Since the mid-1990s, Islamicwebsites have grown considerably. The distribution of fatwas, one of the most booming components of Islamicwebsites, is booming. In 1999 at least 10,000 fatwas were to be found online. In the year 2000 the number rose to at least 14,000 fatwas, and this year thousands more are sure to be added to the score. Since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, the provision of fatwas has been an important social barometer. The interactive component of the internet has made online fatwas not only possible, but easy and accessible as well. Such virtual services, however, impact certain Islamic beliefs and practices.

The distribution of fatwas via internet can be divided into two major groups: the first group comprises the so-called ‘fatwa archives’, which are simple compilations of fatwas that are already published in books. The second group, ‘fatwa services’, involves the processing of queries. There is usually an online form provided, where users can pose their questions. Through the website IslamiCity it is possible to get an idea about the users. The fatwas are then determined by muftis and subsequently published on the website.

IslamiCity (based in the USA) is one of the two main Wahhabi players on the internet and the other being Islam – Question & Answer.2 IslamiCity has already published about 5,000 fatwas on the internet, while the Dar al-Itta al-misriyya,3 for example, has published but 300 fatwas online. The massive interest in IslamiCity’s fatwa service, however, has led the founders of the site to slow down the services so as to search for funds to finance the site in the future. In the meantime, fatwas from the Saudi daily, Arab News, have been added to the IslamiCity database.

IslamiCity is more than just a fatwa service. It provides information on the Qur’an, the Sunna, the Haji, and other Islamic topics. It includes television channels, chat rooms, Islamic screensavers and electronic greeting cards. It also offers space for advertising. Users are offered the possibility to play an Islamic quiz, donate zakat online, or even order flowers. All services are guided by an Islamic etiquette. In this sense, Islamic web-programming could be considered comparable to the concept of Islamic banking.

Intercultural settings IslamiCity is based in the USA and the multiform Muhammad Musri, Dr Ahmed H. Sakr, Dr Musammi Sadiq and Dr Yahya Abdul Rahman, currently working and living in the USA, and Dr Dan Doueiri and his ‘Imam brother Abdullah (but my friends call me ‘Dearest virtual imam of the esteemed Team’ from Beirut handle the fatwa questions to the muftis, for example in online, or even order flowers. All services are guided by an Islamic etiquette. In this sense, Islamic web-programming could be considered comparable to the concept of Islamic banking.

Cyberfatwas

It seems that some users are confused as to whether IslamiCity actually exists in real geographic space. Though the answers to questions do clarify that it is in cyberspace, it makes no difference where the mufti and the muftis are located. Questions from all around the world can be, and indeed are, posted to IslamiCity. It is the technical management of the website distributes the questions to the muftis, for example in Beirut. So, it becomes abstract. The mufti no longer sees the questioner, and cannot perceive the potential dubious aspects of a question. He is bound by its textual form. This is ex-

Baudrillard’s theory of hyper-reality might doubt the sincerity of the questioner. Jean Baudrillard (No. 3203, 3677). Other developers of computer games are allowed to draw pictures (No. 3606).

The aim of using the internet for good Islamic purposes has resulted in new topics for fatwas. For example, before reading a digital Qur’an one should perform the ablution, but does not need to (No. 1101, 1880); the recitation in the background of a webpage is not allowed (No. 1343); and darwa via internet is possible (No. 2078). As IslamiCity offers its own chatrooms, it is important to know how to use these chatrooms. Discussions are allowed as long as Islamic etiquette is taken into account and useful Islamic topics are being discussed (No. 223). For example, one may say ‘I will meet you in the chatroom (No. 752, 2873, 3699). There is a physical distance, the chatroom offers an opportunity for conversation with the user at the opposite sex. If people should happen to fall in love as a result, it is not wrong, but they should not from the beginning have the intention to meet someone in cyberspace with a view to marriage (No. 1983).

Another question raised involves whether IslamiCity actually exists in real geographic space. Though the answers to questions do clarify that it is in cyberspace, it makes no difference where the mufti and the muftis are located. Questions from all around the world can be, and indeed are, posted to IslamiCity. It is the technical management of the website distributes the questions to the muftis, for example in Beirut. So, it becomes abstract. The mufti no longer sees the questioner, and cannot perceive the potential dubious aspects of a question. He is bound by its textual form. This is ex-

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Another question raised involves whether

the internet itself is haram (No. 1474). IslamCity’s opinion is that the internet is a tool that can be used for good or for bad purposes (No. 294, 492, 3466, 3468). This means that the internet in itself is not haram. Nonetheless, it is understandable that some question this since, for example, computer images are used to violate the Islamic prohibition of images (No. 829). Thus, developers of computer games are allowed to draw pictures (No. 3606).

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