Islam, Community, and the Internet: New possibilities in the digital age

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Islam, Community, and the Internet: New possibilities in the digital age

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INTRODUCTION (Return to Index)

This essay uses three examples of Muslim cyberpractices as a means for understanding how the Internet enables the formation, maintenance, and management of certain kinds of Islamic communities. First is the case of the al-Qaeda movement and its critics. Case two is an Ask the Imam web site, where postings on cyberdating are analyzed as a means to define proper Muslim behavior in cyberspace. The third case is the gayegypt.com web site and the controversies surrounding it. [1] It has been said that the Internet is producing a kind of Muslim Renaissance similar in scope and effect to the flowering of Islamic science, learning, and community values during the Abbassid period many centuries earlier. As this analysis illustrates, the kinds of changes in Muslim community enabled by the Internet are fundamentally altering the values and practices defined by Muslims in the Medieval period, especially in terms of the construction of authority. The ways in which this transformation works are examined in more detail below.
While some have argued that the web enhances connectivity among peoples and cultures and thus is a force for positive social change, others have argued that the Internet simply mirrors the diversity and differences that encompass our day to day reality; cyberspace is simply an extension of the contexts from which it is accessed. Two innovations linked with the Internet are the tool’s ability to make marginal voices seem central, and as well, to interrupt traditional mechanisms for verifying the authority of a text or author. These factors are particularly challenging in Muslim contexts where textual/religious authority often shares an organic relationship with political authority. Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson have described the significance of the Internet revolution in Muslim contexts in terms of a “reintellectualization of Islam.” Reintellectualization is defined as “presenting Islamic doctrine and discourse in accessible, vernacular terms, even if this contributes to basic reconfigurations of doctrine and practice” (Eickelman and Anderson, 1999, p. 12). In Muslim cyberspace, we see that “Islamic discourse has[... ] become accessible to significantly wider publics, it has also become framed in styles of reasoning and forms of argument that draw on wider, less exclusive or erudite bodies of knowledge, including those of applied science and engineering” (Eickelman and Anderson, p. 12). In this sense, the Islamic Internet revolution is really more of a “reformation” than a “renaissance” because it is rejuvenating processes of religious and legal reasoning and community, but in ways that subvert classical notions of authority. In the classical definition, authority with which to rightly guide a Muslim community should be embodied in a select group of specialists, gifted with special knowledge, of a closed cannon of texts (Quran, Sunna and the derivation of Shariah from these sources). The publicly recognized and legitimated Ulama (learned ones) should establish the laws and directives for any community.

As examined in the case studies offered below, a reintellectualization of Islam and community made possible by the Internet results in hybrid collectives, virtually sustained, where power and identity are shaped by new forces of Muslim consciousness and authority, but not without contest. In these cases, we see that the Internet enables a fringe movement, Al-Qaeda, to re-define the umma (Muslim community), as well as to invite counter-discourses by Muslims who object to Bin Laden’s reintellectualization of Islam. Case two illustrates how the Muslim mainstream is taking advantage of the online fatwa service at the Islamicity web site to make sense of the Internet revolution, and its implications for proper Muslim conduct both in and out of cyberspace. In case three, we see how in an attempt to foster community among gays in Egypt, one web site, gayegypt.com, in the end provided Egyptian state security forces with a map of gay “territories”, with which the state re-enforced the status quo, which considers homosexuality debauchery. In response, the gay community has used the Internet to launch a series of protests and boycotts against the government of Egypt and has involved International Human Rights organizations and the world media in their quest for sexual freedom, or at least sexual privacy.

Thus in this analysis, we see that the Internet is a vehicle for change, as well as a tool with which to maintain the status quo. It’s a vehicle for the voice of the small, at the same time that it is a tool of the state security apparatus (the strong). It is a technology that both supports and interrupts Islamic social values. This essay does not attempt to explain away these tensions but rather uses them as a means for critiquing the ethical foundations of Muslim cyberpractices from
a variety of perspectives. In this way we can grasp both the positive and the negative side of a Western conceived technology’s impact in a Muslim cultural milieu. This analysis takes us beyond a simple “clash of civilizations” approach to a more ethnographic view of the brackish middle ground between the two camps; to that place in which Muslim cultures adopt and adapt Internet technologies to their own needs, values, and worldviews.

None of these case studies alone fully captures Muslim ideas of community in the Internet age. Together, they illustrate a spectrum of attempts to sort through the multiplicity of possibilities. On the extreme right, we have a coalition of underground Islamist groups (al-Qaida) who act and organize in the name of Islam, often using web based technologies to coordinate, recruit, and distribute their ideas of community and calls for action. On the left of center, we have gay Muslim men using the Internet to reconcile their religious beliefs and sexual orientation, and to seek community with others of their orientation, a particularly risky enterprise, in conservative Islamic societies. And in the middle, we have the Muslim mainstream, who are using the Internet and “Ask the Imam” web sites to figure out how to live in the digital age, in an Islamic way, often in the Diaspora, in societies that are not necessarily supportive of, if not openly hostile to, Muslim ways of life. Some general principles and useful starting points for future research emerge from this spectrum of views. Although I don’t want to suggest that being gay is like being a terrorist, or that cyberdating is like being gay, we do see similarities in how the Internet supports varying levels of typically “un-Islamic,” behavior from the more benign, yet far reaching mixing across gender lines to the more specialized and pernicious act of terror. At the same time, we see that the Internet supports discussion and consensus building which is the essence of the Muslim idea of shura. The Internet also serves to break down some of the barriers and misunderstandings between Muslims and non-Muslims, and often aids in the promotion of the religion both by enhancing Muslims’ observance of their religion, and as well, by promoting conversion (da’wa). In the end, the one message we can take away from this analysis is that just as religion is a tool subject to many uses and effects, so to is the Internet. Thus, just as there are as many expressions of Islam as there are believers, there is a parallel possibility of as many uses of the Internet as there are those with access.

SECTION 1: TERRORISM, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE ETHIC OF RESPONSIBILITY
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One of the problems with knowing how to respond to security issues raised by Black Tuesday, September 11, 2001, is that the technologies that made it possible were a latent part of everyday life. When used ethically, or “normally,” or as they were intended to be used, technologies like the Internet, cell phones, credit cards, rental cars, airplanes, and box cutters make life efficient, pleasurable, and democratic. In the case of the al-Qa’eda movement, we see an Islamic movement whose definitions of community, and the antithesis, “combine two seemingly incompatible sources of strength: a conservative interpretation of Islam and a comfort with aspects of the modern world that have given birth to a highly mobile, popular, wealthy, technologically savvy transnational enterprise” (DeYoung and Dobbs, Washington Post, September 16, 2001 www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A382132001Sep15)
Brian Jenkins, a terrorism expert at the Rand Corporation observes, “What is extraordinary about this episode is that these people were preparing for their missions for months, leading normal lives with wives, taking the garbage out, taking kids to McDonalds, taking flying lessons, living in comparatively pleasant places, all the while knowing that on some date they were going to kill themselves and thousands of people” (Quoted in Washington Post, September 16, 2001).

