CENTER FOR
Global Studies

Project on Global Migration and Transnational Politics

A Politics of Place
How Young Muslims Frame Global and Local Events in Online Communication

Dorthe H. Possing
Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies, Minority Studies Section,
University of Copenhagen

GEORGE
MASON
UNIVERSITY

A Politics of Place—How Young Muslims Frame Global and Local Events in Online Communication

Dorthe H. Possing[*]

PhD Fellow, Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies, Minority Studies Section, University of Copenhagen

Abstract: *Drawing on empirical material from a broader study that focuses on computer-mediated communication and activism among young, well-educated Danish, American and British Muslim women the paper offers a preliminary analysis of how certain events are used by Muslims to express their sense of belonging and being "in place." The analysis shows that when events circulate online they are often understood simultaneously in relation to broader geopolitical issues and in relation to how young Muslims in everyday life experience the boundaries and norms of a particular location. Hence, the paper argues that the concept of "place" and the notion of "politics of place" are crucial in addressing questions of how we are to understand ideas of belonging among young Muslims living in non-Muslim societies and how such ideas are affected by widespread patterns in communication.*

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

> I specifically remember when Deniz Uzun died – you know the Turkish paper delivery boy. The murder made me react because it felt "close to me"—in every sense of the word. The victim was a Muslim and it happened in my city. The debate it fostered taught me a lot about this place and also made me wonder how you can be considered a stranger and, yet, nobody is willing to recognize that that's what got you killed in the first place. This [incident], more than anything else, made me question how I belong here—more than the cartoons, and more than the never-ending debates on integration and Islam (Personal interview with a young Danish Muslim woman, Denmark, September 2008).

The excerpt tells the story of an event that came to symbolize the unacknowledged racism and anti-Muslim sentiments in contemporary Danish society for many young Danish Muslims. The case of fatal violence against a young boy of Turkish descent, Deniz Ozgur Uzun (the Uzun case), in March 2008 was one that many Danish interviewees participating in my study on young Muslim women and computer-mediated communication would mention when confronted with my questions of whether they remembered specific events or instances that had affected them and subsequently influenced their engagement in social critique and activism.

An act of fatal violence against a 16-year-old paper delivery boy might not be the most obvious example of an event with geopolitical significance. However, the incident

---

[*] To contact the author, please email her at hovids@hum.ku.dk.

affected how discourses of belonging among many young Danish Muslims were configured and reconfigured. By contributing to the ongoing formation and transformation of antagonistic "us-them" relations (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 122ff), the event became a matter of a politics of place. A politics of place relates to how places, such as regions, localities, nations, are used to define groups of people in relation to other groups of people and is about constructing and defining the boundaries of a place, and involves negotiations about who and what is "inside" and "outside" that place (Cresswell 2004).

My interviewees often linked the Uzun case semantically to another event that continues to have a significant impact on relations among Muslims and non-Muslims worldwide—the "Danish cartoon controversy."[1] The two events were often mentioned as significant moments by the interviewees when they reflected on how their sense of belonging was affected by events and online debates. The link between the cartoon controversy and the Uzun case was also made explicit by Islamonline.net, an influential Muslim Internet site offering news, counseling, live debates and other online services, which associated the two incidents with the rise of anti-Muslim sentiments in an English-language article on March 24th 2008—five days after Uzun's fatal assault.[2] Hence, the case moved beyond the borders of Denmark and beyond the case itself, highlighting that "geopolitics are local …[and] everyday life is geopolitical" (Pain and Smith 2008: 249).

This paper offers a preliminary analysis of how certain events, such as the case of fatal violence against Deniz Uzun, are used by young Muslims to express their sense of belonging to specific places and to articulate alternative representations of those places. The analysis shows that when events circulate they are often understood simultaneously in relation to broader geopolitical issues *and* in relation to how people in everyday life experience the boundaries of a particular location. The focus suggested here is not exclusively on existing or dwelling in place, but also on how movement and circulation contest and affect notions of place. On this point I agree with anthropologist Arturo Escobar who defines place as a category of thought *and* a constructed reality:

> …the experience of a particular location with some measure of groundedness (however, unstable), sense of boundaries (however, permeable), and connection to everyday life, even if its identity is constructed, traversed by power, and never fixed (Escobar 2001:140).

Through looking at how events circulate and are constructed within everyday negotiations of the boundaries of place, I argue that we can better understand the premises and constructions of place as it relates to belonging.

---

[1] The "Danish cartoon controversy" is a phrase commonly used to refer to the protests and debates in the aftermath of the Danish daily *Jyllands Posten*'s publication of twelve cartoons featuring the Prophet Mohammad on September 30th 2005. The publication of the cartoons was followed by massive protests from Muslims worldwide and by a longstanding boycott of Danish products sold in Muslim countries. For an account of the course of events during the cartoon controversy see Klausen 2009.

