
Editorial

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This issue and a companion piece to appear early in 2007, came about as a result of a general call for papers on the issue of the media and religion. As we sorted through the submissions it became apparent that there was enough material to devote an entire issue to what we have called Islam and the media. This title is satisfyingly imprecise for we did not wish to confine ourselves to any one aspect of the interplay between the media and religion but instead wished critically to explore as wide a range of connections between Islam and the modern mass media as possible. So what we, in co-operation with our contributors present here are a series of discussions relating to Islam and capitalism, nationalism(s) gender, communal identity, terrorism, tradition, modernism, freedom of expression and more.

First of all, Gholam Khiabany using Iran as a case study rejects the notion of a theory of 'Islamic' communication, used both by orientalists, cultural relativists and some supporters of the Iranian government to argue for an homogenous Islamic particularism, when a study of communications in Iran shows clear differences even between the various elements of government and the imperatives of the market, rather than of Islam determining much media policy.

There follows a timely (even before recent tragic events) discussion by Dina Matar and Farah Dakhllallah of the Hizbollah-backed television station Al Manar and the role it plays in the formation of a sense of communal identity for Lebanese Shias, a hitherto marginalised minority group in that country's complex confessional politics, but now recast as 'a community of resistance', both in Lebanon and beyond.

We then move on to the most populous Muslim country, to post-Suharto Indonesia for an examination by Sonja van Wichelen of the interplay between nation, religion and gender in the new political order emerging from the demise of the New Order regime. The locus for this exploration is the attempt by Megawati Sukarnoputri in 1999, and again in 2004, to be elected president. She discusses competing gendered images of Megawati, each articulating a particular political

position – a de-sexualised mother and daughter figure for Indonesian nationalists and sexualised as a female by Islamic traditionalists in order to undermine the legitimacy of a female candidate, with feminists of various hues negotiating between the two.

Al-Jazeera has been rightly acclaimed as a new direction in broadcasting in the Arab world, replacing tired, old formulas of deference and political conformity and instead becoming a 'forum for resistance', and a 'platform for political dissidents'. In an in-depth linguistic study of religious talk show *A-Shari'a wal Hayat*. Dima Dabbous-Sensenig asks whether the station applies its editorial line ('the opinion and the counter-opinion') concerning religion, using as an example one of the most controversial religious topics for Muslims, namely the question of the hijab, or Muslim dress code, and finds that it does not.

Turning to the Indian sub-continent, Srinivas Lankala explores the relationship between journalism, a supposed Islamic terrorism and Hindu nationalism as exemplified in the English language press. Indian nationalism, he argues has two trajectories: 'a secular liberalism identified with Nehruvian Third World nationalism, and the majoritarian Hindu supremacist ideology symbolised by *Hindutva*, or 'Hinduness', which is espoused by the Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP. These tensions he argues are best shown through their relationship to Islam and India's Muslim minority.

Finally, in February of this year, the Communication and Media Research Institute at the University of Westminster held a debate on the question of the Danish cartoons. Because of the continuing interest in the affair, we have grouped their contributions together plus a personal response by the issue editor.

July 2006