The safety of authenticity: Ali Kebab or an exploration in the contemporaneity of foreignness and the self’s post-colonial imaginary

Abstract

Through the analysis of a Swiss advertisement campaign released in the summer of 2009 – the Ali Kebab campaign – this paper explores how the concept of authenticity is deployed today to delimit not only the representational boundaries of the Muslim (foreign) ‘other’ but also of the dominant cultural self. The authors’ argue that to fully grasp the power and scope of this concept it is best understood as a dialogical process that invites us to analyse the act of constituting the authentic other in relation to the stability, comfort and safeness of the dialogically constituted authentic self. To investigate how those power relations unfold in the Ali ad campaign, the article draws on a framework of visual analysis that first studies the field of significations carried by specific images in relation to the particular context in which they are deployed, and facilitates in a second instance their re-contextualisation within wider social discourses. This allows the authors to shed light on how the categories of authenticity displayed by the Ali adverts draw on a deep and powerful colonial imaginary that goes well beyond the borders of Switzerland.

Keywords (3 to 5): authenticity, orientalism, colonialism, modes of representations, visual analysis, Muslims, Switzerland.

In an era marked by the events of September 11th in the United States, Western public discourses have been particularly pre-occupied with trying to define, regulate and represent Muslims. The media, political campaigns and even advertising campaigns have participated to this process by producing and displaying in the public sphere images, often casted in terms of a ‘good’ and ‘bad’ dichotomy, of this Muslim ‘other’. The objectives of this paper are twofold. First, drawing on the discourse of Orientalism, we explore how the concept of authenticity can invite us to analyse these modes of representations (see Bhabha 1983) as a dialogical process. That is not only in terms of representation of the foreign (or the Muslim other) but also in terms of representation of the self. Second, by way of illustrating our argument, through the analysis of a Swiss advertisement campaign – the Ali Kebab campaign –, we provide an analytical framework that facilitates the inscription of a specific iconography within a wider European/western field of significations and power relations with respect to Islam and Muslims.

Over the summer 2009, a series of intriguing posters surfaced throughout Swiss cities, in all linguistic areas of the country, announcing that “Ali Kebap”, referring to a probable new Turkish restaurant selling döner kebab, was “new in town”. No address was mentioned on the posters, so the first question that came to the mind of the attentive observer was who is this Ali character? Who is this hefty looking and smiling chap, wearing his red fez and wielding a very long knife? His sudden appearance in the public and mediatic spaces created a buzz in the Swiss media: What was this advertisement about? Who was behind it? It soon turned out that Ali was part of a teaser campaign for the Swiss market leader of out-of-home advertising. This teaser campaign was built around Ali's success in the kebab business and his transformation from the owner of a single fast-food business to the owner of a chain of restaurants, hotels and, even, an
airline company. For us, the figure of Ali who was chosen specifically for “his authenticity” (Bursa 2009) resonates beyond this imagined entrepreneur and his link to a successful advertisement campaign. We understand it as a window into a broader reflection on the notion of authenticity and the dialogical constitution of the self and the other.

We explore how this notion is mobilised to depict and ultimately ensnare Turks/Muslims into a specific imaginary of foreignness despite the fact that they might formally be members of a polity - an imaginary that is not limited to the ad campaign itself, but taps in a colonial and oriental repertoire. In fact, it is our contention that this process is as much about delimiting the (phantasmagorical) boundaries of the authentic self than the authentic other, as it participates to the (re)production of a safe and stable Swiss political imagination avoiding the challenge of (re)negotiating the terms of the self. One should note here that we are in agreement with other scholars who have posited that colonialism had a profound impact on Switzerland, despite the fact that it has not been a formal colonial power (Purtschert 2008). In this sense, our empirical object of analysis resonates in many ways with the colonial heritage that continues to haunt European imagination.

The paper starts by discussing how authenticity is a category fostering the (im) possibility for the other to re-cast/imagine her/himself outside this phantasmagorical representation of the foreign. We then move to a contextualisation of the Ali Kebab campaign in light of the presence and increased visibility of Muslims in Switzerland and Europe. Thereafter, we analyze the campaign linking its content first to specific social practices, and in a second instance relating it to a larger imaginary that articulates itself around the constitution of authenticity as a form of categorization of the ‘true’ self.

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1 Even though Muslims in Switzerland, as well as in other countries, do not represent a homogenous social group, various survey and analysis have shown that Swiss citizens do not differentiate between Muslims (see Helbling 2010: 68, 70; Mayer, 2009). In fact, scholars have noted a shift in how European states, policy makers, the media and other actors have identified immigrants. While they were in the 1980s and 1990s identified in terms of their ethnicity, this changed in the late 1990s where the main marker of identity became the religion of their country of origin (e.g. Allievi, 2005; Yukleyen, 2010; Knippenberg, 2005; Lépinard, 2011). This shift was accentuated after 9/11: “The Rushdie affair and the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 functioned as catalysts. Moroccan, Turks and other immigrants were ‘discovered’ as Muslims” (Knippenberg, 2005: 103). This as Mayer (2011: 13) and Behloul (2009: 120) observe was the case as well in Switzerland where immigrants have increasingly been identified through their religion. For these reasons we connect forms of representation that are obviously linked to the Turks to more general forms linked to Muslims and Islam.

