13 The emergence of media preachers: Yusuf al-Qaradawi

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New forms and technologies of Islamic discussions and authority

In February 2011, Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, in the light of the uprisings in Libya against that country's despot, Muammar al-Qadhdhafi, whose forces were mowing down unarmed civilians in several Libyan cities, announced on al-Jazeera television: "I hereby issue a ruling (fatwa) that anyone in the Libyan armed forces who is able to fire a shot at al-Qadhdhafi and kill him in order to relieve the people from his evil should do so." How is it possible for a Muslim religious preacher to gain so much authority and issue a revolutionary fatwa that would be controversial and have direct implications for geopolitics and armed resistance? We will discuss how such preachers have come to be accorded mass popularity and whether their new modes of exercising authority may threaten both the traditional ulama and repressive governments across the Muslim world.

Recent decades have seen important changes, not only in religious leadership in Muslim societies, but in the very nature of religious authority and how the message and teachings of Islam are communicated and received by a mass audience. One aspect of that change is in the population itself. Most Muslim majority nation-states that emerged in the postcolonial era promoted government supported mass education up to the university level. For the first time such state education became accessible to males and females from diverse class backgrounds, raising both rates of literacy and expectations for meaningful employment on the part of graduates.

This increase in literacy was exponential, allowing individual Muslims to independently consult religious texts and sources in ways never before possible. According to some analysts, this development parallels the rise of vernacular literacy in Europe on the eve of the Protestant Reformation in 1453. This inspired some observers to anticipate a similar Islamic reformation, coupled with searches for a figure to be dubbed the Muslim Martin Luther. However, Islam, whether Sunni or Shi'a, is not Protestantism, although similar struggles pitting traditional authority guarded by its custodians, the *ulama*, against the ability of individual Muslims to resort directly to the scriptural word—have certainly increased. While the new focus on higher education was avowedly secular, the public's increased interest in debates about how to be properly "Muslim" amid rapidly changing social and material circumstances, and in strategies to Islamicize the private as well as the public sphere, created a space where custodians of authentic Islamic knowledge, joined by those who could articulate the relevance of Islam in today's world, were welcome voices.

In the twentieth-century Muslim world, more than literacy rates and educational access were changing. If the medium of communication is considered to be a major element of the message itself, then a shift of epic proportions was taking place on a global scale with the proliferation of new technologies for delivering data and the multiplication of channels or sources conveying that information.

In many parts of the Muslim world, the same nation-states that had only recently achieved independence or been constituted in the wake of colonialism sought to dominate the information received by their citizens. Some monarchies or dictatorships followed a Soviet-style top-down monopoly over institutions and organs of communication, while others used tight censorship in the name of Islam to repel outside influences or mute dissident voices. Some of the first examples of media preachers who appeared on state television were therefore perceived as being aligned with government policy, a notable example being Shaykh Muhammad Mitawalli Sha'rawi (1915–98) in Egypt. Sha'rawi was a graduate of the prestigious al-Azhar Islamic University, held important government posts in religious affairs, and also was closely associated with Saudi Arabian interests. Sha'rawi cultivated a media presence that was both folksy and authoritative, conducting most of his session in Egyptian colloquial Arabic delivered in expressive and colorful style, while remaining in control of a selected studio audience listening with rapt attention.

New formulations of Islam as an alternative political response that could address the moral and material shortcomings of this world had been formulated by activists from outside of the traditional ranks of the ulama such as Hassan al-Banna (1906–49) and Sayyid Qutb (1906–66) of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and Syed Maududi (1903–79), founder of the South Asian Jamaat-e Islami. Yet these movements primarily appealed to a more narrow vanguard of individuals who felt that the Islamization of society would best be implemented through a top-down process. The works of these figures were primarily disseminated in print, with newspapers and pamphlets beginning to play an important role, alongside more formal book projects. The circulation and translation of such works across languages such as Arabic, Urdu, and English, also reflected a new kind of Islamic internationalism.

The 1970s was the era of cheap cassette technology that dispersed, along with music and entertainment, sermons and preaching by a new type of Muslim preacher. Such tapes could be produced and transported inexpensively and were often associated with oppositional trends in Muslim societies, for example, the case of Ayatollah Khomeini's sermons being sent back to Iran from France while he was in exile. Similarly in Egypt the Islamist preacher Shaykh Kishk criticized social and political trends under the regimes of Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak and achieved pan-Arab popularity.

