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Virtual citizenship: Islam, culture, and politics in the digital age

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This article investigates the complex relationship between digital media, religion, and politics in Egypt since the early 1990s. Charting the emergence of a new media landscape – one that is facilitated by technological innovations such as mobile telephony, high-speed Internet, and small digital cameras – this paper explores how a very strong Islamic revivalist trend is capitalizing on the power and reach of these new media practices in an effort to develop Islamically inflected models of citizenship. The paper argues that such a mediascape is contributing to the development of new models of nationalism and civic citizenship in Egypt – ones that are not orchestrated by the Egyptian State but are mediated through oppositional groups, mainly of the Islamist variety. The paper aims to chart a map of media practices in Egypt in the past two decades, and trace how these practices are informing the rise of new notions of citizenship, cultural policy, digital activism, and media consumption.

Keywords: new media; Islam; culture; cyber policing; popular culture; homosexuality

Introduction: culture and religion in the digital age

New media and digital technology are transforming the world we live in. The adoption, circulation, and diffusion of these new digital technologies are reshaping the spheres of religion, politics, and culture. In this paper, I argue that the proliferation of these digital technologies, with their interactive user-friendly interfaces, can, on the one hand, provide the technological scaffolding of a safe, censorship-free public sphere, albeit virtual, in which debates over issues of religion, culture, and politics can take place. On the other hand, however, they can sharpen the censorial mechanisms of State surveillance and policing. I will refer to participants in these new virtual public spheres as cyber publics. This paper is in dialog with recent academic contributions that aim to expound the nature of cyberspace in relation to the new virtual public spheres. Indeed, the focus of many of these academic contributions is the nexus of religion and politics (Dawson and Cowan 2004). And the assertion is that the Internet (alongside digital technologies) is changing how religion is practiced worldwide and providing a new playing field for the intersection of religion, culture, and politics (Dawson and Cowan 2004). Like other religions, Islam has been widely affected by the Internet and new media technologies. My analysis will map out the ways in which Islam, as both dogma and a set of discursive practices, has been changed by this new media ecology. My theoretical framework is informed by the work developed by Anna Everett in her theses on media convergence in the digital age. More precisely, I

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find her theoretical formulation of digitextuality to be a useful analytical tool for the arguments I wish to put forth in this paper. Everett defines this formulation as follows:

> Digitextuality is a neologism that at its most basic combines two familiar word images: the overdetermined signifier *digital*, which denotes most of computer-driven media's technological processes and products, and Julia Kristeva's term *intertextuality*. With the two terms combined in this way, digitextuality suggests a more precise or utilitarian trope capable at once of describing and constructing a sense-making function for digital technology's newer interactive protocols, aesthetic features, transmedia interfaces and end-user subject positions, in the context of traditional media antecedents. Moreover, digitextually is intended to address, with some degree of specificity, those marked continuities and ruptures existing between traditional ('old') media and their digital ('new') media progeny and, especially how new media gets constructed. (Everett and Caldwell 2003, p. 6, emphasis in original)

My analysis will utilize Everett's formulation of digitextuality to unpack the intertwined relationship between Islam, culture, and media in the digital age.

The expediency of popular culture and the struggle over representation

The holy month of Ramadan is a month of fasting, piety, and introspection; it is also the month of televised drama series and miniseries. In fact, in the last decade or so, the holy month has been the month of drama. State television,[1] privately owned channels, and transnational satellite channels compete to fill the after-*iftar* hours[2] with lavish dramatic productions, mostly Egyptian and Syrian, and to a lesser extent drama from the Gulf region, particularly Kuwait. These series feature many popular stars that bring in massive advertising revenues. In recent years, historical bio-drama has been the de rigueur genre. Bio-dramas based on the life of Umm Kalthoum, the legendary Egyptian chanteuse, King Farouk, the deposed monarch of Egypt, and Queen Nazly, Farouk's much-maligned mother, have attracted width-based spectatorship and brought in substantial advertising revenues.