2 While Purtschert notes that there is yet to be a systematic analysis of postcolonial Switzerland (2008: 177), it is interesting to note, for illustrative purposes, the role played by Swiss religious missions in the mid-eighteenth century. With their anthropological and naturalist undertakings, they helped constitute a referent to which the country and its population came to understand themselves in comparison to the colonised other: “In both private and public spaces, the picture of the dark continent served as a foil against which the Swiss could measure the evolution of their own society” (Harries 2007: 4).
and the ‘true’ other. We conclude with a reflection on how this categorization represents a form of safety for the political imaginary of the dominant group.

**Authenticity as modes of representation**

In this paper we understand authenticity as a dialogical process that identifies and delimits the ‘true’ boundaries of the other, the foreign/Muslim other in our case, but also of the self, the dominant culture. Authenticity thus refers to a form of categorization by which the dominant culture not only constructs and constitutes the essential other, but participates as well to the constitution and construction of its own identity. In this specific instance, the notion of authenticity is best understood as a component of the discourse of Orientalism (Said 1979) - a discourse whose functions include assigning essentialists characteristics to the ‘oriental’ other making her/him identifiable and delimiting her/his representational boundaries, as well as in this process delimiting the boundaries of what the ‘western’ subject is not (Yenenoglu 1998). The fact that this discourse has the authority to produce an ‘authentic’ truth about the other is important as it underlines the power relations (Foucault 2001[1982]; Said, 1979) between the one that produces it and the one that is object to this production:

The Orient was Orientalized (…) because it could be – that is, submitted to being – *made* Oriental. There is little consent to be found, for example, in the fact that Flaubert’s encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence or history. *He* spoke for and represented *her* (Said, ibid: 6 (original emphasis)).

To better shed light on this power play, it is useful to think in terms of Homi Bhabha’s (1983) understanding of modes of representation as constituting and delimiting the relations between a dominant social group and alterity (a variety of contextually different social group)³. Modes of representation delimit social/cultural/racial hierarchies within a polity, and are for Bhabha set as central to the articulation of colonial discourses as they are constructed on the: “concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness” (Bhabha 1983: 18). Fixity refers here not only to the unchanging character of the other but also to the ever-going necessity to assign and ascribe difference to the other (see also Connolly 2002 [1991]). For Bhabha, this ambivalence of fixity both immanent and ever in need of reaffirmation:

ensures repeatability [of the colonial stereotype] in changing historical and discursive conjunctures; informs its strategies of individuation and marginalisation; produces that effect of probabilistic truth and predictability which, for the [mode of representation], must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed (Bhabha 1983: 18).

³ We follow Young’s (1990: 186, see also 43) definition of social group as “a collective of people who have affinity with one another because of a set of practices or way of life; they differentiate themselves from or are differentiated by at least one other group according to these cultural forms.”
The category of authenticity embodies this ambiguity, as dominant groups are constantly ascribing traits and re-affirming the boundaries of the other and as a result of the self. This has political consequences for the ability of dominated or oppressed social groups to speak with different and authorised voices in the public sphere. Indeed, authenticity becomes an expectation from the dominant social group in regard to ‘othered’ social groups, as the latter are repeatedly confined to their authentic dispositions by the former. If a member of a dominated social group does not fulfil the expectations of authenticity he or she will not be taken as a genuine representative voice of this social group and (mis)placed as a non-legitimate and non-representative voice.

We thus contend that authenticity is what constitute, in representational terms, the authoritative voice of the other from the perspective of the dominant social group, even if this voice is neither necessarily legitimate (via forms of political participation) nor, representative. In sum, the category of authenticity has for representational effect to identify and (de)limit whose voice is authorised to speak on behalf of the group and to silence, by denying their authenticity, alternative voices that might alter the comfort of dominant representations, and by extension the safety and security of dominant identities. As such, safety and security are intrinsically linked to the delineation of the other (Connolly 2002 [1991]).

Before analysing the specifics of the Ali Kebab Campaign, the next section provides a short discussion of the transformations in the demographic makeup as well as political and sociological positions of Muslims in Switzerland and Europe more generally.