In the Muslim world, new television networks were potential sites of the propaganda battles in the Cold War between the capitalist West and the Soviet bloc that was being fought by proxy in the developing nations of Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. While the non-aligned movement of the 1970s was dominated by progressive or left-leaning leaders of developing nations, at the popular level calls for a return to Islamic values and practice had begun to find a receptive audience.

The emergence of the media preacher in the Muslim world, then, is a striking development that occurred due to the confluence of new technologies, a rise in

transnational Islamic consciousness and presence, and a more individualized, emotive, and mass oriented response to Islamic authority and discourse. The 1990s was the era of the spread of internet connections and satellite channels through which the information carried by these new communication technologies became global and universal. Increasingly English, along with the traditional Arabic, became an international language of Islamic discourse, and the presence of growing numbers of Muslims in Europe and the United States made long-distance communication and interaction more common.

The story of Yusuf al-Qaradawi

Biography

Yusuf al-Qaradawi is perhaps the most well-known and prolific Muslim preacher in the world today. His books and pamphlets, numbering into the hundreds, are translated into many languages; his television programs on al-Jazeera satellite network are viewed throughout the Middle East; and his online legal/moral advice is sought by Muslims everywhere.

Figure 13.1 Yusuf al-Qaradawi. Courtesy of Fayez Nureldine/AFP/Getty Images.

Al-Qaradawi draws his authority both from traditional sources and institutions and from new media to engage, interpret, and communicate with changing generations in an evolving global context. His triumphal return to Egypt to preach to millions from Tahrir Square in February 2011 symbolizes the confluence of religious, moral, political, and charismatic authority that he, among all Islamic media preachers, epitomizes most effectively.

The sacred language of Islamic tradition is Arabic, and al-Qaradawi comes from Egypt, the country whose media production, dominance in publishing, and large population gave it cultural preeminence in the Arab world in the twentieth century. Yet it was al-Qaradawi's departure from Egypt and its hierarchical state system of ulama bound to government approval and patronage that gave him the freedom and flexibility to think and act outside the box represented by such a system.

Born in 1926, al-Qaradawi came from a small, unremarkable village and family in the Nile delta region of northern Egypt. From childhood, his intellectual interests lay in religion and on the basis of merit he was admitted and supported in pursuing advanced studies at al-Azhar, the most prestigious institute in the Sunni Muslim world for training religious scholars.

Al-Azhar, established by the Fatimid dynasty in CE 969, has been described as a combination of the authority and functions of the Vatican, with those of the US Supreme Court and the Congress. Students traditionally came from all corners of the Sunni world to spend years studying the Islamic religious sciences there. During the 1960s, al-Azhar, under government mandate, undertook a series of internal reforms to modernize and broaden its curriculum, adding secular subjects such as medicine and engineering. This reform was viewed by some observers as a move to weaken and diffuse its authority and rigor and as an indication of the marginalization of the influence of traditional Muslim scholars (ulama) in the face of new systems of authoritative knowledge in modern and technical fields.

Al-Qaradawi joined the Muslim Brotherhood movement in the late 1940s and later became their leading representative at al-Azhar. This relationship has continued, with al-Qaradawi being offered the leadership of the movement at several points during his later career, an offer that he preferred to decline. He graduated from al-Azhar with an undergraduate degree in the Fundamentals of Religion (Usul-al-Din) in 1953. His graduate study was finally concluded in 1973 with a PhD on "Zakat and its effect on solving social problems" having been interrupted and delayed by political persecution, imprisonment, and self-imposed exile. In fact, al-Qaradawi spent a few years in prison in Egypt during the early Nasser regime, a common fate of many Muslim activists during that period.

In 1962 al-Qaradawi moved to Qatar where he worked to establish the new educational system in this small sheikhdom in the Gulf. He became a confidant of the ruler, Shaykh Khalifa bin Hamad (b. 1932), who patronized his activities. While supported by the

Qatari ruler, al-Qaradawi has been considered an oppositional figure in most other Arab countries because of his links to the Muslim Brotherhood. Coincidentally, al-Qaradawi's relocating in Qatar coincided with the economic rise of the small oil-producing nations of the Gulf where, subsequent to the dramatic boost in oil revenues in the wake of the 1973 OPEC embargo on oil exports to the West, the newly wealthy Gulf States began to exercise their strategic and financial weight in the world.

