

Diversifying Muslim Cultural Production

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Abstract

This paper seeks to lay out a case for the importance of producing and drawing on a number of cultural products – all the way from documentaries and blogs to novels and plays – in order to widen, strengthen and make da'wah more influential. However, the paper seeks to go beyond such simple and, it is hoped, appreciable efforts to analyse more deeply the nature of cultural products in relation to social reality and their impact on individual subjectivities. The paper argues that if we see cultural production in sociological terms we will soon see the centrality of cultural products to safeguarding and better embedding Muslims in identities more in keeping with their Islam. It suggests doing this in part by creating an Islamicate culture for Britain through cultural production, which can aid Muslims to live in this country more comfortably without compromising their faith. Overall the paper is animated by a spirit of seeking to assess the role cultural production can have in making positive social changes for Muslims living as a minority in Britain.

Summary

- This paper has sought to layout in some detail the virtue of diversifying Muslim cultural production.
- It has offered the idea of seeing cultural products as discursive products that reinforce society's sense of itself by re-inscribing within a social fabric dominant discourses as well as the particular narrative 'pictures' of the world that animate those discourses.
- By framing these products as discursive products, they have also been shown to emerge as the sites from which resistance and change can be mounted to discursive and narrative realities that have become hegemonic.
- The paper has shown this potential by arguing that cultural products do not stand apart from individuals who approach them as closed off subjects viewing what is "out there". Instead, cultural products (the thesis goes) seep into individuals and help compose our orientation to the world and our own sense of who we are. Cultural products from this standpoint are intimately tied to the emergence and development of our subjectivities and affect the subject positions (social roles) we take up and the manner by which we perform them.
- The paper argues, however, that no one cultural product carries this capacity alone. Rather, the coming together of different types of cultural products helps ensure that the weaknesses of each are minimised and an even echo is achieved across the social landscape.
- It is suggested that for Muslims to remain faithful to their identity and have a way in which to mount resistance against attitudinal currents antithetical to Islam, they must diversify their discursive products and create a cultural space which I am calling the Islamicate.
- The Islamicate I have defined as a cultural space which Muslims can create by melding the best of the majority culture with elements that are specific to Muslims – like a Muslim world view. This patchwork can be pieced together through greater cultural production by Muslims that is at the same time in keeping with Islamic values and Shar'ii requirements.
- The paper ends on a note of caution however, by emphasising the need for greater collaboration between scholars of Islam's primary sources and

artists and cultural practitioners. This stipulation is to ensure that in the spirit of diversification one does not slip into using any means to achieve the end of having a stronger more confident and well informed British Muslim population, which, the paper has maintained, is a real possibility if Muslim cultural production is encouraged and diversified.

Introduction

For two years running I taught Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* as part of the Postcolonial unit in the English syllabus as specified by the OCR examination board. This happens to be one of Gandhi's most important pieces of work as it is in many respects his manifesto for how to gain independence and self-rule for India from the British. The text itself is playful, presented as it is in the format of a Platonic dialogue, only, to be in keeping with the modern era of which it is a product, as that between a newspaper editor and a reader. I supplemented my teaching with a documentary by Carlton productions that showed the earliest known colour footage of the British in India and Richard Attenborough's Biopic, *Gandhi*. I also found some historical letters written during the Raj documented in different texts which I used to bring to my students genuine voices from the time when Gandhi was politically active in India. All of this was in an effort to convey in the most vivid manner possible the fabric - historical, cultural and social - in which Gandhi was embedded. Drawing on such diverse resources, as any teacher will appreciate, is a laudable effort and one most highly recommended in pedagogic theory. Yet when it comes to da'wah and transmitting Islamic knowledge, we as Muslims seem to be grounded firmly in perhaps an unconscious conviction that non-fictional mediums - top of which is the lecture format - are the only means for promulgating Islam and Islamic values. It is to redress this normative rut that the present paper has been written.

The paper itself is divided up into four **sections**, the first being the longest as it goes through in detail the theoretical understanding of why cultural products like documentaries, articles and novels (to name but a few) are important. In its theoretical explorations the section goes against the grain of normative thinking which suggests that broadening the mediums used for getting messages across is a virtue simply because it is likely to draw in a broader audience. Such uncomplicated wisdom notwithstanding, the chapter seeks to look a little deeper at the nature of cultural products and their relationship to perceptions of reality. Much of it draws heavily on social constructionist theories¹ and poststructuralist² insights about the connection between

¹ Vivian Burr writes about social constructionism thus: '[in social constructionism the focus is not on] some objective reality but upon the different meanings with which our worlds become invested. [...] if what we take ourselves and others to be are constructions and not objective descriptions, and if it is human beings that have built these constructions, then it is (at least in principle) possible to re-construct ourselves...and social constructionism seemed to me to offer the same basic message but on a wider [societal] scale.' Vivian Burr, "Realism, Relativism, Social Constructionism and Discourse", in, *Social Constructionism, Discourse and Realism*, ed. by Ian Parker, (London: Sage, 1998), p13.

² The cultural theorist Chris Barker writes, 'poststructuralism rejects the idea of an underlying structure which founds meaning. [...] meaning is unstable and cannot be confined to single words, sentences or particular texts.' Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, (London: Sage, 2008), p83. Poststructuralism also highlights that meaning is stabilised through discourse and not therefore through some natural affinity to the 'thing-in-itself' (the concept of discourse is explored in part one of section one).

language and the social worlds we inhabit. The former (social constructionism) helps focus society as a key ingredient in the formation of ideas and individual subjectivities, while the latter (poststructuralism) emphasises language as constitutive in our understanding of reality and helps underscore the importance of cultural products.

The other source that I have drawn on for the theoretical foundation of this paper is the growing field of narrative psychology and the pronunciation of "narrative" as a way of describing how we come to perceive reality. This narrative turn is a phenomenon with a patchy history, although it is identified closely with certain key thinkers in the twentieth century like Mikhail Bakhtin and later on, with the likes of Roland Barthes and Hayden White.³ All in all, I employ the description of "narrative reality" as merely a way of foregrounding my conviction that our perception of reality is structured as a narrative, which is to say, our mind organises human experience into temporally and spatially meaningful episodes.⁴

To elucidate much of this dense theory I concentrate on one particular historical context as case study and that is the African-American experience in the latter part of the 19th century through to the middle of the 20th century. The reason for using this example from history over any other is a little arbitrary and my only defence is that, other than the wonderful resonance between the theoretical insights and that specific historical context, there are worthwhile parallels to draw between (in some senses) the situation for Muslims as a minority in Britain and of African-Americans in America.

The first **section**, then, is split into four parts, the first of which makes a case for seeing cultural products as discursive products, that is, not as autonomous moments of mere creative or critical output but as both constitutive of and contingent on existing discourses. Following this characterization, part two of section one looks at how individual cultural products help formulate narratives by which individuals and societies imagine reality, while the third part details how these narrative imaginaries⁵ help us observe the subject positions (or roles) that discourses construct. My proposition in part three will be that a lack of cultural production by Muslims means our narrative reality is not only faint (if not absent) but something that also makes us vulnerable to taking up subject positions that are in conflict with an Islamically orientated identity. The fourth part will pick up this sense of the importance of cultural production to build yet one more layer of complexity, namely, the notion that a diversity of cultural products renders more formidable the suturing of individuals to their subject positions. This, given the fact that Muslims' cultural production rests on only a few different modes becomes significant when seen against the fact that Muslims in Britain are confronted by a public sphere profuse with a variety of discursive products. Hence,

³ See, http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/9690_023494Ch1.pdf, accessed 03.05.2009

⁴ For more on this see, Donald Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, (Albany: University of New York Press) and see the entry for Hayden White by Eva Dománska in, *Postmodernism: The Key Thinkers*, ed. by Hans Bertens and Joseph Natoli, (Oxford: Blackwells, 2002).

⁵ I borrow this term from Charles Taylor who uses it to describe the understanding or imagining a given people have for their collective social life.

part four will end in order to take the paper into the next section which will outline the advantages and shortcomings of different cultural products so as to emphasize the need in our current da'wah activities to draw on a variety of modes rather than only one or two. In the third section I will change my focus a little and look at what kind of an impact a diversification of mediums may have on the way Muslims consume their knowledge of Islam and an Islamicate⁶ culture, while also making a brief hypothesis of what impact this may have on Muslims as a population in Britain. Finally, I will address the underlying assumption through much of this paper that the diversification of mediums used for da'wah is a singularly good thing. 'Policing the parameters', as the final section is entitled, will look at some of the potential problems inherent in this project of diversification, and lay out some crucial safeguards. All in all, the paper will aim to show that, although there needs to be some restrictions placed on how different mediums are appropriated, an effort to diversify our discursive products is an important step toward building a stronger Muslim community in Britain and beyond.

⁶ I borrow this term from the historian Marshall Hodgson who defines "Islamicate" as something that would "refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims." Marshall Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, v. 1, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p59.

SECTION ONE:

Theorising the Importance of Cultural Production

i. Discourses and Cultural Products as Discursive Products

Discourse is a concept in cultural theory that is being endlessly defined and redefined. Although it has been fantastically productive in allowing us to talk about the construction of social reality, it has also proved terribly slippery. Yet this patchy semantic history may itself be seen as illustrating poststructuralism's key premise that language should not be seen as an autonomous and self-governed system.⁷ Instead, language is always grounded in society, existing as both an already formulated product and as constitutive of new articulations. This grounding of language in the social world, as both practice and effect, is captured in the term discourse.

But language and discourse are not interchangeable words, and my use of the term discursive products for cultural products does not simply foreground the obvious notion that all such things – whether they be films or essays – are products of language. Rather, by calling them discursive products I mean to show that they are products of ways of thinking and speaking that exist in society at any given time and are in turn means of ratifying and further ingraining into social reality those ways of thinking and speaking. A good example of this is seen in the story of the character of Wolverine from the *X-Men* comic books, cartoons, and now the film, *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*.⁸

Born as James Howlett, Wolverine is said to have gone through a natural mutation which means his body heals itself quickly making him almost invincible. Later on, under some secret US military experiment his bones are fused with adamantium, giving him his trademark metal claws. While there is no doubt that the value of the books, cartoons, and now the films lie importantly in their ability to entertain, like all cultural products they exhibit strands of broader discourses. In the case of *X-Men* and specifically the story of Wolverine, the discourse of evolution (the mutation that leads to his extra ordinary abilities) and the emergent anxieties around the link between technology and militarism (following the fact that the *X-Men* comic strips emerge in a post-Vietnam context where the emblematic images of Napalm have already caught the American imagination). As such, even the *X-Men* products (which may seem part

⁷ Poststructuralism is a key theory within Cultural Studies and emerged in the 1960's with individuals like Derrida and Foucault. Like the name suggests, it was a theory that was borne out of the insights developed within structuralism and in particular Sussure's structural linguistics.