**Contextualising the need to portray, represent and ‘authentify’ Swiss and European Muslims**

As of 2005, Muslims represented about 310’000 residents in Switzerland, that is a bit more than 4 percent of the overall population. The vast majority originally came from the former Yugoslavia (essentially from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia) and from Turkey. Out of these residents about 12 percent were Swiss citizens, that is a bit more than 36’000 residents (Gianni 2005: 13-17). Yet, even if they

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4 Authenticity is, in fact, not only an ascribed category from ‘outside’ of the social group but can also become a self-ascribed category from ‘within’ the non-dominant social group. Some specific voices within a social group might take on the lead to socially and politically define how authentic is one member of this group in order to (de)legitimize this member's voice not only within the social group but also outside of it (Salvatore 2004). To offer an example in line with our case, contemporary hegemonic Islamist discourses have delimited what an authentic Islamist discourse is supposed to be by rejecting forms of critical approaches to Islam, which have been identified as ‘western’ thoughts; whereas ‘true’ Islam has been constructed as non or even anti-western (Mandaville 2001: 180).

5 It is relevant to stress that unlike other European countries, such as France or the United Kingdom, where claims have focused on issues of political representation or economic and social discriminations, Swiss Muslim ‘community leaders’ have usually circumscribed their requests to civil liberties in relation to the ability of members of their communities to practice Islam or to claims of public recognition for their associations. (Gianni 2005: 20-1).
represent a very heterogeneous group, with different levels of religiosity and practices, political and moral values, cultural habits and socio-demographic profiles, they have usually been portrayed, as it is common in many western settings, as a fairly homogeneous group by non-Muslim Swiss citizens (Helbling 2010: 68, Mayer 2011: 13 and Behloul 2009: 120). Moreover, not unlike the rest of Europe, the demands of devout Swiss Muslims (Gianni 2005: 20), and as a result attempts to define and portray them in the Swiss public and mediatic spaces have increased in recent years. This can be explained partly by the fact that the identity of many European Muslims has shifted from being workers in transit in the 1960s and 1970s to permanent residents or citizens in the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, the presence of Islam on European soil became important in the early 1960s due to the need for unskilled labourers in a post-war era. At that time Islam was:

incarnated […] by the anonymous and silent mass of unskilled labourers working in industry and tertiary sector. Largely on the fringes of society, living in groups in their own, separate social spaces, their primary goal was to earn as much money as possible and then return home (Cesari 2004: 13).

However, the oil crisis of 1974 marked the end of the need for unskilled workers and the beginning of new family reunification policies, which changed the demographic makeup of Muslim migrants from a male dominated population to one consisting of nuclear and extended families settling in Europe (Cesari ibid and Triandafyllidou and al. 2006: 9). This shift is important as it indicates a change in the relations between Muslims and Europeans: “It was no longer possible to think of oneself as a worker in transit: the signs of permanency were numerous and irreversible” (Cesari ibid). It is from that point onwards that Muslims started to make demands related to their faith, including requests for prayer rooms, the constructions of Mosques, and so on. These requests have evolved with time and have led to vivid debates, which are still ongoing, related to the recognition, institutionalisation and representation of Islam in Europe.

For Europeans this shift in the status of Muslims and of Islam in Europe, including their demands for greater recognition, has been difficult to accept and subject to different levels of resistance (Cesari 2004: 14). In fact, it partly explains, why religion replaced ethnicity, referred to in the 80s and early 90s, as the principal marker of identification of the ‘foreign’ (e.g. Knippenberg, 2005; Yukleyen, 2010). Even though many Muslims are now second and even third generation citizens their ‘Muslimness’ is mobilised to mark them as the exotic, essentialised and inherently different other. This othering process has reached a new peak after the events of September 11th frequently articulating itself around the figures of a ‘good’ and a ‘bad’ Muslim (Razack 2008, Mamdani 2002, Mahmood 2008, Silvestri 2007). In other words, the ability to identify who and what is included in the categories ‘Muslim’ and

6 In Switzerland shared images of the foreign have been particularly strong and pervasive throughout time. This for Bendix has contributed to fostering and delimiting a common sense of the “Swiss national Self” in a traditionally diverse and multicultural country (Bendix 1993: 24). For more information on the shift that took place in Swiss society in the late 90s/early 2000s from identifying the ‘foreign’ as an immigrant with a different ethничal background to identifying her/him with her/his religious background see footnote 1.
‘Islam’, and to ascribe them particular authentic characteristics is the product of a specific power play, which participates also to delimiting the authentic boundaries of the dominant culture. This interplay between the authenticity of the other (i.e. authenticity of the foreign) and the authenticity of the dominant group (i.e. authenticity of the self) is at the heart of our analysis of the Ali Kebab Campaign which we now turn to.

The Ali Kebab campaign – between denotation and connotation

The Ali Kebab campaign was launched during the summer 2009. The jolly face of Ali, his red fez, his long knife, and his kebab was widely showcased throughout Switzerland and became familiar even in remote Swiss villages (see fig. 1 – poster 1). This campaign immediately created a mediatic buzz, as until August 17 no one knew who was behind it (though some guessed fairly quickly that it was probably a teaser campaign). On that day, a second poster (see fig. 1 – poster 2) appeared where Ali posed next to two of his employees and where one could read the slogan: “25 x in Town” – his business had expanded. At the bottom of the poster one could finally see who was behind the campaign: the Swiss out-of-home advertisement company – APG – and read the following slogan: “APG posters make you successful.” This second poster was followed by two others, where Ali had become even more successful as he was now the proud owner of a hotel and subsequently of an airline company (see fig. 1 – poster 3 and 4).

