Article

Beyond the Global Mufti: Religious Authority as Political Action

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Abstract: The International Union of Muslim Scholars, headquartered in Qatar, is an organisation of Muslim jurists founded in 2004 by Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī and led today by Aḥmad al-Raysūnī. Despite its importance in the current religious-political discourse in the Muslim world and beyond, this organisation received little attention from scholars, and no study to date has been dedicated to examine its claims and practices of authority. The central thesis of this paper is that the jurists of IUMS are religious and political authorities who: 1. embrace a wide range of "*umma*" issues, which allow IUMS to appear as the "authentic" and "autonomous" "guardian" of Islam; 2. play a role in international relations (ranging from Chad to China) as "supporters" of particular political actions; 3. negotiate a new type of religious authority embodied by the scholar-activist who emerged as a reaction to the deep religious and political transformations in the Sunni world. To conduct this case study, I approached IUMS from the perspective of sociology of religion (with a focus on the problem of authority) and relied on qualitative methods of analysis (contextualisation, descriptive discourse analysis, in particular), inspecting the local context of IUMS in Qatar as well the global context of *umma* politics, and using Arabic sources available on its website.

Keywords: The International Union of Muslim Scholars; *'ulamā'*; *umma*; authority; legitimacy

1. Introduction

The International Union of Muslim Scholars, headquartered in Qatar, is an organisation of Muslim scholars founded in 2004 by Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (Egypt-Qatar) and led by Aḥmad al-Raysūnī (Morocco). Despite its significance in the current religious-political discourse and transnational politics in the Muslim world and beyond, this organisation received little attention from scholars, and to date, hardly any research has been dedicated to its discourse and action. I am particularly interested, here, in the way IUMS envisions religious authority and how it displays authority practices both in the religious and political spheres. The fact that IUMS is a collective body of religious scholars makes the study of authority within this organisation a challenging task.

The existing research on IUMS fails to notice the complex identity of IUMS as an organ of a new type of *'ulamā'*, *religious scholars-activists*, who claim legitimacies of action as well as of religious knowledge. Muhammad Al Atawneh's paper (al-Atawneh 2014), the only academic endeavour to study IUMS so far, has described briefly the structure of IUMS and its strategies of establishing religious authority (as an independent umbrella, embracing *wasaṭiyya*[1] principle and legal pluralism) (al-Atawneh 2014, pp. 225–41). However, as it seems to me, IUMS is not an independent organisation. Although IUMS claims autonomy, it is difficult to ignore its roots and current support in various Islamic networks in the Muslim world (Shideler and David 2014, pp. 8–10).

It is also problematic to accept the claim that IUMS is an instance of legal pluralism as various Sunni schools and centres (al-Azhar for instance) as well as non-Sunnis are excluded from the organisation (except the mufti of Oman Aḥmad al-Khalīlī, who represents the Ibāḍī school, a minor *fiqh* school). In the current academic literature, the focus seems to

be laid on the founder of IUMS, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī; this literature approaches IUMS as just one of al-Qaraḍāwī's numerous initiatives. An overlooked dimension in the current research is that IUMS displays religious authority as political action in regional and global politics, beyond the charismatic role of al-Qaraḍāwī.

The central thesis of this paper is that IUMS is a sophisticated case of religious authority invested in political action whereby the activist *'ālim*: 1. embraces a wide range of "*umma*" issues which allow IUMS to appear as the "guardian" of Islam which is "authentic" as well as "autonomous" "beyond" any local political consideration; 2. plays a role in international relations (ranging from Chad to China) as "supporter" of particular political actions, which crosses the interests of certain Islamist movements and governments in the Middle East; 3. negotiates a new type of religious authority embodied by the scholar-activist who emerged as a reaction to the deep religious and political transformations in the Islamic world.

Sociology of religion has a relatively long tradition of studying Islamic organisations. A major advantage of sociology of religion is its ability to observe both the actors and the structures of the organisation under study. Its second advantage is its capacity to investigate religious claims as social actions, the function of which is to validate specific projects or aspirations. To conduct this case study, I relied on qualitative methods of analysis (contextualisation, descriptive discourse analysis, in particular), inspecting the local context of IUMS in Qatar as well the global context of *umma* politics, and using sources available on its website in Arabic.

2. Context

Critics of IUMS tend to contextualise its action in terms of its relations with Qatar. Yet, the Qatari context has little incidence on IUMS' claims to authority, its structures and figures of authority, its line of legal reasoning, or its general action plan. IUMS is not an instrument of Qatar's religious policy although as a guest-organisation sponsored by Qatar (Warren 2021, p. 35), it is occasionally involved in conferences and Islamic humanitarian initiatives taken by Qatari actors; overall, IUMS operates on the margin of the Qatari context and can allege little influence on Qatar's religious or political affairs.[2]

To a certain extent, one should contextualise IUMS in the global Islamic landscape; firstly, the 1500 members of IUMS come from 80 different Muslim countries, mostly far from the Gulf region, and secondly, its chief concerns focus on *umma* politics, mainly in countries where Muslims live as a minority or are engaged in conflicts. It is in this particular context that IUMS wishes to exert influence.[3] IUMS came to the fore in 2011 when it shaped a jurisprudence of revolution (*fiqh al-thawra*) to support protesters of the Arab Spring (Warren 2021, p. 2)

