

The Global Mufti

JAKOB SKOVGAARD-PETERSEN

In the fall of 1998, the newspaper *al-Hayat* advertised a new religious program to be aired on al-Jazeera television channel: “The Shari‘a and Life are Inseparable,” said the headline, and the advertisement continued: “Ahmad Mansur presents the program *Al-shari‘a wa-al-haya* [Shari‘a and Life] in a style radically different from the traditional format of religious programs. He will host the honorable Shaykh Dr. Yusuf al-Qaradawi and a number of great ‘*ulama*’. They will give the verdict [*hukm*] and the view [*ra’y*] of the Shari‘a on contemporary issues and events in the spheres of life, economy, and politics. In the program *Shari‘a and Life* the great ‘*ulama*’ of the tolerant Shari‘a will answer questions put to them by viewers.”

The new program was broadcast on the satellite channel al-Jazeera, and it was announced in the international newspaper *al-Hayat*. Both *al-Hayat* and al-Jazeera are major players in the new global Arab media. Although dating back to the 1940s, *al-Hayat* was relaunched in the late 1980s from its new headquarters in London and rose in the early 1990s to become the newspaper of choice for Arab intellectuals all over the world. Its standard of reporting is consistently high, and its opinion pages are truly international in terms of scope and contributors.

Even more momentous is the rise of al-Jazeera. Taking advantage of the 1996 breakup of the alliance between the Saudi-owned Orbit channel and the BBC, the Qatar-based al-Jazeera was able to sign up a team of skillful and courageous journalists from the BBC project, among them the Syrian Faysal al-Qasim, whose program *Opposite Direction* has scandalized the political establishment of every Arab country with the exception of Lebanon. Among the program’s recent scoops are live speeches by Saddam Hussein, revelations of King Hussein’s secret relations with Israel—leading Jordan to close al-Jazeera’s office in Amman—and an interview with terrorist leader Usama bin Ladin. In December 1998 the

Arab States Broadcasting Union gave al-Jazeera six months to conform to the Arab media code of honor. So far, however, Qatar's young emir Hamad ibn Khalifa al-Thani has valiantly defended the channel, which runs on a five-year government grant.

Opposite Directions features live debates between two opponents who under the current systems of censorship in the Arab world are unlikely to exchange views in any other medium, and questions and comments are phoned in from Arabs all over the world. Berber nationalists and Libyan officials, representatives of Morocco and the Polisario, of Kuwait and Iraq, and Islamists and secularists are seated opposite one another, and compete through words and gestures for the sympathy of the audience. Al-Jazeera also features other programs, such as *More than One Opinion*, based on similar potentially explosive talk show formats. The channel certainly lives up to its slogan of "One View, Another View."

Needless to say, this is an important expression of a new kind of globalization. Telecommunications is a central component, if not the very essence, of the current drive for globalization. And satellite television, which makes ample use of phone-in programs and succeeds in defying states and governments, is a truly revolutionary phenomenon in the Arab world. In terms of audience, issues, and style, al-Jazeera is evidence of, and certainly furthers, a cosmopolitan Arab identity in which Arabs in Europe and the United States are no longer at the margins but are participants in one huge Arab public sphere.

John Anderson and Dale Eickelman characterized al-Jazeera as "TV on an internet model" because it is marked by audience fragmentation, diversity, and active seeking over passive receiving (1999, 59–61). With its emphasis on consumer choice and the breakdown of state-sponsored "great narratives," this description seems to be in line with some characterizations of postmodernism, a theme to which I shall return.

This article will investigate the impact of the al-Jazeera phenomenon on contemporary Arab understandings of Islam. How does "One View, Another View" translate into the language of religion and Islam? Is *Shari'a and Life* a radical break with tradition, as it claims—and, if so, in what ways? In the following, I will contrast the program and its center of gravity, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, with the greatest star of Arab Islamic state-sponsored television, Shaykh al-Sha'rawi.

