Emotion, Sensory Experience, and Islamic Discourse on the Internet:

Theorizing the Affective Islamic Public

By

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Abstract

Digital media platforms have become important spaces for Muslims to discuss and debate Islam and Islamic values in the contemporary world. In this study, I analyze the affective nature of digital Islamic discourse, focusing primarily on how the internet allows for the formation of transnational Muslim collectives based upon shared sensory experience. In doing so, I coin a new term that I use to refer to such digital spaces – the affective Islamic public. I discuss three case studies that I use to define the affective Islamic public: a social media controversy surrounding an American Muslim journalist, an online argument between a preacher in Tajikistan and a member of ISIS, and a Snapchat Live Story depicting the events of a Muslim religious holiday. To conclude, I suggest some best practices that other researchers interested in affect and digital religious discourse can use to conduct further studies in this field.

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Introduction

      This research project calls into question the extent to which the internet serves as a space for affective religious experience as well as for debate on Islamic ethical norms. I analyze three case studies from around the Muslim-majority world to consider this question: the debate that took place on the social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram regarding Noor Tagouri, an American Muslim journalist, and her decision to give an interview to Playboy magazine; a famous preacher in Tajikistan named Hoji Mirzo who uses the internet to negotiate a place for Islamic values between government repression and foreign extremism; and #Mecca_Live, a Snapchat Live Story depicting the events of the Islamic holiday of Laylat al-Qadr in Mecca and the worldwide reaction it inspired on Twitter. In all three cases, Islamic values and ethical norms are perceived to be under threat, whether from government repression, violent extremism, misinformation spread by mass media, or the influence of "Western values," and in all cases the internet serves as a space where Muslims (and non-Muslims) with different conceptions of what it means to be a "good Muslim" interact and challenge each other.

      I consider the role of affect, and digital media technology's capacity to produce affective religious experiences, in allowing for the formation of Islamic communities online and provoking heated debate on Islamic values on social media platforms. By using the term affect, I am referring to an intense, pre-cognitive, sensory experience that, when processed by the brain, results in emotions; affect is a feeling deeply rooted in the body rather than the brain. The intensity of debate online regarding Islamic values is due, in part, to the intense, multisensory, synchronous nature of communication enabled by digital media technology. I argue that digital media technology's affordances, especially its scalability and its capacity to enable synchronous

transnational communication, allow for the formation of novel religious communities online that spread their ideas more rapidly and more broadly than was previously possible. I attempt to elucidate how digital Islamic publics, such as the ones considered in this project, draw on traditional Islamic debate practices and ethical norms while also innovating new modes of Islamic practice in order to address the challenges associated with the widespread adoption of digital technologies.

From the digitally published sermon to the pilgrimage shared on Snapchat and the religiously polemical Twitter post, the internet has emerged as a primary site for Islamic discourse in the modern era. In theorizing the affective Islamic public, I am emphasizing the disciplinary nature of digital discourse and its capacity for religious community formation through appeals to affect. In my conclusions, I suggest a number of best practices that qualitative researchers working in fields related to the study of digital Islamic discourse can use to better understand religious discourse in digital spaces. Although every digital religious community is unique in some ways, I believe that the examples I discuss in this study can provide general insight on an effective approach to the study of religion online.

Literature Review and Methodology

To what extent is the internet a space for affective religious experience and debate on Islamic ethical norms? How do the affordances of digital media technology affect the way Islamic discourse takes place online? In order to answer these questions, it is first necessary to turn to some of the existing literature on affect, religion, and media. While social scientific research on digital Islamic communities remains a small but growing field, previous research in Islamic studies, anthropology, and media studies can shed some light on the phenomena I take as the focus of my research here. In this section, I provide a brief history of internet-based Islamic communities as well as a discussion of the theoretical background I use in framing this study.

The history of the Islamic internet begins in the 1980s when some of the first Muslim internet users began to use the new digital communications technology to discuss matters of faith. According to anthropologist Jon Anderson, these internet pioneers were primarily "students from Muslim countries who studied and worked in some of the high-tech institutes where the technology was being developed or extended."[1] Just as the first ever listservs were formed, with many focused on the hobbies or interests of early internet users, Muslim groups came into being and "digitized texts of the Holy Quran and Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad" were uploaded and shared online. Many of these early digital Muslim spaces were "electronic discussion groups that mixed debate about religion with questions about applying [Islamic] texts to contemporary life and to issues of Muslim life in the diaspora."[2] Anderson argues that this electronic distribution and discussion of Islamic texts resulted in the emergence of a "creolized

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[1] Jon Anderson, "Wiring Up: The Internet Difference for Muslim Networks," in *Muslim Networks from Hajj to Hip-Hop*, edited by Miriam Cooke & Bruce B. Lawrence, 2005: 255.
[2] Anderson, "Wiring Up": 256.

discourse" - a social space in which discussion was based both on traditional Islamic methods of textual interpretation as well as "discussion rooted in diaspora life," drawing on the advanced technological and scientific training of these early Muslim internet users.

As the internet evolved into the 1990s and early 2000s, the range of Islamic content expanded greatly to include ask-the-shaykh services, video sermons shared on social media platforms like YouTube, and a wide range of discussion boards that addressed topics beyond Muslim life in the diaspora. Islamic digital media became more social during this time period, reflecting broader trends like the emergence of Web 2.0 and the greater range of interactive media services becoming available during this time. In addition, internet access became more mainstream and expanded across the globe, allowing a greater number of Muslims with varying levels of technological skills to have access to debates taking place on digital media platforms. Islamic websites and discussion boards began to emerge in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Turkish, and other important languages of the Muslim-majority world. Whereas the early Islamic internet was based primarily on individual efforts to represent Islam in cyberspace, such as those early listservs discussed above, more recent efforts have seen Islamic institutions gain a presence online in order to reach out to their followers and promote their viewpoints to wider audiences. Famous preachers like Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Ramadan al-Bouti have significant online followings, for example, as do well-established *da'wa* (proselytization) movements like the Saudi Arabian religious ministry and the Tablighi Jama'at in Pakistan. Political Islamist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or Hizbullah in Lebanon also began to make use of the internet at this time.[3]

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[3] Anderson, "Wiring Up": 257-60.

Anderson and Dale Eickelman argue that new media do not inherently change the nature of Islamic discourse, but rather allow new conversations to take place that would not have happened as easily without the internet, writing that "media merely enable."[4] Increasing levels of education, literacy, and economic prosperity in much of the Muslim world, as well as increasing familiarity with the West, have allowed Muslims from many different parts of the world to engage in a conversation with each other about the proper role of Islam in the public sphere and in each individual Muslim's life. The capacity for new conversations does not mean that they will necessarily occur, however. Eickelman and Anderson mention that Arab Muslim theologians, for example, do not commonly engage with the work of Indonesian or other Southeast Asian Muslim philosophers although Indonesians are expected to be conversant in Arab thought.[5] Traditional hierarchies (for example, Arab thought being considered primary in importance throughout the Muslim world) are not automatically disrupted by the use of new media platforms. In short, although the internet has allowed for the expansion of the Islamic public sphere, bringing religious material and theological debates into contact with a more diverse group of participants than ever before, Muslim internet users are still generally working within the boundaries of their tradition when they go online and discuss religious issues.

Because the Islamic internet does not represent a break from tradition but rather a continuation and evolution of it, I will now turn to other studies of religion and media, especially in the Islamic world, to elaborate the theoretical framework I wish to use in my discussion. Many recent studies of religion and media in the Islamic world have focused on transnational religious networks and how such networks affect power relations within Islamic communities. In one such

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[4] Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson, "Redefining Muslim Publics," in *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*, ed. Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson, 2003: 14.
[5] Eickelman and Anderson, "Redefining Muslim Publics:" 8.

study, anthropologist Brian Larkin discusses the history and materiality of cinema theaters in northern Nigeria as sites of political, religious, and class-based conflict in the late colonial era.[6] He argues that theaters can be understood as physical sites of contestation where the material realities of colonialism and cultural change came to a head in the British colonial period in northern Nigeria; theaters were spaces where illicit activities that were not looked well upon in Hausa society could take place, such as selling and consuming alcohol, mixed-gender socialization, and sex. Cinemas were characterized as a religious and colonial threat, as they were associated with magic, Westernization, and immigration of Christian southern Nigerians and British colonial agents to the region.

Larkin refers to Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer's theory that "the quotidian landscapes of life… are all surface representations of the fantasy energy by which the collective perceives the social order."[7] In other words, the "social space of media" facilitates both "transnational cultural flows" and "reaffirm[s] and intensif[ies] forms of belonging by providing a cultural foil against which local religious, ethnic, and national identities may be hardened."[8] Furthermore, the cinema allows for the construction of "alternative forms of modernity that react against Westernization by providing their own modes of space and people."[9] Rather than analyzing merely what is portrayed on screen in the cinema, Larkin "shift[s] the study of cinema towards the social practices the theaters create."[10] In short, Larkin analyzes media technologies (in this case, the cinema) as physical, material structures that force the societies in which they

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[6] Brian Larkin, "The materiality of cinema theaters in northern Nigeria," in *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, 2002: 319-36.
[7] Larkin, "The materiality of cinema theaters…": 321.
[8] Larkin, "The materiality of cinema theaters…": 320.
[9] Larkin, "The materiality of cinema theaters…": 320.
[10] Larkin, "The materiality of cinema theaters…": 321.

intervene (Hausa society in northern Nigeria) to engage with them, negotiate with them, and find a place for them within a cultural system. The cinema, as a physical manifestation of colonial cultural influence, forces Hausa society to both reform and reaffirm its traditional stance on a wide range of social issues (including consumption of alcohol, the preservation of moral space, and the segregation of the sexes).

Like the cinema, the internet is a technology which is imbued with colonial power. The internet was invented as a result of American and European government funding during the Cold War and its physical infrastructure continues to favor users living in these more affluent regions of the world, where speed and ease of access to the internet is most developed. Like any technology, the internet forces all societies in which it intervenes to renegotiate norms regarding a whole host of issues, in this case especially privacy, the freedom to speak in public space, and control of access to information. As a foreign technology that has been introduced to the Muslim-majority world from the West, the internet has undergone a process of religio-cultural negotiation - similar to that which Larkin describes - in which its proper context has been debated within the established norms of Islamic societies.

Muslim networks are adept at using other originally-foreign technologies, like cassette tapes, audio CDs, and DVDs, to stay in contact with members of their communities around the world and to reach out to new audiences. Anthropologists Patrick Eisenlohr and Beth Buggenhagen describe two such communities in their respective studies of Islamic devotional media in Mauritius and the Senegalese diaspora. In Mauritius, recorded versions of Urdu devotional poetry, called *na't*, are popular among the Muslim community of this small island nation and are used especially by local *na't khwan* (reciters of devotional poetry) to improve

their pronunciation and skill at reciting.[11] Unlike theorists like Benjamin who suggest that "the

mass circulation and reproduction of art has been associated with a loss of aura and authenticity,"

Eisenlohr finds the "opposite dynamic" to hold true in this case;[12] that is, the circulation of

recordings of *na't* in Mauritius allows for the authentication of Islamic tradition in this context

where Muslims represent a minority community. The tapes allow their listeners to transform

their "affective stances to an intercessor [the recorded *na't khwan*], who consequently facilitates

their approach to God and his revealed word,"[13] suggesting that the relationship between the

technical affordances of mass media and how such affordances are interpreted within any given

society (as authenticating or de-authenticating) is dependent on context.

In a similar study, Beth Buggenhagen analyzes Islamic devotional media in Senegalese

diaspora communities, especially transnational Muridiyya Sufi communities based around

Sheikh Amadou Bamba and his followers.[14] She studies how radio, CDs, DVDs, and videos

shared online and on other platforms work as visual and aural objects to create a transnational

Sufi community. The media platforms work to create "a spacio-temporal domain apart from the

mundane in which the disciple and the shaykh are connected through the act of viewing and

being viewed;"[15] these platforms allow the shaykhs of the Muridiyya order and their followers to

come into close proximity with each other through mediation. Buggenhagen concludes that

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[11] Patrick Eisenlohr, "As Makkah is sweet and beloved, so is Medina," in *American Ethnologist* (33.2), 2006: 230-45.
[12] Eisenlohr, "As Makkah is sweet…": 241.
[13] Eisenlohr, "As Makkah is sweet…": 233.
[14] Beth Buggenhagen, "Islam and the Media of Devotion in and out of Senegal," in *Visual Anthropology Review* (26.2), 2010: 81-95.
[15] Buggenhagen, "Islam and the Media of Devotion": 84.

"Muslim media practices, such as the viewing of audiocassettes, are central to the creation of the proper, pious, and prosperous body."[16]

Charles Hirschkind touches on similar themes in his ethnographic study of tape-recorded sermons and the communities of people who listen to them in Cairo, Egypt.[17] Hirschkind focuses on the sensory aspects of listening and the role of affect in shaping politics and pious dispositions. He attempts to draw a distinction between listening and receiving information from other sensory experiences - he quotes several informants that, according to their understanding of Islam, the act of listening is more conducive to Islamic piety than other sensory experiences (seeing, touching, tasting, etc.). Hirschkind claims that listening is distinct because it allows the listener to engage in an activity he terms pious relaxation, referring to Benjamin in making the claim that modern experiences of boredom, such as driving a taxi, lend themselves to the mental and physical state of openness to listening. The men and women who engage in pious listening perform other activities while they play cassette-recorded sermons in the background. The sounds serve as the background to their daily life, constantly reminding them to behave in ways conducive to Islamic piety. These pious sounds result not only in mental engagement but in physical reactions and bodily orientations toward specific pious actions (calling one to prayer, the appropriate skin crawl one is expected to feel when listening to a particularly scary verse from the Quran describing the torments of hell, the muscle relaxation and calm breathing associated with listening to descriptions of paradise, etc.).

In this study, Hirschkind develops his theory of the Islamic counterpublic. This term refers to a space distinct from the modern liberal ideal of the public sphere as expressed by

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[16] Buggenhagen, "Islam and the Media of Devotion": 93.
[17] Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*, Columbia University Press, 2006.

Jürgen Habermas and others in which power and discourse are separate entities and rational debate is the normative ideal. According to Hirschkind, the counterpublic is a space that recognizes the disciplining power of discourse and does not recognize the epistemological foundations of the liberal public sphere in which individual agents use reason to freely debate fundamental truths with each other. In Hirschkind's counterpublic, Egyptian listeners to cassette-tape sermons recognize Islamic normativity as their ultimate authority (not reason or empirical truth) and engage in discourse with each other as a mode of discipline and ethical cultivation so as to form each other into better members of the pious Islamic community. In the counterpublic, discourse is teleological, directed toward the goal of achieving complete submission to the will of God, whereas discourse in the liberal public sphere is directed toward the exercise of free will and rational argumentation. For Hirschkind, affect is the mode by which Islamic discourse disciplines the body into ethical behavior.

