UNSTABLE SITUATIONS: A RHETORICAL APPROACH TO STUDYING BLOGS ABOUT MUSLIMS

by

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ABSTRACT

UNSTABLE SITUATIONS: A RHETORICAL APPROACH TO STUDYING BLOGS ABOUT MUSLIMS

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The emergence of Internet writing, particularly blog writing, has complicated our understanding of the "rhetorical situation," as first articulated by Lloyd Bitzer. As a basic definition, the rhetorical situation consists of the author/rhetor, audience, constraints, exigence and text. As the genre of the blog emerged shortly after the millennium, the basic premise of Bitzer's definition needs to be revised to incorporate how rhetorical situations operate in the blogosphere and specifically how the concept of audience, exigence, and invention need to be reconceptualized in this genre. Whereas Bitzer saw the rhetorical situation as consisting of separate and discrete elements, in the blogosphere these concepts appear to shift and transform through social and historical fluxes, making for a more "fluid" rhetorical situation that inevitably raises doubts about the stability of the genre itself. Since many trace the origins of the genre of blogging to the tragic events of September 11, 2001, an analysis of blogs relating to Muslims will serve as a useful

tool when discussing the rhetorical situation and concepts such as exigence, audience, and invention. As these terms are viewed in the social and historical contexts and discourses in which they were produced, the evolution of these terms and the lens through which their meanings are derived will shed more light onto the genre of blogging and its ability to remain stable in such a fluid environment.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, the Internet has provided a number of new digital spaces for communicating—from chat rooms in the late 1990s to Twitter in the present day. The proliferation of these new spaces for writing and communicating on the Internet has spurred scholarship in the fields of communication, writing, and rhetoric for researchers seeking to explain its social, rhetorical and discursive implications. The weblog or "blog," in particular, has received a significant amount of attention by scholars such as Carolyn Miller, Dawn Shepherd, and Anis Bawarshi, who see blogs as a new genre of writing that functions in its own rhetorical space. These blogs or online journals exist in the public domain but are also intensely personal in nature, even when discussing public issues. This confusion or mix of purposes arises because blogs address everyone and yet no one: they may potentially reach a global audience or may be read only by the author who composes them. By serving multiple purposes and audiences at once, blogs serve both as a source of information (about a particular topic or issue) and as a means to socialize, or connect with individuals that one might not have the opportunity to interact with in "real life."

Most problematic of the scholarship on blogs are researchers' conceptualization of the terms "exigence" (also referred to as 'exigency') and "audience." Lloyd Bitzer, in "The Rhetorical Situation," defines exigence as a specific event that generates a need or

response—a need that must exist prior discourse; it is an "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" ("Rhetorical Situation" 6). He claims that the exigence comes into being first, subsequently demanding a response from the rhetor. Richard Vatz argues against this claim, stating that the rhetor creates the exigency through the discourse. In 1980, Bitzer responds to Vatz's criticism by modifying his definition of rhetorical exigency as "a factual condition plus a relation to some interest" ("Functional" 28). Bitzer still however contends that exigency is the primary factor inviting the discourse. In 1989, Barbara Biescker attempts to shift the debate over exigency by proposing a deconstructionist reading of the rhetorical situation. In her analysis, she downplays the significance of exigency and frames the rhetorical situation as a process of mutual identity creation between the speaker and audience, as opposed to interaction between speaker and exigency. Likewise, Carolyn Miller further complicates this concept by arguing that the exigence is socially constructed and makes demands on both the reader and the writer in their interaction with and through the text. Since cultural exigencies are socially constructed, the counterargument could be made that they can be socially (de)constructed as well. Thus, it seems as though exigence is a malleable concept. This does not bode well for the argument of the blog as genre, for the unstable nature of the exigence may dictate an unstable genre.

In "The Rhetorical Situation," Bitzer defines the term "audience" as all individuals who are capable of being changed as a result of the discourse. Bitzer would like to draw a solid line in the sand separating the writer from his/her intended audience.

Yet in the "blogosphere" this division becomes blurred—the writer is both author and audience and the audience also acts as author by contributing to and circulating the dialogue. As a result of this interaction, both the author and audience are equally susceptible to "change." Miller and Shepherd argue that the personal form of the blog motivates and satisfies the readers and writers of blogs because it helps shape and validate each others' identities. Yet, if the rhetor is not effective at engaging his/her audience in the discourse, one might surmise that these desires will remain unfulfilled.

In the genre of blogging, writers are continuously reinventing themselves based on their interactions with the public (or audience). The audience's participation in the discourse, of course, can also be viewed as a constraint if they choose not to contribute to the discourse. Though Bawarshi speaks about invention, he gives little attention to the role of the audience (or public) in this process. In fact, Bawarshi claims that invention operates "within a larger sphere of agency that includes not only the writer as agent but also the social and rhetorical conditions, namely genres, which participate in this agency and in which the writer and writing take place" (51). Bawarshi argues that the invention process is not driven by the individual writer, but by the genre itself, because this is the site where the writer realizes his/her desire and the means to fulfill those desires through discourse and social action.

This thesis will attempt to reconceptualize the terms exigence, audience, and invention through historical, theoretical, and practical application of these terms. These terms will be traced from their origins in the rhetorical situation, viewed in their placement in the digital world of blogging, and then they will be analyzed from their

practical application in blogs about Muslims. This research will focus particularly on blogs relating to Muslims that address controversial topics such as the practice of veiling among Muslim women, the conflict in Gaza, and elections in Iran. Discussions of these blogs will show how notions of exigence, audience, and invention have changed with the emergence of blogs and how these changes have contributed to a more fluid, flexible model of the rhetorical situation.

THE RHETORICAL SITUATION AND THEORIES ON GENRE

Exigence and the Rhetorical Situation

Bitzer's essay, "The Rhetorical Situation," has been at the center of lively debate among scholars of rhetorical studies since its publication in 1968. As Mary Garret and Xiaosui Xiao note, Bitzer's view of the rhetorical situation is unique in contemporary rhetorical theory in that it is "both widely accepted and deeply contested" (30). For Bitzer, rhetoric is action-oriented—"a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action" ("Rhetorical Situation" 4). In his article, Bitzer uses the example of language in its primitive uses to make the point that language can be thought of as a "mode of action and not an instrument of reflection" ("Rhetorical Situation" 4). Bitzer views rhetoric as pragmatic and persuasive, responding to a particular exigence and functioning to produce action or change through the performance of a specific task. Bitzer's definition of the rhetorical situation, in fact, is largely tied to material events, not social or cultural contexts. Bitzer describes the rhetorical situation as something that is "real or genuine" and not grounded in fantasy or fiction; it is "objective, publicly observable, and historic" ("Rhetorical Situation" 11).

Bitzer broadly defines the rhetorical situation as "a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely

or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence" ("Rhetorical Situation" 6). Bitzer claims that rhetorical discourse came into existence as a response to situation, the same way "an answer comes into existence in response to a question" ("Rhetorical Situation" 5). For Bitzer, the exigence is a pressing problem that needs to be responded to. The exigence functions as the "organizing principle" because the situation unfolds around the "controlling exigence" ("Rhetorical Situation" 7). Bitzer further distinguishes between rhetorical and non-rhetorical exigencies. For example, Bitzer explains that rhetorical exigencies require modification and change: "An exigence is rhetorical if it is capable of positive modification and when positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse" ("Rhetorical Situation" 7). In his article, Bitzer uses the example of air pollution as a rhetorical exigence because its positive modification—reducing air pollution—can be achieved through discourse on public awareness and calls to action. Racism too is another example of a rhetorical exigence because discourse—particularly the persuasive type—is necessary to resolve the problem. If a situation cannot be modified or if it can be modified through means other than discourse—like death or natural disasters—then it is not rhetorical.

Bitzer's position in "The Rhetorical Situation" receives criticism in fairly short order. In "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation," Richard Vatz responds to Bitzer's essay, arguing that Bitzer's definition of the rhetorical situation is too narrow and that "no situation can have a nature independent of the rhetoric with which he chooses to characterize it" (154). Bitzer, of course, explains that the situation determines the

speaker's response; the success of the rhetoric is dependent on the speaker's skill to correctly interpret the needs of the situation. Vatz believes that the rhetor has the agency to make a judgment call about the situation that folds back to help create the situation. He argues that meaning is constructed through language and human perception and that the rhetor's perception of the rhetorical situation is essentially an "act of creativity" (Vatz 157) and is not set in stone. For Vatz, "meaning is not discovered in situations, but created by rhetors" through language (157). Vatz argues that to view rhetoric as a creation of reality increases rhetors' moral responsibility because they choose to make certain things salient. Hence, the source of the discourse is the speaker or rhetor, not the situation. Rhetoric, at its best, Vatz argues, would exist when meaning is seen as the result of a creative act, not a discovery. The rhetoric, then, gives particular meaning to an event or situation, resulting in a real or perceived exigence that must be addressed. For instance, Bitzer uses the example of air pollution as an exigence that demands a rhetorical response to the situation. This is a somewhat simplistic view of the rhetorical situation because it poses the situation as a problem and the exigence as a need for a solution. In the case of the events of September 11, 2001, Vatz would argue that it is the rhetor's interpretation of the events which creates the situation and multiple exigencies to be responded to. For Vatz, situations don't exist before the rhetoric and are not a result of the exigence, but rather result from the language that rhetors use to create "salience" and their subsequent influence on the audience. Vatz argues that situations are created through language and are made "real" by the audience's perceptions of them. Since rhetoric generates the situation, exigence is not viewed as a given, but as an arbitrary

assignment of importance to certain information and facts. Vatz claims it is the translation of these facts into meaning that will determine whether something is rhetorical or non-rhetorical.

While Bitzer identifies the rhetorical situation as objective and grounded in reality and fact, Carolyn Miller in "Genre as Social Action," goes beyond the material definition to provide a social interpretation of the rhetorical situation. Miller argues that the rhetorical situations are socially constructed and involve exigencies that make demands on the reader and the writer through their interaction with the text. By situating exigence in the realm of the social, Miller's definition allows for genre to be viewed as extending beyond the formal features of the text. In "The Rhetoric of Genre in the Process Era—and Beyond," Richard Coe explains that"[a]lthough usually identified initially as structural/textual regularities, genres are social processes that correspond to (and also construct) recurring situations" (184). Coe further explains that genres are "motivated symbolic actions" that should be understood in terms of "what they *do*, not how they are shaped" (184). Thus, the rhetorical genre must be defined not in terms of form or content, but on the action it is to accomplish. Miller provides a social interpretation of "how genre represents 'typified rhetorical action' based on recurrent rhetorical situations" (151). Miller argues that exigence is located in the social and is "a form of social knowledge—a mutual construing of objects, events, interests and purposes that not only links them but also makes them what they are; an objective social need" (157). Miller defines exigence as "a set of particular social patterns and expectations that provides a socially objectified motive" for addressing society's needs and shortcomings (158).

According to Miller, these needs that demand responses do not originate from the speaker or the situation, but rather in society. The difference between Bitzer and Miller is that the former emphasizes the problem and the latter emphasizes the need. For Miller, in order for social action to occur, society must recognize those social needs and be able to participate in enacting changes necessary to meet those needs. By engaging in those social actions, Miller argues that a new culture and rhetorical situation emerges. As shown in Figure 1, cultural changes result in a new rhetorical situation with new exigencies (and constraints) that require new responses and social actions to facilitate those changes. These actions, in turn, transform societies, creating new cultures.

Figure 1. Carolyn Miller's New Rhetorical Situation

In a more radical perspective of the rhetorical situation, Barbara Biesecker, in "Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from Within the Thematic of Différance," uses a deconstructionist reading of the rhetorical situation to shift the debate over exigency. In this perspective, Biesecker downplays exigency and reframes the rhetorical situation as a process of mutual identity creation engaged in by speaker and audience. Whereas Miller

sees the rhetorical situation as inducing action on the part of the individuals engaged in the discourse, Biesecker sees the rhetorical situation as an event that makes possible the production of identities and social relations. I believe both Miller and Biesecker agree that cultural transformation results from the rhetorical situation, but they differ on how the new culture is created—through social action or through a shift in identity and social relations. One could argue that the two concepts go hand in hand—shifts in identity and social relations would propel a change in culture, just as certain social actions could create a significant shift in identity and social relations of a particular society.