YUSUF AL-QARADAWI—THE NEW MEDIA SHAYKH

The choice of Yusuf al-Qaradawi for al-Jazeera's religious program seems obvious on several accounts. Yusuf al-Qaradawi is an Egyptian *'alim*, based in Qatar,

where he is dean of the Shari‘a faculty. He is a scholar of international reputation, the author of some ninety books, and one of the prominent figures in the current Islamic awakening.

Yusuf al-Qaradawi studied theology at al-Azhar and was involved in student strikes and demonstrations—and he claims to have taken part in the fighting against the British in the Azhar student battalion in the Suez Canal area—in the turbulent years prior to the revolution. In 1953 he founded a youth organization at al-Azhar with the goals of modernizing the university, admitting female students, and introducing English into the curriculum. Its main vision, however, was to instill an activist identity in the Azhar student body. This was the main theme that al-Qaradawi, encouraged by his mentor Muhammad al-Ghazzali, propounded in its program, entitled “Your Mission, Sons of Azhar” (al-Qaradawi 1984, preface).

Because of his links to the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Qaradawi was sent to a prison camp in 1954. Since then, he has spent most of his time outside Egypt, but he is a frequent visitor and commentator in the Islamist press. His standing as an *‘alim* and *mujahid* and his independence from the state-run Egyptian religious establishment have made him one of the most respected *‘ulama’* in the Arab world. His books have sold in the hundreds of thousands. The fact that he has been on the editorial board of such widely different publications as the *Oxford Journal of Islamic Studies* and *al-Da‘wa*, Egypt’s radical Islamist magazine of the 1970s, closed down by Sadat, gives evidence of his standing today.

Many of al-Qaradawi’s books are centered around the phenomenon of the Islamic awakening, hailed by him as the most important and positive event of our age. His full endorsement of the present awakening’s slogan, “Islam is the Solution,” has recently led Armando Salvatore to characterize him as a “solutionist” (1997, 84–89). It is, however, a central tenet of al-Qaradawi’s that the *‘ulama’* must be in charge of the awakening. This idea runs contrary to the understanding of many young activists, who see the *‘ulama’* as backward government stooges, but it is not far from the Egyptian government’s idea of tackling the problem of militant Islamism. Consequently, in 1989, al-Qaradawi was one of a small group of *‘ulama’* who tried to mediate between the government and the Islamists.

According to al-Qaradawi, the Islamic awakening, bereft of *‘ulama’* leadership, would lead to extremism; there are already elements in the awakening, he argues, who envision themselves as prophets, unwilling to listen to or compromise with others and unable to distinguish between what is *haram* and what is simply best avoided (al-Qaradawi 1984, 94). It is only the *‘ulama’* who can provide mature leadership, because of their knowledge of scripture and the Islamic disciplines.

But this leadership requires that the *'ulama'* abandon their secure state-sponsored positions and learn about contemporary issues from other Muslim specialists. The *'ulama'*, then, are not a priesthood but simply people who have had the privilege of studying Islam and who have a duty to share their understanding with laymen, and with each other. Islam, says al-Qaradawi, is only realized in critical and public discussion. Freedom of thought and speech is thus a prerequisite of true Islam.

It is no coincidence that this sounds like the *islah* movement of the early twentieth century. Al-Qaradawi is a product of al-Maraghi's reform plans for al-Azhar, and he often quotes Salafis such as Muhammad 'Abduh, Muhammad Khidr Husayn, Mustafa al-Maraghi, and 'Abd al-Majid al-Salim. He has also taken up their internationalism and sees al-Azhar as a potential beacon for Muslims all over the world. Finally, like them he is a believer in the new media and recognizes this potential for Islam, even though there may be drawbacks. As he explained in Qatari television's first broadcast of its religious program *Huda al-Islam*: media are not evil in themselves, they can only be put to evil use. They can, however, also be used to spread useful, moral, and religious teachings. This instrumentalist view of the media—that we know also from the Christian Right in America—has allowed him to transform himself into a media mufti. It does not, however, endorse an uncritical use of the media. On the contrary, al-Qaradawi insists that the individual Muslim must take responsibility and choose for himself, or, as he puts it, “each man must be his own *mufti*” (al-Qaradawi 1984, preface).