Because all of the theorists I have discussed above consider affect and/or sensory experience to be an essential aspect worthy of analysis in studying religious phenomena, I will now shift my discussion to consider this term in greater detail. What do I mean by affect? Many different theorists have used this term and its meaning is hotly debated amongst them. I will provide a brief outline of some of the major theorists of affect before moving on to how these ideas inform my study. Brian Massumi claims affect to be intensity; that is, an intense sensory experience that is too complex, too excessive, to be fully comprehended in the moment it actually happens.[18] The body, for Massumi, is a resonant system that captures, reflects, and resonates sensory information. The body is open, yet folded in on itself; it "is immediately

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[18] Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," in *Cultural Critique* (31), 1995: 83-109.

abstract as it is concrete."[19] The past and future converge in the realm of the affective - it is a moment that is unmediated, in which reason, logic, and cognition are only at work after every affective experience. In fact, affect is not really experienced - it simply is. The body then processes "that which is" (affect) into a linear system of time; cognition tells us what to think of the world in which we live after we have lived it. This space between activity and passivity, a "space of passion," as Massumi calls it, is affect. "Affects are virtual synaesthetic perspectives anchored in (functionally limited by) the actually existing, particular things that embody them. The autonomy of affect is its participation in the virtual. Its autonomy is its openness."[20] Emotions are what we capture from the affective perspective, but they always leave something out - actual lived experience. "Actually existing, structured things live in and through that which escapes them."[21] Humans process our lived experiences always after they already happen, channeling our intense sensory experiences into understandable packets that we call emotions.

In contrast to Massumi, Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank consider affect to be analog sensory experiences that cannot be reduced to Massumi's one-dimensional, pre-cognitive plane of intensity.[22] They attempt to resurrect mid-twentieth century psychologist Silvan Tomkins' idea that there are finitely many affects (n>2), qualitatively different from each other, that exist and that can (re)combine with each other to produce an exponential amount of emotional experiences in the human body. They attempt to argue against the idea of affect as one undifferentiated mass out of which humans subsequently assign meaning to after it has been experienced. They are less concerned with the cross-cultural applicability of Tomkins' theory of

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[19] Massumi, "Autonomy of Affect": 92.
[20] Massumi, "Autonomy of Affect": 96.
[21] Massumi, "Autonomy of Affect": 96.
[22] Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins," in *Critical Inquiry* 21.2, 1995: 496-522.

nine affects, or even its actual truth, but rather are concerned with resurrecting the idea of finitely many affects in opposition to the post-structuralist trend to essentialize all affects into one pre-cognitive plane of affect. Rather than posit that human experience can be placed on a one or two-dimensional field, Sedgwick and Frank argue for a three-, four-, five- (any finitely-many) dimensional frame that is more complex, more excessive, and less reductive (in their understanding) than Massumi's theory of affect as intensity.

I find Massumi's definition of affect to be more useful than Sedgwick and Frank's in my discussion of the affective Islamic public. I find that the emphasis on the pre-cognitive nature of affect, and its nature as an intense, multisensory (or pre-sensory) field of communication, is particularly applicable to the study of digital media. Much of the rhetoric regarding the internet, and social media platforms in particular, emphasizes the intense level of communication it enables between people across boundaries of time and space.[23] One of the goals of this project is to think more deeply about this rhetoric in relation to Islamic discourse online.

In a slightly different strain of affect theory, Sara Ahmed discusses how the skin, the body, and emotions serve to allow for the differentiation between the self and the other, and the alignment of "some subjects with some others and against other others."[24] Ahmed calls these alignments collective feelings. Collectivities are created by the affective response of bodies to other bodies. These responses are passed along and shared between members of collectivities. Ahmed uses as her example the narrative of the Aryan Nations' website, which posits the existence of an "average White citizen" who reacts affectively (in disgust, rage, or aversion) to

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[23] danah boyd, "Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications," In *Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites* (ed. Zizi Papacharissi), pp. 39-58, 2010.
[24] Sara Ahmed, "Collective Feelings: Or, The Impressions Left by Others," in *Theory, Culture & Society* (21.1), 2004: 25-42.

people of color. The website casts its "average White citizen" as pre-discursive and natural; it is the natural reaction of a White person to be disgusted by interracial relationships, according to the website. This narrative cast masks the discursive work that is at play here. By characterizing the members of one ethnic group (White) as naturally predisposed against another (Black or mixed race), the Aryan Nations argues for an "us against them" mentality, one that works affectively. Ahmed writes that this idea can be summed up as "together we hate and this hate is what makes us together."[25]

Furthermore, Ahmed contends that "it is not just that we feel for the collective… but how we feel about others is what aligns us with a collective, which paradoxically 'takes shape' only as an effect of such alignments."[26] In other words, humans have emotional reactions to other humans (as well as objects, symbols, and ideas) and these emotional reactions are what shape communities. This process is both exclusionary and inclusionary. We align ourselves with others who feel similarly to us and against others who feel differently from us. Furthermore, our emotional reactions to other bodies may produce collectives when we recognize similarities in other bodies (positive affective reactions) and can produce collectives against other bodies when we recognize differences (negative affective reactions). This second process describes what is happening in Ahmed's Aryan Nations example.

In a similar vein, religious studies theorist Birgit Meyer discusses the role of affect in forming religious communities by coining the term "aesthetic formations."[27] Like Ahmed, Meyer considers the primacy of sensory (or affective) experience in shaping both the religious subject

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[25] Ahmed, "Collective Feelings": 26.
[26] Ahmed, "Collective Feelings": 27.
[27] Birgit Meyer, "Introduction: From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations: Religious Mediations, Sensational Forms, and Styles of Binding," in *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses*, Palgrave McMillan, 2009: 1-24.

and the religious community. Rather than understanding religious communities as merely imagined or formed on the basis of some invisible inner belief, Meyer contends that religious sensibilities are shaped by our sensory experiences and the interactions we have with media. She writes that mediation is not merely a tool used by religious authorities to shape the beliefs and practices of their followers but rather that religion *is* mediation; it is only through media, whether they take the form of incense, candles, and icons or Facebook posts, Snapchat feeds, or Twitter conversations, that humans are able to commune with "the transcendental." "In this sense," Meyer writes, "spiritual power materializes in the medium, and is predicated to touch people in an immediate manner."[28]

Zizi Papacharissi, a media theorist and internet researcher, takes up where theorists like Ahmed and Meyer leave off by discussing how exactly affective processes of alignment with and against others work to create digital communities.[29] Papacharissi coins the term "affective publics" to refer to such digital spaces. She takes #egypt and #ows as her examples, discussing how these Twitter hashtags work as "framing devices that allow crowds to be rendered into publics; networked publics that want to tell their story collaboratively and on their own terms."[30] In other words, affective publics are successful at drawing people in and making them feel like they are a part of a narrative community, aligning some bodies with other bodies that feel similarly and against those that feel differently, similar to the example that Ahmed discusses. The Twitter users posting to these hashtag streams do not represent a cohesive community of people living in one place or sharing one identity; rather, they come together to share their

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[28] Meyer, "Introduction": 15.
[29] Zizi Papacharissi, "Affective publics and structures of storytelling: sentiment, events and mediality," in *Information, Communication & Society*, 2015: 1-18.
[30] Papacharissi, "Affective publics": 2.

feelings of support for the Egyptian revolution (#egypt) or their frustration and anger at the American financial infrastructure (#ows). Papacharissi defines affective publics as "networked publics that are mobilized and connected, identified, and potentially disconnected through expressions of sentiment,"[31] effectively applying Ahmed's theory of collective feelings to the study of online communities.

Papacharissi goes on to elaborate five propositions that characterize affective publics: 1) they "materialize uniquely and leave distinct digital footprints," with each public exhibiting a different rhythm of activity depending on its unique social context and goals; 2) "affective publics support connective yet not necessarily collective action," meaning that platforms like Twitter "serve as conduits for connection, but they do not facilitate the negotiation of collective identity;" 3) "affective publics are powered by affective statements of opinion, fact, or a blend of both, which in turn produce ambient, always on feeds further connecting and pluralizing expression in regimes democratic and non," reflecting the intense, pre-cognitive nature of affect; 4) "affective publics typically produce disruptions/interruptions of dominant political narratives by presencing underrepresented viewpoints;" and finally 5) "the streams sustain publics convened around affective commonalities - impact is symbolic, agency claimed semantic, power liminal."[32] Papacharissi's affective publics come together in an ad hoc fashion, are ephemeral in nature, and do not represent collectivities which can effect real political power in offline space. While these publics allow for the representation of minority viewpoints in digital discourse, they do not serve as spaces for legitimate political debate because they cannot hold together long enough to assert any real form of political power. This theory serves as a starting point for my

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[31] Papacharissi, "Affective publics": 14.
[32] Papacharissi, "Affective publics": 5-14.

investigation into digital Islamic publics. In my discussion, I critique many of these propositions as inapplicable to the cases I examine in this study and I suggest edits for how a more comprehensive theory of affective publics can be elaborated.

In the discussion that follows, I use the term "affective Islamic public" to refer to a space where religious discourse takes place that is directed toward the alignment of individual Muslim bodies into collectivities with other Muslim bodies based upon shared affective experiences. These publics are disciplinary and teleological, with the goal of shaping the members of such collectivities into more pious Muslims. Non-Muslims may be included in an affective Islamic public to the extent that they are being aligned into a collective with Muslims through a shared affective experience and they are being taught, through their experience, how a pious Muslim behaves. I am working here primarily off of Papacharissi, Meyer, and Ahmed. From Papacharissi, I have borrowed the term affective public as a space that allows networked publics to come together and "tell their story collaboratively and on their own terms."[33] The affective Islamic public works as an "aesthetic formation,"[34] allowing for the creation of a religious public around media artifacts, and result in the stirring of affect in the members of such a public, aligning them into collectives[35] with others who feel similarly regarding Islamic norms and values (i.e. what it means to be a "good Muslim"). In short, the affective Islamic public brings together disparate Muslim (and non-Muslim) individuals with similar proclivities into contact with each other, across boundaries of time and space through the medium of the internet.

Unlike Papacharissi's theory of affective publics, I argue that the affective Islamic public *does* allow for the negotiation of collective identity, in this case the definition of who is a "good

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[33] Papacharissi, "Affective publics": 2.
[34] Meyer, "Introduction."
[35] Ahmed, "Collective feelings."

Muslim," and the discourse that takes place within them *does* have more than just symbolic power because it shapes how Muslims behave in relation to other Muslims as well as non-Muslims. Furthermore, I argue that the affective Islamic public is distinct from the liberal idea of the public sphere and more in line with Hirschkind's theory of the Islamic counterpublic; Hirschkind's counterpublic and the affective Islamic public are both directed toward disciplining the Muslim body into a more pious disposition through an interaction with media. With this idea, I am also working off the examples discussed by Larkin, Eisenlohr, and Buggenhagen in which media technologies from the West are adopted, negotiated with, and transformed by Muslim communities to fit their needs and desires. Finally, I am taking up where Anderson and Eickelman leave off in their history of the Islamic internet by discussing examples from the past three years (2014-16) and considering the role affect plays in shaping the representation of Islam in digital spaces.

As internet use expands around the globe, an ever more diverse audience is created for digital Islamic publics. The internet works as a technology in specific ways that are unique to different cultural contexts. Within Islamic communities, and more generally in ethico-religious spaces as a whole, the internet allows for the stirring of affect in its users, creating an intense, multisensory experience that is directed toward the collective expression of shared norms or religious ideals. As a multimedia space, where video, audio, images, and text work together, the internet enables a more intimate level of connection with others that lends itself to religious experience. Such experiences shape Muslim individuals by disciplining their body in specific ways to behave in an ethical manner, aligning them into collectivities with others who share similar feelings and against others who feel differently. Affective Islamic publics exist in the physical and digital worlds, although in this project I am concerned primarily with examples of

this type of public in digital spaces. In my discussion, I will elaborate how exactly these processes of affective alignment within digital Islamic spaces work to create affective Islamic publics. In doing so, I synthesize the theories of affect, mediated publics, and religious community formation discussed above into a workable theory that can be used to better understand internet-based religious discourse.

I would now like to turn my attention to three examples of the affective Islamic public from three different parts of the Islamic world. All three concern the negotiation of collective Muslim identity in the modern world, in which disparate individuals with different conceptions of Islamic normativity (i.e. what it means to be a "good Muslim") interact and argue with each other. In my first case study from 2016, I discuss the social media controversy surrounding Noor Tagouri, a prominent American Muslim journalist, and her appearance in Playboy magazine. My next example from 2014 considers one prominent preacher in Tajikistan named Hoji Mirzo and his use of digital media to argue against both state censorship of Islam as well as violent extremist rhetoric from a Tajik member of the Islamic State (also known as ISIS, ISIL, or Da'esh). Finally, I discuss a Snapchat story from 2015 known as #Mecca_Live, where a number of Muslims in Mecca broadcast short videos of themselves on the popular smartphone app performing the rites of *'umrah* and celebrating Laylat al-Qadr, as well as the reaction this event provoked on Twitter. By using these three examples, one each from the past three years and each from a different part of the Islamic world with a different intended audience, I hope to come to a broad understanding of digital Islamic communities in recent years from a transnational perspective.

Chapter 1: A Hijabi in Playboy: Islamic Ethical Performance on Social Media

I begin my discussion with an example of an affective Islamic public concerned entirely with the definition of Islamic normativity within one geographic context - the United States. In late autumn 2016, Islamic social media was abuzz with activity regarding Noor Tagouri, a young hijab-wearing American Muslim journalist who decided to give an interview about her work to Playboy magazine. She appeared in Playboy, fully clothed and wearing her hijab, playfully grimacing at the camera in front of an American flag background (Fig. 1). Soon after the interview was published, thousands of Muslim social media users began to publish their take on Tagouri's decision to appear in Playboy, with many decrying her decision as a breach of Islamic ethical norms while many others supporting her as the first Muslim woman to be featured in the magazine's history.

In this chapter, I analyze how social media users perform Islamic ethical norms by investigating the online reaction to Noor Tagouri's appearance in Playboy magazine. Using network and content analysis of public comments posted on Tagouri's Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram profiles, I discuss how this event resulted in the formation of an affective Islamic public centered on Tagouri. With reference to the Islamic tradition of "commanding the good and forbidding the wrong" (*al-'amr bil-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*), I argue that the many thousands of comments left on Tagouri's social media profiles should be understood as the affective performance of Islamic ethical norms and that this case study represents an example of an affective Islamic public. Rather than being directed toward achieving a political goal, the affective Islamic public is intended to promote correct Islamic ethical behavior online. Furthermore, the commenters on Tagouri's social media profiles are networked together not by a

hashtag or by a conscious decision to "friend" each other but by their collective desire to engage with Tagouri and the ethical questions she raises.

In order to understand how social media users perform Islamic ethical norms, it is first necessary to discuss what exactly those norms are and to outline some of the debates surrounding them. Like any ethico-religious community, Muslim communities have always been concerned with regulating the behavior of their members. In Islamic tradition, the community of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions (*al-ṣaḥāba*) exemplifies the ideal ethical community, especially after their immigration (*hijra*) in 622 CE to Medina, the first city where Muhammad and his followers could practice their religion freely after being forced out of Mecca. In fact, the *hijra* marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar and is a crucial turning point in Islamic history as it represents the first establishment of the independent, self-governing Islamic ethical community (*umma*).