Similarly, other commentators like Kathleen Jamieson in "Generic Constraints and the Rhetorical Constraint" have argued that other factors need to be considered in the rhetorical situation, beyond speaker, audience, exigence and constraints. Jamieson specifically argues that antecedent rhetorical forms may influence the speaker's perception of a fitting response to an unprecedented rhetorical situation (163). That is, the new rhetorical situation will always be viewed through the lens of the rhetorical forms of the past (or antecedent genres). Like Vatz, Jamieson argues that the rhetor's perception of the situation shapes the response; however, she expands on the concept of perception by stating that one's perception of "new" rhetorical situations are always influenced by rhetorical forms of the past. This is a view similar to Mikhail Bakhtin's take on language in "The Problem of Speech Genres." In his essay, Bakhtin explains that every utterance (use of language) is always created in response to previous utterance(s)—the "dialogical echoes from others' preceding utterances" (99)—and in anticipation of a responding utterance(s). By emphasizing that meaning varies based the situation(s) in which

language is used (or uttered), Bakhtin's approach is progressive because it depicts language as open-ended or incomplete and malleable to the situation it encounters.

In a more recent examination of the rhetorical situation, Bawarshi notes the lack of attention given to the "creative act" (Vatz) that the rhetor is engaged in during the creation of discourse. In *Genre and the Invention of the Writer*, Bawarshi argues that the creative process that the rhetor is engaged in (or the "invention process") is not driven by the individual writer but by the genre itself. The genre is where the writer realizes his/her desire and the means to fulfill those desires through discourse and social action. Bawarshi diverges from Vatz by shifting the frame of understanding of the rhetorical situation through the author (in his/her choice or use of language) to the genre and its historical connections to certain types of situations. Specifically, Bawarshi argues that invention operates "within a larger sphere of agency that includes not only the writer as agent but also the social and rhetorical conditions, namely genres, which participate in this agency and in which the writer and writing take place" (51). For Bawarshi, the genre (not the exigence or situation) helps create the discourse, though genres themselves arise in response to typified exigencies and rhetorical situations.

In 2005, Jenny Edbauer takes an even more complex view of the rhetorical situation in "Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies," arguing that rhetoric is not "circumscribed or delimited," but is actively engaged with the living, capable of being transformed by social and historical forces, and is the very process through which texts are "understood to matter" (23). In her article, Edbauer claims that "rhetorical situations operate within a network of lived

practical consciousness or structures of feeling" (5). By placing the rhetorical elements in this wider context of public rhetoric, the solid lines of demarcation that exist between these elements become blurry, destabilizing the whole concept of the rhetorical situation. The rhetorical situation, when viewed as an "ongoing social flux," must be viewed as operating in a "framework of *affectiv*e *ecologies* that recontextualizes rhetorics in their temporal, historical, and lived fluxes" (9). This ecological model allows for a reinterpretation of rhetoric as "a public(s) creation" (Edbauer 9) and effectively accounts for multiple layers of complexity at work in the genre of the blog. Specifically, Edbauer recognizes that multiple exigencies can create multiple structures of feelings and experiences in the public and that the combined total effect of these feelings and experiences can create a new exigence that must be responded to. This framework of affective ecologies will help shape our understanding of the rhetorical situation as it operates in the blogosphere.

To delve further into analyzing the rhetorical situation, as defined by Bitzer and modified by numerous rhetorical scholars over the last four decades, one must take a closer look at its constituent elements. In Bitzer's article, he claims that three primary elements—exigence, audience, and constraints—"comprise everything relevant in a rhetorical situation" ("Rhetorical Situation" 8). While the first two components have been subject to a great deal of controversy, exploration and modification, many others like Biesecker have argued that other elements should be included as well. In this thesis, a third term that will be explored is invention, a process alluded to by Vatz as the "creative act" that the rhetor engages when generating discourse. This process will

provide crucial insight to the role of audience (or public) in generating rhetoric but also shaping the genre. In *Genre and the Invention of the Writer*, Bawarshi is perhaps the first to tackle this concept when he takes an in-depth look at the creative process of the author writing/inventing within the genre, but also being shaped by it.

The following provides a summary of the various interpretations assigned over the last 40 years to the terms audience and invention and the way these interpretations have shaped our understanding of the rhetorical situation. These discussions will provide a framework for analyzing blogs about Muslims, further extending the conversation of the rhetorical situation into the genre of online forms of discourse.

Audience and the Rhetorical Situation

In "The Rheorical Situation," Bitzer defines the rhetorical audience as all individuals who are capable of being changed as a result of the discourse. Bitzer's audience is comprised of more than just those who hear/read the message, but all who could be changed/influenced by the message and who would take action(s) as a result—all who could serve as a "mediator of change" ("Rhetorical Situation" 4). Bitzer's audience is construed as an active or "engaged" audience, one whose presence is concrete or real and whose attitudes, beliefs and expectations are known to the rhetor. Biesecker, however, notes that Bitzer's model of a fixed audience, whose identity is known prior to the rhetorical event, limits the power of the rhetoric. While it may have the power to influence an audience and persuade them to become mediators of change, it doesn't have the power to "form new identities" (Biesecker 233). From Miller's perspective, true social change can only occur through a radical transformation of social identities or

relations in society. Hence, Biesecker proposes a new function for rhetoric where rhetoricians "see the rhetorical situation as an event that makes possible the production of identities and social relations" (243). One could infer, then, that attempting to label and categorize audiences for the purpose of discourse via the blogosphere would serve no practical purpose—by doing this the rhetor would only limit their ability to change or shape social identities and relations through the discourse. This issue will be addressed in more detail in the section entitled, "Blogging as Social Action."

In 1984, Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford in "Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy," argue that there are three types of audiences that need to be considered when generating rhetoric: the audience addressed, the audience invoked and the eventual audience. The addressed audience is "real," similar to that described by Bitzer; on the contrary, the "invoked audience" is "fictional," or a construct of the writer's mind (Ede and Lunsford 160). In this instance, the writer would use "semantic and syntactic resources of language to provide cues for the reader" to help define the role(s) the writer wishes the reader to adopt to respond to the text (Ede and Lunsford 160). For Ede and Lunsford, the discourse creates the audience. This complements Vatz's argument that the discourse creates the exigence. Of course, some theorists, like Walter Ong, criticize any notion of a "real" audience—addressed or invoked—stating that without an intimate knowledge of one's audience, which naturally consists of individuals with varying viewpoints and opinions, rhetors must construct in their imagination "an audience cast in some sort of role" and then tailor their messages as best to addressed this "fictionalized" audience (12). Ede and

Lunsford briefly touch on this third type of audience, an eventual audience, which can best be described as all the individuals who actually come in contact with the discourse, whether intentionally or unintentionally. This concept is perhaps most relevant to online discussions or blogs, where the author has minimal control over who is able to view their messages and discussions.

In 1980, Russell Long further examines the role of audience in "Writer-Audience Relationships: Analysis or Invention?" In his article, Long claims that Bitzer's view of rhetoric as persuasive assumes an adversarial relationship between the reader (audience) and writer (rhetor): the rhetor must convince the audience to change their mind about something, but the audience won't necessarily be a willing participant. Knowing your audience (similar to the adage of "knowing your enemy") is stressed as the key to successful persuasion (i.e., learn their likes, dislikes, attitudes, beliefs, etc. and you will be able to change their mind). Long asserts, like Ong, that the relationship between writer and reader should be creative, not combative: "If audience is a created fiction, then an analysis of its traits becomes possible only as the writer defines his purpose and decides upon desirable reader characteristics" (225). Long suggests that the writer creates the audience first, and then writes specifically to that audience. This process would suggest that the writer is not only creating text, but creating an audience for that text as well. Essentially, this action would "shift the burden of responsibility upon the writer from that of amateur detective to that of creator, and the role of creator is the most important and most basic the writer must play" (Long 225-226). This perspective is mostly useful for rhetoric aimed at persuasion. However, if the audience is unknown—a

random, faceless person in a world of online users—the writer's ability to know their audience becomes significantly constrained. This perspective fails to get at the complexity posed by blogs and Edbauer's idea of writing for the public. Much like sending a signal to outer space, the author cannot possibly predict all who will encounter their messages, and of those individuals, who will respond.

In 1976, David Hunsaker and Craig Smith attacked Bitzer's model for failing to take into account perceptions of the audience and speaker in the rhetorical situation. Hunsaker and Smith took particular issue with the concept of the rhetorical audience, creating subcategories of audiences, including: (1) the situational audience that is witness to the situation and perceives the issues; (2) the actual audience that the speaker addresses; and (3) the rhetorical audience that consists of all who could potentially modify the exigency (154). The conflicting perceptions of the rhetorical situation, according to Hunsaker and Smith, "interact to produce issues that will structure the ensuing conflict and shape its outcome" (152). In 1996, Craig Smith and Scott Lybarger examined Bitzer's model with a postmodernist viewpoint, arguing that the rhetorical situation can consist of "multiple audiences, perceptions and exigencies" (197). Smith and Lybarger essentially argue that these elements are all "highly subjective" (201), as they are merely social constructs created in minds of the rhetor and audience.

Although Smith and Lybarger's article appears almost a decade before Edbauer's, it has the foresight to note that in today's "media-rich" culture, a more "fluid" notion of the rhetorical situation is necessary to account for the complexities of rhetorical events occurring sequentially and simultaneously in time. In fact, until the advent of the

Internet, most analysis of the rhetorical situation was viewed through the lens of the mass media—television, newspapers, magazines, radio, etc. The difference between these traditional forms of mass media and mass media in the modern-sense (post-1999) is the degree of social interaction that takes place between the rhetor and the audience. While Smith and Lybarger's claim that the rhetorical situation consists of multiple audiences, exigencies and perceptions could easily apply to analysis of discourse in the blogosphere, it cannot account for the dynamic nature of rhetoric as it circulates through space, time and history, transforming cultures and identities in society.

Invention and the Rhetorical Situation

The dynamic nature of rhetoric is not a concept that is exclusive to discourse generated in the blogosphere or in the post-Internet age. Aristotle first addressed this notion when he described rhetoric as invention, or the process of "discovering the best available means of persuasion." Aristotle uses the term "invention" to describe various strategies rhetors use to formulate an argument for a thesis. Aristotle even organizes various topics of invention to help the rhetors organize their thoughts on a particular subject. These topics were springboards for rhetors to orient themselves to the rhetorical situation. Aristotle's vision of the invention process engages only the writer with his/her rhetorical argument—not with their intended subjects (audience). Bitzer, on the other hand, emphasizes that the rhetorical argument (though formulated by the author) is driven by certain exigencies in society. This view essentially lands the rhetor in a responsive role. Vatz picks up on Aristotle's idea of invention when he argues that "meaning is not discovered in situations, but created by rhetors" (157). Vatz's argument gives rhetors an

active role in the creation of rhetoric, with increased moral responsibility and agency as they choose to make certain things salient.

In *Genre and the Invention of the Writer*, Anis Bawarshi claims that "writers invent within genres and are themselves invented by genres" (7). Bawarshi expands on Miller's notion of genre, stating: "As we write various texts . . . we rhetorically enact and reproduce the desires that prompted them" (45). Bawarshi proposes that the author-function is a function of literary genres, creating the ideological conditions that produce the "author" (22). Bawarshi explains that the genre function "constitutes all discourses' and all writers' modes of existence, circulation and functioning within a society" (22). Bawarshi argues that the genre function helps individuals conceptualize and act in certain situations, framing the mode of being of those participating in the discourse (23). Although Bawarshi speaks of the writer inventing within the genre and being shaped by it, he gives little attention to the interaction between author and audience in the invention process. Miller and Bawarshi imply that genres are socially constructed; yet when it comes to invention, from Aristotle to Bawarshi, most think in individual terms (even though the whole situation led up to the emergence of the blog).