⁸ Gavin Hood 2009

of an unthinking mass culture) are not merely autonomous objects of entertainment but products of a society and the discourses that circulate in a society at any given historical moment.

This may at first glance appear a rather round about way of speaking of cultural production, yet this approach is neither round about nor obvious. It emerges from a basis in poststructuralist theory of language. After the posthumous publication of Ferdinand Sussure's *Courses in General Linguistics*, language was seen to have no natural link to the world it described; words had meaning in relation to each other, either as what they were not (antonyms) or what they were like (synonyms). Nonetheless, Sussure's presentation of language was of a self-sustained structure that provided meaning not by reference to what was outside it but through an internal regulatory system. This gave great impetus to notions of structuralism and to the idea that social reality was structured outside of human beings and that these structures actually constrained human agency.⁹ Poststructuralism's advancement on this notion was to show that these structures themselves were not independent and fixed. If language had no 'natural' relation to an outside, language was equally unable to sustain an internal regulatory system to render meaning fixed. Since words merely referred to other words – take the example of looking up a word in a dictionary – the condition of language was not simply one systematised on difference but deferral, that is, meaning was always being deferred. Derrida, who is considered the progenitor of this insight, coined the term 'différance' to indicate the nature of this relationship between language and meaning as involving both difference *and* deferral.

What all of this suggests is that meaning in any given era is open and infinitely malleable. All kinds of meanings are possible and that meanings are historically determined as well as socially constructed. Yet in experience, society is not organised in terms of an extreme relativism which the theoretical insights of poststructuralism argue is the condition of the (social) worlds human beings inhabit. How then do societies fix and reproduce meanings so that they function in relatively concrete ways?

Though for Derrida 'meaning has the potential to proliferate into infinity' Michel Foucault – a contemporary of Derrida – presents us with a way of talking about how meaning is 'temporarily stabilised' and made to seem fixed.¹⁰ It was Foucault who gave the word discourse its critical edge so that it became the medium through which meaning was fixed in everyday social intercourse. Discourse, in one sense then, is the corpus of statements and utterances made about a specific topic that, when taken together, delimit the scope of that topic and deliver to individual speakers the knowledge of how to speak about a given topic (from what words to use to what kind of syntactical structures to deploy).

⁹ For example, we cannot speak outside of grammar as given to us by a language (or else we are in danger of not being understood) and so the very grammar of a language organises our thinking and makes possible what is 'thinkable'.

¹⁰ Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, (London: Sage, 2008), p110.

In this sense discourse is not simply speech or language, but speech and language as constituted in society and history. As social constructs, discourses are an evolving totality that interpenetrate and interact with each other providing society a sense of normativity by fixing meaning. If at a time the word black carried negative connotations – used in a pejorative manner in mid-twentieth century America for instance – it was because it was sustained by a host of publications and speeches in which it was defined in negative terms and loaded with cultural signification. A scene in Spike Lee's Biopic, *Malcolm X*,¹¹ shows this when Bimbi, Malcolm's fellow jail mate in Charlestown Prison, takes him to the library and opens a dictionary to the word black:

Black: Destitute of light; devoid of colour; enveloped in darkness, hence utterly dismal or gloomy; 'as the future looked black'; soiled with dirt; foul; sullen; hostile; forbidding as a black day; foully or outrageously wicked as black cruelty; indicating disgrace, dishonour or culpability... and there's others, *blackmail*; *blackball*, *blackguard*

He then turns to look up the word white and tells Malcolm to read:

White: of the colour of pure snow; reflecting all the rays of the spectrum; the opposite of *black*; free from spot or blemish; innocent; pure; without evil intent; harmless; honest; square-dealing; honourable.

Confronted in this way by these words, Malcolm becomes aware that something is amiss and turns to the front remarking, 'wait a minute, this is written by white folks', and indeed it was. The Webster Dictionary published in 1913 carried these definitions¹² and illustrates how at any given moment in history the material objects with which we interact – be they a book, a film, or a radio broadcast of a speech – carry forth discourses and process the precepts within them into a sense of normativity. This is what I want to stress when I speak of cultural products as discursive products; I want to foreground the notion of each and every cultural product, all the way from children's stories to adverts on bill boards, from laws to political speeches, from the best of literature to the worst of movies as instances of the ratification and ingraining of discourses. By using this abstract expression I also want to draw attention away from intentionality to history. The way in which words like 'black' and 'white' were understood in the mid-twentieth century American context for example, was not simply the result of certain mean spirited writers who calculatingly drew up a dictionary, but the effect of a historic legacy of slavery and a white supremacist world view in which individuals were *embedded* and from whence they undertook certain actions like the developing of certain books, pamphlets, and delivering the kind of speeches they did. Though intentionality is to be admitted, it should be circumscribed by locating it within broader discursive and narrative realities and it is this which I hope the

¹¹ *Malcolm X*, dir. Spike Lee, Warner Brothers, 1992.

¹² Spike Lee has taken a little artistic license by picking out some of the words as they are spread in four different entries (under each term) in the actual dictionary.

term discursive products helps emphasise.

Finally, it should be added that the concept of discourse – which the term discursive product evokes – highlights the reality of a public sphere in which there is a constant traffic of ideas. A discourse fixes meaning so long as it can remain hegemonic; challenge to its hegemony however, can only truly come from the creation of counter-hegemonic discourses that further alternative views and alternative meanings. The next section looks at the way individual discursive products construct a view of reality which influence social narratives as well as individual narratives.

ii. Narrative and Cultural Production

If one were to return to early twentieth century America, one would encounter the skewed politics of the era reverberating loudly through the cultural products then circulating. This would be patently clear from the speeches one would hear to the way newspapers covered their stories and even in something as non-political as the rhymes that children would sing.¹³ As such, these discursive products would impress upon one the dominant racial narrative that underpinned much of everyday living in America. This was despite the fact that in the era following the Civil War (1863-77), considerable changes were being brought about within American legislation that (in large part) sought redress for the position of African Americans. The South however, where almost 90% of African-Americans lived in the 19th century¹⁴, was bitterly hostile and resisted, formulating and implementing during this period and beyond what came to be known as the Jim Crow Laws (1876-1965).¹⁵

The logic of these laws, which enforced a strict segregation of races, is echoed in the work of Thomas Dixon Jr., a popular writer and novelist born in 1864 in North Carolina. Dixon was an active man involved in everything from writing novels and plays to preaching as a Baptist minister and as someone who was for a time elected as legislator for the North Carolina General Assembly.¹⁶ Being involved in so many different spheres, Dixon was an influential member of his community and as an individual with considerable written and oratory skills, as also an important cultural producer. The works he produced draw attention to the way in which the South as landscape was not only romanticised¹⁷ in a certain now disreputable part of the American literary canon, but as a space constituted imaginatively through racial discourses.

¹³ For instance, the rhyme, 'eeny, meeny, miney, mo', was popular in the Deep South where it was sung as: 'eeny, meeny, miney, mo/catch a nigger by the toe/if he hollers let him go...' Henry Bolton, *The Counting-Out Rhymes of Children: Their Antiquity and Wide Distribution*, (Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2006 [1888]), p46.

¹⁴ J. R. Mandle, *Not Slave, Not Free: The African American Economic Experience since the Civil War*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), p5.

¹⁵ The first Jim Crow Laws were implemented in 1877 in Florida. Derrick Murphy et al, *United States: 1776-1992*, (London: Collins Educational, 2001), p311.

¹⁶ Michele Gillespie, Randal L. Hall, *Thomas Dixon Jr and the birth of modern America*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), p59.

¹⁷ Anthony Slide for example, writes of Dixon as belonging to the 'magnolia and moonlight school of Southern Literature'. Anthony Slide, *American Racist*, (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), p8

The individual discursive products, of which Dixon's works were most certainly a part, helped construct a particular narrative in which a White supremacist worldview was imaged/imagined. This narrative was constructed through the interstitial spaces between different discursive products and drew on, therefore, numerous sources for its strength and vigour. Religious sermons sacralised that particular picture of the world while quasi-scientific publications naturalised it. Literary works helped in humanising White Americans while simultaneously demonising African Americans. History books gave temporal weight to notions of white America's progress and civility and the barbarousness of Africans and native Americans. Together, these discursive products helped formulate the mental landscape that would be socialised into the populace so that the particular picture of the world that lay behind all these different modal expressions achieved a hegemonic position. Such was its grip on the minds of the masses that Dixon could write without fear of repercussion remarks like, 'but for the Black curse, the South would be to-day the garden of the world' an expression that finds place in his most famous novel, *The Clansmen* (1905).¹⁸ What's more, this very novel is said to have been the inspiration behind D. W. Griffith's film, *The Birth of a Nation*.

Considered one of the most important films of early American cinema, *The Birth of a Nation* debuted in 1915 and re/presented the history of the aftermath of the Civil War. At the time Griffith was credited for displaying considerable artistic mastery over the new medium of film, but by the mid-twentieth century had sparked considerable scholarly controversy for his representation of African Americans. Black characters were depicted as irrational, lustful and incapable of self-rule, emblemised by their lascivious craving for white women.¹⁹ Through their lawlessness and the need to control them, Griffith passed judgment of the way in which the North's domination of the South inaugurated chaos through its insistence in particular that black slaves be emancipated.

Counter-discourses did of course exist, and there is the famous exchange of letters in the press between Dixon and the African-American intellectual Kelly Miller.²⁰ Yet what seems equally true is that these counter-discourses were relatively weaker and less evenly echoed across the landscape than those of the dominant white supremacists. It wasn't until the early twentieth century that these discourses really took off and began to reverberate, formalising themselves in the middle of the century around the Civil Rights movement which we now identify as key in changing race relations within American society.²¹

Up until that point though the racist narrative reality took precedence, and its hegemonic power can be accounted for by the fact that narratives and discourses affect

¹⁸ Thomas Dixon Jr., *The Clansmen*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970), p282.

¹⁹ Robert Staples, *Exploring Black Sexualities*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), p45.

²⁰ <http://www.jstor.org/pss/274972>, accessed 26.04.2009.

