Khalil Rinnawi

Cyber religious-national community? The case of Arab community in Germany

Introduction

Since the 1980s, Arab diasporas in Europe and elsewhere have been connected to the Arab World through Arabic newspapers such as *al-Hayat* or *al-Sharq al-Awasat*, allowing for the creation of a kind of primordial virtual community (Kraidy 2008). This tendency was further strengthened during the 1990s and the beginning of this century by the consumption of the Arabic satellite television channels and the Internet among these diasporas in the shadow of the globalization process. The main assumption here is that the process of globalization, which is inevitable and unavoidable one, has become an integral part of our world experience regardless of our location, means (e.g. satellite TV or Internet), or time (Appadurai 1996). A central claim of this approach is that globalization changes the 'rules of the game' because of the way it facilitates basic communication and cultural exchange (Fiske 1987).

One important phenomenon of globalization is the cultural isolation of ethno-national minorities living in different countries from the cultural majority of the general population (Aksoy & Robins 1997; Rinnawi 2010). This is evident not only in the case of Arabs in Germany, but also in other places in Europe and elsewhere (Miladi 2006; Harb & Bessiaso 2006; Matar 2006). It is also evident among other minorities living in Germany – particularly among the Turks and Kurds (White 1997; Robins & Aksoy 2000). Continuing the research in this field, this study highlights the effects of the Arab transnational media, particularly satellite television and the Internet, among this community. The focus in this study is to determine to what degree a Berlin-based Arab community – mainly of Palestinian and Lebanese origin – is exposed to Arab transnational media. This study is also interested in how exposure to transnational Arab media influences this community. This chapter addresses two main questions: first, how do members of this community consume media? Secondly, what are the implications of this media consumption among this community and across generations in terms of their relationship to German society and with their Arab homeland?

Arab Community in Germany

Compared to the Turks who have been in Germany since the 1950s and 1960s, the Arab community of Berlin I refer to in this study is considered a 'new' collective as (Aksoy & Robins 1997). The majority of them are of Palestinian or Lebanese origin and came from Lebanon between 1973 and the mid 1980s during the civil war. Most of them entered Germany under the auspices of the German Asylum Law (1980). The exact number of Arabs in Germany is not known, but according to a report by Susan M. Akram and Terry Rempel, in 1999 there were approximately 45,000 refugees of Arab origin – most of whom reside in Berlin (Akram and Rempel 2003). Unlike Arab communities in other parts of Europe, the Arab community in Berlin lacks local supporting institutions that deal with culture, welfare, etcetera. Since they have refugee status, they are a social minority who is, to a certain degree, not really accustomed to being supported by local cultural and social institutions. A further distinguishing feature of Arab communities in Berlin, particularly since the 1990s, is their high degree of politicization relating directly to cultural and ideological divisions and struggles within the Arab world. The impact of these cultural and ideological dynamics has been reinforced by the consumption of Arab media among this community.

Theoretical considerations

This study is based upon two main theoretical points of departure. The first is derived from socio-political literature and addresses this topic from the collective dimension, while the second theoretical approach originates from psychological research and places an emphasis upon the individual dimension.

The concept of multiculturalism is important to the first theoretical approach. Population exchange and massive immigration resulting from the reconfiguration of national borders has occurred in many countries around the world since the 1970s. These movements and migrations of populations have led to the creation of ethno-national minorities who seek to preserve their respective identity, cultural heritage, and mother language (Morley & Robins 1995; Geertz 2000). In the framework of the postmodernist intellectual and global climate since the late 1980s, this cultural segregation has gained a significantly large degree of legitimacy (Kellner 1988; Featherstone 1995). This legitimacy is not only evident to social scientists who argue against the melting pot paradigm (Kimmerling 2004). It was also recognized by the legislative community, who has accepted the principle that the bond with one's culture, and in particular with the language people use to express and understand themselves, can be so strong that individuals cannot relinquish it (Rawls 1993). Therefore, the notion of multiculturalism

becomes the most important force in this reality. In this context, Grillo (2001) classifies two kinds of multiculturalisms: weak and strong. Weak multiculturalism refers to the idea that ethnic minorities share the same fundamental values and norms, employment patterns, health care and welfare and education systems with the mainstream population. Cultural differences, distinct beliefs and practices, religious traditions and language are permitted in the private sphere. Strong multiculturalism, on the other hand, recognizes cultural differences in the public sphere, such as providing separate schools or hospitals for Muslims in some European countries. The weak version of multiculturalism is widely held as the Western ideal and has served as the foundation for French policies, while Britain has tended more towards a programme of strong multiculturalism.

