Shaping Global Islamic Discourses

The Role of al-Azhar, al-Medina and al-Mustafa

Edited by Masooda Bano and Keiko Sakurai

EDINBURGH
University Press

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

(International) in the United Kingdom
Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations

Contents

Part Three:
Returning Graduates and Transformation of the Local

Acknowledgements

Introduction

MASOODA BANO AND KEIKO SAKURAI

Claims abound of Saudi oil money fuelling Salafi Islam across cultural and geographical terrains as far removed as the remote village hamlets of the Swat valley in Pakistan and sprawling megacities such as Jakarta.[1] Assumptions that the Iranian state is fighting proxy wars with Sunni Arab states in foreign lands similarly tend to be promoted to the status of fact.[2] In fact, however, there are few empirically grounded studies that explore how those with hegemonic aspirations embed their ideologies in locales to which that thought and its accompanying practices are very foreign. Questions about how ideas are transported from an assumed core to societies viewed to be on the periphery, and how these ideas are embedded, if at all, within the complex socio-economic and political milieus of their new host societies, are more often answered through the creation of hypothetical scenarios than by marshalling scholarly evidence. We still lack academically sound responses to certain critical questions, such as: what enables a particular brand of Islam to gain centrality among competing positions?; to what extent do national governments play an active part in promoting a global Islamic discourse?; and in what ways do the Islamic discourses that acquire global attention challenge local beliefs and practices? This volume is designed to address this gap. It represents a rare attempt to map the complex processes of engagement between an assumed core and the peripheries. The volume illustrates how this engagement at times dramatically transforms the host societies, while in other cases the absorption of new ideas remains partial – the success of foreign ideas in transforming local contexts remaining contingent on their suitability for the socio-economic and political realities of their host societies.

In order to unravel the complex processes that underpin the global transmission of Islamic discourses, this volume focuses on the working of the three

most influential international centres of Islamic learning in contemporary times: al-Azhar University in Egypt; the Islamic University of Medina (IUM) in Saudi Arabia; and al-Mustafa International University in Iran. These three universities, located in the politically influential countries in the Middle East and Gulf region, attract students from across the globe. Their graduates carry the ideas acquired during their education back to their home communities, and some also bring with them a reformatory zeal. These Islamic universities are the modern form of Islamic seminaries, which train ᶜulama of various ranks, including *mujtahid*, scholars entitled to issue legal opinions on matters not explicitly addressed in the Qurʾan.[3] The significance of these universities is in their hybrid nature; they produce ᶜulama through their curriculum, as inherited from the seminary tradition, while claiming a "modern" space by adapting the formal structures of the Western university. To some this model of mixing features of traditional and modern education systems might have much in common with Fethullah Gülen's effort to globalise an Islamically conscious modern schooling system in Turkey; however, the Gülen schools fall into a different category, since they offer pre-tertiary education and do not aim to produce ᶜulama. This volume argues that we should recognise the distinct potential of these universities in globalising specific Islamic discourses for the precise reason that these institutions are state supported, and thus that studying them enables us to examine the complex interplay between states' desires to exercise global legitimacy and the emergence of global Islamic discourses.[4]

Al-Medina and al-Mustafa have, in particular, come to act as the central locations for the promotion of Wahhabi-infused Salafism and Iranian-styled Shiᶜism, respectively: the former particularly associated with encroachment on alternative religious spaces and erosion of the localised Islam of Sufi veneration and folk religion; the latter associated with transmitting a particularly Iranian brand of Shiᶜism, which leads to a close overlap of religious and political authority in the spirit of Ayatollah Khomeini's concept of *vilāyat-i faqīh* (guardianship of the jurist).[5] It might at first appear puzzling to situate al-Azhar alongside two universities that are associated with two globally dominant, but exclusionary, Islamic worldviews, given its much more complex history and rejection of *taqlīd* (lit. to follow, to imitate; strict adherence to a specific Islamic school of thought). However, its ability to command an international presence as the "moderate voice of Islam", whereby sound understanding of Islamic principles is matched with a willingness to adapt texts to changing times,[6] makes it an illuminating case for comparative analysis. These three universities are unique in the sense that they all have direct or indirect links with their governments and their student base comes from across the globe. These characteristics distinguish them from another global centre of Islamic learning, namely, Dar ul-Ulum Deoband in India. The Deobandi madrasa network runs completely independently of the

government, and its following though large is primarily concentrated within the South Asian Muslim communities.[7] By looking at the workings of these three global centres of Islamic learning, and tracing the activities of their graduates and their influence on their home communities, this volume seeks to develop a more nuanced understanding than is available in the literature on globalisation of Islamic discourses, on how ideas are transmitted from one locale to another, and how the ultimate outcomes of this process are rarely fully under the control of one single actor or state.

