

TITLE: Innovation, the Power of Religion and Insecurity

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Abstract

This essay will examine complex interplays between communication technologies, its innovative applications by social actors, inspired and driven by the power of religious imagined identities in many contexts to trigger insecurity, by mobilizing people and opinions. Based on selected examples from Iran, Lebanon and Morocco, the hypothesis is that modern innovative communication technologies (the Internet, mobile phones and video games), the spread of violent religious *gemeinschaften* and vulnerable risk societies are interconnected. The objective of this essay is to understand, through a combination of social sciences approaches, an emerging phenomenon and its consequences and implication for the planet's the security.

Introduction

This essay presents a synoptic analysis of the interplay between communication technologies, its innovative application by religious actors, inspired and driven by the power of religious imagined identities in many contexts to trigger insecurity. Based on selected examples from Morocco, Libanon and Iran, this essay argues there is a direct link between innovative communication technologies such as the Internet, mobile phones and video games, the spread of violent religious discourses and, the sociology of insecurity in a globalized world. It also puts forward the notion that the diffusion of digital based networks of communication has induced the rise of a new aggressive form of religious understanding and practice. The mass self-communication will trigger insurgent

violent counter-politics and social actors who are capable of causing wide scale damage in a more decisively way.

Internet-based communication, the one that exists in hypertextualized and networked realm, provides the support for the religious production and reproduction of textual meanings, the symbolic conflict over intertextuality. This constant conflict is played out in the processes of communication.

The relationship between communication and power reflects opposing religious values and identities, and involves many social actors in conflictual and conflictive practices. Studying video games can be addressed from many human and social sciences perspectives. This research project will adopt **Martin Heidegger's notion of technology's essence as *Gestell*, meaning framing** as well as **Pierre Bourdieu's notions of *Habitus* and cultural and symbolic reproduction**. Included also is **George Gerbner's cultivation theory** which suggests that persistent exposure to mass media frame or cultivate viewers' conceptions of social reality.

This study will use an integrated **ethnographic** research approach to collect data from the various uses of video games by social actors. These approaches can reveal how players (social actors) construct their political virtual stories and identities in their symbolic interactions with the video games. By using extensive ethnographic, **narrative** and **visual analysis** of the games, and the games manuals, we hope to construct an **interpretative frame analysis**.

The Power of Religion

Emerging religious gatekeepers and new self-appointed authorities in the religious field have their own internal controls in terms of their capacity to influence the disoriented youth, because they are primarily power resources in

the conflict over the minds, and they must win their minds and hearts. They are competitive; they must keep their credibility in front of their competitors.

The main issue is not the shaping of the minds by sacred and esoteric texts (messages and images) widely distributed, couched and embedded in the hypertext of the networked publics, but the absence of an engaged and enlightened version of religion that balanced the power of unorthodox and heretics.

On the other hand, we should remember the current rise of ideological Islam and the diminishing importance of the official Islam. These hyperactive social actors are predisposed to challenge the power relations institutionalized in traditional religious discourse, characterized by its powerlessness. In recent years, in parallel with the growing crisis of traditional religious legitimacy, there is increasing growth of religious movements, coming in very different forms and with sharply contrasted interpretations of the sacred text.

The Rise of Digital Communication Ecosystem

The emergence of digital communication ecosystem offers an extraordinary medium for social movements and religious groups to culturally resist and confront the established institutions of religions and power in their own terms and around their own religious and cultural utopias. Social and political actors exercise considerable influence over the youth relying on the digital communication ecosystem. The diffusion of Internet, mobile communication and video games has changed the ancient communication system. The emerging one is based on SMS, blogs, vlogs, podcasts, wikis, social networking websites and the like. A very high proportion of the population in the Middle East region has access to mobile communication even in rural poor regions.

