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The Changing Face of Islamic Authority in the Middle East

Richard A. Nielsen

In 2014, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry urged the government of Egypt to engage the Muslim clerics on its payroll to attempt to counter the terrorist group variously known as the Islamic State (IS), ISIS, or ISIL.[1] As a result, the highest-ranking religious official in Egypt, Grand Mufti Shawki Allam, spearheaded a social media campaign urging Arabic speakers to call the group "Qa'ida Separatists in Iraq and Syria" and urging English speakers to use the acronym QSIS (and the twitter hashtag #QSIS).[2] Coverage in English-language media highlighted the Grand Mufti's role as a traditional authority in the Muslim world, with headlines like, "Call Islamic State QSIS Instead, Says Globally Influential Islamic Authority."[3] In parallel with the campaign, the government body headed by the Grand Mufti, tasked with issuing official *fatwas* (Islamic religious rulings) for the Egyptian government, released two fatwas delegitimizing ISIS and discouraging participation in Jihad abroad.[4]

This rebranding effort was a failure of spectacular proportions: Neither the Arabic nor English names promoted by the campaign gained any purchase. A Google search in Arabic for "the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria" (*al-dawla al-islamiyya fi-l-'iraq wa-l-sham*) yields millions of results, many orders of magnitude greater than if one searches for the Grand Mufti's alternative, "Qa'ida separatists in Iraq and Syria" (*munshaqi al-qa'ida fi-l-'iraq wa-l-sham*). The Twitter hashtag "#ISIS" had been used approximately 400,000 times as of Spring 2015,

while "#QSIS" had been used only seventy-eight times, mostly by journalists covering the campaign itself.[5] In short, the most prominent official religious figure in Egypt, and possibly the Sunni Muslim world, completely failed in its attempt to change the name by which ISIS would be known, even in the community where it is thought to exercise its greatest authority. At first glance, this failure is deeply puzzling. How is it that one of the most widely respected Sunni authorities was almost entirely ignored when it attempted to sideline radical jihadists?

This Brief explains the changing nature of Islamic authority in the Sunni Muslim Middle East. It makes three claims. First, it describes the various Muslim authorities in the Middle East and demonstrates that there is a distinction between those nominally in authority and those who actually have broad influence. Second, it describes how traditional Muslim authorities have lost ground to new, more ideologically diverse clerical voices, in part because of what has been called "media authority," which accrues to those clerics who have established themselves in new media and gained substantial followings as a result. Third, it argues that the decline in the authority of state-employed clerics means that governments that have previously relied on religious authority now risk actually undermining that authority when they seek religious cover for their political projects.

Taken together, the evidence shows that religious authority in the Middle East is not as absolute as it often appears to outside observers. Even the most influential authorities face substantial limitations on their ability to change worldwide Islamic discourse around contested issues like the correct definition of "jihad."

Muslim Authorities and Authority in the Middle East

Authorities in Sunni Islam come in many varieties.[6] Throughout this Brief, I refer to Muslim authorities as "clerics." Sunni Islam does not have a formal priesthood, nor clergy who are ordained *to* the priesthood, so the Christian definition of "cleric" is not quite accurate in a Muslim context. Instead, this Brief regards as a cleric someone who produces Islamic content in generally recognized Islamic genres that attempts to convey religious messages to others.[7] Such individuals could also be called "preachers" or "religious elites," but each of these terms has connotations that could also be problematic.

The authority of many Sunni Muslim clerics is not based solely on their religious positions or credentials. Rather, clerics can derive authority from a number of *academic* sources: peer review, appointments to prominent academic positions, and publishing influential scholarly ideas. Because clerics seem to hold sway with their followers, it might be easy to assume that Muslim clerics are necessarily regarded as authoritative by lay Muslims and that their authority comes by virtue of their placement within a religious hierarchy—as with, say, the authority of priests in the Roman Catholic Church. Although some Muslim clerics do derive their authority from such positions, most are operating in a different context regarding the source of their authority, which results in a different dynamic between clerics and the faithful.

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The key to understanding how Islamic authority is changing in the Middle East is to recognize that not all nominal authorities really *have* authority, and not all those who actually enjoy authority are recognized institutionally as legitimate authorities. I regard an individual as having authority if when that individual makes statements about what other individuals should think or do, at least some of those individuals change their thoughts or actions in the desired way as a result. This definition of authority as having *influence* differs substantially from how Islamic authority is often discussed. Many treatments of Islamic authority focus on "the authorities"—those individuals who hold official positions in governments and religious organizations—while overlooking those who do not have an appointment in some religious or political hierarchy. But this emphasis mistakes institutional position in a hierarchy for actual influence.

