

CHAPTER THREE

TECHNOLOGICAL MEDIATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF TRANSNATIONAL MUSLIM PUBLICS*

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Contemporary Islam is swept up in transformations that move discourse conventionally bound to institutions into more open “publics,” alter the balance of topics and emphases of public talk, and forge new alliances for cultural production, all the while attempting to exploit, expand, or renew ideas and discussion about what “being Muslim” now entails. These moves involve all media from down-market cheap print and cassette tapes to the mass market of satellite television and the increasingly transnational hypermarket of the Internet. These new media bring messages into the forums of mosque, *madrassa*, and other sites of conventionalized discourse of and about religion that range from religious courts to the more informal settings of lesson circles and others characterized by “lay” hosting. On the Internet, particularly, they range from “chat” groups, to old-line religious schools’ posting scholarly texts, to a mushrooming of sites dedicated to women asking for and discussing religious guidance. In these contexts, mediatised messages and channels complement, displace, and expand discourse of and about Islam, much as the arrival of print a century ago facilitated new people and ideas moving into the public sphere of Islam. Then as now, religious renewal movements, the rise of religious parties, increasing levels of literacy, and new modes of consumption facilitated by rising mass education are leading to a technological reshaping of the political economy of meaning. Both technologically and sociologically, the Internet represents a similar leading edge: it includes

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features of other media and forges a new public sphere through its capacity for potentially infinite linkages, notably within diaspora populations but today also with a growing "native" audience, reshaping public priorities, interests, capacities, and practices deemed Islamic. As the print revolution fostered new classes, styles, and sites of Islamic interpretation complementing the 'ulama-based ones of mosque and *madrassa*, the Internet provides a similar site and body of technical practice in the contemporary public spheres of the Muslim majority world. The aim of this chapter is to tie the emergence of new Muslim publics to particular forms of media.

Mediated Communication and the Public Sphere

Connections between media and the public sphere are widely assumed to be pervasive and profound, but the generalizability of models linking them is problematic. The basis of modern media studies is the general theory of communication first articulated by Claude Shannon (Shannon and Weaver 1949), who drew on new theories of information as the reduction of uncertainty to conceptualize communication in terms of improving choices (Rogers 1994). This had the effect of focusing on the enhancement of individual decision making or agency by receivers of messages, and in time converged with the development among European theorists of more reflexive "reader-response" theories (Holub 1992) concerned with "completion" of messages in reading or their use as structural features of input loops. Such views applied particularly to mass media, with their structure of few senders and many receivers, and focused on analyzing the responsibility of recipients of messages, in both critical-deconstructive (European) and pragmatic-applied (American) perspectives on media. Manipulation, conscious or unconscious, critical or not, by but above all of receivers, is central in such perspectives.

Such narrowing of focus to receivers' agency and of its scope to effects on their choices, even in resistance and reflection, is sociologically weak. It discounts the material base and social fields of media and of communication generally, and treats the nodes in systems of communication as black boxes. More comprehensive interpretive approaches can open up the black boxes by providing fuller accounts of senders and receivers. Even these, however, can still fall short of accounting for the social life of media to the extent that they

focus on messages in a unified fashion. Thus, an unreflective emphasis on "impacts" and global measures deflects attention from the social organization of communication and techniques of media (Anderson 2000). It also leaves aside accounts of the wider social settings that are the context of mediated communication, except to assume that they are modern. Where media actually "fit" is only thinly described, implicitly modeled on the mass media and generalized from their modern form (e.g., Lerner 1958), thereby limiting sociological analysis to the assembling of audiences and to identifying the public sphere with a consensus of opinion or market share.

In contrast to these approaches, the perspectives of Jürgen Habermas (1962) and Benedict Anderson (1990) start instead from the mechanisms of communication in the public sphere. Each places media in crucial, even causal, relation to the emergence of bourgeois public spheres, although neither is specifically focused on the media per se. Both focus more on the content of messages, although for some critics their approach is still insufficiently attentive to gender, class, and non-European experience. In particular, they draw attention to the social contours of media as the practical composition of the public sphere. Each locates the process in the social dynamics of the onset of modernity rather than in the later or "high" modernity of mass industrial society that is the focus of most media studies theory.

