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“The Concept of Authority in Muslim Societies:
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ABSTRACT

“Internetic Islam: (Re)Configuring Islamic
Authority through Facebook and Email”

By: Hasan Azad
(Ph.D. Candidate, Columbia University, New York, NY)

This paper examines how “*new* interpretive communities” of Western-educated Muslim scholars are challenging and reshaping traditional *ulematic* (scholastic) authority in the digital sphere. Historically, Islamic authority revolved around a notion of consensus among “interpretive communities” of scholars, which overlapped and disagreed on various issues. The Sufis and the *Fuqaha* are good examples of such interpretive communities. Colonialism disrupted, and in many ways reconfigured, Islamic thought, opening up traditional interpretive communities to lay-Muslim intellectuals (the role of modern, Western knowledge and education being significant in this regard). Today, modern, Western knowledge and norms are (re)shaping the terms of the debate between many new interpretive communities, as can be seen within the (post)modern interpretive space of Web 2.0. Email-based discussion groups and groups on Facebook provide (post)modern conditions of possibility as far as the (re)articulation and (re)configuration of traditional *ulematic* authority. Based on analyses of four internet-based fora, this paper argues that, as far as the *centralization* of “Islamic opinion” is concerned, such sites of interpretation and argument provide avenues for the continued fragmentation of traditional Islamic authority, as Western-educated Muslim scholars and publics intellectuals are refashioning their faith in powerful ways to fit their (post)modern, Western sensibilities.