In fact, "the authorities" in Islam do not necessarily exercise any genuine authority. These individuals may appear to be at the top of a religious hierarchy within a particular Middle East country, but few, if any, people obey when they issue directions. In fact, the changes in the nature of Islamic authority over the past twenty years have largely been a story of traditional authorities ceding ground to individuals who have influence for reasons other than institutional appointments or position. So to understand the changing face of Islamic authority in the Middle East, it is crucial to recognize that authority is something broader than the power wielded by those traditionally understood to be "the authorities."

Who are these official authorities, and how is their authority changing? Muslim clerics are, of course, religious actors and are often referred to in the Middle East as "men of religion" (*rijal al-din*). They promote religious ideas, participate in religious rituals, and urge adherence by others to religious tenets. They might urge the faithful to repentance, give sermons, lead prayers, and issue *fatwas*—Islamic legal rulings that can cover virtually any aspect of life. Different clerics may perform different roles in religious society, which gives rise to a variety of titles by which they are known: *imam* (one who gets up before the congregation to lead prayers), *khatib* (one who gives the *khutba*, or sermon, during worship), *mufti* (one who issues *fatwas*), *qari* (one who recites the Quran), *faqih* (an expert in jurisprudence), *qadi* (a judge), and *muezzin* (one who issues the call to prayer).

Importantly, however, Muslim clerics are also enmeshed in a set of institutions akin to an academic system, which both motivates and constrains their behavior. This is evident in their most common name throughout the Middle East: '*ulama*', meaning "scholars."

Without an understanding of the incentives and pressures that Muslim clerics face from their academic community, some of their behavior and statements can seem puzzling.

Muslim clerics signal their belonging to and participation in academia by deploying symbols, many of which are familiar to academics in the United States: scholarly credentials and degrees, hierarchies based on scholarship, particular modes of speech and writing, and even specialized clothing. Indeed, Muslim clerics generally provide summaries of their scholarly accomplishments—degrees earned, positions held, scholarship produced, students mentored—in a genre very similar to the *curriculum vitae* in American academia. Examining a globally representative sample of Arabic-speaking Muslim clerics on the Internet, I find that 55 percent have a master's degree and 50 percent have a doctorate, typically in one of the "Islamic sciences" (jurisprudence, Quranic exegesis, and so forth). Fourteen percent of these clerics mention academic positions as assistant professors, 16 percent as full professors, and 10 percent as deans or provosts—all academic positions familiar to anyone in American academia.

Muslim clerics have long been pious scholars, but interference by governments in Muslim-majority countries over the past century created much of the trappings of academia in which Muslim clerics now find themselves enmeshed. As governments sought to carry out projects of state-building, traditional religious authorities presented them with both a challenge and an opportunity. Because of their influence, religious authorities were one of the few groups in society capable of thwarting the projects of political elites—but they also could serve as a source of legitimacy if they could be successfully coopted. Accordingly, in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and elsewhere, political elites worked to coopt the religious establishment by confiscating their independent sources of funding (typically religious endowments) and making them public sector employees. Clerics had traditionally served as educators, so state funds paid for teachers and professors as well as for *imams*. Traditional Islamic norms of scholarship fused with norms imported from the Western university model to create the academic field that Muslim clerics now inhabit.

These government-supported, academically oriented clerics are those most commonly considered the "traditional" authorities in most Muslim-majority countries of the Middle East. In Saudi Arabia, for example, the traditional authorities constitute the Council of Senior Scholars (*MajlisHay'atKibar al-'Ulama*'), which is the country's ranking religious body offering advice to the King. The council is headed by the Grand Mufti of Saudi

Arabia, currently Abd al-Aziz bin Muhammad al-Shaykh, who is appointed by the King and is responsible for issuing official *fatwas* (legal rulings) on behalf of the Saudi government. The scholars on the Council have substantial training and a record of scholarly achievement, but they are also selected for their political views, including support for the royal family. As a result, these clerics are derisively referred to by their critics, who consider them to be regime lackeys, as the "scholars of power" (*'ulama' al-sulta*).