Three reasons make this comparative undertaking a particularly useful lens through which to study the working of global and local linkages in the transmission of global Islamic discourses. First, before setting out to study the processes that help a given discourse acquire global standing, it is important to establish that the selected discourse does indeed deserve that label. These three universities easily meet this prerequisite. The influence of these three universities in shaping Islamic discourse and practice in contemporary Muslim societies is visible across North Africa, the Middle East and Asia, and in diaspora communities in North America and Europe. It is reflected in the diversity of their international student populations, with all three universities attracting students from across the globe. As analysed in the chapters presented in Part One, the senior leadership within all three universities is very conscious of their influence in shaping the Islamic discourse for Muslims around the globe, and takes it to be their religious obligation to provide global leadership due to their recognised status as a prominent seat of Islamic learning.

Secondly, a comparative analysis of these three universities presents a rare opportunity to compare the global working of the three dominant strands of contemporary Islam that rival each other for supremacy in the international political and religious arena: Wahhabi-styled Salafism, Iranian-inspired Shiʿism and the voice of "moderate" Islam. Academic scholarship on global Islamic networks, as well as Western policy discourse, remains centred on understanding the ways in which these three major strands of Islam shape Muslim societies and how they determine their relationships with the West. What is meant by these terms is contested, however, given that any scholarly attempt to define such labels as "liberal", "moderate" or "orthodox" Islam remains open to critique depending on what is viewed to be the most important criterion in defining such terms. As a general norm, Salafism has come to be associated with the puritanical and rigid interpretation of Islamic texts often associated with Saudi-styled Wahhabism. However, as we see repeatedly in this volume, the term "Salafism" becomes complicated in the Egyptian context,[8] where modernists such as Muhammad ʿAbduh (1849–1935) and his student Rashid Rida (1865–1935), who were in fact arguing for very modernist interpretations of the Islamic texts, also defined themselves as Salafis, and are indeed referred to as such by

many scholars. They rejected taqlīd, or blind following of the four schools of law (*madhāhib*, sing. *madhhab*), and argued for direct and constant engagement with the Qurʾan and hadith in order to interpret them directly,[9] as do the Salafis in Saudi Arabia. However, in practice their Salafism has had very different theological and societal implications to those of Wahhabi Salafism, where the latter also argues for going back to the original sources, but instead of reinterpreting those texts in the light of modern needs seeks doctrinal purification often resulting in the total rejection of Western influence. Thus, the papers looking at al-Azhar and al-Medina both refer to the influence of these universities in terms of spreading Salafi ideology, but these are two very different conceptions of Salafism.[10] Although the common denominator is the willingness of both groups to go back to the original texts, they take very different approaches on how to engage with those texts.

Defining "moderate" Islam is an equally challenging task given the variations within the organisations that claim a modernist outlook. But, as in the case of the term "Salafism", certain features have come to be recognised as important in defining moderate Islam. The two most popular criteria used here are a willingness to adopt more context-bound, as opposed to literal, interpretations of the text, and to allow for a pluralistic outlook in terms of following several madhāhib rather than taqlīd of one school. Defining the Iranian brand of Shiʿi Islam is similarly complex, but its underlying feature is its close association with Khomeini's political doctrine of vilāyat-i faqīh, which leads to a much closer merger of religious and political authority than was associated with the Najafi seminaries that traditionally led the Shiʿi Islamic discourse.

The cases selected for this volume present these three distinct conceptions of Islam. Thus, al-Medina has been selected because it is today recognised as representing the popular conception of Salafism, which is seen as being conservative and associated with Saudi Islam; few ordinary Muslims, and not just in the West, are aware of the modernist style Salafism of ʿAbduh. Al-Azhar is today viewed globally as a leading example of moderate Islam due to its emphasis on teaching of all four Sunni madhāhib and its willingness to support both the Egyptian and Western states in their decisions to adapt Islamic injunctions to suit the changes induced by modern lifestyles. Al-Mustafa is the obvious case for studying the workings of Iranian Shiʿism, since it is the primary institution in Iran providing religious education to international students. Thus, in this volume, the selection of the three cases is based on their ability to present the three dominant strands of Islam today, as defined in the popular discourse. Individual chapters do, however, show quite clearly that many of these terms are complex, and that they can be applied to opposing organisations. The reason for starting from these broader categories, however, is that they do help to capture the dominant positions within Islam, even though there are variations within each position.