The second theoretical point of departure is derived from psychological research, and places emphasis upon the individual dimension. This consists of strategies that individuals who belong to minority and immigrant groups use in their daily lives within their host societies (Pfetsch 1999). The cross-cultural psychological approach, for instance, considers the links between cultural context and the behaviour of individual members of minorities, particularly immigrant communities (Berry 1997). According to this approach, the immigrant minority group faces two problems: (1) participating in the host society and (2) maintaining their original identity and cultural heritage. Berry offers a model of this dynamic based on dichotomous attitudes towards two issues: the value of maintaining one's distinct identity and the value of maintaining relationships with the host society. As a result of such potentially dichotomous attitudes, minority group members may develop acculturation strategies including: assimilation, separation, marginalization and integration (ibid.).

Within the framework of this discussion, transnational media plays a crucial role in these processes by connecting minorities to the culture and heritage emanating of their countries of origin. This connection has both collective and individual aspects. The main outcome of these tendencies is threatening and challenging the nation-state formula by strengthening sectarian tendencies among the various communities that comprise the nation-state. On the other hand, many democracies work to promote policies that enhance the social integration of different national-cultural minorities into the mainstream culture of the nation-state.

Transnational media and new cultural order

This brings us to the role of the media, cultural organisations, and cultural practices in the transformation of cultural spaces and identities. Studying the media

can provide rich insight into what is happening to these two dimensions in their various contemporary manifestations.

First, it is worth considering the wider transformations that are occurring in contemporary media industries and markets, such as changes associated with the development of new 'space-transcending' technologies like satellite TV and the Internet. An important consequence of this has been the construction of new transnational communicational and cultural spaces in and across continents. In the new media order, audiences who were once marginalized as 'minority interests' to national broadcasting regimes may now be transformed into significant elements for transnational services that embrace diaspora interests and identities.

The landscape of the Arab media has undergone revolutionary changes since the 1990s as a result of globalization and trans-nationalism. The most crucial development has occurred in Arab television, where the historical monopoly of the state broadcasting organisations was undermined in the early 1990s due to both private broadcasting companies and new liberal economic policies (Sakr 2001; Rinnawi 2006). Consequently, there was a proliferation of commercial channels in the Arab world. Additionally, Pan-Arab television channels such as *al-Jazeera* and *al-Arabiya* and, of course, new religious channels such as *Iqraa* were also launched. As of 2014, there are hundreds of channels. These channels have actively sought to make their programmes available to Arab communities throughout the world by using satellite and Internet links. Programming to this diaspora has now become integral to channel scheduling practices. This new logic of transnational marketing has also become apparent in other forms of production, such as television entertainment and general informational programmes.

Essentially, Pan-Arab media enables Arab TV audiences and web users in the Arab world as well as in the diaspora to engage in cultural, religious and nationalistic issues. This engagement is particularly important to Arab diasporan communities, who generally live in Western, non-Muslim, non-Arab environments (Kraidy 2002). Through the Arab transnational media, all Arabs throughout the world can become members of an invisible, imagined virtual community (Rinnawi 2006). Field research indicates that members of this virtual community are no longer a marginalized minority, but because they are members of a virtual community via TV and the Internet, they also belong to a majority. These groups are no longer marginal and remain less assimilated in their host societies. Being significantly exposed to these virtual communities somehow deepens their own societal marginality. Mark Sedgwick, for example, argues that the Internet makes Western Muslims less of a minority by increasing both the frequency and range of their contact (1998). Contact with Arab issues, which was previously limited

to their local mosque, may now extend across continents. Furthermore, information is widely disseminated and sometimes acted upon quickly. In making Arabs and Muslims in the West less of a minority, the Internet increases not only their own sense of identity as Arabs and Muslims, but also their self-confidence (ibid.). Several field studies on Arab diasporas in Europe have reached the same conclusion regarding the crucial influence of Arab transnational media on Arab diasporas in the West since the 1990s (Miladi 2006; Harb & Bessiaso 2006; Matar 2006; Rinnawi 2010).

