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An analytic overview on the rise of cyber spaces and the Islamic Society: An urban challenge or natural transition of cities?*

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Abstract

Moving toward third millennium is characterized by capabilities in transforming human life. Specially, development of information technologies in everyday life lead to great changes in communication tools and our current understanding of urban social life. Indeed, telecommunications because of independency from time—space constraints, provide a new unlimited space for social interactions in global scale. Now, this development in Islamic societies is remarkable, because Islam has many detailed rules in social relations. So, in this situation studying and exploring social and cultural dynamics in cyber environments and its implications for physical cities is a key task of urban planners in Islamic communities to sustain and develop these cities.

In this research, first of all we reviewed some of the basic concepts of social life from Islamic view. We explored the reflection of these rules in Islamic cities and spatial aspect. After that, for each concept, we explored the potential implications of Information technology for Islamic society in the information age. The results showed that Islamic cities are reconstructed as complex amalgam of electronic spaces and urban places, in which, Information Technology has dual impacts on the city: in one hand, a potential for more social interactions, sharing ideas and promoting social integration and in the other hand, encourage the polarization of society, dispersed social relations etc. This indicates only a few parts of complexities in this area and the necessities in rethinking Islamic city in the age of digital communications.

Keywords: Islamic city, social life, Islamic culture, Islamic rules, telecommunications, cyber spaces.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In every society, there is a set of ethics and morals which is clearly expressed in the daily practice of life. Islam is no exception as it includes a social framework with a complete set of principles. Islam is unique in that its social framework is capable of incorporating all races, social strata and peaceable followers of other religions. It combines religious, political, social, legal and economic aspirations in a unity which illustrates order for all aspects of Muslim life. This framework is governed by the rules and precepts of shari'ah (Mortada 2003, 17).

Indeed, the tradition of Islam embodies many principles of social organization and behavior. These principles have been established by this tradition to make the life of believers correspond to its objectives and message. Following these principles, as early Muslim societies did, creates harmonious social and physical environments (Mortada 2003, xix). Now in the information age, a rapid transformation is currently overtaking advanced industrial cities. As we approach the verge of a new millennium, old ideas and assumptions about the development, planning and management of the modern, industrial city seem less and less useful. Accepted notions about the nature of space, time, distance and the processes of urban life are similarly under question (Graham and Marvin 2004, 1).

Apparently central to this transformation, according to nearly all commentators, are remarkable leaps in the capability and significance of telecommunications. Much of contemporary urban change seems to involve, at least in part, the application of new telecommunications infrastructures and services to transcend spatial barriers instantaneously. Telecommunications—literally communica-

tions from afar—fundamentally adjust space and time barriers—the basic dimensions of human life (Abler 1977; quoted in Graham and Marvin 2004, 2).

Hence, in the information age, the Islamic society face with some transformations in fundamental aspects of the city and it's important mainly because Islam has detailed rules in defining, using and applying urban places for living, working, entertaining and so on. However, it's rarely has been the focus of scientific researches both in urban planning and social studies. In this research, we have focused on this important point and exploring responses for the questions like: how digital information technologies can change the Islamic city in socio-spatial aspects? For this, first of all, we investigate Islamic rules and in some of the main social concepts of the city and then study the potential changes that will be created by the rise of cyber spaces. This will be a basis for exploring main transformations in the Islamic city in the information age.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.2. Islam and social life of the city

In every genuine cultural tradition, architecture and urban form can be seen as a natural expression of prevailing spiritual values and beliefs which are intimately related to the acknowledged cosmic order of the world. Whether such a three-dimensional representation is intended explicitly, by “mirroring” the universe in the micro-cosmos of man-made material structures, or whether it is simply an outcome of traditions and daily practices which correspond to certain spiritual principles, is of secondary importance (Bianca 2000, 22). As a rule, there is a close interaction between what people build and what they



believe, and this equation works in both senses: man structures his environment, while he is also influenced and confirmed by it in his attitudes as a result of interacting with it over time (Bianca 2000, 22).

The principles of the Islamic social framework are commitments and responsibilities which Muslims should practice in their lives. In this respect, the Prophet says, 'Allah has prescribed certain obligations for you, so do not neglect them; He has defined [or forbidden] certain things so do not do them; and He has kept silent concerning other things out of mercy for you.'

According to Islam, the principles of its social framework are supposed to be accepted as faith and expressed in action. Representing integration between faith and action, these principles are intended to make the life of the individual meaningful. Clearly, there can be no valid faith without some purposeful action to reinforce it, nor can there be any meaningful action of perpetual significance without faith. Clearly too, whenever accompanied, either directly or indirectly, by action, the two are inseparable in Islam as they are in reality. Thus, the essence of these principles is an internal commitment reinforced by an external manifestation (Mortada 2003, 18).