In *The Wealth of Reality: An Ecology of Composition*, Margaret Syverson widens the lens of invention to include multiple individuals engaged in assorted activities in various environments. Syverson describes rhetoric (specifically writing) as a socially-situated, distributed act of creation rather than an isolated act. Edbauer also views rhetoric as a collective act, existing in an open, collaborative network. Rather than examine individual writers and their contributions to the discourse, Edbauer looks at

rhetoric as an ecology of "lived experiences" (19) that is always interacting with its environment. Through these encounters, the rhetoric changes form as it circulates in a wide ecology of public rhetorics. It is not contained by any particular elements but rather emerges onto a public scene that is host to multiple rhetorics. When examining invention in the genre of the blog, this concept of collective invention will help explain how rhetoric is not created individually, but in tandem with other ongoing rhetorics.

BLOGGING AS SOCIAL ACTION

The collective function of invention within the world of blogs would imply that rhetorical situations and exigencies are always coproduced with audiences, texts, and other rhetors. In "Blogging Thoughts: Personal Publication as an Online Research Tool," Torill Mortensen and Jill Walker claim that although blogs initially were seen as "filters to the Internet," as a compilation of interesting links and sites with commentary from the blogger, today it is very much "a hybrid between journal, academic publishing, storage space for links and site for academic discourse" (Mortensen and Walker 250). In fact, the authors claim that it is the collective academic invention that they experienced through blogging that helped their writing become more focused for their theses. By becoming members of the blogging community, rather than impartial observers, their lived, social experience helped them better understand their object of study: "Rather than distancing ourselves and permitting an escape from the object of research, the blog lives within the same frame as the computer games and the electronic narratives we study, keeping us close to the technology, the relevant formal as well as informal discourse and the objects themselves" (Mortensen and Walker 273).

In recent years, blogs have taken on an entirely new social dimension, serving as a forum where individuals with various backgrounds and opinions could convene to discuss and debate various topics as well as connect with individuals that they would not

normally have communications or interactions. Mortensen and Walker define blogs as "frequently updated websites, usually personal, with commentary and links" (249). In general, blogs consist of short posts that are time-stamped and organized in reverse chronology so that the newest posts appear at the top of the page. Although the "blog" has been in existence for a little over a decade, several rhetoricians have argued that the blog is in fact a genre of writing because it doesn't simply respond to one event but to a specific type of recurring cultural context and social need in society. In "Blogging as Social Action: A Genre Analysis of the Weblog," Miller and Shepherd specifically argue that the blog presents a new rhetorical opportunity made possible by technology that is becoming "more available and easier to use . . . [being] adopted so quickly and widely that it must be serving well established rhetorical needs." These social and technological needs have driven the blog as genre but also challenged the way audience has been traditionally viewed in rhetorical studies, specifically their collaborative role with the author in mutual identity building, which occurs during the process of invention.

The Exigence of Blogging

In their article, Miller and Shepherd address the cultural context in which blogs surfaced, linking the advent of blogging with social and technological changes in our society—to needs produced through the situation rather than exigencies as events. They characterize the exigence of blogging as the "recurrent need for cultivation and validation of the self." This need arose in our society in the late 1990s, when our nation became increasingly voyeuristic. Miller and Shepherd also cite the tragic events of September 11th and technological advancements in the way that individuals communicated via the

Internet in the early 2000s for catapulting the genre of the blog into individual homes as an alternative source of information from mainstream media. The authors connect this technological exigence to a series of social exigencies, such as the pursuit for truth, the desire for excitement, and the need to connect with the world around us.

Clay Calvert notes in *Voyeur Nation* that blogs became increasingly popular in the late 1990s because they allowed the lines between public and private selves to be blurred, allowing for a form of "mediated voyeurism." Calvert defines mediated voyeurism as "the consumption of revealing images of and information about others' apparently real and unguarded lives, often . . . for the purposes of entertainment but frequently at the expense of privacy and discourse, through the means of the mass media and Internet" (23). Calvert explains that much of our social reality is generated through mass-mediated content, such as television shows and movies, rather than firsthand experiences with people, places, and things. Further, much of the mediated content is voyeuristic in nature. Theses messages and images, in turn, "create, maintain, and transform our social reality—our culture" (Calvert 23). Calvert attributes this type of mediated voyeurism to three contemporary social forces: (1) the pursuit of "truth" and "authenticity" in an increasingly media-saturated world; (2) a desire for excitement and experiencing real-life moments; and (3) the need for involvement and connection with the world around us. The high ratings of reality television shows such as *The Biggest Loser*, *The Bachelor*, and *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* attest to the fact that the public is driving this media-spawned frenzy to feed their increasingly voyeuristic desires.

This voyeuristic culture is also fueled by various advancements in technology that have revolutionized the way information is managed and shared. In earlier times, technologies like the printing press and telephone were slowly absorbed into culture as people came to understand and utilize them. Email, for example, became available over 15 years ago, but it took a while for dissemination of the technology to have far reaching effects (Nauheimer). Today, according to an August 2008 study by the Radicati group, there are approximately 1.3 billion email users worldwide (Tschabitscher). In "Technological and Social Change," Nauheimer states that it took about 100 years for the telephone to reach this same level of dissemination. Moreover, the way in which knowledge and information is shared has also changed drastically with technology. In the last five years, Nauheimer notes that the information exchanged via the Internet is widely among people who do not know each other and "we haven't really had time to digest that and understand what this means to social change." While many of the older generation continue to use email as their main form of information sharing, a significant portion of the younger population prefer writing on blogs or using social networking sites like Twitter, Facebook, and MySpace to share information.

One cannot examine the phenomena of blogging without discussing the events of September 11th which truly catapulted the blog into a genre of its own (Andrews). In many ways, September 11th is Bitzer's exigence par excellance—it was a material event that not only invited but demanded a fitting discursive response. The event also fed directly into society's desire for mediated voyeurism and interconnection. Watching the planes crash through the World Trade Center buildings provided individuals with a front

row seat to a real-time event of catastrophic proportions. It was a shared moment of personal heartache and public outrage. September 11th, according to Dan Gillmor, Director of the Center for Citizen Media, was "a galvanizing point for the blogging world" (qtd. in Andrews). Survivors and spectators turned to online journals to share feelings, get information, or chronicle the events and news gathered from various sources. Bitzer and Miller would agree with Andrews that the collective tragedy of September 11th "*demanded a forum* to be shared by people all around the world who wanted to talk about what happened with anyone because it was the only way of making any sense of it" (emphasis added). Blogs provided individuals with large audiences, comprised of more than just family and friends, where individual voices could be heard and virtual social networks could be formed.

With a growing distrust of the media and a fractured American psyche, September 11th caused many computer literate people to turn to the Internet to try to seek out the "truth" about Islam and Al-Qaeda. Ignorance in the Western world about the Muslim world and Middle Eastern culture and politics also created a desire for many Internet users to connect with the larger, virtual global community—a connection that was necessary to begin the healing process. Thus, blogs became a place where individuals sought truth. Authors of blogs helped define this truth by posting articles, links to other online resources, commenting on other people's blogs, etc. According to Miller, a large portion of blogs online are written for issue awareness or personal reflection. According to Technorati's annual online survey results, published in a report entitled, "State of the Blogosphere 2009," bloggers reported "self-expression and sharing expertise" as their

primary motivations for blogging in 2009, with over 70% of bloggers measuring the success of their blog by their levels of personal satisfaction, as illustrated in Figure 2 (Sussman). In some ways, these blogs serve no practical purpose, as very little "action" or "change" results from the plethora of blogs created and discarded every day. This, of course, holds true for many blogs relating to Muslims.

Source: *Technorati*'s State of the Blogosphere 2009 Report

Figure 2. Measure of a Blog's Success, by blogger types

David Sifry, founder of Technorati, a leading blog search engine, reports that the number of blogs grew exponentially in the early 2000s. As of April 2007, Sifry reports 15.5 million active blogs (or blogs updated in the last 90 days) and 57 million adult blog readers just in the United States (39% of the US online population), although few of these

readers read widely or often. Due to the speed in which information sharing technology software is changing, Sifry notes an interesting trend—while the number of blogs exponentially grew after September 11th, the number of blogs created, of late, has slowed. In fact, the number of active blogs tracked by Technorati declined, from 36.71% in May 2006 to 20.93% in March 2007. Many attribute this "slowing" to the popularity of social networking sites such as Twitter, MySpace, and Facebook. This slowing trend, of course, could prove problematic for rhetoricians like Miller and Shepherd who view the blog as genre to be a relatively stable phenomenon, subject to evolution only in small, steady increments.

Though blogging may have decreased significantly in the last few years, as new technological changes replace older ways of communicating via the Internet, it could be argued that the newer technology is in fact less stable and more vulnerable to extinction than the blog. For example, the current trend towards keeping people in touch via "status updates" helped launch the social networking website Twitter.com. Unlike other social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter severely limits the breadth and depth of communication its members can engage in. According to the Twitter website, messages "must be under 140 characters in length and can be sent via mobile texting, instant message, or the web" ("About Twitter"). Like blogs, social networking sites address the need for connection and access to instant information, exigencies that are very much part of modern day society. Although few social networking sites allow searches by keywords like Twitter, this content is not filtered in any way, such as by user rating or most to least relevant, etc.

Since most social networking sites are centered on the individual, and not the topics or subjects they write about, the usefulness of these sites to garner meaningful, detailed discussions with members of the public is limited. Specifically, the formal features of social networking sites restrict interactions between authors and their online public. For example, while MySpace allows users to create page templates, including content such as text, images, videos, and music, each page is unique to the individual, not to the topic(s) they write about. In fact, it is much easier to locate an individual on MySpace than to find a MySpace page dedicated to vegetarianism or human rights in Kashmir, or whatever topic may be of interest to the online user. The same is true for Facebook, with perhaps even more restrictions on search capability due to security features of the software that allow individual subscribers to block certain individuals or the public from searching for their page. Though you can join "groups" on Facebook surrounding particular causes or topics, like "Obama for America," there is no search capability for the notes or comments posted on these pages. Since users are constrained by how much they can say on Twitter, and many of these social networking sites require individuals to register for accounts before they can even access information to individuals/groups and their discussions, these sites do not provide an easily accessible forum for the public to convene. Needless to say, although these new social networking sites offer some amount of linking capability to videos, blog posts, articles, other online sources, etc., the breadth and depth of content is somewhat lacking as compared to that which exists in the blogosphere.

Blogging for the Public, by the Public

In the blogosphere, blogs speak to everyone and yet no one, much like the "eventual" audience described by Ede and Lunsford. For Bitzer, this proves problematic as one might ask how the exigence could be fulfilled through discourse if messages cannot be tailored to a specific audience. Exigence is at the root of audience analysis, yet audience is most problematic of the three elements in terms of its application to blogs. In "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation," Vatz establishes a new function for rhetoric, where the rhetorician serves as an agent for social change. In other words, it is the job of the rhetorician to find situations requiring change and then make public arguments for those necessary changes. Unlike Bitzer, Vatz assumed that once the argument was made public, the argument itself would create its own audience. This is contrary to the traditional model of communication, where rhetors form their messages based on inferences or assumptions about their audience(s). In fact, Biesecker argues that rhetoric has no persuasive power if it is only aimed at an existing audience that has a fixed identity and set of beliefs. The most the rhetor could accomplish in this instance would be to get the audience to accept the stated argument—it would not create change through radical transformation of social identities or relations. Biesecker specifically argues that "if we posit the audience of any rhetorical event as no more than a conglomeration of subjects whose identity is fixed prior to the rhetorical event itself, then we must also admit that those subjects have an essence that cannot be affected by the discourse" (233). In the blogosphere, because the audience that one addresses is undefined—composed of individuals possessing a myriad of identities and social relations—the author's ability to

change or shape these identities expands greatly. Subsequently, Biesecker proposes a new interpretation of the rhetorical situation as "an event that makes possible the production of identities and social relations" (243).