In this context, Pintak (2009) argues that media plays a fundamental role in the formation of national identity, most famously detailed in Benedict Anderson's theory of the imagined community. Consequently, we argue that the widespread displacement of people and the re-creation of communities with shared ethnicity and/or language through transnational media has blurred social and national identities. It has opened up possibilities for 'multiple affiliations and associations outside and beyond the nation state and the state where they live,' giving rise to something Robin Cohen has described as a 'diasporic allegiance' – a proliferation of 'transnational identities that cannot easily be contained within the nation-state system' (1997). Arjun Appadurai uses the same terminology to describe, among other things, the displacement of people and the creation of 'invented homelands' (1996).

The main thesis of this study is based on what Rinnawi (2006) calls 'McArabism.' According to Anderson, a nation is an imagined community despite the fact that not every imagined community is a nation, and nation is not synonymous with nationalism (Anderson 1993). In this context, we can argue that globalizing effects of transnational media on the Arab community in Germany can be traced to the concept of an 'imagined community,' at both in terms of the nation and the Islamic religion. This suggests that instant nationalism, such as 'McArabism' can be a form of an imagined community, composed mainly of Arabs within the Arab world, as well as Arabs in the diaspora. According to Anderson, 'the emergence of new nationalism is the result of a process of "re-imagination" conditioned by drastic transformations in the conscience and media within a modern framework' (ibid.). The 'imagined' nations resulting from the process of re-imagining, positioned within the rise of contemporary nationalism are based upon philosophies of ethnic solidarity. This process of imagination occurs within the framework of radical social changes that have taken place following the industrial revolution (ibid.). In the case of the Arab community in Germany, the introduction of Arab transnational media has strongly impacted the process of re-imagination in the national context as well as in the Islamic-religious one,

built upon people's nostalgic longing for the past in their homeland. Finally, it is imagined as a community because regardless of the actual prevailing inequality and exploitation, the nation is conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship (ibid.). In effect, the thing that is imagined here in Anderson's analysis is the nation. However, in this study we apply the term 'imagined nation' to the Arab community in Germany in order to try to explain the effects of consuming Arab satellite media, which is conceived by Anderson as limited, sovereign comradeship. This will be elaborated later in this study, where we will empirically show the limits of this imagined community.

In light of the above discussion, it is interesting to explore how and if the effects of transnational media differ according to generational lines in general and, more specifically, in our case study. Therefore, we theorize that first generation immigrants formulated an 'Imagined Coherence' or 'Cyber Nationalism and Islamic-religiousness' of a Pan-Islamic and Pan-Arab nation by interacting with Arab media; their children, in turn, must demonstrate a 'schizophrenic situation' that differs from their parents' experience and is evident in their media habits. These differences are explained in the following section.

Methodological considerations

This study involves an analysis of media consumption and cultural practices by the Arab community in Berlin. Media and cultural practices were considered from two perspectives:

1. In-depth, qualitative survey of the use and consumption of Arabic and non-Arabic media by was conducted on 50 randomly selected Arab families living in Berlin.
2. An analysis of the impact of these modes of media consumption on their identity in different members and subgroups within the Arab community.

Studying media helps gain insight into wider questions regarding culture, identity, segregation, integration, and assimilation. In keeping with this focus, the study data is based on 197 face-to-face, open-ended question interviews conducted among 50 families in Berlin during a four-month period in the summer of 2009. 197 participants were randomly chosen and all participating families were Palestinian and Lebanese refugees. Most of the interviews were done in Arabic. Finally, it is important to mention here that we have asked the interviewees about their general use of TV, thus enabling us to also find out about their use of religious TV.

Media consumption among the Arab community in Berlin

General modes of media consumption

In general, the data shows that for most of the interviewees, mass media plays an integral part of their lives and serves as a vital tool. Participants reported feeling that the media is not only an important pastime, but it is also the main tool that connects them to their homeland and Islamic religion. It also helps them retain their sense of belonging to their heritage, both at a national level and religious level. The interviewees revealed a high degree of adaptation to the media. Almost all the interviewees, particularly the parents, reported extensive television viewing, while the younger generation reported long hours of Internet surfing. Most parents belong to the first generation, which is characterized by high rates of unemployment; many live off welfare assistance they receive from the state authorities as refugees. Consequently, they have a great deal of leisure 'time to kill.' Most important is their strong and clear tendency to consume national and religious media content broadcast on Arab transnational media, such as the 'all-news' television channels, as well as the religious ones. All families interviewed mentioned that electronic media, rather than written media, is their sole source of information. This is due to several reasons. There is no local Arabic written media source available in Berlin. Arab newspapers were available in the past, but most of parents are illiterate and/or are not accustomed to reading German newspapers. School-aged children reported that they sometimes read German newspapers, but are unable to read fluently in Arabic.