Qatar, a small island state, became notable for its sponsorship of the popular satellite television station, al-Jazeera, launched in 1996 with the support of Hamad bin Khalifa II (b. 1952) who had deposed his father as ruler in 1995. Al-Jazeera rapidly became popular among Arab viewers across the Middle East due to its allowing controversial social and political topics to be openly debated, in contrast to the censorship prevalent in most government-controlled channels across the region. Despite pressure from conservative Arab regimes and the United States, this station achieved great popularity and a reputation for covering the news in a manner independent from Western governments and their official and commercial media outlets.

"Shari'a and Life": a program and a concept

In January 1997 al-Jazeera launched "Shari'a and Life," a program that showcased al-Qaradawi as a media preacher and a general authority on the shari'a as well as on specific issues in Islamic law. On this program, moderated by a non-expert, al-Qaradawi represented the authoritative voice of the Islamic scholar interpreting the shari'a in response to questions drawn from the everyday life experiences of viewers. This show featured debates over contemporary issues evaluated in the light of the principles of Islamic law. In a process of instant *ifta*—requesting legal opinions on a variety of issues—Muslims were able to call in live from around the world.

It may be wondered why Islam is such an interesting subject in the pan-Arab media. One factor is that Islam constitutes an important part of the identity of most people living in the Arab world. Opinions on how to be a Muslim and navigate changing social circumstances are contested and spark lively interest. Such issues include women's roles or moral dilemmas raised by new medical technologies. Featuring explicitly Islamic content in programming also resonates with the idea that the independent Arab media provides an oppositional forum, distinct from the content and messages distributed from the West.

In his successful media preaching, al-Qaradawi has been able to engage three new elements of the global Islamic audience: women, youth, and Muslims living abroad in the so-called "diaspora." In terms of the female audience, despite his relatively conservative stance, al-Qaradawi has proven adaptable in some of his rulings on gender issues, in contrast to many of the more traditional ulama. For example, he has supported not only female suffrage, but also the political rights of women to

themselves run for office as candidates. His own daughters pursued higher professional degrees abroad and subsequent careers.

One illustration of his position on the issue of Muslim women's dress being more liberal than some, but certainly remaining conservative, is drawn from the following 2010 interview.

Niqab in Europe and the fiqh of Muslim minorities

Al-Qaradawi was asked in an Online Islam interview about the niqab (full-face veil) that some Muslim women wear being outlawed in France. He replied:

> My opinion about the niqab is well-known, which is that the niqab is not obligatory; however, I respect the opinion saying it is. And I do not agree with some sheikhs who regard it as an innovation or tradition that has no basis in Islam. ...
>
> If a Muslim woman is convinced that wearing the niqab is obligatory and the face is *'awrah*, we have to respect her choice and avoid being an obstacle to her religious commitment.
>
> Online Islam: What should a Muslim woman do if the country where she lives bans the niqab, while she believes that it is obligatory?
>
> Sheikh al-Qaradawi: ... I told them [Muslims in France] to wear hijab outside the school and to put it off when they arrive at the school gate to enter. Such a case is governed by two rules:
>
> The first rule: Necessities make what is forbidden permissible. The need can be regarded as a necessity. Accordingly, if wearing the niqab is confronted with the necessity of education or the necessity of work, while the woman needs it, in this case she is permitted to give up the niqab.
>
> The second rule: Necessities should be weighed accurately and honestly. In other words, once a Muslim woman leaves work or school, where the hijab is banned, she has to put it on again; and the same applies to the niqab.
>
> *(al-Qaradawi 2010)*

The new youth audience attracted by al-Qaradawi is important because of its dynamism and participation in Islamic revival movements and the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings. It is also increasingly influential in the light of demographic trends in much of the Muslim world where the percentage of the population under 20 years of age is much higher than in Western nations. It has been stated that the role of Muslim ulama as the "heirs of the Prophet" should be to forge a bond with the youth and guide them. In the West, as in the traditional Muslim world, the search for authenticity and Islamic identity movements among young Muslims make them particularly attracted to the sources of traditional Muslim authority embodied by figures such as al-Qaradawi.

During his triumphal Friday sermon delivered in Tahrir Square in Cairo, in February 2011, al-Qaradawi specifically addressed youth as follows:

> This is why these youth from all regions in Egypt, from all social classes, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, workers and cultured—though the majority were cultured and educated people—we saw altruism increase among them. They became, they fused into, one melting-pot: Muslims and Christians, radicals and conservatives, rightists and leftists, men and women, old and young, all of them became one, all of them acting for Egypt, in order to liberate Egypt from injustice *(zulm)* and tyranny *(taghut)*. It was inevitable that Egypt be liberated, because these youth willed it, and when the youth will, their will participates in the will of God.