For Habermas, the public sphere has prototypical sites where relatively unrestricted communication flourishes and becomes established as a normative alternative, such as the salons and coffee houses of early modern European cities. In these locations, diverse people gather outside the restricted spheres of private domesticity and the public sphere of ritual communicative acts that enact privilege and justify status. Instead, relatively unencumbered by responsibilities for ritual representation, speakers' words and utterances must convey their own responsibility without the crutch of the speaker's status. Habermas's various elaborations of this view (most systematically in Habermas 1989 [1980]) have been roundly criticized for, among other things, disregarding gender distinctions, the implicit privileging of the bourgeois over other social classes, and equating "rationality" with "freedom" and even more narrowly with modernity (for example, see Calhoun 1992, Benhabib 1992, Fraser 1992). From an anthropological perspective, in which communication is seen as a socially organized process, the value in Habermas's analysis is less in identifying a public sphere of opinion, which is still problematic, than in identifying a

more pragmatic sphere of communication relatively free from demands of status representation, particularly representation of authority (royal or ecclesiastical). Semiprivate but quasi-public in its original typesites, Habermas's bourgeois public sphere emerges structurally over time. It develops from an intermediate site between the private and the public into an arena of debate within a limited public identified with appropriate communicative skills, and finally as a generalized social space with a new and evolving kind of authority that is not fundamentally dependent on status and ritual responsibilities.

Another virtue of Habermas's view is that it is developmental, which makes it useful in contexts beyond the unfolding of early European modernity in which he set it, and which is obscured by retrospective views of the public sphere from within its later settings, which Habermas himself came to view with suspicion as a late bourgeois counterpart to earlier royal and ecclesiastical spectacle. The public sphere unfolds through practices that in time set their own generalized context. Although concentrating on responsibility to the exclusion of other issues, his concept of a bourgeois (as opposed to a royal or ecclesiastical) public sphere usefully calls attention to the relocation of responsibility in alternative sites of communication, and thus to its dispersal or—from the point of view of existing authorities—its dilution. A more serious limitation lies in its flattened view of communication that limits it to denotative rationality (Habermas 1989: 77ff.) that ultimately becomes a type of ritual, which was his point of departure.

Benedict Anderson compensates for this shortcoming in Habermas's theory by locating the origin of a public sphere earlier in creolization. Anderson's (1990) approach, like that of Habermas, is situational and dialectical but more strongly tied to an experiential and material base in an alternative sense of community (of dynastic states or religious identity) that became attached to shared linguistic practice in the earliest period of European expansion in Latin America and Southeast Asia. There, Anderson identified a new sense of community—of a "public" in Habermas's terms—in the experience of "creole journeys" on the margins of empire that found expression in the form and medium of "print capitalism." Anderson focused on how shared ideas of ethnolinguistic community emerged as seemingly "natural" with no experiential basis other than common language and a growing sense of "reading together" in a shared time-out-of-time.

His notion of creoles lacks a full linguist's sense that they are not so much mixed languages as intermediate speech communities; but it is sensitive to how language expresses identity and feeling beyond referential meaning, and to media. Central to his whole theory is the emergence of print capitalism—with forms and genres of writing from newspapers to novels to standardized “national” languages—as magnifying and focusing the experiences, practices, and techniques of creole journeys. The public sphere for Benedict Anderson—although he does not use the term, preferring instead to speak of “imagined community”—is thus a mediated one conveyed by and exemplified in media that separate messages from senders into a separate marketplace of and for ideas and alternative ways of expressing them.

Our interest is in the generalizable features of the close identifications of emerging public spheres with changing practices of communication and institutions of new media. Public spheres develop out of practices of communication that become instantiated in media, which in turn have careers that leave their own origins and originators of messages behind. State and market are part of this context, evolving with it and, as Anderson noted, beyond it to the point that they seem natural. The Muslim world today is experiencing something similar to Anderson's creole journeys in seeking to extend the margins of what being Muslim can mean in the modern world, and something similar to the structural transformation of the public sphere that Habermas identified with the emergence of bourgeois consciousness as its frame. We would insist that this is a contingent and ongoing process that has to be placed in historical context to avoid anachronism. Key features of this development include the emergence of intermediate social-communicative spaces with media as their tools and expressions. These public spheres are mediatized in ways not predicted by models derived from mass media of mature modernity, but are similar to earlier print revolutions. We suggest the utility of directing attention to the relatively neglected material base and practical techniques of media and to the social milieus in which they become new resources or factors of production that help project communicative practices aligned with new—often but not always emergent—social strata. Social milieus, material bases, forms of communication, techniques of media, intermediate social spaces, and wider bodies of practice compose this public sphere and its habitus in the actions of individuals drawn to it.