Television is the first media form that interviewees rely upon in order to keep updated on what is going around them and, more importantly, what is going on in their homeland. They rely on television for news, Islamic-religious programmes as well as entertainment, and are accustomed to entertainment from their homeland rather than the other mass media. Ghassan, a 54-year-old Palestinian, said:

> Normally almost all of my media consumption is TV such as al-Jazeera and al-'Arabiya and other Arab entertainment TV channels like MCB and MBC. Sometimes I watch the German Channel ARD and ZDF. I have no access to Arabic newspapers because they do not exist here or to the German ones since I cannot read German well enough to read them. As for the Internet, it is very far from my world except when I talk on Skype to my relatives in Lebanon.

Adult female interviewees reported spending even more time watching TV due to the long hours they spend at home during the day. 'Aysheh, a 47-year-old woman, stated that:

> Television became my best friend. I spend hours and hours watching, moving from one
> TV channel to another, from one Arabic Drama to another Turkish one.[1] When there is
> nothing interesting I move to Rotana Channel to watch Arabic video clips or to Rotana
> Tarab to be connected to my favorite nostalgic [Haneen] Arabic singers such as Umm
> Kulthum and Warda.

Similar sentiments were also expressed in a study conducted by Miladi (2006) among Arab community members in Britain.

The second general finding is 'dual modes' of media consumption. On one hand, our interviewees consume German media received through local cables. This includes German television channels such as ZDF, ARD and SAT1, which keeps them updated on the economy, weather, transport, and other issues in their daily lives in Germany, as well as entertainment programmes such as movies and TV dramas. This tendency is more evident among the young generation. On the other hand, interviewees extensively consume media in Arabic, which they receive through private satellite dishes (Nilesat and/or Arabsat). Hussein, a 35-year-old man originally from Lebanon, explained:

> Almost all of the Arab families I know have access to both German media and Arab
> satellite media. The German media helps me feel more updated with what is going on
> here in Germany and makes my daily life here easier. But, at the same time, without satel-
> lite TV channels coming from the Arab World I would feel bad, strange, and alienated.

Generational-cultural gaps

These findings indicate important generational gaps. While television is considered the main media outlet for the parents, the Internet is the most important medium for the younger generation. This finding can be partially explained by differences in the education levels between both generations. Most of the parents arrived in Germany with low levels of education, which has prevented them from learning to use a computer to surf the Internet. The younger generation, on the other hand, has received a higher level of education since they attend schools in Germany. The second reason for these differences can be attributed to the fact that the younger generation is as 'computer oriented' as their peers in Germany and elsewhere. Mohamed, a 19-year-old, stated:

> Most of the young Arab people my age and younger, including children, are familiar
> with the Internet. We get most of our news about the Arab World through the Arab
> news websites as well as through chatting on the web with our relatives and friends in
> our homeland. We know almost everything that is happening there. Our parents have

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1   Turkish television drama is dubbed when broadcasted at Arab TV.

almost no idea about the Internet; they prefer to watch TV rather than Internet which they perceived as a very sophisticated machine.

These differences indicate deeper generational gaps, which have different implications for both generations.

Another significant finding within the context of generational-cultural gaps is in the modes of television consumption between the two generations. Among the first generation, there is a kind of 'collective viewership': parents frequently reported watching TV together and sometimes watching with their children in the living room, where the TV is connected to Arab satellite channels. However, their children display a kind of 'individual viewership,' as they reported normally watching television alone in their bedrooms – where the television is connected to German channels. This shows significant generational-cultural gaps between the two generations (Rinnawi 2012). These generational-cultural gaps are also evident at another level of television viewing, in terms of the type of television content that each of the two groups normally watches. The interviews revealed that parents watched mostly Arab channels and seldom viewed German channels, primarily because they do not understand German well, and do not feel the same cultural affiliation. The opposite was observed among the children, who viewed more German television and less Arabic television. Importantly, the parents also felt that Arab channels had more credibility regarding news on Arab issues, as opposed to the German channels. To this point, Miladi (2006) and Harb and Bessiaso (2006) reported the same findings among the Arab diaspora in Britain. Viewing Arabic channels, particularly news and current affairs, was also difficult for children due to the formal, classical Arabic dialect that is used instead of the colloquial spoken Arabic language – making it extremely difficult for these children to understand and remain interested in Arabic programming.