An important feature of Islamic ethics is the doctrine of public accountability (*ḥisba*). Within the Islamic community, conformity to ethical standards of behavior is monitored by the other members of the community. Traditionally, it was considered the duty of the ruler of an Islamic community to "command the right and forbid the wrong" (*al-'amr bil-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*).[36] This duty stems from a verse in the Qur'an which reads "and let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful."[37] Al-Ghazali (1058-1111 CE), an influential Sunni jurist and mystical philosopher, expanded on this commandment and wrote that *ḥisba* is the duty of every Muslim and that one must confront another Muslim if they are seen to be

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[36] For a more detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see Michael Cooks' *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, 2000.

[37] Qur'an, Surah Al-'Imran, verse 104. Sahih International translation.

committing a sin; this confrontation must not be conducted in an aggressive or mean-spirited manner, but rather should be conducted with love and mercy.[38] Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328 CE), another influential Sunni jurist and predecessor for modern Salafi thought, wrote that enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong are collective obligations shared amongst all members of the Muslim community and that "friendliness and sympathy are the correct way in enjoining right and forbidding wrong."[39]

Recently, enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong has come be associated with *da'wa* movements, which are a specific type of piety movement within Muslim communities that invite (*da'wa* literally means "invitation" in Arabic) others to exercise greater levels of piety and religious observance. In her ethnography of the women's mosque movement in Cairo, Saba Mahmood takes *da'wa* as a central organizing paradigm for understanding the exercise of agency within an Islamic context. She writes that "while *da'wa* may also be directed toward non-Muslims, the contemporary piety movement in Egypt primarily understands it to be a religious duty that requires all adult members of the Islamic community to urge fellow Muslims to greater piety, and to teach one another correct Islamic conduct."[40] Actions included within the category of *da'wa* include verbal admonishment of wrongdoing, establishing mosques, forming social welfare organizations, and preaching.

As we can see from this brief discussion, Islamic ethics are characterized by collective action within community. The foundations of Islamic law lie in the imitation of the Prophet Muhammad's ethical community and commanding the right and forbidding the wrong has come

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[38] Cook, *Commanding Right,* chapter 16.
[39] Ibn Taymiyyah, trans. Salim Abdallah ibn Morgan, "Enjoining Right and Forbidding Wrong."
[40] Saba Mahmood, "Topography of the Piety Movement," in *Politics of Piety: the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Princeton University Press, 2005: 57.

to be understood as an ethical duty incumbent upon the Muslim community as a whole.

Performing one's ethical duties is seen as an integral part of being an active member of a Muslim

community, whether this means wearing the hijab as a sign of one's piety or confronting a fellow

Muslim about their ethical shortcomings. Imitating the Prophet's *sunna* ("way of life") is

understood to require the public performance of one's Islamic ethics.

  I first became aware of Noor Tagouri and her appearance in Playboy magazine on social

media myself. I follow the Muslim Vibe's Facebook page, which describes itself as an English-

language digital media network with a goal of "[promoting] ethical, positive, engaging, relevant,

and thought-provoking Islamic content."[41] I was intrigued when I saw the Muslim Vibe post a

link to an opinion piece they published entitled "Why as Muslims we can't support Noor

Tagouri's decision to feature in Playboy."[42] Who was Noor Tagouri and why was she

problematic? I was intrigued and wanted to learn more. I read Playboy's interview with Tagouri,

published online on September 22, 2016.[43] In it, she discusses her career as a journalist and her

goal to "become the first hijabi anchor on commercial U.S. television." Tagouri currently works

for Newsy, a digital news outlet focused on producing video content, and she is something of a

social media celebrity, hosting a YouTube channel that "draws tens of thousands of viewers" and

promoting a campaign called #LetNoorShine that "went viral" in 2012. Anna del Gaizo, Senior

Associate Editor at Playboy, describes Tagouri as "a badass activist with a passion for

demanding change and asking the right questions, accompanied by beauty-ad-campaign looks."

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[41] The Muslim Vibe, "About," https://themuslimvibe.com/about.

[42] Hussain Makke, "Why as Muslims we can't support Noor Tagouri's decision to feature in Playboy," The Muslim Vibe, 25 September 2016, https://themuslimvibe.com/muslim-current-affairs-news/why-as-muslims-we-cant-support-noor-tagouris-decision-to-feature-in-playboy.

[43] Anna del Gaizo, "Media Wunderkind Noor Tagouri Makes a Forceful Case for Modesty," Playboy, 22 September 2016, http://www.playboy.com/articles/renegades-noor-tagouri.

Tagouri ends the interview with a call to "do good, stay fearless and remember that everything you want is just outside your comfort zone."[44]
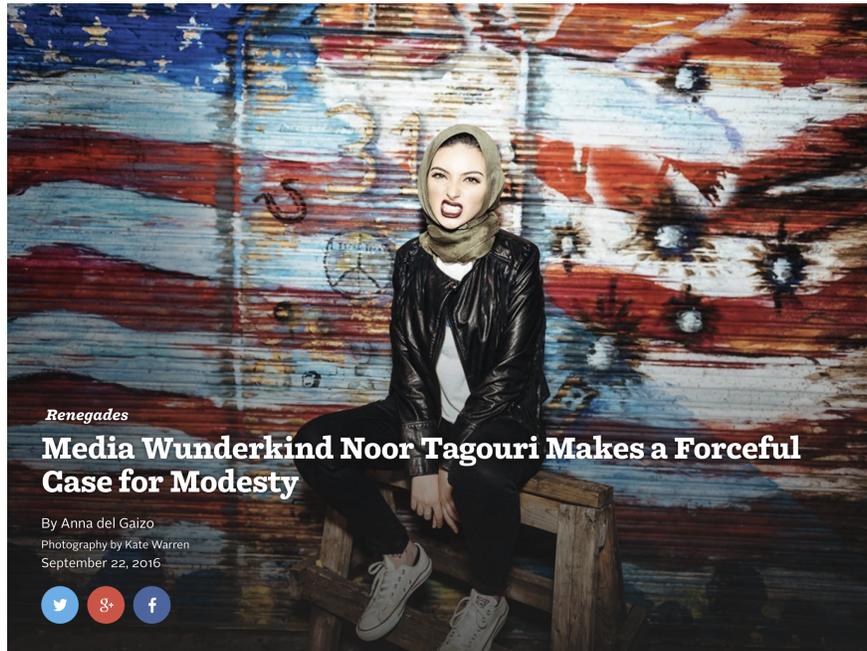
Figure 1. Screenshot of Noor Tagouri's cover photo for her profile in Playboy magazine. Originally published 22 September 2016 online at http://www.playboy.com/articles/renegades-noor-tagouri.

As of December 2016, Tagouri has over 35,300 followers on Twitter, 198,000 followers on Instagram, and 138,000 Facebook users 'like' her public personal page.[45] What I found when I dug a bit deeper on her profiles, especially when I looked back at posts in late September and early October immediately following the publication of her interview with Playboy, was a bit surprising to me - Muslims from all around the world, but especially those from the United States and other Western countries, were commenting heavily on Tagouri's posts related to the

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[44] Del Gaizo, "Media Wunderkind," Playboy.
[45] Twitter: https://twitter.com/NTagouri, Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/ntagouri/, Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/ntagouri/

Playboy feature story and most of the comments were very negative. At the same time, those posts received upwards of several thousand likes, shares, and retweets. What did it mean that thousands of people were coming together to post on Tagouri's social media profiles, flooding her with likes and shares as well as a significant amount of criticism? How had Tagouri become such a divisive figure within the Islamic social media community as a result of a seemingly innocuous interview?

In order to get a better sense of this this social media activity, I conducted a network analysis of Tagouri's Twitter feed and a content analysis of her Instagram and Facebook posts related to the Playboy story. I used Netlytic, a free online data analysis tool developed and maintained by the Social Media Lab at Ryerson University in Canada,[46] to conduct my Twitter analysis. I set up a query that searched for all Tweets posted by or @replying to @NTagouri, Noor Tagouri's official public Twitter account. I began my query on October 21 and ended it on November 4, 2016, a range of about four to six weeks after Tagouri's profile was published in Playboy. There were a total of 3,022 posts collected by this query within the timeframe given above. Because I began my study about a month after Tagouri's profile was originally published, none of the posts collected by this query were directly related to the Playboy incident. Netlytic does not allow for the collection of tweets posted in the past and I realized that I would need to use another strategy to collect data from social media concerning Tagouri's appearance in Playboy. I constrained my data collection to the period from September 22 to October 6, the two weeks immediately following the publication of the Playboy article. I used several digitally

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[46] Netlytic, "About," https://netlytic.org/home/?page_id=10834.

published journalistic stories to collect a sample of tweets referencing the controversy,[47] as well as manually searching Tagouri's Twitter page during this time period for any references to Playboy. I used the same method (pulling from news stories and manually searching Tagouri's profiles) to collect 4 Instagram posts and 4 Facebook posts that Tagouri published in this period that are directly related to the Playboy controversy. On these posts, I collected a sample of several hundred comments and coded them for references to emotion and/or Islamic ethics. See Figures 2 and 3 for a sampling of this data.
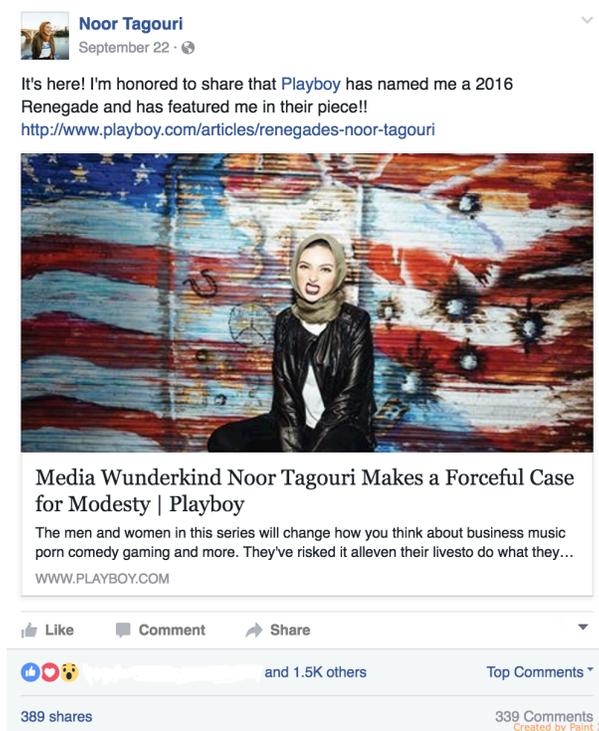

Figure 2. Public Facebook post shared on Tagouri's profile announcing her appearance in Playboy. Originally posted 22 September 2016.

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[47] Journalistic sources include: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/noor-tagouri-playboy-muslim-woman-hijab-first-magazine-a7339201.html, http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/37483996/journalist-noor-tagouri-to-become-first-muslim-to-appear-in-playboy-with-a-hijab, http://metro.co.uk/2016/09/27/playboy-featured-a-woman-in-a-hijab-and-muslims-dont-know-what-to-think-6155764/
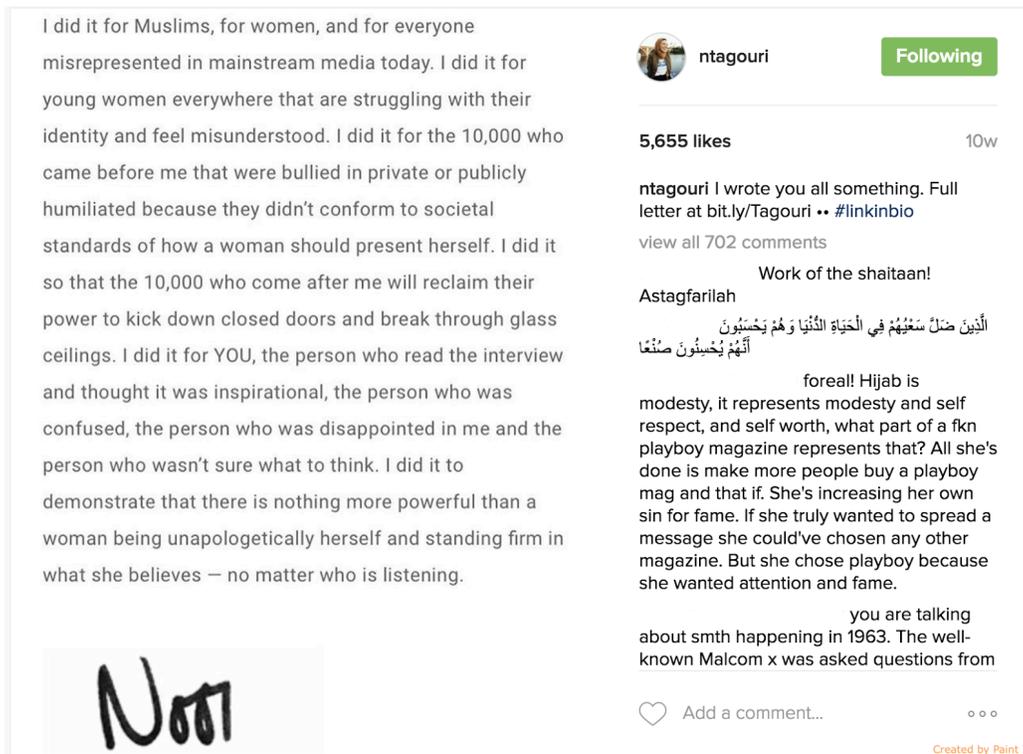
Figure 3. Public Instagram post shared on Tagouri's profile explaining why she appeared in Playboy, with a selection of comments on the right. Commenter's usernames have been deleted. Originally posted 30 September 2016.

These posts on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, as well their respective comments sections, are representative of the affective Islamic public I argue exists in this case. These three social media platforms allowed for the formation of a cross-platform public directed toward the performance of Islamic ethical norms. The comments posted on Tagouri's profile are generally addressed directly to her and are either critical or supportive of her decision to become the first Muslim woman to appear in Playboy magazine. Rather than being organized around a hashtag, these publics are organized around Tagouri herself - and her Muslim female body - as an object

of ethical contention. The public that formed to discuss Tagouri's decision to appear in Playboy

falls in line with the Islamic tradition to "command the good and forbid the wrong," addressing

Tagouri directly with the specific goal to either reprimand or support her behavior within an

Islamic ethical framework. I discuss in detail three examples, one each from Twitter, Facebook,

and Instagram, in the section below.

