

European Conference
EMTEL (The European, Media, Technology and Everyday Life Network)
London, London School of Economics, April 23-26 2003

Ethnic Media, An Alternative Form of Citizenship

(communication paper)

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Themes: Community + Citizenship

Keywords: ethnic media / new technologies / citizenship

The representation of minorities in the public sphere became one of the most important conditions for a harmonious European construction. In that context, the use of new technologies of information and communications (NTIC) plays a primordial role for people, especially minorities or minoritised. The intensification of exchanges produces dynamic effects on minority groups that would not have grown on the national and European spheres without overtaking traditional communication (A. Appadurai (1997). Using new technologies, ethnic media are exploring new forms of participation in the information society. Cyberspace and satellite are becoming a vital link and meeting ground for a civically engaged and politically mobilised stratum of the polity (B. Axford & R. Huggins, 2001). A consequence of the new (ethnic) media is the reworking of political reality, which is apparent in a number of trends, such as deterritorialisation of social relations, decentralisation, transnationalisation, significance of culture and identity, proliferation of political identities and actors, significance of information and communication technologies in the constitution of political life.

Ethnic media are playing an increasingly centrality to the exercise of full citizenship. We would refer in this paper to the habermasian notion of active citizenry: citizenship should not only be understood in a legal sense, but as a key word in debates over desirable combinations of rights, responsibilities and competences. An effective participant democracy can only succeed if the individual, the subject, the actor or the citizen has a real capacity of action on the public sphere. In its turn, this capacity is real only if the individual can use supports (R. Castel & C. Haroche, 2001) or resources (P. Bourdieu, 1991): that is to say a rational, cultural, political or economical knowledge permitting the development of new strategies. These supports or resources, which lead to skills and competences, are acting as a guarantee of independence.

Ethnic minorities, through their media, intend to be involved in the society of residence (at both a national and European level) and to give models for their communities. For them, being a good citizen means sharing rights, responsibilities and competences. But globalisation and new technologies affect citizenship in many ways (S. Castles & A. Davidson, 2000). In this context, the migrants, thanks notably to their media, contribute actively to the reinterpretation of the notion and practices of citizenship. This communication paper is based on a comparative research study on the Turkish language media and the Muslim media in

Britain, Germany, France and Belgium. It intends to show how the ethnic media have brought new opportunities of citizenry to minority groups.

Ethnic media and social sciences

Social sciences are now conscious of the way media are producing social representations of migrants, cultural and religious minorities (J. ter Wal 2002) using categorisation and evaluation processes (discursive disposals leading especially to an essentialist attribution of negative identitarian features) (A. M. Hargrave 2002, E. Poole 2002). If the media coverage has been for a long time considered as an indicator of social phenomena such as intercultural relations or the construction of collective identities, several theoretical orientations have been adopted during the last decades. Whereas the first approaches concerned the media distortion of social construction (S. Hall et al. 1978), recent analyses insist on the intricate relations between media production and social (T. A. van Dijk 1991) or communitarian representations (S. Cottle 2000). Last but not least, a third level of analysis leads to more dynamic models of media production and representation of cultural and religious minorities within the media.

In other respects, the theme of mobilisation has rapidly evolved during the last thirty years. Linked to the notion of sociation (*Gesellschaft*) and communitarian belonging (*Gemeinschaft*), solidarity and citizenry practices have been oriented toward new forms of organisation and new repertoires of action (E. Neveu 1996). Ethnic media, who are suffering from a lack of research in social sciences (J.-P. Marthoz 2001), are playing a primordial role in providing an essential support for the elaboration and the relay of mobilisations. Thanks to the NTIC, they prompt us to reconsider the relations with others that neither the borders nor temporality keep more at a distance, and thus carry the solidarity claims on the national and European political diaries.