Unlike their parents, the children who arrived in Germany were quickly integrated into German culture through schooling, and learned the language rapidly. They are immersed in German culture for a large part of the day, and are in continuous contact with the German language and culture. Most of the children have difficulties reading or writing in Arabic. Many even have difficulties speaking Arabic well, particularly those between 4–18 years. The first generation is highly interested in *al-Jazeera* regardless of gender, while Western channels are more popular among the younger generation (Miladi 2006). Our interviews revealed that television-viewing habits of the children included mostly German programmes. When they did watch Arab TV, it was mostly for entertainment – particularly music. Abed, a 13-year-old youth stated:

> I only watch Arabic music, especially Arabic music video clips that I am familiar with.

The immersion in German culture and way of life for the young Arab generation is similar to the immersion other foreigners in Germany, such as Turkish or Kurdish youth, who feel some degree of alienation from German society (White 1997). On one hand, they are like their German peers in terms of their daily media use, consuming German media content and culture (TV dramas, movies and video clips on MTV). They are also integrated in the societal modern youth lifestyle in terms of clothing, foods, and so on. However, these young people expressed having special concerns as outsiders living on the margins of German society due to their religious, cultural and political identity, resulting in significant differences between them and the majority culture.

Many children claimed they watch Arabic programs with their parents if previously told the programme would be interesting. Rasha, a six-year-old girl revealed:

> I sometimes watch Egyptian films or shows with my mother, but I don't always understand what is said and my mother has to translate or explain for me.

Children and youth also reported watching some news with their parents, particularly during crises in Palestine or Lebanon, along with some religious programmes. They usually asked their parents for explanations and translations, although Arab channels usually show a great deal of pictures and footage, which help the children to understand visually. Most of the second generation said that such interactions help them to understand their heritage, religion and culture, while also making them feel part of the Arab and the Muslim world. Haitam, a 17-year-old boy stated:

> After watching only German for two consecutive days, I feel like watching Arabic in order to understand what is happening in the Arab world and to improve my Arabic language skills while viewing a bit of my heritage.

It appeared that the children of Arab refugees in Berlin in their teenage years tended to feel a need to relate more to their Arab and Islamic heritage, and became more interested in mastering Arabic. This appeared to occur simultaneously with their transition from school into the workforce, where many mentioned how Germans treated Arabs. Moreover, following the events of September 11, many revealed that they were treated differently or met with suspicion. This leads some children to seek answers from Arab transnational TV. Rula, an 18-year-old participant mentioned:

> As foreigners we never experienced any problems from the German students prior to the events of September 11, especially from my friends in the school. Now, during recess,

the German students form one group and the Arab students form another separate group and they do not associate with us.

The Second Intifada (October 2000), the Lebanon War (2006), and the Gaza War (2008–2009) have also played a significant role. Children, as well as their parents, watch more TV. As Germans get their information from German newscasts, which communicate a primarily Israeli perspective, Arab youths feel that they have to get the Arab perspective as well. A 15-year-old youth stated:

> I am now more interested and concerned with the Palestinian news and affairs because above anything else, I am a Palestinian. And when the German students accuse us Palestinians of attacking Israel and committing terrorism, it is important for me to have the real facts, which are usually the opposite of what the Germans hear. I want to argue and defend the Palestinians.

Implications of the New Modes of Media Consumption

The findings of this study indicate two main tendencies among the Arab community in Berlin concerning the effects of new media consumption, particularly those from the Arab World. The first is an impulse to return to Islam, Islamic traditions and ways of life. The second is a strong expression of a feeling of greater belonging to the Arab nation, culture and heritage known as 'imagined coherence,' which was observed in most of the interviews. These processes are due to many factors. The first factor consists of the political and military events that have occurred in the Middle East during the last decade, such as the Second Intifada of 2000, the War in Afghanistan, the Iraq War (2003–2011), the Lebanon War of 2006, and the Gaza War of 2008–2009. The second factor is the antagonistic attitude among some of the population in Western countries towards Arab and Muslim minorities, which has become more evident in daily life spheres for diasporans. A third factor in this process comprises the antagonistic and biased-coverage of Arab and Islamic affairs in Western mass media, leading to suspicious attitudes among Arab and Muslim populations in the West, as well as in the Arab and Islamic World. Finally, the emergence of Arab transnational media such as *al-Jazeera*, the large number of religious television channels and the Internet revolution, together with new global media technologies, have allowed Arabs in the diaspora to access media coming from the Arab world.