Figure 1 – The Campaign Posters

The immediate message conveyed by these posters was about how (small) companies could become rapidly prosperous via this type of media advertisement: “Ali, un personnage fictif, symbolise les entreprises qui connaissent un succès durable grâce

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au média de l'affiche” [Ali, a fictive character, symbolises companies which become successful on the long run because of poster advertisement] (SWR 2009). Yet, beyond this first reading, we argue that this visual campaign articulates the categories of authenticity of the foreign and of the self in specific ways. To determine these ways we turn to an analytical framework, which rather than focusing on what is represented focuses on how it is represented (Chandler 2007: 124). Doing so invites us to move from visual semiotics to social discourse by distinguishing between two complementary dimensions of discourse (van Leeuwen 1993). On one level, we pay attention to the generic structure of the campaign, that is to the “structure of the text” (van Leeuwen 1993: 203, original emphasis), to the “sequence of linguistic (and/or other semiotic) activities” (van Leeuwen 2008: 12) that is presented in the campaign. In other words, we first identify different visual and textual signifiers not only to reconstruct the “syntagmatic structure of discourse” but also to relate the latter to certain social practices qua discourse (van Leeuwen 1993: 194). These social practices enable us to identify how social actors are represented via the campaign. On another level, because we consider that it is important to understand how these visual and textual productions are linked to a larger field of significations (Chandler 2007: 124), we pay attention to the field structure of the Ali Kebab campaign, to “a structure used in the text” (van Leeuwen 1993: 203, original emphasis):

It is assumed [...] that texts make reference to an experiential world outside themselves and their immediate context, and that this ultimately means ‘reference to a social practice other than that constituted, in part, by the text itself’. In other words, the field of structure of a text or set of texts is a recontextualization [...] of the structure of a social practice, or set of interrelated practices. (van Leeuwen ibid: 204, original emphasis)

In order to show the interplay between these two dimensions (see fig. 2) we mobilise basic categories of semiotics, inspired by Barthian semiotics, that have been used to analyse visual materials (van Leeuwen 2001). To illustrate how the “syntagmatic structure of discourse” is articulated in the campaign we first identify the denotations present in the advertisement (i.e. what or/and who is being portrayed) and show how they relate to connotations (i.e. to the ideas and values conveyed by those representations) (van Leeuwen 2001: 94). While there is a formal distinction between denotation and connotation, both are significantly linked since denotation can be divided in two analytic categories: denotative signifiers and denotative signified. The latter can be associated with something akin to connotations as denotative signified also refer to ideas or values (van Leeuwen 2001: 99). At the level of the generic structure, this interplay between denotative signifiers and denotative signified highlights the sequence of semiotic activities both synchronically and diachronically present in the ad campaign. We highlight how two social practices, one explicit – economic success and entrepreneurship –, and the other implicit – integration –, are emerging from this interplay. This analysis of the generic structure of the campaign leads us to an analysis of its field structure.

Figure 2 – Generic and Field structures of the Ali Kebab ad campaign

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8 This figure and the different concepts it mobilises are informed by the aforementioned theoretical framework of van Leeuwen, 1993, 2008.
To reconstruct the field structure of the Ali Kebab campaign, our analysis centers on its recontextualization within the social discourses of authenticity of the foreign and authenticity of the self. The denotative signified that we identify at the level of the generic structure in the ad campaign serves, again in light of Barthian semiotics, to identify the larger connotations that emerge from it. According to Barthes, what is signified via connotations is a “fragment of ideology” (Barthes 1985: 78). Yet, Barthian semiotics is only useful in an effort of recontextualization to the extent that significations are then replaced in an intertextuality or a *longue durée* which Barthian semiotics primarily lacks (see van Leeuwen 2001). The recontextualization of the ad campaign beyond its sole generic structure allows us, for instance, to analyse the intertext between Ali's adverts and colonial tropes, such as the one conveyed by the French Y’a bon Banania advert popular at the beginning of the 1900s (see fig. 3). We are also able, through parallels between the Ali adverts and the Swiss People's Party (SVP) anti-minaret campaign that took place around the same time (see fig. 4), to inscribe the Ali Campaign within a wider European social discourses on Muslims articulated along dichotomic terms. By delineating such system of semiotic associations – that is by pointing out how Ali’s campaign can be related to a larger post-colonial imaginary – we show how figures of the foreign are differentially constructed in the Swiss public sphere and how they contribute to (de)limiting the representational boundaries not only of an authenticity of the foreign, but as well of an authenticity of the self.
Analysing the Ali Kebab campaign

The generic structure of the campaign – Ali Kebab or the story of a successful integration