²¹ Alan Farmer, Vivienne Sanders, *An introduction to American History (1860-1990)*, (Oxon: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002), p175.

human beings. This is not only through the relations they produce in society and the manner by which they propagate the natural order of things (blacks at the bottom, whites at the top) but because they co-opt individuals into the imaginative schemes and roles (or subject positions, as I will call them) that they construct.²²

A good example of this can be seen in the 18th century emancipated slave and poet, Phillis Wheatley. Born in 1753 and transported through the slave trade to Boston at the age of eight, Phillis received an informal education through her master's daughter, Mary. Over time she earned herself a reputation as a poet and was afforded freedom in 1773.²³ Phillis' poetry shows – understandably no doubt – the imprint of discourses prevalent during her time. What is important here however, is the fact that her poetry is not simply a discursive product but, being a product of her imagination and self, that her imagination and self are products too. In her poem, *On being brought from Africa to America*, she says:

*'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land,
Taught my benighted soul to understand
That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too:
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
"Their colour is a diabolic dye."
Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Cain,
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.'*

'The inclusion of a direct quote – "their colour is a diabolic dye" –', I wrote elsewhere, 'intrudes upon the poem and divides the voice and the consciousness that has produced it.'²⁴ Phillis' voice, therefore, is not an autonomous projection of thought, but one that is embedded in and endowed with meaning through social discourses and a societal narrative that has already reached inside her and shaped her mind.

In the same way, black actors performing in minstrel shows exhibited a similar refracted perception. Prior to the Civil War, minstrel shows, which were popular in America and consisted of comic sketches, variety acts and a whole lot of music and dancing, involved white actors performing in black face (that is, imitating African-Americans) and, after the Civil War, black actors in black face also imitating African-American stereotypes. Pondering over this bizarre situation, George Walker – who was an early African-American intellectual and a minstrel performer himself – wrote:

Black face white comedians used to make themselves look as ridiculous as they could when portraying a "darky" character. In their "make-up" they always had tremendously big red lips, and their costumes were frightfully exaggerated. The one fatal result of this to the colored performer was that they imitated the white

²² See footnote 29.

²³ See, Susan R. Gregson, *Phillis Wheatley*, (Mankato: Bridgeston Books, 2002).

²⁴ Syed Haider, "Remembering Ahmed Deedat", www.islam21c.com, accessed 29.04.2009.

performers in their [own] "make-up" as "darkies". Nothing seemed more absurd than to see a colored man make himself seem ridiculous in order to portray himself.²⁵

In his essay, 'The fact of blackness', Fanon writes about an incident when a young white girl draws attention to his own constructed-ness by calling out to her mum, 'look, a negro...mama see the negro! I'm frightened'.²⁶ He describes this moment as a moment of 'amputation' and 'excision' whereby he is drawn out of himself to an acknowledgement of how his inner psychic space is not one purely self-constructed but one that is made outside him: he is made 'black'. 'I could no longer laugh,' he writes, 'because I already knew where there were legends, stories, histories, and above all historicity [²⁷']'. But as traumatic as this moment is for Fanon himself – inserting as it does the gaze of the white child into his own subjectivity (like the voice of slave owners in the case of Phillis above) – he recognises that this is a moment of significance/signification for the white child too. She has confirmed the 'reality' of those racial and cultural stereotypes that she read about in children's fiction by pronouncing her statement in 'real' time and space upon a 'real' body. She has identified with those fictions in which black and white characters are fixed as opposites and through which they have seeped into the social narrative that determines the social roles afforded to each while being socialised into individuals' own mental landscapes or narratives.

It is this interconnected nexus with which cultural products are bound. They are at once the outcome of discourses prevalent in a society but also means for ingraining discourses further into social realities. They are products that influence the societal narratives that animate social processes as well as products that impact on individuals' sense of self and their own personal narratives of who and what they are. If this seems remote and a little too abstract, the veracity of this can be seen in an experiment that was carried out by Kiri Davis in 2006 and documented in a film called, *A girl like me*.²⁸

Davis' experiment was a follow up of those undertaken by psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark in 1939, which involved young black children and black and white dolls. When asked to identify the doll that was "pretty" and "good" the children chose the white doll. When asked to pick out the doll that was less good looking and "bad", they chose the black doll. The results – documented in papers published between 1939 and 1940 – showed that children as young as five had internalised a picture of the world that was not 'natural' but constructed.²⁹ When Davis repeated these experiments in 2006 she found, astonishingly, that nothing much had changed. What was most heart breaking, however, was that after the children had made their choices they were

²⁵ David Krasner, *Resistance, Parody, and Double Consciousness in African American Theatre* (1895-1910), (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997), p25.

²⁶ *The Visual Cultural Reader*, ed. by Nicholas Mirzoeff, (London: Routledge, 1998), p130.

²⁷ That is, a sense of facticity generated by a sustained baggage of historical documentation..

²⁸ "New York Teen 'Doll Test' Takes On Race Issues", *Jet*, 18 Sep 2006, vol. 110 no. 11, pp38-40.

²⁹ See, John P. Jackson, *Science for Segregation*, (New York: New York University Press, 2005), pp142-143.

asked which doll looked most like them. Davis' film shows a faint hesitation in the children as they eventually pick out the black doll.

What these experiments highlight is that our comprehension of the world and our own sense of who we are is constructed, and because they are constructions they are intimately tied to cultural products, practices and conventions, bearing therefore an indelible imprint on our identities. Indeed, identities in this sense are also something that is an effect of our social realities rather than natural possessions we hold in and of ourselves. That being the case, our identities are the result of a mental commitment to certain subject positions (or roles) made available through discourses and narratives. But this commitment is not necessarily a conscious act and this is backed up by the fact that the children in Davis' and Clarks' experiment were too young to have made any conscious commitments. Instead, these commitments are akin to reflexes engendered by the force of representation within discourses and the fact that our apprehension of reality takes the form of a narrative. This parallel between, on the one hand, social narratives that exist as an amorphous animating force behind social discourses and, on the other hand, personal apprehensions of reality as narratively structured suggests that when we think of ourselves and our world we draw heavily upon those narratives already out there to come to some kind of understanding of our place in the world.

iii. Narrative co-option³⁰

In 2006 I wrote a paper entitled 'The place of Narrative and the importance of Narrativity'.³¹ There the proposition was that human beings think narratively and that, as Peter Brooks puts it, 'our very definition as human beings is...bound up with the stories we tell about our own lives and the world in which we live'. Building on this, I suggested that we are therefore narrativised beings. 'What this means', I said, 'is that our sense of our self is part of a narrative of which we are subject and in which we are object.' This seemingly cryptic way of looking at human beings is important because it helps us explain the manner by which social discourses affect human beings. The sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall puts it thus:

The fact that we project 'ourselves' into...cultural identities, at the same time

³⁰ What I mean by co-option here is what Phillip Selznick meant by cooptation in TVA and the grass roots (1949). Robert Charles Smith puts it well when he writes of cooptation in the African-American context, saying, 'simultaneous with this pattern of repression the system responded with cooptation, a systemic and highly visible effort to absorb blacks into the system as a means of system maintenance and stability.' Robert Charles Smith, *We Have No Leaders*, (Albany: University of New York Press, 1996), p20. I use co-option in a similar vein but in the context of discourse theory and imagine it as the process Stanley Fish identified with Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost*, which is that by his charm Satan draws the reader in, disarming their resistance toward his (reputation of) wickedness until the narrator has to interject to rescue the reader from falling completely under the "Mephistophelian allure", see, Stanley Fish. *Surprised by Sin*, (Toronto: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1997). Instead of charm however, I will argue that narrative co-option occurs because of the congruence/correspondence between societal narratives (as revealed through discursive products) and our own psychological propensity toward perceiving reality narratively.

³¹ Syed Haider, "The Place of Narrative", www.islam21c.com, accessed 03.05.2009.

internalizing their meanings and values, making them 'part of us', helps to align our subjective feelings with the objective places we occupy in the social and cultural world.³²

What Hall does not give us is an understanding of why we should project ourselves at all, why not remain aloof, an independent thinker free of occupying social and cultural places. This problem also plagues thinkers like Althusser and Foucault who think of human beings as subjects of ideologies and discourses respectively (that is, considering our identities as essentially formed by the discourses and ideology prevalent in society). Describing this problem Hall writes that though the proposition of the subject as produced rather than transcendently always-already available is compelling, this central thesis of poststructuralism (and cultural studies more broadly) suffers from lopsidedness. While it offers a formal account of the construction of subject positions – that is, how discourses, narratives and ideologies provide ways in which to talk and think about different people and different identities (black/white etc), they reveal little about why it is that individuals take up these subject positions at all. I want to suggest therefore, that a way of bridging this antinomy is by taking into account two important features of individual subjects as social beings. On the one hand there is the subject/object dialectic present in human consciousness, an idea that has a genealogy stretching back to Schopenhauer.³³ On the other hand is the notion that the way we think about our lives and the world in which we live is through narrative or narrative like constructions. So (the proposition goes), we are born into a world of language where we identify ourselves through the words given to us – boy/girl, black/white – yet we sense our individuatedness, which, it should be said, is not the same as a sense of individuality for the latter entails a sense of personality. Rather, our sense of being individuated is borne out of a self-reflexive consciousness that "knows" itself as a subject. This can be appreciated in reverse, so to speak, by pondering over the absurdity of a scene presented by Dickens in his novel *Hard Times*. A sick Mrs Gradgrind is asked whether she is in pain to which, in a state of deliriousness she says, 'I think there's a pain somewhere in the room, but I couldn't positively say that I have got it'.³⁴ We can all detect that there is something quite bizarre about this remark since pain exists only in so far as it is experienced. It is also experienced by everyone individually and even when the experience is shared – say in a car crash or some other collective harm – it is 'known', or at least assigned to individuated beings. That being the case, we can say that although we are born into language and given numerous labels that place us in a preconceived schema (hence, our object-*ification*) our existence as self-reflexive consciousnesses produces our sense of being subjects (in a way that is unavailable to mountains and trees). This sense of being "subjects" links well with psychologists' claim about the narrative like structuring of our apprehensions

³² Mairtin Mac an Ghaill, *Contemporary Racisms and Ethnicities*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), p52.

³³ See, Arthur Schopenhauer, *The world as will and representation*, trans. by E. F. J. Payne, (New York: Dover Publications, 1969) and Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp105-189.