2.2. Telecommunications and Cyber spaces

Generally, Telecommunications has been defined as a technology concerned with communicating from a distance. It includes mechanical communication and electrical communication because telecommunications has evolved from a mechanical to an electrical form using increasingly more sophisticated electrical systems (Anttalainen 2003, 1). Further there are two kinds of telecommunications considering the follow direction: Uni-

directional communication and bidirectional communication. In this paper, our concern is electrical and bidirectional communication, highlighted in figure 1, Because of their increasing share in future communications.

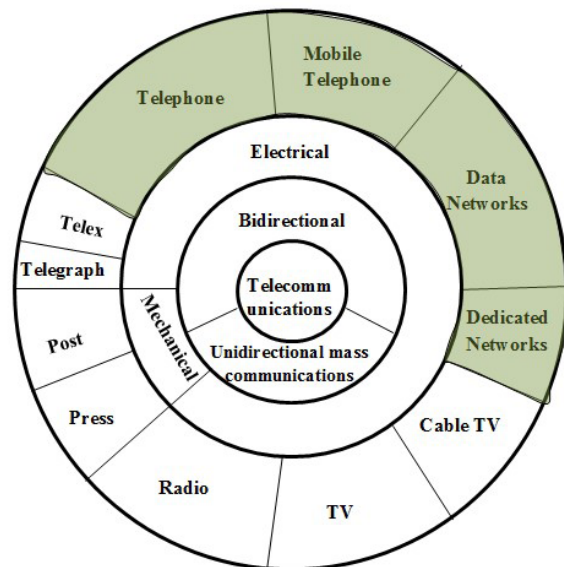


Figure 1: Telecommunications
(Source: Anttalainen 2003, 2)

Comparing with physical communication technologies, there are fundamental differences between Telecommunications and transportation which indicate some of the main features of telecommunications. These differences could be organized in four themes as stated in Table 1.

As it can see from the table 1, we face with a completely different communication method, in which, invisible contents are moved so fast incomparable with the flows of physical contents by even most advanced transportation tools.



Table1: Some of main differences between Telecommunications and Transportation

Theme	Transportation	Telecommunications
Communication context	Physical and natural environment	Electronic networks
Time spent	Depend on the communication environment	Negligible
Communication Velocity	A limited velocity depend on communication environment	Almost the speed of light
Communication content	Visible flows of people and goods	Invisible flows of information and capital

(Source: Kheyroddin and Khazaeian 2014, 21)

2.3. Space of places and space of flows (exploring theoretical concepts):

There are mutual relationship between social layer and spatial layer. In fact, spatial structure of the city emerges from urban social forces and the spatial logic has effects on social meaning of the city. In this area, Manuel castells with a simultaneous consideration of both aspects could present a theory.

He concentrates on explanation of human-place interactions and divides human history into two periods: pre information age (includes traditional and industrial age) and information age. He argues that the definition of place isn't possible without considering social activities. He concentrates on explanation of human-place interactions and divides human history into two periods: pre information age (includes traditional and industrial age) and information age. He argues that the definition of place isn't possible without considering social activities. In fact, place is rooted on society and is the base of social activities in a certain period of time (adapted from castells 2010). In pre-information age, one of the most important factors effect on social interactions patterns, was what Graham and Marvin named as "time and distance constraints"(Graham and Marvin 2004, 428). It means that all relations was physically and based on physical attendance on physical place. Therefore, place was defined as a physical identity with certain boundaries which includes a set of activities in a certain time.

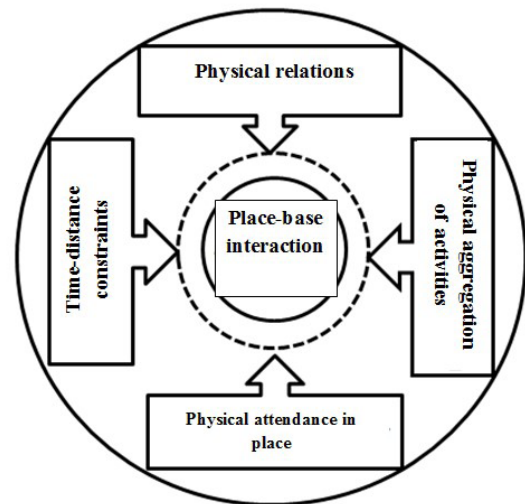
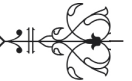


Figure2: general pattern of social interactions in pre-information age

But in the information age, that information flows define the dominant pattern of human activities, telecommunications play an important role in new spatial structure as a suitable and effective tool to exchange information. So it can be said that nowadays the social interaction patterns are being shaped by placeless information and capital flows. In this situation, social place isn't defined by physical aspects but defined as a float electronic identity and as Graham and Marvin argues a "Ubiquitous"





(Graham and Marvin 2004, 88) phenomena. This place is based on what castells named “Space of flows” (castells 2010, 440): the base for social activities done by flows in a certain time”.