On September 24, Imam Suhaib Webb of the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center,

a prominent American Muslim religious leader and active social media user himself, tweeted his

response to the Tagouri controversy. He wrote, "Muslims may not know that one of Malcolm

X's greatest interviews was in Playboy. I can attest to the goodness that is @NTagouri

[Tagouri's Twitter handle]" (Fig. 4).
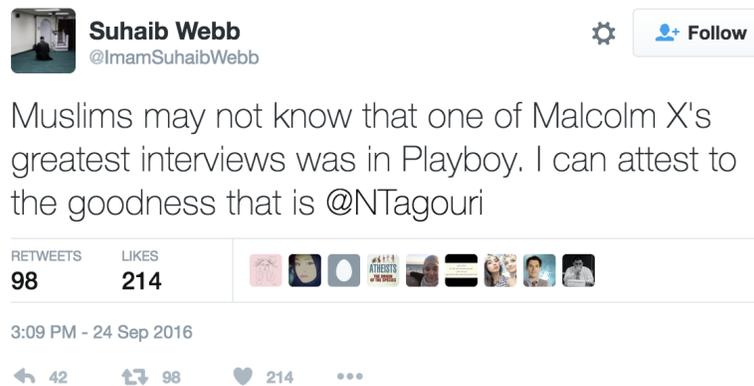
Figure 4. Screenshot of Imam Suhaib Webb's Tweet responding to Tagouri and the Playboy controversy.

Posted 24 September 2016.

In this Tweet, Webb expresses his support for Tagouri and vouches for her ethical

"goodness" from his standpoint as a Muslim religious leader. He compares Tagouri to Malcolm

X, the famous black Muslim activist and civil rights leader, by reminding his Muslim audience that she is not the first American Muslim to appear in the magazine. Implicitly, he critiques those Muslims who are expressing their discontent with Tagouri's appearance in Playboy as misogynistic and ill informed of history. It is unclear what his relationship to Tagouri might be that allows him to vouch for her ethical standing within the Muslim community (I do not know if he knows her personally or if he is just a fan of her and her work). At a basic level, however, Webb is using his platform as a prominent American Muslim religious leader to defend Tagouri from what he perceives as misguided criticism and to vouch for her "goodness" as a Muslim.

Webb's Tweet sparked a fair amount of its own controversy. Many people attacked Webb for "fetishizing" the hijab and thereby minimizing its sacredness while others critiqued Webb's comparison of Tagouri with Malcolm X, reminding him that Malcolm "wasn't infallible" and that such a comparison "[co-opts] Black Muslim Experience."[48] Many of those who commented on this Tweet expressed disbelief that an imam would support a "woman appearing in Playboy" and pointed to this as an attempt by Webb to "tweak Islam 2 suit d west" (*sic*). It is worth mentioning that Webb is one of three well-known American imams that "got put on ISIS's hit list for promoting the idea that Islam and the West can coexist."[49]

With this example, we can see that the discussion surrounding Tagouri on Twitter does not make use of a hashtag as its primary mode of engagement. Suhaib Webb and the Twitter users who respond to him do so directly, @replying to him as well as @NTagouri with their feedback. The critiques of Webb and Tagouri should not be understood as just internet hate or

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[48] All quotes from comments sections are direct quotes. I have chosen not to publish usernames of those who wrote these comments in order to respect their privacy.

[49] Katie Zavadski, "ISIS Targets American Imams for Believing Muslims Can Thrive in U.S," *The Daily Beast*, 14 April 2016, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/04/14/isis-targets-american-imams-for-believing-muslims-can-thrive-in-u-s.html.

trolling; all of the Tweets responding to Webb's post reference Islamic history, Islamic ethical

norms, or the user's own identity as a Muslim, allowing them to speak with some authority as

part of the community the imam is claiming to represent. These commenters argue against Webb

by making "affective statements of opinion, fact, or a blend of both,"[50] referencing traditional

sources of Islamic law like the Qur'an and hadith as well as more questionable sources of

authority like tradition or essentialized narratives like "Black Muslim Experience." In short, this

is not an ordinary networked public but rather an Islamic ethical public held together by affect.

Let us take a detailed look at another example, this time from Facebook. In response to

the criticism she received after the publication of the Playboy feature story, Tagouri posted a link

on her Facebook page to her personal blog on September 30 where she explains why she decided

to appear in Playboy.[51] In her blog post, Tagouri explains that she was approached by Playboy

and was asked to be featured as one of "seven cultural rule breakers who are changing the way

we think, dress and more." She was initially apprehensive about appearing in Playboy because of

the magazine's associations with nudity and pornography. While she writes that she was

comforted by the fact that Playboy had decided to stop publishing nude photographs of women,

it was the magazine's association with "social justice and cultural progress" that ultimately made

her feel comfortable appearing in this venue. She writes that she participated in the interview "on

[her own] terms," wearing hijab and spreading "a positive and much needed message." Tagouri

argues against her critics "who perpetuate this notion that if something a woman does isn't

aligned with how you would have liked to see it done you're justified in attacking her character,

morals and religious beliefs," saying that she appeared in Playboy "to demonstrate that there is

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[50] Papacharissi, "Affective publics," 10.
[51] See her blog post here: http://noortagouri.com/blog/.

nothing more powerful than a woman being unapologetically herself and standing firm in what she believes — no matter who is listening." At the end of this post, she includes an Arabic translation of her post as well as a link to a screengrab of the Playboy article so that her readers who live in countries that ban access to Playboy's website can read her interview.

The Facebook post linking to this blog entry received over 1,900 'likes,' 299 'loves,' 18 'wows,' 13 'angrys,' 5 'sads,' and 3 'hahas,'[52] according to Facebook's emoji-based reaction system, as well as over 270 comments and 311 shares. As in the example I discussed above on Twitter, this Facebook post provoked its own share of controversy; a large number of people commenting on this post were supportive of Tagouri and her appearance in Playboy along with many others who were critical. Both her supporters and her detractors used affective language to express their reactions. Tagouri's supporters wrote comments like "I think the courage you have is truly inspirational and regardless of all the negative criticism, I still respect and appreciate what you did," "I believe what your doing is phenomenal!!! May Allah bless you," and "Habibati ["my dear"] I am so proud of you. Love you" while some of her critics used the following language, "Don't use the prophets name when trying to justify your sin. All you've done is ashame yourself," "As someone who has a passion for journalism, Islam and Da3wa [da'wa], I have always supported your movement. The thing is, when I saw this link with this magazine I was truly disappointed. You are way better than this," and "You do not represent me so stop claiming that you did something for me! I embrace the model of Fatima (as) [the Prophet's daughter, peace be upon her] and YOUR decision to mix with the profane is solely yours" (sic). Again, as on Twitter, much of this discussion consisted of affective reactions that

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[52] Noor Tagouri, Facebook post on 30 September 2016.

directly addressed Tagouri and the acceptability of her appearance in Playboy within an Islamic ethical framework.

Finally, let us look at an example from Tagouri's Instagram profile. On the same day that she posted on Facebook, as discussed above, Tagouri used her Instagram to share a link to the same blog post (Fig. 3). In total, over 5,655 people 'liked' this post and over 702 people commented on it. Again, as on Twitter and Facebook, both Tagouri's supporters and her critics used affective language to express themselves. I found the following exchange to be particularly fascinating and representative of the type of discussion occurring in the comments section here (Fig. 5).

USER1 #NOTINMYNAME

USER2 #NOTINMYNAME

USER3 Muslims are so full of hate for women it's seriously unreal #INMYNAME#ISUPPORTMUSLIMWOMEN#MuslimUmmahIsAJoke

USER4 #NOTINMYNAME

USER5 @USER6 so now because I have a voice, Liberty of expression and I tell the ugly truth I am hating woman? Check out hate's definition. I did not use hateful or insulting words. I justified my opinion. I love my sisters and my religion and want them to be valued not misrepresented.#WhatSheDidIsTheRealJoke#NotInMyName

USER3 @USER5 the problem is that nobody had anything to say when muslim men gave an interview to Playboy and everyone ignores the oppression muslim women face in the muslim and in the Western Community

Figure 5. Transcript of exchange debating Tagouri's decision to appear in Playboy. Copied from comments section of Tagouri's 30 September 2016 Instagram post. Usernames have been anonymized.

As we can see, both Tagouri's supporters as well as her detractors use affective language to make their arguments. A series of critics begin using the hashtag #NOTINMYNAME to express their disapproval of Tagouri's appearance in Playboy. This is a clear instance of Papacharissi's model of hashtags signifying affective allegiance to a certain perspective; the use of this hashtag is a performance of the critics' ethical disapproval of Tagouri and her claim to speak in their name. Following this, one of Tagouri's supporters, USER3, edits the hashtag to read #INMYNAME as a performance of her ethical approval of Tagouri's decision to appear in Playboy. One of the critics, USER5, responds by saying, "I love my sisters and my religion" and that her critique of Tagouri is justified because she is telling "the ugly truth." The entire exchange is highly emotionally charged, with words referencing emotion being used many times.

The three examples I have discussed above can be understood as a cross-platform affective Islamic public. After Noor Tagouri appeared in Playboy in late September 2016, thousands of social media users descended on her Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram profiles to leave their comments on her decision to appear in the controversial magazine. Rather than using one hashtag as a gathering point, their discussion took place across several different platforms, the most prominent of which are the three mainstream social media platforms I have discussed in this study. On all three of Tagouri's social media profiles, there was disagreement about whether her appearance in Playboy fell in line with correct Islamic ethical behavior or not. Two main opposing camps formed - those who supported Tagouri's decision and those who did not - and these camps were primarily organized around shared affective sentiments. I discuss more of what I mean by this in the concluding section.

Tagouri's appearance in Playboy presented Muslim social media users with something of a visual paradox - a hijabi Muslim woman appearing fully clothed in Playboy magazine. This

potent image was taken to represent an Islamic ethical problem, resulting in the formation of opposing camps organized primarily around affect. Those who supported Tagouri and her decision to appear in Playboy used affectively stirring words like "love," "goodness," and "inspirational" while her critics used affectively distancing words like "shame," "sin," and "disappointed." Both camps used language, and occasionally hashtags, GIFs, or other means, to express their affective allegiance to one side or the other. As a whole, both camps were concerned with policing the boundaries of respectable Islamic ethical behavior, with Tagouri's supporters arguing for the morality of her decision to appear in Playboy while her detractors arguing the exact opposite.

How do these examples fall in line with traditional modes of Islamic ethical policing? I argue that they can be understood as examples of digital *da'wa*, "commanding the good and forbidding the wrong" by using social media. The people criticizing Tagouri on her social media profiles come together in an ad hoc fashion, responding to what they perceive as an ethical dilemma. These commenters work within a long tradition of Islamic ethical reproachment that consists of monitoring the behavior of other Muslims and addressing any ethical shortcomings they may be seen to have. The goal of such criticism is the creation of an Islamic ethical community modeled after that of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. By referencing Islamic tradition or specific historical models, such as the Prophet's daughter Fatima, these critics claim authenticity and the authority to criticize Tagouri for breaching Islamic norms.

Like her critics, Tagouri's supporters also work within the Islamic tradition of *da'wa*. Instead of calling her out on her perceived ethical shortcomings, these commenters voice their public support for her decision to appear in Playboy. Tagouri herself references Islam and ethical values when she defends her reasoning to appear in the controversial magazine, referring to

Playboy's association with "social justice and cultural progress," values that she considers the Islamic community to share. Many of her supporters, like Imam Suhaib Webb, point out the hypocrisy of her critics while others echo the likes of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah in their calls to engage with Tagouri in a friendly and sympathetic, rather than an adversarial or harsh, manner. Both the critical and supportive camps fall in line with Ahmed's and Meyer's theoretical emphases on affect in understanding the formation of collectivities.

Furthermore, these examples show how the internet and social media allow for the clashing of different conceptions of Islam and Islamic ethics. In her theoretical outline of social networks as networked publics, danah boyd writes that one of the challenges that emerge on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram is the collapse of contexts, "[forcing] everyday people to contend with environments in which contexts are regularly colliding."[53] I argue that this is what happened in Tagouri's case. For a great number of Muslim social media users, Tagouri represents decadence, sin, and corruption and her appearance in Playboy represents her total surrender to Western codes of morality, which are wholly incompatible with Islam and Islamic values. For many other Muslims, Tagouri is a great example of a young, modern Muslim woman who owns her identity and isn't afraid to speak her mind and challenge tradition. When Tagouri speaks from her identity as a Muslim woman online, she speaks to all Muslim women online, inevitably putting her up against those who disagree with her because not all Muslim women who use social media think in exactly the same way.

What makes the example of Tagouri and Playboy different from other studies of ad hoc and affective publics? Unlike the publics based on political discussion or news events that

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[53] danah boyd, "Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications," In *Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites* (ed. Zizi Papacharissi), pp. 39-58, 2010.

Papacharissi discusses, the publics centered around Tagouri and Playboy are directed toward the communal policing of Islamic ethical behavior. Muslims with different viewpoints on what constitutes correct ethical behavior come together on Tagouri's Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram profiles to admonish or support the young journalist's decisions, working within the framework of *da'wa*. In this way, the collectives that form to discuss Tagouri can be understood as an example of an affective Islamic public. Tagouri's critics perform their ethical disapproval by distancing themselves from her affectively, further inscribing themselves as pious Muslims in the process. In short, these publics represent the collective exercise of power and moral discipline directed toward Tagouri through the performance of affect.

Another distinguishing factor of these networked publics is their system of organization - they are not organized around a hashtag but rather around Tagouri and her social media profiles (her digital body, so to speak). The ethical discourse regarding Tagouri takes place across multiple platforms and much of it consists of comments directed toward Tagouri herself, rather than Muslim community as a whole. As such, this public is considerably more private in nature than those that use hashtags. Someone who wishes to join in the conversation must already be a part of the Muslim social media community, as I was by following the Muslim Vibe on Facebook, in order to realize such a conversation was happening in the first place. I argue that the commenters who did voice their opinions on Tagouri's Playboy appearance did so because they felt some sort of affective connection with her, as most of the commenters on her posts identified themselves as Muslim women and pointed to their identity as Muslim women as their source of authority in speaking on her behalf or against her claims to represent them.

Although this affective Islamic public is sustained by "affective commonalities" and is "powered by affective statements of opinion, fact, or a blend of both," falling in line with two of

Papacharissi's criteria for affective publics, the public surrounding Tagouri and Playboy does support some measure of "negotiation of collective identity," challenging her second criterion.[54] By commenting on her decision to appear in Playboy, the members of this public perform their moral support for or disapproval of Tagouri and what she stands for, namely integration into mainstream American culture. The commenters on Tagouri's posts are implicitly, if not explicitly, negotiating what it means to be an ethical Muslim woman in the contemporary world, especially one living in the United States with a very public image.

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[54] Papacharissi, "Affective publics," 6-14.