The Media Ecology of Islam Today

The leading-edge communication technology in the Muslim world today is arguably the Internet. Less popular or less widely utilized than television, or even print, structurally it includes their features of multiple channels and thus of choice, to which it adds its own hypermedia of potentially infinite links. The ease of creating such links blurs distinctions between cultural production and consumption, and at a very low cost opens production as much as consumption to new participants and to deeper participation in cultural production through more interactive engagements than mass media provide. Early theorists of the social impact of the networked computing model in the Internet (for example, Pool 1990) put this as convergences of information streams, user control that reverses the mass media revolution, and the "death of distance" including social distance (see also Cairncross 1997). To the mass media world of few senders and many receivers, the Internet counterposes a many-to-many model of communications, interactivity, and an underlying mode of production more comparable to the early days of print than to the later days of broadcasting.

The Internet in the Muslim world likewise has a trajectory more like that of the print revolution than like broadcasting, which everywhere in the Muslim world was until recently a state monopoly and closely tied to the centralizing, nation-building states of the independence period of the mid-twentieth century. Widespread use of print came relatively late to the Muslim world in comparison to Europe and as a late-stage accompaniment to industrialization, urban growth, and modernization in the era of colonial domination. Print brought newspapers in a relatively developed form—not as shipping news, from which they originated, but as political news and commentary into which they developed under nineteenth-century "official" nationalism. Mechanical printing stimulated book publishing, including Islamic publishing, and the new voices that came, like newspapers, with projects to inform and to express sensibilities attendant upon or stimulated by challenges of modernization under the conditions of imperialism. Among their innovations was Islamic publishing in the vernacular and for what were no longer conceived as classically trained audiences (see Gonzalez-Quijano 1991).

In this new creole space, intermediate between classic and vernacular discourse and between secular rulers and the masses, the exemplary,

defining figure might be Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935). Riḍā was the scion of Syrian village notables; he obtained both a religious and modern education and became a journalist in Cairo in the 1890s (Cole 1983). In a city of 168 periodicals and newspapers, he founded a religious journal with the aim of linking orthodox Sunni jurisprudence to journalism in order to “guide the faithful in the ways of progress and civilization” (Hamzah 2002). Hamzah describes his expository technique as a “discrete” and “discontinuous” journalistic style that Riḍā applied to writing about religion, in contrast to the intensely intertextual style of the ‘ulama, a style that requires their professional guidance to read. Although the content of his writings is about Islam, his style is not the rigorous demonstrative one of jurisprudential categories or of religious rulings (fatwa) but the “omniscient and omnipresent” style of writing in science or medicine (Hamzah 2002). Articles were in turn to be assembled into books, previously the domain of the ‘ulama, whom Riḍā invited to join him in his mission to free Muslim lands and institute a viable political system compliant with both Muslim identity and modern conditions. Hamzah points out that Riḍā’s approach also involved a knowledge of market conditions and required a determination to shape the public sphere through both commentary and public debate.

The result was thoroughly the product of a creole journey tied to an emerging public sphere, which Riḍā conceptualized as the “common good” (*al-maṣlaḥa al-‘amma*) that was forged partly through the new print media of his day and that found its way to India, repeated across the range of Muslim responses to British imperialism from Deobandi revivalists to Aligarh integrationists (Metcalf 1982). In this context, Riḍā is an intermediate figure, who collaborated with Muḥammad ‘Abduh, a key leader of the Salafī renewal movement among nineteenth-century ‘ulama, and influenced the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1928, that came to define political Islamic activism in the twentieth century.

Riḍā’s efforts and the contexts they addressed help identify the material bases and social fields of a mediatized public sphere. The contexts include rising levels of education, but more mixed forms of education than the classical disciplines imparted in *madrassa* are implied by the alternative style of writing about Islam that aims to persuade on its own rather than by adherence to demonstrative conventions. Riḍā represents more than an alternative voice using a new medium. New vehicles of communication, from mechanical printing itself to

the newspapers and the book trade (Gonzalez-Quijano 1991), were profoundly modifying the shape of the intellectual field as a mode of production, as well. Riḍā's activities were part of the diversification of discourse of and about Islam initiated in the religious-intellectual field through a new medium (journalism) tied to a material base (mechanical printing) in a social context of rapid urban growth in a colonial economy that, more than fully formed institutions, was the setting of creole journeys like his that made the links.