Given that these three conceptions of Islam can lead to quite varying outcomes for the shaping of Muslim societies and their relationships with modernity and Western societies, much of the global policy discourse is aimed at curtailing the influence of Saudi-style Salafism and the Iranian brand of Shiʿism, and instead galvanising support for the spread of a more tolerant Islam.[11] Looking at these three major centres of Islamic learning – where each is clearly aligned with one of the three influential Islamic discourses in the international arena – thus presents a unique opportunity to study the micro-level working of discourses that have acquired global hegemony and the factors that contribute to their rise. Such a comparative approach also affords an opportunity to inquire whether the underlying mechanisms of engagement between the core and the assumed peripheries are the same across the three influential discourses, or whether the nature of the discourse (taqlīd versus a pluralist outlook) itself ends up impacting the nature of the engagements between the two sides – taqlīd arguably demanding a one-way transmission of ideas if the purpose is to promote adherence to specific ideals.

Notwithstanding the growing scholarly debate on the fracturing of Islamic authority due to the rise of alternative platforms, the power of those who control the teaching of Islamic texts remains paramount with regard to shaping global Islamic discourse. There is indeed a mushrooming of online imams, and some have come to command a reasonable level of authority among ordinary Muslims; but more often than not, in order to gain that attention, they still need a stamp of higher approval, in the form of a degree certificate from one of the orthodox centres of learning. This continued importance of the knowledge of the written texts in staking a claim to religious authority makes these universities, with their focus on the teaching of Islamic texts, central to the training of serious Islamic scholars who will continue to speak on behalf of Islam in coming decades.[12] Thus, while multiple platforms can be used to promote certain religious ideas globally, centres of Islamic learning that train the ʿulama or scholars in their ability to interpret the text remain central to advancing any globalising Islamic mission.[13] Looking at the universities that have emerged due to the direct or indirect support of the theocratic state[14] – especially al-Medina and al-Mustafa – thus enables us to decipher how certain institutions can cultivate allegiance to very narrow interpretations of the Islamic texts while discrediting other equally influential sources. The case of al-Azhar, on the other hand, helps to elaborate how the same texts can be used to promote a pluralistic outlook where critical engagement with multiple sources is prioritised over the taqlīd of a particular madhhab.

By looking at the working of these three global centres of Islamic learning, and tracing the activities and influence of their graduates on their home communities, this volume thus argues for a nuanced understanding of how ideas are

transmitted from one locale to another, and how the process of transmission results in making adjustments to those very ideas in the process of winning followers. By showing that the hegemonic discourses have to be flexible in engaging with counter-discourses if they are to win a following beyond their original set of adherents, the volume counters simplistic assumptions about the mechanisms that shape the global transmission of ideas and also checks the exaggerated claims sometimes made about the power of theocratic states. What becomes very clear in the volume is that while the Saudi or Iranian states might invest heavily in the promotion of their religious ideology, the extent to which they succeed in this mission is contingent on a number of factors at the receiving end, most importantly the local political context, historical patterns of religious affiliation, and the existing cultural and aesthetic sensibilities of the recipient community. When studying the processes of the global transmission of ideas, it is thus not only important to map the "attempts at influence", but equally important to examine the "adaptations for influence". As we will see throughout this volume, this adaptation is essential both to winning students over to a particular ideology, and equally important for preparing the students to meet the counter-arguments of other madhāhib or sects. The chapters in this volume show that in the cases of al-Medina, al-Mustafa and al-Azhar, there is always a dialectical engagement between those who want to influence and those being influenced, with both sides having an impact on the other.

More importantly, the volume also illustrates that there is a natural limit to which religious adherence can be cultivated by design – despite concerted efforts, not all students enrolled in the three universities absorb the ideas and attitudes associated with these institutions. Rather, many students use their education at these universities to advance material rather than religious interests. What becomes clear is that the appeal of the extreme puritanical practices associated with Saudi-styled Salafism or Iranian Shiʿism can never totally crowd out the appeal of alternative or more pluralistic platforms, as many individuals are inherently more inclined towards one approach over the other. Despite all efforts at expanding its following, Saudi-styled Salafism cannot totally eradicate the appeal of the more moderate voices of Islam as represented by al-Azhar, just as the Iranian brand of Shiʿi Islam cannot eliminate the influence of the seminaries in Najaf, which to date have had limited enthusiasm for Khomeini's conception of vilāyat-i faqīh. Thus, one of the important correctives offered by the volume is to put the concerns about the hegemonic tendencies of any discourse, religious or secular, in perspective – and to note that while financial commitments do indeed help to cultivate religious allegiance, the ultimate appeal of a religious worldview is shaped equally by the inherent appeal of the ideals associated with it and its relevance to the historical practices, as well as the everyday realities of the believers, and their individual dispositions.