For Ramadan 2010, Egyptian television and many other satellite channels screened the highly anticipated *al-Gama'a*: a drama series that depicts the rise and development of the Muslim Brotherhood and charts the life of the founder of the Brotherhood, Hasan al Banna. The television series was written by renowned screenwriter Wahid Hamid and is a coproduction between Hamid and Egyptian television. Months before the start of the series, the Internet, the blogosphere, and newsprint were abuzz in anticipation of the airing of the series, predicting a whirlpool of controversy that would be generated as a result. The reasons for such predictions of a backlash of controversy are multi-layered. The Muslim Brotherhood is a banned organization under Egyptian Law. It is by far the most organized and oldest oppositional religio-political organization – one that has immense networks of support and enjoys an impressive capacity for mobilizing people. However, although the group is banned, many of its members fill the seats of the Egyptian parliament where they run as independents. It is a game of political subterfuge where the Brotherhood members in parliament are known, and they are often referred to as the Brotherhood bloc. The impressive and unexpected win by Brotherhood independents in the 2005 parliamentary election, where Brotherhood candidates won 88 of 444 elected seats, gave them a legitimate platform to question the executive branch of government through parliamentary mechanisms like interpellations.[3] In fact, Brotherhood members have used these mechanisms to voice their concern regarding cultural

policy. During the current 2005–2010 parliamentary term, the Minister of Culture was questioned by Brotherhood members several times concerning the publication of books that were deemed by the Muslim Brotherhood to be morally suspect. Many of the commentators writing about the anticipated impact of *al-Gama'a* expected the Brotherhood to question the Minister of Information and the head of Egyptian television as a consequence – which they duly did.

Having said that, the policy of the State *vis-à-vis* the Brotherhood has been complex. At times it has been accommodating to its presence – this is particularly noticeable in the cultural and moral arena where the State has been tough on censoring books and films in order to appease the Islamic trend while asserting its moral superiority. And at other times, the State has been aggressive in its clampdown on members of the Brotherhood and their sympathizers. The decision to produce and air a series about the Brotherhood in Ramadan 2010, when viewing rates are at their peak, can be understood as a tactical move on the part of the State to provide a platform where it can provide its take on the history and trajectory of the organization. It is precisely this point that provoked the ire of the Brotherhood, for they argued that the series is unbalanced and biased against them. Furthermore, in an interesting and unprecedented move, the Brotherhood announced in a press conference that it intends to produce a series about Hassan al Banna to correct some of the 'lies' that were propagated by the series. This marks the first major cultural production to be undertaken by the Brotherhood in an attempt to challenge the official State-mediated representation of the organization.

The debate around the airing of *al-Gama'a* highlights how media both in 'old' and 'new' formats have emerged as a contentious site for struggle over representation. Furthermore, I argue that the series should be analytically understood as a case of what Yúdice (2003) called *culture-as-resource* – and more specifically here as a case of (popular) culture-as-resource. Yúdice's idea of the expediency of culture-as-resource hinges on a conceptualization of culture as a field of force allowing power to be wielded for sociopolitical and economic amelioration. Moreover, Yúdice rightly argues that this new strategy of using culture as an expedient and a resource for other ends has permeated many different sectors of contemporary life: from the use of museums and galleries for urban development and gentrification to the deployment of native cultures for touristic purposes (2003 pp. 25, 26). Producing the television series gave the Egyptian State the dramatic field of force to tell the story of the Brotherhood on its own terms and from its own standpoint, achieving a political goal of educating (at the same time as entertaining) the public about the Brotherhood, while also using that entertainment as a source of capital accumulation via advertising revenue, and airing right fees in dealings with a multitude of transnational satellite channels.

The series was written by Wahid Hamid, a veteran Egyptian screenwriter who is known for his staunch anti-Brotherhood sentiments. The resume of Wahid is replete with films and television series that tackle the issue of Islamic fundamentalism and extremism. Although Hamid claimed that his representation was objective and based on meticulous research in gathering his material, it was known beforehand what his position was *vis-à-vis* the Brotherhood. The series was a great success. It was lauded by critics, hailing it as timely, lavishly produced, and superbly acted. On the other hand, the series was severely criticized by Brotherhood members and their sympathizers as biased and deliberately conveying a skewed version of the history of the organization and its founder. Moreover, the grandson of al Banna filed a lawsuit to prevent the series form airing (the lawsuit was rejected by court). It might be argued that the series could result in an auspicious, albeit unexpected, outcome for the Brotherhood,

insofar as it dedicates precious air time to the organization and thus propels into the orbit of the popular imagination and gives it a legitimacy that it legally lacks. The Brotherhood decided, however, to counter the official-mediated narrative with their own version, thereby subscribing to the same logic of culture-as-expedient, albeit for different ends.