Today, a similar pattern is playing out with the advent of digital technologies. Arabic word processing first appeared in the mid-1980s, which facilitated a recreation of Arabic newspapers to reach a worldwide readership through the Internet. These range from the explicitly transnational *al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ*, published in London since 1978, to the conversion of the Lebanon-based *al-Hayāt*, to a fully computerized editorial process after 1987 (Gonzalez-Quijano 2003). Nearly every major Arabic-language newspaper now has an on-line edition, and hundreds of Arabic publications are available on the Internet: some six hundred are linked on a site, www.mafhoum.com, maintained by a Syrian computer technologist in Paris. Preceding and surrounding this development is a burgeoning of publishing activity in venues small and large that include local and regional papers (Eickelman and Anderson 1997) and a new genre of modern "Islamic books" that address contemporary topics and are written in the vernacular (Gonzalez-Quijano 1998), all facilitated by the spread of personal computers and Arabic-language software.

The context of all this activity includes other media technologies. Since the 1970s and the period leading up to the Iranian revolution, sermons have circulated on audiocassette tapes, which are widely available in audio shops alongside popular music and oral performances of folklore. Religious shaykhs now routinely appear on television dispensing fatwas to callers, engage in question-and-answer exchanges with moderators, and offer formal televised lessons and Friday sermons, later sold on video tapes or even CD-ROM. These various media share a common body of technique and patterns of consumption as well as the technology. Religious texts and teaching materials, particularly for children, are widely produced by software companies, which often acquire the content from others and then "program" it much as they do calculus lessons or large text databases of secular material from parliamentary proceedings and government regulations to business guides and the archives of newspapers, such as currently

on offer from *al-Ḥayāt*. These new media combine production values and intellectual techniques shared with contemporary products of popular culture and what Starrett (1996: 11) has called a “functionalist” approach to education as training that imparts syncretic and highly creolized qualities to the Islamic discourse that migrates to these media. In turn, consumption of that discourse is set not only in well-established religious practices but also in the habits developed around commercial popular culture (see Hirschkind 2001).

This migration is importantly a function of another wave of people who join the new technology and contemporary Muslim discourse in the intermediate public space that their activities are forming. These activities range from conscious efforts like Riḍā’s to open Islamic discourse to wider audiences through alternate discursive forms, broadening its authority, to the forging of new links and practical alliances not based on ideological motives but in the practices of organizing and delivering media on a market basis. These new links and alliances unfold in contexts where computer use and Internet growth are hemmed in by costs and limited infrastructure that initially shape the social field. Although the extension of Islam’s emerging public sphere to the Internet is in its infancy, the Internet’s “horizontal” format, in which peers comment on one another’s ideas and arguments, especially among the rising generation, bypasses the more “vertical” hierarchies of authority and creates a public beyond earlier, established religious authorities.

Like the earlier print revolution, the Internet today involves a material base and social field that is already transnational. This includes the Internet itself, but also a recentering of the worldwide Muslim diaspora in a transnational sphere associated with middle classes, professional educations, and the global diffusion of an emerging industrial regime centered on practices of what are called “knowledge industries” (e.g., Pool 1990) or, more prosaically, on the service sectors that make it work and to a considerable extent are its work. Their roles and influence are both functional and expressive. Beginning in the 1980s, these middle classes acquired the skills and access to the technology before the national governments and ruling elites in Muslim countries from Malaysia to Morocco came (in the later 1990s) to see the Internet’s potential role as a development tool and as a potential development sector in itself (Anderson 1997). They were not only drawn to the Internet professionally, however, but also early claimed a place for Islam in it.