SHARI'A AND LIFE

Let us turn now from the TV station and al-Qaradawi to his program itself. *Shari'a and Life* is an eighty-minute weekly call-in talk show with two men sitting at a table, Yusuf al-Qaradawi with his spectacles, Azhari turban, and *galabiyya*, and the host, Hamid al-Ansari, in regular Gulf attire. While this is not exactly innovative, the questions raised in the program often are, as illustrated, for example, by the session on “contemporary *fiqh*” on 28 February 1999.

The issue was abortion. A woman calling from the United States was four months and two weeks pregnant. Several doctors had told her that the fetus had severe brain damage and would be heavily mentally retarded or perhaps die. Everybody advised her to have an abortion, but she wanted al-Qaradawi's endorsement.

Al-Qaradawi began by noting that the woman's plight is a good example of contemporary *fiqh* because it presupposes new medical techniques. But he could not endorse an abortion because the fetus was old enough to be a human being,

complete with spirit. Thus, he adhered to what amounts to a consensus today among the 'ulama', that abortion is endorsed by Islam in the first four months if the fetus is seriously defective (Rispler-Chaim 1993, 15).

There is a small addition to the story, though. Feeling that he could not leave it at that, al-Qaradawi consolingly told of a similar incident when in a *fatwa* he had refused to allow an abortion, but later received a photo of a healthy boy. He therefore advised the woman to leave the matter to God and to trust in Him.

Phrases such as "leave it to God" (*khalliha ila Allah*) and "trust in God" (*tawakkul*), however, are rare in al-Qaradawi's writing; he habitually scorns Sufis and conservative 'ulama' alike for their fatalism and apathy. In his books, al-Qaradawi also maintains that analysis and scientific investigation should not be conducted over the mass media, but in specialist publications (al-Qaradawi 1990, 31). The proper role of television and radio then is to allow discussion and to educate. Al-Qaradawi's consoling remarks are revealing of an emotional quality of television with which he is perhaps not quite at ease, but which others, like al-Sha'rawi, have skillfully exploited.

Yet, this is still television with a human dimension, a program worth watching for many Muslims. The format is fixed: in the first half hour, al-Ansari and al-Qaradawi discuss the subject in a broad sense, while the phone number of the program is displayed on the screen. In the second part of the program, al-Qaradawi is consulted over faxes and phones—roughly two-thirds from Europe and the rest from the various Arab countries. The predominance of Europe does not, however, reflect lack of access to the program in the Arab world; rather, it has to do with a lack of alternatives—both of muftis and of Islamic programs—in Europe, and with greater affluence and experience in long distance calls there. And some of the issues, such as democracy, human rights, and the Islamic legitimacy of Arab governments, are perhaps best commented upon by Muslims living in Europe.

Many of the people who phone in do not seem to be particularly interested in asking questions, but simply seek to air a view. Often they succeed, at least in part, before al-Ansari asks them to state their question. Sometimes the questioner is interrupted, or al-Ansari and al-Qaradawi refuse to answer or comment. Occasionally, callers are severely rebuked, as was a man in Paris who had sworn by the Qur'an to stop gambling but had fallen back into his old habits and now contritely asked what to do (al-Qaradawi 1999, 7 March). On the not infrequent occasion when people complain about being forced to resort to bribery, they are told to direct their complaints to the appropriate authorities. The overall impression is certainly that of a relatively free forum for opinions, enhanced by

al-Ansari's open role as a moderator who seeks to make people stick to the issue and ask questions. Some of these questions—such as the one on abortion—were slightly embarrassing to al-Qaradawi and seem to indicate that the program is not prefabricated.

But compared with the other talk shows on al-Jazeera, al-Qaradawi's does not really adhere to the slogan "One View, Another View." Yusuf al-Qaradawi's opinions are certainly the correct ones, he is the expert, and he is not there to entertain but to educate. There is the occasional minor challenge, for example, when a man from Mecca stated that it is the Muslim scholars (*al-'ulama' wa-al-mujtahidun*) who created the internal strife (*fitna*) in the *umma*, or when al-Ansari teasingly asked al-Qaradawi why he has not produced one single first-class *'alim* in all his years in Qatar. But these are just small exceptions. All in all, Yusuf al-Qaradawi represents the Shari'a, and everybody else represents Life.