3. What Makes the Jurist's Authority in Islamic Ethics?

In Islamic ethics, the jurist-theologian, *'ālim* is the most prestigious religious authority, whether he intervenes individually or collectively within the framework of juristic-councils. Traditionally, the jurist-theologian has two main functions in the hierarchy of authorities in Islam: to produce fatwas[4], which gives him an authority on the daily affairs of Muslims, for those who accept it obviously, and to maintain the tradition, and thus mobilising the legitimacy of the transmitted religious knowledge. It is, therefore, a question of a double authority: that of tradition and that of the sharia. In view of the importance of religion in the identity of many Muslims today, the authority of the Muslim tradition had and still has a significant weight among Muslims both in the Muslim world and the West. This need for religious tradition has created a market for the jurist-theologian. Moreover, sharia[5], which is inseparable from the Islamic tradition, has become a field of permanent debate, and a source of social and political conflicts dominating the space of the private and public life of many Muslims. This creates additional opportunities of action for the jurist-theologian.

It is often assumed that the jurist-theologian obtains his authority from religious knowledge. What is overlooked by this assumption is how this legitimacy is supported and even surpassed in functionality by the legitimacy of action and network building,

which allow the *ʿālim* to transform his epistemic authority into moral, religious or political authority.

Religious knowledge continues to be a primary source of legitimacy in Islam because the link between the founding community and the subsequent generations is established through the transmission of a symbolic legacy. This is often a "simulacrum of the original knowledge" insofar as the origin is only an interpretation of the tradition by these same "transmitters" of the Islamic traditions from the 9th century on. Yet, it is not only an "epistemic link" that the religious scholar claims to guard, but indeed a social and political one that connects communities of the present with those of the past.

Generally speaking, legitimate religious knowledge in Islam is the mastery of Qur'anic studies, the prophetic or imamic tradition, theology and law. This religious knowledge is transmitted by recognised traditionalists and jurists, according to the various schools of thought which detain authority in a given context; it is by authorisations that senior scholars validate the degree of religious knowledge that allows a person to claim the status of a person who teaches or produces fatwas. This religious knowledge is acquired through transmission, peer recognition, and respect for specific ethics. Thus, these three pillars grant the authority figure the status of the scholar in the community, the guide of the *umma* and the guardian of its tradition. Knowing that religious knowledge is only transmitted in a particular interpretation, a religious scholar belongs to a specific school of law, thought, or traditions. Additionally, his authority is functional as long as he stays in this framework (Kister 1994, pp. 84–127).

It should be made clear that the mere knowledge of texts is not enough to make a person an authority figure. To transform this religious knowledge into "an order which inspires obedience"[6], the religious scholar must embody the deontology of the cleric and be part of a network of peers which allows him to act as a religious scholar. For without these elements, one would take an enormous risk of being challenged by peers and the community, knowing that it is all the more difficult to obtain this obedience in a world where religiosity is becoming individualised and complex.

Even the meaning of the religious knowledge to be acquired is a subject of dispute. Thus, a recurring issue in Salafi discourse, and in other Islamist or Islamic discourses, is the criterion by which it is possible to distinguish between good and bad scholars. This conflict of religious knowledge pits the Salafists against other Sunni interpretations, and divides the Salafists themselves. Ṣāliḥ b. Saʿd al-Suḥaymī, an influential Saudi Salafist scholar, considers the "divinely inspired" scholar (understood in the sense of a scholar who fears God and receives his blessing in return) to be one who follows the Qur'an and the Sunna, and calls for God's oneness and whose moral conduct is beyond reproach; this "divinely inspired" scholar is characterised by modesty, the fear of God, righteousness, and a command of the good. God, he says, raises the rank of those scholars (for him these scholars live in Saudi Arabia). On the other hand, the evil scholar is not God-fearing and is materialistic, gives fatwa without knowledge, calls for misguidance and innovation, and allows unlawful things like music or mixing between men and women.[7] It is assumed in al-Suḥaymī's view that al-Qaraḍāwī is not a divinely inspired scholar because he allowed a certain type of music.

All this shows that what counts is not only holding the "technical" religious knowledge, but above all being judged honourable and virtuous according to the belief of a particular group. The status of the cleric reflects the status that the community gives to its moral economy: based on trust in a religious, revealed, blessed and virtuous tradition. The theologian-jurist reinforces this trust and disseminates teachings and practices that maintain the foundations of that community.

However, such a pre-eminent position is normative, and the jurist-theologian has to accept the complexity of the Islamic religious-political field, and negotiate with the State and/or other actors in the religious field. Thus, the *ʿālim* often has a limited margin of action, which he tries to exploit, claiming an important role in the Islamic moral economy (even if the State took over the pious foundations, *waqf*). In the Western context, the jurist-

theologian has even fewer opportunities to assert his authority; he must not only negotiate within a secularised context, but he also has to deal with the institutional mechanisms of the organisation of the Muslim religion as well as the minority context of the Muslim community.

4. Competing Authorities

IUMS is one of the many collective structures of Islamic law competing over authority in Islamic law. To take the case of Saudi Arabia alone, there are various organisations which bring together Muslim jurists to produce rulings and transmit sharia; and thus, in Saudi Arabia we can encounter the *Majma' al-fiqh al-islāmī* (The Council of Islamic Law)[8] in Jedda in which jurists from 57 countries are represented, *al-Ri'āsa al-'āmma li-l-buḥūth wa-l-iftā'* (The General Directorate of Research and fatwa) composed of Saudi jurists[9], and the *al-Majma' al-fiqhī al-islāmī* in Mecca (an international organisation connected to the Muslim World League).[10] Each of these bodies has both local and global anchoring, entertaining complex relations with the Saudi political establishment.