Chapter 2: Islamic Normativity and Digital Media in Transnational Tajikistan

In this chapter, I discuss an example of an affective Islamic public concerned with the definition of Islamic normativity within the transnational Tajik community. Who claims to speak for Islamic values in Tajikistan today, what do they say, and how do they say it? I investigate these questions through an analysis of religious media in this Central Asian country, where government repression of Islam coupled with the threat of foreign Islamist groups like ISIS (the so-called Islamic State, also known as ISIL or Da'esh) has sparked a public debate about the proper definition of normative Islam in recent years. The internet and other digital media, consisting of audio and video recordings of religious material shared via mobile phones, as well as CDs and DVDs widely available in public markets, have become important spaces for discourse regarding the role of Islam in public life. Hoji Mirzo Ibronov, a mullah (Islamic preacher) from the southern Tajik city of Kulob whose sermons are popularly shared on digital media platforms, is an important figure in this debate (Fig. 1). Hoji Mirzo, along with other prominent Tajik clerics such as Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda and Eshoni Nuriddinjon,[55] represents himself as a defender of traditional Islam against both government repression and foreign jihadism. In the discussion that follows, I focus on how Hoji Mirzo and a Tajik-speaking ISIS propagandist named Nusrat Nazarov make use of digital media to form two oppositional camps within a transnational affective Islamic public. By using digital media and mediation, both Hoji Mirzo and Nazarov work to create transnational collectives based on shared sentiment regarding Islamic normativity and in opposition to the collective sentiments of each other.

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[55] Farangis Najibullah, "Tajik Government to Issue List of Approved Sermon Topics," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 10 January 2011, http://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan_government_orders_mosques/2271961.html.

Figure 1. Hoji Mirzo at his computer. Photo credit: Radio Ozodi, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

In order to fully appreciate this discussion of religious media in the Tajik context, I will first provide a brief outline of the relationship between religion and the state in Tajikistan in the contemporary period. Tajikistan gained its independence in 1991 with the fall of the Soviet Union. After over seventy years of repression under the Soviet system, Islam began to re-enter public life upon independence amidst a growing trend of nationalism.[56] Civil war erupted in 1992, pitting the newly elected government led by the former First Secretary of Tajikistan's Communist Party Rahmon Nabiyev against a broad coalition that would come to be known as the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). The leading faction within the opposition forces was the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), which partnered with other regional factions to

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[56] Shirin Akiner and Catherine Barnes, "The Tajik civil war: causes and dynamics," in *Accord*, volume 10, published by Conciliation Resources, 2001, http://www.c-r.org/downloads/Accord%2010_3The%20Tajik%20civil%20war_2001_ENG.pdf.

demand political change. In 1997, the leader of both the UTO and the IRPT Said Abdullo Nuri and Tajik President Emomali Rahmon signed a power sharing agreement in which the IRPT was guaranteed "thirty percent of places in government at all levels from village to ministerial."[57] Despite this agreement, Rahmon's government has "gradually eroded"[58] the IRPT's power and on 29 September 2015 a high court in Tajikistan officially branded the IRPT a terrorist organization after a failed coup attempted by a high level minister (Abduhalim Nazarzoda) formerly associated with the party.[59] Muhiddin Kabiri, the leader of the IRPT, is currently in self-imposed exile and other members of the party have been arrested and questioned by the authorities since late 2015.

Many Tajiks and international observers understand the crackdown on the IRPT, the second-largest political party in Tajikistan after President Rahmon's People's Democratic Party and the only legally recognized Islamic party in post-Soviet Central Asia, as part of a larger trend perpetrated on behalf of the government to consolidate control over Islam. According to Radio Free Europe, President Rahmon "has argued that rolling back Islamic influence in Tajikistan is necessary to stop growing militancy among Islamists."[60] Examples of government measures taken against public expressions of Islamic piety include laws preventing children under the age of 18 from attending mosques, ordinances banning female students from wearing the hijab, and

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[57] Bruce Pannier, "The Demise of Tajikistan's Islamic Party," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 4 September 2015, http://www.rferl.org/a/qishloq-ovozi-demise-of-tajik-islamic-party/27227509.html.

[58] Pannier, "Demise of Tajikistan's Islamic Party," 2015.

[59] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Shuttered Tajik Islamist Party Branded as Terrorist Group," 29 September 2015, http://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-islamic-party-terrorist-organization/27277385.html.

[60] Farangis Najibullah and Charles Recknagel, "As Tajikistan Limits Islam, Does it Risk Destabilization?" Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1 December 2015, http://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-islam-destabilization-rahmon-secular-/27400692.html.

several reports of bearded men being forcefully shaven at the hands of the police.[61] In addition,

in 2011, the official Religious Affairs Committee and the state-sponsored Islamic Council

compiled a "list of 60 topics" that were deemed acceptable for Friday sermons and this list was

distributed to mullahs across the country.[62] All of these measures were taken in response to the

perceived threat of radicalization among Tajikistan's youth, and the Tajik government points to

"over 400" of its citizens fighting for ISIS – including former Tajik special forces commander

Gulmurod Halimov – as evidence of this threat.[63] In short, the relationship between the Tajik

government and Islam is highly contentious, as both Tajik and international analysts fear that the

government's policy of repression of Islam in the country is promoting radicalization rather than

containing it.[64]

　　　With government repression of Islam in the public sphere and censorship of most mullahs

in their Friday sermons, where can Tajik Muslims turn to access authentic Islamic knowledge?

For many, this authentic source is found on digital media platforms.[65] The internet, as a space

with the potential to challenge authority, faces heavy censorship at the hands of the Tajik

government. According to EurasiaNet.org, a media outlet that reports on the countries of the

former Soviet Union, the Tajik authorities "tend to take fast action to suppress dissent and

discontent" online, routinely blocking social media websites like Facebook, YouTube, and

popular Russian social networks like VKontakte and Odnoklassniki as well as email services like

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[61] Catherine Putz, "Tajikistan: No Hajj, No Hijab, and Shave Your Beard," The Diplomat, 17 April 2015, http://thediplomat.com/2015/04/tajikistan-no-hajj-no-hijab-and-shave-your-beard/.

[62] Najibullah, "Tajik Government … Sermon Topics," 2011.

[63] Farrukh Umari, "Why Tajikistan's special forces chief joined ISIS," Global Voices Online, Public Radio International, 1 June 2015, https://www.pri.org/stories/2015-06-01/why-tajikistans-special-forces-chief-joined-isis.

[64] Catherine Putz, "Terrorism as Pretext: Religious Repression in Central Asia," The Diplomat, 15 October 2015, http://thediplomat.com/2015/10/terrorism-as-pretext-religious-repression-in-central-asia/.

[65] Tim Epkenhans, "Defining normative Islam: some remarks on contemporary Islamic thought in Tajikistan - Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda's *Sharia and society*," Central Asian Survey 30(1): 92, 2011.

Gmail and various international news outlets. Official news outlets are generally considered to be "light on information and lack analysis," and many Tajiks – especially the younger, web-savvy generation – have become "adept at using proxy servers to reach their favorite websites" instead of relying on this government sponsored media.[66]

While internet penetration remains relatively low in the country due to poor infrastructure development and widespread poverty, with just 17.5 percent of the population identified as internet users by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in 2014,[67] Tajik authorities seem threatened by the potential for dissent "just as internet penetration is starting to have an impact on political life in the country."[68] As further evidence of this, in late November 2015 the Tajik parliament "legalized the blocking of internet and telephone services during 'counterterrorism operations'" – a loosely defined term that the authorities have previously applied "to anyone even in mild opposition to the state."[69]

Although access to social media and international news outlets remains subject to heavy censorship in Tajikistan, other digital media such as MP3 recordings distributed via mobile phones as well as CD and DVD copies of religious lectures are commonly found throughout the country. According to data from the ITU, 95.1 percent of Tajiks owned a mobile phone in 2014,[70] giving them potential access to a wide range of MP3 recordings of popular sermons, while Radio Free Europe correspondent Farangis Najibullah reports that "CDs and DVDs" of

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[66] EurasiaNet.org, "What's Behind Tajikistan's Web Woes?" 14 September 2015, http://www.eurasianet.org/node/75076.

[67] International Telecommunication Union, World Telecommunication/ICT Development Report, 2014, http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.P2?locations=TJ.

[68] OpenNet Initiative, Tajikistan, 2010, https://opennet.net/research/profiles/tajikistan.

[69] Catherine Putz, "Fears of Terrorism Prompt New Communications Laws in Tajikistan," The Diplomat, 3 December 2015, http://thediplomat.com/2015/12/fears-of-terrorism-prompt-new-communications-laws-in-tajikistan/.

[70] International Telecommunication Union, World Telecommunication/ICT Development Report, 2014, http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.CEL.SETS.P2?locations=TJ.

popular preachers like Hoji Mirzo and Eshoni Nuriddinjon are widely available in public markets and "have become nationwide hits."[71] Electronically recorded religious material has been popular in Tajikistan since the end of the Soviet period.[72] Due to this widespread, easy access to certain types of digital media, it has been difficult for the government to censor these religious media – but that does not mean it does not try. Recently, under the pretext of preventing Taliban militants in neighboring Afghanistan from making use of Tajik cell phones, the Tajik government passed new legislation mandating that mobile phone providers "register all SIM cards sold, and re-register those already in circulation."[73] Catherine Putz, a reporter with *The Diplomat* magazine, fears this new legislation could do more than just limit Taliban access to Tajik mobile phones. Taken in context with other recently passed laws limiting access to digital media, the passage of this round of legislation points to the important role the internet and other digital media has played in allowing the distribution of uncensored religious materials among the Tajik public.[74]

Famous preachers like Hoji Mirzo, Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda, and Eshoni Nuriddinjon are some of the most popular Islamic voices in Tajikistan today, with a large number of their sermons recorded and distributed on digital media platforms. Originally used by Tim Epkenhans in his research on Turajonzoda, I use the term "moderate traditionalist" to refer to government-sponsored clerics like these three preachers who do not always censor their sermons to align with government policy; they will criticize the government when they perceive a threat to Islamic tradition, but otherwise they will abide by the government's censorship policies because they do

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[71] Najibullah, "Tajik Government … Sermon Topics," 2011.
[72] Muriel Atkin, "Religious, National, and Other Identities in Central Asia," in *Muslims in Central Asia: Expressions of Identity and Change*, ed. JoAnn Gross, Durham: Duke University Press, 1992.
[73] Putz, "Fears of Terrorism," 2015.
[74] Putz, "Fears of Terrorism," 2015.

not wish to be seen advocating for the destabilization of the government and risk losing official support.[75]

In summary, digital recordings of religious media from preachers like Hoji Mirzo, Turajonzoda, and Nuriddinjon, have become popular in recent years in the face of growing controversy about the proper role of Islam in public life in Tajikistan. The ardently secular Tajik government imposes heavy restrictions on religious activity in the country, promoting only a "specific form of Islam that does not threaten, and indeed actually supports, the regime."[76] Digital media have emerged as primary sites of religious contention just as the government seeks to restrict access to media that challenge its definition of Islam. By recording and popularizing messages of traditionalist mullahs like Hoji Mirzo, many Tajik Muslims participate in the definition of Islamic normativity against the dual threats of censorship and radicalization.

This brings me to the next section of my discussion – what does a moderate traditionalist mullah like Hoji Mirzo actually say and how does he frame his vision of Islam in relation to both the secularist state and foreign Islamists who compete against him for religious authority in Tajikistan? When one performs a simple internet search for "Hoji Mirzo," dozens of YouTube videos and MP3 recordings of his sermons appear. These sermons are typically recorded by mosque-goers during Friday prayers and are later uploaded to social media platforms like YouTube (Fig. 2). According to Tim Epkenhans, Hoji Mirzo and his followers operate a "semi-professional recording studio" called Nasihat ("advice" in Tajik) that distributes MP3 and DVD copies of "festivities and [his] weekly sermons."[77] There are three main topics these sermons can

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[75] Epkenhans, "Defining normative Islam," 2011.

[76] Bruce Pannier, "'Unawareness' of Islam May Be Feeding Tajik Extremism," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 11 February 2015, http://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-islam-education/26842429.html.

[77] Epkenhans, "Defining normative Islam," 92-93, 2011.

be classified under: the basic aspects of Islamic practice in everyday life like prayer (*намоз*) or

respect for one's in-laws; stories of the prophets and explications of the Qur'an and hadith; and

legal advice on a range of topics such as divorce (*талоқ*), adultery (*зино*), greeting women in

public (*салом кардан бо духтар*), and the permissibility of praying behind an imam who uses

chewing tobacco (*нас*), for example. A significant portion of Hoji Mirzo's sermons address

issues surrounding women, both instructing them on how to behave in relation to their husbands

and other family members as well as instructing men to respect their wives, mothers, and sisters.

These sermons are often presented in question and answer format (*саволу ҷавоб*) or as

monologues offering advice (*насиҳат*). Throughout these sermons, Hoji Mirzo draws upon his

training as a Muslim cleric and speaks as a mullah from his home mosque in the city of Kulob.[78]

Figure 2. Screenshot of one YouTube video, with over 345,000 views, of Hoji Mirzo preaching on

"advice for newlyweds." 10 March 2017. Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQU9I--23C0.

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[78] Hoji Mirzo, YouTube videos, see here for links to some of his videos:
https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=hoji+mirzo.

With reference to traditional Islamic texts, including the Qur'an and hadith, I argue that Hoji Mirzo "presents himself as a centrist but outspoken representative of Tajikistan's political and religious elite stratum,"[79] similar to Epkenhans' characterization of Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda. As a prominent mullah in an officially sanctioned mosque, Hoji Mirzo cannot be too critical of the government or he risks losing his position. His power lies in his ability to successfully navigate the thin line between being perceived as an authentic religious leader and a loyal supporter of the Tajik government. Like the Nasser regime's campaign to nationalize and modernize the ulama of Al-Azhar in Egypt,[80] the Tajik government's project to co-opt all official religious authority in the country has resulted in an unexpected level of freedom for moderate traditionalists like Hoji Mirzo. The government needs clerics like Hoji Mirzo to be a bulwark against the threats of more radical Islamists who wish to overthrow the secular government and, in return for his loyalty, the government allows him to speak with relative freedom on matters related to religion. For example, in 2011 he spoke out against the ban on the hijab in schools and offices.[81]

Hoji Mirzo works to create an affective Islamic public by defining a clear vision of Islamic normativity against the excesses of both government secularism and violent jihadism. He has gained a significant following through the proliferation of his sermons on digital media. In all of his sermons and media appearances, Hoji Mirzo gives practical advice on how to live a pious lifestyle within the confines of current Tajik law, implicitly calling upon his followers to accept the authority of the secular government. His sermons demonstrate that living a pious

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[79] Epkenhans, "Defining normative Islam," 2011.
[80] Malika Zeghal, "Religion and politics in Egypt: The ulema of Al-Azhar, radical Islam, and the state (1952-94)," International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (31): 371-99, 1999.
[81] Najibullah, "Tajik Government … Sermon Topics," 2011.

Muslim lifestyle is compatible with life in secular Tajikistan. Tajiks who listen to Hoji Mirzo's sermons are disciplined into behaving piously within the confines of Tajik law and are consequently aligned into a collective against violent Islamists who wish to overthrow the secular government. In this way, it is clear that Hoji Mirzo's media presence has resulted in the creation of an Islamic public that is directed toward the alignment of individual Muslim bodies into collectivities with other Muslim bodies based upon shared sensory experience (listening to his sermons).