The volume maps out the details of how the centres of learning act as the basis for three critical interactions that eventually shape these apparently hegemonic global Islamic discourses: (1) between the teachers and the students at the university; (2) between the state and the management of the university; and (3) between the students and their communities on their return home. The chapters in this volume show that students gain appreciation for an idea if the teacher is able to convince them, and the teacher in turn will be more effective in spreading an idea if he is himself convinced of it. A state wanting to promote a specific agenda thus has either to appoint the teachers and select the students using very narrow parameters to assess their prior affinity to the given religious outlook, or show sufficient flexibility such that the teachers as well as the students can gradually develop ownership of those ideals. To illustrate these complex dynamics, the volume presents eight chapters organised in three parts.

The chapters in Part One highlight the strategies adopted by the three universities to advance their influence. It takes the reader inside these universities and provides an account of their evolution, the extent of recognition of their authority globally, their teaching methodologies, and, most importantly, the nature of their association with the state. Part Two presents three original case studies illustrating how ideas flow from these global centres of learning to communities across the globe via their graduating students. Most importantly, the section illustrates how the relevance of these ideas to local political developments and traditional practices has direct bearing on how extensively these ideas reshape the local context. Part Three then spells out more vividly how the spread of the ideals within the home communities depends not just on the effectiveness or zeal of the messenger, but even more importantly on the specific characteristics of the community, such as the relationship between the state and religion, the nature of existing religious elites, and contemporaneous political developments. The importance of context is addressed in all the chapters, however it is in Part Three that the most explicit evidence is presented. The analysis presented in this section of the overwhelming influence of al-Azhar in Malaysia and Indonesia during the twentieth century illustrates how a complex set of factors have to come together to enable the large-scale diffusion of foreign ideals in a new context. It is therefore understandable why in most cases the diffusion remains limited to isolated pockets.

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITIES WITHIN THE STRUCTURE OF ISLAMIC AUTHORITY

The scholarship on Muslim societies has long acknowledged the societal importance of the orthodox centres of Islamic authority, namely, the mosque and the madrasa, since the ʿulama within them define what it means to be a good

Muslim. While in theory Islam has no clergy, those who are able to interpret Islamic texts come to command great influence in shaping Muslim societies. Much of this religious authority was traditionally transferred through an informal system of knowledge accreditation in form of an *ijāza* (a traditional method of authorisation for a student to start independent teaching) rather than the issuance of formal degree certificates. The colonial encounter led to the emergence of the first major fracturing of the traditional structures of authority, whereby graduates from Western-style universities started to speak on behalf of Islam, thereby establishing significant followings.[15] The changed profile of those exercising Islamic authority had major implications for the socio-political processes within these societies: the Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaʿat-i-Islami, the two most influential political reform movements in the Middle East and South Asia, respectively, were established by such Islamic modernists.[16]

What is less studied in terms of the changing structures of Islamic authority, however, is the shift towards the establishment of international Islamic universities as an alternative to mosque- and madrasa-based centres of learning. While al-Medina was established as a state-sponsored university from the beginning, al-Mustafa gradually emerged as a university, albeit a private one. Officially, al-Mustafa is a private university drawing its budget mainly from the profits of the factories it owns, as well as from investments, religious endowments and government funding. However, as Chapter 2 illustrates, the post-revolutionary Iranian state has played an active role in the gradual emergence of al-Mustafa as the leading platform for the global dissemination of Iranian-style Shiʿism. Al-Azhar, whose origin goes all the way back to 970 and was historically more independent, similarly underwent a major administrative transformation when it was nationalised in 1961 by the Nasser regime. This conscious preference by these modern states to invest in Islamic universities, whether by bringing them under state control or indirectly supporting them, partly reflects their aspiration to modernise the traditional Islamic education system. Rather than drawing on the informal personalised method of teaching,[17] where the scholars normally studied a major book at a pace that was tailored to the capabilities of the individual student, the shift towards the establishment of universities led to the introduction of a standardised system of education, whereby a standard syllabus, a pre-planned and standardised examination process, and state-accredited degree certificates replaced the personalised teaching model, informal assessment methods and issuance of an ijāza that marked the madrasa system.

