck cf. Haikala 1997: 74–75). Additionally, there is an ongoing endeavour to neatly dissect and extrapolate religion from the cultural and political realm. According to Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1962) religion as a discrete category separable from culture, politics and other areas of life is an invention of the modern West. Cavanaugh (2006: 21) points out that European colonial bureaucrats, in the course of categorizing non-Western colonized cultures, invented the concept of religion as irrational and anti-modern.

Despite the epistemological dichotomy between religion and politics, Bauman (2006: 112) points out 'Secular ideological expressions of rebellion have been replaced by ideological formulations that are religious despite the grievances remaining the same (i.e. the sense of alienation, marginalization, and social frustration are the same). As such there has been a global tendency in the 'religionization of politics.' In places such as Kashmir, Sri Lanka, Iran, Egypt, Palestine, and Israeli settlements non-religious grievances once expressed in Marxist or nationalistic vocabularies have tended to be translated into the language of religious revival. Bauman (2006: 112) in citing Charles Kimball's analysis of Bush

administration highlights Bush's rhetoric of 'cosmic dualism between good nations led by the United States and the forces of evil' which creates a Manichean dualism. These black and white depictions convey incompatible messages and allude to the reduction of a complex world into life and death confrontations. According to Mark Juergensmeyer (2000: 217) religious violence creates a 'larger than life' context of cosmic war whereas secular conflicts are 'more rational conflicts.' For Juergensmeyer 'religious violence differs from secular in that it is symbolic, absolutist and unrestrained by historical time'. William Cavanaugh (2006: 2) on the other hand contends that the West finds it comforting and ideologically useful in perceiving religion as more violent than the so-called secular phenomenon:

'The myth of religious violence helps to create a blind spot about the violence of the putatively secular nation state. We like to believe the secular state arose to make peace between warring religious factions.' 'The myth of religious violence promotes a dichotomy between us in the secular West who are rational and peacemaking and them, the hoards of violent religious fanatics in the Muslim world. Their violence is religious, and therefore irrational and divisive. Our violence, on the other hand, is rational, peacemaking and necessary' (2006: 2).

The association of religion with violence and irrationality enables religious issues to be transformed into risk discourses and security threats which threaten the whole of Western civilization and modernity. The appropriation of rational scientific discourses and the employment of expert knowledge to counteract anxiety is yet another feature of the modern world. Attempts to control risk or their occurrence generate in turn new risks and challenges that can create outcomes which are unpredictable. Giddens (1991a) analysis of risk considers the condition of the self and the issues of self-identity in the post modern society. Giddens' (1991b) notion of modernity is understood through the changes and revolution of daily life and is characterised by the emergence of individualisation, disaggregation and reflexivity. The individual has a constant engagement with the uncertainties and anxieties facing her and consequentially expert knowledge systems become the major sources of appropriate information and behaviour to reduce or minimise risk. This however gives rise to 'communities of anxieties' in which citizens find solidarity not just through shared appreciation for scientific expertise but also through the shared experiences of risk. In high modernity, the influence of distant happenings on proximate events and on the intimacies of the self, becomes more and more commonplace' (cf. Shaw 2000: 2). Hence in the risk society, 'science's monopoly on rationality is broken' (Giddens 1991a: 92).

Invariably, ICT's play an important role in creating this shared experience. Media as a technological innovation carries an implicit element of risk, as applying new methods of thinking and doing is not predictable which in the process generate new risks and side effects. The 'intrusion of distant events into everyday consciousness' (Giddens 1991a: 27) is double-edged as it construes new forms of mediated reflexive knowledge production along with the new paradigms of risk discourse which further influence the discursive reflexivity of modern societies. Media involvement in abstract or local knowledge production is then important as it not only mirrors reality but in some parts constitutes it (Giddens 1991b).