As mentioned above, a digitextual framework of analysis enables an investigation of the continuities between 'old' and 'new' media. Thus, we can note that in the aftermath of the airing of the television series ('old' media format), Brotherhood-sponsored and -produced digital videos on the popular Internet portal *YouTube* ('new' media format) began to appear. The title of these videos is 'We live among you,' and the videos show the immense contribution of the Brotherhood to society and the social infrastructure that it has provided for millions of Egyptian, from health services and educational support to cultural events. The timing of this campaign was crucial as Egypt was bracing itself for parliamentary elections – historically these elections have been marred by unfairness and foul play at the expense of Brotherhood members, who due to the illegality of their affiliative organization run as independents, and are thus at a disadvantage. This fact, coupled with the negative publicity that the Brotherhood received after the airing of the series, compelled the Brotherhood to launch a digital campaign as a public relations effort in rectifying and restoring its image. I believe that looking at the digital *YouTube* videos (a new media format) in relation to the television series (an old media format) enables us to understand the extent to which popular culture is used as resource and expedient for political ends. On the one hand, the State has used an 'old' media cultural format as expedient in its campaign for delegitimizing the Brotherhood, and the Brotherhood has used a new media cultural format to retaliate.

Religion and *Facebook* or *Ikhwanbook*

> The first communication technology in Islam was the minaret, and the most recent tool in our day is *Facebook*. (Moukhtar 2008, p. 171)

With these words, the author of a new book on the Internet social networking site *Facebook*, Gamal Moukhtar starts his discussion on religion in the age of *Facebook*. Indeed, religion has had a very prominent visibility on *Facebook*. According to a recent report by e-marketing, the number of *Facebook* users in Egypt now totals 3.8 million, around 5% of Egypt's population.[4] Egyptians have been using the popular social networking portal for political purposes such as calls for nation-wide boycotts, election boycotts, and demonstrations. This use of *Facebook* has been so effective that commentators in Egypt are using the term '*Facebook* revolution' to describe the reach and efficacy of this new media tool for political mobilization. It is salient here to mention that although *Facebook* is tolerated by the Egyptian State and has not been banned as in Syria, there have been arrests made by State security of *Facebook* users who have called for nation-wide boycotts. This brings us to the issue of cyber-surveillance, which I will take up in another section of this paper.

Religious issues figure prominently in the *Facebook* virtual environment. There are many groups on *Facebook* that are platforms for discussing and debating Islamic issues such as the veil. In fact, one recent *Facebook* page concerning the veil is called 'Marwa Al Sherbini: the Martyr of the Veil'. This refers to the case of the young Egyptian mother of two residing in Germany with her husband (who was on a

scholarship there). Marwa, a veiled women, was stabbed in court by a German man whom she took to court on a harassment case due to his constant bullying and the verbal abuse he directed at her in the children's playground on account of her Islamic dress. Other prominent Islamic-inflected *Facebook* pages are dedicated to the Danish cartoon issue, the Burn-a-Quran day initiated by a Florida pastor, and fan pages for popular young Islamic preachers. In fact, the immensely popular preacher Amr Khaled has 27 different fan pages on *Facebook* for his followers. In addition, some of these virtual groups offer Islamic services such as downloading and voice streaming of Quranic verses with the option of choosing the voice of one's favorite Quranic reciter.

In an interesting development, the Muslim Brotherhood launched its own version of *Facebook* in 2010. This social networking portal is called *Ikhwanbook* (www.ikhwanbook.com). The aim of this digital networking site, as stated on the website, is to join Muslims of different languages and races from all over the world, offering the opportunity for constructive networking, convergence, and open discussion of various issues in the light of moderate Islam, which according to the site's mission statement is the main objective of the Muslim Brotherhood an organization. The Muslim Brotherhood launched a trial website under the name 'Brothers Book' on 29 May 2010, before changing it later to *Ikhwanbook* on June 30 2010. The web portal frames its mission as one of a larger project of Islamic reform uniting members interested in contemporary Islamic issues and instigating discussion within a 'peaceful reform model of moderate Islam.' In a direct snub, *Ikhwan.com* not only distances itself from the popular *Facebook* but also hints at an Islamphobic prejudice on the part of the management of *Facebook*. Thus, *Ikhwanbook.com* states clearly in its welcome page that it provides:

> Content that is independent from the management of *Facebook*, which has recently deleted or removed several pages and accounts of its members on the grounds that arguments by religious and Islamic movements are of political content despite the fact that some indecent pages are left.