Other countries in the region have installed similar bodies of religious authorities to issue official religious rulings in the name of the state. In Egypt, the venerable al-Azhar mosque and university serve as the official voice of Islam for the Egyptian government, in concert with the office of the Grand Mufti of Egypt, who runs the government *dar al-ifta'* (office of *fatwas*), which issues official religious rulings on behalf of the government. Similar bodies exist in the United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Jordan, and elsewhere, although many citizens in these countries look to the Egyptian and Saudi authorities because of their prominence and international fame.

Not all clerics are employed by their respective governments or are formally trained as academics, but the academic flavor of modern Muslim clericism can still shape their actions in ways that otherwise appear puzzling. Few, if any, of the clerics who publicly support the global jihadist movement have day jobs as university professors, but they display the trappings of academia. Anwar al-Awlaki, a Yemeni-American who is credited with inspiring a dozen attempted jihadist attacks, referred to Nidal Hassan, the perpetrator of the Fort Hood shootings, as his "student," making the attack sound almost like a class project. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the current leader and self-proclaimed caliph of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, touts his PhD in Quranic studies and his knowledge of Islamic law in his otherwise cryptic CV.[8] Jihadists have argued over questions of plagiarism and scholarly influence, as measured by citations. And even Osama bin Laden followed the academic pretension of having his photograph taken in front of a bookcase laden with scholarly tomes.

But although government-funded, academically oriented clerics have long been viewed as "the authorities," it is no longer necessarily the case that they automatically enjoy authority by virtue of their positions, or their proximity to ruling elites. The process by which clerics accrue authority has changed, leaving them to compete for followers under a new and shifting set of opportunities and constraints.

The remainder of this Brief examines how changes in the media environment of the Middle East have propelled this change and are likely to shape the balance of authority in Sunni Islam for years to come.

Media Authority versus Traditional Authority

Most individual Muslim clerics generally do not exercise enough authority to individually command large swaths of the faithful to action. When they do exert authority, it is often exerted through unofficial channels—derived from popularity, scholarship, and personal reputation rather than from institutional position. This in part explains why an institution like the Egyptian *dar al-ifta'* cannot simply direct Muslims to refer to ISIS as QSIS and have them get in line.

According to a number of commentators, this indicates that Islamic authority has been in an extended crisis.[9] Traditional religious authorities are ceding ground to upstart clerics with new and varied agendas. I believe that this crisis has been exacerbated by the spread of mass media technology throughout the Muslim world, which has undermined the authority of "traditional" religious elites and aided clerics of various orientations who rely on this new "media authority." Traditional Muslim authorities have lost ground to new clerical voices who have made their reputations in new media and gained substantial followings as a result. And although states in the Middle East can often control the range of messages delivered by traditional authorities through cooptation or coercion, governments are less capable of fully regulating the virtual religious sphere. As a result, the rise of new authorities has broadened the range of Islamic discourse.

The rise of media outside of state control—including independent presses, audiocassette tapes, and, most recently, the Internet—has, then, contributed to the declining authority of traditional authorities. The availability of independent media enhances the authority of some clerics and not others, depending on their source of clerical authority. For the most part, media like audiocassettes or the Internet facilitate communication and information-sharing, so they advantage clerics who rely for authority on their popularity. Clerics who rely on scholarship, peer recognition, and government sponsorship benefit less from innovations like the Internet, because wider visibility in the public sphere does not necessarily enhance their standing. Earlier media technologies—newspapers, magazines, and audiocassette tapes—had significant effects on changing sources of authority, but the

Internet appears to be accelerating and cementing shifts in Islamic authority because of its greater capacity for mass communication.

The authority that some clerics gain through media exposure has been called "media authority,"[10] and I refer to the clerics who rely heavily on media for their authority as "media clerics." This designation actually mirrors the phrases used by some Muslims to refer to these clerics, such as "YouTube scholars" and "Google sheikhs."[11] These labels are intended dismissively, as pejoratives suggesting that the cleric in question is not a serious scholar—but their use mostly reveals the inability of traditional authorities to compete for the ears of fellow Muslims in the new media environment. After all, many of these establishment clerics have also taken to Twitter and Facebook to get their message out.