³⁴ Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, (Kent: Wordsworth Classics, 1995), p156.

of the world.³⁵ In our narratives we emerge as protagonists while other people play supporting roles in the theatre of our minds. We experience time – generally speaking – as linear, with a yesterday and a tomorrow. We locate ourselves in concrete spaces and settings. But none of this of course occurs in a vacuum; in fact, as soon as we are born we are initiated into cultural practices and exposed to numerous cultural products, which as discursive products reflect societal narratives. The interaction between our internal propensity toward narrative construction and the societal narratives that echo unseen between numerous discursive products is the “alignment” that Hall speaks of in the quote above. So while our self-reflexive consciousnesses help produce our sense of being subjects in the world, social narratives co-opt us into the subject positions discourses construct by our own subconscious need to know who we are. This taut dialectic between having a sense of our individuatedness and needing at the same time a mirror to tell us who to be and how to be beings in a social world is the moment of identification. The power of this is clear in the fact that in prejudiced environments – like that of early twentieth century America – one finds peculiar examples of minorities conforming to prejudicial stereotypes.

In his autobiography, Malcolm X for example, reflects on the burning pain he endured to make his natural Afro hair limp and straight ‘as any white man’s’.³⁶ Awestruck back then but calling himself ridiculous in retrospect, Malcolm says,

This was my first real step towards self-degradation when I endured all of that pain, literally burning my flesh to have it look like a white man’s hair. I had joined that multitude of Negro men and women in America who are brain-washed into believing that the black people are “inferior” —and white people “superior” —that they will even violate and mutilate their God-created bodies to try to look “pretty” by white standards.³⁷

What Malcolm terms ‘brainwashing’ may be called the co-opting power of narratives for the subject positions discourses construct. What’s more, given that narratives and discourses find material actuality in cultural products of all hues, those who control or influence cultural production have a significant hand in determining the way we “see” ourselves in a society and how others in a society “see” us.

By talking of individuals and their identities as constructed what one draws attention to is the non-essentiality of any given label and therefore to identities as always unstable and needing discursive and performative reinforcement. Discourses and the concomitant narrative that animates them fix identities in any given period and, through their representational power co-opt individuals into certain subject positions. Resistance to narrative co-option therefore, can only be had through generating counter-hegemonic discourses which help generate alternative narrative realities

³⁵ See, R. Schafer, *Retelling a Life*, (New York: Basic Books, 1992); George Yancy and Susan Joan Hadley, *Narrative identities*, (London: Kingsley, 2005); Martin Payne, *Narrative Therapy*, (London: Sage, 2000).

³⁶ *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, (London: Penguin, 2001), p138.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p138.

which can provide alternative subject positions. There is a theoretical problem here, namely, if our individuated subjectivities are narratively constructed and our identities are bound to the subject positions given to us through discourses and societal narratives, then how can opposition be generated? What kind of subjectivity outside of existing discourses would render possible the production of a counter discourse? This problem is quite complex and is best dealt with in a space of its own. For now, all I would say is that societies are always profuse with (perhaps as a result of history) competing discourses such that even while one narrative (borne out of officially sanctioned and acknowledged discourses) is hegemonic, there are murmurings of disquiet from marginalised discourses which seek always to displace the hegemonic narrative reality. Such murmurings may be seen in the case of Kelly Miller and George Walker in early twentieth century America. To sustain these alternative discourses however, one needs a sustained output of cultural products. It is this which is lacking in the Muslim context in Britain in the twenty first century. Muslims' cultural production is limited and haphazard. In the face of a variety of non-Muslim discursive products Muslims have but a few. The Khutba, for example, is attended by many but they are often of poor quality or then not even in a language comprehensible by the vast majority of those who attend the Jummah. What's more, outside of the Friday sermon, few interact with Muslim discursive products mainly because there is such a lack of them around. In a situation such as this, it is highly likely that Muslims adopt subject positions that are in many respects antithetical to Islamic guidance and therefore their estrangement from the deen in terms of their (lack of) observance of its precepts and their behaviour at large is due to an absence of appropriate mirroring present through cultural products that espouse positive and meaningful Islamic ideals. The last part of this chapter, therefore, will attempt to articulate why a variety of discursive products strengthens one's mental landscape, and to do this I will draw once again on the rich history of African Americans in the last century as they utilised a multitude of cultural products to fix anew the meanings and experiences of black America.

iv. Why diversity matters

One should not forget of course that discourses contrary to the dominant racial narrative in nineteenth and twentieth century America did exist, but these were not particularly strong. This was because of two reasons. Firstly, there wasn't the same degree of output of cultural products as of those carrying the mainstream racist discourse, and secondly (and consequently) these alternative discourses were less evenly echoed across the landscape. One famous example of a counter discursive product in the American racial context is Harriet Beecher Stowe's anti-slavery novel called *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Considered an important piece of work for the abolitionist cause, Stowe's novel sparked considerable debate about slavery and instigated a strong surge in novels from writers defending the institution of slavery, especially in the South. The novelist William Simms, for instance, described the book as 'utterly false' while others considered it to be criminal in its exaggeration of the plight of slaves.³⁸ The novel in-

³⁸ "Simms's Review of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" by Charles S. Watson, *American Literature*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (November, 1976), pp. 365–368 cited on, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncle_Tom's_Cabin#cite_note-45, accessed 06.05.2009.

stigated numerous other works of fiction by those in favour of the institution of slavery as rebuttals and as discursive products seeking to maintain the hegemonic position of the dominant narrative. This episode in the history of American literature highlights the degree to which a certain narrative reality colonises the public space through all sorts of cultural products, even those that were once studied for purely their aesthetic and literary qualities.

The publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* though was not welcomed by all African American's. In fact, by the middle of the twentieth century many African Americans spoke against the book and its overly placid presentation of black slaves and its lack of an aggressive approach in depicting the often tyrannous nature of slave owners. Yet what these criticisms really reveal is that by the 1960's and 70's, the climate had significantly changed. African American consciousness had become much more assertive and full of confidence in a way that was markedly different from only a hundred years earlier. One reason for this may be seen in the demographic change that occurred in the black population of America. Whereas in the mid-nineteenth century almost 90% of African-Americans lived in the rural parts of the South, rapid industrialisation in the North attracted scores of blacks to the cities in the North. 'Between 1890 and 1930', write Arnold Hirsch and Raymond Mohl, 'New York's Black population increased from 36,000 to 328,000' while Chicago's grew from '14,000 to 234,000'.³⁹ This inaugurated a period of blacks living together in a more concentrated form, one which gave rise to greater crime and poverty on the one hand, but also an opportunity for the creation and promulgation of counter discourses seeking in turn to reflect the new experiences and world of the Urban African-American.

Incidentally – or not, as the case may be – this period of geographical movement also coincides with a period in African-American history termed the Harlem Renaissance (believed [unofficially] to have been started by Alain Locke) often cited as beginning in the 1920's or 1930's. This period is identified as marking a flourishing of Black cultural and intellectual activity. One of the key tropes of this emerging counter culture was the aggressive rejection of language as given by the racist society of America. For example, the word Negro was eventually termed pejorative and replaced instead by the word black which then came to be used for self-description by African-Americans.

Several cultural products emerged during this period and in greater quantity helping to sustain an echo that reverberated the spirit and sounds of the alternative discourses that were central to the movement. Able Meeropol's poem *Strange Fruit*, for example – inspired from a photograph showing Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith's lynching by a white mob – became a popular protest song attracting singers like Billie Holliday (1939) and Nina Simone (1965). It inspired a novel by the same name in 1944 by the writer Lillian Smith, was behind a short film by writer and director Christopher Browne and the Seattle literary Magazine *The Strange Fruit* is said to be named after

³⁹ Arnold Hirsch and Raymond Mohl, *Urban policy in twentieth century America*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993), p66.

this song.⁴⁰ The increased output of cultural products carrying a more assertive depiction of African-Americans was key to the creation of a new black identity. Numerous plays, novels, poems and songs were churned out drawing on marginal discourses as they had existed and thrusting them onto centre stage to eventually become a fuller and more pronounced narrative in whose context the Civil Rights movement could be imagined and made possible.⁴¹ Fictional cultural production also shared space with non-fictional modes ranging from more intellectual and sociological tracts to religious sermons and speeches by black ministers and Muslim leaders as well as more political and journalistic products, the earliest of which is known to be *The Voice*.

Set up by Hubert Harrison (known as "the father of Harlem Radicalism") *The Voice* is said to have reached a weekly circulation of 11,000 with an estimated readership of 55,000.⁴² In it, Harrison propounded ideas like the 'race first' approach which he argued was necessary for any collaboration between blacks and socialist parties or labour movements. Race, Harrison contended must be taken up as a central issue without exception. He also used his paper as a medium by which to campaign and shape the minds of black Americans mixing the political with the artistic by providing reviews of black theatre, which he felt 'revealed the "social mind"' of the black race and 'offered a glimpse' of the black soul in terms of the new experiences of urbanity and growing confidence that marked this period for African-American communities.⁴³ What Harrison was doing, in one sense, was ushering his readers to open themselves up to the new subject positions being offered in all these different modes of discursive products (fictional/non-fictional). By using the same space of *The Voice* for political thinking as well as exhibiting and celebrating a new black aesthetics, Harrison was shoring up the alternative narrative with which we are more familiar and comfortable and that has since displaced the racist hegemonic one.

It should be noted, of course, that while this productivity was coming out of the Harlem Renaissance, there were still numerous African-Americans both affected by and embedded in the racist narrative which the counter discourses sought to displace. What I want to emphasise nonetheless is the fact that what gave these counter discourses their vigour was not simply the veracity of their claim but the variety of products that espoused this alternative picture/understanding of the world. That variety helped internalise new sorts of sensibilities through, for instance, seeing fictional characters struggling against the conditions the counter discourse sought to undermine. It helped internalise new facts and political visions through newspapers and speeches giving readers and listeners a sense of contemporaneity and political consciousness through which claims for constitutional rights could be made possible. Religious tracts helped

⁴⁰ See, David Margolick, *Strange Fruit: Billie Holiday, Café Society and an early cry for civil rights*, (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2000).

⁴¹ Of course in one respect these products were part of the early phase of the Civil Rights movement, but whether they were conscious of belonging to a movement – as later cultural producers such as Maya Angelou and Nina Simone would be – is questionable.

⁴² Jeffery Babcock Perry, *Hubert Harrison: the voice of Harlem radicalism, 1883-1918*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p304.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p8.

provide a sense of metaphysical worth to blacks, identifying their suffering with that of early Christians providing them a kind spiritual sustenance in their struggle. Songs and poems took on the role of morale building anthems to be drawn on as in a battle. Together, not only did they patch together a more dynamic narrative picture of reality which individuals could imagine and strive for, but provided new subject positions through which new consciousnesses and new identities could be taken up.