The case of the al-Qaeda movement illustrates how the Internet can aid in the perpetration of un-Islamic behavior (terrorism). Bin Laden’s speeches and communiqés, often distributed over the Internet to operatives worldwide, argue that it is a duty of every Muslim to resist American citizens and interests wherever they exist, and by any means necessary, including violence. At the same time, the Internet supports the Islamic process of seeking knowledge and enlightened debate, in this case, as a forum for Muslims (and non-Muslims) critiquing al-Qaeda’s definition of Islam, so as to reappropriate images and definitions of Muslim community. This process of consensus building through discussion of differing opinions is at the heart of Islamic concept of *ijma’* which aims to construct knowledge and rightly guided understanding through enlightened debate. How Muslim communities respond to these contradictory capabilities of the Internet is the subject of the sections that follow.

**Black Tuesday and the use of Islam**

Islam is the professed religion of those involved in the al-Qa’idah (the base) movement, headed by Osama Bin Laden. As demonstrated below, it is a brand of Islam not embraced by the majority of Muslims. Al-Qa’ida is allegedly responsible for the World Trade Center and Pentagon attack, as well as the bombing of the US embassy in Kenya, the U.S.S. Cole bombing in Yemen, the Khobar Tower’s bombing in Saudi Arabia, and the bombing of the World Trade Center basement several years prior to Black Tuesday. The two documents analyzed in this section enable us to grasp the role of Islam within the movement, as well as to begin to understand the particularistic world view of al-Qa’ida members. Al-Qa’ida, Bin Laden’s network organization has cells in an estimated 30-60 countries. Despite geographic diversity, this is a tightly networked and socialized movement. Hatred of the United States is a prime unifying factor, as is guerilla and ideological training in Afghani camps, and a heavy dose of religious teachings by sheikh Bin Laden, who is viewed by members of the movement as the new caliph (ruler) of Islam.

Bin Laden’s writings demonstrate a hybridization of Islam. In the Ladenese Epistle (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A4342-2001Sep21?language=printer>) Bin Laden declares war on “the Americans occupying the land of the two holy places” in Saudi Arabia. The text begins with the customary witnessing, or shahada, that states that there is no God but God and Muhamad is his messenger. He cites verses from the Quran, including a passage from Sura An-Nisa, (4:1) in which Muslims are reminded to guard their ties of kinship. Another verse cited (al-Imran, 3:110) expresses a desire for reform and God’s direction in facilitating reform. There is a call to all Muslims to heed the Prophet’s words that they will be punished by God if they “see the oppressor and yet fail to restrain him” (Ladenese Epistle, p. 1).
Bin Laden uses the Quran to define the boundaries of Muslim community in terms of oppressor (America) and oppressed (Muslim believers everywhere who are bound together by kinship networks). He uses the Quran to motivate believers to be vigilant in their opposition to America.

The Epistle argues, “clearly after belief, there is no more important duty than pushing the American enemy out of the holy land” (Ladenese Epistle, p. 2). Bin Laden cites Ibn Taymiyyah, a well-known Classical Islamic reformist, to support his call to action against the United States. Inspired by Ibn Taymiyyah, Bin Laden claims “to fight in defense of religion and belief is a collective duty.” He elaborates that “the enemy should be fought with one’s best abilities.” Elsewhere Bin Laden has been quoted as saying, “You cannot defeat the heretic with this book alone [Quran], you have to show them the fist” (Quoted in Washington Post, September 18, 2001). In 1998, Bin Laden was quoted as saying that in terms of weapons of mass destruction, “If I seek to acquire such weapons, this is a religious duty, and how we use them is up to us” (Washington Post, <www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/binladen/words.html>). In these passages, we see that Bin Laden advocates armed struggle, and reserves little space for dialogue and compromise with the West.

The second half of this document is a call to action against the leadership of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, who are said to have committed two mortal sins (suspension of the Islamic Shariah, and allowing “the American crusader forces to occupy the land”) and nine other sins. Prominent among them are intimidation, human rights violations of Islamist community and oppositional leaders, using the state run media as a dis-information tool, the state’s inability to provide basic human services to the population of Saudi Arabia, and the state’s failure to run a viable economy.

In document 2, “Jihad against Jews and Crusaders,” written February 23, 1998, Bin Laden clarifies his call to action by stating, “The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilian and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Holy Mosque (Mecca) from their grip” (http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A4993-2001Sep21?language=printer). Here we see the agenda of liberation broadened to include not only Saudi Arabia, but Palestine as well. He explains in this document, “All these crimes and sins committed by the Americans are a clear declaration of war on God, his messenger, and Muslims” (Bin Laden, 1998, p. 1). Citing Medieval commentary, Bin Laden argues that “nothing is more sacred than belief, except repulsing an enemy who is attacking religion and life” (Bin Laden, 1998, p. 2). The call to action, in this document is quite explicit. Bin Laden states, “We (al-Qa’i’dah)—with God’s help—call on every Muslim who believes in God and wishes to be rewarded to comply with God’s order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it” (Bin Laden, 1998, p. 2).

History is rife with examples of the exploitation of God and religion in the service of war and destruction: the Crusades, Nazism, the Armenian holocaust, ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Bin Laden and his al-Qa’i’dah movement provide another illustration of the ways in which technology and religion are tools subject to many uses. In terms of Muslim
community, we see that Bin Laden has defined his war in terms of the Americans and their allies on one side, (Zionists, and the regimes of the Arab world who collaborate and cooperate with the “crusaders and Zionists”) and all believing Muslims, the ummah, on the other. He calls into question the faith of any Muslim who is not willing to kill the enemy (which includes any American, men, women, children, the enemy’s military forces, its financial resources, as well as anyone who collaborates with the enemy) wherever and whenever they are able. He also says that anyone who is able to take a stand for their faith will be richly rewarded in the world to come (the afterlife), while those too weak in their faith to do so will be punished.

While al-Qa’idah remains a fringe movement within the big picture of Muslim consciousness and action, unfortunately, as Fawaz A. Gerges observes, “Bin Laden’s rhetoric has sunk deep roots in Arab soil. Hatred toward American foreign policy has become solidly entrenched in Arab popular culture as well as intellectual circles. Public discourse in the mosques and newspapers is full of references to America’s legacy of aggression, manipulation, and subjugation of the Arabs [...] Arab children are being indoctrinated to hate Americans, thus providing a fertile breeding ground for Bin Laden’s foot soldiers” (www.csmonitor.com/2001/0918/p9sl-coop.html).

*The Muslim Community Responds*

The shock of Black Tuesday has invited much Muslim commentary on Bin Laden’s definitions of Islam and community. Even Islamist conservatives, like Yusif al-Qaradawi, who incidentally has his own web site, (www.Islam-online.org), and who may share in Bin Laden’s indictment of the West and its corrupting presence in the Muslim world, strictly condemn al-Qa’idah’s advocacy of violence. In Qaradawi’s words, “Islam, the religion of tolerance, holds the human soul in high esteem, and considers an attack against innocent human beings a grave sin” (Yusif al-Qaradawi, www.islamonline.net/English/News/2001-09/13/article25.shtml.). Qaradawi supports his interpretation with a verse of the Quran, “Whosoever kills a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind, and whosoever saves the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind” (Al-Ma’dah: 32). Qaradawi then draws from the Sunna and explains that The Prophet (PBUH), is reported to have said, “A believer remains within the scope of his religion as long as he doesn’t kill another person illegally.”