Similarly to IUMS, these *fiqh* organisations all address "issues of the *umma*" and have recourse to the approach of *maqāṣid al-sharī'a,* in order to gain legitimacy as voices for all Muslims. Yet, perhaps one major difference distinguishes IUMS' jurists from the Saudi *fiqh* organisations, namely that IUMS embraces or takes political action. The Saudi *fiqh* organisations endorse more limited roles, which consist mainly in producing religious knowledge per se as rulings, research or educational materials (although this can be used to validate a political agenda as well).

Yet, it would be too simplistic to consider the three *fiqh* organs in Saudi Arabia as mere political-religious instruments in the hands of the Saudi government. These organs claim religious authority, and sometimes even political authority on global Muslim issues, but are quite prudent most of the time, avoiding any competition with the executive political power in Saudi Arabia. They prefer prudence, cooperation, to a certain extent, and autonomy insofar as it is possible, and as long as political power respects their relative autonomy, while it displays a sufficient command of social order. The authority of the *'ālim* is self-sufficient and self-evident in Islamic ethics, while that of political power needs an external justification (sharia). For this reason, in Muslim societies, relations between religion and politics are far more complex than simple funding and (mutual) instrumentalisation.

In the course of 2017, Saudi Arabia (in addition to Egypt, UAE and Bahrain) decided to enlist IUMS as a terrorist organisation (because of its alleged links to the Muslim Brotherhood). Saudi Arabia justified the decision by "fighting terrorism, drying up its sources of funding, combating extremist ideology and the tools for its dissemination and promotion, and working jointly to eliminate it and immunize societies from it".[11] IUMS is primarily accused of working "to promote terrorism by exploiting Islamic discourse and using it as a cover to facilitate various terrorist activities".[12] For Saudi decision makers, there are two major problems with IUMS: 1. it disseminates and promotes a competing Islamic discourse which could become a "threat" to Saudi society; 2. it is funded by Qatar, which is a sufficient political reason for Saudi Arabia to enlist it as a terrorist organisation.[13]

5. IUMS' Claims of Authority

For clarity purposes, we need to distinguish between claims and practices of authority. The former are underlying positions about one's status and its aspired influence in the public sphere while the latter are actions taken to perform the claims of authority. Claims of authority tell us a great deal about the identity of the agent and the role it wishes to play in the religious, moral, epistemic or political fields. Most often, the claims of Islamic authority make appeal to the normative ethics of legitimacy. For example, one might claim to be a caliph, an *imām*, *amīr*, a *'ālim* or a *faqīh* to mobilise the normative registers associated in Islamic ethics with these religious-political roles. All these functions are significant for various Muslim communities. It is another matter whether the practices of authority are derived from the same register or other fields of action in the modern times, or whether the

modes of action validate the claims of authority at all. In this section, my goal is to discuss the claims of authority made by IUMS. Afterwards, I will address its practices of authority.

IUMS presents itself as a scholarly umbrella of religious reference for the global Muslim community and an independent legal scholarly institution, *miẓalla 'ulamā'iyya marji'iyya jāmi'a li-l-umma wa mu'assasa 'ulamā'iyya shar'iyya mustaqilla*.[14] Insistence on the independence of the organisation is meant to foster the claim of authority over legal matters, implying the absence of the influence of governments and Islamist movements on its action.

Thus, IUMS claims the legitimacy of its organisational structure (umbrella, institution), and makes a first claim of authority as an organisation, functioning in some rational way as opposed to an ad hoc, charismatic or traditional functioning. IUMS also makes a claim about its authority as that of *'ulamā'*, religious scholars of law and theology, the highest religious authority today and in most periods of the history of Islam. Third, IUMS makes another claim about being a reference for Muslims; here, *marji'iyya* is a term used to utter Sunni religious authority (different from the connotation of *marji'iyya* in the Shii circles) (Walbridge 2001), although some confusion might arise as whether this Sunni *marji'iyya* is a religious authority, equivalent to the phrase *sulṭat al-'ulamā'*, the authority of the *'ulamā'* or a reference to both religious and political authority. Perhaps a distinction should be made between the shii *marji'iyyat al-taqlīd* (a reference of imitation with submission to a particular religious and political authority of a shii *marji'* and with specific implications such as collecting the *khums*) and the Sunni *marji'iyyat al-umma* (the reference as a religious and political guidance of the *umma* in a broad ideological sense without specific implications).

IUMS also makes a fourth claim of authority, that of endorsing the concerns of the global Muslim community, and, thus, aspiring to play a role of global guidance, a political-religious function in essence. Since the *umma* has no territorial boundaries, IUMS extends the scope of its authority to every place where Muslims live.

Finally, IUMS claims its authority to be specific to *sharia* matters, in other words, to the legal aspects of Islam, while in effect, *sharia* matters include rituals, war and peace, financial issues, ethical issues, social transactions, and civil and criminal aspects. Consequently, *sharia* matters also include political aspects, especially what pertain to international relations.