Let me end this characterization of the program with an account of a session that clearly would not have been possible on an Egyptian or, for that matter, any other traditional state-run channel. It was called "The Violence of the Islamic Groups, and the Violence of the Regimes," and it specifically addressed the problem of violence as counter-violence of the Arab regimes. Yusuf al-Qaradawi dismissed explanations of violence that stressed poverty and misery as "overly materialistic," and explanations based on conspiracy theories as "evading responsibility." To him, the core of the problem was lack of moral leadership, that is, the absence of morally committed and moderate *'ulama'*. As it was now, there were, on the one hand, the *'ulama'* of the government, and on the other, ignorant youngsters (*shabab*), each considering himself to be *shayekh al-islam*, a recurrent theme in al-Qaradawi's writings on the Islamic awakening. But this phenomenon was in itself related to the lack of dialogue, democracy, and debate in the whole of the Arab world, where dissent is not tolerated and elections are rigged. Pressure always generates counter-pressure. Added to this is the "Shari'a masquerade," where Islam is officially declared the religion of the country and the Shari'a the main source of legislation. Moreover, it was very often the security forces who caused the violence to escalate, for instance in Algeria and in the Egyptian south, where the tradition of blood feud will ensure that the cycle of violence could go on forever (al-Qaradawi 1999, 21 Feb.).

This statement provoked a number of phone calls—most of them sympathizing with the radical groups—but al-Qaradawi referred to Ibn Taymiyya's famous *fatwa* about the Mongols' mixing of laws and pointed out that even Ibn Taymiyya mainly appealed to the Mamluks to change things: changing laws is solely the responsibility of the state.

At the end al-Qaradawi turned to the issue of government-sponsored media campaigns against Islamist groups. It was clear, he said, that the official media could not reach the violent groups. The problem was that their programs and serials were unconvincing. At this point he became so upset that he spoke in Egyptian vernacular about a film he had seen, in which a young Islamist terrorist was paid forty Egyptian pounds a day to spread his terror. All this was nonsense. What a wrong use of the media! True Islamic media should be edifying.

THE GLOBAL UMMA

As already mentioned, the Jazeera phenomenon is an important component in the process of globalization, as is the very format of *Shari'a and Life*. Globalization is also sometimes explicitly mentioned in the program, at times derided as little more than a euphemism for Westernization, common in the Arab media (al-Qaradawi 1999, 28 Feb.).

What is more important, however, is that globalization is constantly reflected in the idea of Islam as it is espoused in the program. In *Shari'a and Life*, God is rarely mentioned, apart from a small introductory invocation. Yusuf al-Qaradawi prefers to speak of Islam, or rather, of the Shari'a and of the *umma*, the world Muslim community, and its recent history. The unity of all Muslims is of central concern to al-Qaradawi. Naturally, this was the theme after the *'Id al-Adha*—the feast observed by all Muslims in the world, as well as by the hundred of thousands of pilgrims during the yearly pilgrimage. Unlike the more militant Islamists, al-Qaradawi seems convinced that Muslims by and large are religious and committed to following the Shari'a, even if they do not know it well enough and are in need of guidance. To al-Qaradawi, the word *umum* (pl. of *umma*) should not be used, for there is only one *umma*. The Shari'a demands that Muslims unite, and at a time when the Europeans and the Americans set up interstate bodies, it is only natural that the same should be done in the Islamic world, which, because of Islam, is already culturally united (al-Qaradawi 1999, 28 Mar.). For al-Qaradawi, Islam is very much identical with the contemporary *umma* of more than one billion people, who are juxtaposed with other civilizations of the globe.