In terms of the broader diaspora audience, al-Qaradawi has had important outreach to European Muslims. A prominent example is his role in the establishment of the European Council for Fatwa and Research in 1997 in London to coordinate ulama in Europe. Over time, however, European perceptions of al-Qaradawi changed and some of his fatwas, such as those allowing Palestinian "martyrdom" operations as well as certain illiberal pronouncements made in his work, *The Permitted and the Forbidden in Islam*, on issues such as gay rights, led to his being banned from visiting a number of European countries, and he has also been barred from entering the United States since 1999.

These developments epitomize some of the tensions implicit in al-Qaradawi's positions and in their reception among diverse publics. We may take as an example one of his works that has been translated into many languages and found popular acceptance among diaspora Muslim communities. This is the previously mentioned book on the permitted and forbidden according to Islamic law. The idea of rulings designating permitted (halal) and forbidden (haram) is certainly well-known in Islamic law and enshrined in a hadith (saying of the Prophet) to the effect that, "The permitted is clear and the forbidden is clear and between them are many dubious/ambiguous things that should be avoided." Al-Qaradawi's volume on this topic is presented in the form of a manual of rulings on everyday situations that any Muslim can follow. While the very polarity of *halal* and *haram* suggests a black-and-white view of the world, it also resonates with the Islamist project of a comprehensive Islamic approach to all aspects of everyday life conceived as a total system. Furthermore, it functions as a means for the re-enchantment of modern life experience by bringing everything into relationship with the divine mandate. While some perceive this project as a positive source for inculcating and clarifying Islamic norms, others find the concept to be simplistic and stultifying. One expert characterizes the new production of such manuals and their pronouncements as "journalistic," in contrast to classical Islamic legal and religious argumentation that was heavily intertextual

and layered in sophisticated prose that needed to be read by specialized experts (Skovgaard-Petersen 2009). This new genre is omniscient and straightforward, eschewing nuance and ambiguity, while presenting itself as a primer or "operator's manual" for the modern, technologically minded, Muslim.

A critical concept invoked by al-Qaradawi to characterize his positions is "wasatiyya" (the middle way or moderation)—thereby denoting a centrist position. While al-Qaradawi is not exclusive in using this term, it establishes him as being a balanced alternative or mediating element between opposed extremes, for example, in being positioned between the secular, non-observant Muslim and the militant fundamentalist, or in the case of his juristic opinions, it suggests that he favors pragmatic solutions grounded in revealed sources that are neither excessively rigid nor compromised by liberalism. In the sphere of political Islam, the "moderate" label signals a rejection of extremism. His mediation of various spheres of cultural life and Islamic norms is further viewed as making space for art and a new Islamic consumerism. It also finds its place in the contemporary discourse of Islam that is shifting to address personal and social identity issues rather than debating ideal forms of politics and governance (Skovgaard-Petersen 2009).

In classical Islamic political theory, the focus was on the legitimacy and qualifications of the ruler and his (being male was often cited as a qualification) implementation of the shari'a. In al-Qaradawi's socio-political thought we find greater attention being given to considerations of public welfare and social justice, for which the classical Islamic legal concept of *maslaha* (taking public interest into account) is elaborated as a way to move the rulings of the law forward.

In addition to his public role on al-Jazeera, al-Qaradawi's internet website, Islam Online, has become the largest Islamic portal in the world. It provides coverage of world news from an Islamic perspective, while another important and popular feature of the site is his dispensing online fatwas as part of the "global mufti" phenomenon. A mufti is an Islamic scholar who issues opinions as to the Islamic status of diverse actions or doctrines. Over the past 150 years, fatwas, now broadly disseminated, have achieved greater significance in shaping Muslim life and public opinion. The traditional process of scholars' deriving their rulings within one of the four Sunni schools (madhahib) was known as *taqlid*, or accepting the traditional authority of the legal schools in upholding their decisions on issues that had been ruled on by the great scholars of the past.