[2] http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=Article_C&cid=1203758361910&pagename=Zone-English-News/NWELayout (accessed October 12, 2009).

THE STUDY: FOCUSING ON THE ONLINE-OFFLINE CONNECTION

According to some Internet Studies scholars, there is a lack of qualitative research that takes into account how people apply the interactions and experiences gained online to their everyday lives. Instead, much of the current research relies primarily on textual analysis of Internet material and on online surveys (Downey & Fenton 2003, Orgad 2005). This trend calls for a methodological reassessment, encouraging more researchers to, for example, conduct face-to-face interviews and maintain long-term relations with key informants. This holds particularly true for Internet studies on Muslims. Most of the research focuses on textual material available on Muslim and Islamic Internet sites (el-Nawawy & Khamis 2009, Bunt 2009, 2003, Halldén 2006) or transformations in the public spheres of Islam and Islamic authority through new media, of which the Internet is one part (Anderson 2003, Anderson & Eickelman eds. 1999). Sometimes research on online communication has focused on specific actors, primarily the scholars of Islam (ulama), or "professional Muslims," such as representatives of Muslim organizations or networks, and their influence on exegetics (tafsiir) or religious discourse (Skovgaard-Petersen, Graf & Dwyer eds. 2009, Wise 2004). However, research has rarely, with the exception of the work of Peter Mandaville (2001a, 2001b), focused on theorizing the spatiality of the movement or travelling of Islam and Muslims facilitated by, for example, the Internet. Computer-mediated communication and its impact on receivers' everyday life remains relatively unexplored. Through my study I attempt to contribute to the latter dimension of research on Muslims and the Internet by exploring connections between online communication, activism and social affiliations.

I draw my primary theoretical inspiration from political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre. The discourse theory developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 1990) suggests that social spaces and groups are contingent and discursively constructed entities, and that the definition of what 'we' (self) are, always involves the definition of who 'they' (other) are. Put differently, identities are relational. This particular mode of analysis therefore focuses on the production of objects, such as "group" and "society," and is highly suited to studying the spatiality of social relations. In order to develop an approach that avoids drawing a distinct line between my interviewees online and offline lives, and between private, public, and counter-public spheres, I also draw on the concept of lived space (Lefebvre 1991, Soja 1996). This concept was initially developed to bridge the gap between binaries such as real/imagined, subjective/objective, and mental/social in the study of social space and the spatiality of social relations. Lived space is a flexible term that highlights the nuanced relation between binaries. It does so by highlighting that two concepts—e.g. local/global, real/imagined, and subjective/objective—are never enough. The approach is an attempt to move beyond describing and analyzing the milieu of subjects and the discourses involved in constructing and maintaining it. Instead, more analytical emphasis is put on how various social spaces are connected, what occupies the social spaces, and how so (Lefebvre 1991: 12).

The empirical material that I draw on in this paper is generated from a broader study that focuses on well-educated 18-to-35-year-old British, American, and Danish Muslim women.[3] Through interviews with fifty women thus far, I have examined how the Internet is used as a tool for information retrieval, communication, and support for political and social

---

[3] The 3-year study is a part of the Alternative Spaces project hosted by the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies at the University of Copenhagen (http://alternativespaces.tors.ku.dk/), and is generously funded by the Faculty of Humanities, University of Copenhagen and the Danish Council for Strategic Research.

activism. The interviews are combined with regular online observations conducted since February 2008. I have kept in contact with many of the interviewees since I first met them, and some of them have functioned as key informants whom I have interviewed several times. In addition to accompanying them to meetings, demonstrations, and other activities, continued contact and communication has also fueled valuable discussions about changes in their communication and interactions both before and after the events and debates that are the focus of my study.

The interviewees participating in my study include women who are not affiliated with Muslim organizations or networks; women who are affiliated with Muslim organizations or networks and chose to give voice to those when interviewed; women who have created blogs, Facebook pages, or established new networks because they did not feel that existing ones represented their voice; and women who, through their activism, contest existing Muslim and non-Muslim representations of Muslim women alike. Interviewees were not found according to their use of specific Muslim or Islamic Internet sites, and my online observations were not limited to Muslim or Islamic Internet sites. Rather, observations were conducted on sites where the women participating in the study were active (primarily blogs and Facebook). Moreover, observations focused on examining how specific events and debates figure and circulate among the users of the sites. The primary focus of the online observations was on debates and activism related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (particularly on the 2008-09 upsurge in the Gaza conflict), and on gender-related politics generated by debates about Muslim women and gender equality within Islam.