'Back to Islam'

Given the media's transnational and independent character, media theorists have been argued that 'digital Islam' has unevenly broken the authority of institutions controlled by clerics, as the new generation is no longer dependent

on traditional sources for knowledge of Islam (Schleifer 2007; Galal 2008; Field & Hamam 2009). New contours of Islamic knowledge are being mapped due to these mediums (Mandaville 2001). Anti-media statements by religious authorities can be traced their increasing marginalisation within their societies. This 'unprecedented access' to Islamic sources of knowledge for common followers through the Internet and TV has prompted Jon Alterman to predict the following scenario: 'the days have gone when governments and religious authorities can control what their people know, and what they think' (Alterman 1998: 14).

Therefore, in terms of Islam as an '*Umma*' (a collective with high degree of coherency), I argue here that transnational digital media can be understood, to a certain degree, as liberating believers from religious and the other forms of traditional leadership. This happens due to increased access to new media; furthermore, new content horizons allow for a higher degree of individual media consumption with greater variety of ideas and 'modes of thought' in the religious as well as in other realms (Alterman 1998; Schleifer 2007). However, digital media has become a very effective instrument that connects believers to their authorities regardless of geographic location, giving them more access and opportunities to be connected to forms of religious education which was not previously available to them (Rinnawi 2012). Digital Islam has been adopted by global muftis, such as the famous Islamic preacher Amr Khaled, different Islamic websites such as Islamonline.com, bloggers, and the large amount of Islamic satellite television channels such as *Iqraa* and *al-Huda*, among others. This is happening both in the Arab and Islamic world as well as in Arab-Islamic diasporas. Most research concerning the Arab-Muslim diaspora in the West concludes that one of the main effects of their exposure to the Islamic religious media in the last two decades has strengthening their sense of Islamism and Pan-Islamism through more involvement in Islamic affairs at both ideological and practical levels (Rinnawi 2010).

In general, our findings indicate a very strong tendency among the Arab/Muslim community in Berlin to consume Islamic media content via satellite television stations such as Iqraa and around 135 other Islamic channels, including those broadcast via the Internet (cf. chapter one of this volume). As a result of this pattern of consumption, a 'back to Islam' sentiment has emerged, which is a kind of religious conservatism in terms of values and daily life affairs. During the interviews, interviewees exhibited more Islamic attitudes towards different social, cultural and even political issues raised during the discussions, which indicate a kind of 'Islamic values ghetto' within the Western German-Christian environment. By better understanding their daily routines, the effects of Islamic

principles on their daily life practices become particularly visible. These relatively new religious trends are partially a result of their exposure to the religious television programming from the Arab World.

Moreover, our findings indicate two aspects of the 'back to Islam' sentiment among this community. The first is a 'Fundamental practical back to Islam,' which was more noticeable among the parents. However, among the younger generation we noticed a more 'emotional back to Islam' sentiment. While the first generation emphasised the content and structural dimensions of watching Arab satellite media, especially Islamic channels on the religious level, the younger generation tended to emphasise the emotional dimensions. Younger interviewees stated that they felt a greater sense of belonging to the Islamic community, culture, and heritage than before. These feelings are based primarily on their need to experience the principle features of Islamic religion, and largely result from antagonistic attitudes expressed towards them by the host society. However, their parents felt the need to practice the Islamic religious way of life and to learn about it in a more nostalgic manner.

In general, for Muslim Arabs living in a primarily Christian environment, the interviewees do not have the opportunity to experience the Islamic way of life from a religious aspect or, more importantly, from a social and cultural aspect. They do not necessarily experience the festive atmosphere of Muslim holidays and Ramadan or other social-religious ceremonies and traditions the same way they would if they were living in the Arab World. Prior to the introduction of the Arab satellite TV to Germany, Arabs could not experience holidays or cultural events to the degree they now can with television. In fact, sometimes holidays would come and go without people realizing it. This is evident in Hussein's statement:

> One of the reasons I connected to the Arab satellites is so that my children would get a sense of their Islam, especially during the holidays and Ramadan.