This same spirit of condemnation of Bin Laden’s views and actions by Muslims around the world is documented on listserves, in online discussions, on television, in the print media. On the Islamicity web site (www.islam.org), a discussion session yields the following words of comfort and condemnation:

*I don’t know where to begin [...] I just want to say to all those people whose lives have been shattered, that my heart bleeds for you. Nothing justifies the killing of innocent people. What a cowardly, shameful, and horrendous act. To top it all off, they claim to do it for the sake of God. God has nothing to do with it; they only follow their vain desires. May Allah grant you the strength, patience and perseverance to live through this difficult time. Amen. –A Muslim
Echoing these sentiments, Imam Isak-el-M. Pasha, a Muslim chaplain with the New York Police Department is quoted in the Washington Post as saying, “those who do these dastardly deeds claim our faith […] We are Muslims, but we are Americans. We stand with our country against all who would come against us. We are members of one human community, one human worth (Washington Post, September 24). A Kuwaiti colleague who is Muslim sent me the following email, which provides yet another demonstration of Muslims around the world denouncing this event:

_I really can’t believe what’s happened in the USA last Tuesday. It’s too big a tragedy to understand. The United States has been targeted by a ruthless and dastardly attacker, and many innocent people have been killed. In all my thoughts and prayers, I’m with all the people of the USA, all the victims[... ] and I know all people in the whole world are in their thoughts with victims of the tragic and barbaric crime that was committed on 9-11-2001. It will never be forgotten. This is such an enormous loss of innocent lives through mindless violence [… ] The people of Kuwait still are in a state of shock. No one could believe ever that something that horrible could be initiated against the mother of democracy, the USA._

(E-mail correspondence Sept. 17, 2001).

The Internet provides not only a means by which terrorists can organize and create acts of violence in the name of religion, it also sustains electronic communities in which acts of violence and hatred can be condemned and discussed openly so as to build trust and understanding among people of different faiths and geographic regions. At the same time that Bin Laden’s rhetoric represents a “reintellectualization” of Islam, the critical response to his words and actions from Muslims around the world evoke a “counter-reintellectualization” of Islam. The Internet makes both possible. It opens our eyes to the contested nature of Muslim community in the 21st century. The collapse of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 represents the establishment of a new era in global politics. No longer can we consider the extreme rhetoric of a fringe religious movement peripheral. We have a duty to take such musings seriously and to be better informed about the ways in which the definition of community in the Internet age is facilitated, often at the expense of large majorities who would otherwise dominate, in both voice and physical presence.

SECTION 2: IS IT A SIN TO SURF? (Return to Index)

_Muslim Cyber-dating and the Possibilities of Internet Led Change_

This second case study provides an analysis of postings to an “Ask the Imam” service on the Islamicity web site (www.islam.org). Unlike the Al-Qaeda movement’s use of the web, which is specialized, clandestine, and marginal in scope (but not impact), the Ask the Imam postings are broad, open and central (although more hidden in terms of impact) to the Muslim community world wide. Online fatwa services are the most demanded service in Muslim cyberspace, according to a recent article by Matthias Brückner, and Islamicity’s web based question and answer postings on Islamic guidance provide more fatwas than any other site in cyberspace (Matthias Brückner, “Islamicity: Creating an Islamic Cybersociety,” in ISIM Newsletter, 8, 2001,
A fatwa is a ruling by a faqih (one trained in Islamic jurisprudence) on an issue of specific concern, usually requiring some improvisation or interpretation of classical sources in light of modern circumstance. For example, fatwas were issued by the fuqaha (plural of faqih) of Saudi Arabia in 1991 to allow American servicewomen to drive on U.S. military bases in the kingdom, even though it is illegal for Saudi and other expatriot women to drive in the rest of the Kingdom. This analysis uses online fatwas concerning the Internet and Cyberdating to illustrate a more mainstream example of Muslim community building in the digital age.

What we learn from this analysis is that for the majority of Muslims, the Internet does not equal a wild frontier where religious sensibilities are set aside. Instead, cyberpractices are to be governed by the same kind of ethical principles that guide “real” life. We can glimpse some of the challenges for Muslim ideas of community in postings on Ask the Imam Web sites. This section focuses on postings to the Islamicity web site. This site hosts 12 million visitors annually, 78,000 emails received and 45,000 Dawa (proselytizing) pages. Brückner’s analysis tracked the growth of this industry and found that in 1999, there were 10,000 online fatwas world wide. By 2000, the number of online fatwas had grown to 14,000. For the years 2001-2002, the numbers are expected to rise exponentially. The Islamicity web site is responsible for providing more than half of all online fatwas (Brückner, 2001, p. 17).

There are several ways to use the online fatwa service provided by Islamicity. One can pose a question, or simply browse the archive of other people’s questions and answers. There are two ways to browse. One way is through keyword searches. Another way is by examining all of the rulings in a particular category, like “women,” “marriage,” or “prayer.” For the purposes of this analysis, I focus on fatwas concerning the issue of cyberdating. This issue was selected because it encapsulates Muslim efforts to manage science, technology and religion questions in a fundamental and practical way of applying ethical understanding, legal reasoning, and knowledge to real world issues in everyday life.

The Quran and Islamic legal interpretation has generally considered the separation of genders outside marital and blood relations a necessity, given the natural tendency of human beings toward sexual appetite. These traditions have shaped, in some contemporary Muslim societies more strongly than others have, interactions (or the lack thereof) between the sexes at school, in public, at work. The advent of cyberspace, and cyberdating raises serious questions about Muslim conduct online. Are interactions between men and women online haram? (forbidden) If men and women are not “really” interacting in a physical way, but rather a virtual way, wouldn’t this be jaza (permissible)? What if people send pictures of themselves to cyberchatters, or meet in private chat rooms? What if people who meet online agree to meet in person as the relationship progresses? What of the intimacy possible between two people, the secrets and mysteries that are shared and unraveled in the relatively anonymous spaces online? Such intimacy, outside of marriage, and between relative strangers is highly atypical in Islamic societies. If people become accustomed to such deeply personal relationships with people they hardly know in cyberspace, what will be the spill-over effects in real life? These are some of the questions that motivate this analysis.
Most of the rulings suggest that the same kind of ethical principles that govern relations between the genders in the physical world, apply to Muslim interactions in cyberspace. And yet, the ease with which gender boundaries are transgressed in cyberspace already suggests a significant transformation in normal social structures. The fact that non-Muslims created this technology makes the need to come to terms with and manage its ability to change Muslim culture all the more pertinent. The evidence of questions and concerns about how to behave “Islamically” in cyberspace imply a new set of relationships and possibilities that require questioning and adaptation. As is not surprising to Islamicists, Imams try to absorb new technologies and relationships into pre-existing and traditional frameworks of Muslim ethical behavior. The question “what would the Prophet (PBUH) do/say in this situation (the sunna)” or “what do the legal commentaries provide as guidance (fiqh)” is the ultimate question for interpretation. Sometimes a verse (ay’ya) from a chapter (sura) of the Quran is provided, if relevant. Other times an Imam offers his expert opinion as social critic without drawing from classical sources. This hybridization of Islamic social commentary enables online Imams and their patrons to deduce from a rich tradition of rules and inspirations, an Islamically sanctioned response to technological and social innovations, as well as new cultural stimuli brought about by forces of globalization. In this way we see a “reintellectualization” of Islam where classical understandings are updated and spiced with modern commentary and innovation; where an Imam in Beirut can sit with his computer and take on the cares and concerns of Muslim brothers and sisters around the world, often responding to questions and issues that are too sensitive or embarrassing to be communicated under normal circumstances.