The move towards supporting universities, however, has equally been shaped by the states' desire to have greater control over the teaching of Islamic texts. The most explicit difference between these universities and the traditional structures of Islamic authority revolves around the nature of the relationship they have with the state, as compared with the madrasa system. The latter experienced a

much higher level of autonomy than is available to a modern university because of the greater degree of financial autonomy it enjoyed. Historically, the Muslim empires patronised madrasas in order to gain religious legitimacy, which also remains the primary motive for the modern states to engage with the international Islamic universities. However, state patronage for the bigger madrasas or mosques normally took the form of *waqf* endowments, which provided an independent income to the ᶜulama even in cases where the state might also have provided for the salaries of teachers. This gave the ᶜulama within the madrasas a certain degree of autonomy from the state – this, for instance, was the case for al-Azhar, which until nationalisation was supported through waqf income. The nationalisation of al-Azhar resulted in the confiscation of its waqf properties, making the ᶜulama directly dependent on salaries from the state. This greatly curtailed their authority. Similarly, a number of changes in the post-revolution Iranian context decreased the ability of independent *marjaᶜ-i taqlīd* (see Chapter 2) to collect *khums* (religious tax), making most leading seminaries in Qom highly dependent on the state to provide stipends to instructors and students. Al-Medina university, on the other hand, was founded with a university charter whereby the scholars appointed to university positions directly draw government salaries and thus are bound by the university regulations. These universities are thus part of the modern educational network, which is much more tightly regulated by the state in terms of what is taught, and also how it is taught and examined, than the prestigious centres of Islamic learning historically were.

What is interesting to note, however, is that being influenced by a theocratic as opposed to a non-theocratic state does have different implications for the level of religious independence that these international Islamic universities can exercise. As we see in Chapter 3, the nature and extent of manipulation by a non-theocratic state is different to that by a theocratic state, because the latter comes to realise that it is important to allow the religious institution some autonomy if it is to retain the public legitimacy needed to be useful for the state. The Mubarak regime in Egypt thus realised early on that al-Azhar's religious endorsement would be effective for gaining popular legitimacy only if al-Azhar continued to command popular respect as an independent mediator on Islamic matters: the Egyptian state has thus tolerated the existence of dissenting ᶜulama[18] within al-Azhar to counter the damage caused to al-Azhar's reputation when the Shaykh al-Azhar has been obliged to issue controversial fatwas in support of the state. The religious state, on the other hand, has a different basis of engagement with places of religious education. A theocratic state is less dependent on institutions such as Islamic universities to gain legitimacy for its actions; rather, it needs them to propagate its specific religious worldview. In this case, it is the state's religious legitimacy that is extended to the universities rather than the other way around. Thus, in the case of al-Azhar, the state used the Islamic

status of the university to seek popular legitimacy for its actions, while in the case of the other two universities the states had clear religious identities which the universities were courted to advance.

These international Islamic universities thus represent a very complex case of religious authority. In order to advance their worldview globally they must have some following and legitimacy in the eyes of Muslims, yet their heavy reliance on the state instead of independent sources of survival makes them suspect in the eyes of more critical followers, who start to see these universities as an extension of the state apparatus. Unpacking the complex processes that help these universities to balance the complex demands of retaining legitimacy in the eyes of their followers while also meeting the needs of the states that support them is thus at the heart of the analytical puzzle addressed in this volume. In order to resolve this puzzle, it is useful to begin by asking what makes certain places and institutions acquire the status of the core, and what shapes the interaction of this core with the alleged peripheries?

Becoming the "Core"

Looking at the three universities it is clear that whether they were deliberately established by the state, indirectly supported or gradually taken over, the idea of these universities being core centres of Islamic learning is central to their capacity to advance a certain viewpoint at the global level. What, however, defines this core? The chapters in this volume show that while the three universities might have made conscious efforts to exert their identity as the core locations for the exercise of Islamic authority, there has also been a corresponding willingness on the part of the so-called peripheries, lands geographically at a distance from these central locations, to recognise the superior status of the core. As Chapter 7 illustrates in detail, going to the Middle East to pursue higher learning has historically been important in the view of Muslim scholars located in other lands. There is a recognition that because of their sacred location or otherwise geographical importance, a certain location comes to have a confluence of scholarship that leads to establishing its right to speak on behalf of Islam. Thus, the modern Egyptian, Iranian and Saudi states have made conscious efforts to exert their influence globally, and the locations they are using to exercise this authority have a pre-modern legacy or global following.

Not surprisingly, hosting the sacred spaces is one of the key credentials for acquiring the status of the core. In the view of many Muslims, by virtue of being the guardian of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, the Saudi state has a natural right to guide Muslims across the world. The sites themselves, however, are not the only claim to authority; rather, the formation of authority is more complex. These sacred sites traditionally attracted scholars from all corners of

the Muslim world. Eventually, the confluence of a large number of prominent scholars at a sacred site leads to the emergence of that location as a core centre for Islamic learning. Often this confluence is directly linked to the existence of a sacred site, but in other cases it is also simply a result of geographical location. This was the case for Cairo, which, due to its central location within the Muslim lands during the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, became host to many prominent scholars on their way to Mecca for the holy pilgrimage, or a place of refuge for reputed Muslim scholars escaping persecution in lands where Muslim power was on the decline. These natural credentials of certain geographical locations thus lend them a level of legitimacy that attracts state attention. Provision of state resources does in fact help to increase the outreach of these places that come to acquire the status of the core, but, as indicated above, this association with the state also poses serious questions with regard to their authority by those who believe that religious authority should stay independent of state authority.