Furthermore, the website insists that it **s**upports moderate Islam and offers 'interrelated activities and ideas which have been instigated as a result of sophisticated intermingling of innovative and fresh ideas in a refined framework with no threats or restrictions.' The site officially launched a page on *Facebook* itself. The founders of *Ikhwanbook.com* justify this marketing strategy of using *Facebook* to advertise their new site as a tool to 'promote the integration and intermingling of communities in an effort to prove its intention of non-isolation and to make known and promote its moral values and to advance them.'

In an article about *Ikhwanbook*, the English language newspaper *The Daily Star* conducted an interview with one of the users of the Islamic social networking site. Asked what drew him to join *Ikhwan.com*, Ahmed Osman, a 30-year-old from Sudan, said:

> I just saw that there are a lot of enemies who hate Islam, and actually every non-Muslim almost became a potential enemy, so I want to know how Muslims think and whether this problem comes from the way Muslims think or it is the west media … No one can deny that Islam is targeted right now but does this problem lie in Islam? Of course not. It is our perception and understanding of Islam or just a campaign by the West, and so I've joined *Ikhwanbook* to find out. (Abdoun 2010, p. 2, emphasis added by author)

What does the case of *Ikhwanbook.com* illustrate? What does it tell us about the nexus of new media, culture, and religion? For one, the case of *Ikhwanbook.com* underscores the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood is not a monolith. There are many strands and offshoots of the organization. A digitextual analysis of the mediated products of Brotherhood members neatly illustrates this point. I argue that applying such analysis forcefully reveals a generational schism between an older guard of Muslim Brothers and a new generation of young new media-savvy Brothers who veer from the older generation in ideology, strategy, and mobilization techniques. This generational fissure was highly pronounced due to new media technologies. In 2007, the Muslim Brotherhood released a political platform document, which stated their political goals and reform agenda. The response to this draft was to say the least scathing, especially with regard to the document's position *vis-à-vis* women (women holding judicial positions, for example) and Coptic Christians (Christians' eligibility to run for presidency). These are all issues that the Brotherhood label 'cultural', as opposed to expressly 'religious' issues like the implementation of *Shari'a* Law. Although the hostile reaction to such a document on the part of State officials and secular intellectuals was expected, an unexpected force of resistance to the document came from within the organization itself, particularly from a younger generation of Muslim Brothers who found the document problematic and have voiced their criticism and concern on their blogs and on the Internet.

Another germane point that arises form a digitextual analysis of these blogs is the end-user interactivity features that these digitally mediated technologies provide: Internet users who visit these blogs are able to respond to what they read and debate the contents of the document and the criticisms leveled at the document by the bloggers. Such interactivity creates a virtual public sphere where members of the Muslim Brotherhood could publicly, albeit virtually, congregate to discuss cultural, religious, and political issues in a manner that is generally prohibited in the 'real' public sphere due to the illegality of their organization and the emergency laws in place in Egypt since the assassination of President Sadat in 1981. Commenting on this development Lynch (2007) succinctly notes that:

> These online discussions are a manifestation of a new trend among young Muslim Brothers and a dynamic new force inside the organization. As of the spring of 2007, there were an estimated 150 bloggers … At home in cyberspace, blogging Brothers have more in common with other young Egyptian activists, whether leftist or nationalist, than they do with their less wired peers. (2007, p. 45)

This new generation of new media-savvy Muslim Brothers are often referred to as fourth-generation Muslim Brothers.[5]

The case of the fourth-generation Muslim Brothers' use of blogging illustrates and expands on the notion of cultural citizenship. I argue that these fourth-generation Brothers are indeed asserting their cultural citizenship rights through blogging and Internet usage, given the environment in which the Brotherhood operates. In order to clarify the argument, we can define cultural citizenship following the formulation of Renato Rosalto:

> At odds with conventional notions of citizenship, which emphasize universal, albeit formal, applicability of political rights to all members of a nation, cultural citizenship entails that groups of people bound together by shared, cultural, and/or physical features should not be excluded from participation in the public spheres of a given polity on the basis of these features'. (Flores and Benmayor 1997, p. 36)

The final point I want to discuss here is that the analysis of *Ikhwan.com* and other new media technologies deployed by the Brotherhood has to take the political context into account. As Saskia Sassen rightly reminds us, the Internet is a powerful technology that 'is partly embedded in actual societal structures and power dynamics: its topography weaves in and out of nonelectronic space' (Featherstone and Lash 1999, p. 62). As political commentators have observed, the decision of the Muslim Brotherhood to enter into parliamentary politics in Egypt came with a price: the Brotherhood had to resort to pragmatism at the expense of its ideological platform in order to effectively play the game of politics. Brown and Hamzawy (2010) make the argument that the entry of the Muslim Brotherhood into Egyptian parliamentary politics has necessitated cross-ideological coalitions with other opposition parties, forcing them to focus on economic and political issues, such as corruption, labor, wages, etc., while at the same time diluting their moral, cultural, and religious platform. In fact, Brown and Hamzawy state that, 'the brotherhood's religious and moral platform has been reduced to illiberal stances on women's issues and scattered calls for the application of *Shari'a* provisions' (2010, p. 41).

It is true that this has functioned as a politicking maneuver on the part of the Brotherhood to ease their entry into the fray of Egyptian politics. It is my contention, however, that as a result of this compromise, the Brotherhood strategically decided to focus on the moral, cultural, and religious tenets of its ideology through media outlets such as *YouTube* videos, a social networking portal, blogs, televised series, and *Ikhwan.com.* These digital platforms provide the Brotherhood with the space and freedom to propagate their ideological stances regarding religious and cultural issues while affording it the opportunity to focus on pragmatic political issues in parliament, building coalitions with secular opposition groups.

In the name of religion and cultural authenticity: Internet entrapment cases

So far I have mapped out how digital technologies are taken up by different groups as platforms for mobilization and expression of dissent. However, my intention is not to romanticize digital technology or frame the Internet as a panacea for the woes of authoritarian rule. I am acutely aware of the limitations of the medium and its susceptibility to regimes of surveillance and censure. Recently, Gladwell (2010) wrote an article for the New Yorker entitled, 'Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted.' In this article, Gladwell contends that:

> With *Facebook* and *Twitter* and the like, the traditional relationship between political authority and popular will was supposed to be upended, so it would be easier for the powerless to collaborate, coordinate, and give voice to their concerns. Instead we ended up with the reverse: social media increase the efficiency of the existing order rather than empowering dissidents. (2010, p. 42)

While my prognosis of the efficacy of social media for mobilization is not as stark as Gladwell's, one needs to think about the limitations of social digital media. Having provided this caveat, I believe the power of these digital practices has had an indelible imprint on the political and cultural scene in most of the Arab world, and this makes such digitally mediated strategies worth critically investigating. In this section, I will investigate how governments attempt to police the virtual borders of this digital topography. While digital networks have been relatively successful in putting pressure on governments to increase their accountability toward their population, governments

have also devised surveillance techniques to monitor and operate those unruly virtual borders. Here, I will examine what become known as the Queen Boat case in Egypt. This case stands as an example of digital surveillance and the power of the State to police citizens in the name of cultural and religious authenticity.

The arrest and trial of 52 allegedly homosexual men in Cairo on 11 May 2001, which came to be known as the Queen Boat case, has spawned an unprecedented politicization campaign against non-heteronormative sexual practices in Egypt. The perpetrator of this vicious and infamous campaign is the Egyptian State as represented by both its repressive State apparatuses (the police and the courts) and the ideological State apparatuses (the religious establishment, the press, and mass media) (cf. Althusser 1971). It should be stressed that the Queen Boat case is by no means the first crackdown on people engaging in same-sex relations in Egypt; but the case has metonymically become the most famous of such arrests due to the media extravaganza that followed it, and which, I argue, was meticulously engineered by the Egyptian State and the State-owned media and press in an attempt to create a collective fantasm concerning homosexual subjectivity and posit it as a threat to the moral fabric of the nation.