The change of the media scene, *via* the development of ethnic media, thus contributes to defy the multicultural and multireligious European nation-states. The socio-political sphere is marked by these new stakes which question as well the concepts of sovereignty (relation with the territory), of citizenship (place and statute of the minorities) and of discrimination (access to the word) as social relations (generation, gender) and mobilisations. We are more

specifically studying here two revealing cases of these new solidarity and citizenry practices for which the technological innovation holds an essential place in the development, allows their redeployment and guarantees their effectiveness: Muslim media and religious representation; media turcophones and ethnic representation.

The analyses relating to the social construction of reality by the media like on the relations between media production and social representations, extremely useful in the comprehension of some socio-political phenomena (racism, discrimination, representation, participation), are from now on known. Another level of analysis, which leads to the study of more dynamic models of media production and representation of the cultural and religious minorities in the media, is even more interesting.

- A first model is that reflected by an increasing number of governmental and non governmental organisations which, created during 1990s, show a great capacity of initiative and invention concerning the representation of the minorities in the media sector. The European network of journalists *One-Line/More Colour in the Media*, the specialised formation centres and various multicultural organisations were thus set up in Europe with an aim of improving the representativeness of the cultural minorities in the media programs. National experiments also exist, in particular in the Netherlands with *Mira Media*, an independent organisation created in 1986 by the largest organisations of migrants; *Migrants and the Media*, a working group which intends to ensure a greater diversity of the media coverage and fights for a higher recruitment journalists of foreign origin; MTLN, *Multiculturele Televisie Nederland*, which produces multicultural programs, etc. - and in Britain with institutional organisations like the *Independent Television Commission (ITC)*, the *Standard Broadcasting Council (BSC)*, the *Radio Authority* et the *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*, or with independent organisations such as *Migrant Media*, a formation centre and a company of production created in 1989 by people resulting from immigration.
- A second model is that reflected by the myriad of religious and ethnic media created between the 1970s and 2000s, and which incontestably profited from the NTIC. The domination that some groups of media exert gives a partially misleading image of the exceptionally complexity of the media universe of the minority or minorised groups in Europe.

These two types of experiment, based on distinct strategies ("entrism" for the first, "separatism" for the second), reveal new practices and solidarities with important socio-political consequences, but which however drew the attention of very few European researchers.

Ethnic media in context

My ongoing research is focused as well on newspapers, magazines, radio and television broadcasts, internet websites of ethnic media and media committees. A primary fieldwork has been conducted in Germany and Belgium (1998-2000) during my PhD at Paris 8 University (France); and a more recent fieldwork has just been completed in Britain and France (2001-2003) during my post-doctoral fellowship at the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, Warwick University (UK). The research consists on the one hand in a census of Turkish-language and Muslim media, and on another hand on interviews with editors and journalists, analysis of articles published in the ethnic press as well as of guestbooks and online chats.

The media panel is either in English, German, French, Turkish and Kurdish (I. Rigoni, 2002). However, I did not select the media published in Britain written in Arabic or Urdu, especially because they are written in a national perspective rather than an universalist or Ummah-based one. Once I was asking the editor of *The Muslim News* why he chose English language, he answered me: "bilingual papers are nationalistic papers. If a journal is in Urdu for exemple, it means that the paper is only for Pakistani Muslims": that is to say, not for the community of Muslims. Neither did I select the Turkish national dailies published in Germany and distributed throughout Western European countries.

Why having chosen these two groups: communitarian media and religious media? Both have been created by immigrants and are published thanks to either the first and second generation. Both intend to play an active role in the society as well as to represent another voice in the media sphere. Nevertheless, communitarian and religious media differ broadly in their conception. They have neither the same ambition nor the same practices. It is then particularly meaningful to compare these two kinds of media and the role they intend to play.

One key issue is the creation of communitarian and religious media as alternative forms of participation in the society, alternative forms of citizenship. An appreciation of the complexity of ethnic media, and the heterogeneous demands it makes of migrants as citizens, should prompt us to lower our expectations of citizenship. But there is also an ambiguity. Are these media empowering the migrants while offering them a platform for debates as well as forming a lobby at the political level? Or, on the contrary, are they maintaining them stubbornly in a particularist logic?