These complex dynamics shaping the relationship of these universities with their multiple constituencies, including the state and their students, form the focus of analysis in Part One of this volume. The chapters in this part take the reader inside the three universities and provide an account of their evolution, their global standing, their conception of their role in shaping global Islamic discourses, and, most importantly, their relationship with the state. Chapter 1 presents a thoughtful analysis of how the IUM was from its very inception meant to function as a Saudi-state-backed Salafi missionary project with global reach. Eighty-five per cent of the places among its entirely male student body were reserved for non-Saudis, and within decades the university had disbursed tens of thousands of scholarships to applicants from all over the world under a generous funding programme covering everything from transport, to tuition, living expenses and the cost of books. The goal was for students to return to their home countries or to travel on elsewhere after graduation for *duʿa*, or as missionaries, to promote spiritual commitment and "correct" religious knowledge and practice. As the university president and future Grand Mufti ʿAbd al-ʿAziz bin Baz wrote in a prospectus published in 1971, emphasising the sacred geography of Medina and suggesting a parallel between this Saudi-backed project and the Prophet's own mission, the university was to operate as "a source of modern Islamic propagation from the source of the first Islamic propagation". In addition to the diverse student body, for much of the early period of its existence a majority of the university's faculty also came from beyond the kingdom – particularly from Egypt, but also from locations as distant as Morocco and Pakistan. The chapter sketches key aspects of the IUM's genesis and evolution over the course of half a century. Unpacking this history serves to underscore the extent to which the university and its morally conservative missionary project, far from reflecting a timeless "Wahhabi" anachronism isolated from the sweep of twentieth-century

history, were in fact deeply involved in far-reaching contemporary dynamics of religious revival and reform, globalisation and geopolitical rivalry.

Chapter 2 presents an insight into the rise of al-Mustafa International University, including its two preceding institutions and its globalisation agenda. Tracing the evolution of the university, it shows how the emergence of al-Mustafa was a result of the rivalry among the marājiʿ-i taqlīd, the highest-ranking Shiʿi authorities, in post-revolutionary Iran. It also elaborates the attributes and strategies of al-Mustafa that helped this institution to establish itself as the key international platform for Shiʿi scholarship and to differentiate itself from its Shiʿi rivals in Najaf and their Sunni counterparts. This university is a product of the complex internal political battles within Iran as well as the state's global agenda known as "the export of revolution", whose mission is to propagate the Iranian version of Shiʿism which places special value on Khomeini's concept of vilāyat-i faqīh. Owing to the direct patronage of the current supreme leader, this university has been able to update its curriculum and education system to meet the expectations of foreign students, including females. However, this very attempt to adjust the curriculum to the level of the majority of the foreign students discourages them from studying up to the level of mujtahid, which perpetuates Iranians' monopoly on the position of mujtahids and leaves non-Iranians as their followers (*muqallid*) in the Shiʿi religious hierarchy. The uniqueness of al-Mustafa is its strategies to reach out to youth in other countries through its numerous overseas branches, aiming to counter the spread of anti-Shiʿi "Wahhabism" and ensuring its uncontested dominance over its rivals, especially the seminaries in Najaf. Although the "Iranised" and "politicised" form of teaching remains controversial among Shiʿa outside Iran, the al-Mustafa graduates are maximising the functional as well as symbolic benefits of their degrees and adapting the knowledge obtained in al-Mustafa to meet the needs of their local communities.

Chapter 3 shows how al-Azhar, established by the Shiʿi Fatimid empire in 970, was eventually to become one of the most respected centres for Sunni Islamic learning around the globe. Today, more than 30,000 foreign students are enrolled in the Islamic Studies and other related faculties of al-Azhar at any given time. The chapter shows how the emphasis on a "middle way", as reflected in al-Azhar's emphasis on teaching all four Sunni madhāhib, has been central to the rise of al-Azhar as a global centre of learning. The chapter notes that a number of factors led to the rise of the university to this prominent leadership position within Sunni Islam, including its location in Cairo, the exodus of scholars from places such as Andalusia due to political instability and their settlement in Cairo, the university's ability to harbour multiple discourses, and the controversial state-led reforms enacted since the 1960s. The chapter analyses the challenges al-Azhar has faced in retaining legitimacy in the eyes of believers

at home and abroad since Nasser's decision to nationalise it, and what has enabled it to survive these challenges. The chapter further shows how, post-Arab Spring, al-Azhar acquired a new zeal to play a prominent role as the moderate voice of Islam both within Egypt as well as globally. It shows how these ambitions are bound to be checked by the return of political authority to the hands of the military – a move which ironically had the active support of the Shaykh al-Azhar.