Increasingly, beginning in the late 1700s, some Muslim scholars called for a revival of the process of *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning), returning to the revealed sources of the religion in search of answers for new questions that had come up or in response to changed perceptions about issues that had been ruled on in the past. *Ijtihad* was advocated both by certain literalist movements such as the Wahhabis, and at the same time offered as a principle of movement and creativity within the religion by thinkers who were inclined to liberal attitudes and advocated the modernization of

society as being compatible with the spirit of the Qur'an. The sort of new lifestyle and technology issues addressed by Muslim preachers such as Qaradawi provide the ability to exercise ijtihad in a less radical "reinventing the wheel" way since the novel circumstances themselves demand a response and traditional sources and authority do not need to be directly interrogated by the process.

With the formation of new nation-states in the twentieth century, many governments in the Muslim world realized the moral authority, as well as the social and political benefits, of appointing fatwa committees composed of Islamic scholars to rule on issues significant to official policy that needed to be accepted by the public. One striking example is the debate over the nature and permissibility of birth control, often framed less controversially as "family planning." In countries such as Egypt, having Islamic scholars declare in fatwas that Islam sanctioned contraception proved strategic in garnering public compliance. However, participating scholars could be subjected to the criticism that they had allowed themselves to be coerced by government patronage.

Standing outside of the reach of any one government has allowed Qaradawi to rule on a number of issues that are controversial and prominent. Examples of these are his rulings justifying suicide bombings by Palestinians, or his endorsing the choice of Muslim Americans who signed up to fight in the US armed forces. Most recently, Qaradawi sanctioned uprisings against autocratic regimes such as those in Libya or Egypt, whereas many local jurists promoted quietism for either religious or pragmatic reasons.

Muslim preachers: a global phenomenon?

When we look at other media preachers in diverse local Islamic contexts, we note how their new media presence has challenged some traditional concepts of Islamic authority, while observing that there are significantly distinct ways in which such individuals engage media and the modern components of the role. Let us take several other examples to compare with the al-Qaradawi phenomenon: a fellow Egyptian, an Indonesian, and two Pakistanis.

Amr Khaled (Egypt and the Arab world)

The foil for al-Qaradawi has often been his compatriot, Amr Khaled (b. 1967). Khaled is from a significantly younger cohort and lacks both the background in the traditional Islamic sciences and the mantle of authority bestowed through being a formally trained scholar (*'alim*). He rather defines himself as a *da'iyya*, one who "calls to Islam" through invitation (da'wa) (Rock 2010: 18). Trained as an accountant, he began

preaching in mosques in 1990 while still working in his regular profession. Khaled's increasingly popular lectures were broadcast on the IQRA channel via the NILESAT satellites, and distributed over the internet and on audio and videocassette tapes. In 1998, Khaled embarked on a full-time preaching career, primarily on satellite television with popular series such as "Words from the Heart" (2001) and "Life Makers" (Sunna' al-Hayat).

Amr Khaled has proven himself to be charismatic. He usually preaches dressed in stylish Western suits and has been compared to American personalities such as Billy Graham and Dr. Phil. In fact, Christian televangelists and their programs were studied and emulated by Khaled and his production team. His programs have attracted a large youth following, especially among the upper middle class, ultimately bringing him under government scrutiny and threat that led him to move to the United Kingdom between 2002 and 2007 (Rock 2010: 16).

Khaled's preaching notably emphasizes self-help and forming networks of like-minded youth to undertake projects of moral and social rectification. This has created a sense of community among viewers who then organize grassroots social projects in their own neighborhoods.

Media scholar Lindsay Wise observes:

> *Sunna' al-Hayat* is part self-help psychology—an emotional and positive twelve-step program to a better Islamic life—part spiritual experience, and part televised call for social reform and grassroots organization. This tactic helps create a sense of achievement, identity, and community among his viewers...
>
> Since he doesn't have the authority to issue *fatwas*, there is very little finger-wagging discussion of exactly what is *haram* or *halal*. Instead, Khaled offers practical moral advice, such as urging his audience to avoid listening to songs with sexy or provocative lyrics, even encouraging them to write protest letters to music channels. But he doesn't ask them to give up music all together. In fact, he goes so far as to offer an alternative to what he refers to as sappy, empty-headed pop music.
>
> On college campuses and community centers, students sell t-shirts, key chains, and stickers bearing the *Sunna' al-Hayat* logo and motto "Together We Build Life" in both English and Arabic to raise money for their philanthropic clubs. These trendy (and fairly expensive) commodities are reminiscent of the virginity promise rings and "What Would Jesus Do" bracelets so popular among born-again Christian youth in America. On the internet, Khaled's own high-tech Arabic webpage, *www.amrkhaled.net*, offers live "dialogues" with the preacher himself, as well as e-books, cartoons, songs, MP3 recordings of his sermons, web broadcasts, and translations in eight languages.
>
> *(Wise 2004)*

It could also be claimed that Khaled's message projects a "prosperity gospel" that appeals to the upwardly mobile, and he has been characterized as the "richest Islamic preacher" by *Forbes Arabia* (Rock 2010: 21). The strength of his global profile is such that *Time* magazine has numbered him among the 100 most influential people in the world (2007).