This communication paper intends to give some elements of answer. I will focus my communication on the case of the communitarian and religious newspapers in Britain. I propose to concentrate my analysis on 3 points:

- the audience, and the construction of an “imagined community” – illustrated by interviews ;
- the image, and the construction of social reality – illustrated by a picture ;
- the citizenship, and the reconstruction of political reality – illustrated by interviews as well as by transnational exchanges of young people involved in the media.

The panel

The research in Britain has been focused on 4 Turkish-language newspapers and 4 Muslim newspapers:

Title	Date of creation	Community	Language	Frequency
<i>Crescent International</i>	1972	Muslim	English	Monthly
<i>Impact International</i>		Muslim	English	Monthly
<i>Q-News</i>	1992	Muslim	English	Monthly
<i>The Muslim News</i>	1989	Muslim	English	Bi-monthly
<i>Avrupa</i>	2002	Turkish speaking	Turkish	Weekly
<i>Londra Gazete</i>	2001	Turkish speaking	Turkish, English	Weekly
<i>Olay</i>	1987	Turkish speaking	Turkish	Weekly
<i>Toplum Postası</i>	1982	Turkish speaking	Turkish, English	Weekly

The Turkish-language media which are still published today have been created between 1982 and 2002. They contain between 40 and 60 pages each, but many are dedicated to advertisements and pictures of the “community”. They are all written in Turkish but some include a supplement in English, since a few years for or a few months. They publish around 15 000 copies a week. All of them can be collected free of charge in ethnic shops and associations, mainly in London. Two of them wish to be distributed in continental Europe.

The Turks and Kurds who have immigrated in Western European countries have a long and strong tradition and practice of political fights which reflect the situation in Turkey. These quarrels have many times resulted in splits, especially in the left-wing organisations. The same for the Turkish Cypriots for whom the partition of the island and the politics of Rauf Denktash lead to very conflicting positions. As a consequence, the Turkish-language weeklies in Britain are agitated by these tensions, although they claim not to be involved in politics. Nevertheless, these newspapers define themselves as the media of the “Turkish speaking community”. All the editors insist on that expression which is “politically correct”. That “Turkish speaking community” aims to represent the Turkish Cypriots as well as the Turks and the Kurds from Turkey. Even if these newspapers claim not to be involved in politics, it is already a partisan bias in the Turkish context.

The Muslim newspapers have been created between 1972 and 1992. They contain between 12 and 16 pages each on news and analysis on the Muslim issues. They are all written in English although also distributed in countries like Pakistan, Nigeria, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Malaysia. Some are distributed in Canada and the United States either. In Britain, some are distributed freely in bookshops and associations but anyone can subscribe.

Within the Muslim media, we can distinguish the community newspapers from the international newsmagazines. In addition to ideological divisions, the selection of the news differ broadly: *Crescent International* and *Impact International* are clearly international newsmagazines, whereas *The Muslim News* and *Q-News* attach the utmost importance to British Muslim issues.

Ethnic and religious media are obviously not homogenous. The ideological game has several effects on their creation and development. Moreover, although they intend to represent a specific group of people, each of them has its own definition of that group as well as its own perception of how to belong to that group. In their collective book *Making Media*, Lawrence Grossberg, Ellen Wartella and D. Charles Whitney explain that the term « mediamaking » is « intentionally ambiguous. It implies that the media are *themselves being made* while they are simultaneously *making something else* » (p.7). As well part of the reality and creating the reality, the media both reproduce and create the discourse on the group they aim to represent.

The audience, and the construction of an “imagined community”

The people who benefit from multiple belongings meet with a strong mediatic homogeneity giving them few place. In Europe, the take off of the media went hand in hand with the development of the modern concept of the nation, and contributes to consolidate the national « imagined communities ». Benedict Anderson (1991) identified the way in which certain forms of mass mediation, notably those involving newspapers, novels, and other print media, played a key role in imagining the nation and in facilitating the spread of this form to the colonial world in Asia and elsewhere. Arjun Appadurai’s general argument is also that « there is a similar link to be found between the work of imagination and the emergence of a postnational political world » (A. Appadurai 1997). Indeed, press, cinema, radio and advertisement have permitted to standardise the popular ideologies, to make them homogenous and also to exploit them deliberately to ends of propaganda (E. Hobsbawm 1990). Likewise, in Niklas Luhmann words, « the social *function* of the mass media is to be found [...] in the memory generated by it » (N. Luhmann 2000: 65).