Hoji Mirzo's prominence in Tajik-language media has not come without some significant opposition, however, especially from those who disagree with his stance of accommodation to the secular authorities. An interesting example of this pushback from Islamists is a 2014 exchange between Hoji Mirzo and Nusrat Nazarov, a Tajik militant who moved to Syria to fight for ISIS (Fig. 3 and 4).[82] In a Tajik-language ISIS propaganda video posted online, Nazarov accuses Hoji Mirzo of "wearing the mask of Islam," and therefore calls him a hypocrite (*munāfiq*) by implication. This is one of the most affectively powerful accusations a Muslim can make against another Muslim because it is a reference to Qur'anic verses that condemn hypocrites as worse than unbelievers.[83] Responding to Nazarov's video in an interview published online with Radio Ozodi, Radio Free Europe's Tajik-language service,[84] Hoji Mirzo accuses ISIS of using "financial incentives to lure 'undereducated' and 'impoverished' Tajik migrants in Russia to fight in Syria." He characterizes the Syrian war as a "geopolitical conflict, not a jihad"

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[82] Daniil Turovsky, "How ISIS is recruiting migrant workers in Moscow to join the fighting in Syria," The Guardian, 5 May 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/05/isis-russia-syria-islamic-extremism.

[83] For example, see Surah Al-Munāfiqūn, Qur'an.

[84] Mu'min Ahmadi (Мӯъмин Аҳмадӣ), "Ҳоҷӣ Мирзо: Русия лонаи ҷалби тоҷикон ба ҷанги Сурия шудааст," Radio Ozodi, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 14 May 2014, http://www.ozodi.org/a/excl-iv-with-dfamous-cleric-hoji-mirzo-ibronov/25384535.html.

(Fig. 5).[85] Hoji Mirzo says that this opinion is in line with rhetoric employed by many other mainstream Muslim clerics around the world in their characterization of ISIS, aligning himself and his followers with a global collective of anti-Islamist Muslims.[86] Hoji Mirzo is careful to make use of affectively powerful words and phrases, many directly referencing terms from the Qur'an and hadith, when denouncing ISIS, saying that there is no "opportunity for true martyrdom on the straight path" in the "ugly brawl" that is the Syrian war (Fig. 5). He refuses to characterize the Syrian war as a jihad, denying Nazarov and other ISIS sympathizers any religious basis for their militant actions there.

Figure 3. Nusrat Nazarov with his iPhone. Photo credit: Raqqa Media Center.

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[85] Farangis Najibullah, "Tajik Mullah's Remarks on Jihad Spark War of Words," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 27 May 2014, http://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-syria-war-words/25400717.html.
[86] Najibullah, "Tajik Mullah's Remarks," 2014.

Figure 4. "Pike" magazine from Kulob, Tajikistan. 1 April 2014. Headline: "Terrorists invite Hoji Mirzo to Syria." Subheading: "Nightmare! Ignorant terrorist calls on imam to fear God!" All translations from Tajik (Persian) are my own. Photo credit: Daniil Turovsky, Meduza.

"Аслан, он ҷо ҷиҳод нест. Ҳатто баъзе аз уламои олами Ислом ҳам аз рӯи инсоф баён карданд, ки дар Сурия фитна аст. Он ҷо ҷиҳод нест. Он ҷо ҳалли баъзе аз масоили давлатҳои абаркудрат аст. Дар он ҷо аз ҷиҳоду аз манзалату мартабаҳое, ки мусулмон бояд пайдо кунаду муҷоҳиди роҳи ҳақ шавад, дар он минтақаву он ҷанҷолҳо вуҷуд надорад."

"Actually, there is no righteous war (jihad) there. Although some scholars (ulama) from the Islamic world say there is chaos (fitna) in Syria, there is no jihad there. That place is where the world powers are resolving some of their issues. Jihad doesn't exist there – a Muslim cannot find the opportunity for true martyrdom on the straight path in that ugly brawl."

Figure 5. Excerpt from transcript of RFE/RL interview with Hoji Mirzo regarding ISIS. Source: Najibullah 2014. All translations from Tajik (Persian) are my own.

In this example, both Hoji Mirzo and Nazarov make use of affectively powerful words and phrases to denounce each other as impious or improper Muslims. I contend that their dispute should be understood not just as a rhetorical or political argument but rather as a conflict between two different and oppositional camps within a transnational affective Islamic public. Hoji Mirzo and ISIS sympathisers like Nazarov represent two very different camps in terms of what they consider to be Islamically normative (i.e. what it means to be a "good Muslim"). For Hoji Mirzo, the proper Muslim will behave in an ethical manner in their relations with other people, respecting the law and behaving peacefully. For ISIS sympathisers like Nazarov, proper Muslims must take up arms and fight to establish an Islamic system of government at all costs, respecting no earthly authority or secular power. Both camps feel justified in calling each other hypocrites (*munāfiq*) because they disagree about the fundamentals of Islamic normativity. Like the Aryan Nations in Ahmed's example, the two camps discussed here use affectively negative language to distance themselves from each other; the term *munāfiq* is used in this case to align a group of Muslims (purported "good Muslims") against those who have gone astray ("bad Muslims"). It is through digital media that these two opposing camps come into conflict with each other, resulting in the formation of a transnational affective Islamic public, with Hoji Mirzo and Nazarov representing opposite poles of this public.

Furthermore, Hoji Mirzo and Nazarov's respective physical appearances appeal to different sections of their Muslim audience in affective ways. Hoji Mirzo, who always wears the black *tyubeteika* hat and long white beard associated with Islamic scholars in Central Asia (Fig. 1), appeals to tradition by signaling his status as a member of the religious elite. Nazarov, by appearing in a military fatigue, black skullcap, and unkempt beard, holding a gun and pointing a single finger to the sky (Fig. 3), signals his adherence to a violent jihadist ideology. For a Tajik

Muslim audience, it is immediately clear where the two stand in regards to their theological and political positions simply by the way they look. This works to further reinscribe those who agree with Hoji Mirzo and those who agree with Nazarov against each other because their physical appearances appeal to two completely different and incompatible forms of Islamic normativity (moderate traditionalism vs. violent jihadism).

Unlike Papacharissi's characterization of affective publics, the affective Islamic public analyzed here clearly *does* allow for the collective negotiation of identity and *does* have political implications in offline space. The power Hoji Mirzo and Nazarov are claiming is not merely rhetorical or symbolic but highly political; by claiming to speak in the name of Islamic values, both camps attempt to win influence and gain followers among Tajik-speaking Muslims, aligning greater numbers of Muslims into their respective camps. Changing someone's opinion through an appeal to affect in this context can mean the difference between agreeing with a traditionalist mullah or with an ISIS sympathiser, a difference that has real political implications.

I will now revisit my original questions from the beginning of this chapter in an attempt to answer them more definitively. Who claims to speak for Islamic values in Tajikistan today? There are certainly many voices, the most prominent of which include government censors seeking to limit the influence of religious figures on public life, foreign Islamist groups like ISIS who use online propaganda, and moderate traditionalists like Hoji Mirzo who assert a form of Islam characterized as compatible with Tajikistan's current socio-political situation. Beyond these three voices, Islam is further defined by each individual Tajik Muslim in their affective engagement with these competing messages. Because of its increasingly digital presence, Tajik Islam is not limited to voices within the country. Traditional Islamic sources of authority, in the form of local mullahs, are increasingly subject to government restriction and, for many Tajiks,

authentic Islamic values are better embodied in digital media avenues than in physical spaces like mosques and madrassas, reflecting Eisenlohr's findings in his study of *na't* cassette tapes in Mauritius.[87] These digital media products easily transcend the boundaries of national borders, government restrictions, and physical presence.

What do Tajikistan's public figures say about Islam? In the current socio-political climate, Islam is defined primarily in relation to the Tajik state. Government-approved mullahs recite their allegiance to the Tajik authorities in their Friday sermons and are careful not to argue against policies that many consider to be counter to Islamic values, such as the banning of the hijab in schools and workplaces, because they fear they will lose their positions. Radicalized Islamists from abroad promote their message primarily online, calling for rebellion and the overthrow of the secular state. Others, like Hoji Mirzo, Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda, and Eshoni Nuriddinjon, promote a version of Islam that is considered to align with traditional Tajik Muslim values but is compatible with the secular state. These prominent, more independent mullahs are able to assert a version of Islam critical of some government policies because they enjoy widespread appeal and do not call for the overthrow of the secular government.

And finally, how do discussions of Islamic normativity occur in Tajikistan? Increasingly, on digital media through appeals to affect. In Hoji Mirzo's digitally recorded sermons, norms are discursively constructed and interacted with in novel ways. Listeners to Hoji Mirzo's sermons do not have to be physically present at his mosque in the southern city of Kulob to engage with him and his ideas. In fact, his message can reach people around the world – from government ministers in the capital city of Dushanbe to Islamists in Syria and Iraq to researchers in the United States, such as myself. Because of the presence of his sermons on digital media, Hoji

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[87] Eisenlohr, "As Makkah is sweet and beloved … ," 2006.

Mirzo and his followers can be understood to have created a transnational affective Islamic public. Everyone with access to the internet who can understand the Tajik language can participate in this public and can be shaped by Hoji Mirzo's ideas. Individuals who feel similarly to Hoji Mirzo regarding the role of Islam in public life may begin to follow him while those who disagree with him on these issues may speak up and critique him, resulting in the formation of different camps of opinion within the broader affective Islamic public.

As we can see in this example, religious authority lies in community and collective feelings.[88] Islam has many definitions in Tajikistan and any analysis of religious authority must account for this diversity. The definition of Islam in Tajikistan today is fiercely debated by several different actors who seek to influence the Tajik populace. These actors are not uniformly successful in finding a receptive audience. Only through the acceptance and embodiment of their message do these actors achieve any degree of religious authority. It is therefore inaccurate to understand Islamic normativity in Tajikistan as a monolithic entity. It is more accurate to understand Islam and Islamic values at the center of a heated debate on the role of religion in public life. As Tajik Muslims are exposed to increasingly different media and divergent ideas of Islamic normativity, it is unlikely that the question of the proper role of Islam in public life in this Central Asian country will be settled any time soon. With increasing censorship of mosques and madrassas, it seems that the digital media sphere – with its widespread, transnational reach and potential for affective engagement – has become the primary site where Tajik Muslims can find Islamic guidance that feels authentic and relevant to their lives.

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[88] Ahmed, "Collective Feelings," 2004.

Chapter 3: #Mecca_Live: Affect, Da'wa, and Pilgrimage on Social Media

In this final chapter, I discuss an example of an affective Islamic public concerned with the definition of Islamic normativity on a global scale. On July 13, 2015 the popular smartphone application and social media platform Snapchat broadcast a stream of user-generated videos called a "Live Story" from Mecca, Saudi Arabia, depicting the events of Laylat al-Qadr, the "Night of Power" and one of the holiest dates in the Islamic year. These videos were recorded by Muslims in Mecca on their smartphones and immediately uploaded to Snapchat in the form of a "Live Story." Known on social media as #Mecca_Live, this event allowed millions of non-Muslims to observe the rituals of Laylat al-Qadr in Mecca, a city otherwise forbidden to them, as well as provided a way for Muslims around the world to experience the rituals taking place in the holy city as they were happening. #Mecca_Live quickly spread online, with over one million Twitter users sharing their reactions to the event on the same day it took place.

I discuss the affective nature of this social media event and its reception amongst both Muslim and non-Muslim Twitter users. As a sensory experience, the #Mecca_Live Snapchat Story inspired a range of reactions. Many non-Muslims took to Twitter to comment that their opinion on Islam and Muslims had improved as a result of the beauty they witnessed while many Muslims from around the globe praised Snapchat for showcasing a rare positive depiction of Islam. The images and sounds broadcast on Snapchat's live story even prompted some viewers to express a wish to convert to Islam. As such, I argue that #Mecca_Live should be understood not just as a live broadcast of a religious event but also as a participatory religious experience, one which provokes an affective engagement on the part of the participant. I analyze

#Mecca_Live within the framework of *da'wa* in an attempt to understand the role of non-

Muslims in an affective Islamic public.

I use the term *da'wa* here to refer to the act of inviting others to better understand Islam.

As discussed in chapter one, *da'wa* encompasses Islamic outreach to non-Muslims as well as

intra-communal maintenance of ethical behaviors.[89] *Da'wa* involves preaching, verbal

admonishment, and range of other social activities like mosque establishment and involvement in

social service organizations. As outreach to non-Muslims, *da'wa* commonly involves the

distribution of religious texts and pamphlets explaining Islamic practices and beliefs. Any sort of

exposure to Islam and Islamic values in a non-Muslim context can be understood to fall within

the category of *da'wa*.

I argue that one major way the process of performing *da'wa* occurs in the digital media

realm is by appealing to the emotions and senses, not just to reason or intellect. These affective

appeals seem to be particularly successful on image and video sharing services like Snapchat.

This popular smartphone app allows its users to share photos and videos (called "Snaps") with

each other that are only visible for a few seconds.[90] Unlike other image-sharing platforms such as

Instagram and Facebook, Snaps are not permanently visible nor is there the option to post

lengthy written descriptions of one's Snaps; these images and videos are intended to be an

ephemeral, fleeting glimpse into one's life. According to Snapchat's marketing website, "over

60% of U.S. 13 to 34 year-old smartphone users are Snapchatters" and the total of all Snaps

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[89] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 2005.
[90] J. J. Colao, "Snapchat: The Biggest No-Revenue Mobile App Since Instagram," *Forbes.com*, November 27, 2012, accessed April 22, 2016, http://www.forbes.com/sites/jjcolao/2012/11/27/snapchat-the-biggest-no-revenue-mobile-app-since-instagram/.

shared each day exceeds eight billion.[91] Snapchat brands itself as "the best way to reach 13 to 34

year-olds" and explains that members of this demographic "love" Snapchat because it

"provide[s] a personal window into the way [they] and [their] friends see the world" and that

"Snaps are a reflection of who [they] are in the moment – there is no need to curate an

everlasting persona."[92] Users can send private Snaps directly to their friends or upload their

Snaps to a personal Snapchat Story, a "[compilation] of Snaps that create[s] a narrative" with "a

beginning, middle, and end,"[93] that is visible for 24 hours to a user's friends. During this time,

one's Snapchat Story can be viewed multiple times, unlike private user-to-user Snaps that are

visible only once. Snapchat also promotes public "Live Stories," where users can upload their

Snaps to a Story that is visible to all Snapchat users for 24 hours. Snapchat employees curate

these Live Stories and users can only upload their Snaps to them if they are in a specific

geographic location.[94] For example, during #Mecca_Live, only users near the city of Mecca in

Saudi Arabia were able to submit their Snaps to the Live Story. As such, Snapchat is a medium

of communication that is location and time dependent. The images and videos users send are

only available for a short period of time, and the content one is able to create is dependent upon

one's geographic location.