K.H. Abdullah Gymnastiar (Gym) (Indonesia)

A media preacher from beyond the Arab world is K.H. Abdullah Gymnastiar (Gym) (b. 1962) from Indonesia. Gym attracted a large audience of Indonesian youth, as well as middle-aged and middle-class admirers in the open, pluralistic, and moderate environment that followed the fall of the dictator Suharto in 1998. His preaching was distinctive in incorporating relationship issues into a homiletic genre that he termed "managing the heart." He dealt with topics such as how to have an ideal family life in the Islamic mode, while following the consistent theme of how to apply Muslim practice and values in everyday situations. At the height of his popularity millions of viewers watched Gym's weekly television shows; hundreds of thousands made pilgrimages to his Islamic school; and politicians of all leanings lined up for photo-ops during campaign season. He managed his image by telling his fans to call him "older brother," suggesting a more intimate and approachable identity than that of a traditional religious teacher. Further "branding" contributed to extensive commercial and popular success, casting Gym as a modern religious scholar who ran several businesses, went sky-diving with the Indonesian special forces, and flew fighter jets with the air force—all while wearing a turban (Hoesterey 2007).

Gym's style is reminiscent of the "self-help" and "how to succeed" genres in the West, for example, one of his slogans describes three "beginnings"—"begin with yourself, begin with small things, and begin now." He also drew inspiration from Sufi tales and dream spirituality, which resonate with Indonesian Muslim culture. Gym is said to have lost a lot of his popular following when he married a second wife in 2007, in particular since his first wife, mother of his seven children, had been presented as a role model and object of his devotion.

> Heartbroken and betrayed, his followers staged a backlash and the event became a national scandal. Infotainment shows and gossip magazines circulated stories of female followers who shredded his pictures, boycotted his television shows, and cancelled weekend pilgrimages to his Islamic school and 'spiritual tourism' complex, Daarut Tauhiid (DT). Pressured by hundreds of protest text messages, SBY [Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono—the President of Indonesia] ordered a review of the national marriage law. Gymnastiar lost his pending television contracts; his business empire started to crumble, and DT became a ghost town.
>
> *(Hoesterey 2007)*

Gym has since attempted to draw a new audience by reinventing himself in a more traditionally Islamic mode, upgrading his religious knowledge by taking madrasa-type courses and altering the tone of his discourse toward religious conservatism. For a time his newly expanded family projected polygamy as an acceptable option with mixed success, but by 2011 he had divorced his first wife, Ninih Mutmainah, only to remarry her in 2012.

Moving between popular media such as film, television, and the music world into Islamic preaching and missionary outreach (da'wa) seems to be a global trend. For example, in Egypt, the trope of popular actresses abandoning secular screens and donning Islamic dress (the hijab) has been characterized as a movement of repentance (tawba). Ultimately the media itself is not the enemy, since many of these figures return to the public stage in proper Islamic roles and dress (van Nieuwkerk 2008).

Junaid Jamshed (Pakistan)

In Pakistan the case of "repentant" rock star Junaid Jamshed bears instructive parallels to developments in the Arab world. Jamshed (b. 1964) was formerly a lead singer for a popular Pakistani rock band of the 1980s, Vital Signs. His attraction to Islam, and in particular, his involvement with the conservative international Islamic piety movement, Tablighi Jama'at, led him to hang up his guitar in 2002 and to grow a long beard, along with other manifestations of embracing a pious Islamic lifestyle.

Currently Jamshed operates a national Pakistani chain of exclusive clothing boutiques for males and females. Such ventures characterize other contemporary trends among pious Muslim figures and social movements who embrace religious fervor and revival and yet conform to, and even facilitate, popular aspirations to consume quality goods in a modern, affluent mode. Junaid Jamshed does not concentrate on media preaching, however, and in general Tablighis have eschewed, not only electronic, but even print media to communicate their message. Jamshed is still seen from time to time on Pakistani TV, reciting *na't*—poems in praise of the Prophet Muhammad—without any instrumentation, in conformity with perceived Islamic strictures on musical performance. In fact videos of some of his lectures are readily available on internet sites and indicate that he tours internationally presenting lectures and fundraising for Muslim Centers and activities.