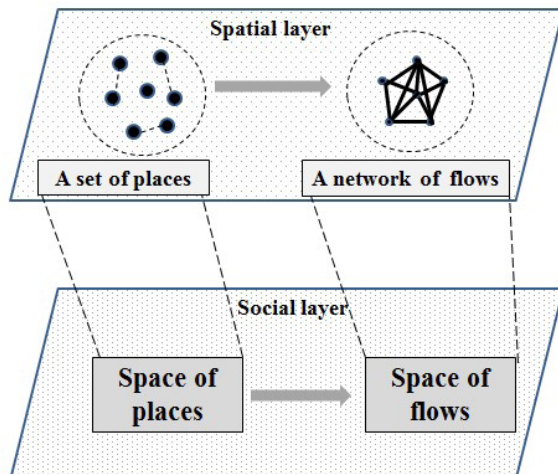


Figure3: fundamental change in social system and its indication for spatial structure

So, in this situation, how we can think about Islamic rules for places? Islamic rules were presented in the traditional age, when basic communication infrastructures and technologies, and so, high costs of geographical interactions caused the geographical space to shape as a set of places (see figure 3- the picture at the left side). But now in the information age, in which most of cities are highly dependent to this the flows of people, goods and information and many daily activities done by information flows, how Islamic rules can be conformed to this new situation? Exploring main transformations and potential challenges is the first step in this broad way that is the focus of this research.

3. METHODOLOGY:

Doing research in a new field always face with specific problems, but in the field of mutual interactions between urban places and electronic flows, these problems grow to a challenge; the

fact is that almost all researches done in urban planning so far, have concentrated only on physical layer of city such transportation, buildings, land-uses and etc. because of this, neglect from electronic layer of city resulted in comparably few literatures in both theoretical debates and research method. Therefore in this field it should be first to develop theoretical researches to initiate the main basis of future implementation studies. Because of this, we concentrate on theoretical aspects in this paper.

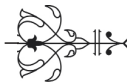
In fact we face with fundamental challenges raised from unconformity of current research methods with the flow-base nature of ICT. These could be abstracted in three parts:

1.3.Theoretical challenge: the current theories in urban planning are based on old place-base social interactions and fundamentally can't understand and justify the new flow-based ICT impacts on social and spatial aspects.

2.3.Conceptual challenge: the increasing social dependency on timeless and placeless telecommunications leads to changes in many basic concepts of urbanism; in fact, current concepts of urbanism have been built on the main taught that there are considerable time-distant constraints limits the city boundaries, human interactions and shape the social and spatial life in the specific boundaries. But today ICT undermined this basic taught and through this, the increasing inefficiency of current concepts tends to start. We should review these, considering flow-base nature of ICT and find new definition for the future city.

3.3. Challenge in indicators: time-distant constraints in the past resulted in the increasing importance of place in the geography and cities were mostly depended on their geographical environment. So in that era, the indicators used in urban researches were mainly place-base like population, employment, soil fertility, mining





and etc. but in the age of ICT, in which flows increasingly act important role in dominant social activities, considering only place-base indicators isn't efficient. In turn we should consider both place-base and flow-base indicators in this field (Khazaeian and Kheyroddin 2014, 57-60). In this research, in order to investigate main transitions in Islamic society at the information age and as an analytical overview and based on a descriptive-analysis method, first of all, recognizing the fundamental concepts in Islamic social life, defining them and their reflection in Islamic cities. Then, following a correspondent analysis, these concepts will be compared with changes supported by cyber environments. Therefore, the challenges and potentials for the Islamic city will be determined. So, analysis process is as following:

1. recognizing the fundamental concepts in Islamic social life
2. exploring reflection of these concepts in Islamic cities
3. comparing fundamental concepts with changes supported by cyber environments

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:

1.4. Islamic Society ('ummah'):

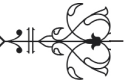
The foundation of the Muslim society is faith or 'Imān, whose essence is Tawhid (the belief in the existence and unity of God). Sayyid AbuA'laMawdudi¹, one of the chief leaders of contemporary Islamic theorists, defines this society as 'a society whose political order, social organisation, culture, economic policy, legal system, international strategy are all in true [and harmony] with the code of guidance revealed by Allah'. He elaborates on this definition by maintaining that this society is the result of a deliberate choice, the outcome of a 'contract', which takes place between human

beings and their Creator. Islam is a tradition that is oriented towards community. The effect of this orientation is translated in the concept of 'ummah', with which the Muslim society is identical (Mortada 2003, 18). In fact, Islam has encouraged Muslims to have social interactions with each other as brothers and based on this consider the society as an integrated identity. The commitment to be 'ummah has been strengthened by Islam, which requires the enhancement of the basic social units (i.e., family and neighbourhood). Ultimately, this creates a sense of solidarity and fidelity in any society that sustains Islam. The practice and attainment of solidarity is reflected in Muslims' living together in a society whose members support each other. In this social wholeness and association, the 'ummah gains its solidarity through the happiness and goodness achieved in life. As Mortada (2003, 20) argues; this was reflected in traditional Muslim society when different tribes and nations were successfully mixed by Islam into one single nation without variance.



Figure 4. Urban compactness of early Muslim cities symbolised the concept of 'ummah. This has been manifested in various cities throughout the Muslim world such as Fez regardless of local environmental or cultural variables.

(Source: After S. Bianca, 2000)



Following this, it could be said that instead of citizens, dwellers and concepts like these as was the case in European civilization after medieval ages and was based on communal interests between people, Islam proposes the concept of “Ummah” as the special social order of Islamic society.

2.4. Information technology and the rise of changes in the society

Technical media support a large and growing proportion of modern cultural flows and social interactions. Current innovations in telecommunications and telematics support new types of rapid social interaction or cultural transmission across previously impossible distances. This extends long-established processes whereby the ‘spaces’ of social and cultural interaction have separated from the particularities of social and geographical ‘place’ (Giddens 1990; quoted in Graham and Marvin 2004, 172).

These developments are important not simply because such new technical media can establish different patterns of social life but because they can also act ‘as a potential reorganization of social relations themselves’ (Thompson 1990, 217. Emphasis added).

Already, communications technologies, particularly television, ‘have brought individuals and families into the presence of places and events that were previously distant or unknown, enabling them to identify with dispersed yet knowable communities and to imagine themselves as embedded in regional, national and even transnational collectivities’ (Moore 1993, 623).

Telecommunications flows and cyber spaces, because of independency from physical constraints, affect social interactions and spatial structure of place to shape a new conception of place in information age. Before comprehensive developing of ICT, almost all of social interactions did physically and face-to-face. So, at that time, the place was a physically limited part of city in which, the relationships between people inside it, limited by physical boundaries of place (figure 5). But in the information age and the onset of advanced Telecommunications technologies, individuals inside a physical place can freely communicate with any other individuals outside this place simultaneously. So, social interactions easily break the physical boundaries of place (figure 5).

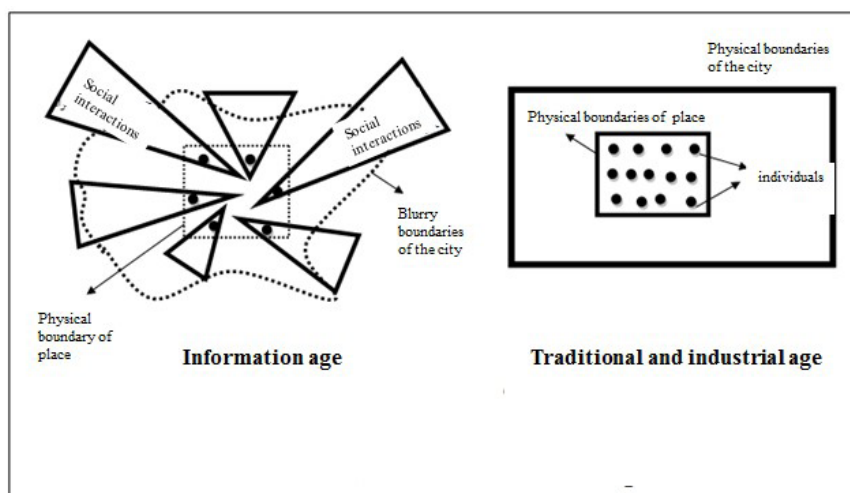


Figure 5. The conceptual transformation of place and society by the rise of ICT





Therefore, by moving toward the age of ICT and transformation of the patterns of social interactions, we face with a fundamental change in the identity of place. Although public place as the context of social relationships, at the past has a physically limited identity, but in the information age, simultaneous presence of individuals in cyber spaces and independency of these places from physical limitations, have led to the rise of new identity for the public places for information society: a flow-base, variable and ubiquitous place in cyber spaces which is timeless and placeless.