Cultivating the Local: Agency of the Students

As in the case of the universities, we see that the dual process involving strategies of influence and adaptation for influence is equally applicable to the graduates of these universities when they return to their home communities. At least some of the graduating students do indeed absorb the ideas they are exposed to during their time at university. However, the spread of these ideas within local communities is heavily dependent on their skills and ability to adapt the ideas to the local context. Part Two looks at these issues and presents three original case studies illustrating how ideas flow out from these three global platforms to communities across the globe via their graduates. Most importantly, the section illustrates how the relevance of these ideas to the local context, political developments and traditional practices has direct bearing on their success in changing the local context.

Chapter 4 profiles a network of prominent preachers, the "Ahlussunnah" (People of the tradition of the Prophet) of contemporary Kano, northern Nigeria. Of these preachers, roughly half are graduates of the IUM. By looking at leading figures within the network, the chapter shows how exposure to new thinkers and texts at the university, as well as physical distance from the bitter struggles in northern Nigeria, launched a process of reflection that culminated in the Medina graduates' decision to break with the anti-Sufi movement Izala (Jamaᶜat Izalat al Bidᶜa wa Iqamat al Sunnah; The Society for the Removal of Heresy and the Instatement of the Prophetic Model), to which they had been affiliated before leaving for Medina. Izala, the students felt, had become too rigid in its approach and was excluding non-members. Upon their return, the graduates established themselves as independent, though still anti-Sufi, preachers. Study in Medina, the chapter argues, increased these preachers' intellectual self-confidence and led them to seek models of leadership based more on individual reputation than on the backing of hierarchical organisations. Next, the chapter examines how, in their preaching at home, the Medina graduates relate events in Nigeria to struggles in Muslim communities at other times and in other places. The chapter argues that study in Medina helped to shape the doctrinal positions, intellectual interests and rhetorical strategies of these preachers, and notes that lasting ties

to Saudi Arabia provided them with material support. However, the chapter concludes that the popularity of these preachers among different sections of Kano society, especially youth, is owed largely to their mastery of new media, particularly recorded sermons, and their ability to present sectarian identities and allegiances in ways that address local quotidian concerns. These preachers, finally, were drawn deeply into local electoral politics and into struggles with the Sufi brotherhoods and traditional Muslim authorities of Kano, and thus local issues loomed large in spreading the Ahlussunnah network.

Chapter 5 explains how returnees from al-Mustafa International University, including those from the International Centre for Islamic Studies, its preceding institution, have played a significant role in the development of the Shiʿi community in Sunni-dominated Indonesia. Pursuing Islamic education at Qom is a post-1979 phenomenon made popular by al-Habsyi, an Indonesian scholar of Arab descent, who gained the trust of religious leaders in the Islamic Republic of Iran. To date, there are more than 200 Qom alumni in Indonesia. Following a detailed account of the educational background of Indonesian students who went to Qom, the chapter illustrates the activities of the graduates in their home towns, such as their creation of the Association of al-Mustafa International University Alumni, missionary activities through various Shiʿi institutions, and educational activities in religious schools, including the Islamic College Jakarta, a branch of the university. Emphasising the contribution of Qom alumni in making the Shiʿa a dominant force in Indonesian Islamic movements, the chapter also sheds light on the commitment of Qom alumni to connect Indonesian Shiʿi to the world's centre of Shiʿi orthodoxy in Iran, and on the competition and conflict that arose within the Shiʿi community in Indonesia as a result of their endeavours.

Taking a historical approach, Chapter 6 discusses the impact of al-Azhar University on the Moroccan nationalist movement and specifically its independence leader Allal al-Fasi, whose ten-year exile in Egypt exposed him to the ideas of Muhammad ʿAbduh and influenced the ideological position of the Moroccan independence party, *Istiqlal*. The chapter emphasises the impact that ʿAbduh's ideas had on the educational policies of the independence party and their continued importance in Moroccan educational politics throughout the twentieth century. Graduates of the university in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including Abdullah ibn Idris al-Sanusi and Abu Shuʿayb al-Dukkali, brought ideas of Islamic modernism back to Morocco. These ideas were shared with Moroccan religious students through lectures at the Qarawiyyin University in Fez and flourished into a movement for religious reform. The emphasis shifted from religious to political reform after the Berber *Dahir* crisis of 1930, which provided Berbers with different courts from those for Arabs. An outcry among the community of religious scholars over the weakening of Islamic law and the