Finally, in order to understand how *da'wa* works on digital media platforms like

Snapchat, I will turn to Birgit Meyer's theory of aesthetic formations.[95] As discussed above,

Meyer contends that both religious subjects and religious communities are formed by their

relationship to media. It is the images that we see, the sounds that we hear, the smells, tastes, and

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[91] Snapchat, "Ads," accessed April 22, 2016, https://www.snapchat.com/ads.
[92] Snapchat, "Ads," accessed April 22, 2016, https://www.snapchat.com/ads.
[93] Snapchat Support, "Stories," accessed April 22, 2016, https://support.snapchat.com/en-US/ca/stories.
[94] Snapchat Support, "Live Stories," accessed April 22, 2016, https://support.snapchat.com/en-US/ca/live-stories.
[95] Meyer, *Aesthetic Formations*, 2009.

feelings that actually *touch* our bodies that shape the way we behave as religious subjects in relation to other religious subjects and to God (what Meyer calls "the transcendental"). In other words, aesthetics (as in sensory experiences) are what *form* religion and, simultaneously, religion *takes form* through aesthetics. Although Meyer does not cite her directly, this is very much in line with Sara Ahmed's understanding of affect and the way collective feeling works to form communities.

I argue that Snapchat is designed to communicate and direct expressions of sentiment, marketing itself as a platform where users can spontaneously share both the mundane and consequential moments they experience in daily life. By allowing its users to share visual and auditory information in an ephemeral, immediate way without the aid of lengthy textual descriptions, Snapchat is more successful at transmitting affective information than other media platforms that are heavy on text or that allow viewers to permanently save content. Snapchat is the perfect medium to communicate affective information because it is fleeting, ephemeral, and only allows its viewers to see short glimpses into the lives of others. Like Massumi's affect, Snaps contain much more information than we can process when viewing them. Furthermore, because Snapchat is successful at transmitting affective information, Snapchat users are likely to describe the content they view on the app using emotional language. Each individual Snapchat user will have a different reaction to the material they are exposed to, and each will describe their experience in a unique way. I discuss one example of this process – #Mecca_Live and its reception amongst Twitter users – in the following section.

The #Mecca_Live Story begins with an invitation for Snapchat users to "travel to Mecca for ليلة القدر or Laylat al-Qadr" (Fig. 1).[96] As the call to prayer (*adhān*) plays in the background, an African man wearing white *ihram* pilgrimage robes explains that before the holiday begins, Muslims in Mecca must perform the rites of *'umrah* (minor pilgrimage). Two young women wearing hijab and designer sunglasses then show Snapchat users the "gates of the world's biggest mosque" (the Masjid al-Harām) as they explain that "people from all around the world and [from many] cultures come here." The Story then moves inside the Masjid al-Harām as more Snapchatting pilgrims show those around them performing *ṭawāf* (circumambulation) around the Ka'aba. The viewer of the #Mecca_Live Story gets short glimpses of this religious rite as it is being performed. One male Snapchatter recites a quick prayer as he focuses his phone's camera on the golden calligraphy inscribed around the top of the Ka'aba, saying, "O Allah, accept all the prayers and *du'ās* (prayers) of all those people who came [to Mecca] just for you." Another describes Maqam Ibrahim, "the station of Prophet Ibrahim who has built (*sic*) the Grand Mosque with his son Prophet Ismail," as he takes video footage of pilgrims surrounding this sacred location. Yet another Snaps a group of pilgrims performing *sujūd* (prostration) as the *takbīr* (*Allāhu akbar*) is recited, adding a written caption of this phrase in Arabic (الله أكبر) to the images and sounds he records (Fig. 2). In between these short written and spoken descriptions of the events taking place, much of this portion of #Mecca_Live consists of "raw" footage showing pilgrims circling the Ka'aba as they perform the rites of *'umrah*. One gets a sense of what it is like to be physically present in Mecca, entering this sacred space through the perspective of the Snapchatting pilgrim.

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[96] Snapchat, #Mecca_Live Story, broadcast July 13, 2015, accessed via recording on YouTube April 26, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2KT-8kBy0B8. All further references to #Mecca_Live in this section are taken from this source, with direct quotes marked in quotations.
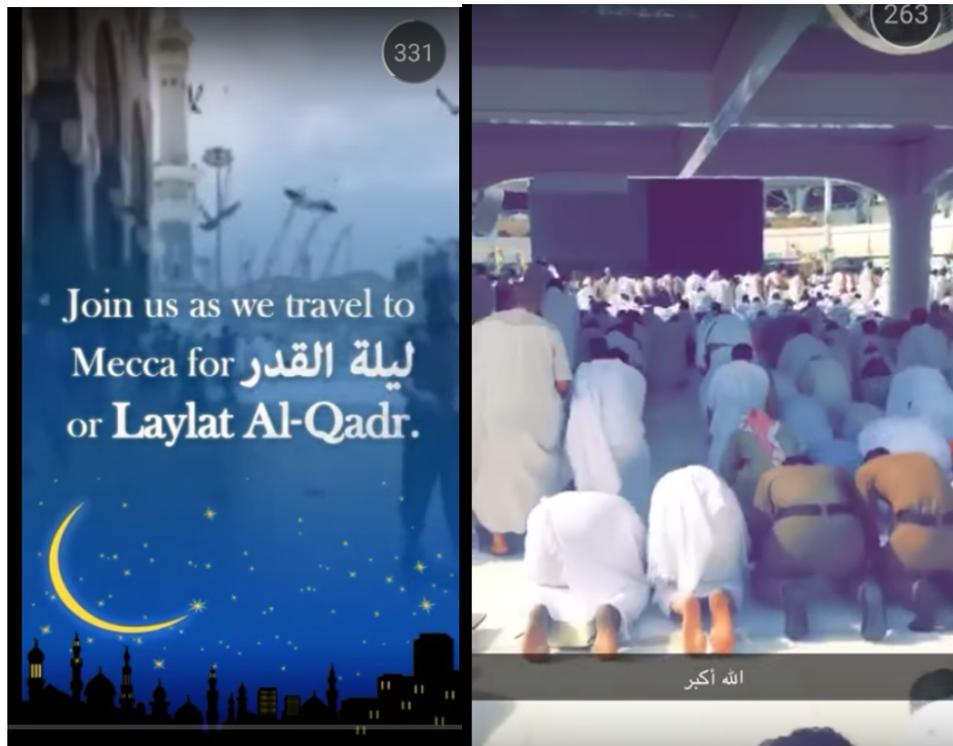
Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 (left) is a screenshot of the beginning of the #Mecca_Live Story. Figure 2 (right) is a screenshot of men bowing in prayer inside the Masjid al-Harām from #Mecca_Live. All screenshots from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2KT-8kBy0B8.

#Mecca_Live continues, showing pilgrims performing the other rituals of 'umrah, including drinking Zamzam water ("recommended by the Prophet Muhammad," as one Snapchatter writes) and running between the holy sites of Safa and Marwa (symbolizing Hagar's search for water in ancient times) (Fig. 3). One young male pilgrim then informs his Snapchat audience that the formal rites of 'umrah are complete, saying "*As-salāmu alaykum*, I am in Mecca, *alḥamdulillāh* (praise be to God), and now I just finished al-'umrah, *alḥamdulillāh*." The focus of #Mecca_Live then turns to breaking the Ramadan fast, with several Snaps showing men

and women preparing rice, pastries, and dates for the upcoming *ifṭār* meal (Fig. 4). One

Snapchatter informs the viewer that "millions of meals" will be provided to pilgrims for free for

the fast-breaking meal. As the *adhān* announces the beginning of the evening prayer, one

Snapchatter informs his audience that "this sound means everyone can eat now." This is

followed by several Snaps showing men and women breaking the fast together in the Masjid al-

Harām. During this section of #Mecca_Live, viewers get a good sense of the rhythms of Muslim

life during Ramadan as they experience the rituals of prayer and fasting.

Figures 3 and 4. Figure 3 (left) shows one male pilgrim jokingly spraying water on his head after shaving

it during the rites of 'umrah. Figure 4 (right) shows volunteers preparing rice for the iftaar meal.

The final section of #Mecca_Live begins during night prayers (*tarāwiḥ*) with a young woman wearing a *burqa'* recording a video of herself, utilizing Snapchat's text overlay feature to include an emoji (small digital icon) depicting hands held together in prayer and a timestamp of 8:18 p.m. as she says, "Hi, we are in Mecca mosque. We are pray long time all this night (*sic*)" (Fig. 5). A textual graphic then tells the viewer more about Laylat al-Qadr, explaining that " ليلة القدر commemorates the night Muslims believe God first revealed the teachings of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel." While this text is visible, a pilgrim invites his viewers to "imagine this - more than two million people, one spot, one night" as he records an aerial view of the Masjid al-Harām; an invitation to place oneself in his shoes and experience the power of community. Following this, a young woman in her hotel room overlooking the Sacred Mosque records a short video of her prayer beads, explaining that "this is called the *sabḥa*. We have it in so many different colors and styles, and we mention God's name with every marble." As she fingers the beads, the viewer hears her whisper *"subhānallāh, subhānallāh, ..."* (Glory be to God) (Fig. 6).

Figures 5 and 6. Figure 5 (left) shows an image of one female pilgrim in Mecca. Figure 6 (right) depicts one pilgrim explaining how she uses her prayer beads.

A few Snaps later, a young bearded man muses that "you can't imagine how spiritual and amazing this feeling is" as he records himself standing behind rows of men performing the prayers of Laylat al-Qadr. Another Snapchatter records hundreds of pilgrims facing the Ka'aba as the loudspeakers broadcast a Qur'anic recitation, inviting his viewers to "look how beautiful is this (*sic*)." These calls to admire the beauty of the moment continue, as one Snapchatter records a short video of four women, one from Sub-Saharan Africa, two from Malaysia, and one from Egypt all sitting next to each other and saying "I'm Muslim" in their native languages. This display of unity across the boundaries of ethnicity and language is meant to exemplify *tawhīd*, the "ultimate oneness" that is a fundamental concept in Islamic thought (Fig. 7). The last minute

of #Mecca_Live consists mostly of footage showing pilgrims praying their *tahajjud* (late night) prayers as the Qur'an is recited over loudspeaker - the defining ritual of Laylat al-Qadr. Over the space of just under six minutes, viewers of Snapchat's #Mecca_Live Story experience the rituals of 'umrah, breaking the fast in Ramadan, and praying late into the night on Laylat al-Qadr as well as gain an introduction to several fundamental Islamic concepts, most especially those of the power of community and the beauty of God's oneness. At several points during the Story, viewers are invited to imagine themselves being in Mecca during these rituals and it is clear from many of their reactions that these invitations had a profound emotional effect on them.

Figure 7. A sequence of three Snaps shows Muslim women from around the globe, all saying "I'm Muslim" in their native languages, during the late night (*tahajjud*) prayers in the Masjid al-Harām.

Over one million viewers of Snapchat's #Mecca_Live Story soon took to Twitter, another social media platform that prides itself on spontaneity and minimal text, to share their reactions.

According to Yahoo Finance data, over 1.5 million total Tweets were posted about #Mecca_Live from July 9 to July 16, 2015, with peak traffic reaching 1,700 Tweets per minute on the morning of July 13.[97] The vast majority of tweets that I was able to find posted in response to #Mecca_Live were positive and, as a result, I only address positive tweets in my analysis. Both Muslims and non-Muslims praised Snapchat for showcasing a positive depiction of Islam. For example, one Twitter user writes "Thanks @Snapchat to let the world know about the peaceful #Islam. #mecca_live" (*sic*).[98] Another writes, "I'm not Muslim, but thank you, @Snapchat for opening my eyes to how beautiful and captivating the world of Islam truly is. #mecca_live." A third contends that "#mecca_live has shown the world what Islam really is. @Snapchat story has done what media has failed to do till date." Many non-Muslim Twitter users shared their emotional reactions to #Mecca_Live, with many expressing amazement at the beauty of Islam. One non-Muslim Twitter user writes, "The #mecca_live snapchats are the best things to grace my eyes!! Absolutely love seeing the peacefulness and unity of Islam" while another posts, "Checking out the pictures on #mecca_live. As a Christian, I continue to be in awe of the beauty and humanity of Islam." At least one politician posted a response to the #Mecca_Live Story on her Twitter feed; U.S. Congresswoman Sheila Jackson-Lee (@JacksonLeeTX18) writes, "Wishing my constituents a Happy #Ramadan. How beautiful is their faith of #Islam as you can see in the #mecca_live story on @Snapchat!" (Fig. 8).

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[97] Yahoo Finance, "#Mecca_Live: See how the conversation unfolds on Twitter," published July 21, 2015, accessed April 27, 2016, http://www.worldreligionnews.com/religion-news/islam/snapchat-makes-it-possible-for-the-world-to-witness-mecca_live-during-ramadan.

[98] All further quotations from Twitter posts are direct quotations; I have not edited them for grammar or spelling. I have not printed the usernames of Twitter users along with their quotes to protect their privacy, with the exception of Congresswoman Jackson-Lee.
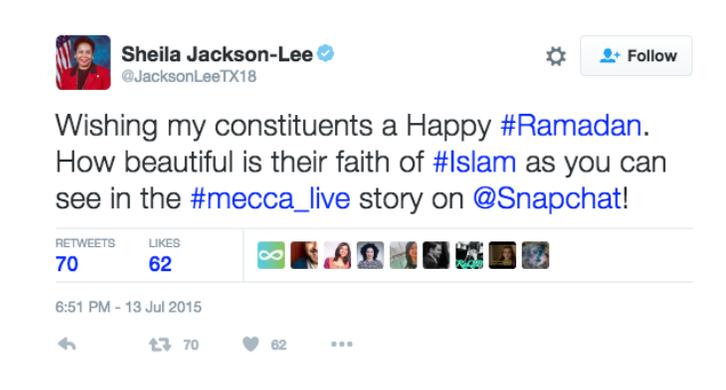
Figure 8. One American politician, Sheila Jackson-Lee (D-TX), posted her response to #Mecca_Live on Twitter.

Furthermore, the #Mecca_Live Story prompted many viewers to express a wish to learn more about Islam, evidence of its role as *da'wa* amongst non-Muslims. One user writes that "#mecca_live is a beautiful look at an example of people coming together, really want to learn more about Islam, not the Islam we see in news." Another non-Muslim posts, "If you have any prejudices against #Islam, I can wholeheartedly recommend checking out #Mecca_Live on snapchat. Reflects the beauty of Islam." Several other Twitter users expressed their interest in converting to Islam, with one asking, "As a non-muslim I would like to ask something, is it easy to convert into Islam? It's just that after seeing #mecca_live I fell like in love" and a few minutes later posting, "Im serious, as a non-muslim, seeing #mecca_live made me realize that Islam, might be, the right religion for me. Its so beautiful." Yet another writes, "Not a Muslim, but #mecca_live is something so beautiful that it makes me really want to be one… Maybe one day." While it is difficult to say whether or not these people followed through with their decision to convert to Islam, it is clear that #Mecca_Live had a profound emotional impact on them and prompted them to see Islam and Muslims in a new light.