6. Practices of Authority

I defined practices of authority as actions taken to perform the claims of authority. In the case of IUMS, three major practices of authority have gained focus since its foundation in 2004: 1. producing and disseminating religious knowledge; 2. fatwa and legislation; 3. playing an active role in Muslim society and politics. While teaching and fatwa issuing are traditional practices of authority for a theologian-jurist, social and political activities are usually overlooked in the academic literature. Sunni *'ulamā'* are believed *to transmit* rather than *to take action,* while, in fact, the latter is an integral part of their authority (Zeghal 1996; Zaman 2002; Hatina 2010; Pierret 2013). Next, I will elaborate on each of these practices.

6.1. Producing and Disseminating Religious Education

IUMS provides training for the religious leadership, *qiyāda 'ulamā'iyya*, including technological skills as well as advanced legal reasoning and Islamic finance.[15] The purpose of such training is to make the theologian-jurist able to adapt to the modern transformations of the access to knowledge, particularly through the internet. IUMS also offers religious education to the public on various questions (such as pilgrimage) and seminars to the Muslim youth in different locations (in Europe, Africa and Asia).[16] The organisation also publishes books, videos and reviews to disseminate religious content produced by its members. Its main publication is the review *al-Umma al-wasaṭ* published in Arabic since 2010 with a focus on the Islamic *umma*, Islamic education, political *fiqh*, moderation, terrorism and family issues.[17] The general intention of IUMS is to support a modernised religious education sufficiently concerned with current tools and challenges (foreign languages, medicine, finance, politics, spirituality, etc.)[18] In view of these authority practices displayed in the field of Islamic knowledge, it appears that IUMS insists not on the epistemic authority

of '*ulamā*', which is taken for granted in matters of religion, but rather on their capacity to be resilient to changes around them, especially in the economic, technical and political fields. The new '*ulamā*' are expected to be extremely aware of their context, far beyond their knowledge of the tradition. This explains why the '*ulamā*' devote so much time and effort to the organisational authority, that is to rational-institutional structures and to platforms such as the media to broadcast their religious knowledge. *Acting* religious knowledge, and not only transmitting and teaching it, seems to be necessary to make the authority of the theologian-jurist up-to-date.

Furthermore, the '*ulamā*' now need to use various tools, from communication in media, to international workshops, and from foreign languages to medical and scientific knowledge in order to compete with rivals such as online preachers and intellectuals. IUMS' '*ulamā*' produce targeted knowledge, as one can see from their publications, which are relevant to current debates within Islam (education, politics, economy, etc.) and far from being a scholastic knowledge, that is only understood by the learned audience. This contextualised knowledge and organisational legitimacy are increasingly essential to the religious authority of the '*ālim* because the ways Islam itself displays today are immensely complex and encompass technological, social, economic and political transformations (Volpi and Turner 2007, pp. 1–19).

6.2. Fatwa and Legislation

One of the main practices of authority carried out by IUMS is issuing fatwas. The Jurisprudence and Fatwa Committee at IUMS is led by Nūr al-Dīn al-Khādimī, who was a minister of religious affairs in Tunisia (2011–2014), a specialist of Mālikī legal theory and an outspoken Islamist thinker involved in several political polemics.[19] The other members of the Committee are 'Ikrima Ṣabrī (Palestine), the famous imam of al-Aqsa mosque, often arrested by the Israeli government, Sālim al-Shaykhī (Libya-The UK) and Aḥmad Jāballāh (Tunisia-France) who both have strong connections to the Muslim Brotherhood and Faẓl Murād (Yemen), who is involved in International Islamic economy. The muftis of IUMS are particularly skilled in conjugating knowledge of *fiqh* and political action at national and international levels: They were selected by virtue of being both knowledgeable in Islamic legal matters and risk takers, as they are involved in political action. Additionally, thus, they owe their legitimacy (for IUMS' public) to being dissidents against ruling regimes in their countries, in addition to having proper *fiqh* knowledge.

In other words, these religious authorities took the risk of opposing power whether in Tunisia, Libya, the UK, France, Israel or Yemen. They might have, at some moments, collaborated with these regimes, but overall, *as authorities*, they have proven their autonomy *from ruling powers*. The legitimacy of opposing power is mobilised here to strengthen the authority of fatwas delivered as free from serving power, which is expected to increase the weight of this discourse in the eyes of the Muslim public.

The fatwas issued by the Committee include conventional questions (pillars of Islam, inheritance, etc.) as well as politics, economy, Muslim minorities, art, and coronavirus related fatwas.[20] Thus, the scope of fatwas encompasses almost all vital matters of private and public life today. As a consequence, the jurist's authority extends to all possible fields in which he signs in the name of sharia.

To take one example by way of illustration, a question was sent to the Committee of fatwas about the sharia ruling on giving alms to non-Muslims during the Corona epidemic. This fatwa was signed by the members of the committee besides the president of IUMS, Aḥmad al-Raysūnī and its general secretary the Iraqi Sunni scholar 'Alī al-Qaradāghī, the highest figures of authority in IUMS, to grant an even stronger authority to this fatwa, perhaps because the question is rather controversial. This fatwa states that "it is permissible to give alms to non-Muslims, especially in this difficult pandemic that the world is going through due to the Corona epidemic".[21] The ruling is justified by the principle of charity towards non-Muslims who did not persecute Muslims. The fatwa states that "charity and kindness towards non-Muslims (who did not aggress Muslims) is a legally prescribed

matter, and this includes giving alms, aid and gifts, whether the aid is cash, food, health, or communication, or by participating in efforts and supporting the official and unofficial authorities who confront this epidemic".[22] This is clearly an authorisation of humanitarian action taken by Islamic NGOs all over the world, and who, for various reasons, might be driven to help non-Muslims or to be involved in campaigns of assistance to non-Muslim victims of the coronavirus crisis.