Farhat Hashmi (Pakistan/Canada)

Farhat Hashmi is a female Pakistani preacher with a strong television and internet presence. Her program, broadcast on Pakistan's GEO satellite network, features a seated Hashmi looking at the camera dressed in full face veil or niqab while reading from the screen of her computer—an image that projects the confluence of pious

traditionalism and media-savvy prosperity. Hashmi, who holds a PhD in Islamic Studies from the University of Glasgow, Scotland, has been spearheading a religious revival among the Pakistan "begamat"—(primarily) upper class females—for some 15 years. She left a position as a professor at the International Islamic University in Islamabad to allow herself more independent scope and interpretation of Islam that yet remains conservative. Her lectures and website feature advice for women in dealing with everyday topics including relationship issues and household management (Ahmad 2008). At the same time Hashmi developed an intensive two-year course of almost daily lessons that inculcates basic teachings of Qur'an and hadith studies along with Islamic ritual law. Established in 1994, this al-Huda course is franchised across Pakistan and operated locally by females who have been her students. Scholarly views and public opinion differ as to whether Hashmi is an empowering innovator for female Muslims or a regressive force. In 2004 Hashmi relocated to Toronto, Canada, where since 2005 she has operated the al-Huda Institute to train diaspora South Asian women in her educational method and interpretations. Here they follow a 20-month course called Taleem ul-Quran, paying a nominal fee of $60 a month, and attending classes four days a week for five hours a day. Meanwhile Hashmi's global media presence continues to expand through her prerecorded television broadcasts and active internet and publishing outreach.

Conclusion

In summarizing the rise of media preachers, Yusuf al-Qaradawi's position as a global mufti and popular celebrity illustrates the confluence of several important trends in the contemporary Muslim world. Among the figures we considered here, Qaradawi is the prime example of a combination of traditional scholarly authority with a contemporary media presence. His positions on Islamic rulings as well as on contemporary social and political affairs resonate with an increasingly globalized Muslim youth culture struggling to carve an alternative path between religious extremism and disillusionment with state-controlled clerics.

This confirms Lindsay Wise's conclusions that:

> As demonstrated by the growing popularity of everything from "dial-a-sheikh" telephone services that charge by the minute and online "*fatwa* sessions" that invite Internet users to submit religious questions by e-mail, there is a growing mass market catering to Muslims seeking spiritual guidance, both moral and mundane: Should teenagers be allowed to date? Is masturbation against Islamic law? How should Muslim women dress at the beach? Is it a sin to play football on a Friday? Are suicide bombers martyrs or murderers? Is kidnapping un-Islamic? In the search for answers, people no longer look only to their neighborhood

> sheikh or local mosque, but to all forms of media, including audiotapes, DVDs, broadcast television, telephone hotlines and the World Wide Web.
>
> *(Wise 2004)*

Many of the examples given in this chapter suggest that preoccupation with personal and social identity issues such as a renegotiation of gender roles, coupled with a new Muslim consumerism, are elements of primary concern to the new publics addressed by media religious teachers. It should also be noted that there are serious collective and political consequences to the larger roles accorded to them. For example, in the public sphere the preachers' new forms of authority and teachings regarding daily life have implications that may potentially mobilize Muslim youth and women in ways not previously seen. Each of the cases of current media preachers cited in this chapter confirm how religious challenges to existing political systems in the Muslim world are increasingly "not based only on personal reputation and knowledge of texts but also on a demonstrated grasp of society and the ability to share with audiences a grasp of their daily challenges" (Eickelman and Anderson 2003: 13).

Among the global cases of Islamic media preachers that we have profiled here, we find those who, like al-Qaradawi, project an Islamic message through popular media and appeal to the same youth and female demographic. Yet none of these others is in the same position of actually ruling authoritatively on matters of Islam law in the sense of being an authorized 'alim or mufti. Therefore, we may conclude that al-Qaradawi is unique in his role, but that his popularity has blazed the trail for a new cohort of Muslim media preachers who, on the whole, primarily connect with the personal "life"-style element of Islamic preaching, rather than the textually based "shari'a" one.