A variety of discursive products, therefore, help suture individuals more closely with the subject positions available to them. This is because together a variety of fictional and non-fictional modes, as well as modes with differing emphasises – from ones that focus on images to those that concentrate on the creation of sounds, to those that invite a more tactile interaction, all help render a more holistic cognitive matrix through which to observe one's reality.

SECTION TWO:

Seeking variety

The importance of drawing on a variety of cultural products to further alternative discourses and narratives, is not merely premised on the wisdom of ensuring one attracts an audience from a wide spectrum. Instead – as section one detailed – it is a way to fortify (in the context of social change) alternative discourses and reinforce alternative narratives that can help alter individuals' mental landscapes. In terms of the first section then,

A variety of cultural products (produced in resistance to hegemonic worldviews) help suture individuals with the alternative subject positions that alternative discourses construct by co-opting individuals into the alternative narrative reality that animates those alternative discourses.

In simpler terms,

What the variety of products (produced in resistance to hegemonic worldviews) provides is a more rounded picture/representation of an alternative world and helps it be imagined, and, the logic goes, if it can be imagined then it can be striven for.

Variety (in one sense then) is a means to an end, but to imagine that each cultural product is as good as any other would be to miss a vital truth, and that is, that each cultural product when looked into more closely has specific advantages and certain shortcomings. The virtue of diversifying therefore also lies in minimising each cultural products shortcoming by complementing and offsetting them against each other. It is to this end that the present section is dedicated and I have divided it deliberately into two parts. The first part deals with non-fictional-cultural products and the second part focuses on what I will class as fictional-dramaturgical-cultural-products.⁴⁴

i. Non-fictional-cultural products

Non-fictional-cultural products, needless to say, are those that seek to relate facts and information that are not "made up". As Elizabeth L. Chesla and Anita Davis write, 'non-fiction...is not the product of the author's imagination. The people and events related in non-fictional [cultural products] are real.' They go on to suggest that 'a general distinction we can make between non-fiction and fiction is the same distinction we can make between fact (non-fiction) and fantasy (fiction)'. Although I shall retain this simple binary for the ease of discussion I think it is important to point out that

⁴⁴ Such a division is not without its disputes, see, Michael X. Delli Carpini and Bruce A. Williams, "Fictional and non-Fictional Television Celebrates Earth Day: Or, Politics is Comedy Plus Pretence", *Cultural Studies*, 8:1, 1994.

there is some disagreement about whether the distinction is as clear as commonsense would have us believe (Hjort 2007; Carroll and Choi 2006).

Non-fictional modes of cultural production:	Strengths	Shortcomings
Lectures	<p>Lectures provide an opportunity for knowledge of a subject to be conveyed in conjunction with an enthusiasm that does not necessarily transfer as easily off the written page. As an auditory mode, lectures are also potentially more egalitarian than the written word given that the latter presupposes literacy. Finally, as live events (this is true even of recorded sessions where the q&a has been filmed) lectures also provide an opportunity for questioning the lecturer directly on the material delivered.</p>	<p>As time bound events and requiring a coherent flow, digressions are rarely welcomed, and few opportunities exist for footnoting further details. Over doing the lecture format can also mean an audience is fatigued by a droning voice. Lectures invite the audience to be passive recipients, which means the retention of information is considerably low. Time consuming as they need to be hosted at a venue, advertising needs to be carried out etc. Even where lectures are not live but recorded in a studio (for instance) they still require collaboration with other individuals.</p>
Essays	<p>As short analytical or exploratory tracts, essays are ideally placed to convey an idea or insight in a concentrated form. More often than not, they also prove to be a potent polemical device to further arguments. They also provide opportunities for footnoting details which is something that is absent from the format of a lecture for instance. Also, because essays are by convention relatively short pieces, they train writers to be succinct and require readers to engage. Essay can also be critiqued as they are read something which is not always easy to do with the spoken word. Essays are (normally) individual efforts and therefore depend largely on the dedication of one person.</p>	<p>Like any textual based cultural product, essays presuppose a literate audience. Essays can also appear dry and less enticing than a live event or other modes that employ sound and moving pictures. Essays rely on argumentation alone to persuade a reader and therefore are not able to illustrate other feelings like that of beauty or awe as may be necessary if talking about art or nature. Because of the imperative to be succinct, essays often have to take it for granted that readers have a certain level of requisite knowledge (of certain terms/concepts for instance) which may alienate certain readers. Good essays require good writers.</p>

Video Essays	Video essays are products similar to audio books, but involve visual cues according to what is being said. Words can be reinforced by images that appear on the screen, thus making a deeper impact. The combination of moving pictures, sound, and text to be read mean the viewer/reader is much more engaged and active which makes for better retention and recall power.	Requires a computer and therefore cannot be read on the go as hardcopies of textual products can on the tube or (in the case of lectures) heard on one's mp3 or ipod. Producing video essays can be labour intensive as a large amount of images (both still and moving) are required to fill in every second or so of the spoken aloud essay. What's more there are two stages of labour involved: the writing of the actual text and the production of the video. As a result of this a video essay cannot be produced immediately after an important event/incident.
Documentaries	Depending on how they are produced, documentaries can be an entertaining and engaging way to convey information. As auditory and visual mediums, documentaries can make a greater impact on a larger number of people and provide a sense of experiencing a topic more closely than may be available through descriptions and an analytical text. Documentaries can also convey information quicker than reading an entire book.	Documentaries are expensive to produce and require the coordination of many people. They require hosting - preferably by a prominent TV channel.

Textbooks	Textbooks are detailed and present a comprehensive view of a subject. They also carry an air of authority and are useful for pedagogical ends. They are good to present a subject in depth by being broken down and dealt with bit by bit. Since length is not a major issue, textbooks have the flexibility to expand on things and follow relevant diversions.	Compiling a textbook is long and laborious. It is utilised primarily by students and in the context of schools, colleges, universities and therefore are difficult to circulate. They are bulky and can be expensive to both produce and purchase.
Blogs	Popular and contemporary medium to air opinions. Particularly good to capture a younger audience. Potentially able to reach thousands of individuals. Low labour intensity. They are egalitarian and can be utilised by anyone. Have a good mechanism for feedback and are inclined to generating discussions. Can include links to other information on the web and thereby help create a pervasive presence for a narrative across the web.	Are not formal and do not carry the same authority as printed texts. The sheer number of blogs means quality varies considerably and as yet there is no sense of an emerging due order against which blogs may be measured. However, this mode of cultural production does not lend itself to ranks and scales as it is difficult to envisage how this may be achieved without compromising its egalitarian nature.
Newspapers	One of the oldest forms of media. Newspapers are very up to date and contemporary, conveying news and information that is very much of the moment. They are well established in many cultures as being a source for 'learning' about what is happening in the world – both close to home and internationally. Combine text with photos to create greater effect. Are published daily or weekly.	Newspapers are expensive to produce and therefore reserve a large amount of space for advertising. The world of newspapers is competitive and non-mainstream newspapers are treated as poor substitutes to the mainstream. Newspapers need news.

<p>Non-fiction books</p>	<p>This medium is able to cater for numerous topics – both big and small. Non-fiction books can dedicate themselves to a single topic and provide considerable depth and insight on it as a result. Non-fiction books are also ideal for reading while travelling, being easy to store and weighing considerably less than textbooks.</p>	<p>Non-fiction books may be seen as too comprehensive and therefore draw only a niche market of students and researchers. Like other textual mediums their efficacy is presupposed on literacy.</p>
<p>Biographies</p>	<p>Biographies are a medium that can be highly effective in presenting role models. As analyses of specific individuals' lives they can also be a different way of looking at history. They are in a more traditional sense a medium through which to learn about one's own life through the successes or failures of others. Unlike other non-fictional mediums, biographies are written in a prose that comes close to storytelling and therefore are engaging and interesting to a larger number of people.</p>	<p>Biographies are open to a lot of subjective interpretation and thereby questionable as means of gaining facts/information. They are difficult to write as they require a lot of personal data and tapping into private – often familial – networks.</p>

Exhibitions	Exhibitions are a medium that can convey information to a large number of individuals and unlike lectures, they require an engagement of the audience in terms of reading displays, looking at artefacts and walking around the exhibition. The physical presence can enhance a visitors over all impression by helping them to feel a topic as much as learn it through a higher cognitive process.	Exhibitions are expensive to organise, requiring a venue and displays. Displays need regular updating. They are premised on the understanding that people will read and absorb the information, presented as it is in a relatively passive way where the effort is to be made by the audience unlike a lecture where the energy in large part comes from the speaker. Does not lend itself to deep analytical prose and require skill in distilling information in small amounts.
Leaflets	Leaflets are a quick, short and snappy way of delivering information to a reader. They are cheap to produce and distribute.	They can lack a sense of authoritativeness. Are difficult to write in terms of making them short but forceful; simple but meaningful.

>Non-fictional modes of cultural production in focus

- Being one of the oldest media, there is a large amount of statistics on Newspapers and their readership. The Newspaper Marketing Agency (NMA) for instance carries out research into how many people newspapers reach and how much advertising revenue they take.⁴⁵ For the Jan 2008 - Dec 2008 period, the NMA recorded popular newspapers – such as *The Sun* and the *Daily Telegraph* – as having the highest reach in all age groups (highest amongst 15-34 year olds), while the quality papers – like *The Guardian* and *The Independent* – had almost half the reaching capacity as the popular newspapers, averaging across all age groups at 23.3%. In a separate slide about the time spent reading newspapers, the time spans 15 mins, 30 minutes, and 1 hour showed highest ratings while 1 hour emerged as the category scoring highest. What these statistics present is an understanding about people accessing and reading newspapers; they tells us less about the influence made by them. Of course, in a circumstantial sense, the fact that newspapers are reaching large numbers of people, it would not be altogether unreasonable to assume a line of affect. As it happens though, the NMA survey also shows a slow decline in readership when compared across the years. This may be because people are getting their news from elsewhere, but if these trends are accurate, then whether or not newspapers are influential they're capacity to be so will also decline.
- Unlike newspapers, the statistics on other non-fictional cultural products are sketchy at best and non-existent for many. Blogs, for instance, have by all accounts burgeoned on the web in the past decade or so, yet few authoritative statistics on them exist. There are a few exceptions like a 2002 report in the New York Times which reported that the blog host, livejournal.com, had signed up 690,000 users since 1998.⁴⁶ Weird News noted similarly that in Jan 2002 41,000 people created blogs using Blogger.⁴⁷ While the numbers given by these different sources are impressive, they need to be counterbalanced by the fact that many blogs are discarded after being created and few are updated. Nonetheless, blogs are popular although this is circumscribed by the fact that they are regularly viewed by a small percentage of web users who seem also to be a younger crowd with the highest figures being for those aged 13-19.⁴⁸ The picture that emerges from this is patchy and one that is sobering for those who may claim blogging as a revolution in information transmission.
- *The Effectiveness of Documentary Broadcasts* by Elmo C. Wilson is a review of a study into the effectiveness of documentaries published in 1948. Wilson looks specifically into the creation of documentaries by the Columbia Broadcasting System and its use of panel interviews to gauge the impact of the documentaries aired.