It is crucial to add that fatwa production within IUMS is collective. This is, by no means, an innovation by IUMS' jurists. The collective production of fatwas has been a process widely practiced and known in the Muslim world and beyond since the mid-20th century (Shah 2014; Kersten 2019; Caeiro 2011). Deliberative fatwa adjoins to the jurist-theologian's authority the "old" legitimacy of *ittifāq* (juristic agreement) and *jumhūr* (the majority of jurists) although these mechanisms are appropriated, here, within a single organisation of *'ulamā'*. The collective character of IUMS' fatwas consolidates the *'ālim*'s action (versus a single *'ālim* relying on his own authority).

6.3. Guiding the Umma: A Role in Muslim Global Politics

Guiding the *umma* is a hybrid kind of authority that entails both religious and political authority. It is an overlooked function of the *'ulamā'*, especially since the modern states in Muslim countries turned most of them into employees, assigned to specific tasks, forbidding them from engaging in politics per se. As "heirs of the prophets", the jurists are expected by the tradition to say their word about the "issues of the *umma*" today, and IUMS does not spare the occasion to utter its opinion and even take action regarding certain issues, especially the ones that are subject of some consensus within the Muslim world (the Palestinian question for example). IUMS' support for Palestinians (especially to Islamic initiatives in Palestine) is a major part of its action and discourse, calling itself "a pulpit to serve al-Aqsa" and overtly siding with Hamas.[23]

IUMS assumes religious authority, as guides of the *umma*, in terms of stating what political actions are illegal according to Islamic law. For example, the terrorist attacks in various places, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq, are condemned by IUMS and so are the despotic regimes.[24] Thus, IUMS explicitly authorises the kind of politics that fits within their understanding of Islamic law, which should be based on peaceful *da'wa* and consultation rather than violence and despotism.

As far as political authority is concerned, IUMS displays care about "the wounds of the *umma*" and its victories.[25] In Islamic political ethics, a guide of the *umma* is indeed expected to *care about* Muslims and also to *care for* them. Since political power in most Muslim countries today is detained by nation-states preoccupied mostly with their own citizens and lacking in "Islamic political legitimacy" a void exists in terms of Islamic political authority. Such a role can only be played by autonomous jurists, which IUMS claims to be. The relative autonomy of its jurists from ruling regimes in the Muslim countries allow them to speak for "persecuted Muslims" from Myanmar to Canada. IUMS takes the denunciations of the *umma*'s wounds as its obligation.[26]

This political role of guiding the *umma* can be ambivalent. While it is true that IUMS embraces the major "issues of the *umma*", it often supports those causes in which Islamist movements are opposed to authoritarian regimes: Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, etc.[27] IUMS also supports Sunni factions in the Yemen conflict, calling the soldiers of the Arab alliance martyrs.[28] IUMS adopts a clear position with regard to Iran, calling Sunni countries to oppose Iran's military expansion in the Middle East.[29] This can be considered a sectarian position although most Sunni scholars beyond IUMS express similar views (and that many Shii religious scholars are equally sectarian). In particular, IUMS' authority is totally rejected in countries which are in conflict with Doha and Istanbul (such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt) (Warren 2021).[30]

7. Figures of Authority

The founder of IUMS, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, still holds the honorary title of president-founder. Al-Qaraḍāwī led IUMS from its foundation in 2004 to 2018, when he stepped down from the presidency of the Institute for health reasons, leaving his position to Aḥmad al-Raysūnī. Yet, al-Qaraḍāwī's line of reasoning and charisma are still present in IUMS' action, discourse and networks. Thus, al-Qaraḍāwī still enjoys the authority of the charismatic founder, bestowing legitimacy on IUMS and other figures of authority that carry on the work.

Al-Qaraḍāwī is an Egyptian Sunni jurist, theologian and preacher based in Qatar, and a prominent member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Born in 1926 in Egypt, he studied from primary school to doctorate in the schools and university of al-Azhar, obtaining the legitimacy of a *ʿālim* from this prestigious institution in 1953. In 1973, he obtained a doctorate on Zakat and its impact in solving social problems. Yet, what distinguishes al-Qaraḍāwī from thousands of other Azharis who obtained the title of *ʿālim* is his involvement in political action: He joined the Muslim Brotherhood in the early 1940s and became a disciple of Ḥasan al-Banna (d. 1949). Al-Qaraḍāwī was imprisoned in 1949 and again in 1954. In 1961, he went into exile in Qatar, where he became the director of the newly established Secondary Religious Institute. In 1977, he created the Faculty of Sharia and Islamic Studies at Qatar University, which he headed until his retirement in the late 1990s. His link to the Muslim Brotherhood was informal after his establishment in Qatar. He preferred to exercise intellectual-spiritual-historical leadership to the Muslim Brotherhood. His fatwas and the translation of his works (some fifteen of his books have been translated into several languages from Arabic) contributed to his global impact. The creation of the European Council for Fatwa and Research in Dublin in 1997 and The International Union of Muslim Scholars in 2004 in Qatar increased his influence. He is also a member of the Centre for Islamic Studies at Oxford University. His contributions to minority jurisprudence, an adaptation of Islamic Law to Muslim minority contexts, Islamic finance and *wasaṭiyya* (moderate Muslim thought) (Shavit 2015) thinking are widely recognised; and his writings on Islamic movements, Muslim theology and law as well as his religious shows on Aljazeera TV make him the most popular and influential Sunni theologian today (Maréchal 2009; Gräf and Skovgaard-Petersen 2009).