Thanks to the diversity of interviewees both Muslim and non-Muslim relations as well as "internal" Muslim relations, i.e. differences within Islam, could be articulated.

The Circulation and Impact of Events and Debates

The majority of the women in my study were familiar with discussions by scholars like Tariq Ramadan, Sheikh Taha Jabir Fayyad al-Alwani and Sheikh Yousuf al-Qaradawi, all of who are known for their reflections on the possibility and need for developing an Islamic jurisprudence for Muslim minorities—the so-called fiqh al-aqalliyyaat. However, most of the women told me that they rarely use the Internet to keep up with ongoing negotiations of theological issues initiated by scholars, just as they told me that they rarely look up specific theological information online.[4] A significant feature of their Internet use—and one that came to be the focus of my study—is that much time spend online was used engaging in debates, often involving non-Muslims, on what was sometimes articulated as "Muslim issues," including for example, gender equality, women's rights, racism, discrimination, integration and foreign politics in relation to the so-called Muslim world. They do so in diverse manners including blogging and commenting on other peoples blogs; writing comments and publishing articles on the websites of larger TV-networks or newspapers; and using Facebook

---

[4] This does not mean that they do not use the Internet to find information on Islamic perspectives on various issues, but rather than using the Internet to keep track of ongoing theological debates, they watch and/or listen to lectures and debates on, for example, YouTube. Favored scholars and preachers among both European and American participants in my study are Tariq Ramadan, Amr Khaled, and Sheikh Hamza Youssef, and the lectures and debates that they tend to keep track of, are on topics they consider close to their everyday life (for example gender issues, environmental issues, communication of best practice examples on community work, and reflections and guidelines on how to engage in non-Muslim societies).

profiles to post links to articles or videos, or to engage in threaded communication about topics they consider relevant to their everyday life.

I found that the kind of events and debates that generated activism and societal engagement were most often local and/or national issues, and that the Internet was often used as a source of information on how similar issues play out in other geographical settings. One obvious example of an event that generated attention beyond local and national boundaries was the 2005-06 Danish cartoon controversy. It has affected many of my interviewees' computer-mediated communication and social relations because it created global awareness about the ways in which Islam and Muslims are perceived within a Danish context. Some of my interviewees talked about how they have experienced a growing international interest in things they circulate online such as blogs, articles, and updates and comments on their Facebook profiles. When I talked to them about how the growing interest in Danish Muslims conditions of life affected their computer- mediated communication and activism, they underlined that the "grand scale politics" of minority-majority relations, of which the cartoon controversy was considered to be an example, is less relevant to them than many of the local and national issues that also circulate online. Accordingly, they emphasized events that are more closely related to their everyday life as having a more significant impact on their sense of belonging and social affiliation. When asked to exemplify what they considered as events closer to everyday life, many of them would instantly mention the Uzun case as an example. They also talked about how this particular event stresses how authorities fall short to recognize the discrimination Muslims currently face—something that was often evaluated as a potential hindrance in terms of societal engagement. As put by one interviewee:

> It is problematic that even before engaging in issues of how we can contribute to society and how we, as citizens, would like this society to develop in the future, we have to prove that we belong here. And addressing experiences of discrimination instantly labels you as 'a minority' living on the fringes of society. And even worse: the experience of being discriminated against is most often considered to be false. Thus, being 'a minority' is a position that is considered to be a conscious and often strategic choice – *and* it's a position that is considered to be mutually exclusive to that of being 'a citizen' (Personal interview, Denmark, September 2008).

It became increasingly clear during the interview process that computer-mediated communication was sometimes used strategically to challenge the boundaries of place, and more specifically the norms of how you can belong to a specific place. The Muslim women participating in my study often accentuated a nationally defined sense of belonging, and talked about their obligation to participate in debates about how to make society a better place for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In this vein, they downplayed—or sometimes even dismissed—a position as "a minority." In fact, many of the women problematized how certain events, and the way they were debated by Muslims and non-Muslims alike positioned them as a minority. They also talked about how this positioning served as an incentive to stress their belonging to Denmark, and that much of their transnational communication was concentrated around knowledge-sharing with other Muslims living in non-Muslim societies. To that end, they wrote about their experience facing discrimination, and how they created awareness about discrimination in the wider social debates. Hence, I found it important to explore the underlying research puzzle of (1) how we are to understand ideas of belonging among young, well-educated Muslim women living in non-Muslim societies and, (2) under which circumstances such ideas are affected by widespread changes in patterns of communication and mobility. I found that the politics and concept of place was crucial in addressing these questions.