This is also the view of the program as a whole, which became evident in a broadcast in which al-Qaradawi's substitute was 'Abd al-Rahim 'Ali, president of the African World University, and Hamid al-Ansari's substitute was Ahmad Mansur, host of another al-Jazeera talk show. The subject was Africa. A major issue was that Africa's Arab heritage was unknown to the Arabs, because European colonialism had successfully cut Africa off from the Arab world. This isola-

tion still endures, and the Arabs should strive to break the spell and to become acquainted with African Islam. This point, in turn, led to a long discussion of the reliability of statistics, and of Christian missions. A number of people called in and complained about Christian missionary activity, especially in schools, but they were dismissively told that the missionaries were simply doing their job, and that it was up to the Muslims to do a better job.

Both missions, we were told, were mainly targeting “tribal religion.” At this point Ahmad Mansur wanted to know what tribal religion was. He was told that this was the worship of idols, stars, and talismans, and he exclaimed, “Oh, you mean all those things we see among the fans at the African Soccer Cup?” (al-Qaradawi 1999, 28 Dec.). What is striking here is not only Ahmad Mansur’s representing the intellectual horizon of the ordinary Arab soccer-loving male, apparently expecting his viewers to have the same reference. More to the point, it is also the—from an Islamic perspective—completely neutral, even curious, discussion of African religion as tribal religion, without any condemnation or even use of classical Islamic terms for idolatry. Africa—displayed on maps in the program—was seen as the arena of a battle for the souls of simple-minded people, caught between two world giants, Islam and Christianity, who were both simply doing their job. People belong to one or the other religion, and only one of them is right. They might be best understood as opponents in a game of influence. This seems to confirm Peter Beyer’s observation that in the current phase of globalization a new interdependence in the identities of the religions has evolved (Beyer 1994).

Arab state broadcasters were set up to cater to national audiences and occasionally to spread national propaganda to neighboring states. Al-Jazeera is quite clearly also operating with a national audience, only this is the national community writ large: *al-watan al-‘arabi*, consisting of anybody who can speak Arabic in the Arab world and beyond. It may use new images, but it quite clearly sees itself as serving an imagined community that is a national audience with common interests, sentiments, and allegiances.

To Yusuf al-Qaradawi and his program, this imagined community is the *umma*. Ultimately, the *umma* encompasses all Muslims whatever their language, but the program constructs its audience as the Arab *umma*. Arabic is important—we saw how the Arabic culture of African Muslims was stressed. What is new and interesting is that this virtual *umma* does not have a ruler; it has many, and this means that no state can control it. The Western Muslims are suddenly of pivotal importance, and al-Qaradawi wants them to break the links to their countries of origin: he advises them to set up a council (*majlis*) in each country to solve their

own problems, and to make their own observation of the new moon instead of each group of immigrants following the observations in their countries of origin (al-Qaradawi 1999, 21 Mar.). At the same time, al-Qaradawi emphasizes that social security fraud in Western countries is as great a sin as in a Muslim country (al-Qaradawi 1999, 21 Mar.). Muslims should be good citizens in these countries, and their only other allegiance should be to the *umma*.¹ The pan-Islamic universalism of the Salafiyya movement is given a new lease on life through the new global medium.

THE MEDIUM AND THE MESSAGE

For Yusuf al-Qaradawi, as mentioned, television is a mere instrument, a medium in the original sense of the word, with little impact on the message itself. But two sessions devoted to the media themselves, the first about the new satellite channels and the other about the Internet, make it clear that matters are not as simple as that.

The program about the satellite channels, aired in June 1999, was fairly critical of the content of the new channels. Al-Qaradawi—who appeared to be watching a great many of them—maintained that these new channels did not serve the interests of the *umma*, either in their news coverage or in their entertainment programs. Even in terms of language, they let the Muslims down by using too much of the vernacular, the *'ammiyya*. Callers appeared to agree with al-Qaradawi and complained that the satellite programs were only practicing a mindless copying (*taqlid*) of the West, insisting on issues that run counter to the Shari'a, such as homosexuality. Almost everybody ended their contribution by demanding more hostesses wearing headscarves (*muhajjabat*) on al-Jazeera—and its directors agreed to this demand by fax at the end of the program.