In order to understand the concept of audience from the perspective of blogging, one must first grasp a better understanding of the unbounded audience, often referred to as the "public." In "Publics and Counterpublics," Michael Warner sheds light on the undefined audience that comprises "an ongoing space of encounter for discourse" referred to as a "public" (62). The public that Warner refers to is the one that "comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation" (50). Warner claims that "[t]he idea of *a* public, as distinct from both *the* public and any bounded audience, has become part of the common repertoire of modern culture" (50). In other words, Warner's (discursive) public is created through the circulation of discourse, as opposed to the traditional unbounded (abstract) public or bounded (addressed) public that most rhetoricians label as their audiences.

In his article, Warner makes seven claims about discursive publics and the role they play in constructing our social world, which can better explain the "public" that bloggers address when writing: (1) "A public is self organized"; (2) "A public is a relation among strangers"; (3) "The address of public speech is both personal and impersonal"; (4) "A public is constituted through mere attention"; (5) "A public is the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse"; (6) "Publics act historically according to the temporality of their circulation"; and (7) "A public is poetic world making" (50-82). I will briefly address some of these claims to differentiate

between the terms "audience" and "public" and to explain why the term "discursive public" is more fitting when discussing the audience addressed by blogs.

When Warner states that the discursive public is self-organized he means that the public is a "space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself" (50). In other words, the public exists only as the end for publication of the blog—it exists simply by being addressed by the blog discourse. A discursive public is more than just a list of known individuals, it must include strangers. According to Warner, "a public . . . unites strangers through participation alone, at least in theory. Strangers come into relationship by its means, though the resulting social relationship might be peculiarly indirect and unspecifiable" (56). This "social relationship" that forms between the blogger and public is both personal and impersonal. With public forms of speech, Warner states that "we might recognize ourselves as addressees, but it is equally important that we remember that the speech was addressed to indefinite others; that in singling us out, it does so not on the basis of our concrete identity, but by virtue of our participation in the discourse alone" (58). In this public address, it is the individual who chooses to either identify with the rhetoric as an addressee or chooses to ignore the address of the blog—much like one would respond to someone calling out "Hey, you!" on a crowded street. It is not until the individual turns around and realizes they are being addressed that they become engaged in the discourse, claims Warner. Of course, people in the crowd always have the choice to ignore this call. Warner argues that by merely paying attention to the discourse (or the "call") one becomes a member of the discursive public. The existence of this public, however, depends on its members' activity. According to Warner, discursive publics

"commence with the moment of attention, must continually predicate renewed attention, and cease to exist when attention is no longer predicated. They are virtual entities, not voluntary associations" (61). This is most evident in the phenomenon referred to as "the death of a blog," i.e., through prolonged inactivity, the blog's discursive public, as a virtual entity, ceases to exist.

Warner asserts that a discursive public has to be constituted through regular, if not daily, intervals of publication. Warner believes that one is no longer addressing a public if there is no sense of timely and punctual response. Warner argues that "a public can only act within the temporality of the circulation that gives it existence" (68). Warner argues that "[discursive] publics have an ongoing life"—as the texts circulate in the public through time, which are confirmed through "an intertextual environment of citation and implication" (68). As blogs function in the public sphere, the public is allowed to see discourse unfold through a lens of time. For example, blogs are arranged chronologically (from new to old) and time stamped for the viewer to see the discussion unfold over time through a serious of posts and comments by bloggers (Gurak, et al.). Most of these sites have detailed archiving of articles and they are centrally indexed. Since the discursive public is "an ongoing space of encounter for discourse," it is not the blog itself that creates this public but the formulation of texts over time through ongoing discourse: "only when a previously existing discourse can be supposed, and a responding discourse be postulated, can a text address a public" (Warner 62). By emphasizing reflexivity, circulation, and time, Warner explains that writing for the public is essentially an attempt to speak to various "others" whose differences can help shape the discourse.

Like Warner, many rhetoricians (Syverson, Bieseker, Edbauer, et al.) have argued that the traditional triangular model of communication—comprised of text, writer, audience, and context (see Figure 3)—is too simple to account for the complex social forces of interaction at work in the blogosphere. Since this model completely disregards

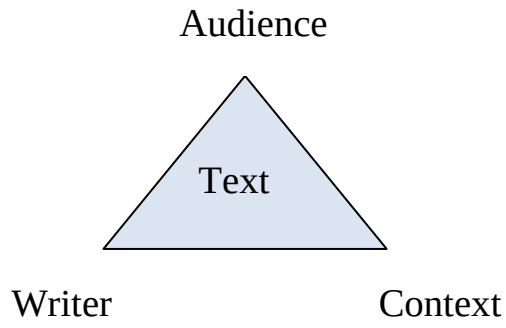


Figure 3. Old Rhetorical Model for Communication

the concatenations that comprise Warner's definition of a discursive public, a new model must be proposed that replaces the term "audience" for "public" and that places the public as the site of creation, as opposed to a passive participant. This model must also take into account the dynamic interactions across "physical, social, psychological, spatial, and temporal dimensions" (Syverson 23). Specifically, the social dimensions of interactions in the blogosphere must be seen as "distributed, embodied, emergent, and enactive" (Syverson 23). In Figure 4, I have proposed that the rhetorical model for communication in the blogosphere be portrayed as an atom rather than as a static triangle. This view would ensure that rhetorical situation be seen as dynamic, and its component parts always in flux, moving and adapting to their changing environments. In this model,

the discursive public, blog author, and exigencies are depicted as revolving around the discourse because they keep the discourse alive and in circulation. As the blog author and discursive public engage with and encounter the discourse, responding to multiple exigencies in our society, these "lived" experiences help create and transform the rhetoric as it moves through dimensions of time, space, and society.

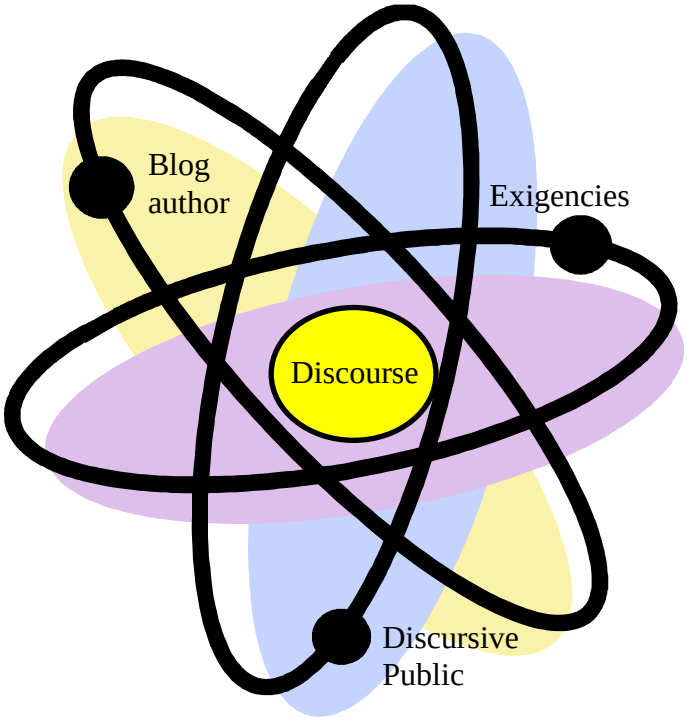


Figure 4. Ecological Model for Blogging – Dynamic rhetorical model that accounts for multiple exigencies that drive interactions between the author (blogger) and the public (discursive) as the blog's rhetoric circulates in time, space and society

The above model helps emphasize that blogs should be viewed as a rhetorical model of interconnection, rather than a static model composed of discrete elements. In "Personal Publication and Public Attention," Mortensen states that studying weblogs

"should not just be a study of form and technicalities, but of interconnectedness." Blogs are both personal expression and public participation: "To post online is to declare yourself as part of something larger," claims Mortensen. Blogs connect text fragments within the blog but also make connections through links to other online texts. This feature of blogs, according to Mortensen, signifies "existing connections and potential connections: those made by the writer and those made by the reader." As readers become writers, they can link to their own weblog from their pieces of work. Although this type of writing might appear fragmented, or schizophrenic in nature, according to Mortensen, it may also be viewed as a narrative of interconnection via a new digital, public sphere—a digisphere, so to speak.

Seyla Benhabib notes in *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* that cultural exigencies, particularly those rooted in the political domain, are often enacted in the public sphere and in public spaces, where people can "meet to discuss matters of public concern" (89). After the events of September 11th, both individual and community blogs dedicated many articles to the attacks, allowing individuals a forum for sharing information and expressing their opinions about the attacks. The need to express different versions and meanings of Islam became a driving force behind the creation of many blogs about Islam and Muslims. For example, the practice of veiling received a lot of attention on the Internet shortly after September 11th when stories started to surface about the treatment of women in Afghanistan. Today, much of that conversation has shifted to the crises in Gaza and negotiating peace between Hamas and the Israeli government and to election scandals in

Iran and Afghanistan. It is the dynamic nature of the blog that allows this dialogue to circulate in the public and, as exigencies driving the discourse shift, to mutate based on the needs of the public. In many ways, blogs are the vehicles that bring together members of the public and that drive the discourse (whose destination is not fixed, but always changing direction).

Public Invention in the Blogosphere

Blogs written for the purpose of issue awareness or personal reflection characterize a large portion of the discourse online related to Muslims. According to Miller and Shepherd, this emphasis on issue awareness and personal reflection helps contribute to the art of self. This personal form of the blog, according to Miller, motivates and satisfies readers and writers of blogs, enabling its survival as a genre. However, placing so much emphasis on the individual writer and reader, or the author and the public and their desire for self-expression and self-validation, limits our view of the concept of invention in the blogosphere. In *Genre and the Invention of the Writer*, Bawarshi tries to expand on the concept of invention by claiming that "writers invent within genres and are themselves invented by genres" (7). Bawarshi argues that there are social forces at work to shape writers and their texts. He describes writing as a form of social participation, where the discourse community is comprised of the social and rhetorical environment shaped by members who use common discourse strategies for communicating certain values, goals, assumptions, etc. (Bawarshi 5). Although Bawarshi speaks of the writer inventing within the genre and being shaped by it, he gives little attention the dynamic role of the public in the invention process.

In the genre of blogging, the writer's ability to invent is largely dependent on the public's participation in their discourse. In "Weblogs: A History and Perspective," Rebecca Blood argues that weblogs have the power "to transform both writers and readers from 'audience' to 'public' and from 'consumer' to 'creator.'" Writers in this genre continuously reinvent themselves based on interactions with the public—through various forms of self-expression and self-disclosure, the writer seeks validation from the public. The writer and reader, in other words do not operate in isolation, but rather in collaboration. Thus, when the public responds to an author's blog, they too become part of the invention process. Based on the feedback provided by the public, the author is afforded status and value in the online world. Simply put, the author-function that endows the "author" with a certain cultural status and value cannot exist without the public to assign those values that validate the author-as-self.

Edbauer argues that the rhetorical situation need not be viewed a series of discrete elements but as "an ongoing social flux" because the elements of the rhetorical situation "bleed" into the concatenation of public interaction, which in turn bleeds into larger social processes (9). With blogs, Edbauer argues that "rhetorical publicness" needs be thought of as a context of interaction—as "a framework of affective ecologies that recontextualizes rhetorics in their temporal, historical, and lived fluxes" (9). Edbauer proposes a revised strategy for theorizing public rhetorics as "a circulating ecology of effects, enactments and events [that shifts] the lines of focus from the rhetorical situation to rhetorical ecologies" (9). By adding in the dimensions of history and movement into

the rhetoric of public situations, this model of rhetorical ecologies helps us understand rhetoric as "a public creation" (Edbauer 9).

Edbauer argues that this creation that the public engages in does not take place in a fixed site or location, but rather through a "networked space" shaped through time and history. This writing is a not an isolated act of creation, but rather a shared activity among people and "various structures in the environment, from physical landmarks to technological instruments" (Syverson 8). Edbauer argues that the word "rhetoric" itself should be viewed as a verb rather than a noun—rhetoric is something we do, not a state of being. According to Edbauer, an "affective" rhetorical model is one that reads rhetoric both as a "process of distributed emergence" but also as an "ongoing circulation process" (13). Edbauer likens public rhetoric to a virus, because it is always in a state of flux—always changing, mutating, expanding and transforming. This "viral spread" of exchanges in the wider ecology lend for a rather fluid framework of the rhetorical situation. This fluid framework accounts for amalgamations and transformations of events and happenings in the elements of the situations, as well as in the "radius of neighboring events"—movements that post-Bitzerian models cannot account for (Edbauer 19-20). This dimension of movement within the ecology frees the power of rhetoric from being restricted to particular time, space, or moment.