THE CONCEPT OF PLACE IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

The concept of place has been scrutinized from many different angles, particularly in regard to its fate under the impact of globalization. Some scholars have argued the sense of so-called placelessness or flow, sometimes linked to the work of imagination (Appadurai 1996, 2006), has become the hallmark of contemporary life in a globalized world (e.g. Augé 1995, Castells 1996). In academic discourses, deconstructions of place-based identity positions often focus on the productive and transformative potential of hybrid identities that are not confined to a specific location. In a continuation of this tendency we have seen the emergence of a range of concepts and metaphors, all pointing to mobility and fluidity, rather than boundedness and fixity, as the leitmotif of contemporary society. Examples of such concepts are diaspora, travelling (theory), mobility, third space, hybridity and de-territorialization (Said 1984, Hall 1991, 1999, Gilroy 1993, Cohen 1997, Appadurai 1996, Bhabha 1990, 1994, Clifford 1994, 1997, Werbner 1997). However, scholars writing on the spatiality of social relations do not necessarily agree on the workings of place. The question remains how and under which circumstances does the erosion of distance and boundaries affect the meaning of place (see also Friedman 1995). Has place become less important due to globalization and its flow of capital, people, and worldviews?

Place is a concept often associated with boundaries and the defense of boundaries, for example in the break up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Whether or not it is associated with such violent conflicts, place is often thought to be entwined with identity politics linking *a specific* group of people to *a specific* location. As such the concept of place has been equated with the unwanted workings of essentialisms. In reaction to this, scholars have sought to deconstruct notions of place, labeling the politics of place as a reactionary and exclusionary activity. In this vein, geographer David Harvey (1996) highlights how "a place" can be used to distinguish one social entity from another, and how the politics of place is often used as a means to gain independence from the wider pressures of globalization. However, more recently other scholars have instead emphasized the need for caution, since for many people, place and place-making remains an important and vital activity, making it important not to loose sight of place (e.g. Cresswell 2004, Escobar 2001, Morley 2001, Massey 1997, 2005). People, in fact, relate to the same place in very different ways and rather than writing of place as irrelevant we need to examine the different ways of relating to the same place. One possible way of examining this is by looking at how certain events and debates impact notions of home, belonging and togetherness (for similar approaches see Morley 2001, Vertovec 2003, Hage 2009). This construction of place involves the simultaneous definition of (1) what lies "outside" a place and what lies "inside" it, and (2) who is considered to be the legitimate residents of the "inside" and "outside" respectively. However, as pointed out by scholars such as geographers Tim Cresswell and Doreen Massey, boundaries are defined by permeability. Thinking of place as something that is made and remade on a daily basis, and thus thinking about place as something relational, helps us to think of place in non-essentialized ways (Cresswell 2004, Massey 2005).[5]

---

[5] This analytical lens to examine the concept of place is also associated with the theory of lived space (Lefebvre 1991, Soja 1996)

THE SEMANTIC STRETCH OF THE UZUN CASE – AN EXAMPLE OF NEGOTIATING THE BOUNDARIES OF POLITICS OF PLACE

When looking at how events, such as the Danish cartoon controversy or the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, circulate online, the Internet becomes an enlargement of transnational political space, and a space where the boundaries of various communities and solidarities, such as diasporas, can be negotiated and sometimes reformulated. While this is only one mode of online engagement, my empirical findings underscore a similar need for examining how ideas of locality and place affect the way the Internet is used. In the following section, I will examine how place-based discourses and imaginaries were turned into a critique of power, and how certain events affected the construction of place (Escobar 2001).

When conducting interviews, I always asked interviewees to mention specific events or debates that had encouraged them to engage in online communication. I had, admittedly, expected an emphasis on, for example, the invasion of Iraq, the Danish cartoon controversy, the French ban on religious symbols in public schools, or the ongoing European (primarily British) debates on Shari'a in civil courts as events that encouraged communication and potentially activism. Despite the fact that such events and issues often *did* occur as themes during the interviews, most interviewees would, as described, initially emphasize other events, evaluated as closer and more significant to their everyday life. Thus, while almost all interviewees saw the Danish cartoon controversy as an event that had influenced (and obscured) relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, they rarely brought up the topic themselves and our conversations would often arrive at it via unexpected routes. One such route was the Uzun case. I suggest that while these events are not causally related, they can be studied as part of the same kind of politics of place and as examples of how the boundaries of such politics of place are negotiated, not only between Muslims and non-Muslims, but also internally among Muslims.