On 1 March 2004, Human Rights Watch launched an influential report entitled 'In a Time of Torture: The Assault on Justice In Egypt's Crackdown on Homosexual Conduct,' documenting the details of the crackdown campaign targeting homosexuals in Egypt, dealing not simply with the Queen Boat Case but unearthing arrests that date back to 1997. Furthermore, the 144-page report, which is based on research conducted by Human Rights Watch in Egypt, provides the genealogy of the laws used to criminalize homosexual conduct in Egypt. The report opens as follows:

> Egypt is carrying out a crackdown. The professed motive is cultural authenticity coupled with moral hygiene. The means include entrapment, police harassment, and torture. The agents range from government ministries to phalanxes of police informers fanning out across Cairo. The victims are men suspected of having sex with men. (Long 2004, p. 1)

The post-hoc reaction and response to such a crackdown has been largely in line with the official State stance. Such a stance was even shared by many Egyptian Human Rights groups who preferred not to get involved so as not to endanger their already precarious position vis-à-vis the State. However, a few indignant and appalled voices tried to make sense of the events that were unfolding before their eyes. Hossam Bahgat, an Egyptian Human Rights Activist and founder of a human rights and advocacy organization called the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, has been active in championing the plight of the arrestees. Bahgat (2001) contends that the reasons behind such an atrocious and prurient crackdown campaign were not only to 'divert public attention from economic recession and the government's liquidity crisis' (p. 2) but also 'to present an image as the guardian of public virtue, to deflate an Islamist opposition movement that appears to be gaining support every day' (p. 2).

Raoul is a very charming but dangerous man. No one exactly knows if that's his real name or his chat nickname. Consider Raoul's story as told in the Human Rights Watch Report:

> Raoul – the name he used on the Internet – was hardworking but had charm. Through his computer, he reached out to new friends who might not otherwise know he existed. Yet he possessed a virtue endearing him to many of the lonely men he contacted through

> their personal ads, or chatted with on instant messaging services: people interested him. Even without physically meeting him, some found themselves falling in love with an interlocutor who wanted so acutely to learn about their lives. In late 2002, Raoul read a personals ad posted by Amgad, a young professional in his twenties, living with his parents in Upper Egypt, secretive about his sexuality and achingly lonely. Raoul reached out to Amgad via e-mail. They began 'conversing' computer-to-computer. … Not long after that they decided to meet face-to-face. Amgad left for Cairo, full of hope, to meet Raoul. In the end, though, Raoul did not appear for his encounter with Amgad. This was not because he suffered panic or second thoughts. It is because Raoul did not exist. Instead, Amgad found himself surrounded by police. (Long 2004, pp. 73–74)

This account is one of many accounts that came to be infamously called Internet entrapment cases. This is the latest device – the use of informers and undercover policemen on the Internet posing as potential friends or sexual partners for lonely men in Egypt – used by the State in its crackdown campaign on men suspected of having sex with other men. On the one hand, the Internet was seen by urban Egyptian gay men as a safe haven, an outlet, a consolation, on the other hand, the authorities found the Internet as a virtual geography of potential perversity that hence needed to be controlled and patrolled.

Writing about the age of globalization and its encounter with the State, Trouillot enjoins us to seriously consider the relationship between globalization and the post-colonial nation-state through entertaining the following questions: 'Are national governments in the post colony obsolete reminders of fictitious histories? Are they everywhere mere survivals from times gone by? Or are they left only to watch borders – and ineffectively at that?' (2003, p. 94).

In answering these questions, Trouillot uses banal everyday experiences in the lives of citizens to assert that despite of, or rather because of, globalization, 'the government still performs a gate-keeping role. Regardless of the relative effectiveness of governments at border patrol, the national state still produces – and quite effectively among most populations – a spatialization effect' (2003, p. 94). Through another banal experience I would like to explore how Trouillot's argument applies to the crackdown campaign in Egypt. As I have outlined thus far, to assert itself as an effective container of morality and cultural authenticity, the Egyptian State produced the threat of a western-supported organized homosexual insurgency seeking to corrupt a nation and destroy its culture. It is crucial to understand this fiction in the context of globalization, free market economies, and the age of telecommunications, in which the Egyptian State feels threatened and powerless in controlling its populace and asserting its territorial hegemony.