1. The Internet

The Internet itself is a questionable technology for Muslims, or any religiously minded community. It is a technology that has been used to support rings of child pornographers, to launder money, to commit fraud and other ethically questionable behavior. The Imams at Islamicity fatwa service have responded in creative ways to their patrons’ attempts to deal with the Internet as a social phenomenon. Most of the rulings treat the Internet as a tool that is subject to both proper and improper usage. It is the responsibility of the user to make sure that they employ the tool in accordance with Muslim guidelines. What are the proper Muslim ways to use the Internet? Question 492 which was posted in 1997 asks what the Imam thinks of the Internet, because another faqih, Brother Yusif, has said that the Internet “is like a web, and people are attached to it like flies.” In other words, it is a dangerous trap. The Imam from Islamicity replies:

Regarding your question, the Internet, like T.V., newspaper, radio, books, videos, and other methods of acquiring knowledge, is a mean not a goal in itself. Can we say that T.V. is bad? A T.V. is an instrument [...] It is what people make out of them that make these tools good or bad. If people spend time on them to learn about religion, to discuss educational topics, to do research, then the way Internet is being used is totally acceptable and is even encouraged.

The Imam explains in the rest of the passage that which constitutes misuse by noting: “those who forget about their responsibilities towards God, towards their own selves, towards their
families, and spend endless hours behind a screen without any purpose” these are the people who misuse the Internet (www.islamicity.org, question 492.0, Topic: Internet, 1997-01-20). Another person writes in (Ask the Imam question 3416) “According to Shari’ah, is it permissible to be an Internet Service Provider?” The Imam replies, “Internet is a modern technique of communication and its use is not prohibited in Shari’ah […] The using of the Internet for some unlawful activities does not render all the Internet services as prohibited.” Moreover, “the person using the Internet […] will be responsible for using them for unlawful activities,” not the service provider. When asked to describe what the Imams might want to censure on the Internet, they responded, “the list will certainly be lengthy. For starters, the Internet is renown for pornography, and the promotion of various forms of immorality. A censure of all such material would certainly be welcomed, for obvious reasons” (Question # 3415, Society and Culture).

2. Chat Rooms and Cyberdating

One area of great concern among Muslim youths is the issue of online chatting. Often youths join chat rooms with the specific intention of interacting with members of the opposite sex. Does the Shari’ah allow or discourage this? Several of the questions on the Ask the Imam service addressed this question directly. As in the rulings regarding the Internet, where the permissibility of the technology depends on the use, the Imams argue that chatting online can be Islamically sanctioned, if Muslims conduct themselves properly. There are different sets of criteria offered by the Imams. For example, a general explanation of whether or not “to chat” the Imams observe:

*Each case should be judged according to its context and content. If you see that you are increasing your Islamic knowledge through the channel, then go ahead and log on, otherwise, if you feel you are wasting your time, then it is better to do other beneficial things. The best advice we can give you is to have a purpose in logging on these chat channels, such as to learn about a topic, to ask a question, or to enlighten others about Islam (Question 966.0, Chat).*

If one is obtaining or giving knowledge about Islam, then chatting with the opposite sex is ok.

What if one is joining chat rooms for the express purpose of interacting across gender lines? The Imams also offer advice. First they note that they have “reservations” about Internet relationships. They explain that often when relationships progress in cyberspace, there comes a time when two people want to find out if they are really compatible in person, and “this often involves long distance traveling between family members who want to get to know each other.” Moreover, “it is difficult to check on the other person’s background.” (Question 3099, Chat). Likewise, “relationships over cyberspace have been very common but many of them end with great disappointment.” (Question 3146) One of the important reservations is the fact that “Islam does not allow dating.” The Imams note:

*Muslims take pride in not dating because it preserves the sanctity, dignity, respect and chastity of the human being... In addition, even if dating didn’t involve sexual relations, all the acts that dating may lead a couple to do, such as being alone in secluded areas, touching,
kissing, etc. between non-married couples are prohibited and condemned in Islam… .Islam encourages marriage, ethical behavior, and the preservation of the family, and dating contradicts with one or all of these goals (Question 3099, Chat).

This explanation of why dating is not allowed in Islam still leaves the question of cyberdating's permissibility unanswered, as on the Internet, kissing, sexual relations, and touching are not physically possible. Therefore, from this perspective, maybe cyberdating is a good thing for Muslims. They can interact with the opposite sex, while not engaging in acts that Islam forbids.

The Imams at Islamicity have a consistent response to such questions. The ultimate litmus test is human intention. If the couple sincerely intends to get married, then cyberdating is allowed, assuming several guidelines are observed:

1) You have the true and sincere intention to get married and you are communicating with him (or her) only to get to know them better.
2) Your communication with him (or her) is kept at an extreme high level of respect and morals.
3) You should inform your parents about what is happening with you.
4) You should not delay any plans to get married for too long (Question 3146, Chat).

The Imams distinguish between the natural interaction between two people who are seeking knowledge about one another with the intention of getting married, and flirting or interacting with the opposite sex with no real goal in mind. Even in the former case, where people are interacting with the intention of finding a suitable mate, strict rules of conduct apply. According to the Imams, "while getting to know each other, the adult couple has to be in the presence of other people and never in seclusion. The couple has to respect the Islamic guidelines, and both of them have to realize that they are together for the purpose of getting married in the future and not for having fun" (Question 3099, Chat). The idea that the genders should not be together in seclusion until marriage is one of the key principles that makes cyberspace such an important Muslim frontier, especially for youths. The main concern with cyberdating, however, is that young people might waste their time “playing” with strangers they never intend to meet; or meeting with people they bond with in cyberspace but don’t intend to marry. All of these distractions and risks keep both the Imams and their clients skeptical about the effects of cyber-activities between genders.