The Uzun case

On March 8th 2008 Deniz Uzun, a 16-year-old boy of Turkish descent, was taking a lunch break from his newspaper route. He was chatting to a friend when three young men in a car pulled up in front of them. They stopped the car and jumped out. One of them yelled, "What are you looking at?" and subsequently dealt Uzun several blows to the head with a baseball bat. Uzun became comatose and died the following evening from severe head injuries. According to one eye-witness (the friend Uzun had been chatting with just before the assault), one of the attackers yelled "Fucking Perker" while repeatedly beating Uzun to the head. The expression "Perker" is a contraction of the Danish words for Persian and Turkish, and is a commonly known derogatory Danish slang for immigrants. Discussions soon arose as to whether or not the assault had a racist motive and should be tried in the courts as a hate crime. The death of Deniz Uzun received extensive coverage by the Turkish media. And when Islamonline.net published an article about the case it was under the headline, "Danish Islamophobia Kills Muslim Teen" and the assault was thus inscribed within a larger context of anti-Muslim sentiments. Based on statements made by Abdelhamid Hamdi and Jehad Abdulalim Al-Farra, both affiliated with the Islamic Council in Denmark—the Danish branch of the umbrella organization Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe—the case was

seen as an example of what was perceived as a general anti-Muslim atmosphere in Denmark.[6] Under the sub-headline "Cartoon Effect," the rise in Danish racism was linked to the publication of the caricatures of the Prophet Mohammad, a linkage that was reinforced by the "Related links" box to the left of the article; all referring to information on the cartoon controversy and the existence of islamophobia in Denmark. In the eyes of Danish officials, working intensely to restore relations to Muslim countries after 2005, this labeling of Denmark as an anti-Muslim country was obviously undesirable. According to the Danish daily newspaper, *Jyllands Posten*, Danish officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs contacted the editors of Islamonline.net to convince them to nuance the information in the article.[7] According to statements made to Danish media by Klavs Holm, Ambassador of Public Diplomacy in the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ove Dahl, Head of Homicide Investigations at the Copenhagen Police Department, there was no reason to believe that the victim's religion or ethnicity had anything to do with the assault, and communicating such "misleading information" could damage the reputation of Denmark.
Conversely, in the eyes of interviewees participating in my study—of which some uploaded comments on the news media's coverage of the case and wrote about the assault on blogs—there was no doubt that anti-Muslim sentiments and racism had played a role in this case. Comments on the assault made by Danish Muslims online spurred a great deal of emotional debate on issues of difference and notions of belonging. I asked one interviewee who had engaged in numerous online debates about the assault, why she thought it had spurred so much debate, answering that,

> The things we have to change are right here. It is not through debating things like the French ban on the hijab that we come to know society and society come to know us. Such debates are self-evident, they rarely lead to mobilization, *and* they rarely evolve beyond the halal-haram [permissible and impermissible] level – so they sometimes create more division than unity. With the Deniz Uzun case it's different. Maybe it is not so much the case itself as it is the fact that the debate following in the wake of the murder told us a great deal about Danish society – a society where people outright refuse to deal with the fact that we, Muslims, experience racism and xenophobia everyday. However, the case actually did start a debate about xenophobia and reminded us that racism is something we face, and must confront, collectively (Personal interview, Denmark, September 2008).

The interviewee and other Danish research participants believed that the authorities' reluctance to admit the potential racial motivation of the assault was very problematic. This reluctance, now also communicated globally, made many of my interviewees feel that their experiences of discrimination were rejected like a knee-jerk reaction. The experience of unacknowledged racism was mentioned by many as a motivating factor for much of their activism that strives to carve out public space for Danish Muslims. Thus, rather than merely contributing to a feeling of estrangement, the event also made many of the women I talked to

---

[6] It is beyond the scope of this article, but if we were to gain a more detailed knowledge about how the online circulation of events like the Deniz Uzun case affects social affiliation among Danish Muslims, it would be highly relevant to examine how other Muslim and Islamic organizations commented on, or refrained from commenting on, the case and how their attitudes were evaluated among Danish Muslims. In terms of circulation it can be noted that the statements made by the representatives of the Islamic Council of Denmark were reported on sites such as the *Brunei Times* homepage, the Islam in Europe blog (www.islamineurope.blogspot.com), Yahoo groups, www.montrealmuslims.ca and www.forumbismillah.com.

[7] The *Jyllands Posten* article does not mention if the officials also contacted the Islamic Council in Denmark directly to ask them to nuance their statements http://jp.dk/indland/krimi/article1303696.ece (accessed October 12th 2009)

insist that their chosen home country, Denmark, should not become associated with racism. By addressing issues of racism and discrimination in public and by communicating with Muslims elsewhere in Europe, similar cases could be avoided in the future.