According to the wishes of their founding members, editors and publishers, the ethnic and religious media intend indeed to challenge the mainstream media’s news coverage.

Ahmed Versi, Editor of *The Muslim News*, says: “We need to have a medium, a place where people could discuss their issues and also to report about their issues. Because people don’t know there are so many human rights abuses against muslims in this country. It’s not published in non-muslim papers, so we have to highlight.”

Iqbal Siddiqui, Editor of *Crescent International*, says: “We write primarily for a Muslim audience. For Muslims who are aware that the news coverage provided in the mainstream media is not the only perspective. To provide them with an alternative to the mainstream Western media, to provide information on the Islamic movement, and to inform people about how Muslims who are active in the Islamic movement [are involved] in world’s affairs.”

Some others emphasise the role of the ethnic newspapers as a whole within the society. Suzan Nuri, Editor of the English Pages of *Londra Gazete*, argues that: “if I got a copy of *The Voice*, the Black newspaper, it gives me an idea of what they think about. You see this story about Damilola [a Black boy murdered by 2 Cypriots]: if you got *The Voice*, I am sure that they would write this very differently, and it’s interesting to see how different communities are viewing. Community newspapers give the local authorities an insight into the community.”

But challenging the mainstream media’s news coverage does not lead to the same practice for the Muslim newspapers and for the Turkish-language media in Britain. The most obvious difference is certainly to be seen in their relations with the mainstream media on the one hand, and the local and national authorities on the other hand.

The Muslim newspapers are often closely linked to Muslim organisations – such as the *Muslim Council of Britain* (MCB) or the *Institute of Contemporary Islamic Thought* (ICIT) – although they are not their press organ. The Muslim newspapers, especially *Q-News* but overall *The Muslim News*, claim an active participation in the society and an involvement in politics on Muslim issues.

Ahmed Versi (*The Muslim News*) declares: “We have influenced the government a lot.

Of course we work with the community, we don’t work in isolation. So when we publish anything, we get support from the Muslim leadership and we influence the policies.”

What Ahmed Versi calls the “Muslim leadership” is especially the *Muslim Council of Britain* which contains hundreds of associations. Aiming to represent the British Muslims, the *Muslim Council of Britain* has notably an active Media Committee whose task is to react on the

mainstream media coverage on Muslim issues. Ahmed Versi participates occasionally to the Media Committee of the MCB.

He explains that: “we found that there was a lack of information, a lack of coordination, lack of contacts, so we also work at that level. We not only criticise the [mainstream] newspapers but we go and meet them to resolve the problem. We have professional relations.”

The involvement of newspapers such as *Crescent International* and *Impact International* in political issues are much more based on international matters than on British Muslim issues.

Iqbal Siddiqui (*Crescent International*) says: “George Galloway reads *Crescent International*, some other MPs are aware of it. If they want it, they can subscribe, I don’t send it free to any of these people. It doesn’t serve any purpose for us.”

He is also quite laconic on the form of participation in the political debate, saying that: “no matter of *how* you participate, it’s open, but certainly you *need* to participate, obviously”. The purpose of *Crescent* is clearly to represent an alternative thought at the international level.

The practices of the Turkish-language newspapers differ from the Muslim ones, since they are much more interested in giving “role models” and “showing the positive nature of the community” (Suzan Nuri, *Londra Gazete*) than in being directly involved at either a local or national level. Nevertheless, all of them pay a deep attention to the Turks and Turkish Cypriots elected in local councils.