Yusuf al-Qaradawi is a cleric who has mastered the requirements of media authority and used it to become one of the most influential voices in Sunni Islam. His rise to prominence was facilitated by a show called "Sharia and Life" that he hosted on al-Jazeera's popular satellite television channel until 2013, which reportedly reached 60 million people each week.[12] Al-Qaradawi was also the founder and religious leader of the website islamonline.net, founded in 1997, which helped to spread his religious philosophy. In 2013, as the Syrian civil war was reaching a fever pitch, it was Al-Qaradawi who appears to have helped change the discourse around the war from one of civil strife to one of jihad, through repeated calls on his show for young men throughout the Muslim world to leave their homes to support the Syrian uprising.[13]

Another example is Muhammad al-Urayfi, who boasts 14.4 million followers on the microblogging platform Twitter and has communicated to them through over 30,000 tweets. Despite his widespread popularity, though, al-Urayfi's experience as a media personality also highlights the perils of life as a media figure. Thus, Al-Urayfi was a guest on a 2013 episode of "Sharia and Life," where he was asked to explain a *fatwa* that he had purportedly written permitting temporary marriages for fighters in the Syrian conflict so that they could have sex. al-Urayfi disavowed what he considered an erroneous position and claimed that someone had posted the *fatwa* in his name, mimicking his website, to make it appear that he had endorsed the ruling. Media authority opens new avenues for such exploitation, because it is easier for impostors to hijack the identity of an influential authority when their messages are mediated through personal websites, Facebook, or Twitter.

Another effect of the media revolution on Islamic authority is that Internet "*fatwa* banks" are replacing local religious authorities as the primary source of religious advice and guidance. Traditionally, when faced with uncertainty about how to apply Islamic doctrine in their own lives, lay Muslims can ask a religious authority for advice or guidance or for an Islamic legal ruling about their situation, which is usually given in the form of a *fatwa*. Hundreds of thousands of such *fatwas* are available on aggregator websites like islamonline.net and islamway.net, where future audiences can access them indefinitely. Some of these have been viewed widely; the most often viewed *fatwa* on islamway.net has been viewed 1.3 million times.[14] This *fatwa*, entitled "The Question of Satisfying the Desire of Women," exemplifies the fact that many of the most widely viewed online *fatwas* answer questions related to sex.

It is telling that this *fatwa* is not from one of the famous establishment clerics, but rather was issued by a lesser known preacher named Khaled Abd al-Monam Rifai, whose writings would have been extremely unlikely to circulate so widely without the democratizing influence of the Internet.

The Internet is also empowering *women's* voices in Islam, especially among conservative religious social movements, like Salafism, whose ideologies with respect to gender typically severely restrict women's participation in public religion. In a detailed examination of writers on the prominent Salafi website saaid.net in February 2016, I find a surprising proportion of women writers: 43 out of 216. These women tend to write on so-called "women's issues" but sometimes stray far beyond, writing on occasion about jihad and other topics typically reserved for men. Part of the appeal for the Salafi movement of these female preachers is that they can deliver messages that men cannot ("I am a woman and I oppose the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women"), and they can mobilize audiences that male clerics have trouble reaching. Salafis have thus pragmatically opted to allow female preachers some religious authority in order to enhance the movement by increasing its popularity with women.[15]

Governments in the Middle East have grown concerned about the interpretations proffered by the new Internet clerics and have attempted to impose "official Islam" to solve the crisis of authority within their own borders. These efforts, however, have met with only limited success. The government of Saudi Arabia, for example, has responded to the proliferation of competing legal rulings by declaring any *fatwas* not issued by the Council of Senior Scholars illegal, but *fatwa* banks like islamway.net are still

widely accessed in the Saudi kingdom.[16] Egypt attempted to create media authority for the state-funded religious authorities of al-Azhar by rolling out a new website, www.azhar.eg, in the summer of 2015. The website is flashy but relatively slow to load, however, and lacks many of the elements that have driven traffic to the websites of non-establishment clerics.

Moreover, in the new age of Internet-mediated Islamic authority, traditional authorities can sometimes appear out of step in ways that further undermine their already eroding authority. For example, in a widely publicized incident, a scholar at al-Azhar issued a now-notorious "breast-feeding *fatwa*" which ruled that male and female coworkers could permissibly work together (usually considered a forbidden mingling of the sexes) if the female coworker were to breastfeed her male colleague, thus making them honorary kin in Islamic law.[17]

This drew mockery and scorn as it made the rounds on the Internet, where those re-posting news articles about the event in Arabic and English took the ruling as evidence that traditional Islamic authorities were out of touch with modern realities.

The Declining Effectiveness of State-Deployed Religious Authority

During the past century, governments in the Middle East have attempted to control religious authority and turn it to their purposes by convincing or coercing clerics to issue opinions supporting the political projects of the rulers. One political cartoon portrays this as the "cleric switch": a battery-operated cleric that can be deployed at will by the state.[18] But paradoxically, such cartoons are part of the evidence that this is no longer a very effective tool of statecraft. As the nature of Islamic authority has changed, the ability of regimes in the Middle East to harness religious authority has declined. Even more intriguing is the possibility that continued overuse of this strategy is actually hastening its demise.