Negotiating the boundaries of politics of place: different modes of linking of the Uzun case and the cartoon controversy

I was interested in finding out if and how my interviewees made the same kind of semantic stretch as Islamonline.net that linked the Uzun case to the Danish cartoon controversy.[8] As mentioned in the beginning of the section some interviewees were reluctant to engage in conversations about the cartoon controversy, and generally it was not a topic brought up for its own sake.[9] However, others did bring up the cartoon controversy, approaching the topic by expressing concerns with how other Muslims had handled the event. Certain interviewees said that some Muslims, claiming to speak on behalf of "the Muslim community," concluded that the Uzun case revitalized the conflicts that followed the cartoon controversy—and that they used Uzun's death strategically to revitalize a conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims. In such conversations the interviewees emphasized that they also found official Muslim statements about the publication of the cartoons very problematic and potentially counter productive. Not only did they leave the impression that they were to be taken as collective statements made on behalf of a globally unified Muslim community, but they also left Muslims in Denmark in a self-proclaimed deadlocked position as victims. Moreover, some interviewees noted that Danish press and politicians used the official statements to bear witness to the fact that many Danish Muslims lacked the will to acknowledge social norms within Danish society.

On one occasion an interviewee addressed the controversy between Amr Khaled—an Egyptian born television preacher and social entrepreneur who is known for his attempts to communicate an Islam compatible with modern life—and Sheikh Yousuf al-Qaradawi, an influential Egyptian born, now Qatar-based, Islamic scholar who initiated the establishing of Islamonline.net in 1999. The controversy relates to a situation in early 2006: Amr Khaled suggested that a conference addressing coexistence and dialogue be held in Copenhagen. Opposing Amr Khaled's suggestion, Sheikh Yousuf al-Qaradawi made a statement saying that until an excuse for the defamation of the Prophet had been given, the time was not right for such initiatives. The attitude expressed by Sheikh Yousuf al-Qaradawi resonated well with that of the Muslim clergy in Denmark including leading imams and representatives of Muslim and Islamic organizations who had sought to mobilize protests from the international Muslim community since October 2005 (Klausen 2009) in order to make the cartoon controversy a global matter. When talking about the controversy, the interviewee noted how tiring it had been with all the international commotion surrounding the cartoons:

---

[8] My definition of semantic stretch differs slightly from G. E. R Lloyd's notion (2006). Lloyd refers to this concept in order to overcome a crude dichotomy between a literal and a metaphorical use of terms. I use the notion to direct attention to the ways in which people sometimes draw upon their understanding and interpretation of prior, often unrelated, events, when understanding current events. A semantic stretch can thus indicate how a current event is incorporated into a more general situation – in this case the everyday life experience of discrimination.

[9] This was different in interviews carried out in Britain and the U.S. where interviewees were usually eager to learn how the controversy affected Danish Muslims, and in many cases even mentioned the cartoon controversy as an example of an event that had affected their online communication.

> At the end of the day the cartoons were all about Danish xenophobia and anti-Muslim sentiments, but those claiming to speak on behalf of Muslims made it about the Muslim umma being subordinated anti-Muslim global scale politics (Personal interview, Denmark, November 2008).

Interestingly, she had stopped engaging in online communication about the cartoons soon after they started receiving global attention because she felt reluctant to be placing herself alongside those who claimed to speak for a global, subordinated Muslim umma. Another interviewee expressed a similar attitude when talking about how the Uzun case had affected her:

> I wrote a statement about Deniz Uzun and got a lot of angry comments. One person wrote: "Why do we have to care if he was a Muslim, what does that have to do with anything?" I think this is a brilliant example of the problems we're facing after the cartoon controversy: Muslims outside Denmark refused to engage in discussions of freedom of speech, democracy and all that. Instead they made it a question of the defamation of religion. While it offended me personally that *Jyllands Posten* tried to create a gap between Muslims and non-Muslims, I still think that many Muslims abroad, especially in the Middle East, hijacked the agenda and made it about something else – those in power, like politicians, scholars and journalists, used the opportunity to draw attention away from their own corruption and abuse of power (Personal interview, Denmark, December 2008).

During the interview it became apparent that the most important issue was the discussion of democracy and the limits on freedom of speech within a Danish context, including e.g. discussions she participated in as a Danish citizen engaging with other Danish citizens residing in the same place, such as journalists at *Jyllands Posten*, Danish politicians, and other Danish Muslims. She experienced that other actors had sought to embed the cartoon controversy in a different discourse, namely that of global discrimination against Muslims, in this case through the defamation of Islam. According to the interviewee, this "hijacking" of the event undermined the possibility of effectively questioning the boundaries of what it takes to be a legitimate part of Danish society.