During holidays, Arab satellite TV bases a large percentage of its programming around the festivities; German media agencies at best only briefly mention the Muslim holidays. Indeed, particularly during Ramadan, competition is strong to hold viewers' interest during fasting hours with entertainment shows. Ameera, a 35-year-old participant explained:

> I watch Arabic only during the period of Ramadan or other holidays because they broadcast many entertaining programmes like 'Jameel and Hanaa' or 'Abu al-Hana' and, of course, 'Bab al-Hara'[2] and the other Turkish Telenovelas on MBC4.

This tendency was even more evident among the younger generation. For example, Ahmed, a 19-year-old participant stated:

> I was never religious and I rarely prayed before. Now, I understand Islam especially through the Arab TV stations and I have somehow returned to it. I can pray and I understand its implications and meanings from many things in my daily life. But at the same time I continue to practice the German daily life style.

Furthermore, Arab satellite programming not only creates a pleasant environment for the Arabs in Berlin during holidays, especially Ramadan, but it also draws people closer to their religion and their heritage. Arab satellite programming has made it easy for people in Germany to feel the Ramadan atmosphere – to follow prayers during Ramadan and to know when to break their fast. Prior to being able to access Arab satellite programming, it was not easy for believers to fast during Ramadan because prayers and fasting had to be individually scheduled. As such, it seems that by guiding viewers, television channels may also enable more individualized religious practice. This point was observed more among the first generation who returned to Islam, as was clearly indicated by this mother's remark:

> Since the introduction of the Arab satellites I have been able to create a festive environment for my children during the holidays, especially during Ramadan. I can also teach them the customs and prayers of Ramadan and how to enjoy it. Also, now I know the precise times for prayer and fasting and can respect them.

Arab satellite programming also plays a role in educating viewers of the values and traditions of Islam, especially for parents. The majority of interviews indicated that families, primarily parents, follow a great deal of religious programmes. This point is clearly evident in 64-year-old Ibrahim's comment:

> I always follow religious programmes on the Arab channels, especially on Munajah TV and Iqraa TV, such as the Friday sermon, or other religious programmes on al-Jazeera where they discuss religious issues and questions. This way they provide us with answers

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2   One of the highest-rated, bestknown Syrian dramas in the history of Arab TV. This socio-political drama, which began to be screened on MBC during Ramadan in 2007 and continued to be screened through 2010 with new episodes, tells the story of the Syrian and the Palestinian resistance to Western colonialism in the Arab world <u>at</u> the political level, while at the social level it emphasises the authentic and nostalgic Arab lifestyles and values at that time in a positive way.

to our daily problems through religion, which we can't find here because there are no religious authorities.

Arab satellite programming also teaches Arab families, especially the parents, what is allowed and what is not from a religious perspective. They learn about their religion not only as passive viewers, but also as active viewers. The term active refers to some of the talk-show style programmes in which a Sheikh comes to answer questions from the audience, including those who can call in. The 'Awad family stated,

> We [the mother and father] follow religious programmes that teach us what is right and wrong according to the Sharia [Islamic law] and we can now also teach this to our children.

Consequently, Arab satellite programming empowers parents to teach their children about Islam (Harb & Bessaiso 2006).

'Imagined coherence': cyber-instant nationalism – McArabism

As was mentioned above, most research in this field concludes that one of the main effects of this phenomenon is a strengthening of the sense of Arabness and Pan Arabism due to greater involvement in Arab affairs afforded by new media (Sakr 2001; Alterman 1998). Others go further by claiming that this effect is beyond regular Pan Arabism and, in Andersonian terms, constitutes a kind of instant nationalism. Rinnawi (2006) calls this 'McArabism' and explains that it is based on an 'imagined coherence' or 'cyber-instant nationalism,' while Pintak (2009) calls it 'imagined watan' [Imagined nation], referring to the instant influence that Arabs elsewhere experience when they consume Arab satellite broadcasting, the Internet, or other transnational media.

To be more specific, we can argue that our findings demonstrate two kinds of 'imagined coherence.' The first is 'nostalgic imagined coherence' among the parents, which is a kind of imagined national belonging based more on nostalgic experience. Among the younger generation, we observed a kind of 'patriotic imagined coherence' based on their desire to be affiliated with an imagined national community and culture due to the antagonistic attitudes expressed towards them by the host society. Regarding the effects consuming Arab transnational media, first-generation interviewees stated that they felt a greater sense of nostalgic belonging to the Arab World, culture and heritage than before. Nasser, 55, was very clear about this when she said:

> After extensive exposure to the different Arab TV channels, I feel that I went back to my Authentic Arab society. Besides the fact that I now know more about the Arab World, I really feel that I am living there, not here in Germany.