Encounters over the blogosphere are always lived and in circulation, as blogs are open to public comment and citation (linking content internally and externally). This linking of web content and pages places the blog in a social network of circulation and transformation. Without citation and circulation, Edbauer argues that the blog is as good

as dead. Through circulation, encounters and engagement with the public, blogs are not only produced in the realm of the social but also derive meaning and value when they are produced, encountered and enacted in the social. It is this "engagement with the living" that enables rhetoric to be encountered rather than created (Edbauer 23). Edbauer's interpretation of rhetoric lends for a rather complicated look at the process of invention. If rhetoric is something that is meant to be encountered, not created, then how does one encounter rhetoric without the use of language or discourse? In the public sphere, the writer is always creating rhetoric but the public, I would argue, encounters it—either through accident or by choice. Once the public chooses to respond to the discourse, they become part of the discursive public, re-inventing the discourse through citation and circulation of their thoughts and ideas.

REDEFINING EXIGENCE AND AUDIENCE THROUGH ANALYSIS OF BLOGS ABOUT MUSLIMS

To delve further into the rhetorical situation, a rhetorical analysis of blogs relating to Muslims will be conducted to shed light on how the concepts of exigency and audience operate in the realm of the blogosphere, as well as challenge some of the definitions of earlier rhetorical scholars like Bitzer who could not have envisioned a world where communities of practical strangers would engage in active discourse via the Internet. The concept of invention will also be briefly addressed to show how the co-creation of rhetoric (by writers and their publics) in the blogosphere is transforming not only how discourse is generated and circulated in the public, but also the blog genre itself. For this analysis, I have selected blogs relating to Muslims simply due to the fact that the exigence of September 11th undoubtedly spurred the explosion of online blogging and much of the discussions centered on the fact that all 19 hijackers were known Muslims. Today, in fact, a great many blogs are still being circulated about Islam and Muslims, relating to topics like conflict in the Middle East, the practice of veiling, and elections in Iran. These issues are extremely divisive in the Muslim community and globally have large impacts both on personal and political levels. As a result, the narratives produced are both intensely personal, yet packaged for public consumption. In my research, I will use blogs relating to Muslims to discuss the concepts of exigence and audience as they

relate to violence in Gaza, the practice of veiling, and elections in Iran, respectively. Analyses of these terms through the lens of the blog will be used to expand on Edbauer's claim that the fluid nature of blogs does not allow for a strict demarcation of elements constituting the rhetorical situation but rather an ecology of experiences and feelings that operate in the realm of the social. It will also bring to light concerns relating to the stability and future of the blog genre as other forms of social networking sites are being used concurrently with blogs to call for social action.

Exploring Exigence through Blogs on Violence in Gaza

In the wake of September 11th, the conflict between Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews in the Gaza region received a great deal of scrutiny by bloggers around the world, as the Middle East region became viewed as a breeding ground for terrorist activities. In fact, Al-Qaeda, the group responsible for the September 11th tragedies, cited the conflict in the Gaza region as one of the many justifications for their attacks on the United States, a country which has been a strong supporter of the State of Israel. The exigence of September 11th spurred many blogs online about Muslims, but also increased the public's awareness about other "hot spot" issues in the Muslim world, including the struggle between Arabs and Jews in the Gaza region. Thus, the salience of September 11th brought to light other issues affecting the Muslim world, resulting in an upsurge in blogging activity on these topics as well.

Although the exigence of September 11th drove the need for blogs about the conflict in Gaza, other events made this particular issue more salient to the public. For example, suicide bombings in the Gaza region after September 11th increased the need to

learn about this conflict. Sending American troops to Afghanistan in October 2001 and to Iraq in March 2003 also made the conflict in Gaza seem more significant in the broad scheme of fighting terrorism, with these multiple exigencies creating a structure of feeling that needed to be responded to. Exigence, according to Bitzer, drives the need for social change, but it does not exist in isolation from other "neighboring events" as explained by Edbauer. There are multiple needs that drive the public in their pursuit for knowledge about September 11th or Muslims. As Edbauer argues, this need is always in flux, always changing as events transpire in the global community and as discussions circulate in the blogging community relating to these events. The importance that the blogging community assigns to these events is evident through the number of articles and links posted, blogs read, and blogs commented on by the public. These conversations, in turn, determine the salience of certain issues and help transform the exigence and how it is perceived in the public. By linking an exigence to other existing issues, exigencies can be transformed by neighboring events and happenings, creating larger structures of feelings and experiences that impact the way the rhetorical situation is perceived.

The Daniel Pipes Blog is a perfect example of a blog that developed in the post-September 11th environment and that addresses various exigencies relating to Muslims, such as violence in the Middle East, the practice of veiling, jihad, etc. The website is dedicated to discussing "radical Islam and the threat to the West" and has a fairly large

online readership.[1] Pipes' blog includes posts about the various forms of Islam practiced by Muslims both in the United States and abroad. He writes explicitly that his blog is aimed at confronting "radical elements" of Islam and ensuring that governments and individuals do not "endorse" such elements through passivity or public policy. Though Pipes makes no bones about his agenda, the articles that he posts frequently address the "hot topics" of the time, such as elections in Afghanistan, banning veiling women from swimming pools in France, or addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Regardless of the personal/political agenda of the author, the fact that Pipes' articles are always socially relevant, addressing the latest issues relating to Muslims in the global community seems to be keeping the blog's readership and viewership very high. In larger, more stable blogging communities like Pipes', all it takes is for the author to "merely convene or spark a rolling conversation among commenters" (Burke). Pipes' blog speaks directly to the need for information and truth about Islam in our society. The blog is also published in several languages, which allows for readers around the world to have access to the content and to engage in the discussion. The author further keeps the public engaged in discussions about Islam by updating his site on a

[1] Danielpipes.org received about 10,000 unique visitors a month from its opening in December 2000 until September 11, 2001. After September 11, the number of visitors jumped to about 50,000 a month. The readership has continued to grow and has reached over 300,000 unique visitors a month. The number of page views per month increased from about 50,000 to over 1 million. In February 2006, it had the 15,273rd largest readership on the web. In all, the site has received over 12 million unique visitors. (Source: Internal tracking by Danielpipes.org.)

daily basis with articles and links to other blogs and websites. By feeding into the public's fear of Islamic extremism and their desire for up-to-date information about issues affecting Muslims, Pipes is able to address multiple exigencies, perceptions, and publics even as these issues evolve and change over time. Unlike print journalism, Pipes' blog is situated in a fluid environment, where rhetoric is encountered, circulated and situated amongst other texts so that it is understood to matter. By operating in an affective rhetorical ecology that responds to multiple exigencies in society, Pipes' blog is able to maintain a fairly steady online readership and an active discursive public.

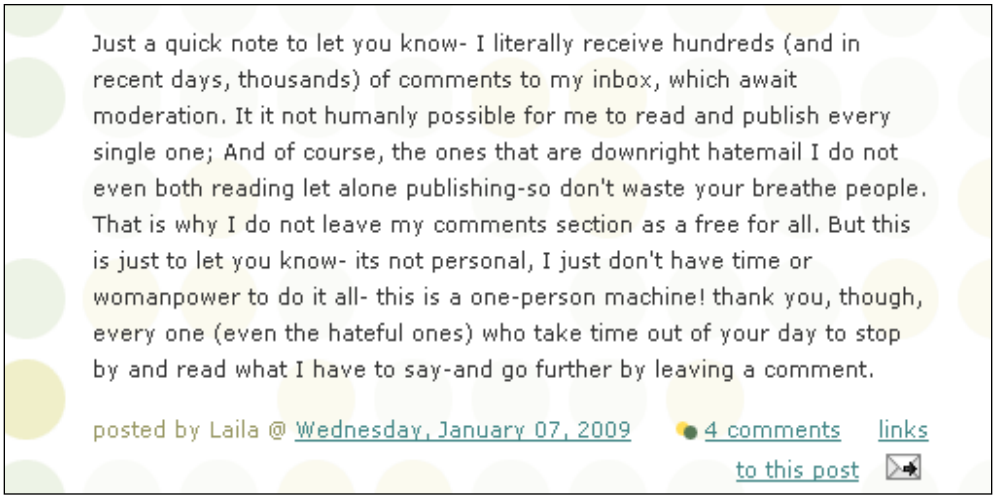
Although the events of September 11th helped spur on other exigencies relating to Muslims, they should not be viewed as isolated events in history; over time, these events have transformed, bringing to light other issues of concern in the public's mind relating to Muslims. As the initial fear of terrorism waned, the exigence of September 11th mutated into a less salient threat; thus many blogs began to address other exigencies related to Muslims made more relevant through September 11th, such as the conflict in Gaza. In fact, it is difficult to talk about the exigence of September 11th without addressing several other exigencies relating to Muslims that exist concurrently in time, place, and society. When blogs are created to address a single exigence, and not multiple exigencies, they tend to attract fewer readers and bloggers. Interest in a blog, of course, is usually stirred by certain exigencies becoming more salient in the public's eye. As Timothy Burke argues in "Berube Stops Blogging," many blogs tend to have a life cycle and few outlast the initial burst of enthusiasm. Burke claims that as the practice of

blogging evolved, self-aware blog writers eventually started to recognize "static or repetitive patterns" in their postings that threatened to "devolve into schtick."

It seems as though a blog's survival is very much dependent on the author's ability to engage the public by addressing certain social exigencies. For example, shortly after the situation in Gaza escalated between the Hamas and the Israeli military, many relatively small blogs, such as Laila El-Haddad's "Raising Yousuf and Noor: Diary of a Palestinian Mother," began to receive a lot of Internet traffic. El-Haddad's blog is very much an example of an intensely personal blog that is also political: it provides both political commentary about the situation of Palestinians in Gaza and also very personal narratives about the author's children and how they are coping with the situation. The author claims that her blog aims to document the trials of raising two young children in Palestine "between spaces and identities; displacement and occupation; and everything that entails from potty training to border crossings." Although El-Haddad began her blog in November 2004, during the escalation of violence between December 2008 and January 2009 the blog experienced increased activity with and attention from the discursive public. Though the exigence of the violence was driving the rhetoric, the author's decision to post certain images and to highlight certain aspects of the conflict on her blog indicates that, like Vatz argues, the author has some control over creating the exigence through language. For example, an article posted by El-Haddad on January 14, 2009, entitled, "If Canada launched rockets at the US..." received over 149 comments from the discursive public because it fed into the exigence of fear in our society about possible future attacks on America. By crafting a hypothetical doomsday scenario for

Americans, El-Haddad did not create a new exigence, but merely spoke to the exigence of fear already circulating in our society. By making this issue more salient in the public's mind, El-Haddad added to the structures of feeling already circulating in the realm of the public about the possible threat of a future attack on the United States.