Thus, the purpose of the ethnic and religious press is not that much to criticise the mainstream media and politics than to propose alternative active ways of participation in the society. Nevertheless, challenging the mainstream media’s news coverage does not mean challenging the general role of the media in imagining a nation or, in our specific cases, a community. Taking a stand not against but facing the mainstream media, the ethnic media are giving a definition of the community they intend to represent. Their social function is also to be found in the memory generated by it. Indeed, the ethnic newspapers also build their own “imagined community”. For the Muslim media, the “imagined community” is portrayed by the *Ummah* – although all the editors I interviewed emphasise the very diversity of the Muslims. For the Turkish-language media, the “imagined community” is portrayed by the Turkish speaking

community – although all the editors I interviewed also emphasise the extreme diversity and even the divergences of that “imagined community”. The feeling of belonging is of prime importance for these media: it is even their *raison d’être*.

The image, and the construction of social reality

After the audience, another important issue is the image. The photographic image is broadly used by the media, on television as well as in newspapers, in mainstream media as well as in ethnic media. In the media I study, the policy of image varies a lot. The Muslim media do not publish a lot of photographic images and when they do, they are related to the events described in the newspaper. The use of the image is completely different in the Turkish-language newspapers: image – together with advertisements – constitutes the main part of the newspaper. The range of image’s content is large: it varies from the illustration of the news, to a photo album of young and middle-age Turkish fellows in clubs and bars, through advertisements for Turkish restaurants, music groups, estate agents, etc.

Indeed, media languages are visual as well as verbal. And the image is essential in the construction of social reality. Image, media and representation are the three elements of a combination which leads to the construction of social reality. The reading of a photographic image cannot be separated or abstracted out from the social and historical context within which it has come to be recognised, understood and used. In the ethnic media, the reading of a photographic image can often neither be separated or abstracted out from the partisan or political context. It is particularly the case in the Turkish-language newspapers, even if they are not directly involved in politics. Advertisement is a good example. If I ask where do we have most of the chance to see a “subjective” photographic image, you will probably answer photo reports. If yes, you would be partly wrong! Advertisements contains many “subjective” photographic images.

Exemple: PHOTO

Thus, although photography is a visual medium, it is not purely visual. The greater part of photographic practice is, *de facto*, scripto-visual. This fact is nowhere more apparent than in advertising. And while the Turkish-language newspapers in Britain are mainly finance by advertisements, interests at stake are important.

The structure of representation in photography, the point of view and the frame, reflect and reproduce an ideological position that remains easily hidden – especially in advertisements. However, we must always remember the significance of the social, cultural and political practices which surround photography, even the apparently innocent ones. It should serve as well as the basis for our reading of photographic images, and as one of a basis for our understanding of reality construction.

The citizenship, and the reconstruction of political reality

The third and last point I would like to raise in this communication paper is the citizenship, and the reconstruction of political reality.

The intensification of exchanges produces dynamic effects on groups, especially political and religious ones, which would not have grown on the international sphere without overtaking traditional communication. As Arjun Appadurai notes, « we need to pay a special attention to the relation between mass mediation and migration, the two facts that underpin my sense of the cultural politics of the global modern. In particular, we need to look closely at the variety of what have emerged as *diasporic public spheres*. [...] As mass mediation becomes increasingly dominated by electronic media (and thus delinked from the capacity to read and write), and as such media increasingly link producers and audiences across national boundaries, and as these audiences themselves start new conversations between those who move and those who stay, we find a growing number of diasporic public spheres » (A. Appadurai 1997: 21-22). Even if I would not use the word « diasporic » to define the initiatives of the Turkish speaking community, and certainly not for those of the Muslims, my general argument is that ethnic media are playing an increasingly centrality to the exercise of full citizenship. This full citizenship, which confirm the habermasian notion of active citizenry, should not only be understood in a legal sense, but as a key word in debates over desirable combinations of rights, responsibilities and competences. In Stephen Castles and Alastair Davidson words, « the fundamental problem is to work out new rules of conviviality, which provide not only the basis for equality, but also the conditions for cross-cultural communication and the development of a new sense of community » (S. Castles & A.

Davidson 2000: viii). In fact, the collaboration between mainstream and ethnic media would contribute to enhance both conviviality and cross-cultural communication.