⁴⁵ See, <http://www.nmauk.co.uk/nma/do/live/marketPlaceCharts>, accessed 02.06.2009.

⁴⁶ <http://www.caslon.com.au/weblogprofile1.htm>, accessed, 02.06.2009.

⁴⁷ <http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/2002/02/50443>, accessed 02.06.2009.

⁴⁸ <http://www.caslon.com.au/weblogprofile1.htm>, accessed, 02.06.2009.

He finds that although attitudinal shifts are noticeable in participants, the long term effects of this, or indeed retention, is difficult to determine.⁴⁹ I have tried to find more recent work on the effectiveness of the documentary medium but there seems to be a lacuna in media research about documentaries. As a result it is difficult to establish the effectiveness of this medium although its capacity to affect people's opinions is equally difficult to dismiss. Patricia Aufderheide's short introduction to documentary filmmaking presents a section on the effectiveness of documentaries but looks specifically at government propaganda films and says that viewers are not as subservient to these films as governments would like to assume. In fact, she suggests that viewers do not 'surrender easily to propaganda they can identify'.⁵⁰ But of course, when the films we are dealing with are not easily identifiable as propaganda and are endorsed by the inclusion of authoritative voices (think of Richard Attenborough) then viewers are more likely to take as factual information presented in documentary films which give off the impression that viewing them is 'to observe reality'.⁵¹

- Last year the BBC published an article about book reading in the UK. The article painted a mixed picture, suggesting that other ways of getting information had placed book reading lower on people's list of daily practices. At the same time it reported that in 2006 Britons had bought 338 million books at a total cost of £2,478 million. 'This was,' Dennis Winterman wrote, '13% higher by both volume and value than five years ago'.⁵² Yet only two years earlier the Book Marketing Ltd's (BM) "Expanding the Market" research found that books needed to improve their image to win over new readers. Literacy Trust's website describes the research as including

a quantitative study, using an omnibus survey among 2,000 adults interviewed face to face, to examine how the adult population divides in terms of book reading and buying, and the demographics of different types of reader/buyer; and 200 in-depth interviews with non or light readers and/or non or light book-buyers.⁵³

Many people who didn't purchase books, the research found, often felt that other mediums like CDs and Videos offered better value than books because of 'future repeat use'. 'The cinema', for example, 'was seen as more social, and newspapers and magazines offered lower cost reading.' Those who confessed to not reading at all said they preferred television as it was "'pure relaxation" and not a solitary occupation'. Yet like much of the statistics that are presented, they do not offer easy interpretation and again the BM's research also showed that 82% of non-readers admitted the importance of reading to children, while intending themselves to

⁴⁹ Elmo C. Wilson, (1948), "The Effectiveness of Documentary Broadcasts", *Public Opinion*, 12, pp19-29.

⁵⁰ Patricia Aufderheide, *Documentary Film*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p73.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p73.

⁵² http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/7178598.stm, accessed 03.06.2009

⁵³ <http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/Mori.html#Challenge>, accessed 03.06.2009.

read more in the future and when they had more time. The influence of books therefore is not to be underestimated, but one must also concede that books carry a symbolic power (or cultural capital) that is somewhat separate to their content and thus if books are influential, this has as much to do with this symbolic power as with the content they carry.

ii. Fictional-Dramaturgical-cultural products

The category of fiction is easy to understand. This relates to products that are borne from the producer/s imagination and in contrast to non-fictional-cultural-production, fictional-products depict or comment on reality but do not present themselves as involved in the business of detailing facts and information. Where these are part of the make-up of such products they are incidental or at any rate secondary to the demands of aesthetics and creativity. I have complicated this definition a little though by adding the term dramaturgical in my label for this category. The reason for including this term is to foreground the sociological nature of these products as counterbalance to notions of aestheticism that are normally associated with fiction. Dramaturgy is a term employed by those sociologists (mostly from the Interactionist or Interpretivist school of thought) who are interested in looking at how meaning is created in specific social contexts and how individuals interact to produce the social world as opposed to being determined by or responding to impersonal and rigid structures. "Dramaturgical" therefore focalises acting as a social trope transforming everyday life into performances and each of us as social actors enacting our roles (father/mother, teacher, Prime Minister). Following this it implies that fictional products in one way or another deal with people and their interiority, 'a point', as I wrote in 2006, 'that is important in helping people see from the eyes of another'.⁵⁴ What is more, a dramaturgical view of fictional products emphasises their role in the construction of reality as opposed to windows on reality given that in order to enact our roles we need role models/ mirrors/scripts and cultural products provide us that.

⁵⁴ Syed Haider, "The place of Narrative and the importance of narrativity part two", <http://khayal.org.uk/#/papers/4530873199>, accessed 05.06.2009.

Fictional-Dramaturgical modes	Strengths	Shortcomings
Plays	<p>Live performances mean that the audience is entertained and engaged. Has the potential to depict real life issues and explore the social/personal challenges faced by people. Able to meld symbolism and abstractions with realism so as to provide a greater analysis without necessarily having to rely on theory to do so as would be the case in non-fictional-cultural products. Potential to appeal to the five senses – touch, taste, smell, hear, sight.</p>	<p>Time consuming to produce. Need re-runs or recording in order to be watched again either by the same or different sets of people. Needs an appropriate venue.</p>
Novels/Short stories	<p>As products depending entirely on language, novels and short stories are well placed to influence the way in which language is used by individual speakers (premised on popularity). As descriptive mediums – unlike plays which are visual – novels and short stories have the capacity to represent more acutely the interiority of individuals. As narrative mediums they are a step closer to relating societal stories as well as those of individuals. Like all books, they are able to be read on the go (on the tube, bus or plane) and easy to carry.</p>	<p>Like all textual based products, novels and short stories presuppose a level of literacy. They have gone up in price and seem to many as expensive. In today's literary culture, books are often read only once. Their influence is indirect in terms of furnishing people's mental landscape with a general colour and impression, and not direct in terms of influencing legislature (although a novel or story can kick start a vigorous debate that leads to political and social change – but this is more the domain of newspaper articles).</p>

<p>Graphic Novels/ Comic books</p>	<p>Attract a younger readership. Conveys information using the power of both image and text. Can enhance the way in which stories are told by concentrating on action and vivid colours, providing a more exciting engagement.</p>	<p>Images compete with text. The emphasis on action limits the prose. Requires both a skill in drawing and writing.</p>
<p>Poetry/Singing</p>	<p>Poems and songs are succinct formats that deliver feelings and thoughts in an evocative manner. Successful poetry/singing disarms one's critical faculties in favour of cognition of beauty and a sense of metaphoricity that is not bound by strict edicts of logic or reason, although these may be applied to poems/singing in order to critique and better appreciate their composition and mechanics. Can, when amalgamated with other formats, enhance a topic and its delivery.</p>	<p>Can be interpreted as vague. We have lost a culture of poetry or else it seems elitist. Need to be printed as collections or, if singular, poems need other sources to be "hosted". Songs need recording or live performance/s. This cultural format in particular is susceptible to the inclusion of musical instruments, which for some Muslims may be a turn off (although a cappella is an alternative – though not without its problems).</p>
<p>Video Games</p>	<p>A product that is used mostly by young people. Can be fast, entertaining, engaging and is purposeful as some end is aimed for. Has the capacity to tell a story through "play". Involves the player/s in an active mode where they are participating "in" the story thereby any learning that may take place is a little less passive.</p>	<p>Very technical and requires a lot of time to develop and produce. Action/adventure is of a higher priority than storytelling. Danger of promoting a game culture that can lead to children becoming languorous.</p>

Painting/Photography	As visual mediums, paintings and photography are particularly good at capturing the impression of a moment. Both help visualise a topic and evoke emotions in the viewer more strongly. Being visual mediums both paintings and photography are egalitarian products able to be appreciated (differently) by people of varying backgrounds.	Can raise religious issues for some Muslims as far as depicting living creatures goes. Require narrative fixtures (or a narrative frame) without which meaning is either infinite or fixed rigidly to that which is depicted.
Sculpture	Provide tactile experience. Can act as ornament and therefore as visual tokens that can punctuate public spaces. Sculptures can command a space and provide it an emotional atmosphere. Sculptures offer a special experience of matter; turning an inanimate object into a specific form can draw attention to human capacity for creativity and ingenuity, this can rouse a sense of awe/mystery that accentuates sculptures' power to persuade or engage a viewer with what is being depicted.	May raise religious concerns especially when sculptures are specifically of living beings. Need physical space in order to be displayed. As static/singular depictions, sculptures cannot tell a "story" or on its own contest discourses or narratives. They can only provide a sign/signpost for protest or contestation.
Films/Cartoons	Films and cartoons are presently a dominant medium that capture most people's imagination. Moving images with sound enhances their storytelling capacity. With special effects, the depiction of reality can be accentuated. As part of a cinematic culture, films and cartoons can impress upon viewers an experience of contemporaneity.	Expensive to produce requiring the input of several different people with various skills. Pathos, drama and action are of higher priority than analysis/commentary.

>Fictional-dramaturgical modes of cultural production in focus

Although non-fictional modes of cultural production can manipulate their material to present it in a number of ways, they are confined nonetheless to the requirement of presenting events as factually as possible. Take for example a creationist textbook of science that is flagrant in dismissing evolutionary theory without any engagement with actual debates or issues, or, an inflammatory article that uses the conventions of newspaper journalism but no sense of journalistic balance. Between April 2003 and January 2004 Robert Kilroy-Silk got into trouble for his racist rant about Arabs, causing him to lose his job with the BBC. 'In a statement,' the BBC reported in 2004, 'Mr Kilroy-Silk said: "I greatly regret the offence which has been caused by the article published in last weekend's Sunday Express."' He went on to state that "'the article contains a couple of obvious factual errors which I also regret.'" Speaking about the controversy, Labour MP Lynne Jones said that 'the BBC needs to consider very carefully whether it's appropriate to have Mr Kilroy-Silk presenting a programme which is supposed to be objective and impartial in looking at topical issues.'⁵⁵ What she drew attention to is the disconnection between Kilroy-Silk's article which was gratuitously biased and his need to be perceived as objective. In non-fictional cultural production facticity cannot be dismissed entirely or easily.