The Politics of Violence and Sociology of Insecurity

Over the last five years, the violence was centered in the city of Casablanca. It witnessed since May 2003 a series of five suicide bombings that killed many people and terrorized thousands. The recent suicide bombing in an Internet Café in *Sidi Moumen* slum reflects the growing pressure of the religious terrorist networks in Morocco, the power of religion and the insecurity. These suicide bombers can potentially execute larger scale attacks.

The suicide bomber who blew himself up in a Cyber-cafe after being prevented from visiting jihadist websites, blogs or to obtain direct instructions through the websites or email on where to detonate the explosives is indicative of this complex relationship between religion, technological innovation and terrorism and insecurity.

For these young people, Casablanca, an urban center has become the battlefield that metamorphoses their misery into paradise. This demonstrated that the power of religious images and messages has motivated these young people to look for messages from religious authorities to secure a place in the paradise.

The bombing of a cyber-cafe in Casablanca is a case in point of the link between religious motivation and indoctrination made easy by communication power and the power of religion. The bombing is a new empirical evidence of the growing threat posed by *Al Qaeda* affiliates when empowered by the communication power and the power of religion, two determinants factor in the struggle for power.

When police surrounded these young terrorist people in an apartment building in the working-class *Hay Farah* neighborhood of Casablanca, they blew

themselves up with explosives in an effort to negate social reality and transcend to a religious constructed after-death hyper-reality.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, global security has witnessed a dramatic shift in content, context, and architecture as a result of the rapid diffusion of communication technologies. An emerging area of computer-mediated communication scholarship now highlights video games, which are rapidly catching up to movies as a tool for cultural entertainment. While video games are not new, the social and political power they can harness has received much media attention in the past five years.

Initially they were perceived as a children's medium, yet in recent time, video games have become an essential tool for the global circulation of power configuration and imagining constellations of war and peace. Like the Internet, the history of video games begins with the Pentagon, when the first computer game, *Space War*, was created in 1962 to reflect the ideology of war. Videogames have made a significant break into the politics of war, terrorism and global security, since they reflect real and imagined geopolitical conflicts. In the post 9/11 world, states, non-state actors and terrorists have started to explore the potential of games in their war making machine.

In the conflated post 9/11 world, military-themed video games have become popular. While the US used them as a recruiting mechanism, Iran harnessed them to spread anti-Americanism. While Hezbollah launched video games as a way to conduct its propaganda and re-fights war with Israel. *Al Qaeda*, a network of terrorist networks, has used video games to proselytize, recruit and mobilize young Muslims. The three different applications of the military-themed games are designed to function as rhetorical, propaganda and recruiting mechanism. These political agencies have made video games to serve as explicit political commentaries and to create representations of particular

historical events to frame the perception of war or peace. By showing players how to fight wars, “persuasive games” are used to influence players to simulate experiences and take action.

Many different political agencies, including Iran, *Hezbollah* and *al-Qaeda* are exploring video games’ potentials in changing international and global power configurations. For top *Hezbollah* officials, virtual and video games are another way to fight Israel. In the last decade, *Hezbollah* has launched many anti-Israel video games to nurture and celebrate a culture of resistance among younger generations. The digital construction of “heroes and martyrs” seems to be designed to foster a “digital dignity”.

Global Islamic Media Front, a media branch of *Al-Qaeda*, has a growing list of Islamic video games. In addition, tech-savvy *Al-Qaeda* terrorists have culturally contextualized and reconstituted US video games for their ideological needs. Iran used video games as a propaganda medium, fostering anti-American overtones. Iran has capitalized on this new technology and launched some video games, which were designed by a team of radical students based in Isfahan, a city that houses a nuclear site.

Conclusion

Religious authorities aim at positioning themselves in the Internet-mediated communication realm; religious actors striving for social change often use the Internet platform as a way to influence the religious agenda of established, traditional and orthodox elites. They increasingly use the means of digital communication, because of their flexibility, instantaneity, and unfettered capacity to diffuse any kind of discourse, relevant for the practice of identity politics in real time.