Finally, the #Mecca_Live Story motivated many Muslim Twitter users to reconnect with their faith, evidence of its role as *da'wa* within the Muslim community. A Muslim Twitter user writes, "This live story makes me wanna throw everything and just run towards Mecca. #mecca_live #snapchat." Another shares a photo of men performing *sujūd* and writes, "Young, old, rich, poor, white, black, men and women, this is the true meaning of equality in Islam. #mecca_live." A third Muslim tweets "Amazed by the #Snapchat #Story about the beautiful and blessed #mecca_live. Proud of being a blessed #Muslim Alhumdulilah #Dubai." Many Muslims responded not just to #Mecca_Live itself but also to the positive reactions it prompted among non-Muslims, with one writing "I'm so proud to be a Muslim seeing the reactions make me cry. Terrorism is not Islam #mecca_live." Another Muslim posts a photo of four Tweets from non-Muslims expressing their desire to convert to Islam as a result of #Mecca_Live and writes, "#mecca_live All hail Snapchat! Alhamdullilah for being a muslim." For non-Muslims, #Mecca_Live served as an invitation (*da'wa*) for greater understanding of the Islamic world at the same time as it represented an occasion for the Muslim community to reconnect and take pride in their religious identity.

In this final section, I argue that #Mecca_Live is best understood as an affective Islamic public. For both its Muslim and non-Muslim audiences, affect is #Mecca_Live's primary mode of inviting its viewers to engage with Islamic tradition. These affective experiences occur via digital media and many viewers of the #Mecca_Live Story took to Twitter to share their opinions of what Islam means to them, providing further evidence of the emotional effect #Mecca_Live had on them. In light of the proliferation of Islamic voices competing against each other for authority in the contemporary world, Islam can be understood to mean precisely what the majority of people accept it to mean. For many people, especially non-Muslims living in the

West, Islam is often associated with terrorism, violence, and oppression of women. These negative characteristics have come to define Islam in the popular imagination because they are the ones most people who watch cable news or read popular newspapers are exposed to most commonly. However, many non-Muslims remain unconvinced that Islam is a religion completely tainted by violence and oppression and many seek to experience "true Islam," that is, Islam from the perspective of pious Muslims.

Perhaps one reason that #Mecca_Live provoked such a strong reaction with millions of people, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, is that it purportedly shows what "true Islam" looks like. Presenting such a stark contrast to the violence that Islam is characteristically associated with, the peaceful sounds and images of #Mecca_Live allowed millions of Snapchat users to feel as if they experienced the true nature of Islam, or more precisely its appeal from the perspective of its adherents, by transcending the vitriol of traditional media coverage of this religion. This sentiment is echoed by many of those who took to Twitter to share their reactions to #Mecca_Live. Because this Snapchat Story allowed them to experience the rituals of Laylat al-Qadr from the perspective of pilgrims in Mecca, it can be said to have opened a window into Islamic life that is normally unavailable to the outside observer. As an intensive, immersive, multisensory experience, from the meditative sounds of the *adhān* to the many visual representations of unity (*tawhīd*) presented (rows of men performing *sujūd*, millions of pilgrims of different genders and skin colors gathered together in one place, four women from around the world sitting in a row all proclaiming adherence to the same religion), #Mecca_Live allows its non-Muslim audience to get a glimpse of what Muslims purportedly "really do," as opposed to what politicians and political pundits tell them they do. In short, #Mecca_Live allows these

outsiders to have something close to an immediate (or unmediated) experience with Islam and with Muslims.

Furthermore, #Mecca_Live serves as an invitation (*da'wa*) to learn more about Islam. Young English-speaking pilgrims in Mecca eagerly explain the rites of *'umrah* and the rituals of Laylat al-Qadr as they are happening. The chronological distance between the pilgrims performing these rituals and those observing them is lessened by Snapchat's ability to transmit information in real-time around the globe; as a result, the audience can come closer to experiencing these events themselves even though they are unable to physically participate in them. Because of this, #Mecca_Live provides a more immersive, immediate lesson on Islam and Muslim life than can be received from reading about this event or simply hearing about it after it happens. The multisensory, live nature of material broadcast via Snapchat allows for a more unmediated experience of such material than if it were broadcast on another media platform.

#Mecca_Live appeals to its Muslim audience in a similar fashion. This event allows Muslims all around the world to participate in the rites of 'umrah and Laylat al-Qadr as they take place in Mecca by watching and listening to their fellow Muslims perform them in real-time. In a certain sense, it enables Muslims outside of Saudi Arabia to perform the rites of pilgrimage by proxy via their smartphones. The Qur'an, as recited in the most Sacred Mosque on the most sacred night of the year, can be heard by Muslims all around the globe through #Mecca_Live. The limits of the sacred space erected in Mecca on Laylat al-Qadr are greatly expanded by the transmission of live sounds and images from the Masjid al-Harām through Snapchat's Live Story.

In effect, the multisensory, live nature of the #Mecca_Live Story allows for a collapsing of the barriers of time and space as the pilgrims recording Snaps in Mecca and those watching

these Snaps from all around the world share the same experiences (or as close to the same experiences as technologically possible) at the same time. This is what I mean when I say that #Mecca_Live represents an example of an affective Islamic public; the immersive, multisensory, live nature of this broadcast allows its viewers to see more directly into the lives of the pilgrims recording these short Snaps than they are able through other media. It allows for a large number of people to experience, through their senses, the same rituals on the same day that they occur. In this way, Snapchat is savvy in marketing itself as a platform for creating a "personal window" into one's life experiences, enabling a person to show an audience "who [they] are in the moment."[99]

#Mecca_Live works to discipline its viewers' opinions about Islam by exposing them to Islamic ritual in an immediate manner. Islam is presented as a peaceful, harmonious, beautiful religion, antithetical to the violence that is normally associated with Islam in mainstream media. Because all the viewers of #Mecca_Live were able to experience the same rituals in the same way on the same day that they occurred, this is a great example of how media works as an aesthetic formation, shaping each individual's opinion on religion at the same time as religion takes shape in mediated form. The viewers of #Mecca_Live begin to form a global collective because of their shared interaction with this media event, transcending the boundaries of space and religious identity as people from around the world from Muslim and non-Muslim background alike share their experience of #Mecca_Live with each other on Twitter. By shaping the opinions of people around the globe in a positive manner regarding Islam and Muslims, #Mecca_Live is successful in achieving an offline goal of aligning the sentiments of non-Muslims with Muslims into a broader collective of people who appreciate the beauty of Islam

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[99] Snapchat, "Ads," accessed April 22, 2016, https://www.snapchat.com/ads

and the rituals of Laylat al-Qadr. Understood through the framework of *da'wa*, it is possible to see how non-Muslims can be aligned into a collective with Muslims within an affective Islamic public.

Discussion and Conclusions

What do these three case studies tell us about the way Islamic discourse takes place on social media? What are some of the unique challenges facing researchers interested in digital religious communities and how can they be addressed? In this final section, I attempt to answer these questions and synthesize my ideas about the affective Islamic public into a workable theory that can be used to study digital religious communities in the Muslim-majority world and beyond.

Islamic discourse on social media is primarily directed towards the collective negotiation of Muslim identity in the contemporary world. In all three examples discussed above, the Muslims coming together on the internet did so in order to interact with others (Muslim and non-Muslim) interested in what it means to practice Islam in the world today. Facing threats from government repression and surveillance, violent extremist rhetoric, misrepresentation by mass media, and internal disputes on proper ethical behavior, Muslims come together online and work to articulate their values on their own terms. By interacting with each other through social media, participants in these discourses perform their own ideals of what it means to be a proper Muslim and find community when they encounter others who perform similar ideals.

The performance of these ideals takes place primarily through the public expression of emotion, or affect. In all three case studies, affect played a key role in negotiating what it means to be a proper Muslim in the contemporary world. The commenters on the Tagouri controversy used emotionally powerful language to perform either their agreement with her appearance in Playboy or to express their harsh disagreement; Hoji Mirzo used strong emotional language in his denunciation of Nazarov and ISIS's ideology; the Snapchatters and Twitter users who

participated in #Mecca_Live consistently made use of emotionally powerful language when describing what they experienced, referencing how beautiful the Live Story was and how much of an emotional effect it had on them and the way they understand Islam.

In all three cases, collectivities began to form based upon shared sentiment; the public performance of emotion allowed for the formation of different camps of opinion within each discursive public. Tagouri's supporters and her detractors fell into different camps of opinion based upon their emotional reaction to her appearance in Playboy magazine; Hoji Mirzo and his followers fall into one camp while Nazarov and other ISIS supporters fall into another with regards to their emotional reaction to the war in Syria and the need for a violent overthrow of the secular Tajik government; #Mecca_Live provoked a positive emotional reaction for both Muslims and non-Muslims who Tweeted about their experience of the Snapchat story, resulting in a moment of interreligious collective feeling that crossed the boundaries of what might otherwise be different camps of opinion.

In this way, because the affective Islamic public works as a way for Muslims (along with non-Muslims) to negotiate Islamic normativity in the contemporary world, these participants in these discursive publics exercise more than just symbolic power. In all three cases, discussing and debating Islamic values online is the *actual practice* of Islam, not just a discussion *about* Islam. Working within the tradition of *da'wa*, the participants in these case studies exercise power by collectively determining who is a "good Muslim" and who is not. For Noor Tagouri, this resulted in (at least) temporary ostracization from parts of the American Muslim community after appearing in Playboy. For Hoji Mirzo and Nazarov, determining who is a "good Muslim" and who is not has very real consequences in offline space – Hoji Mirzo could lose his job as a government-approved mullah in secular Tajikistan if he appears too accommodating to Islamists

while Nazarov is placing himself in a great deal of physical danger by openly identifying himself as a member of ISIS and a subscriber to violent jihadist ideology. In #Mecca_Live, the pilgrims in Mecca who record and broadcast themselves to all Snapchat users worldwide are successful in improving (at least some) non-Muslims' opinions about Islam, an act which (at least theoretically) lessens the probability that Muslims will be subjected to Islamophobic violence by the non-Muslims who have seen this video.

I argue that because of these characteristics, the three examples I discuss in this paper can be considered affective Islamic publics, a term I am using to synthesize and refine the theories I have used above in framing my discussion. Like Hirschkind's Islamic counterpublic, the affective Islamic public is a space where discourse is directed toward the performance of Islamic ethics and the inherence of these ethics in the bodies and minds of those who participate in these spaces. Like Meyer's theory of aesthetic formations, these publics are formed by a collective engagement with media and mediation. Like Papacharissi's affective public, these publics come together on social media through the performance of emotion and are rather fluid, forming and dispersing quickly based on events. Taken together as a whole, the affective Islamic public recognizes the disciplinary power of social media discourse that appeals to affect.

Furthermore, within the affective Islamic public, participants work to assert communal norms through the collective expression of feeling. These norms work to connect people across the boundaries of time, space, and national borders, similar to Eisenlohr and Buggenhagen's studies of other Islamic media in diaspora communities. In all three cases, people from around the world were able to participate in the public. Tagouri, a Libyan-American from West Virginia, was featured in a nationally-famous magazine in the United States and this appearance attracted commentary from Muslims and non-Muslims around the country and beyond; Hoji Mirzo, in

Tajikistan, argued with Nazarov, in ISIS-occupied Syria, and anyone able to access Tajik-language media was witness to this argument; #Mecca_Live consisted of videos recorded in Saudi Arabia by pilgrims from around the world and anyone with a Snapchat account could view these videos. Although very different in terms of their specific contexts, the three examples I discuss in this paper are similar to the examples discussed in Eisenlohr and Buggenhagen's studies because they allow for the creation of transnational Islamic collectivities that come together through media use.

In coining the term affective Islamic public, it is my intent to emphasize the specific nature of discourse that occurs in the Islamic digital media sphere. Whereas traditional discussion of Islamic communities (and religious communities in general) has focused on the role of belief, text, and ritual, it is my goal to highlight the role that media use and affect play in the formation of Muslim communities. In this regard, I draw much of my inspiration from Meyer. However, unlike Meyer, I also want to emphasize the specific nature of discourse in digital media realms as well as the power relations that come into play in discursive spaces. I am also critiquing and expanding on Papacharissi's theory of affective publics by showing that, despite the ephemeral nature of these digital publics, discourse in the affective Islamic public allows for the collective negotiation of Muslim identity and results in the exercise of more than symbolic or rhetorical power. It is my hope that this term will serve to highlight the unique nature of digital religious discourse and its power to enable intense, intimate communication that allows people around the world to share experiences in ways not previously possible before the widespread adoption of digital media technologies.

I will conclude by suggesting some best practices that scholars interested in digital religious discourse should take into account when designing and conducting their studies, the

first of which is 1) pay attention to affect and media. By focusing on appeals to emotion and the senses, one can get a sense for how any particular event works to shape the religious disposition of the viewer or participant in this event. Take field notes and write down how this event affects you and your emotions and talk to as many other participants as you can about what they feel and how they are experiencing this event. Pay particular attention to the way in which media and mediation work to create or transmit affect. Investigate the physical media infrastructure for any particular event and analyze the affordances of any media that participants use.

Furthermore, 2) understand that religious publics are not easily defined, especially in digital spaces. Conversations take place across platforms and often refer to contexts outside the digital realm. Adopting a multi-sited ethnographic approach could be a good way to address the challenges of keeping track of such conversations and contexts. Try to meet with the people whose religious practices you are interested in studying in both digital and physical spaces and learn to do what they do. By spending as much time as you can with them, and absorbing the way they interact with each other, you will get a better sense for how the religious communities you are interested in can be defined or bounded.

Finally, 3) look for religious discourse everywhere. Religious practice can take place almost anywhere and in very unexpected places. Negotiation of one's religious identity happens not just with other members of one's religious community but is constantly performed and re-negotiated in every moment of one's digital and physical life. Religious identity is affected by ostensibly mundane media use, like one's Snapchat use, Facebook friends, and Twitter feed, and understanding how these taken-for-granted practices affect the way one interacts with religious tradition can lead to innovative insights. Do not necessarily look for religion in specifically

religious spaces but look for how religion shapes and is shaped by one's everyday practices, including (especially) media use.

As more people around the world use the internet in new and interesting ways, scholars of religion must devote more time to studying how internet use affects the way people interact with, subscribe to, and modify religious tradition. From negotiating what it means to be a pious Muslim woman in the contemporary United States to challenging violent Islamist ideology in Tajik-speaking communities and shifting the public perception of Muslims around the world, the internet and social media serve an increasingly important role as a space for public discourse within the global Muslim community. Digital spaces, and particularly affective Islamic publics, are where a growing number of Muslims are living more of their religious lives. In these spaces, communication is often an intense, multisensory, synchronous experience that allows for the formation of collectives that cross boundaries of space and time in novel ways. If scholars are to approach a comprehensive understanding of how Islamic normativity is constructed in the contemporary world, we must learn from media anthropologists like Birgit Meyer and Charles Hirschkind as well as media theorists like danah boyd and Zizi Papacharissi by paying more attention to the affordances and possibilities of digitally mediated communication.

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