A Tri-Phased History of Islamic Media

At the time that the Internet itself was being formed in the 1980s, students who went from Muslim countries to leading Western universities and research institutes that were developing it soon followed the example of their colleagues by bringing avocational interests into what began as an engineers' work tool (Anderson 1998). In pious acts of witness, they scanned and placed on line texts of the Holy Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* of the Prophet. These students and a penumbra of émigré and other diaspora Muslims who joined them on line engaged in often fierce discussions of how to apply Muslim rules and interpretations to conditions of modern life—particularly modern life in non-Muslim-majority societies that lacked many familiar reference points, extended family life, and public institutions. Their discussions were often focused on conditions of diaspora life in Western societies, international affairs, and practical issues such as how to find a mosque or a *ḥalāl* butcher, cheap flights home, or matrimonial services that betoken continuing links.

These discussions were characterized by an absence of contributions from 'ulama, and they did not show much training in religious hermeneutics. Used to the methods of the physical sciences, contributors to these discussions had a habit of sanctioning interpretation by quick recourse to texts treated analytically as sources to be reasoned about objectively (Anderson 2003), much as Eickelman (1992) has described with the spread of modern education in Muslim countries themselves. This gave early on-line discussion of Islam a widely ranging character that, as much as the medium, attracted the attention of more conventional spokespersons of official Islams and of oppositional or militant voices as the Internet became more public with the advent of the World Wide Web in the early 1990s (Fandy 1999, Mandaville 2001, Sreberny 2002). Citing needs to present interpretations and views of Islam that they define as "correct," Muslim governments and oppositional movements or parties began establishing publication-like websites that purvey more institutional views of religious establishments and of oppositions to them. Some classic *da'wa* organizations brought their conventional apologetics on-line in a context of free-for-all *ijtihād* (see Bunt 2000). Most were also located in the Muslim world's émigrés to Europe and North America, where Internet expertise and infrastructure were available and were also being tapped by Arab media conglomerates that were likewise establishing initial presences in cyber-

space (Anderson 1997). Generally, these second-round Web sites were static, often directly transposed from other media, and preserved their formats and the diction of formal, official pronouncements.

This second phase is giving way to a more modulated one, orthodox in theology and mainstream in interpretation but more dynamically attuned to developing an audience or public on line. This phase takes technological advantage of the development of the World Wide Web to provide more interactive content and sociological advantage of the Internet's demographics to reach a transnational population of middle-class professionals. Their habits of work and often of leisure bring them on line for news and information that they extend to finding an Islam that is expressively and in its focus attuned to their interests, problems, resources, and practices of information seeking. These sites use the latest Web techniques of instant polling, searchable databases, on-the-fly formatting of results, and email queries to engage a base of users and build sites that respond to their interests and grow with them. This may include databases of fatwas and also of advice of a more social and psychological sort, material for religious instruction of children as well as formal sermons, news with a Muslim interest and other kinds of religious commentary on current issues. The format is shared with portals that organize and provide links to other sites and with newspapers whose on-line editions adopt continuously changing content, searchable databases, other query features, and user-modifiable interfaces that invite interaction of users with a website. Indeed, the style is indistinguishable from that toward which news, and newspaper, sites have evolved, exemplified in the completely on-line multilingual news portal, Albawaba.com, produced in Jordan.

These sites are distinguished by the ideological profiles they project and their practical profiles. An example is the website of Shaykh Hussein Faḍlallāh, the spiritual authority of Hizbullah, in Lebanon, which has replaced Hizbullah's own earlier static collection of pronouncements and position papers with a growing collection of the shaykh's fatwas, sermons, and links to extensive Shī'a websites in Iran that provide access to libraries of digitized religious documents, including those produced by 'ulama. From the Sunni world, the website of Islamonline.net features perhaps the currently most famous Sunni preacher, Shaykh Yūsuf al-Qarādawī, and a cohort of other "young Azharis" (Zeghal 1999) who contribute sermons, fatwas, social and psychological advice, lessons, and commentary that is modern in expression, orthodox in theology, and middle-of-the-road in interpretation.

This fully bilingual site is produced in Arabic and English versions by a company in Qatar that also designed and maintains the website for al-Jazeera Satellite Television. Its content is produced in Cairo, where Shaykh Yūsuf and his colleagues are based near al-Azhar University. Others range from strict Salafī and Wahhābī to Sufi “outreach,” and from Iran’s religious universities to hybrid organizations of local and national Muslim organizations in Western countries. Whatever their ideology, their styles are modern, engaging, and oriented to pious middle-class professionals who seek an Islam that is orthodox and accessible and that addresses how to lead a Muslim life in a modern society, whether Muslim-majority or where Muslims are a minority and immigrants.