The editors I interviewed were in most of the cases very wordy about the citizenship issue. It doesn't mean that they were all agree on the role their media may play on citizenship, but they feel all deeply concerned by, and involved in, that issue.

Ahmed Versi complains: "All the debate is wrong! The debate talks about how I feel, no: it is how the government feels, how they treat me, if *they* treat *me* as a part of the society or not. [...] The question is: how could you feel British if you are not accepted as a British? This is the dilemma."

Iqbal Siddiqui's discourse is not so different: "Now, we are talking and we are using terms that are very contested. They mean different things to different people. Some people, when they say that British Muslims owe to be good citizens, they mean different things by that. For some people, it means that they should accept and submit to the dominant value system. Whereas we would say that we should contribute to the mix that constitutes British society, we should contribute to the debate in terms of what British society owe to be, and we should encourage people to understand and appreciate and follow the values that we believe in. Is that not being a good citizen, I don't know. That can be regarded as a social responsibility. There is so many different ways of understanding what constitutes good citizenship..."

The position of the Turkish-language media coincides also with the idea of citizenship not only as political rights and duties but also as social rights and duties.

Suzan Nuri explains: "Personnally, I think that we should all be proud to live here. I'm a Londoner and that means a lot to me, to live in one of the world greatest cities. And I wish everyone could be as proud as that, but not everyone is because things go against them. But if you're here, you should try to be part of the society, and by being part of that society, becoming a citizen of that society. That is why people standing for local, councillor elections... that's a big thing for our community. If our paper does anything to promote that, I'm happy, I think we *should* get involved."

Serhat Incirli goes even further: “Actually, [citizenship] is one of our main target: we try to ask, we try to tell our community with our news, with our columns, with our comments, and everything, to be good citizens of the United-Kingdom. Not being an English. But being a good British subject, British citizen. Actually, we would like to see our community, not as an ethnic minority here. I don’t accept any community here as an ethnic community: I hate that. But I would like to see all the people in England to be good British citizens, United-Kingdom’s citizens. And if they are in France or Belgium or anywhere else, it’s exactly the same.”

Indeed, ethnic and religious media intend to be involved in the society of residence and to give models for their communities. For them, being a good citizen means sharing rights, responsibilities and competences.

Some other experiences have been held in continental Europe by young people from Turkish and Kurdish origin involved in associations as well as in media. They have created at the end of the 1990s a network of associations working on the citizenship issue, either theoretically and practically. Some of these young people are volunteer speakers in radio broadcast dedicated to the young Turks and Kurds in radio stations such as *SFB-Multikulti* and *Kiss FM* in Berlin, *Fréquence Paris Pluriel* in Paris, and some TV broadcasts in the Netherlands. Some others are speakers for *Radyo Metropol*, the first Turkish radio in Germany, or even journalists in the mainstream German media. Some others are involved in associations, like *ACORT* (Citizen Assembly of the People from Turkey) in France. They meet generally once a year in a European country to discuss about citizenship: how can they define this concept and explain it to the youngests, what about being a citizen, what about the several national practices and rights towards citizens, etc.

Citizenship is certainly a big issue for people working in ethnic and religious media. Globalisation affects citizenship in many ways (S. Castles & A. Davidson 2000). In this context, the migrants, thanks notably to their media, contribute actively to the reinterpretation of the notion and practices of citizenship. Cyberspace and satellite are becoming a vital link and meeting ground for a civically engaged and politically mobilised stratum of the polity (P. Dahlgren in B. Axford & R. Huggins 2001, K. Hill & J. Hughes 1998). A consequence of the « new media » is the « reworking of political reality », which is apparent in a number of trends, such as deterritorialisation of social relations, decentralisation, transnationalisation,

significance of culture and identity, proliferation of political identities and actors, significance of information and communication technologies in the constitution of political life (B. Axford & R. Huggins 2001).

It seems then, that the media have brought new opportunities to the migrants and so-called “community groups”. However, ethnic and religious media also serve the whole society.

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