The situation described here illustrates how the event became part of an ongoing struggle, in which some actors sought to make the cartoon controversy part of a global politics of place, while others, including the majority of the Danish women participating in my study, interpreted it as primarily a national politics of place, confined to Denmark. A common denominator of the Uzun case and the cartoon controversy was that they were often evaluated as events that called for transnational communication in the sense that they underlined the need to gain knowledge on how Muslims living in other non-Muslim societies dealt with the experience of discrimination, but that they were ultimately a matter of national politics of place, and should be dealt with accordingly. While the interviewee quoted above experienced the globalization of the politics of place by certain actors as an obstacle for an effective discussion of what was "really at stake"—the recognition of Muslims in Danish society and the broadening of ideas of who and what belong in Denmark, other interviewees, like the woman quoted below, pointed to exactly this kind of globalization as a way to facilitate such discussions. The online threaded debates about Uzun's death were dwindling by late April 2008, but discussions of racism and xenophobia and Muslim initiatives to fight them were not. As the following excerpt illustrates, in the ongoing discussions of Danish xenophobia, the death of Deniz Uzun, became the poster child example of Danish racism.

Interestingly, when the case was brought to court in January 2009, it was not treated as a hate crime:

> In Denmark we represent ourselves as a tolerant, liberal society. Racism does not exist here, right? Harsh anti-Muslim rhetoric is tolerated in public debate, but the argument that it works on exactly the same premises as racism and is in fact xenophobic is not accepted—events like the killing [of Deniz Uzun] and the cartoons have effectively changed that. Other people now see Denmark as a xenophobic country, so even if Muslims can't address this in the public debate, Denmark has to deal with its reputation abroad! On Facebook I sometimes get messages from Muslims in other countries—they want to know what it's like to live in this country after the cartoons (Personal interview, Denmark, October 2008)

The quote shows that the interviewee perceived the murder of Deniz Uzun and the cartoon controversy as instances of racism and xenophobia, but her experience was that this perception is not recognized by the broader society that holds a collective narrative of toleration and freedom. In this case, the world outside Denmark is called upon as an authoritative correction to this narrative, and thereby the interviewee gains support for her interpretation of the situation in Denmark by aligning herself with "Muslims in other countries." This point was further elaborated by the interviewee in a conversation we had later the following year (June 2009). She told me that initially she had been rather puzzled as to why it was so important for officials to try to control the coverage of the Uzun case. Not until the debates about the equivalence between racism and defamation of religion, spurred by the Durban II conference in April 2009, had she thought of the case again. She believed that if Uzun's death had been considered the result of a hate crime, this would have signaled some sort of official recognition of the fact that racism flourishes in Denmark. And since the case had already received international attention, this scenario would potentially lead to a situation in which Denmark, the nation widely accused by Muslims across the world of defaming Islam in 2005, would be forced into a discussion of whether defamation of religion should be placed on the same footing as racism.[10]

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper I have shown that rather than large scale politics, like that of the cartoon controversy which affected export, trade and diplomatic relations, it is sometimes local events, considered to be closer to everyday life, that had a greater impact on the politics of place articulated by the women participating in my study. However, this paper has also shown that the local dimension of politics of place should not be understood in relation to dichotomies such as global/local or national/transnational. Instead, we need to empirically examine the conditions under which such events are discursively "placed." Rather than presupposing the existence of various boundaries that shape identities and social relations *a priori*, I suggest a mode of analysis where attention is drawn towards the spaces where the *effects* of ideas of differences appear, and where social relations are constantly remade and renegotiated through politics of place—and thus where places are never fully established. Combined with the notion of the politics of place, the mode of analysis presented in the paper, rather than emphasizing mobility and fluidity as the leitmotif of current everyday life,

---

[10] This was proposed by the Organization of The Islamic Conference (OIC), an inter-governmental organization safeguarding the interests of Muslim countries, before the Durban II conference.

prioritize an approach that affirms the "dialectics of fixity and flow—of place and mobility" (Cresswell & Uteng 2008: 2).

Based on a preliminary analysis of how the fatal assault on Deniz Uzun circulated online and was semantically linked to the cartoon controversy, I have shown that transnational communication can be strategically used to change the boundaries of place, and that place-based identities and imaginaries sometimes function as operational strategies for the right to be "in place." The Muslim women participating in my study articulated place not as an exclusive site, but rather as a "meeting place" where alternative representations and constructions of a homeland can be articulated—in other words, they sometimes reach out to others through space, i.e. online, because of their experience of the boundaries of place.

REFERENCES

Anderson, J. W., (2003). "New Media, New Publics: Reconfiguring the Public Sphere of Islam." In *Social Research* 70, no 3, pp. 887-906.