3.4. Social interaction

Islam recognises that mankind cannot live without social intercourse. Therefore, it values social relationships in order to limit isolation of people from each other, and strongly encourages social life on a wider or communal scale. In this sense, Islam has designated the social relationships between Muslims as 'mu'amalat'. Interaction, collaboration,

showing kindness, benefiting others, and avoiding harming others, are part of the domain of mu'amalat. This domain of interaction is well expressed in the Qur'an (i.e., 3:103)², which calls upon Muslims to relate strongly with each other. This relationship, which stands above that of blood, is a commitment with fellow Muslims (Mortada 2003, 20-21). In his recent book, *The Duties of Brotherhood in Islam*, M. Holland mentions that the shari'ah scholar, Al-Ghazali³, confirms that Islamic brotherhood is a contract between people. He defines this contract as, a bond between two persons, like the contract of marriage between two persons. For just as it gives rise to certain duties which must be fulfilled when it is entered into, so does the contract of brotherhood confer upon your brother a certain right touching your property, your person, your tongues and your heart, by way of forgiveness, prayer, sincerity, loyalty, relief, and consideration (ibid 2003, 22).



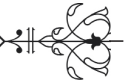
Figure 6. The tiny squares surrounded by and providing access to dwellings in the old city of Jeddah have social values by enhancing interaction between residents.

(Source: Mortada 2003, 24)

2- Surah: 'Ali' Imran, Ayah: 103:

« وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا ۚ وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِيَعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِنَ النَّارِ ۚ فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ مِنْهَا ۗ كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ »

3-(d. 505/1111)



Strong social interaction through close ties and kindness in Muslim society is also expressed in the obligation that calls Muslims to have consideration for each other. Indeed, the Prophet mentions that even planting a tree is highly rewarded by Allah as it benefits other Muslims. 'Ihsan and Infaqor giving alms is an example of this obligation (adapted from ibid 2003, 22-23).

Indeed, Islam is a religion which has encouraged followers to help each other to support the social equity of the society. But the point is the traditions and the way these helps should be provided that varied place by place and time to time.

4.4. Telecommunications and online communities: which pattern for social interaction?

At the information age, undermining time-space constraints and increasing tendency of socioeconomic life toward information economy leads social interactions be more dependent on electronic-base flows. This transition in one hand intensify the dominance of flows on spatial structure and in the other hand, pervasive penetration of wireless electronic flows in interior space of urban places –like homes and markets- which never has been seen in transportation systems, led city to shape as an integrated identity of urban flows and complete the dominance of flows on places.

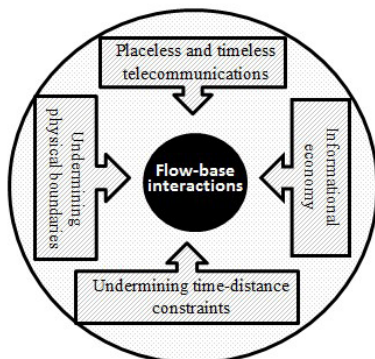


Figure 7: general pattern of social interactions in the information age (Source: owned design)

So it can be said that electronic flows with their pervasive penetration in all areas and places, includes all urban areas in virtual layer.

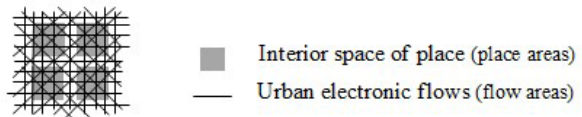


Figure8: flow areas and place areas considering urban telecommunications. (Electronic flows encompass almost all urban area)(Source: owned design)

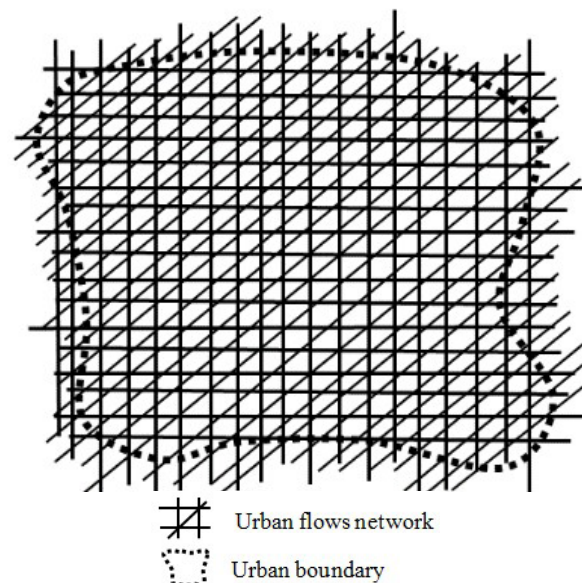


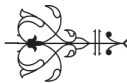
Figure 9: urban spatial structure in information age; complete flow dominance on spatial structure(source: owned design)

In this situation, fundamental changes in place definition from a physical identity by specified boundaries (in industrial age) to a node in electronic flows network, resulted in undermining segregation between place and flow which is directly or indirectly the base of all current theories in urban planning. So, electronic flows have found such dominance that in the virtual layer, the place is defined based on flows network.