Locating the global in the local context

While it is not the intent to debate the notion of globalization in this paper, there is a need to establish that globalization to a large extent conveys the interlinked nature of the world and thus the myriad of activities and processes that can accrue from these interfaces between different nation states. Bauman (2006: 98) articulates this connection between the local and global paradigms as a ‘web of human interdependence’ which cannot guarantee that what others do ‘won’t affect our prospects, chances and dreams.’ This may be interpreted as affecting our trajectories of self-perception including constructs of history, myths and construction of progress and identity which structure our ‘ontological securities’ (Giddens 1991a). While the local context anchors our existence, the transcendence of the global on the local context creates new forms of dislocation and reconnections with the global spheres as has been the experience of diasporic communities. Kevin Spence (2005) points out that the emergence of Beck’s theory on modernity, modernization and the consciousness of risk became a performative text as it coincided with a number of global hazards and disasters like SARS and the collapse of Barings. In the process, it created a cultural environment that continues to sustain the culture of fear which Beck regards as a pathological evasion rather than a rational engagement with risk (Beck 1998, pp. 147–8; 199, p. 2; cf. Spence 2005). Spence (2005: 288) further expands his argument that the attacks of 9/11 constituted an attack on globalization itself. Firstly, the attack itself was enabled by the existence of global infrastructures of transport, mobility, communication and capital. Secondly, at least 2,825 lives were lost from over 115 countries (cf. Spence 2005) and thirdly while the attacks were specific and particular in terms of location they were simultaneously experienced across the globe.

The shrinking of the globe into a village, while attributed to McLuhan, is a resonant metaphor in the development of information and communication technologies. The non-stop transmission of images and text construct the ‘global’ as a place which is distant yet within people’s reach. The ICT’s have invariably created a new global consciousness which conveys both the communion that can happen in a village as well as the (unequal) sharing of risks observed by Beck (1992). This global consciousness is constantly re-negotiated through texts and images creating ‘abstract knowledge’ (Giddens 1991b) or local knowledge in modern society which is lifted out of its context and embedded into new contexts. While modernity creates individualism, disaggregation and a degree of reflexivity, their engagements with the wider world are mediated through this abstract but localized knowledge. From the perspective of individuals, and even national societies, globalization is experienced as something that is happening to us rather than something we are in control of (Bauman 1998: 60).

ICT’s constitute one of the major components which contribute to this local knowledge. The ‘imaginary economy’ (Sekula 1987: 114) of our visual culture dominated by ICTs is a problematic one which has to negotiate between the politics of representation as well as the politics of visibility where images create a reality as well as an interpretation of that reality. Susan Sontag (2003: 19) in writing about the attacks of 9/11 articulates that: ‘non-stop imagery (television, streaming video, movies) is our surround, but when it comes to remembering the photograph has the

deeper bite. Memory freeze frames; its basic unit is the single image. In an era of information overload, the photograph provides a quick way of apprehending something and a compact form for memorizing it.' In periods of 'festive viewing' (Dayan and Katz 1992), it is the image that coagulates the process of distance, time, space and the ritual of remembering into an archive in the human psyche. Princess Diana's death in the French tunnel and the streets of London lined with flowers convey two different spaces and temporality but convey a coherent narrative through images. According to Spence (2005: 288) 'the new normalcy of life in the absence of the towers discloses a discomfiting condition where the distribution of terror is democratic, and as unconstrained by the boundaries of nation-state, as that of smog.'

The ideology of the visible

In C. Wright Mills' apt description of our 'second-hand world,' this constant circulation and repetition of images constitute a terrain of mediation and as such images are not innocent of cultural formation nor are they innocent of forming culture. Annette Kuhn (1985) calls this ideology of the 'visible as evidence' where the illustrative function of photographs leaves opinions, prejudices, fantasies, misinformation untouched' (Sontag 2003: 75). Mark Danner (cf. Bauman 2006: 106) ascertains that the most powerful weapon of the 9/11 terrorists was 'that most American of technological creations: the television set.' The TV can push universal fears of vulnerability and the sense of ubiquitous danger far beyond the limits of the terrorists' own capacity (Bauman 2006: 106). Hence in our media-saturated world 'repetition is instrumental in sustaining a sense of the real' (Deleuze 1994). The role of images in structuring or perhaps restructuring reality has consumed much of the debates both in art history as well as in the field of photography. Often the image is a short-hand for both objectivity and subjectivity and hence creating 'a crisis of faith in optical empiricism' (Tagg 1992). The capacity to forge a personal connection with a traumatic public past depends first on the materiality of photographs, whereby photographic images stand in for the larger event, issue or setting they are called to represent (Zelizer 2002: 699). Barbie Zelizer (2002) points out that in the process they concretize memory while becoming primary markers of memory itself.