In all the different posters the figure of Ali remains almost the same – he is smiling widely and identifiable through his red fez. The only thing that changes is that the sequence of posters showcase symbols of his growing economic comfort: in the second poster he traded his apron and t-shirt for a tie and a shirt, in the third one, one sees that he had a gold tooth put in, and in the last one he is wearing a big shiny watch and ring. Moreover, although the posters market different products, all of them follow the same story line, where Ali remains a petit, even if successful and, seemingly, foreign entrepreneur. In other words, when the denotative signifiers present in all the posters (e.g. fez, ring, gold tooth, and so on) are put together they tell us something about the denotative signified present in those images – about the social practices conveyed by the campaign. Indeed, Ali is depicted as having reached a certain economic success, which means that he has been able to integrate himself in his host country. Yet, this success remains conditioned on his ability to be identified through signs that indicate his foreign/Turkishness.

More precisely, his success is limited to an economic one, where he is ensnared in his niche, where he and his products are easily identified as ‘foreign’. The category of foreignness is fairly clearly articulated through the use of denotative signifiers such as the fez, the kebab and other signs that come back in all the posters. For instance, Ali’s hotel, on poster 3, has the shape of the rotating spit where the kebab meat is cooked on and clothes are hanging out of the hotel windows – something that would be rather uncommon in Swiss hotels. Moreover, the hotel is apparently located in a semi-residential urban area next to a building covered with graffiti. The impression is that Ali’s hotel is more of a motel, thus clearly conveying the socio-economic boundaries of Ali’s success. Finally, the symbol of the kebab comes back in poster 4, where Ali is on the pilot seat – himself piloting? – holding triumphantly a kebab stick outside his window. Yet, even at the height of his economic success, Ali is still represented with a shirt with rolled up sleeves, a symbol of someone who has not totally abandoned manual work; Ali is not your ‘typical’ CEO.

The sub-text present in all those posters indicates something about the terms of successful integration in the Swiss polity, where success is achievable if one is able to remain identifiable as a different but non-threatening other. As such one realises that Ali’s is able to accumulate capital precisely because he taps in what is identified as his ‘cultural’ difference. Caglar (1995) and Pecoud (2001) discussing the German case go

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9 It is interesting to note that for APG, the campaign did not showcase signs of foreignness or racism. Indeed, according to their Head of Marketing and Acquisition Beat Holenstein: “Les vendeurs de kebabs font désormais partie de notre culture” [Kebab sellers are now part of our [i.e. Swiss] culture] (SWR 2009). Yet, as one can see from our analysis, the kebab seller is still set in a register of foreignness that indicates a certain conception of what is authentic in being a kebab seller; an armailli – a typical Swiss alpine shepherd – would not for instance have been considered authentic enough to be a kebab seller.
through the dilemmas such a situation can pose to the foreign other and how he or she chooses to represent himself/herself. They point out that the image of the exotic Turk was re-appropriated by döner shop owners in Berlin until the 1990s to market their business, where they referred to the western construction of the Orient to promote a specific product as an authentic culinary experience. This was done despite the fact that döner kebab, as sold in Western Europe, were not really found in such a form in Turkey (Caglar 1995: 210). In so doing, Döner shop owners, like the figure of Ali, were able to acquire rapid economic success through self-employment, but this restrained their ability to acquire “symbolic [i.e. cultural] capital” as they built their success on their “exoticism” (ibid) – this process therefore limited substantially their field of possibilities to choose how to articulate their identity publically.

Interestingly, beyond the visuals of the advertisement, the rational given by the ad agency to explain the choice of Ali provides us with further details on this understanding of integration conveyed by the interaction of denotative signifiers and signified in the campaign. We learn that Ali, Hasan by his real name, is a 46 years old Palestinian, who was cast because of his “typical features” (Brusa 2009) by the Swiss communication agency, Publicis, outsourced by APG to conceive and design the campaign. According to the agency, Hasan was chosen for his “authenticity” (Brusa 2009).

Mit ihm liesse sich eine Tellerwäschergeschichte erzählen, mit einem Profi-Model sei das unmöglich. Dass Hasan studierter Maschinenbauingenieur ist und von CNC-Fräsen mehr versteht als von Dönerspiessen, ist Nebensache. (Brusa 2009)

[Given his lack of profile as an agency model, it is really possible to tell a story of a self-made man […] The fact that Hasan studied machinery engineering and CNC-grinding and does not know a thing about döner kebab is not important]

This image of authenticity was eventually even re-appropriated by Hasan himself:


[They all call him Ali and it is alright with Hasan. Ali has become a little bit of Hasan, and Hasan can identify himself with Ali. He sees in him a symbol of integration, an example for the cohabitation of cultures in Switzerland]

Once again embracing one’s authenticity, in this discourse, seems to be understood as key to a ‘successful’ integration in Swiss society, or at least to a peaceful “cohabitations of cultures”. In fact, Hasan represents the example of the foreigner, who has been able to reproduce and market his authenticity to gain economical success (Brusa 2009). In doing so, he reproduces and perpetuates the dichotomy between the authentic other and the dominant culture.