These phases are not mutually exclusive. The first phase is characterized by technological adepts in diasporic settings who reached out through the Internet for a shared Muslim community, which they primarily found with each other. They were tied not only by the Internet but also to the world of universities and research centers that produced it and housed them and provided their skills and social base. This is a contemporary diaspora population that in addition to students includes professionals pursuing careers in adopted countries as well as exiles and other émigrés. They place online an Islam of textual objects and intellectual techniques rooted more in professional milieus into which they have been tracked from early schooling than in the hermeneutics that is the forte of ‘ulama training and interpretation that requires them.

A second phase was dominated by content providers who restored interpretive contexts that surround the texts, and hence claims to interpretive privilege, both in traditional and in political Islams. Here, technological prowess took a back seat or was purchased, often from outsiders with additional media skills lacking among the technological adepts of the initial phase. Formal and formulaic expression returned, often in the conventional apologetics of *da‘wa*, or missionary (literally, call) organizations, but primarily in English, the lingua franca of the Internet—it was in but not of the diaspora. A third phase presents a coming together of content providers and programmers in a transnational population of Arabic speakers, Muslims, and modern professionals including modern shaykhs, who are at home with the Internet, with which many of them work and which some of them are building. What they are building is a transnational composite of business practices and religious outreach, both of which are mobile and can

be produced from multiple locations, just as the Internet is consumed in multiple locations. Indeed, these initiatives open alternatives in cyberspace that may not be available locally and which produce a new "deterritorialized" Islam specific to the Internet (Roy 2002).

The result is not an interest-group Islam, for it lacks the sharp edges and singular focus distinctive to special interest groups and their activism. It is multidimensional, user-oriented, modulated to the settings and concerns of professionals, and set within the concerns of pious middle classes. It implicitly mobilizes Muslim traditions of choice in seeking guidance by providing more rather than less information through the linking capabilities of the World Wide Web's technology, which is not only hyper-linked but also increasingly interactive. Above all, this is a social field of people on the move or potentially ready and able to move. Through cyberspace they find organized expressions of Islam and communities that are unavailable closer to home. In this respect, they mirror the model of the creole journey, forming a sort of inner diaspora that is a counterpart in the region to the diaspora outside it and in some respects continuous with it.

This is an "inner" diaspora in several respects. It is scattered in modern occupations and high-tech corners in the Muslim world, but rarely in numbers sufficient to constitute a local community with enough patronage to shape a distinctive religious profile. It is highly mobile population, like Benedict Anderson's creole journeymen, or the technological adepts of the first phase, but also able to pursue modern careers from their homelands through the Internet without emigrating, or in moves within the region or to neighboring countries and on shorter cycles than long-term international migrants. These practices carry over to seeking out others like themselves in cyberspace and extending to religious lives the habits of working with others at a distance developed through the Internet. The diaspora of the third phase is also inner, in that the process of bringing Islam on line that began in the external diaspora and centered on its characteristics comes full circle in a transnational public whose primary concerns are increasingly post-Islamist (Roy 1999; see also Kepel 2002).

The institutional side of this process is deeply enmeshed in the market, but in an unexpected way. Just as Arabic-language newspapers have not been commercial ventures but are supported by special interests, so also getting Islam on line has been an important motive and a source of support for companies that develop and provide services and products for Arabic text processing. In the experimental

period marked by technological adepts, a fully searchable Arabic text of the Holy Qur'ān was the first product of what developed into the largest Arab software firm with a full range of programs for processing Arabic text. Although some content activists turned initially to foreign firms, religious patronage has been crucial in developing the businesses that Arabize content, and crucial to businesses created to provide web hosting, site design, text-processing software, and graphics that today compose Web technology. Services that were often sought initially from foreign firms are shifting to local firms, which assemble their own network of suppliers that further embed the Internet in institutions and practices of the marketplace and make religious interests important factors in that market's priorities.