According to John Tagg (1993), the 'power of the image fails as long as it is not tied to another system; on the one hand into the system of cross-referencing of the file and the archive,' and on the other hand into 'a discourse which mimes the process of chronological sequence' (Bann 1984: 67), i.e. of a narrative time. Julie Kristeva (1982) in writing about the 'power of horror' in a myriad scenarios of the complex human existence, finds the abject in the law, prophetic literature and the gospels, but the ultimate abjection is in the fiction of the end of the world or the apocalypse (cf. Pippin 1999: 2). The concept of abjection illuminates the difficult connection between horror and the human psyche, highlighting both our attraction and revulsion to the images of horror. Television as a communication medium further distorts the imaginary distance and the closeness of the depictions of horror, creating archives of evidence through this visibility.

The great balls of smoke depicting the attacks of 9/11 stand for a 'metaphorical representation of the potential for ending of all life on earth' (Pippin 1999). The

sphere of spectatorship provided by a global audience via ICTs raises the tenuous connections between horror and human reaction as well as the need to moralise. Sontag (2003: 91), points out that our ability to feel sympathy means that ‘we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering for our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence.’ Nevertheless, it is within this maelstrom of chaos, destruction and horror that Islam is narrated and its entrapment in this pathos enslaves it into a yet another temporal phase of Orientalism where modern and discursive reflexivity struggle with the ideology of the visible continuously supplied by the media landscape.

This ‘imaginary economy’ (Sekula 1982) of our visual culture since 9/11 not only cross-references our existing belief system and stereotypes but also reorders the temporality in which there is a re-imagining of Islam through the events of 9/11, thus constituting a new narrative time for Islam. Tagg’s (1992) emphasis on the discursive rather than the phenomenological forces of the documentary photograph and on its power-wielding status as an articulation of institutional, discursive and political formations producing regimes of evidential knowledge is crucial to the production of Gidden’s ‘abstract knowledge’ in our postmodern society.

Here the familiarity of the visual image binds ‘our sense of the present and immediate past’ (Sontag 2003: 76), and thus image fragments perception into successive sequences. Here the numbers 9/11 stipulate a new calenderical time to recalibrate all engagements with Islam. It also signifies the creation of a new media-constructed ‘new memory’ (Hoskins 2001) which hinges on an archive of representative images to re-imagine Islam. This collective memorising mediated through ICTs is a repository of selective images which re-position the past and present. Jacques Derrida’s (1981) contention that ‘there is no political power without the control of the archive’ situates the importance of remembrance and memory in contextualising both past and present within the discourses of political power.

Gonzalez Echevvaria locates the archive as both ‘relic and ruin, representing a repository of codified beliefs, genres for bearing witness, clustered connections between secrecy, power and the law’ (cf. Stoler 2002). The composition of the archive and the ritual of remembering increasingly done through the media in the digital age using the global landscape as the spectacle of display reiterate the complex nature of our contemporary imaginary economy and the effects it may have not just on re-imagining Islam but also in knowledge production and the sustenance of reflexive modernity.

‘Disorientalism’ and 9/11

According to Said, the narrative of Orientalism has confined the human imagination of Islam to these intrinsic structures and as such Islam has been looked at with distinct fear and hostility (Said 1997). For Said, Orientalism led the West to view Islamic culture as being static in both time and space and invariably as ‘eternal, uniform and incapable of defining itself’ (Windshuttle 1999: 4). These discourses attribute an essentialist quality to the Orient, depicting it as monolithic and a place isolated from mainstream human progress in the sciences, arts and commerce. The trajectory of enlightenment, modernity and postmodernism in Western political

thought and literature epistemologically locates Islam as exterior to these developments in human thought and consciousness. Additionally Islam is also perceived as a formidable threat and a late coming challenge to Christianity (Said 1997). The juxtaposition of the ‘static Islam’ and the ‘progressive West’ places the two worlds into a dichotomous temporality.