In a nutshell, al-Qaraḍāwī is a figure of authority not only because of his undisputed religious knowledge, but because his sphere of influence is supported by large political, media and religious networks. More importantly, al-Qaraḍāwī owes his charisma to being a "guide" in terms of religious knowledge, fatwa and political action. For this reason, his legitimacy is contested in certain countries such as Egypt by al-Azhar itself and Saudi Arabia because of the geopolitics that divide Arab and Muslim countries.

It is also worth mentioning here that al-Qaraḍāwī, contrarily to most Muslim jurists today, does not endorse a particular school of Islamic law. He argues for "comparing the opinions of the various law-schools to find out which opinion is the most adequate to current needs" (Shaham 2018, pp. 49–50). His method of fatwa is selective, rather than innovative, and consists in choosing among the existing legal literature produced by various schools, an opinion that seems to match his criteria of adequacy to modern Muslim societies and compatibility with the objectives of Islamic law.

Al-Qaraḍāwī's twofold legitimacy, based on religious knowledge and political action, sets a model to other members of IUMS; the latter also possess this double legitimacy although at less prestigious degrees. The current president of IUMS, Aḥmad al-Raysūnī who replaced al-Qaraḍāwī in 2018, enjoys credit both in the circles of religious knowledge as well among militant Muslims. Al-Raysūnī was born in 1953 in Northern Morocco. He obtained his diploma in Islamic law at al-Qarawiyyīn University in 1978 and his PhD in Islamic legal theory at Mohammed V University in Morocco in 1992. Between 1986 and 2006, he was a university professor at various places in Morocco, and especially at Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Ḥasaniyya, the most prestigious centre of religious training of *ʿulamāʾ* in Morocco. In the 1990s and 2000s, he was the most prominent scholar of Islamic legal

theory and ethics in North Africa, and the uncontested specialist of al-Shāṭibī's thought (Seniguer and Zouaoui 2020). His legitimacy within the circles of religious knowledge became international when he was appointed as director of the *Encyclopaedia of Islamic Legal Rules* by the International Council of Islamic Law in Jedda (a project that ran between 2006 and 2012). Subsequently he was invited to teach and supervise projects in various countries in the Muslim world. To date, al-Raysūnī has published over 20 books on Islamic legal theory and Islamic ethics, most of which are important contributions to *maqāṣid al-sharī'a* (highest objectives of Islamic law) applied to private and public spheres, including politics, as shown by his book *Fiqh al-thawra* (*The Jurisprudence of Revolution*), a justification of the revolts of the Arab Spring and a discussion of Islamic views of democracy.[31]

As for his legitimacy in political action, al-Raysūnī has been a regional Islamist leader in North Morocco since the 1980s. He was the head of the Islamist movement *League of Islamic future* (1994–1996) and that of the Islamic movement *al-Tawḥīd wa-l-iṣlāḥ* (1996–2003), both of which are close to the Muslim Brotherhood. *Al-Tawḥīd wa-l-iṣlāḥ* unified various Islamist groups at a national level, becoming the main Islamist opposition in Morocco, recognised by the Moroccan ruling monarchy, and constituting the PJD (Justice and Development Party). This party led the government in Morocco for a decade (2011–2021).[32]

As a figure of authority of IUMS, al-Raysūnī plays the guiding role of this organisation of *'ulamā'*. On the one hand, he supervises the production of knowledge and legislation. His authority as an Islamic jurist bestows credit on the publications and decisions taken by various committees of IUMS. On the other hand, al-Raysūnī proposes and executes the foreign policy and political relations as well as the organisational aspects of IUMS. So, the president acts as "a little Islamic ruler", with certainly no powers, but with sufficient religious and political authority to represent the *umma* and influence, to a certain degree, the ongoing political affairs in the Muslim world.[33]

Al-Raysūnī's scope of action goes beyond the function of mufti, which constitutes one of his tasks, but by far not the most important. IUMS' president is above all a guide of the *umma* on the burning and current issues at stake in the Muslim world: Al-Raysūnī declares jihad in Palestine as a religious obligation,[34] sets limits on freedom of expression[35], welcomes ministers and delegations of various countries (from Mali to Afghanistan), intervenes in the internal politics of Tunisia (supporting Islamists and denouncing their adversaries)[36] and Egypt[37] and calls to follow the *'ulamā'* who are, according to him, authorised by the Quran to protect the *umma* from error and misguidance.[38] Accordingly, al-Raysūnī asks, from his audience, obedience to the political and religious authority of the *'ālim* as a guide. As he puts it:

> So, whoever obeys the emir who commands what the scholars have decided and the scholars have deduced, then in reality he is obedient to the scholars. Whoever obeys the scholars is in fact obedient to God and His Messenger, so obedience in the end returns to God Almighty, returns to the Messenger of God (PBUH). Therefore, obedience is subject to the requirements of what God commanded, and what the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) commanded, meaning that obedience is subordinate to the requirements of religious knowledge.[39]

Thus, IUMS' president believes the *'ulamā'* have the final word on legitimating political power. As long as power obeys what the jurists consider being legitimate politics, power can be said to be legitimate. Politics are subordinate to religion, and this claim extends the jurist's authority beyond that of the mufti assigned to him by most ruling regimes in the Muslim world.