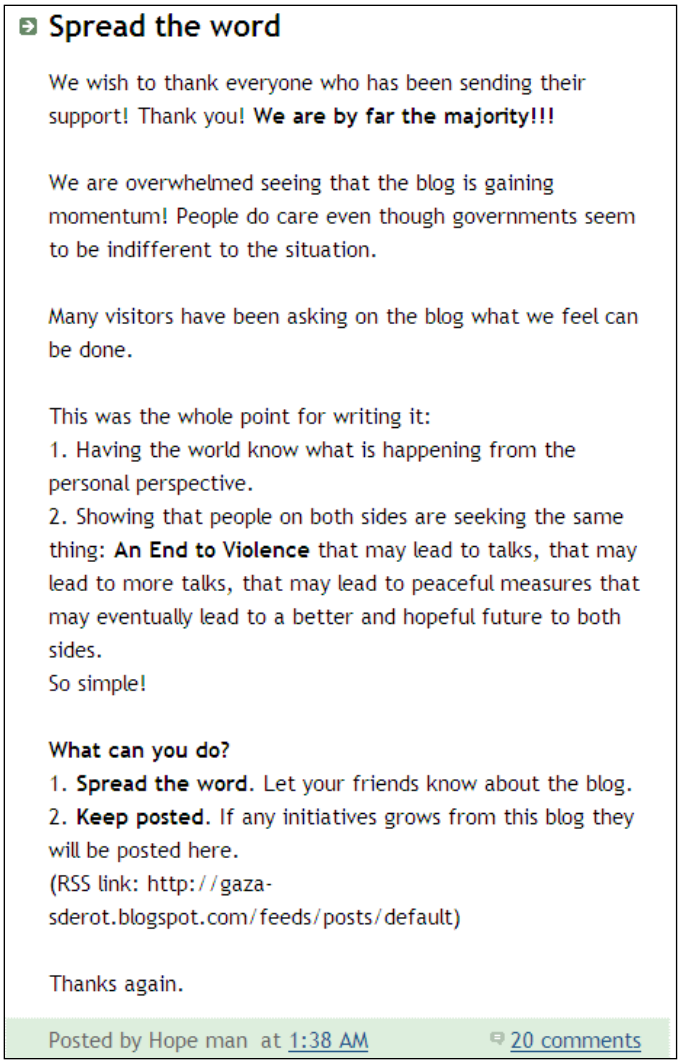
The exigence of the situation in Gaza not only drove the author to post more articles, photos, and videos to her site, but it also drove more users to visit her weblog to express their own opinions and contribute to the circulation of the discourse. In fact, once El-Haddad began to post several articles on the conflict, she started to receive hundreds of comments from the public. As both author and moderator of a relatively small weblog, El-Haddad became so overwhelmed with comments from the public that she posted an apology to her public for being unable to read and respond to all of the comments (see Figure 5). Hence, like Pipes' weblog, the cumulative effect of the large number of posts by the author and responses from the public helped create a "living" structure of feeling that people felt compelled to respond to.


Just a quick note to let you know- I literally receive hundreds (and in recent days, thousands) of comments to my inbox, which await moderation. It it not humanly possible for me to read and publish every single one; And of course, the ones that are downright hatemail I do not even both reading let alone publishing-so don't waste your breathe people. That is why I do not leave my comments section as a free for all. But this is just to let you know- its not personal, I just don't have time or womanpower to do it all- this is a one-person machine! thank you, though, every one (even the hateful ones) who take time out of your day to stop by and read what I have to say-and go further by leaving a comment.

posted by Laila @ Wednesday, January 07, 2009 4 comments links to this post

Figure 5. Author overwhelmed by blogger comments

Similarly, a weblog entitled, "Life Must Go On in Gaza and Sderot," co-authored by Hope man (an Israeli living in Sderot) and Peace man (a Palestinian living in Gaza), also generated a lot of interest and comments during periods of intense violence in the region. For example, in February 2008, the authors posted 17 articles about violence in the region and received 183 comments in total. For a small weblog, this is a significant increase in public engagement given that in the previous month the authors only posted 9 articles and received a total of 32 comments from the public. Since the authors provide readers with first hand, day-to-day knowledge of events transpiring in Gaza and Sderot, including their thoughts, feelings and personal experiences with the violence, the exigence of the moment seemed to spur Hope man and Peace man to generate more articles, which in turn led to increased viewing/commenting by the discursive public. According to the authors, the purpose of the blog is to give a balanced view of the situation—from opposite sides of the wall, so to speak. The authors cite biased media coverage as the driving force behind creation of the blog and invite the discursive public to engage in concrete social actions to create a material change in public sentiment (see Figure 6). Specifically, the authors ask individuals to petition their political leaders to negotiate peace in the region and for Israelis and Palestinians to engage in open discussions with "the other side" to foster "good-will" rather than hate.



Spread the word

We wish to thank everyone who has been sending their support! Thank you! **We are by far the majority!!!**

We are overwhelmed seeing that the blog is gaining momentum! People do care even though governments seem to be indifferent to the situation.

Many visitors have been asking on the blog what we feel can be done.

This was the whole point for writing it:
1. Having the world know what is happening from the personal perspective.
2. Showing that people on both sides are seeking the same thing: **An End to Violence** that may lead to talks, that may lead to more talks, that may lead to peaceful measures that may eventually lead to a better and hopeful future to both sides.
So simple!

What can you do?
1. **Spread the word**. Let your friends know about the blog.
2. **Keep posted**. If any initiatives grows from this blog they will be posted here.
(RSS link: http://gaza-sderot.blogspot.com/feeds/posts/default)

Thanks again.

Posted by Hope man at 1:38 AM 20 comments

Figure 6. Author calls bloggers to social action

In "Life Must Go On in Gaza and Sderot," the primary exigence being addressed is the need to understand the conflict in Gaza, but there are multiple, perhaps secondary exigencies also addressed—the need to document the lives of individuals residing in the conflict zones of Gaza and Sderot, the need for cultural understanding between Jews and Arabs, and the need to form an international collation of citizens committed to peace in

the region. By addressing these multiple exigencies, the message of Hope man and Peace man reach a broader international public—many comments on the weblog are left by individuals living in countries such as Germany, Spain, Malaysia, Hungary, Greece, the United States, and Lebanon. In many ways, the public engaged in the discourse was more than just a list of real or invoked audiences; it also included an eventual audience. According to Warner, "a [discursive] public . . . unites strangers through participation alone, at least in theory" (56). This coming together of known and unknown individuals, according to Warner, helps form social relationships. Biesecker would add that these social relationships help forge new social identities in the public sphere. Such a global public is exactly what Hope man and Peace man need for their message of hope and peace to resonate around the world, rather than just regionally.

Warner describes the public not as a material, conglomerate of individuals, but as a virtual entity that exists through activity and attention. Warner explains that the discursive public "commence[s] with the moment of attention, must continually predicate renewed attention, and cease[s] to exist when attention is no longer predicated" (61). It is this engagement and activity that creates the structures of feeling that keeps the discursive public alive. Without active participation of the public in the discourse, the "lived" experience that blogging affords essentially dies. This is what occurred to the weblog "Life Must Go On in Gaza and Sderot," which was last updated over a year ago (on March 11, 2009), just three months after the war in Gaza ceased. As soon as the discourse failed to engage with and circulate in the public, it essentially rendered the blog an "archive" of articles, rather than a forum for encountering lived experiences.

Exploring the Public Sphere through Blogs on Veiling

When analyzing the role of the audience in the blogosphere, the term "public" (borrow from Warner) or "social actors" (borrowed from Miller) is perhaps a better way of defining the individuals to whom the discourse is directed. The discourse is always engaged with the living and always packaged for public consumption—to a multitude of strangers, friends, potential enemies, or indifferent passersby. In the realm of blogging, the author writes to an unbounded, undefined audience referred to by Warner as the "discursive public." This public can be either passive or active: (1) viewing the blog, but not responding; or (2) viewing and responding to the content. According to Warner, "the public" is not just an abstract term used to categorize a blogs' audience, real or imagined; it exists virtually through the circulation of the blog's discourse. Further, membership to this discursive "public" does not exist through voluntary or involuntary means, but through mere attention that the individual pays to the discourse.

To explore the concept of public as it pertains to blogs about Muslims, I will look at blogs that address the practice of veiling among Muslim women. Although fascination with the practice has always been present in the Western world, the upsurge of interest in the practice of veiling stemmed from a series of social exigencies related to increased coverage of the Taliban and their treatment of Muslim women in Afghanistan—particularly as the women were forced to don the Burqa (a full bodied veil that covers the woman from head to ankles). Haitham Sabbah on "SabbahBlog: Fighting the Ugly" tackles several issues relating to Muslims and Arabs, including the Muslim headscarf or "hijab." Sabbah uses this very private practice and turns it into a debatable issue for the

discursive public. On June 26, 2005, Sabbah writes an article entitled, "Hijab: a Must, OR a Choice?" in response to a post by a user on SabbahBlog. In his article, Sabbah attempts to answer some of the questions people of "western background" have about the issue of veiling. Sabbah delves into the issue of whether Muslim women are required, according to the Quran, to cover their heads while in public, or whether it a Muslim woman's choice to abide by the practice. He attempts to put the veil in historical perspective by covering the various forms of "veiling" practiced by Christians and Jews alike. Needless to say, the issue is controversial among Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Although Sabbah claims that his writing is aimed at "Western" audiences (a defined "public" or group of people in real time and space), the responses he receives are from the discursive public that is actively engaged with the text. Responses are posted by individuals residing in countries such as the United Kingdom, Kuwait, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Denmark, the United States, et al., and includes males and females, young adults, married and unmarried individuals, veiling and non-veiling Muslim women, Baptists, Catholics, Jews, atheists, etc. SabbahBlog encourages dialogue between Warner's "virtual" strangers, and through these discussions individuals are able to connect with others and validate their thoughts and feelings but also express different opinions on and interpretations of the veil. As Mark Federman explains in "Blogging and Publicy: What is the Message?" blogging is "essentially an 'outering' of the private mind in a public way . . . Unlike normal conversation that is essentially private but interactive, and unlike broadcast that is inherently not interactive but public, blogging is interactive, public and, of course, networked—that is to say, interconnected." Since individuals in the

blogosphere have complete control over the amount and type of information they transmit to the public, Federman uses the term "publicy" to contrast with the term "privacy."

SabbahBlog contains language that is both personal (individual testimonials about experiences with the veil) and impersonal (historical/fact based information about the veil). As Warner explains in his definition of what constitutes a discursive public, the speech of this public is always both personal and impersonal. According to Warner, "[t]he benefit of this practice is that it gives a general social relevance to private thought and life. Our subjectivity is understood as having resonance with others, and immediately so" (58). As feelings and thoughts generated by the public through the circulation of discourse begin to resonate with these virtual strangers, social relationships begin to form between the blogger and public, but also among members of the discursive public. With public forms of speech, Warner states that "we might recognize ourselves as addressees, but it is equally important that we remember that the speech was addressed to indefinite others; that in singling us out, it does so not on the basis of our concrete identity, but by virtue of our participation in the discourse alone" (58).

As Sabbah's blog functions in the public sphere, the public is allowed to see discourse unfold through a lens of time. For example, blogs are generally arranged chronologically (from new to old) and time stamped for the viewer to see the discussion unfold over time through a series of posts and comments by bloggers. Since publication in 2005, Sabbah's blog article received a total 150 comments by 65 users through May 23, 2008, and a total of four trackbacks (or cross-reference links that inform bloggers of other blogs written about this particular issue). Of the 65 users who posted comments,

only 9 of the users—including the author of the blog—were actively engaged in the discussion.[2] Warner asserts that a public has to be constituted through regular, if not daily, intervals of publication. If there is no sense of timely and punctual response, Warner claims that the rhetor is no longer addressing a public. Sabbah himself posts 17 comments to the article, more than any other blogger responding to his article. Many of his comments are either in response to comments by other bloggers, to clarify arguments made by the author, or to encourage divergent opinions and open discussion about the issue, without fear of judgment (see Figure 7). Sabbah's interaction with his discursive public certainly seems to keep the discourse active and in circulation. Warner argues that "a public can only act within the temporality of the circulation that gives it existence" (68). As the texts on Sabbah's blog circulate in the public over time, confirmed through "an intertextual environment of citation and implication," the public is ensured an "ongoing life" (Warner 68).