In fictional-dramaturgical cultural production, on the other hand, being true to reality means something slightly different. The reality here is more to do with emotions and characters and the world that the product creates. If, of course, the product is a historical depiction it needs to be faithful to the period, but even then, viewers are more ready to suspend disbelief than if one is reading or watching something that is non-fictional. This suspension of disbelief comes in part from our understanding that these modes have at their centre the power of metaphoricity and not facticity. They can meld together more freely events and human actions to present a particular reading of the human condition and of the world in which they live. In *Romeo and Juliet* for instance, Shakespeare presents the story in such a way so as to make fate a dominant feature – both lovers, for example, are called 'star-crossed' implying their union is fated to end in tragedy.⁵⁶ This presentation emphasises the role of invisible forces, depicting a world that is more precarious and where individuals need to implore God or some other force to aid them through life. The strength of non-fictional-dramaturgical cultural products, then, resides not so much in their scientific accuracy (which is not to say that **non-fictional modes** are *scientific*, but that they are expected to be more thorough and evidence based), but in their resonance with emotions and an aesthetic sensibility. This aesthetic sensibility is not simply the conventions of beauty that exist in any society at any given time, but an inner sense of harmony; a sensation of being alive not because of one's activity – the sense of feeling alive because you are rushing around completing errands – but alive in the sense of taking time-out (a momentary pause) to be conscious of admiring something. Some non-fictional products can also achieve this – like a really well written essay which at once excites the intellectual

⁵⁵ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3384573.stm>, accessed 10.06.2009.

⁵⁶ Act 1, Prologue.

mind and also catches one's breath momentarily as one admires the writer's genius in composing the thought. Aesthetic experience therefore is more general and not confined to non-fictional-dramaturgical cultural products, but these are often the ones that enliven this capacity within us. Their power therefore comes from their ability to capture one's unconscious mind as well the conscious mind; to enrich our emotional connection to the world, our surroundings, with other beings and with life in general. In this context, one can be more closely sutured to a narrative if it is depicted *in* and echoes *between* different non-fictional-dramaturgical products.

What this section has sought to highlight is the need to diversify the mediums we employ to talk about and promulgate Islam and Islamic values. Each product has its own strengths but also certain limitations. It is a fact that we have not looked at cultural production in this way and hence paid little attention to the way in which messages and ideas are circulated. If we were to take up this 'project' more seriously we could initiate the beginnings of a niche cultural industry here in Britain as well as (over-time) create a British Islamicate culture that would provide Muslims a stronger sense of community and a stronger sense of being British citizens. The overriding message of this section, then, has been the need to draw on a variety of cultural products which will in one stroke achieve several ends.

SECTION THREE:

The consumption of Islam and a British Islamicate culture through cultural production

Every culture produces cultural products which, in being 'consumed', help assimilate individuals within a society to it. The *diversification* of such products strengthens their ability to absorb individuals into the narrative schemas that underpin them. Narratives, however, are not 'consumed' in any straightforward sense. Rather, as something that exist in the interstitial spaces between different cultural products and that emerge through a process of echoing, narratives cannot be 'consumed' in a singular fashion, which is to say they cannot be accessed through *individual* cultural products. As such the process of assimilation is always potentially open-ended and need reinforcement. Cultural producers therefore are – in the most Gramscian⁵⁷ sense – necessary components in any ideological machine, and yet, paradoxically, they are also crucial members of any contra-cultural politics.

This capacity of cultural producers is important because it is this capacity that positions them and the cultural products they create as the builders and building blocks respectively of culture. This function of cultural production is what I see as important in building a British Islamicate culture that helps align Muslims in Britain more closely with their Islamic values.

The term Islamicate comes from the historian Marshall Hodgson who used it to distinguish between Islam the religion and the civilisation historically associated with it and Muslims. For Hodgson, Islamic meant something that 'expresses Islam as a faith' while Islamicate denoted that which did not refer 'directly to the religion...but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and Muslims'. Daniel Pipes⁵⁸ provides a useful example to substantiate this distinction when he says that

⁵⁷ Antonio Gramsci was an Italian philosopher and political theorist imprisoned by Benito Mussolini's Fascist regime. His writings are heavily concerned with the analysis of the link between culture and politics and is best known for his concept of cultural hegemony as a means of maintaining political and philosophical status quos.

⁵⁸ I reference Daniel Pipes here merely because he helps draw out the distinction between Islam/

although mosque decorations such as the arabesque panels from the Alhambra, or the vegetal and geometric designs found in a number of other historical Muslim buildings or books carry the “flavour of Islam”,

...One hesitates to call this flavour “Islamic”, for that would imply that these patterns are inherent in the religion, which they clearly are not. The Qu’ran and the Hadith Reports [sic] nowhere prescribe mosque decorations or attitudes towards rulers [59], yet these did resemble each other across Islamdom.

What Pipes refers to as the flavour of Islam that is detectable across the Muslim world and in its historic legacy, Ibn Battuta described as the remarkable commonality and continuity of spirit between the vast spread of Muslim lands. While we would rightly associate this with the centrality of certain institutions (mosques, madaris), of certain offices (the office of the qadhi, the ulema, the muezzin) and of course the implementation of the Shari’ah (even if nominally in places), Pipes, like Hodgson, is not incorrect in claiming that there is something more diffuse – a culture of habits, perceptions, attitudes, aesthetics, boundaries and propriety that pervaded, and in places still pervades, the Muslim mind. It is this which the term Islamicate denotes. Where Pipes overdoes it is when he draws too much of a distance between the Islamic and the Islamicate, like when he claims “Islamic literature” is religious writings [while] “Islamicate literature” is the entire output of Muslim communities, including even anti-religious works.’ The danger in this is to begin to infuse a Christian sense of giving to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s within Muslim life. Instead, I want to treat the notion of an Islamicate as a category that stands parallel with Islam. Paintings depicting nudity, no matter whether produced by Muslims or not, cannot find place in an Islamicate culture for it is antithetical to Islam. Indeed, the Islamicate is engendered by Islam and its Shari’ah.

Why, it may occur to some readers, is there a need then for the term “Islamicate” over and above the term “Islamic”? Here two things need to be clarified. The emerging importance of culture both in disputes about ijihad⁶⁰ and about second/third generation Muslims living in the West has seen a prominence in the notion of multiple Islams.⁶¹ Tariq Ramadan is often associated with this trend although, to be more accurate, he is an advocate for greater contextualisation of Islam according to where Muslims are living, rather than the more discomfiting claim of multiple Islams. Nonetheless,

Islamicate as Hodgson developed it. I am fully aware that Pipes is a discredited figure in the eyes of many Muslims, and I am not uncritical in borrowing from him.

⁵⁹ This is disputable given 4:59 in the Qu’ran and Bukhari (633) and Muslim (665).

⁶⁰ Disputes over who can practice ijihad and whether ijihad is simply interpretation undertaken as and how one likes, or whether there are certain restrictions and parameters within which ijihad ought to be practiced. Such disputes normally have a culturalist basis, arguing that rulings of old were based on the cultural specificities of the time.

⁶¹ See, Peter R. Demant, Asgharali Engineer, *Islam vs. Islamism: the dilemma of the Muslim world*, (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2006); Roxanne Leslie Euben, *Journeys to the other shore*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006); Paul Hopper, *Living with globalization*, (New York: Berg Publishers, 2006), p78; for a more sophisticated treatment of the notion of multiple Islams see, Ian Almond, *The new Orientalists*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), pp42-60

his call for a European Islam strikes one as problematic, for even though Ramadan may mean an Islam contextually based in Europe, it sounds like a fragmentation of Islam and the fact that it *sounds* like it ought not to be treated too lightly. Given that tawheed is of such central importance to Islam and Muslims, any call for *Islams* is therefore jarring. Yet the problem, which Ramadan highlights, remains; Western born Muslims do need a cultural reality, and caught as they are between parents whose cultural reality is closely tied to their country of origin and a Western culture that is profuse with much that is antithetical to Islam, such Muslims can often feel alienated and thereby drift to different extremes. In one sense, then, Islamicate is merely a less jarring way of expressing the need to construct a cultural space in non-Muslim countries that is true to Islam (hence, a British Islamicate, an American Islamicate etc).

But why not Islamic then? Why borrow a term that is relatively unknown and under-used. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, not everything that is Islamicate is necessarily Islamic – that is, it is not necessarily spoken of in Islamic texts explicitly, for instance (and borrowing Pipe's example) the decoration of mosques. Although Pipes is inaccurate if he means that Islam has nothing to say about Mosque design, he is not incorrect if he means that there are no strictures in the Sha'riah that determine mosque structure. Indeed, the historic development of Mosques has as much to do with local design and historic places of worship as with anything inherent to Islam itself.⁶² Islam, for instance, stipulates that during prayer men and women ought to be segregated, that, given the way Islam proscribes prayer, open space is necessary, that there ought to be a point from which the muezzin calls the faithful to prayer and therefore necessarily a place from where his voice is audible. None of this, however, necessitates domes, minarets, latticed windows etc. Yet this structure has become symbolic of Islam even though it is not Islamic in the same way that memorising the Qur'an is Islamic, linked as it is to an explicit hadith in which the Prophet (pbuh) said:

It will be said to the reciter of the Qur'an (on the Day of Judgment), 'Recite and ascend; recite slowly and rhythmically as you used to do in the previous world; your place will be at the last ayah you recite.'⁶³

Islamic – as I am defining the term therefore – is the domain of the scholars of Islam's primary sources while the Islamicate is a shared atmosphere in which everyone is immersed. The Islamicate is subsidiary to the Islamic in this schema and draws on it for its legitimacy. Cultural producers who function within the Islamicate need to pay heed to Islamic ideals, parameters, and ethos, but have considerable freedom and manoeuvrability in order to innovate new expressions and formats to tell stories, present critiques and engage with their present and past to propel themselves into as yet unformed futures. The Islamicate in this sense is an always incomplete fabric but an end towards which all Muslim discourses and narratives point, encompassing as it does an Islamic air which can be breathed from the most devout of Mu'min to the

⁶² Marian Moffett, Michael W. Fazio, *Lawrence Wodehouse, A world history of architecture*, (London: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2004), pp169-170.