A Syrian man stated that the satellite channels must be used to topple infidel regimes, but was interrupted by al-Ansari, who said that politics was not being discussed on this program (al-Qaradawi 1999, 13 June). Characteristically, al-Qaradawi ended by calling for an international board of *'ulama'* to supervise the ethics of the new transnational channels. His main point, however, was that all programs must have an Islamic message or appeal: "We must make use of all

1. Ironically, the emergence of al-Jazeera, MBC, and similar Arabic-language channels is probably a threat to the Islamic and Arabic programming on local TV stations.

genres, dramas, serials, etc., but all must have a *risala* and an Islamic culture. We must grant an hour for your heart and an hour for your Lord” (al-Qaradawi 1999, 13 June).

In this last formulation, we witness the emergence of a television policy. Apart from specifically missionary programs, it appears that most other types of program, such as dramas and serials, if they contain nothing reprehensible, can also be considered Islamic. Any program that adopts Islamic symbolism, such as the headscarf, and avoids or denounces certain controversial issues, such as homosexuality, seems to qualify as Islamic. Again, this seems akin to the path taken by American televangelism since the 1950s, which appropriated popular formats—such as the talk show—and made them Christian by adding religious symbolism, talk, and paraphernalia. As pointed out by Bobby Alexander, this eclecticism enabled marginal religious groups to adapt to some of the views and lifestyles of mainstream American society, with the potential to win greater acceptance and inclusion (Alexander 1997, 195).

American televangelism is often credited with a pioneering role in fund-raising via television, thus specifically developing techniques of appealing to its viewers that were later reused by the advertising industry (Lindermann 1996, chap. 1). Yusuf al-Qaradawi, too, is now the figurehead of a cluster of medias promoting a specific Islamic mission. He had had a popular home page on the Internet for years, but in October 1999 a broader Internet service, <islam-online.net>, was launched, which aimed at becoming the gate of choice for Muslims on the Internet. The idea was to create “a trustworthy global *minbar* [pulpit]” at a time when many Islamic sites on the Internet were in fact operated by “enemies of Islam, such as Jews, Bahais or Qadyaniyya” (al-Qaradawi 1999, 3 Oct.).

Like al-Jazeera, <islam-online.net> enjoys financial support from the emir of Qatar, but it is expected to break even in five years. Achieving this goal, of course, means fund-raising. Amidst *fatwas* allowing such novelties as sexually mixed chat rooms, al-Qaradawi was asked whether contributions to the project could count as *ḥaḥat*. He answered that this was an important new dimension of the Islamic mission (*da'wa*), and as such may be supported by *ḥaḥat*, *sadaqa*, legacies, or other funds (al-Qaradawi 1999, 3 Oct.).

Inserted several times in the program was an advertisement for the new service. Yusuf al-Qaradawi appeared in the middle of his own program, promoting the Internet site and asking, subtly, for contributions to it. Al-Qaradawi was obviously relying on his dignity and status in the program to render his appeal efficient. This is a novelty. Islamic television—and especially ‘*ulama*’ who appeared

on it—had not before resorted to appealing to audiences for funding. But this is yet another instance where the logic of the media is making itself felt in the content of the message.

POSTMODERNISM OR PUBLIC SERVICE

This leads me to the last theme of this chapter, namely postmodernism. Here I will compare the introduction of *Shari'a and Life* to that of Shaykh al-Sha'rawi's program *With Shaykh al-Sha'rawi* on national Egyptian television on 26 August 1993.

The contrasts are clear: the al-Sha'rawi introduction features a ceiling in a mosque, the camera slowly following the arabesques, while the text is written in very elaborate calligraphy, accompanied by classical Arabic oud music. *Shari'a and Life*, by contrast, is introduced by a series of pictures flowing at high speed, allowing us glimpses of dollars, soldiers, veiled women demonstrating, oil, arrests, a bathroom, and (curiously) royal horse guards, all along accompanied by a portentous kind of music reminiscent of the music CNN uses for momentous events (and of a type that would certainly have met with Atatürk's approval). All these images are glimpsed through the Arabic letters of the word "Shari'a," which thereby functions as a prism through which to watch and evaluate these contemporary features.