Political events past and present have created pressing circumstances for governments in the Middle East and beyond who would like to persuade the Muslim inhabitants of the Middle East to behave in certain ways and not others. In one particularly notable example, the United States sought permission from the Saudi monarchy to use the kingdom as a base for military operations during the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq. However, this situation seemed to clearly violate Islamic laws of war, which prohibit Muslims from aiding non-Muslims in attacking fellow Muslims. Some in Saudi Arabia were also troubled by the presence of non-Muslim soldiers in the country that contains the holy cities of Mecca and Medina and their holy sites, including the Kaaba, toward which Muslims pray. The latter issue was a core grievance behind Osama bin Laden's turn against the Saudi kingdom and his decision to organize attacks against both Saudi and U.S. interests. The Saudi government wanted to allow the basing of U.S. forces in order to strengthen their military alliance with the U.S., so they leaned on the popular Grand Mufti, Abd al-Aziz Bin Baz, to issue a *fatwa* ruling that the action was permissible.[19]

More recently, governments in the Middle East and elsewhere have sought to harness religious authority to blunt the appeal of militant jihadist groups. In 2004, King Abdullah II of Jordan convened a large number of Muslim scholars from a broad array of schools of Islamic thought to issue the Amman Message, which laid out an ecumenical, anti-jihadist vision of Islamic unity.[20] Efforts have been underway since 2014 to undermine the claims of ISIS with counterclaims by the official clerics of a number of countries; the campaign by Egypt's authorities was just one of several efforts in this direction. (One of the strangest such campaigns occurred when Jordan enlisted the pro-al-Qaeda cleric Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi in its efforts to secure the release of Jordanian fighter pilot Muath al-Kasasbeh, who was captured by ISIS after his plane was downed in 2014. This effort was ultimately unsuccessful, because ISIS had already executed the pilot and was negotiating in bad faith, a move that infuriated al-Maqdisi.[21])

Many of these efforts appear to reflect the belief of policy makers, both in the Middle East and in the U.S., that the "cleric switch" remains effective: If a sufficient number of traditional clerics can be trotted out to endorse a particular opinion, then this will result in Muslims in the region behaving as political elites wish them to. But the limited success of such efforts in recent times suggests that while this may have been true in the past, it is not true now.

In fact, efforts by governments to harness religious authority for political purposes can backfire, undermining the authority of the very clerics on which the government relies. If authority is fundamentally about influence, then governments that force their preferred religious authorities to issue directives can risk revealing those clerics' *lack* of authority. This can happen through at least two processes. First, many Muslims are skeptical of clerics who are too close to political power and may discount religious authorities who are revealed to be malleable to government requests for desired rulings. Second, if the response by lay Muslims to regime-sponsored clerics is tepid, then future edicts by these same clerics are even less likely to

be followed, because now everyone knows that no one else is listening to them. Both of these outcomes are especially likely in the Internet age. Stories speculating about the ulterior motives of clerics and the disobedience of their followers circulate in Islamic-themed Internet chatrooms, making religious authorities' failures more public than ever before.

Conclusion

Who holds authority in Islam today? Because of media changes in the Middle East, Islamic authority is arguably more diffuse than at any point in its prior history, and religious authority in the region is no longer—and perhaps never was—as absolute as it has often appeared to outside observers. Even the most influential of Islam's traditional authorities now face surprising limitations on their ability to change worldwide Islamic discourse around contested issues, while media-savvy outsiders have gained the ability to speak to, and often persuade, millions.

Failure to comprehend this change has important implications for the interactions of Western governments with rulers in the region. This Brief began with an episode revealing the limits of traditional authorities in Egypt, who failed to change the discourse around ISIS despite their apparent position as pre-eminent spokespersons for Sunni Islam. That campaign was apparently prompted by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's urging the Egyptian government to pressure its religious officials to "do more" to counter the message of ISIS. Instead, what the incident made clear was that there is no longer a "cleric switch" that policy makers can push to sway the faithful by manipulating the messages of Islam's traditional authorities.