In sum, one realises that although the images of authenticity conveyed in the Ali campaign can seem harmless, and even a positive sign of integration, they participate to the othering of the Muslim difference. They do so in two ways. First by projecting the
image of what is meant by successful economic integration, Turks are invited to re-appropriate this image to be able to quickly acquire economic capital. Yet, in so doing it also limits substantially their possibility of acquiring symbolic capital, as they remain enclosed in the category of the authentic other – symbolised by a series of denotative signifiers that make reference to their foreignness, exoticism, and circumscribed economic success. This othering thus fails to recognize the entire spectrum of differences offered to a subject to represent and re-imagine his or her identity, whether in terms of class, gender, political orientation, religious belonging, and so on. In a second instance, this process of categorization allows to locate, define and regulate the foreign other. This is why the fact that Ali is portrayed with his ‘ethnic’ characteristics - through symbols such as the fez and the kebab - is not considered problematic, as it makes him distinguishable. It is a way of locating and defining him as different. His success depends on his difference and his ability of not blurring categories. One could argue therefore that Ali’s identity remains entirely controlled by the dominant culture, inasmuch as he is subjected to its projection of what the good exotic other should be. In other words, Ali is the dominant culture's object.

**The field structure of the campaign – authenticity of the foreign and of the self: tapping in a colonial repertoire**

Figure 3 – The Ali and the Banania Adverts

The Ali campaign unravels an interesting facet of the relationship between Switzerland and foreignness. Indeed, while the Swiss public was intrigued by the campaign in itself, it triggered little self-reflection on whether it could create uneasiness among individuals of Turkish decent or of Muslim faith, or perhaps project discriminatory traits or at least stereotypes on that population. Whereas this type of campaign would probably have triggered debates in North-American societies, where there is a greater tradition of awareness of cultural discriminations, the Swiss public

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10 Bendix (1993) stresses that in the United States a majority of the population, because of the civil rights’ movement, is aware of the possible negative stereotypes carried by
space remained very quiet about it. This is representative of a longer tradition of unreflexiveness over images of the foreign other – images that have existed in Swiss culture long before some of those foreigners were physically present and that have participated to the strengthening of the rather weak national identity of the multicultural polity (Bendix 1993: 15, 16). It is precisely because these images have been entrenched in Swiss memory and have perpetuated themselves throughout time that they have been considered by many to be harmless: “they have in fact become signifiers no longer invoking the signified image” (Bendix 1993: 23).

Accordingly, the few reflexive comments on this campaign were mainly found on French blogs (Benassi 2009) and a Swiss feminist blog (Martin 2009), where people noticed a strange and almost disturbing similarity between the Ali campaign and the Y’A Bon Banania advertisement. The Y’A Bon advertisement for a cocoa-based drink – which showcased a Senegalese infantry man (at the service of the French colonial empire) drinking cocoa – was very popular in France throughout the 20th century, but started to be criticised in the 1970s for its colonial connotations. Indeed, it was argued that the advert reinforced colonial stereotypes of the nice and smiling, but “stupid” and “childlike” African (Berliner 2002). Observers stressed that Ali displayed a similar wide smile and jolly face, a red fez and that the same yellow background was used in both ads – denotative signifiers that draw on this precise colonial imaginary. One can in fact easily inscribe the figure of Ali within a wider field of connotations related to the ‘oriental’ other – an other who, in this specific case, corresponds to the ‘good’, ‘non-threatening’ and ‘inferior’ colonial subject who stays within the space that has been assigned to him by the dominant culture. In a sense, therefore one could argue that the Ali advert draws on an imaginary that does not only confirm the superiority of the self

cultural, racial and ethnic designations. This is, however, not the case in many European countries, including Switzerland, that have a weak tradition of social activism on those issues. She explains how these images of the foreign might even be more entrenched in the Swiss context than in other European settings, due in part to the multicultural character of Switzerland, which needs to find elements to strengthen its sense of national cohesion.

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11 Bendix highlights that: “‘To be jealous like a Turk’, “ smoke like a Turk”, or “be clever like a Turk” are among common proverbial phrases that have established themselves in Swiss dialect since the first reports about the Ottoman conquerors in the twelfth and thirteenth century” (1993: 15).

12 The Y’a Bon Banania and Ali adverts are displayed in fig. 2. Banania is a drink that was created in the early 1900s, and was known for being made of two colonial products (bananas and chocolate). In 1915, the symbol of Banania becomes a Senegalese infantry man at the service of the French colonial army. Although the features of the infantry man will change over time, he will remain the icon of the brand recognizable by his unchangeable red fez and wide smile.