Technological Mediation and the Public Sphere

Transnational Islam is recentring diasporic contexts, and in those contexts is linking new sensibilities of minority status to the concerns and habits of professionals, middle-class priorities, and marketplace practices. Much attention has focused on political and particularly on militant Islam; but contemporary Islamic-oriented discourse actually engages a much broader range of concerns and practices. It ranges over social, personal, and identity issues, psychological matters and behavioral issues, over questions of authority that are often implicit and made problematic by increasing choice. Indeed, it has been argued (Kepel 2002) that the discourse of political Islam is receding at least partly in favor of social and psychological discourses focused more on personal and behavioral issues than on political constitution and governance. If this is so, it is not yet clear how much it is an artifact of observation, although the observation gains strength as attention turns from intellectuals (for example, Moussalli 1992, Lawrence 1989, Rahnema 1994) to wider publics that would be called "lay" in Christian terms. Issues engaged in this context have focused on authority, its multiplication, and the dilution implicit in that. Evidence suggests that the range is broader still, and that it includes the techniques of media, from journalism's pithy formats that feed the discursive style of political Islam to the capacities for linkage that make the Internet "smart" and increasingly interactive.

Little of this is captured in easy dichotomies such as Barber's pop-

ular "Jihad vs. McWorld" (1996) and others that would relegate Islam and information technologies to clashing sides of a great divide or project one as the impediment of the other. Such formulas draw on too narrow views of both Islamic activism—not to say of Muslims—and information technology that not only excise their histories but also miss the real sociology of their intersections. Those intersections include the spread of mass education and before that of print in Muslim countries, on the one hand, and the diasporas of Muslims, on the other hand, that increasingly extend to mobile professionals in the global information economy. They also miss the more interesting contribution of religious patronage in actually developing this information economy, both internationally and in Muslim-majority countries, and the contemporary internal diaspora of professional middle classes that it unites through the medium of information technology.

In drawing these processes together, it is easy to overstate the role of new media. Muslims throughout the world have multiple channels for religious expression and for seeking religious guidance. Many such messages, and messengers, "migrate" to new media, whose contribution is to delocalize choices and voices. In this sense, newer media join older ones as channels for religious expression and outreach, but do not necessarily accept all their established conventions. Each has a material base, a corpus of practices, and a network of actors who produce them. Migrations of Islamic discourse into new media are accompanied by vernacularization, whether in print or on television or on the Internet, and by their location in the market space of commodities (Starrett 1995, Gonzalez-Quijano 2003: 72–76) rather than as circulated ritual objects. Thus, an Osama bin Laden might pose before a library of bound classical commentaries while recording a video message in ordinary Arabic, whereas the traditional 'ulama deploy classical Arabic and a more esoteric diction that recalls books that are out of sight. Not apparent on the surface but implicit in such migrations and the transformations that accompany media-tization are altered conditions of cultural production that bring new skills, practices, and habits, and a new constellation of actors to the media ecology of Islam.

Applying models of mass media to the Internet aligns modes of consumption but not their modes of production, which with the Internet reduce social distance between producers and consumers. The Internet joins the mass media of modern print and broadcasting

by adding to an already expanding range of choices for consumption. In this model, a newsstand, a television with fifty or two hundred channels delivered by cable or satellite, and the Internet are equated as media characterized by choices, which in modern media theory express the agency of actors (Rogers 1994). Such comparison makes them contemporary, but at the expense of recognizing the different stages at which each is present. Print is relatively mature and broadcasting a maturing medium in comparison to the Internet, whose early stages are not yet obscured by years of later development, history of reconceptualization, and reflexive understandings that have their own lives.

One important history that is obscured by the comparison to mass media is the technological development of the medium itself. Here, the Internet stands apart in that the basic technologies diffused quickly and then experienced local development, not just application, in context that already included the print and broadcast computing technologies, mass education, and economic globalization which particularly privileges the technologically adept and the knowledge worker. Development, which had commenced in Arabic text processing that made on-line Arabic newspapers practical, has been followed by Internet-servicing businesses that draw support from religious customers and utilize the highest available Internet technology to service their needs and capabilities to interact with users, who are not just an audience but also a community, this time in "cyberspace."

More than a century after the widespread diffusion of print technology in the Middle East, cultural production under conditions of globalization also ties the Internet particularly to a diasporic sphere. The Internet revolution is fluid, transnational, and connects stocks of knowledge, common orders of practice, and similar social actors. Islam on the Internet began in the diaspora; and the Internet increasingly resonates in Muslim-majority countries as a channel for expressions, interests, populations, and projects of an inner diaspora that is the late modern counterpart to early modern creole journeys. Likewise, its habits and techniques are the practices of the emerging public sphere that is transnational, not because it is Muslim but because those practices are.

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