The newly formed Internet crimes division of the Egyptian Ministry of the Interior is the State's solution to some of the problems posed by the post-modern age of globalization and the proliferation of telecommunications technology. The Internet is seen as a dangerous virtual landscape that requires patrolling and surveillance. It is considered by the State to be within the uncontested prerogative of the State to regulate its population and patrol its borders even if those borders are virtual. The virtual spatial geography that the Internet offers as a platform from which virtual communities can organize, mobilize, voice dissent, and engage in a certain economy of desire and consensual sex is deemed a threat to national security, and hence necessitates State intervention. It is within this framework that the Internet crimes division of the morality police was established to monitor and patrol 'perverse' and 'immoral' interactions and transactions, and also to entrap people. The Human Rights Watch report has documented the names of 46 men arrested and brought to trial for homosexual

conduct since 2001 after being entrapped by police over the Internet (Long 2004, p. 74).

Foucault reminds us that 'our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance' (1995, p. 217). However, new realities necessitate new technologies and modes of surveillance. Those new technologies of surveillance are required to preserve the cultural fabric of the Egyptian social canvas and prevent the infiltration of 'corrupt' western values and norms of behavior. An Egyptian Interior Ministry official asserted that 'We are dealing with a different type of criminal and the spread of new crimes … This requires security and technical expertise to be able to patrol the Internet the same way we Patrol Egyptian streets' (al Maged 2002, quoted in Long 2004, p. 76). The rules of the game have changed and the nature of the frontier and the territorial boundary that Mitchell (1991) describes as one of the characteristics of the modern state has expanded to include virtual landscapes that require new forms of policing and regulations.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot begins his above-cited piece on globalization by stating that 'sociocultural anthropology often arises from the banality of daily life' (2003 p. 79). The material treated in this section has indeed confirmed that the workings and mechanisms of this diffuse, micro-level disciplinary power of the State often manifest themselves in the banality of daily life. In our case, this entails the mundane act of starting one's day by logging on the Internet to chat with a certain person called Raoul, and possibly ending one's day in prison.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to investigate the relationship between Islam and culture in the digital age. The case of the Muslim Brothers' use of new media can be seen as a digital strategy of assertion of their cultural rights within a polity that demonizes and delegitimizes their right to do so. On the other hand, I have attempted to show the limits of digital freedom by providing the case of the Internet entrapment cases as an example of State policing of sexuality in the name of religious and cultural authenticity. This brings us to the issue of citizenship and sovereignty in a digital age. My intention has not been to resolve the intricate relationship between religion, culture, and new media, but to bring out its complexity and raise new questions regarding governance and sovereignty in relationship to current geopolitical realities – a globalized world, electronic mediation, the triumph of neoliberal logic in governance, and the use of culture-as-resource. These are questions that undoubtedly need further investigation.

Notes

1. Egyptian State television was established in 1960 – the high moment of Nasserist socialist and pan-Arabist ideology. The mission of Egyptian television was – and, to a large extent, still is, despite changing ideologies, neoliberal reforms, and the proliferation of privately owned Egyptian and Arab satellite channels – both entertainment and education. Hence, a curatorial concern of programming on Egyptian State television can be described as didactic.
2. *Iftar* is the Arabic word for the breaking of the fast at sunset.
3. For a succinct analysis of the Muslim Brotherhood's forays in Parliamentary politics see Brown and Hamzawy 2010.
4. http://www.emarketing-egypt.com/Facebook-in-Egypt-E-Marketing-insights/2/0/10.

5. The Muslim Brotherhood was established in 1928. Commentators on political Islam find it useful to analyze the movement in terms of generations. The first generation of Muslim Brothers are those who faced the repression of Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s; the term 'second generation' is often used to refer to Muslim Brothers who capitalized on the openings that were granted to them under Sadat in the 1970s; the third generation of Brothers are those who reorganized during the 1980s; and finally the fourth-generation Muslim Brothers are typically urban, educated, technologically savvy young men who find themselves in opposition to the old guard on a number of ideological issues. Lynch (2007) offers a cogent analysis of the use of cyber technology by the fourth-generation Brothers.

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