8. Concluding Remarks

The International Union of Muslim Scholars is a religious and political structure whose functions are established around the paradigm of guidance, *imāma*. The religious scholars of IUMS regard themselves as figures of authority, claiming to be guardians of Islam,

carrying the traditional roles of the *'ulamā'* as well as new roles (international and national politics, media). IUMS' structures of authority follow a pattern of an Islamic transnational organisation with an assembly, presidency, secretariat and specialised committees. This is a sophisticated structure which bestows the authority of the "collective" or the "bureau" on a particular religious discourse and action taken by the religious scholars that can be labelled activist. The different committees (family, education, proselytising, fatwa, Palestine, youth, Muslim minorities, investment, media) extend the scope of action beyond religious matters to vital political and social ones. Although it claims a more universal role, IUMS is a Sunni organisation that fully embraces the idea of the "religious scholar-activist".

As figures of authority, IUMS' *'ulamā'* display both capitals of religious knowledge and political action, linked to regional and global Muslim political issues. IUMS' *'ālim* claims the legitimacy of autonomy, action and knowledge at the same time. This triple resource gives him an influence over certain Muslim publics beyond the fatwa domain, although his political role sets limits on this influence insofar as IUMS is envisioned as an ally of the Muslim Brotherhood, a link that alienates it from countries such as Egypt, The United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

Notes

[1]　*Wasaṭiyya* is a normative and disputable term which could mean the "way of moderation" or " the approach of the middle way". Many Muslim thinkers and religious groups use the term to descibe their own interpretation as "Islamically mainstream", although these uses denote different things. IUMS uses *wasaṭiyya* in reference to al-Qaraḍāwī's methodology which claims to avoid extreme positions (salafism) and laxism (modernism). *Wasaṭiyya* could be roughly equated with mainstream sunni reformism.

[2]　Mu'assasat Qaṭar tastaḍīf nadwatan 'an "akhlāqiyyāt al-ṭibb al-ḥayawī" https://www.qf.org.qa/ar/media-center/islamic-principles-of-bioethics-examined-at-qf (last accessed 12 January 2022).

[3]　Intikhāb 31 'uḍwan jadīdan li-Majlis umanā' al-Ittiḥād al-'ālamī li-'ulamā' al-muslimīn. https://www.yenisafak.com/ar/world/3409592 (last accessed 12 January 2022).

[4]　A fatwa is a non-compelling juridical ruling on a question of private or public interest from the perspective of Islamic law issued by a Muslim jurist or a group of jurists.

[5]　Although perceived by Muslims in different ways, ranging from a rigorous law to an ethical path.

[6]　M. Weber envisioned authority as "the probability that an order with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of people" (Weber 1978, p. 53).

[7]　Kayfa yumayyiz al-insān bayna ṭālib al-'ilm wa-l-'ālim wa-'ālim al-sū'? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7n9a0HULPA (last accessed 12 January 2022).

[8]　Majma' al-fiqh al-islāmī al-dawlī. https://iifa-aifi.org/ (last accessed 12 January 2022).

[9]　al-Ri'āsa al-'āmma li-l-buḥūth al-'ilmiyya wa-l-iftā'. https://www.alifta.gov.sa/Ar/Pages/default.aspx (last accessed 12 January 2022).

[10]　al-Majma' al-fiqhī al-islāmī. https://ar.themwl.org (last accessed 12 January 2022).

[11]　Siyāsī/al-Mamlaka wa-Miṣr wa-l-Imārāt wa-l-Baḥrayn: tu'lin iḍāfat kiyānayn wa-aḥad 'ashar fardan ilā qawā'im al-irhāb al-maḥẓūra ladayhā. https://www.spa.gov.sa/1690714 (last accessed 12 January 2022).

[12]　*Idem*.

[13]　The main elements of the religious-political rivalry between Qatar and the Arab alliance of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt and Bahrain can be seen in the study by David H. Warren in his book *Rivals in the Gulf: Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, Abdullah Bin Bayyah, and the Qatar-UAE Contest over the Arab Spring and the Gulf Crisis*.

[14]　al-Ittiḥād al-'ālamī li-'ulamā' al-muslimīn. https://www.iumsonline.org/ar/ (last accessed 12 January 2022).

[15]　Lijān al-Ittiḥād: al-tadrīb wa i'dād al-'ulamā'. https://www.iumsonline.org/ar/Committees.aspx?ID=30 (last accessed 12 January 2022).

16. Lijān al-Ittiḥād:al-Shabāb. https://www.iumsonline.org/ar/Committees.aspx?ID=38 (last accessed 12 January 2022). Lijān al-Ittiḥād:al-Shabāb: al-Dawrāt. https://www.iumsonline.org/ar/Sections.aspx?ID=78 (last accessed 12 January 2022).

17. Lijān al-Ittiḥād: Maktabat al-Ittiḥād. https://www.iumsonline.org/ar/LibraryList.aspx?ID=2 (last accessed 12 January 2022).

18. *al-Umma al-wasaṭ* 8: al-taʿlīm al-sharʿī wa-subul tarqiyatith. https://pic.iumsonline.org/uploads/books/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8 %A3%D9%85%D8%A9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B7208-%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%8 4%D9%8A%D9%85%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B9%D9%8A%20%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%A8%D9%84%20%D8 %AA%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%AA%D9%87(1).pdf (last accessed 12 January 2022).