4.5. Social justice

Social equity is a key feature and a vital manifestation of 'ummah. In Islam, the concept of





social justice is absolute and not relative. As a social system, this concept stems from the fact that all human beings are created by one God, equal and in a single comradeship. This is clearly explicit in God's saying: 'O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you' (Qur'an, Su. 49:13)⁴.

The religious brotherhood and uniformity of Muslims' rights and obligations is the foundation of equality in Islamic society. Islam stresses that all members of the society including non-Muslims are equal in rights and social duties and there is no difference between the rich and the poor, the high and the low, or the white and the black (Mortada 2003, 22-23).

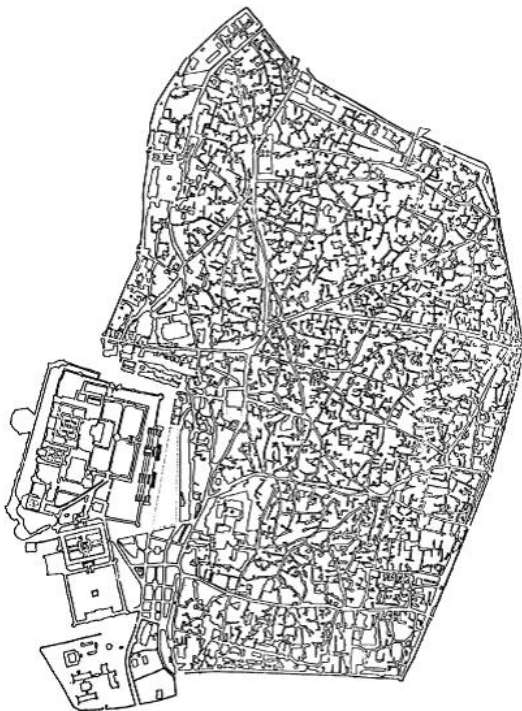


Figure 10 the walled city of Lahore (AD 1446), where Muslims, Hindus and Sikh communities lived for a long time as one integrated society⁵.

This socio-ethnic solidarity was also exhibited in cities such as Fez, Tunis, Medina, Isfahan and Damascus, where Muslims, Christians, Jews and other religious groups lived as a socially integrated community (ibid 2003, 26).

The religious brotherhood and uniformity of Muslims' rights and obligations is the foundation of equality in Islamic society. Islam stresses that all members of the society including non-Muslims are equal in rights and social duties and there is no difference between the rich and the poor, the high and the low, or the white and the black. This is principally derived from the fact that Islam is open to all people regardless of their race and faith. The Qur'an says, 'and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to Piety' (Qur'an, Su. 5:8).

4.6. Cyber environments and Social equity: uniformity or Polarization?

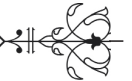
Usually utopian treatments suggest that telematics will herald some point of departure from the familiar social inequalities of capitalism. The onset of a benign and Utopian society with universal access to technology and an end to geographical barriers and drudgery is the usual prediction (see, for example, Graves 1986). Current evidence suggests, however, that such predictions fly in the face of contemporary urban reality. As Pedersen (1982, 254) argued, there are dangers that what he calls the 'radical democratic ideal of an information society' popularized by the Utopian visions 'may turn out to be a myth'. Urban societies are becoming more unequal not less unequal. There are many related processes underway here. We have already seen in the last chapter how global economic restructuring is underpinning a shift toward a more polarized urban world (Graham and Marvin 2004, 189).

The factors linking economic restructuring to

4-Surah Al-Hujurat, Ayah:13:

«يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۗ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ»

5- However, there were some social conflicts between different tribes and religions in India. One of them was the conflicts between some Indian tribes and Pakistani Muslims that caused to the terror of Gandhi at 1948 by some nationalist Indians.



social polarization in cities have been widely discussed (see Mingione 1991; Healey et al. 1995). Much less common, however, is discussion of the social inequalities in access to telecommunications and telematics infrastructures—and the resulting unevenness in the ability of social and cultural groups to participate in the increasingly telematics-mediated life of cities (Nowotny 1982; Calhoun 1986; Robins and Hepworth 1988; Murdock and Golding 1989). Many debates about globalization and the shift towards telematics-based social networks imply some degree of uniformity in these processes. Universal access to technology is often assumed or implied. As Doreen Massey argues, the concept of ‘time—space-compression’ which tends to be invoked in these debates tends to be ‘a concept without much social content’ (Massey 1993, 59).