A good summary of this ambivalence comes in response to question 1724, where a young Muslim woman writes in to ask about cyber-chatting across gender lines and its effects on Muslim society. The Imams reply:

_The speed by which technology is developing is so overwhelming and it is getting hard to write guidelines that stay valid because soon they become outdated… The best thing we can tell those Muslims and non-Muslims involved in the Information technology revolution is to limit their usage of it to beneficial subjects. Also, there are classical cases of disappointments_
between couples who have met on the net because once they meet physically, they were behaving totally different than they represented themselves originally. There are indeed no substitutions to human physical contact. Also, Muslims should remember that if they want to learn about Islam, it is extremely important that they frequently go to the mosques and also form groups where they meet and increase their knowledge (Question 1724, Chat Line).

This passage provides glimpses of the most pertinent guidelines for imagining Islamic community in the Information age. First is the sense that Islamic values are forced to contend with rapid technological change; the kind of changes which can interrupt norms while leaving little space and time for improvisation. Second is that sense that traditional ways of doing business, face to face, whether it’s trading livestock, arranging marriages, or praying, are still the best for Muslims. With that said, new technologies do have something positive to add to Muslim communal life. As illustrated here, they can help to promote marriage and family values by facilitating the safe interaction among men and women looking for partners. Moreover, the cyber chat rooms are often sites of conversion, where witnesses are occasionally hearing testimonies of faith (the Shahada) thus bringing new Muslims into the fold. Islam is at present the fastest growing religion in the world, the second largest religion in the United States, and the dominant religion in more than 20 countries. The Internet has helped to bolster this global presence. In addition, the Internet, as demonstrated by the Ask the Imam service of the Islamicity web site, can help Muslims and non-Muslims to learn about this highly intricate and delicate social and ethical system, which has withstood centuries of innovation and adaptation to changing technological circumstance.

SECTION 3: BEING GAY AND MUSLIM, HOW THE INTERNET CAN HELP, AND HURT (Return to Index)

On Friday, May 11, 2001, State security police in Egypt arrested 55 men accused of “defiling Islam” with debauchery. These men had been dancing at the Queen Boat Disco, a three-story floating houseboat located across the street from the Marriott Hotel Zamalek, the night they were arrested. The Queen Boat, situated on the Nile, along with a cluster of other houseboat based restaurants, coffeehouses and Discos in this posh Cairo neighborhood, is known as a gay gathering place, although its clientele is not strictly homosexual. Foreigners present were not arrested, and neither were heterosexual couples present that evening. At least four straight men who were unaccompanied by women were taken into custody as well. Although homosexuality is not tolerated in Egypt, and gays have been arrested and harassed in the past, this crackdown is unprecedented. Two factors make this case different: one is the use of the Internet both by gay Muslim communities and subsequently, by state security forces, to define and crack down on alternative Muslim communities in Egypt. Second, and perhaps more importantly, is the interweaving of a reinterpretation of Islam, and a human rights agenda, linking several of those arrested. Sherif Hassan Farahat, 31, an engineer, arrested and sentenced to five years in prison, is the supposed founder of the “Agency of God’s Soldiers” movement, a Gay-Muslim cult of Lot. He was one of the dozens arrested that night. This case study uses the Queen Boat controversy as an opportunity to consider Islam’s responses to homosexuality, gay Muslim counter-responses
Homosexuality and Islam

The story of Lot, mentioned several times in the Quran is the foundational text for deriving Muslim attitudes towards homosexuality. In sura al Shu’ara (The Poets) verses 166-173 we read:

“Of all the creatures in the world, do you men have carnal relations with members of your own sex—and shun women, whom God has created to be your partners? Your perversion puts you beyond the pale of society and humanity; you are indeed a people given to extreme transgression.” And the people of Lot said, “O Lot! If you do not desist from your objection to us, we will banish you from this city.” Lot said to them: “Like anyone with any sense, I abhor what you do. Oh my Lord! Deliver me and my family from the evil that these men do!”

In Sura 7 verses 81-82 of the Quran reads:

We sent Lot to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, saying: “O my people! Will you continue to tread the evil path of sexual perversion, the likes of which no other community in history has witnessed? “In order to satisfy your lust, you sleep with men rather than women. Man’s innate disposition is towards the opposite gender; by lying with those of the same sex, you have corrupted your own souls and denied womenfolk their rights. Indeed you have transgressed far beyond the bounds of propriety.”

Contemporary Muslim commentary online has used these passages to denounce homosexuality. Shabir Ally notes:

This (the story of Lot) is mentioned in the Quran, not only for the sake of information, but mainly to serve as a warning to anyone who dares to repeat such acts... If one feels a tendency to do something that God prohibits, he or she should seek help from a community of loving, caring, believers who would understand his or her difficulty and help him or her to overcome it.” (“Common Questions People Ask About Islam, http://www.themodernreligion.com/misc/sex/s_homo.htm).

Similarly, M. Siddiqui observes:

Since God condemns homosexuality, then we have to believe that a man or a woman with homosexual feelings is expected to behave like any other human being and follow God’s laws if he/she truly believes in them. He/she shall resist his/her feelings, maintain abstinence, use all available resources of help including medical, social, and behavioral therapies to overcome their behavior and feelings. They should pray to God to help them getting over it and submit to God’s law that sees homosexuality as gross sin” (“Homosexuality and Islam,” www.submission.org/sex/homosexuality.html).
The Hadith literature is even more explicit in its condemnation of homosexuality. The Prophet Muhammad is said to have commanded, “Kill them [homosexuals] wherever you find them” (www.gay.net/cruise/home_queerjihad_000201.html). Another hadith observes “Lut’s [Lot] people did kill the one who’s doing it, and kill the one it’s being done to” (gaytoday.badpuppy.com/garchive/world/010600wo.htm). The hadith literature also observes, “Homosexuals should be thrown off the tops of high buildings or cliffs” and “you should drive them (effeminate men or masculine women) from your homes and families” (gaytoday.badpuppy.com/garchive/world/010600wo.htm). While the Quran and Hadith literature is unambiguous in their condemnation of homosexuality, to some, such teachings are antiquated, inauthentic (especially hadith that advocate killing) and subject to multiple readings. These critiques of classical sources on homosexuality have especially found favor among gay Muslim communities in cyberspace that are trying to find ways to reconcile their sexual preference with their faith.

Gay Muslim Cyberspaces and the Challenge of Islamic Orthodoxy

The Internet enables gay Muslims to begin to talk about their sexual orientation in light of their religious convictions. Before the Internet opened up public discourse on the subject, many gay Muslims felt that they were alone. One gay man from Cairo explains, “When I first had these feelings, I thought I was the only one. Then I met someone, and we thought we were the only two. Slowly we found our way into the community” (Joshua Hammer, “Gay Egypt in the Dock,” Newsweek, 11 February, 2002, p. 22). Regardless of the emerging unity of gay Muslims on the ground, and in cyberspace, Sulayman X, founder of the QueerJihad web site observes:

Much work needs to be done, especially among queer Muslims. The unbending condemnation of homosexual activity is so ingrained that most cannot even begin to conceive of how they can remain true to Islam and yet be true to themselves, much less live an openly gay life. Many view their homosexuality as a test from God that must be struggled with each and every day, a never-ending source of frustration and travails. All too often the only way out of this intense psychological pain is to abandon Islam—whether one wishes to do so or not. Some would argue—as I do—that it is possible to be a good Muslim and a gay person, that there is no inherent contradiction between the two. Islam is only hurting itself when it shames and silences its gay sons and lesbian daughters, when it refuses to deal with the question of sexuality, when it relies on interpretations handed down hundreds of years ago to answer challenges posed by today’s world (www.gay.net/cruise/home_queerjihad_000201.html).