19. Siyāsiyyūn am duʿāt? mādhā taʿnī taḥawwulāt al-Nahḍa li-Tūnis. https://carnegie-mec.org/2019/03/01/ar-pub-78479 (last accessed 12 January 2022).

20. Lijān al-Ittiḥād. https://www.iumsonline.org/ar/FatwaList.aspx?ID=1050 (last accessed 12 January 2022).

21. Fatwā bi-khuṣūṣ dafʿ al-ṣadaqāt wa-l-musāʿadāt wa-l-maʿūnāt li-l-muṣābīn al-mutaḍarrirīn bi-jāʾiḥat Kurūnā. https://www. iumsonline.org/ar/ContentDetails.aspx?ID=11222 (last accessed 12 January 2022).

22. *Idem.*

23. Khuwayṣ: ʿuḍwiyyat al-Ittiḥād al-ʿālamī li-ʿulamāʾ al-muslimīn minbar jadīd li-khidmat al-Aqṣā. https://www.iumsonline. org/ar/ContentDetails.aspx?ID=21649 (last accessed 12 January 2022). al-Qaradāghī yastankir ḥukman miṣriyyan yaṣif Ḥamās bi-l-irhābiyya. https://www.iumsonline.org/ar/ContentDetails.aspx?ID=7795 (last accessed 12 January 2022).

24. Nadwa ḥawla: "khuṭūrat ḥukm al-fard wa-jināyat al-istibdād ʿalā l-bilād wa-l-ʿibād"—bi-mushārakat nukhba min al-ʿulamāʾ wa-l-mufakkirīn. https://www.iumsonline.org/ar/ContentDetails.aspx?ID=21395 (last accessed 12 January 2022).

25. al-Ittiḥād yuqīm nadwa ḥawla "wājib al-ʿulamāʾ tujāh jirāḥ al-umma wa-intiṣārātihā". https://www.iumsonline.org/ar/ ContentDetails.aspx?ID=21035 (last accessed 12 January 2022).

26. *Idem.*

27. al-Raysūnī: al-ʿunf al-ḥālī radd fiʿl ʿalā ʿunf al-thawra al-muḍādda. https://www.iumsonline.org/ar/ContentDetails.aspx?ID=17 39 (last accessed 12 January 2022).

28. Amīn ʿāmm al-Ittiḥād yuʾayyid ʿamaliyyat "ʿĀṣifat al-ḥazm" al-latī taqūduhā 10 duwal ḍidda al-inqilāb al-ḥūthī bi-l-Yaman wa-yuṭālib bi-ḥimāyat al-madaniyyīn. https://www.iumsonline.org/ar/ContentDetails.aspx?ID=7771 (last accessed 12 January 2022). al-Qaradāghī yuʿazzī fī l-junūd al-ʿArab bi-l-Yaman dāʿiyan Allāh an yataqabbalahum shuhadāʾ wa-kull al-shuhadāʾ al-yamaniyyīn wa-an yuʿajjil bi-l-naṣr al-mubīn muʾakkidan daʿm irādat shuʿūb al-minṭaqa. https://www.iumsonline.org/ar/ ContentDetails.aspx?ID=7432 (last accessed 12 January 2022).

29. Akhbār al-Ittiḥād. https://www.iumsonline.org/ar/UnionNews.aspx (last accessed 12 January 2022).

30. al-Qaradāghī yuḥayyī Turkiyā wa-Qaṭar ʿalā dawrihimā fī daʿm qaḍāyā al-umma. https://www.iumsonline.org/ar/ContentDetails. aspx?ID=224 (last accessed 12 January 2022).

31. al-Raysūnī: al-Sīra al-dhātiyya. http://raissouni.net/ (last accessed 12 January 2022).

32. *Idem.*

33. Maktab al-riʾāsa. https://www.iumsonline.org/ar/PresidentOfficeInfo.aspx (last accessed 12 January 2022).

34. al-Jihād fī Falasṭīn wa-li ajl Falasṭīn lā shakka fī mashrūʿiyyatih wa-wujūbih. https://www.iumsonline.org/ar/ContentDetails. aspx?ID=21660 (last accessed 12 January 2022).

35. al-Ḍawābiṭ al-sharʿiyya li-ḥurriyyat al-taʿbīr. https://www.iumsonline.org/ar/ContentDetails.aspx?ID=21605 (last accessed 12 January 2022).

36. Barlamāniyya tūnisiyya tatazaʿʿam ʿiṣāba balṭajiyya. https://www.iumsonline.org/ar/ContentDetails.aspx?ID=16172 (last accessed 12 January 2022).

37. Daʿā li-l-qunūt li ajlihim.. al-Raysūnī yuṭālib al-shaʿb wa-l-Azhar wa-l-nukhab al-miṣriyya al-tadakhkhul li-waqf tanfīdh aḥkām al-iʿdām bi-ḥaqqi al-ʿulamaʾ. https://www.iumsonline.org/ar/ContentDetails.aspx?ID=19658 (last accessed 12 January 2022).

38. Ittibāʿ al-ʿulamāʾ aṣl aṣṣalah al-Qurʾān li-ḥimāyat al-umma min al-zaygh wa-l-inḥirāf. https://www.iumsonline.org/ar/ ContentDetails.aspx?ID=12939 (last accessed 12 January 2022).

39. *Idem.*

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