

CFP: Ift?' on Screens: Satellite Television, the Internet and Religious Authority in the Arab World

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Ift?' on Screens: Satellite Television, the Internet and Religious Authority in the Arab World.
Doha, Qatar 27-28 June 2011

A Workshop Organised by the Center for the Study of Contemporary Muslim Societies of the Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies, in collaboration with the New Islamic Public Sphere Programme of the University of Copenhagen.

In the last two decades satellite television changed the scene of religious media in the Muslim Arab World, only to be followed by the more open, and at times more problematic, cyberspace. Traditionally, it was the knowledgeable *fuqaha* whom Muslims sought for a *fatwa*. Today, television and computer screens bring *fuqaha* to the privacy of home. "Seeking" the (presumed) most learned has become as easy as changing channel or surfing the internet. However, this ease of access is not mere acquiescence to pre-defined authority. The proliferation of modern media forms offers an unprecedented range of choice, leading to great variation if not clashes and confrontation. Multiple sources of intellectual influence are at play, all drawing on classical sources of Islamic jurisprudence while claiming to present views most-fitting for contemporary reality. Thus wherever he is, an Arab Muslim is exposed to differing influences, constantly struggling for his religious leanings and also, in effect, reifying or changing his perception of religious authority. This workshop will focus specifically on *ifta'* on screens, be they of Arab satellite channels or of the Arab cyberspace, for both Sunni and Shii Muslims. The aim is to explore the ways in which these new spaces for, and means of, *fatwa* are reconfiguring religious authority in the Arabic-speaking Muslim World.

Among the questions and themes we expect papers in this workshop to tackle: how are these spaces for religious knowledge reconstituting, or even redefining, elements of religious authority? Are they undermining existing institutions (e.g. al-Azhar) or are they buttressing them? Are we witnessing the emergence of "*fuqaha*-stars"? And if so how? To what degree and in what ways is the political scene affecting (or shaping) this phenomenon? Are these new media forms making Muslims better aware of, or more ignorant about, both, the intricacies of *Sharia* and the room for difference and variation it traditionally allows? In relation to the last question, can we devise an ideological map of Muslim religious media, with clear contours and intellectual-religious battles? How does *ifta'* in these spaces, which at times appears relatively free, relate to existent political systems? Is it the subject of their hegemony or is it a challenge to their ideological lines and legal structures?

It is up to the researchers to tackle these questions the way they choose; among these may be specific case studies of programmes and websites. The researcher may also opt for examining certain cases of controversial *ifta'* that stirred heated debates. Or, alternatively, examine the example of a single *fuqaha* and the evolution of his (or her) role through these hypermodern venues. The final deadline for the submission of abstracts (no more than 200 words) is 15 February 2011.

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Papers, not more than 8000 words, are to be sent to us by 15 June 2011. Please note that we are only interested in papers that have neither been published nor presented, partially or fully, before. All expenses, including airfare will be covered. Please send your abstracts, and any inquiries you may have, to muslim.media@qfis.edu.qa