Chat rooms, listserves, message boards, and web sites, dating services and alternative historical analysis of homosexuality in Islam, support for dealing with family pressures, and advice about coming out, or not, are all found in gay Muslim cyberspace. Also present are reintellectualizations of the Quran and the Sunna, which aim to carve out spaces for gay Muslim existence within the umma (community of the faithful). The Internet is a relatively safe gathering space, where anonymity is provided, along with community. Lakshmi Chaudhry observes:
Living in countries where homosexuality is a crime often punishable by death, gay Muslims are finding refuge on the Internet. From Malaysia to Iran, gay men and women are joining each other in a virtual way. Sites created by gay Muslims living in the United States offer a safe and anonymous space for a community that lives in constant fear of being discovered (http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/2000/05/35896).

One Iranian Lesbian, founder of the Khanaye Doost (www.geocities.com/khanaye_doost/welcome.html) online community for Iranian Lesbians observes, “The Internet really helped me come out—at least to myself. Almost by accident I found all these gay sites. I realized there is this whole family out there” (http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/2000/05/35896). One guestbook entry on 1/26/2002 notes, “This is great, a way of knowing we’re not alone and that there are other Iranian women out there who share similar emotions and experiences to ours.” The founder of the Al-Fatiha organization, Fisal Alam, observes, “The Internet can help make a dent in the orthodox community’s refusal to acknowledge the existence of gay Muslims” (www.al-fatiha.net).

In spite of the positive and nurturing community cyberspace offers gay Muslims, the realities on the ground in Muslim societies remain difficult, if not dangerous as the following warning on the “Gay Persia” (www.geocities.com/gay_persia/index.htm) web site suggests, WARNING >> meeting a total stranger off the Internet could be dangerous anywhere in the world. In Iran, in which gayness and lesbianism is officially illegal and punishable, this danger is much more. This does not mean you should freak out! you gotta be only pretty cautious. Get to know the person, either through chatting, emailing or telephone. Do not rush to meet after few correspondences. See if the person you are about to meet knows any of your friends. Never mention your friend’s name, last name or your address to her/him. Meet in a public place and in daytime and in a busy spot. Remember you are taking a risk to meet a new friend. Try to make it as less risky as you can!

The Queen Boat Controversy provides another illustration of the tensions between the liberating effects of cyberspace and the continued domination of “real” power arenas by states, religious orthodoxies, and public hostility in the Islamic world towards homosexuality.

The Queen Boat Controversy and gayegypt.com

Homosexuality in Egypt is not new, but it is more visible today than ever before. Local and global media attention to the Queen Boat arrest and trial that occurred in the last eight months of 2001 is drawing homosexuality in Egypt into an increasingly public forum. The gayegypt.com web site has been “a key organization coordinating support and information for the 52 men arrested at the Queen Boat raid in May, 2001” (www.gayegypt.com/mideastim17a1.html). It has made an open plea to the International community, “Boycott Egypt—Don’t Finance Torture,” in response to the State Security police’s treatment of the men arrested. It also has archived local and international media coverage of the controversy in Arabic, English, Italian, French, German, and a number of other languages. The site administrator estimates that Gayegypt.com gets more than 3000 hits a day in the wake of the controversy, although many inside Egypt are increasingly hesitant to log
on, given the warning, appended in May 2001, that Egyptian State Security Police are monitoring the site. Still, 40 percent of all traffic to the site comes from inside Egypt. A warning to not log on to the site frequently and from the same address appears on the site (www.gayegypt.com). Ironically, the gayegypt.com web site may have helped the Egyptian government to crack down on gay activists in Cairo. The events surrounding the arrest and sentencing of 52 gay men in Egypt, as well as Egyptian society’s response to the controversy reveal the tensions between traditional Islamic values and the new informational and sexual freedoms possible in cyberspace.

The gayegypt.com web site gives a brief history of homosexuality in Egypt with references to Ancient Egypt, Roman times, the time of Salah el-Din, Muhammad Ali, and even a narrative of E.M. Forster’s first gay sexual experience, which occurred with an Egyptian peasant in 1917. The site suggests that homosexuality is a “normal” yet neglected part of the region’s cultural identity. The founder of the gayegypt.com web site estimates that nearly 10 percent of the Egyptian population is either openly or privately gay (www.gayegypt.com/mideastim17al.html). Professor Josette Abdalla of American University in Cairo argues that homosexuality is becoming more visible in Egypt in part because of new communications technologies. She observes, “more exposure to mass media, western influences and more access to papers, satellite dishes and TV” and the Internet, “make Egyptians more aware of their own sexuality” (Lilian Lang, “Hiding Themselves in the Crowd,” Middle East Times, Issue 33, 1999). Similarly, Ted Swedenburg, Professor of Anthropology at University of Arkansas, observes:

In the past, it (homosexuality) was not very much talked about, but it was more accepted. Now, homosexuality is more visible and causing more reaction. The reaction is more of a backlash. Instead of becoming more liberal, society is becoming more conservative [……] It is easier to deal with things when they remain out of sight (www.gayegytp.com/newrepongayi.html).

The founder of the gayegypt.com web site adds:

Views about one’s own sexuality depend on attitudes and availability of information within society. Many Egyptians have never even heard the word “gay.” At the same time, however, it is clear that the Internet and ironically, recent media coverage will force more and more Egyptians to reflect on their sexual identity” (Middle East Times, “Interview with Ali From gayegypt.com, 17 August, 2001).

Adding support to the notion that the Internet is aiding in gay activism in Egypt, Joshua Hammer observes, “Dozens of Internet chat rooms have started up, allowing gay men to establish support networks, organize parties, and arrange dates” (Newsweek, 11 February, 2001, p. 22). In part, the Queen Boat crackdown “reflects government concern about growing freedom of expression in Egypt—fueled by the proliferation of Internet chat rooms and web sites beyond the regime’s control” (Newsweek, 11 February, 2001, p. 23).