I think it can be safely said that *Shari'a and Life* is consciously setting itself off against the Sha'rawi program and its various epigones in other Arab countries. These programs represent two very different ideas of what kind of religious message should be transferred via television. But can the difference between them be framed in terms of modernism and postmodernism? Is *Shari'a and Life* a good example of television on an Internet model? I will argue that it is not.

The Sha'rawi program features only his person, placed in a mosque, with an audience around him, relating some event in the life of the prophets. The introduction is revealing: Islam here is seen as the venerable tradition, as *turath*. Sha'rawi will not look at contemporary events, but takes us back into sacred history. When Sha'rawi uses 'ammiyya, the vernacular, it is not because he is upset, as was the case with al-Qaradawi, but because he uses direct speech, playing the role of the prophet Joseph or some other Qur'anic figure. Or he switches to 'ammiyya to break with the fictional framework and give a contemporary comment. But as anyone who has watched him will confess, this is just one of his artistic effects: his voice, his gesticulation, his facial expressions are mesmerisingly used to convey

the importance and intensity of his message. It is these telegenic gifts that have earned him his colossal audience around the world. When he died in the summer of 1998, thousands of weeping Egyptians followed the funeral procession.

Sha'rawi, then, is easily the most popular Islamic television star ever, having appeared at least once a week on Egyptian television for almost twenty-five years. Like al-Qaradawi, he was an Azhari who went abroad to Saudi Arabia and Algeria and made his career there, but he was never a refugee and always kept up good relations with the Egyptian government. When he returned to Egypt, he went into the administration, and in the late 1970s even served for a time as minister of *awqaf*. His literary output was enormous, consisting of print runs totaling more than 700,000, but his work was not well respected in 'ulama' circles: his books were clearly an offshoot of his television fame, unlike those of al-Qaradawi. There was a huge public interest in Sha'rawi's private life, and he could confide in the press about his favorite food, his old age, and his lifestyle; there were even critical books brought out that tried to portray him as a hypocrite who had enriched himself on the naïveté of his audience.

The Sha'rawi program, then, may look traditionalist—at least if we remember that traditionalism itself is in many ways a product of modernity—but there is something approaching the televangelic in Sha'rawi the media phenomenon, with its components of stardom, audience identification, and consumerism. Admittedly, none of these is new. But, at least to a European like myself, these qualities of televangelism do seem to be increasingly important features of the kind of television that we are watching in the postmodern age.

In comparison, this emotional and charismatic quality seems to be lacking in *Shari'a and Life*. In fact, there is something curiously familiar about the channel: al-Qaradawi insisting on dialogue and argument, on educating and edifying the public and imbuing it with a rational, universal, and democratic Islam. And perhaps this observation should be extended to the whole of the Jazeera channel: men sitting and discussing serious issues for hours, only interrupted by news—is not this the ultimate channel of the old modernist intellectual?

If postmodernity is characterized by features such as the eclectic mixing of hitherto antagonistic spheres such as high and low culture, the breakup of national consensus and paternalism, consumerism, and individual constructions of identities, then al-Jazeera does not seem to qualify; indeed it seems to be the very opposite. It very much resembles that icon of European modernism, national public television. Only here the nation is *al-watan al-'arabi*, consisting of some twenty states plus substantial Arab minorities in the Western world. In both media and Islamic thinking, modernism had its own brand of globalism, namely

universalism. Just as Yusuf al-Qaradawi is a latter-day Salafi who can now make use of yet another medium to further his universalist pan-Islamism, so the ideals of al-Jazeera are reminiscent of a modernist globalism that came to the fore in the Arab world a hundred years ago, but ever since has had to fight to establish a platform free of political control.

GLOBALIZATION and the Muslim World

Culture, Religion, and Modernity

Edited by Birgit Schaebler *and* Leif Stenberg

With a Foreword by Roy Mottahedeh

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