⁶³ Al-Tirmidhi (2914) and Abu Dawood (1464)

least practicing Muslim. What is more, it is this space that Muslim cultural production could help create and which would then act as the matrix within which further cultural production could occur. And the fact that it is a term which is relatively unknown and underused makes it attractive, having as yet little signification other than pointing to the space that rests between Islam and culture.

To work toward generating a specifically British Islamicate means letting loose the creative impulses of Muslims in this country who – guided by both the spirit and letter of the Shari’ah – can help forge a space in which we borrow the best of this culture, its humour and its flavour, and meld it with Islamic ideals, Muslim histories, and a Muslim world-view. Such a space would heighten the reverberation and echo of discourses and narratives that would help suture Muslims to identities that are more in keeping with Islam, for while the Islamic is observed to different degrees by different Muslims, the Islamicate is more diffused and can potentially affect everyone. ‘The observant Muslim’, writes Daniel Pipes, ‘moulds his [sic] whole existence to Islam in roughly the same way’ as any other observant Muslim in any other part of the world. But under the influence of an Islamicate (culture), Islam permeates the lives of even the most impious sceptic in terms of affecting his or her *Weltanschauung*⁶⁴ – something that is evinced by the fact that historically even the dhimmi would pick up Islamicate features like idioms that originated in Islamic traditions or texts.

Together then the Islamic and the Islamicate shape Muslim lives, but where the former is weak due to lacking political power as in the present, it retrieves into private spheres influencing only those who seek to live by it. Under these trying circumstances the Islamicate emerges as a necessary feature to ensure that at least culturally and psychologically, Muslims living as minorities are not subjugated to attitudinal currents contrary to an Islamic world-view. Having said that, one should also note that due to the technological globalisation which characterises our current world, Muslim lands ought not to be complacent and need also to work harder in shaping an Islamicate culture to stave off harmful influences travelling via satellite networks and the internet.

It is important at this point to reiterate a crucial detail which is that none of this is either a closed off endeavour nor a defensively isolationist option. The building of a British Islamicate is to better hybridise between the reality of the ‘national culture’ in this country⁶⁵ and of the necessary sentiments and precepts which, as historical residue if nothing else, posit difference between Muslims and those amongst whom they live. If anything, a British Islamicate may prove a cohesive force and a road toward better integration by making Muslims feel more comfortable in calling Britain their home, and at greater ease therefore with being British and Muslim through the mediating force of the Islamicate.

⁶⁴ Noun (German). A comprehensive conception or image of the universe and of humanity’s relation to it. www.dictionary.com

⁶⁵ The question of what this culture, however, is not without its problems.

To encourage the birth of a vibrant British Islamicate, Muslim cultural products need to improve in terms of both quality and variety. For this to occur we need to build networks between individual cultural producers and a climate of critical inquiry amongst Muslims and Muslim scholars in which we further explore the relationship between cultural production, social change, and Islam. By doing this a significant shift can occur in the way that we 'consume' our knowledge of Islam from being something that is instructional to something that is closer to a lived experience (the Islamicate). Instead of merely listening to how a good life ought to be lived we can see it reflected on stage, depicted on the screen, read of it in a novel and listen to it as a poem or sung through a cappella. The impact of this shift is also worth noting. An emphasis on fictional-dramaturgical cultural production and certain types of non-fictional cultural production (documentaries for example) will foreground the importance of ensuring products are aesthetically pleasing in their appearance and finish. The reason for this is that these particular modes of cultural production are aesthetic objects as much as a means of delivering intellectual arguments or encompassing literary quality and will therefore impress upon Muslims the importance of drawing others to Islam through beauty as much as through clever rhetoric, argumentation, or an immaculate logic.

SECTION FOUR:

Policing the parameters

In his treatise on *Diversion and Arts in Islam*, Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi begins by identifying two sets of people. One set, according to him, view the duty of Muslims and of Muslim society as only to consecrate the worship of Allah the Most High. Leisure activities and mirthful entertainment from this point of view are irksome nonsense at best and at worst condemnable distractions. The other set is identified as those who over-indulge in such play and activity. This set neglects the sphere of worship as enjoined by Allah and His apostle (saw). What's worse is that this group can loose itself in the moment of enjoyment and commit transgressions which in any other state they would see as contravening the dignity of their eeman (faith). A good example of this is a qawwali⁶⁶ sung by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and written by Mohammad Iqbal Naqibi called *Yeh Jo Halka Halka Suroor Hai* (This mild intoxication).⁶⁷ Leaving aside the permissibility or impermissibility of music, the lyrics strike even the most non-observant Muslim who is acquainted with an Islamic ethos as flauntingly improper. After flirting with an imagery that is ambiguously referencing intoxication through drinking for the intoxication one feels when in love, the qawwali turns unambiguously blasphemous, declaring in the ninth stanza:

Tera Pyar Hai Meri Zindagi
(Your love is my life)

Tera Pyar Hai Meri Bandagi
(I am enclosed In your love)

Na Namaz Aati Hai Mujhko, Na Wazoo Aata Hai
(I know not how to pray nor how to make ablutions)

Sajda Kar Leta Hoon, Jab Saamnay Tu Aata Hai
(I merely prostrate when you come in front of me)

As if growing in daring, the qawwali becomes progressively worse in terms of its blaspheming, pronouncing at one point that, 'Mera Ishq Keh Raha Hai, Mein Tujhe Khuda Bana Doon' (the immensity of my love for you compels me to declare you a god). Such foul and heinous poetry absorbed audiences in Pakistan and continues to do so on sites like YouTube where (outrageously) commentators praise the qawwali using the

⁶⁶ Qawwali is a form of Sufi devotional singing which employs guttural sounds and is popular in South Asia, though it has roots in early Muslim Persia.

⁶⁷ I am grateful to Afroz Jahan for drawing my attention to this qawwali and to the following website for its lyrics, [<http://www.geocities.com/karachiiterulez/halkahalka.html>].

phrase – “subhan’Allah”! It may have been this that Dr Qaradawi had in mind when he wrote that for the second group the ‘distinct limits between the lawful (Halaal) and the unlawful (haraam) are non-existent’ and therefore their life becomes ‘a fair for fun and games’.⁶⁸

Yet his approach of charting a path between two extremes is entirely appropriate for a dismissal of the arts or – in terms of this paper – cultural production on the back of these unfortunate examples is a little like throwing the baby out with the bath water. Hence Sheikh Qaradawi presents two extremes; one bereft of any subtlety and disingenuous to reality⁶⁹ while another debauches in excess. If the latter is reprehensible the former is insidious since it robes itself in the garments of religiosity even though its stoicism and sternness is entirely idiosyncratic. Indeed, while Islam does not prohibit individuals adopting such austere positions, it is out of step with Islamic precepts to enforce such a position on others.

Dr Qaradawi presents a fairer case that sees recreational pursuits as healthy, vital and endorsed by Islam. He presents several textual evidences to support his view like the hadith of the Prophet (saw) when he answers Hanzala’s query:

Hanzala reported: We were in the company of Allah’s Messenger and he delivered to us a sermon and made a mention of Hell-Fire. Then I came to my house and began to laugh with my children and sport with my wife. (Hanzala) further reported: I went out and met Abu Bakr and made a mention of that to him. Thereupon he said, ‘I have done the same as you have mentioned’. So we went to see Allah’s Messenger and said to him: ‘Allah’s Messenger, Hanzala has turned to be a hypocrite’, and narrated to him the story to which Abu Bakr added, ‘I have done the same as he has done’. Thereupon he (the Prophet) said: Hanzala, there is a time for worldly affairs and a time for (worship and devotion)

Sheikh Qaradawi supplements this with a compelling rationale that sees play and amusement as a necessary safeguard against overwhelming the heart and becoming fatigued with worship, which can easily lead to a loss of khushu (tranquillity and serenity) and a build up of resentment.

‘As one should not swallow more than the prescribed dose of a medicine’, however, ‘one should not’, he writes, ‘take this antidote [to overwhelming the heart] to [an] excess’. By analogising cultural production to medicine Sheikh Qaradawi at once elevates such products but also limits them. Cultural products are not merely helpful and welcome amusements to be deployed secondarily in order to help reinvigorate the Mu’min for his or her worship. Although cultural products appear less substantial when placed next to acts of worship, in the context of real everyday life they are cru-

⁶⁸ Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *Diversion and Arts in Islam*, p2, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/4977504/Diversion-and-Arts-in-Islam-Yusuf-Qaradawi>

⁶⁹ Disingenuous because if one were to look to the life of even the most stoic and pious of individual one would most certainly see their engagement in some activity that could be classed as recreational.

cial objects that ensure Muslims and their Islam remain intact and that the believer does not fall into a subtle secularism wherein Islam is confined more and more to private worship and denied a presence in the other elements of a Muslim's life.

To see cultural production in this way is to assess their value from a sociological perspective, something which Dr Qaradawi sadly neglects. As sociological objects, cultural products are vital to individuals, societies, and any contra-cultural politics that seeks to challenge current status quos. It is this angle which has been pursued throughout much of this paper, and although Dr Qaradawi provides some understanding about the legitimacy of cultural production (and consumption thereafter) in Islam, he does not speak in depth about what boundaries need to be defined around cultural production in order to ensure one does not contravene Islamic rulings. The reason for this is because he does not define his subject matter as cultural production but as amusement and (in his opinion) necessary diversion. But when spoken of as cultural products, the call for their diversification (as this paper has been making) is not a simple case of "middle paths". With diversification emerge greater possibilities that can tamper hitherto static perceptions of what can and cannot be done. For instance, questions around the involvement of men and women both behind and in front of the camera and on stage emerge; the depiction of non-belief or apostasy by Muslim actors in plays and films becomes an issue of concern; the nature of respect may be pondered over when it comes to depicting Sahaba and Ulema of the past; the practice of sculpting suddenly emerges as needing to be rethought; matters concerning controversial subjects (Darwinism for instance) become more pertinent when thinking of writing a science textbook to be used in Muslim schools.

What a reading of Sheikh Qaradawi highlights is the need for greater collaboration between practitioners of cultural production and scholars of Islam in order to substantiate a Muslim cultural industry that is intimately tied to Islam and which can therefore help produce a specific Islamicate culture. The way to best achieve this – and I will end on this note in order to anticipate the need for yet another paper which builds on this idea – is for an institution to emerge where both practitioners and scholars collaborate, teach and train promising young Muslims in everything from journalism to drama, from oratory to the technical process involved in making video games.