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Abstract Only – Work in Progress

**“From the World as Text to the World as Image:
A Possible Paradigm Shift”**

**By Dragos Stoica
Ph. D Candidate, Concordia University, Canada)**

This paper investigates the on-going implementation of western identification tools of post-hermeneutic and meta-narrative nature in the Muslim social space. It is claimed that the recent example of the Danish cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad may mark the outset of a long-term paradigm shift. Even when justified by the appeal to freedom of speech, the transgression of Islamic iconoclasm creates a precedent that scars mass sensibilities and trans-individual value systems. It is postulated that late western modernity circumscribes collective and individual identities to a post-hermeneutic paradigm. Images represent an identity and engage in a dynamic of relativism that allows individuals to extract particular landmarks, a function of the dominant cultural pattern and/or essential contexts. On the other hand, the system of Muslim collective identities, complete with mechanisms of access and contestation of power, was shaped by the continuous recourse to normative canonical texts and collective narratives. This paper concentrates on whether the permeability of Muslim iconoclasm to post-modern, image-induced relativism jeopardizes the survival and durability of collective identities and the perpetuation of strong Muslim ontological values. The textual universe specific to the *Weltanschauung* of the Muslim world could be gradually replaced by a new cultural, identification and ontological system that focuses primarily on image-dominated configurations. Moreover, the preeminence of local mass media (Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiyya) may facilitate the successful evolution from textual domination to image-dominated patterns. Such transfers are also likely to generate the progressive dissolution of the textual universe, the last genuinely Muslim identification matrix.