Understanding these dynamics is critical for anyone seeking to make sense of the role of religion in the politics and future of the Middle East. Religious authority still influences the lives of millions in the region, but it is more fluid and "up for grabs" than ever before. This has several important implications. Observers of Islam should not expect moderate voices to be able to definitively and permanently silence less moderate voices within Islam. And pushing moderate religious elites to do more can in fact be counterproductive, because it risks revealing the limits of their authority and thus undermining that authority further.

Endnotes

1 This organization is known by several names: the Islamic State, ISIS (an acronym for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria), ISIL (the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant), and Da'esh (an Arabic acronym for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, *al-dawla al-islamiyya fi-l-'iraqwal-sham*). For an overview of some of al-Azhar's recent activities in relation to ISIS, see Dr. Michael Barak, "The Al-Azhar Institute: A Key Player in Shaping the Religious and Political Discourse in Egypt" (International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, ICT Jihadi Monitoring Group, 1916).*

2 https://www.facebook.com/QSnotIS (accessed 5/4/2016).*

3 Patrick Kingsley, "Call Islamic State QSIS Instead, Says Globally Influential Islamic Authority," *The Guardian*, August 27, 2014.*

4 "Is it Permissible for Young Muslims to Join QSIS and Establish an Islamic State? *Dar al-Ifta al-Missriyyah* and "My Son in Travelling for Jihad Without my Permission," *Dar al-Ifta al-Missriyyah* (accessed 5/4/2016).*

5 Google searches by the author, March 2015.

6 Islam is broadly divided into two sects, Sunni and Shia, which emerged because of a debate about who should lead the then young faith after the death of its founding prophet, Muhammad. Sunnis constitute about 90 percent of Muslim adherents and have relatively non-hierarchical structures of religious authority with no universally recognized leaders. Shiite authority is more hierarchical, with religious authority concentrated in a few widely recognized figures. This Brief focuses on authority in Sunni Islam.

7 My definition of "cleric" casts a wider net than definitions employed by some other scholars of Islam, including Qassim Zaman and Malika Zheghal. These scholars typically view as clerics only individuals who have sufficient scholarly credentials to be regarded as such in Sunni Islam, but this additional requirement risks omitting the comparatively less credentialed upstarts who are upending religious authority in the Muslim world.

8 An English-language summary of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's Arabic-language CV, referred to as his "Biography," is available at https://pietervanostaeyen.wordpress.com/2013/07/15/abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-a-short-biography-of-the-isis-sheikh/ (accessed 5/4/2016).*

9 Richard W. Bulliet, "The Crisis within Islam," *Wilson Quarterly* (Winter 2002), pp. 11–19. *

10 Susan Herbst, "Political Authority in a Mediated Age," *Theory and Society* 32, no. 4: 481–503.

11 See, for example, the discussion Nasr al-Fahd's credentials in this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6zZ5-

uJFmY#t=102s (accessed 5/4/2016). "He had many *shuyukh*, so he's not a drive-by sheikh – the ones who pop up suddenly on Youtube."*

12 Alexander Smoltczyk, "Islam's Spiritual 'Dear Abby': The Voice of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood," *Spiegel Online International*, February 15, 2011.*

13 Thomas Hegghammer and Aaron Y. Zelin, "How Syria's Civil War Became a Holy Crusade: One of the World's Most Influential Clerics Declares War," *Foreign Affairs*, July 3, 2013. *

14 Khaled abd al-Monam Rifai, "The Question of Satisfying the Desire of Women," *islamway.net* [in Arabic] (accessed 4/19/2016).*

15 Richard A. Nielsen, "The Circumscribed Authority of Female Preachers in the Salafi Movement" (unpublished manuscript, March 19, 2016).*

16 Alexa web traffic data show that islamway.net is the 583rd most popular website in Saudi Arabia as of May 4, 2016. "How popular is islamway.net?" *alexa.com*. *

17 "Breastfeeding Fatwa Causes Stir," BBC News, May 22, 2007.*

18 This cartoon circulated on Twitter and Facebook: https://twitter.com/y_bn_m/status/501438275916427264 [in Arabic] (accessed 4/19/2016).

19 Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick, and David Powers, eds., *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and Their Fatwas*, Harvard Studies in Islamic Law (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

20 The Amman Message is available at http://jordan.specicom.eu/pages/amman.pdf. The press release announcing it issued by the Jordanian Embassy as well as related official statements, press releases, and related newspaper articles and the like are available at http://web.archive.org/web/20070816204118/http://www.jordanembassyus.org/new/pr/pr11092004.shtml.

21 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56azfP8yI0E (accessed 5/4/2016).

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