The location of discourses of Islam as being trapped in time and shackled to a state of regression has consequences for the ‘re-imagining’ of Islam in the geopolitics of the contemporary world and within the visual narrative of the destruction of the Twin Towers. It reiterates the perception of the West having to deal with a ‘backward other’ incapable of discourse, deliberation or rational debate. Modernity is seen to be in crisis as Islam is perceived to lack the ability to engage with its esteemed constructs of rationality and reflexivity.

In *Desperately Seeking Paradise*, Ziauddin Sardar (2005) recounts the day Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa against Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* on 14 Feb 1989 charging him with blasphemy against the holy Quran and prophet Mohammed. According to Ziauddin Sardar (2005: 294), ‘the fatwa mentality was generally and readily accepted as the entirety of what Islam meant and was about, leaving no space for any kind of Muslim identity or outlook...for somewhere between the two extremes (Rushdie and Ayatollah) was a humanistic interpretation of Islam.’ The response of fatwa to *Satanic Verses* at once reduced the Muslims to a feeling of despondence and impotence for ‘implicit in the fatwa is the proposition that Muslims thinkers are too feeble to defend their own beliefs (Sardar 2005: 294). These recurrent narratives of Islam appropriate the rhetoric of the jihads and fatwas and are often reconstituted by the media under the banner of ‘Islamism,’ which becomes a catch phrase for many negative associations creating a crisis of identity for Islam.

The narrative depiction of Islam through the acts of terrorism, wars, deaths, fatwas, jihads or bombings sustains a Western sociological imagination of Islam but at the same token, it thrusts the *Ummah*, or the global Muslim community, into a constant struggle to re-represent Islam. Inevitably for ‘many Muslims articulations on Islam is a reactive counter-response, for anything said about Islam gets more or less forced into the apologetic form of a statement about Islam’s humanism, its contribution to civilization, development and moral righteousness’ (Said 1997: 55). Said viewed difference as an integral part of human civilization. He observed that ‘difference or distance whether in time, place, mode of thinking or societal organization ought not to be used as a licence to build exclusionary walls but as a testament to the rich diversity of human cultural forms.’ (Hussein 2002: 18).

The main challenge which faces Muslim intellectuals is often an expectation to give one all-encompassing hermeneutically-sealed interpretation and meaning for a diverse array of political contexts and practices of Islam. This places them in an intellectual cul-de-sac for ‘any talk about Islam is radically flawed, not only because an unwarranted assumption is being made that a large ideologically freighted generalization could cover all the rich and diverse particularities of Islamic life but also because it could simply be repeating the errors of Orientalism to claim that the correct view of Islam was X, Y and Z’ (Said 1998: 2).

Since 9/11 the narrative of Islam has put the focus on Muslim communities in the West. Unlike the Islamic revolution in Iran in the late 1970s and 1990s, this

‘reimagining’ of Islam, narrated as posing a clear and present danger to the Western civilization, has placed Muslim communities in the West under relentless scrutiny. The Muslim intellectual debates and responses emanating from the communities are often seen as being externalised from the conditions of modernity or its incumbent reflexivity. The constant need to respond to events associated with Islam renders immense pressure on these communities to negotiate the sustained moral and social stigmatization in narrating Islam. While it is not possible to offer one hermeneutically-sealed narrative of Islam, it by the same token brings to the fore the dialectical struggle within Muslim communities to re-examine their own plight in the contemporary world and a serious need to re-think Islam in the modern world. Islamic intellectuals like Sardar (2005) point out that there is a need for the Muslim community to engage in *Itijihad* or ‘reasoned struggle’ to rethink and reformulate Islam. The need for *itijihad* raises the question of whether old interpretations of Islam are adequate to cover the difficult issues facing the Muslim world. There is often an implicit assumption that Muslims have to choose between modernity and Islam or between democracy and Islam but *itijihad* renews the possibility that modern interpretations of Islam can be compatible with both the world of God and the situations, ideas and values that have emerged over the past several centuries (Smock 2004).