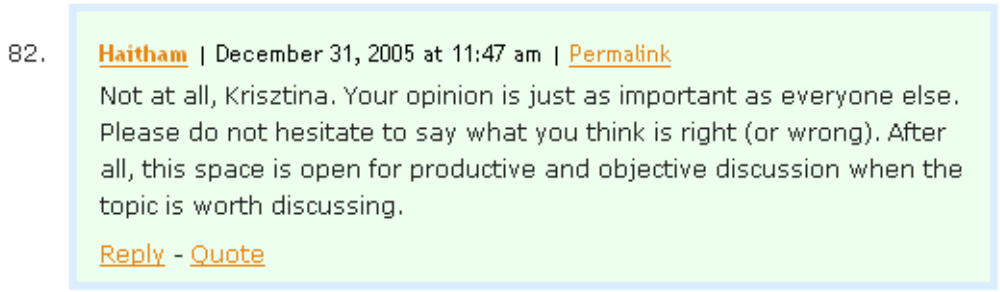


Figure 7. Author encourages open discussion on veiling issue

[2] Users posting 4 or more comments to the initial blog were deemed "actively" engaged in the blog discussion.

It is important to note that while most blogs engage the public in very enthusiastic discussions, language is not the only means of engaging with the discursive public. In larger, more stable blogging communities, all it takes is a mere image or video to "spark a rolling conversation among commenters" (Burke). For example, Daniel Pipes' blog has an article titled "Hijabs on Western Political Women," that contains very short blurbs accompanied by pictures of prominent women's rights politicians and journalists donning the hijab while meeting with Muslim leaders or traveling to Muslim countries (see Figure 8). The deliberately controversial photos received a great deal of comments (173) over a one-year period of circulation and resulted in very heated debates between bloggers defending the practice and those condoning it. It is also no coincidence that Pipes chose

Nancy Pelosi, speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, donned a headscarf when she visited Damascus in April 2007.

Nancy Pelosi, speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, in Damascus.

Figure 8. Example of American politician wearing the hijab

to publish these images on March 19, 2008, on the five-year anniversary of the United States' incursion into Iraq. The timing of this discourse is the author's attempt to capitalize on the here and now—on a moment in time that historically and temporally speaks to the discursive public. The term "deixis" is useful for understanding the significance of the timing of Pipes' article. This term, borrowed from the ancient Greeks, represents essentially a moment in time and functions much like the word "now" (Brooke). Of course, the word "now" has multiple meaning for blogs, i.e., when it is being written, when it is being read for the first time, when it is published and being read by many "others," etc. (Brooke). As Kathleen Yancey explains in her article, "Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key," the meaning of the word "now" varies depending on the time and space in which it is uttered or read. Thus, Pipes' rhetoric speaks not only to the immediate circumstances of the utterance but also to discourses of the past. By addressing both the "now" and the "then," Pipes' blog exists both historically and temporally in the public space.

Unlike Sabbah's blog, Pipes' blog only allows users to comment on the original post and each other's posts—there is no interaction between bloggers and the author at all. Pipes, however, "updates" his initial article four times after the initial posting to include more pictures of western political figures wearing the hijab, keeping the content up-to-date. Because there is no feedback from Pipes to his discursive public, much of the conversation transpiring on the blog is between individuals comprising the public. Although Pipes says that he never closes a blog, as the exigence of veiling becomes less

salient, discussions in Pipes' blog seems to wane. In fact, the bulk of the comments (163 of the 173 total) on the hijab article were posted by 98 users in the four months after the article was published. What is important to the public at any given time varies and depends on the prominence of various exigencies in society. Thus, the exigence of the moment that spurs authors into posting more articles generally leads to increased public attention and engagement. The exigence(ies) that drive the circulation of the discourse creates the discursive public. Cascading exigencies, however, ensure the discursive public a permanent residence online, as opposed to temporary housing. The more exigencies the discourse addresses, the wider the structures of feeling. It is this structure of feeling that helps establish social relationships, keeping the discourse alive through encounters with various members of the public.

Warner argues that as the texts circulate in the public through time, they continue to "live," so to speak. Warner argues that "a public can only act within the temporality of the circulation that gives it existence" (68). One way that technology and blog authors keep the public engaged in the discourse is through continuous or daily updates on the blog topic. Steven Johnson notes in his article, "Use the Blog, Luke," that bloggers do more than just "offer up packaged opinions on the news of the day; they can actually help organize the Web in ways tailored to your minute-by-minute needs." For example, when Obama's campaign asked two Muslim women wearing headscarves not to sit or stand behind the candidate at a rally in Detroit on June 16, 2008, SabbahBlog quickly posted this story which ran concurrently with other news wires. Although the blog post did not receive many comments (1 comment, 2 trackbacks), the fact that the author made it

available to the public immediately after the event showed that he was attempting to respond to the public's need for more information about the Obama "hijab flap." When the Obama campaign apologized for flap shortly after the news aired, the public lost interest and the discourse's circulation came to an end.

Although the blog genre seems to be sticking around for some time, the exigencies that these blogs address tend to be less stable. For example, the cultural exigence brought about by September 11th that drove the demand for blogs about veils seems to have shifted from the specific to the general—there are currently not many blogs about the Muslim veil in "active" status; however, there appears to be a growing number of blogs related to Muslim women's rights. This is evidenced in the number of comments posted to Pipes' blog article, "Advice to Non-Muslim Women Against Marrying Muslim Men." As of April 2009, the article, since its May 2004 publication, received over 7,000 comments. The author claimed that of all the articles on his blog, this one in particular received the most comments. To keep the discursive public alive through the circulation of his blog, Pipes stated that he never "closes" a blog for comments, no matter how many or few it receives (Email). Unless the blog author is a mind reader, they cannot predict the whims of the public or the fluctuating exigencies in our society that drive interest in certain topics at any particular time or place. Since the exigence of the practice of veiling is always in flux, the conversation surrounding this issue will also ebb and flow with the structures of feeling circulating in the public. Since public is "an ongoing space of encounter for discourse," it is not the blog itself that

dictates the existence of a public, but the formulation of texts over time through ongoing discourse and their relevance to society at any given time (Warner 62).

It is important to note that nearly all of the blogs explored in this thesis expressed feeling overwhelmed by the public's response to their posts. To keep the discourse alive and circulating online, the blog author must be equipped to manage incoming comments from its discursive public. As the moderator controls both volume and content posted, one could say that the blog as a genre has its limitations on author/public interaction and feedback, something Bitzer would label as a constraint. Though blogs give authors the "autonomy to post what they want, given the lack of an editorial process, it also places the burden on an individual to provide the resources necessary to produce the weblog" (Baoill). In addition, while the rhetorical situation places demands on the author to address certain exigencies in society, it also places demands on the discursive public to respond to these exigencies. In fact, the blog itself is another exigency for the public to potentially to respond to. Notably, the technology of the blogging software (with its underlying structures of registration fees, advertising and links to larger entities like Blogger and Google), also provides a space for such a response.

Inventing in the Public Sphere

In the blogosphere, writers always reinvent themselves based on interactions with the public—through various forms of self-expression and self-disclosure, the writer constantly seeks validation from the public. When the public responds to the author, both the discourse and the discursive public are given life. The writer and reader, in other words do not operate in isolation, but rather in collaboration. When the public responds

to an author's blog, they are participating in the discourse and thus become part of the invention process. For example, in Sabbah's blog, the author continuously reinvents himself based on his interactions with the discursive public. As a wide range of individuals with various ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds respond to Sabbah's blog, the author is forced to defend, concede or clarify various his assertions. For example, Sabbah cites various statistics on women and sexual assault in Canada and then claims that something is "fundamentally wrong" with a society where such alarming statistics exist (see Figure 9). The author claims to have taken the statistics from a pamphlet, yet provides no further details on the validity of the statistics; namely, he does not provide sexual assault statistics from other Muslim countries (where the veil is enforced) for cross-comparison purposes.

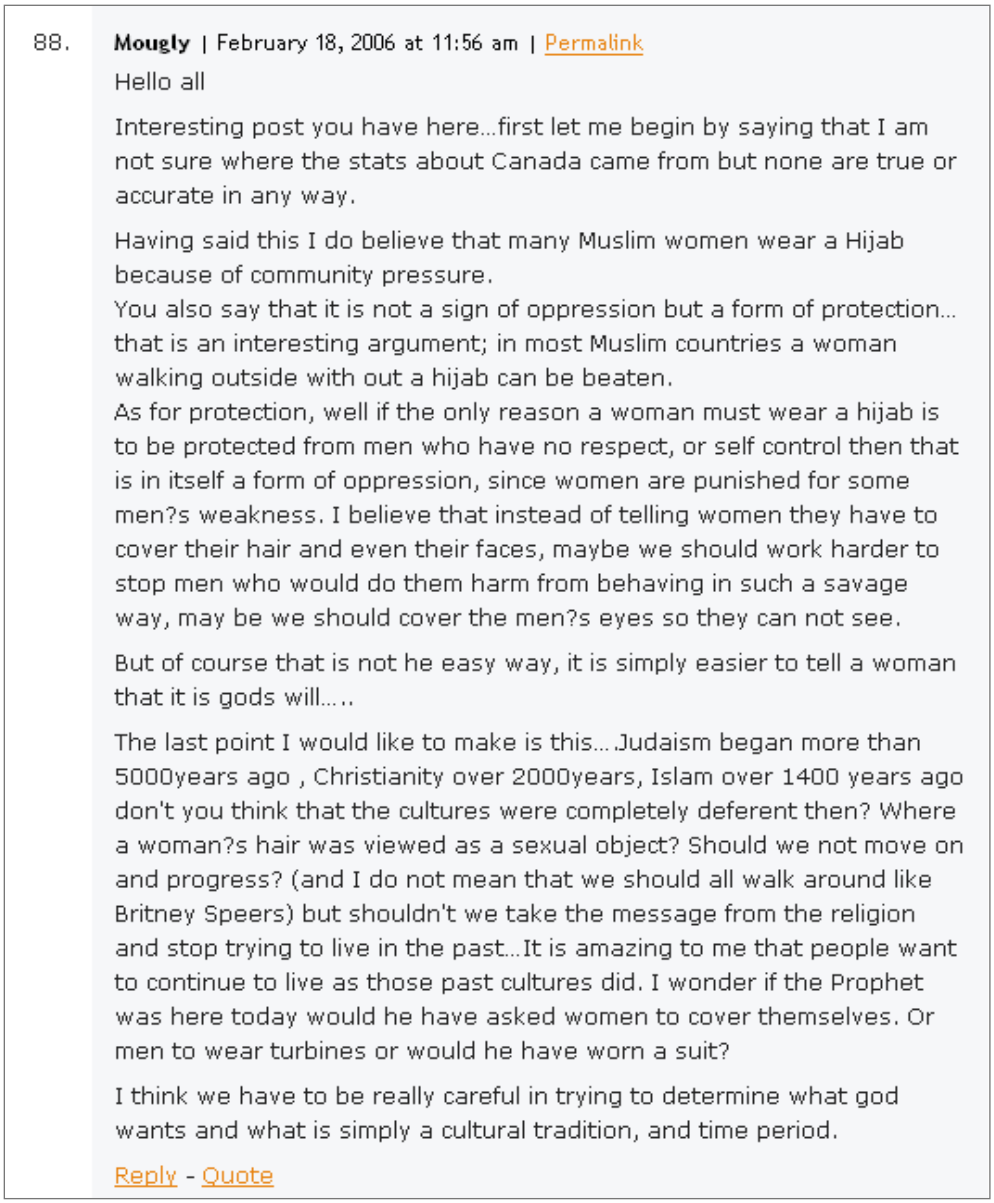
I couldn't believe my eyes when I read the following statistics, written in a pamphlet issued by the Dean of Women's office at Queen's University:

- In Canada, a woman is sexually assaulted every 6 minutes,
- 1 in 3 women in Canada will be sexually assaulted at some time in their lives,
- 1 in 4 women are at the risk of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime,
- 1 in 8 women will be sexually assaulted while attending college or university, and
- A study found 60% of Canadian university-aged males said they would commit sexual assault if they were certain they wouldn't get caught.

Figure 9. Sexual assault statistics provided by SabbahBlog

The fact that bloggers raise concerns about the rhetorical arguments put forth by Sabbah makes for a dynamic interaction between author and public where the discursive

public is allowed to question the credibility of the author, but also help "reinvent" or recast the rhetorical argument, as necessary (see Figure 10). By contesting Sabbah's



88. **Mougly** | February 18, 2006 at 11:56 am | Permalink

Hello all

Interesting post you have here...first let me begin by saying that I am not sure where the stats about Canada came from but none are true or accurate in any way.