13 It is interesting to note that critics have also argued that the expression “Y’a Bon” made reference to the inability of Africans to correctly speak French (they spoke “the petit nègre” [a pidgin French] – i.e. a version of French considered to be highly simplified).
vis-à-vis the other, but in this process also (de) limits the ability of the self to tap in other repertoires that would offer a wider spectrum of possibilities to re-imagine and represent its own identity.

Remembrances of these colonial tropes and resonances with social discourses beyond the Swiss context are even stronger when one places the Ali campaign within the larger visual landscape that dominated the Swiss public sphere over the summer 2009. The Ali Campaign was launched around the same time as the political campaign by the far right Swiss political party SVP on the referendum to ban minarets. This latter campaign also showcased images of the foreign – yet this time these were negative images of the foreign symbolised by a woman wearing a *niqab* (a veil covering the entire body of the wearer except for her eyes) standing in the forefront of the Swiss flag that was being pierced by missile-like minarets (see fig. 4). The denotative signifiers of this campaign make reference to a social discourse, where the foreigner is constructed as a threat to Switzerland symbolic capital as a country defending freedom and women's rights. The fact that a woman is used as the key figure to represent this reality is far from being trivial. This image inscribes itself in a larger context of significations that recalls the centrality of ‘the woman question’ in the encounter between the West and the Muslim world, where ‘un-veiling’ came to be associated with modernity and autonomy (Najmabadi 2006). The veil became a central focus of attention for colonial and modernists’ projects, as its removal symbolised their ability to penetrate the intimate life of women, understood as the carriers of traditions and transform Muslim culture from within – ensuring dominance and superiority of one moral project over the other (Ahmed 1992). This colonial legacy is conveyed in the posters of the political campaign, as they make allusion to the need to save, transform and control Muslim women – through in this case bans on minarets perceived as a direct symbol of political Islam ([www.minaret.ch](http://www.minaret.ch)) – from a patriarchal, archaic and anti-democratic moral project.

Figure 4 – SVP political advertisement and initiative committee logo during the anti-minaret campaign

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14 It is relevant to note here how the A in the Ali advert is the same A that has been used in images illustrating the tales of Aladin and Ali Baba making reference to a whole ‘Oriental’ universe that has been present in western imaginary.
Because the process of authenticity works in a dialogical manner, the comfortable and safe position in which it sets the other echoes the ways by which a similar stability and safety for the identity of the self is reached (see author). This safety precisely stems from the powerful production and delimitation of the reassuring boundaries of the other; whether the other is a friendly face or a threatening shadow. Accordingly, Ali’s social integration echoes the constitution of an image of Switzerland as a harbour of tolerance for differences, as a place where anyone can be integrated and succeed economically as long as they do ‘their’ job and stay at ‘their’ place. Not unlike the situations depicted in the 1979 Swiss comedy Die Schweizer Macher (the Swissmakers), in which a series of stereotypical characters – an Italian worker with unionist activities, a German psychiatrist and a Yugoslav dancer – are trying to obtain Swiss citizenship and face almost daily scrutiny of police inspectors\(^\text{15}\), the figure of Ali tells us something about the role played by political economy in the construction and representation of the Swiss authentic self. Indeed, despite Ali’s apparent economic

\(^\text{15}\) Die Schweizer Macher, written and directed by Rolf Lyssy, is a very popular movie in Switzerland. When it was released in 1979, almost a million persons went to see it (out of a population of almost six millions at the time).
success, Ali remains a member of a ‘popular’ class without the symbolic capital that would enable him to move up socially and integrate in the Swiss political community – a capital that is strongly based on ‘natural’ ties with this political community (Studer 2001: 625-626; see Caglar 1995 for a similar argument about Turks in Germany). Such capital is thus ‘culturally’ attached to the ‘natural’ members of the Swiss political community (Wessendorf 2008), members who do not have to limit themselves to deploying their capabilities in niche economies.

The other is, therefore, a figure of security, the security and safety of a position that does not have to look back at the self's own contingency (Connolly 2002 [1991]). Defining difference as an other becomes here more than a temptation as “it typically moves below the threshold of conscious reflection and because every attempt to come to terms with it encounters stubborn obstacles built into the logic of identity and the structural imperatives of social organization” (ibid: 9). Accordingly, the political economy represented in the Ali kebab ads depicts an imaginary where foreign figures are facing the impossibility to represent authentic, i.e. credible, political actors and thus be considered ‘genuine’ Swiss voices. The parallel between the Ali campaign and the SVP one confirms this necessity (and not the mere temptation) of locating difference in the other when constructing and [re] producing the boundaries of the Swiss authentic self. This campaign makes reference to the historical role given to gender in the articulation of Swiss nationality and citizenship, where gender has been understood as a “symbolic boundary between a [masculine] nationality that [is] stable and permanent, thus grounded in loyalty, and one that [is] inherently unstable [i.e. a feminine one]” (Studer 2001: 647). While Ali cannot speak of/by himself as he does not possess the type of capital to belong to the political community, the veiled woman in the SVP poster has to be spoken for, she represents the potential lack of loyalty and instability of Muslims to the “stable and permanent” fixtures of the Swiss political community. This reference to stability, permanency and democracy is reiterated through the images of the Swiss flag (on the poster) and the mount Cervin (on the logo) both threatened by within by Islam (the mount Cervin is literally pierced from within).