Others went further, saying that these television channels were like a 'breaths of fresh air' that allow them to reconnect with their Arab culture and heritage. Nasreen, 47, said:

> During Bab al-Hara Drama, I really feel the really good Arab culture that I always feel nostalgic about.

To conclude, we can argue here that 'imagined coherence' and 'cyber national-ism' among the first generation stems mainly from nostalgia, which they per-ceive through Arab and Islamic TV dramas and other media content that remind them of their homeland. However, interviews among members of the younger generation reveal a quite different effect: for them, 'imagined coherence' and 'cyber nationalism' are more imagined than among their parents. Unlike their parents, they have never lived in 'real' Arab society and culture –some of them were born in Germany and others came at an early age. For them, information about their homeland, culture, religion and heritage is not based on nostalgia, since the majority of them have lived most of their lives in Germany. For in-stance, 21-year-old Fatima said:

> The reports coming from Arab TV channels bring me back my people which urges me to feel greater solidarity with what's happening in the Arab World, particularly Palestine, Iraq and Lebanon. Sometimes when I watch al-Jazeera or al-Manar news reports from these places I feel the need to go there and fight against the enemies of the Arab nation.

There are now two generations in Germany with varying degrees of fluency in both languages and widely disparate lifestyles. The first generation consumes Western/German physical products together with Arab-Islamic cultural-nation-al products via transnational homeland media. The second generation of the German-Arab community has an identity of its own that has been constructed at one level, set off for and against both German and Arab identities. This co-herence is clearly imagined. In other words, new modes of media consumption, along with the antagonist reaction of the host society towards them (especially after the events of September 11) have contributed to a 'schizophrenic situation' among this generation, in which they are exposed to Arab and Islamic content through the media that refers them back to Arab and Islamic traditions on the one hand. On the other hand, the antagonism displayed by the host society pre-vents them from becoming assimilated or feeling solidarity with the Western way of life. They cannot identify with all aspects of Islamic broadcasting (especially

the traditional and conservative aspects). One path future research should pursue in this context is to conduct a deeper analysis of both generations concerning their integration in and segregation from German society.

Conclusion

We can conclude on basis of this study that the Berlin Arab community's access to Arab-Islamic transnational media content has clearly influenced them as a collective, both on a religious-cultural and a national-cultural level. The findings indicate a very strong tendency among the Arab/Muslim community in Berlin to consume Islamic TV programming and other new media content such as the Internet. Such modes of media consumption result in a tendency towards exhibiting 'Back to Islam' sentiments, which is a kind of religious conservatism both in terms of values and practices. This was observed among the Islamic community, who showed greater Islamic attitudes towards different social and cultural and political issues, indicating a kind 'Islamic values ghetto' within a non-Muslim environment. The effects of Islamic principles guiding their daily routines and practices, especially within their community, were very apparent. These relatively new religious trends are partly an outcome of an exposure to religious television programming from the Arab World. In generational terms, the findings also demonstrate two kinds of 'back to Islam' among this community: parents and adults experience a more 'fundamental practical back to Islam' sentiment, while an 'emotional back to Islam' response is dominant among their children. While the first generation focused on the religious content and structural dimension of the Islamic satellite media, the younger generation emphasised the emotional dimensions, stating that they felt a greater sense of belonging to the Islamic community, culture, and heritage than before. These feelings were strengthened primarily by the antagonistic attitudes expressed towards them by the host society. However, their parents felt the need to practice the Islamic religious way of life and to learn about it in a more nostalgic manner.

Exposure to Arab global media has transformed viewers into an imagined community. While Arab transnational media and its content have become an integral part of the lives for the first generation in Germany, for the second generation, these images are not drawn solely from the Arab World. In other words, we argue that first generation immigrants formulate an 'imagined coherence' of a Pan-Arab nation and Pan-Islam by interacting with Arab transnational media. For the young generation, this 'imagined coherence' stems mainly from their desire to become informed about their culture and religion in order to increase their sense of belonging. The general tendency among this generation is towards

a kind of solidarity not only with Arabness and Muslimness, but also or even primarily with their social class, with a particular regional or non-Arab ethnic origin, with a transnational creole 'third culture,' or as a part of German society.

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