Having said this I do believe that many Muslim women wear a Hijab because of community pressure.
You also say that it is not a sign of oppression but a form of protection... that is an interesting argument; in most Muslim countries a woman walking outside with out a hijab can be beaten.
As for protection, well if the only reason a woman must wear a hijab is to be protected from men who have no respect, or self control then that is in itself a form of oppression, since women are punished for some men?s weakness. I believe that instead of telling women they have to cover their hair and even their faces, maybe we should work harder to stop men who would do them harm from behaving in such a savage way, may be we should cover the men?s eyes so they can not see.

But of course that is not he easy way, it is simply easier to tell a woman that it is gods will.....

The last point I would like to make is this....Judaism began more than 5000years ago , Christianity over 2000years, Islam over 1400 years ago don't you think that the cultures were completely deferent then? Where a woman?s hair was viewed as a sexual object? Should we not move on and progress? (and I do not mean that we should all walk around like Britney Speers) but shouldn't we take the message from the religion and stop trying to live in the past...It is amazing to me that people want to continue to live as those past cultures did. I wonder if the Prophet was here today would he have asked women to cover themselves. Or men to wear turbines or would he have worn a suit?

I think we have to be really careful in trying to determine what god wants and what is simply a cultural tradition, and time period.

Reply - Quote

Figure 10. Blogger questions credibility of author

claims and providing counterclaims, backed either by personal experience or various

interpretations of religious doctrines, the bloggers on SabbahBlog take on authorial power. This rhetorical use of contrast, as a function of the thought process, helps individuals during the invention process to categorize things according to differences (contrast) or similarities (comparisons) (Connal 146). These counterclaims help develop areas for the invention process, adding to the discourse and even allowing for exploration of other areas of mutual interest. As Warner explains, writing for the public is an attempt to speak to various "others" whose differences can help shape the discourse.

The blogging world is unique in that allows for diverse voices to be heard without the constraint that many literary works place on the author's name or status in society. The anonymity that blogs provide affords the college student, housewife, or notable politician equal opportunity to enter into and add to the discourse. This level playing field allows for the co-production of discourse by the author and public, who are continuously inventing and reinventing through ongoing circulation of anecdotes. It is important to note that "counterpublics" too play a role in the invention process. This group is comprised of individuals in the discursive public who are producing counter-rhetorics that "directly respond to and resist the original exigence" (Warner 19). As Michael Foucault states in "What is an Author?" the author function that constitutes the "rational being that we call 'author'" (347) is not limited to a particular individual but to a process of creation. The author-function that operates in the blogging world obliterates the concept of the individual author, as the discourse is controlled not by a single person but by a group of persons constituting the public and counter-public, responding to discourse generated by the multiple, ever-changing exigencies in our society.

Exploring Genre Re-Invention through the Election in Iran

An interesting development in the recent years is the movement towards a community of "socially networked" individuals rather than individual authors or bloggers. In fact, since my research into blogging began two years ago, nearly half of the blogs have added "Facebook" and "Twitter" applications for the discursive public to follow their posts, like El-Haddad's blog and Sabbah's blog. Other alternatives are either completely abandoning the blog for a social networking site or "co-authoring" blogs like "Life Must Go On in Gaza and Sderot." As the exigence of social networking sites have placed increased demands on the blogging world to change the way information is transmitted, blog authors are increasingly constrained by the demands that the socially networked publics place on them. As a result, blogs are becoming less content driven and more "time" driven—brevity of content and speed of information is the new exigence driving the public away from blogs and more towards sites like Twitter. While I have discussed how the discursive public can work with the author to invent and re-invent the discourse, one cannot overlook the important role of the public re-inventing or transforming the genre of the blog itself. I will briefly examine the situation with the election in Iran in June 2009 to elaborate on how the exigence of situation drove the discursive public to radically transform the way blogs and other social networking sites are circulating discourse, impacting the affective ecologies that comprise communication in the public realm.

During the last election cycle in Iran, the Iranian blogosphere served as crucial source of information to the global community about the various social and political

movements underway in Iran, but also as a way for the people of Iran communicate and connect with individuals on a personal level. The Iranian blogosphere was so rich with content and information that a Harvard-based Internet and Democracy Blog, published by John Kelly and Bruce Etling, were able to analyze blogs originating out of Iran and make a prediction about the election results. Of course, the study predicted Mousavi to be the winner—which was incorrect—but the assumption of the study was that one could predict the election outcomes based on the positive/negative comments, videos, and links posted about the candidates on these blog sites.

During the election in Iran, the blogosphere was far quicker with posting news and information from Iran. But with all of the chatter going on in the blogosphere and via Twitter, it became almost impossible for the average person to keep track of the election events as they happened in real time. With little information coming out of Iran, even the American press was hard pressed to siphon information about the election from inside Iran. The standard blog form was no longer a conducive mode of transportation for discourse in the online world. As a result, media-based websites like the *Huffington Post* developed a modified version of the standard blog to report minute-by-minute news from Iran to the public. On June 15, 2009, Huffington staffer, Nico Pitney, began the "Iran-Election Live Blogging" weblog, which contained over 80 posts by the author in the time span of 24 hours, including links to articles, videos or latest breaking news coming from individuals in Iran. At the end of the 24 hours, Pitney's blog received over 20,000 comments from the public. Given the intensity of the situation, only professional blog sites like the *Huffington Post*'s were capable of keeping up with the constant flow of

information out of Iran. Guides were even developed for the public on how to keep up with all of the Internet chatter on the election. For example, Ben Parr's article on Mashable.com, "How to: Track Iran Election with Twitter and Social Media," provided step-by-step guidance on how to search for and track information on social networking sites about the election in Iran. The guide essentially listed the best social media sources for real time information, but also web tools that users could employ to help them organize and make sense of the information available through Google Blog Search. For example, the guide explained how keywords like "Ahmadinejad" could be used to search for information on Twitter and how hashtags like "#IranElection" were being used by people talking about the situation in Iran to help the public track the flow of information on this topic. As news sites and blog authors struggled to reinvent the blog to suit the needs of the discursive public on this issue, the discursive public's impatience with the genre's limitations forced them to turn to social networking sites for immediate access to the discourse in circulation.

While a green revolution was occurring in Iran (the color worn by candidate Mir Hussein Moussavi), a social networking revolution was also underway. Thousands of "tweets" were being posted to the web as well as YouTube videos and Flickr photos from people inside Iran. When violence escalated in Iran, people quickly reached for their digital video recorders and cell phones for immediate mobile uploading to the web. Graphic images of individuals being shot and arrested and of protesters clashing with police were available for viewing to the discursive public just minutes after they occurred. While multiple exigencies drove the need for information about events

transpiring in Iran, one notable exigence really spurred the circulation of discourse online, complicating the affective ecology. This occurred when a YouTube video of a young girl named Neda being shot by the police during a protest in Iran became public. The exigence of Neda's death added to the structures of feeling already in circulation, producing a temporary public through a post-human process of invention. Images and videos were essentially replacing the need for language to convey information online. Instead of visiting CNN.com, individuals were "tweeting" and "googling" YouTube videos of protests. Even news media outlets had to rely on these social networking sites to gather information and video footage for their broadcasts. In this situation, the genre of the blog lacked the technical capability to expediently generate and circulate information to the public about events surrounding the election.

The exigence of the election in Iran spurred a social movement that revolutionized the way information was being transmitted and tracked via social networking sites. The exigency of the event caused the public to reinvent the genre of the blog so that its content was more accessible to the discursive public. This phenomenon was somewhat of a wakeup call for bloggers who traditionally do not provide "up to the minute" information to their discursive publics. It seems that the exigencies of immediacy and accessibility via mobile devices that attract the public to social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook will eventually force blogs to either conform to these new demands (by adding applications that link the public to these networking sites) or its use to the discursive public will become increasingly cumbersome and its demise imminent.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of blog genre shortly after the millennium has undoubtedly complicated our understanding of the rhetorical situation, as first articulated by Bitzer. The basic premise of Bitzer's definition, with its separate and discrete elements, needs to be revised to account for the dynamic nature of rhetoric as it operates in the realm of the blogosphere. Rather than view the rhetorical situation through an artificial framework of fixed elements, I proposed in this thesis that a new ecological model be developed to account for the multitude of possibilities for interaction and engagement between writers and their discursive publics, as discourse circulates through various environments, spaces, times, and societies. The "atomic" model of the rhetorical situation that I proposed is a rudimentary attempt to give "life" to rhetoric, as discourse is generated, shaped, transformed, and circulated in the public. This dimension of movement in blogosphere also frees the power of rhetoric, as it is no longer restricted to a particular time, space, or moment. Further, this model emphasizes that the constituent elements of the rhetorical situation are less important than the sum total experience of the "lived" encounters in the public realm.

Through analyses of blogs about Muslims, it became evident that the notion of audience/public and exigence must be reconceptualized to ensure a certain degree of fluidity or flexibility. The term exigence, for example, needs to be expanded to include

multiple exigencies—social, cultural, or technological—that exist in society in a given time and space, with varying degrees of prominence. Further, these exigencies must be viewed not as operating individually to generate the public's interest in a topic at a given time, but as operating in tandem with other exigencies to create structures of feelings or experiences that must also be responded to by the public. I also propose that the term "audience" is not appropriate when examining the rhetorical situation in the blogosphere. In the public sphere, the author is always creating rhetoric but the public "encounters" it—either through accident or by choice—and it always has the choice whether to respond to the discourse or ignore it entirely. Once the public chooses to respond to the discourse, they become part of the discursive public, re-inventing the discourse through citation and circulation of their thoughts and ideas. Thus, I propose that Warner's phrase "discursive public" is more appropriate because it ensures that rhetoric be viewed as something that is "encountered" by the public, rather than information merely shared by the author with discreet groups of individuals in society. Lastly, though I briefly touch on the concept of invention, it is important to note that in the blogosphere rhetoric is not created in isolation, but in response to current or past (antecedent) rhetorics. It is always a collaborative venture between authors and their discursive publics. As evident in the analysis of Sabbah's blog on veiling, the public's voice can play a decisive role in shaping the rhetor's voice and opinions. It can also help decide the social actions necessary to bring about change in society, as evident in the blog about the conflict in Gaza, "Life Must Go On in Gaza and Sderot."

Given the ability for rhetoric to shift and transform with social and historical fluxes, concerns have been raised over the ability for the blog genre to remain stable in such a fluid environment. In the analyses of blogs relating to Muslims, the unstable situations created by fluctuating exigencies and publics seemed to undermine the stability of genre itself. As long as blogs continue to address certain social exigencies, one could argue that there will always be a need for accessing them. However, technological advances of social networking sites are driving the need for modification of the blog to ensure that the public's need for immediate and up-to-date information is being fulfilled. This was evident in the case of the 2009 Iranian presidential election. In this instance, it was not the situation creating the exigence (Bitzer's argument) or the rhetoric creating the exigence (Vatz's argument), but it was the demand from the online public for up-to-date information about the situation in Iran that resulted in a call for modification of the blog genre. Since most blogs were not capable of meeting these needs, many were abandoned by the public, who turned to social networking sites like Twitter and YouTube for first-hand accounts of the events and up-to-date information.

Although Miller and Shepherd argue that the personal form of the blog motivates and satisfies the readers and writers of blogs, enabling its survival, one would argue that the cultural and technological exigencies that gave life to the blog have mutated since and have significantly threatened the blog's ability to survive in the coming years. As social networking sites become ever more popular with the public, addressing technological exigencies like immediacy and brevity, while also addressing social exigencies like the need to connect with other individuals, blogs will be forced to either incorporate these

features—to become fluid with the times—or face an uncertain future. As long as social networking sites such as Twitter can be accessed via mobile Internet technologies like the iPhone or Blackberry, blogs will be viewed as increasingly cumbersome and inaccessible over time. Through inattention and disengagement, the "lived" experiences and feelings that give life to the rhetoric and to the discursive public will eventually meet its untimely death in the blogosphere.

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