Therefore, it would not be unreasonable to say that information technology has dual impacts on social equity; in one hand, in the network geography and in a world in which having access to the information is a vital factor in urban life, the status and potential in the global network of information is so important, but this network doesn’t have a completely even socio-spatial pattern and may isolate some social groups and by this, a new definition of privileged and unprivileged social groups will be created based on the quality of access to the information. This may intensify the social inequity in the city and so, considered as a main challenge for Islamic city in the third millennium. In the other hand, telecommunications and cyber spaces have increased the access to the information worldwide with really low prices. So, these technologies can also intensify the social equity in the Islamic society.

4.7. Family

According to Islam, the family is the base of the

entire socio-cultural structure and a self-sustaining institution which ensures ideological and cultural stability over the entire spectrum of society on the one hand, and in time, past, present and future on the other. It is the most fundamental element of Muslim society because it is the cradle of the individual and the vital source of the reinforcement of society.



Figure 11 Old Riyadh, where mud courtyard houses are similar in height (one story), none of which blocks the air from reaching the others.

Source: (Mortada 2003,31).

The importance of the family and its life as a source of the solidarity of the ‘ummah and prevention of social problems is strongly emphasized in the Qur’an (i.e., Surahs 24 and 33)⁷. About one third of the ‘a’kām (legal ordinances of the Qur’an) is related to the family and its proper regulation. The function of the family is mentioned in the Qur’an in a number of ways. A Qur’anic verse says, ‘And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them. And He has put love and mercy between your (hearts)’ (Qur’an, Su. 30:21)⁸.

6-Surah Al-Maida, Ayah: 8:

«يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاَنُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا ۗ اعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ»

7-Surahs An-Nūr (24) and Al-ʿAḥzāb (33)

8-Surah Ar-Rūm, Ayah 21:

«وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً ۗ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ»

1.4. Home and Family in the information age: which relationships?

In the modern city, the home emerged as ‘the last reserve space’. It was, to quote Helga Nowotny, ‘a social space of special significance which has come to signify for us the last sanctuary in a bewildering outside world’ (Nowotny 1982, 102). But this sense that the home is isolated from the rest of the social world is changing rapidly. Many homes, as we have seen, are being incorporated into more and more networks on increasingly global scales. These blur the dividing line between what is public and what is private. To Putnam, this means that the best way to consider the home is as a ‘terminal’. He writes, in speaking about the modern home, we are talking about more than technologized comforts. The

modern home is inconceivable except as a terminal, according the benefits of, but also providing legitimate support to vast infrastructure facilitating flows of energy, goods, people and messages. The most obvious aspect has been a qualitative transformation of the technical specification of houses and their redefinition as terminals of networks. (Putnam 1993, 156). This is not the result of some simple technological ‘logic’ however. Nor can we attribute this process entirely to broad political and economic forces. Rather, Roger Silverstone has shown that new communications and information technologies are entering homes through complex and diverse processes of social construction and ‘domestication’ (Silverstone et al. 1992; Silverstone 1994; quoted in Graham and Marvin 2004, 210).

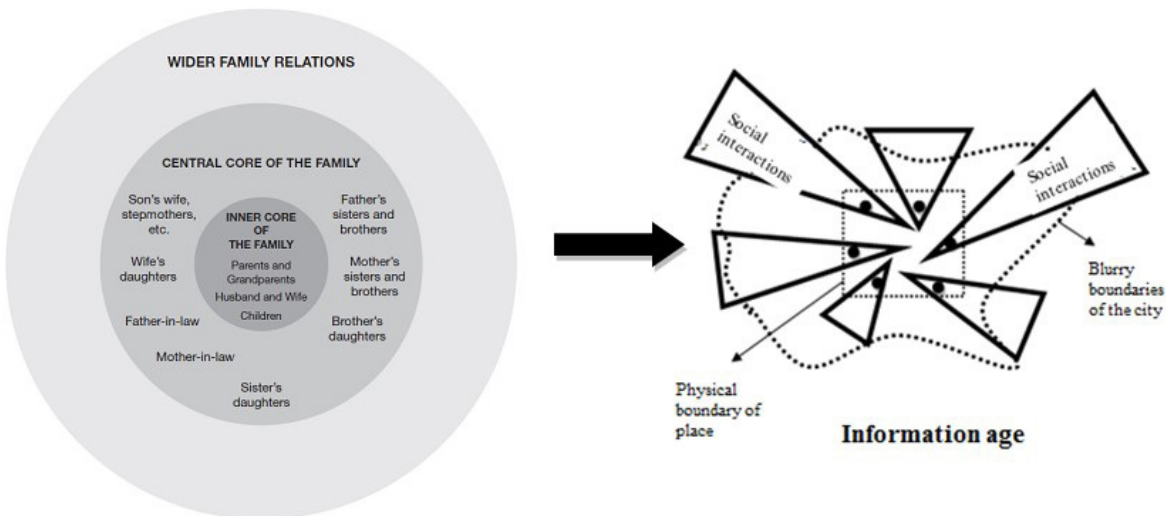
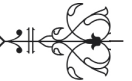