The gayegypt.com web site symbolizes the government’s concern about the growth of
homosexual discourse and awareness in Egypt. The home page features links to media reports covering gay issues in Egypt, a city by city guide to Egypt’s gay scene, personal ads, with links to cities all over the world, gay stories, gay Arabic (key terms), and a link dedicated to Girl Power, the only aspect on the site directly targeted at a lesbian audience. Whereas other gay Muslim web sites like Queer Jihad and Al-Fatiha Foundation are more focused on supporting Muslims who are trying to negotiate the tensions between their sexual identity and religious belief, gayegypt.com is heavily laden with advice about how to score sexual encounters, city by city in Egypt. The main reason the site was created, however, was to promote sexual rights as human rights in the hostile climate of contemporary Egyptian society, where gays are viewed as “worse than prostitutes.” (www.gayegypt.com/newrepongayi.html)

The web site was founded by Ali Asali (a pseudonym), an Egyptian, in May of 2000. The founder explains that he established the web site six months after having witnessed the brutal beating of a gay man in the custody of several police officers on the streets of Cairo. Ali felt helpless when he witnessed the attack, and decided to establish a web site to draw attention to “the situation facing the gay community in Egypt” (Middle East Times, “Interview with Ali from gayegypt.com,” 17 August, 2001). While the web site is hosted in London, Ali explains that for a while he and a few friends maintained the site from inside Egypt. He explains, “we have worked on the site inside Egypt, usually using Internet cafes with seats which back to the wall in order to post messages” (www.gayegytp.com/mideastim17a1.html). Since the Queen Boat raid, the founder of gayegypt.com has left Egypt for “a Third World country” for fear of arrest.

The charges against the 52 men arrested in the Queen Boat Raid, according to police, were based on the fact that “they had been involved in wild sex parties on the Queen Boat;” that the mostly teenaged men “had painted their faces and then had homosexual group sex” (Middle East Times, “Gay Jail Terms Stir Outcry,” 23/11/01). Eyewitnesses present on the Queen Boat at the time of the arrest, however, deny that any sexual activity had occurred, and argue that these men were arrested, “simply because they were suspected of being gay” (Middle East Times, “Gay Jail Terms Stir Outcry,” 23/11/01). All 52 were held for six months pending trial. Many were denied family visits; some were tortured to extract confessions. The youngest detainee, only 16, drew the attention of international human rights organizations in light of documented violations of his human rights as a minor. In the end, 23 men were convicted and handed sentences from one to five years, while 29 were acquitted.

Perhaps the harshest sentence is the judgment Egyptian society offers. Even those acquitted have their reputations blemished for life, and in conservative Muslim societies, it is not just the individual’s reputation, but that of the family as well that is tainted by violating society’s rules. Dr. Sanaa Nassif, HIV/AIDS program officer at Caritas Egypt observes, “It’s a big shame to the family because it’s not only about the homosexual himself. His sister is going to be know as the sister of a homosexual and his father will be known for having a homosexual son” (www.gayegypt.com/newrepongayi.html). This public shame of homosexuality even effected Egyptian human rights organizations, which were hesitant to get involved in helping to defend the rights of the men accused in the Queen Boat affair for fear of losing what little credibility and
effect they have in Egyptian society in general. While Western governmental representative and Human Rights organizations view sexual preference as a basic human right, this is not the case in Egypt. In the words of Hisham Kassam, head of the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, “I don’t want to be charged with defending homosexuality in Egypt, which is seen as taboo. This would have been like jumping into water, not to save a drowning man but to die with him” (Middle East Times, “Gay Jail Terms Stir Outcry,” 23/11/01).

Although homosexuality is legal in Egypt, there are public laws concerning morality under which homosexuals have been arrested in the past. Rules against “obscenity and public indecency” are a part of the Egyptian penal code and have been used to prosecute gays, but few have ever faced charges until the Queen Boat affair. (Hossam Bahgat, Morality Police Crackdown, Cairo Times, Volume 5, Issue 11, 17-23 May, 2001). One element that was different in this case, and compounded the sentencing of several of the men was the charge of blasphemy. According to the state prosecutors office, the men were arrested, not because they were gay, rather, because of their blasphemous activities. The leader Agency of God’s Soldiers allegedly “confessed” while in custody that the source of his ideas was a prophetic dream (Rana Allam, “The Circus is in Town” Al Ahram Weekly Online, 17-23 May, p. 1). Rose Al Youssef, a well-respected Egyptian weekly magazine obtained a copy of the Agency of God’s Soldiers manifesto allegedly linked with the men arrested on the Queen Boat. It provides a critique of the manuscript noting “its author wants to create a historical and humanistic link for perverts and their actions” (Rose al Youssef, 17 May, 2001). The tone of the critique reflects Egyptian society’s intolerance of homosexuality. The group is said to have strong ties to Israel (another strategy in Egyptian public discourse to discredit someone’s reputation), in that some of their rituals involve pilgrimage to the Dead Sea to bathe in its waters in order to be blessed as Lot’s people. The Rose al Youssef critique argues that the group’s most serious error is that “they believe in homosexuality and that perversion is a human right and that forbidding it is only a form of rigidity and refusal to accept reality, not a transgression that angers God.” To this “error” the magazine replies, “they [the Agency of God’s Soldiers] are unaware that perversion is actually the seed of any society’s downfall.” What is at stake in this case, according to the moral majority of Egyptians, is the preservation of society itself. If homosexuality is blessed or at least ignored, “lesbianism will follow […] so comes the beginning of the end” (Rose al Youssef, 17 May, 2001).

Lessons Learned

Determining weather or not the men sentenced in the Queen Boat controversy went to jail because of their religious expression or sexual preference remains murky at best. Many of those in jail have denied having any affiliation with the Agency of God’s Soldiers, or any other religious beliefs for that matter. In their views, they are serving time for expressing what is in the West, a basic human right. The presence of the manifesto, allegedly found in raids on the apartments of several of the men sentenced suggests the former. Moreover, in Egypt, there are no laws on record making homosexuality illegal, but there are laws against blasphemy, which carry terms of one to five years, in line with the sentencing of the men. In either situation, with a consideration of the following case, we glimpse the Internet’s support of both new community formations in
Islam, and at the same time, enhancements of religious orthodoxy, conservatism, state power, and invasions of privacy. As well, we see that the Internet enables small controversies to become major international news events, and helps individuals all over the world to participate in efforts to change social and political situations for minorities within the jurisdiction of nation states. At the same time, as demonstrated by this case, nation states, cultural norms, state security courts, religious orthodoxy and authoritarianism are not quick to wither (R. Augustus Norton, “The New Media, Civic Pluralism, and the Slowly Retreating State,” p. 22).

CONCLUSION: THE INTERNET AND THE MUSLIM WORLD: MAPPING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF MUSLIM CYBERSPACE (Return to Index)

The above analysis provides three distinct guided tours of Muslim cyberspace as a means for understanding both new community formations as well as enhancements of traditional institutions in the digital age. However, where are we to locate cyberspace in relation to the Muslim world as a whole. The question of access to the Internet is relevant to this analysis, as the Muslim world has been one of the slowest sectors of global civil society to transition to the Information age. Three quarters of the world’s poor live in the developing world, and a significant portion of the developing world is Muslim. In some cases, like the case of Egypt, those with access to the Internet, and the computer and linguistic skills required to use it, are less than half a million out of a population of 68 million. Even in the oil rich Gulf, the number of Internet users is less than five percent of the population (including expatriates). These figures suggest that when examining Muslim communal values in the Internet age, we must ask whose cyberpractices/values are we considering. Generally, the answer is a handful of literate, educated, relatively wealthy, cosmopolitan, young, mostly male, Muslims. This means that we should not surf chat rooms if we want to know what most Muslims think about technology and social change. And certainly, gay Muslim communities represent several degrees of minority status.