Summary

- This chapter explored the rise of Muslim media preachers, providing context and causes for their emergence and popularity, and considering the importance of such phenomena for Islamic authority.
- Significant background historical developments that laid the foundation for the emergence of popular media preachers in the Muslim world include:
  - the development of new technologies from cassettes to satellite television stations, that limit state control of media messages;
  - mass education and a new interest and public debate about Islamic topics;
  - Islamic revivalist movements that often focused on issues under the control of individuals when making personal lifestyle choices.
- Al-Qaradawi as the "global mufti" is the prime example of such a "media preacher." The chapter reviewed his biography including his humble origins, study at al-Azhar, achieving credentials for traditional scholarly authority as one of the ulema, his

participation in the Muslim Brotherhood movement, and transformation from scholar to media presence.
- The reach of his message is broadened both by satellite and internet connections and appeal to new audiences: women, youth, and the Muslim diaspora in the West.
- A survey of some other media preachers suggests how personal style and appeal combines with Islamic preaching and teaching in a range of local contexts:
  - Amr Khaled (Egypt): lacks traditional scholarly credentials, but has a pan-Arab appeal, especially to youth who network in projects for social activism;
  - K.H. Abdullah Gymnastiar (Gym) (Indonesia): appeals to lifestyle and relationship issues, but became discredited due to turmoil in his own family life;
  - Junaid Jamshed (Pakistan): represents the case of a "repentant" rock star;
  - Farhat Hashmi (Pakistan/Canada): a female preacher who developed courses on Qur'an and hadith; networking and franchising her instructional method across Pakistan and now globally, her program has a particular appeal in addressing lifestyle issues for contemporary Muslim women.

Discussion points

- What might an Islamic Reformation look like? How would an Islamic Reformation both resemble and be distinctive from the Protestant counterpart?
- What are some of the factors contributing to the emergence of the media preacher phenomenon in the Muslim world?
- How are the messages of these media preachers distinctive from traditional forms of religious argumentation and discourse? Why do you think these changes are taking place?
- Discuss how questions of gender play out in the lives and opinions of the new media preachers?
- Do the categories of "liberal," "conservative," "extremist," "moderate" make sense when we try to apply them to the opinions and rulings given by Muslim media preachers?

Further reading

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A participant-observation based study of Farhat Hashmi's al-Hoda Islamic courses in Pakistan.

Eickelman, Dale and Jon W. Anderson (2003) *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

An edited volume that pioneered the study of how new technologies and genres were globally impacting Islamic discourses and authority.

Hirschkind, Charles (2009) *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*, New York: Columbia University Press.

An exploration of the role of cassette sermons in impacting the genre of popular preaching and Islamic authority in contemporary Egypt.

Larsson, Goran (2011) *Muslims and the New Media*, Farnham, UK: Ashgate.

A discussion of how Muslim scholars have responded to new technologies from print, to the telephone, film, and the internet. Provides a useful historical and doctrinal context for understanding the emergence of Muslim media preachers.

Moll, Yasmin (2010) "Islamic Televangelism: Religion, Media and Visuality in Contemporary Egypt," *Arab Media and Society*, 10 (spring), available at www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=732, (accessed May 14, 2012).

Concentrates on the role of television as a medium in shaping the nature of contemporary Islamic preaching in Egypt.

Wise, Leslie (2003) "Words from the Heart: New Forms of Islamic Preaching in Egypt," MA Thesis, Oxford, available at http://users.ox.ac.uk/~metheses/Wise.html (accessed April 27, 2012).

The most detailed study of Amr Khaled from a scholar of media and communication theory. This and her other writings are particularly astute in understanding his appeal and the role that media and audience play in shaping his message.

Zaman, Muhammad Qasim (2007) *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Zaman presents a detailed historical overview and analysis of how Islamic scholars and their institutions are responding to social change and challenges to traditional authority in both the Arab world and South Asia.

www.onislam.net/english/shariah/contemporary-issues/

This website has replaced Islam Online as a repository for al-Qaradawi's opinions available in English translation.

http://wp.farhathashmi.com/

Farhat Hashmi and al-Huda materials, videos, etc.

www.jjamshed.com/

Junaid Jamshed audio and video

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al-Qaradawi, Yusuf (1980) *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*, available online at various sites, www.witness-pioneer.org/vil/Books/Q_LP.

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Hoesterey, James B. (2007) "The Rise, Fall, and Re-branding of a Celebrity Preacher," *Inside Indonesia*, 90 (Oct–Dec), available at www.insideindonesia.org/weekly-articles/aa-gym (accessed October 16, 2011).

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