Finally, while these two adverts make reference to different repertoires in their reproduction of the Swiss self, both locate the foreign other (e.g. Ali and the veiled woman) on a different temporality than the self – a temporality that finds its roots in colonialism where foreign populations were denied coevalness of time and which is therefore marked by a constant need for progress to reach an undefined status of modernity (a status that has been reached by the self) (Fabian 1983). This contrast allows to inscribe the imaginary of the self in a modern and tangible particular conception of time (that is unattainable by the other). To put it differently, what this suggest is not only the exclusive strand of the political imaginary of Switzerland, but its inability to go beyond a discourse about authentic selves that ends-up ensnaring both the dominant political community and social groups deemed external to it in a political situatedness that denies any possibility for coevalness.

Conclusion

16 Fabian understands this denial of coevalness as implying a: “persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse” (1983: 31).
In our view, the analysis of the Ali Kebab Campaign is relevant in two respects. First, this article shows how using a visual framework of analysis can be useful to explore an image both in its generic structure, but also to re-contextualise it within a wider field of significations. This seems important as it unravels how an image that might at first glance be understood as being particular to a specific context resonates with wider social discourses. In our case, this approach helped us shed light on how the categories of authenticity of the foreign and the self are articulated and draw on a deep and powerful colonial imaginary that goes beyond the borders of Switzerland. Our second aim was to explore how a campaign like the Ali Kebab one can serve as a window to think in more general terms about the concept of authenticity. Grounding our reading of this notion in the discourse of Orientalism allowed us to understand it as a dialogical process. As such, our analysis was guided both by a need to explore how the authenticity given to the foreign [Muslim] other was a factor in closing off or opening up the other’s ability to politically participate in a polity. Thinking of authenticity in those terms discloses the power dynamics around which this concept is grounded. Even if ad campaigns, such as Ali Kebab's, can seem to be harmless they nonetheless participate in a process where the dominant culture is constantly involved in the action of defining, delimiting and ultimately speaking for an 'authentic' other. This does not only tell us something about the possibilities available for the other to represent himself or herself, but as well about how those are interlinked with the stability, safety and comfort of the 'authentic' self.

Unravelling this power dynamic opens the door to a whole set of new conundrums with respect to individuals who wish to escape this ensnarement in the 'authentic' category. An option that seems to have become increasingly popular across European states, even in traditionally multicultural ones, is to invite individuals to assimilate, i.e. to detach themselves from their culturally positioned identity in order to become identical to the equally phantasmagorical authentic self. This route is well summarised by the chief of police in the Movie Die Schweizer Macher (1979): "Wir glauben, dass die Assimilation jener Zustand ist, bei welchem der bei uns anwesende Ausländer nicht mehr auffällt" [We believe that assimilation has been achieved when a foreigner resident here is indistinguishable from the rest of us]. So doing however does not only reproduce the category of authenticity as self, but comforts it in its position of superiority.

An alternative route would be to try to articulate one's position beyond both categories. Yet, the possibilities to successfully do so seem to be limited. Not surprisingly individuals who have tried to embark on that path have often been subject(ed) to active scrutiny aiming at pushing them back into safe authentic categories. The case of Ilhem Moussaid – a young women member of the new anti-capitalist French party (NPA) who identified herself as being a “secularist, feminist and anti-capitalist” (Moussaid, cited in Alemagna 2010) and who presented herself to the 2010 regional election with her headscarf – is a case in point. Accordingly, her decision to run as a candidate became the prime subject of conversations, debates and criticisms among French journalists, intellectuals, politicians and even members of her own political party. While members of the socialist party argued that a candidate wearing a headscarf would not be accepted on their list as expressions of religious belief belonged to the private realm, members of the French right considered that the young girl had been instrumentalised by her own party, lacking the wisdom and autonomy to be an independent subject (Zappi 2010). In such a cacophony, Ilhem voices, in a strangely
similar way as Said’s description of Flaubert’s encounter with the Egyptian courtesan, was almost inaudible. In fact, when reference was made to her speech, it was as proofs of her illogical subjectivity and irrationality. Her headscarf was sufficient, from the outset, for the dominant group to “represent her emotions, presence or history” (Said 1979: 6) – that is to delimit her identity and push her back in a well-defined category of authenticity. While these reactions are a direct product of the interrelation between the stability of the authentic other with the safety of the authentic self, they point, in our opinion, as well to the need to further study the problematic of the instability and danger created for the dominant culture by the ‘inauthentic’ self present within the authentic other – if only to better evaluate the thinness of the dominant culture’s imaginary.

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