We need to seek our understanding of Islam and its expression in Muslim behavior at many levels. We need to understand the disenfranchised, because it is their sense of hopelessness that can trigger the desire for revenge. Nevertheless, more generally, we need to focus on the meanings of moral order among poor Muslims because they are the majority, and their understandings of ethical behavior are potentially different from cosmopolitan Islam. We need to understand the values, ideals, and actions of Islamist groups, and the contexts in which they act. We need to understand Muslim cyberpractices, because a community of educated leaders and future leaders are using the tool to both organize and advocate a Muslim consciousness and value structure for the New Millennium. Moreover, the Internet enables Muslims who hold relatively marginal positions within their larger societies (from homosexuals to terrorists) to find community online, and to express their values in a way that the authoritarian states in which they often reside forbid. It is within this spectrum of cyberpractices that we glimpse the seeds of change, the power of the center, and at the same time, the huge gaps between Muslim life online, and the existence of the ummah world wide, where literacy rates are only 38 percent, where only eight percent of the Muslim population aged 20-24 is enrolled in institutions of higher education, where abject poverty is a way of life, for generations to come.

BIBLIOGRAPHY (Return to Index)

(most citations are included in the body of the text with hyperlinks when available)


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[1] When the Government of Egypt used the site in a sting operation that resulted in the arrest of dozens of gay Egyptian men for “blasphemous behavior.”

This entry was posted in Uncategorized by Editor. Bookmark the permalink [http://bcis.pacificu.edu/interface/?p=2375].

23 THOUGHTS ON “ISLAM, COMMUNITY, AND THE INTERNET: NEW POSSIBILITIES IN THE DIGITAL AGE”

gluten free meal plan
on January 30, 2014 at 4:45 AM said:

Thanks a bunch for sharing this with all folks you actually realize what you’re talking about! Bookmarked. Kindly also discuss with my website =). We will have a hyperlink exchange arrangement between us!
Landon Timone
on February 2, 2014 at 2:55 AM said:

Admiro lo que ha hecho aquí. Me encanta la parte en la que dice que usted está haciendo esto para dar vuelta, pero yo supongo por todos los comentarios que está trabajando para usted también. ¿Tiene más información sobre esto?

breville coffee maker
on February 2, 2014 at 7:48 PM said:

Excellent weblog here! Additionally your website lots up fast! What host are you the usage of? Can I get your affiliate link in your host? I wish my web site loaded up as fast as yours lol

food processor reviews
on February 2, 2014 at 10:25 PM said:

You’re so interesting! I don’t believe I have read something like that before.

So nice to discover another person with a few original thoughts on this issue.

Really.. thanks for starting this up. This web site is something that is needed on the internet,
someone with some originality!

breville espresso machine review
on February 3, 2014 at 5:20 PM said:

Excellent blog right here! Additionally your site a lot up very fast! What host are you using? Can I am getting your affiliate hyperlink in your host? I desire my web site loaded up as quickly as yours lol
Allyson Earlywine  
on February 3, 2014 at 8:52 PM said:

My mother used to give me the exact same advice.

induction cooktop reviews  
on February 4, 2014 at 12:33 AM said:

Why viewers still make use of to read newspapers when in this technological world everything is accessible on web?

espresso machine reviews  
on February 4, 2014 at 1:18 AM said:

Hello! I could have sworn I’ve been to your blog before but after browsing through a few of the posts I realized it’s new to me. Anyhow, I’m definitely pleased I came across it and I’ll be book-marking it and checking back often!

recumbent bike reviews  
on February 4, 2014 at 1:20 AM said:

Hello, I log on to your new stuff like every week. Your writing style is awesome, keep up the good work!

garment steamer reviews  
on February 4, 2014 at 2:34 AM said:
Hi I am so thrilled I found your blog page, I really found you by error, while I was browsing on Google for something else, Regardless I am here now and would just like to say thanks for a marvelous post and a all round thrilling blog (I also love the theme/design), I don’t have time to browse it all at the moment but I have saved it and also added your RSS feeds, so when I have time I will be back to read a lot more, Please do keep up the awesome work.

**table saw reviews**
on **February 4, 2014 at 5:27 AM** said:

You could definitely see your enthusiasm within the work you write.

The world hopes for even more passionate writers such as you who are not afraid to say how they believe. All the time follow your heart.

**nigeria**
on **February 4, 2014 at 10:15 AM** said:

I do Like visiting your website, you usually make me amaze with good articles.

**nigeria entertainment news**
on **February 4, 2014 at 10:26 AM** said:

Attractive section of content. I just stumbled upon your website and in accession capital to assert that I get in fact enjoyed account your blog posts. Any way I’ll be subscribing to your augment and even I accomplishment you access consistently rapidly.
If you will be going away to watch comic videos on the net then I suggest you to pay a quick visit this site, it consists of truly thus comical not only movies but also much more data.

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best robotic pool cleaner  
on **February 4, 2014 at 4:55 PM** said:

I’ve been exploring for a little for any high quality articles or weblog posts in this sort of house. Exploring in Yahoo I at last stumbled upon this site. Studying this info So i am satisfied to show that I have a very good uncanny feeling I came upon exactly what I needed.

I most no doubt will make certain to don’t overlook this site and provides it a glance regularly.

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folding bike reviews  
on **February 4, 2014 at 9:47 PM** said:

I was very happy to discover this website. I need to to thank you for your time for this wonderful read!!

I definitely appreciated every bit of it and i also have you saved to fav to check out new information in your web site.

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garbage disposal reviews  
on **February 4, 2014 at 9:58 PM** said:

Link exchange is nothing else except it is simply placing the other person’s weblog link on your page at appropriate place and other person will also do same for you.
best home gym
on February 4, 2014 at 11:34 PM said:

I am in fact happy to read this webpage posts which consists of tons of helpful information, thanks for providing these kinds of statistics.

jig saw reviews
on February 5, 2014 at 12:17 AM said:

May I simply just say what a relief to uncover a person that genuinely knows what they’re discussing on the internet.

You certainly understand how to bring an issue to light and make it important. More and more people should look at this and understand this side of your story. I was surprised that you are not more popular since you most certainly possess the gift.

best shoes for crossfit
on February 5, 2014 at 2:27 AM said:

Hi colleagues, its great post about cultureand fully defined, keep it up all the time.

best juice extractor
on February 5, 2014 at 11:20 PM said:

magnificent publish, very informative. I wonder why the other experts of this sector do not understand this. You must continue your writing. I’m sure, you’ve a great readers’ base already!

ninja nj600 pro blender
on February 6, 2014 at 2:50 AM said:
I do believe all the concepts you have introduced for your post. They are very convincing and can certainly work. Still, the posts are too quick for starters. May just you please extend them a bit from subsequent time? Thanks for the post.

Chanel 2.55 Bags

on February 6, 2014 at 2:06 PM said:

Great Seller. Would buy again.