Anderson, J. W. & Eickelman, D. F. (ed.) (1999). *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Appadurai, A. (2006). *Fear of Small Numbers. An Essay on the Geography of Anger*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Augé, M. (1995). *Non-Places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. London: Verso.

Bhabha, H. K. (1990). "The Third Space." In J. Rutherford (ed.), *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture.* London: Routledge.

Bunt, G. (2009). *IMuslims. Rewiring the House of Islam*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Bunt, G. (2003). *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments*. London: Pluto Press.

Castells, M. (1996). *The Rise of Network Society*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Clifford, J. (1994). "Diasporas." In *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 302-338.

Clifford, J. (1997). *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Cohen, R. (1997). "Diasporas, the Nation-State, and Globalisation." In W. Gungwu (ed.), *Global History and Migrations*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Cresswell, T. (2004). *Place. A Short Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Downey, J. & Fenton, N. (2003). "New Media, Counter Publicity and the Public Sphere." In *New Media & Society*, Vol. 5(2), pp. 185-202.

el-Nawawy, M. & Khamis, S. (2009). *Islam Dot Com. Contemporary Islamic Discourses in Cyberspace*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Escobar, A. (2001). "Culture sits in places: reflections on globalism and subaltern strategies of localization." In *Political Geography*, 20, pp. 139-179.

Friedman, J. (1995). "Global System, Globalization and the Parameters of Modernity." In M. Featherstone, S. Lash & R. Robertson (ed.), *Global Modernities*. London: Sage.

Gilroy, P. (1993). *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso.

Hage, G. (2009). "Hating Israel in the Field: On Ethnography and Political Emotions." In *Anthropological Theory* (9), pp. 59-79.

Hall, S. (1999). "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." In S. Vertovec & R. Cohen (ed.). *Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism*. Aldershot: Elgar Reference Collection.

Hall, S. (1991) "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities." In A. D. King (ed.). *Culture, Globalization, and the World System*. London: Macmillan.

Halldén, P. (2006). "Militant Salafism on the Internet: 'Alneda.com' and the Legacy of Yusuf al-'Ayyiri." In Larsson, G. (ed.), *Religious Communities on the Internet* (Studies on Inter-Religious Relations 29). Uppsala: Swedish Science Press.

Harvey, D. (1996). *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*. Cambridge: Blackwell.

Klausen, J. (2009). *The Cartoons That Shook The World*. Orwigsburg: Yale Press.

Laclau, E. & Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, London: Verso.

Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lloyd, G.E.R (2006). *Ancient Worlds, Modern Reflections: Philosophical Perspectives on Greek and Chinese Science and Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mandaville, P. (2001a). *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma*. London: Routledge.

Mandaville, P. (2001b). "Reimagining Islam in Diaspora. The Politics of Mediated Community." *Gazette* Vol. 63(2-3), pp.169-186.

Massey, D. (2005): *For Space*. London: Sage.

Massey, D. (1997): "A Global Sense of Place." In T. Barnes & D. Gregory (ed.), *Reading Human Geography*. London: Arnold.

Morley, D. (2001). "Belongings: Place, Space and Identity in a Mediated World." In *European Journal of Cultural Studie*s, vol. 4(4), pp. 425-448.

Orgad, S. (2005). "From Online to Offline and Back: Moving from Online to Offline Relationships with Research Informants**.**" In C. Hine (ed.) *Virtual Methods: Issues in Social Research on the Internet*. Oxford: Berg.

Pain, R. & Smith, S.J. (2008). *Fear: Critical Geopolitics and Everyday Life*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Said, E. (1984). *The World, the Text and the Critic*. London: Faber and Faber.

Skovgaard-Petersen, J., Graf, B., Dwyer, M. (2009). *The Global Mufti .The Phenomenon of Yusuf al-Qaradawi*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Soja, E. W. (1996). *Thirdspace. Journeys To Los Angeles And Other Real-And-Imagined Places*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Uteng, T. P. & Cresswell, T. (ed.) (2008). *Gendered Mobilities*. Hamshire: Ashgate.

Vertovec, S. (2003). "Diaspora, Transnationalism and Islam: Sites of Change and Modes of Research." In S. Allievi & J. S. Nielsen (ed.) *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities in and Across Europe*. Boston: Brill.

Werbner, P. (1997). "The Dialectics of Cultural Hybridity." In P. Werbner & T. Modood (ed). *Debating Cultural Hybridity. Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*. London: Zed Books.

Wise, L. (2004). "Amr Khaled: Broadcasting the Nahda." In *Transnational Broadcasting* Studies, 13.