Figure12. The structure of Muslim family and possible changes in the information age

But how do such virtual communities operating in electronic space interact with and affect urban places? There are two key issues here: the way the growth of virtual communities relates to the public sphere of community interaction in urban places, and the possible

implications of the widespread emergence of truly virtual ‘cities’ assimilations and software constructions within electronic space (Graham and Marvin 2004, 229). This dual future has some important implications for Islamic family. In one hand and



following current debates in this area, virtual spaces have intensified the social isolation among family members and so, have decreased the social interactions between them as a preponderant point in holy Quran. But in the other hand, if consider profoundly, social interaction is not necessarily physical and could be done virtually. In this respect, information technologies provide broad access to the people around the world and so, develop the friendship networks and so, the domain of social interactions from traditional home and city to the new global village!

CONCLUSION: WHICH FUTURE FOR ISLAMIC SOCIETY IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS?

Doing this research, we could shed light on some social aspects of transforming Islamic cities as the new geography emerged by developing information technology in the society, but raising this kind of geography causes many issues in urban and regional studies; today's city has been built not only as a set of physical places but as Graham and Marvin (2004, 379) argues, increasingly formed as a complex amalgam of physical places and electronic spaces, which have intricate interactions with each other. so, in the beginning of 21th century we face with a theoretical challenge in defining basic concepts of society and city.

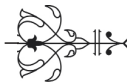
Now, considering most social outlines of Islam have been translated into physical aspect of the city, like the pattern of streets, houses, public spaces and so on, neglect from cyber environments means neglect from translating Islamic laws in these environments and overlooking a significant part of Muslims' life. So,

although these spaces are virtual, but the challenge is quite real!

In fact, these transformations are not just occurring with remarkable speed; their nature can be profoundly disorienting to those used to the old rhythms and regularities of modernist urban life. These processes operate in ways that can stretch our ability to perceive and understand cities, distance, space and time, the nature of what is public and what is private to breaking-point. Through telecommunications and innovations in rapid transportation, relations between the physical and locational aspects of cities and the operation of social and economic systems are being fundamentally loosened and reworked, often on a global basis. Many electronic fluxes now explode continuously into the physical spaces of cities, providing profoundly new systems through which urban life can be reorganized and remade. In a very real sense, current telematics systems provide technical networks inside which new spaces and times are being created in all areas of urban life. These networks 'bind together' places in many different spatial and temporal positions in the form of 'real time' networks (Gillespie and Williams 1988, 1317). Indeed, the development of telecommunications in the societies, beyond being only physical devices, is gradually changing time-space patterns of current urban life. In the past, most of activities done in physical space and in the context of space and time, but now in virtual reality, the same activities could happen in an environment regardless of time-space barriers.

Considering Islamic rules, the rise of telecommunications and cyber spaces can have dual impacts on the society. In one hand, that is common in the current debates in telecommunications-city interactions, cyber spaces





by intensifying globalization power and the invasion of western culture and its life style in the Islamic societies, could be considered as a main challenge for Islamic culture in third millennium. However, in the other hand, virtual spaces can develop the abilities and the domain of communicating and having social interactions to other muslims around the world and also develop the knowledge by having immediate access to a wide variety of scientific references (this is also encouraged in Quran strongly).

Therefore, as we have seen, interactions between new information technologies and Islamic society is much more complex than currently speculated. Unfortunately the debates in this area is dominated by some superficial approaches. These approaches oversimplify the impacts of cyberspaces on the Islamic societies and mostly consider negative impacts,

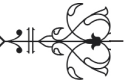
like transforming traditional Islamic principles to a western society. But stressing upon these approaches may cause Islamic societies to be isolated in the world and remain as a traditional society.

But the reality is much more convoluted. Telecommunications provide a unique opportunity to connect to the global society, global knowledge and have a unique opportunity to develop in the information age. Indeed, in the information age, it's necessary to develop the relationships to other countries and develop the status in the information network as a new and really important factor in the development. So, thinking about these dual impacts and redefining new criteria for development and more important, translating Islamic rules in the context of digital world could be the subject of future researches in this field.

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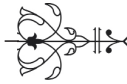




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