Itijihad has flourished in different periods of Muslim history like the ninth and the nineteenth centuries. During the first period, *Itijihad* functioned as a legal process and in the second it was perceived as a creative impulse to rejuvenate Islamic civilization. In the twentieth century, *itijihad* constituted a search for something intrinsic within Islam that would allow Muslims to think freely and to engage and embrace the positive elements of their civilization in view of the various humiliations Islam had endured with colonialism, the dismemberment of the caliphate and abolition of Islamic law by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (Smock 2004). The events of 9/11 have yet again propelled the *Ummah* to re-initiate the process of *itijihad*. According to Peter Mandaville (2001: 169) ‘new media are likely to play an increasingly important role among young Muslims born and raised in the West as they search for spaces and languages in which to shape an Islam that is both relevant to their socio-cultural situatedness and free from the hegemony of traditional sources of interpretation and authority.’ New media are opening up new spaces not just of dialogue but also ‘contestation where traditional sources can be challenged by the wider public and this fragmentation of traditional sources is a key theme with regard to the nexus of Islam and new media’ (Mandaville 2001: 177). This ‘soundbite Islam’ (Mandaville 2001) may not necessarily indicate a concerted efforts by Muslim communities to re-invent themselves as a collective but it does convey Muslim individuals’ attempts to re-construct their identity which cannot be solely sustained by traditional institutions and cultures. With modernity, self-identity is constantly at risk and the challenge is for the individual to reconstruct her identity which she carries through as a reflexive project. The intrusion of abstract systems into the actions of almost everyone coupled with the dynamic diffusion of knowledge means that an awareness of risk seeps into the action of almost everyone (Shaw 2000: 3).

The Muslim communities’ struggle to negotiate their Islamic values and beliefs in non-Islamic societies is happening within this mediated politics of post 9/11. As such the communities’ hermeneutic engagement with its religious text and its efforts

for reasoned re-thinking or *Itjihad* are forced to occur within this imposed sphere of intrusion and judgement. Western society's hermeneutic struggle with its religious scripture and text has evolved over centuries and decades and is still an ongoing ontological exercise. In comparison, Islam's hermeneutic engagement is being forced within this contemporary volatile context of globalized terror where one's self-identity and its belonging to the community can be equally threatened by media representations. The media as a liminal space between the private and the public as well as the individual and the community is an important artifice in imagining one's community, religion and the wider world (Anderson 1991). The process of *itjihad* is both frustrated and advanced by new media spaces and its wider image economy. The narrative framing of Islam through the events of 9/11 and the crystallization of this 'new memory' has implications for the construction of identity and belonging as well as the imagination, re-interpretation and idealization of Islam by diasporic communities in the West. It will propel younger Muslims to create new forms of belonging through the construct of religion and new forms of idealization to preserve what they may consider as tainted by the Western gaze through new media spaces. These in turn may be interpreted as new forms of risk by the secular modern states.

Conclusion

The narrative construction of Islam through the conditions of modernity, post-modernity, risk culture and within the constructed realities of information and communication technologies resurrect and frame a sociological imagination of Islam which coalesces the narratives and images of 9/11 and after into a referential archive. This binding of the recent past into a new memory of Islam's engagement with the West relocates Islam as a pervasive postmodern risk discourse within the secure urban spaces of Western society. The narrative of Islam is negotiated through these irrational fears of the postmodern condition, the utilization of 'expert knowledge,' the reflexivity of modernity as well as the shared experiences of communities. As such, media as sites of cultural production and dissemination constitute places for communion, shared experience as well as a cultural terrain for the construction and appropriation of local knowledge.

This re-imagining of Islam through media rituals and risk discourses re-mythologizes Islam globally and creates an intertextuality which constantly weaves present events as new memories crafting a new temporality to gauge and locate Islam. Media as a liminal space between the private and public, individual and society and local and global becomes a digital terrain for re-imagining a de-centred Islam which is pervasive, atavistic and constructed through new risk discourses. This cultural construction of Islam as an omnipotent threat has implications for community and identity construction of Muslims in secular nation states. The call for reformation within Islam is happening through these volatile conditions where constructive dialogue, reflections and introspection within the community is constantly mediated by the need to offer one hermeneutic interpretation of Islam against the acts of violence or conflict happening across the globe. The need to interpret and narrate Islam through global events imprisons both the Western

imagination of Islam and Muslim self-perception into a trajectory of mediatized discourses crafting proximity (with images) and separation through its representations.

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