attempt to divide the Muslim *umma* led to demonstrations across the Arab world. Al-Azhar University again became a centre for Moroccan dissidents and exiles to meet and find support as they protested this decree. After returning to Morocco, al-Fasi led the country as prime minister and ʿAbduh's ideas formed the basis of his party's educational platform. Those ideas continue to have significant influence on Moroccan educational politics of the twenty-first century. The chapter thus traces the relationship between Islamic modernism and the Moroccan nationalist movement, highlighting the role of al-Azhar as the institutional link between these two groups. It concludes by discussing the continuing legacy of the relationship between Islamic modernism and the Moroccan nationalists in terms of educational policy in twentieth-century Morocco.

Transforming the Local: The Significance of the Context

While the above chapters help to illustrate the multiple ways through which students carry the influence of these universities back to their home communities and the challenges they face, the chapters in Part Three illustrate how in a few cases the transformation of the local context in response to the foreign ideas can be quite extensive, as has been the case with the Azharisation of Islam in Malaysia and Indonesia. The chapters show how such widespread influence occurs only when, by a rare coincidence, the independent consensus of the religious scholars in that community converges with the strategic interests of the state, forging a wide-ranging support base for the adoption of that external ideology.

Chapter 7 draws on rich historical evidence to demonstrate how exposure to al-Azhar, starting in the early twentieth century, led over time to the complete transformation of the methodology adopted by independent ʿulama and state religious platforms to issue fatwas in Southeast Asia. It examines the mainstreaming of Salafi methodology – inspired by the work of Muhammad ʿAbduh – in place of the taqlīd of the traditional Shafiʿi School in Southeast Asia for the issuing of fatwas. Until the middle of the twentieth century, a majority of influential ʿulama in Southeast Asia studied in Mecca and were followers of the Shafiʿi School. From the end of the nineteenth century, a number of factors, including the establishment of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, led to a shift to al-Azhar as opposed to Mecca being the base for Southeast Asian Muslim scholars. By comparing Southeast Asia fatwas of the early twentieth century against those issued in the 1970s, the chapter shows how the transition from Mecca to Cairo – and especially towards al-Azhar – led to the mainstreaming of Salafi methodology.

Chapter 8 discusses the relationship between al-Azhar and the government policy of ʿulama training in Malaysia. The chapter traces how, during

the twentieth century, a number of factors led to al-Azhar becoming one of the most popular choices for Malaysian students wanting to major in Islamic Studies. The chapter shows that, initially, ʿulama adopted al-Azhar's reformed curriculum by choice, as the mixed curriculum introduced by al-Azhar, starting with Muhammad ʿAbduh's modernisation project, helped the religious schools in Malaysia to compete with the state-run modern schools. However, with time, to demonstrate its commitment to Islam, the Malaysian state also started to invest in al-Azhar education. Under a series of policies intended to emphasise Islam, religious education and religious administration expanded rapidly, thus providing increased job opportunities for al-Azhar graduates. In the 1990s, the state religious governments began to directly import al-Azhar's curriculum and examination system, and the federal government introduced a secondary school Islamic education certification system that is accepted by al-Azhar. The Islamic education system in Malaysia today is thus heavily inspired by al-Azhar. This standardisation of the Islamic curriculum has in turn helped to legitimise government control over ʿulama training. In the name of following the al-Azhar system, the religious schools were modernised and transformed, thus becoming a part of the national education system. Thus, a host of local social and political dynamics, and not any proactive globalising agenda of the Egyptian state, has led to the wide-reaching absorption of Azhari Islam in the Malaysian context.

Despite the breakdown of authority and the rise of individual imams in this age of online fatwas, it is very clear that these centres of authority will remain important. The reason for this is that the concentration of scholars in these institutions gives them a mark of authority and quality. Under the conditions of modernity, with competing time pressures on the daily lives of believers, the search costs for a valid interpretation of the Islamic texts are best minimised by looking for quick markers of quality and identity. Thus, the online imams that become popular often need to get these markers of identity first, and these centres will always control those markers. Thus, in all likelihood these centres will indeed become *more* rather than less important with time. However, as the volume shows, it is also important to be clear about the limits to which these centres can promote their agendas and inculcate a global following through finance alone. Winning committed converts is a much more complex process than is often acknowledged in the literature on the globalising mission of certain Islamic discourses.

Notes

1. Natana J. DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Juan Cole,

Engaging the Muslim World (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (London: Hurst, 2009), pp. 33–57.

2. Nasr Vali, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006); Khaled Ahmed, *Sectarian War: Pakistan's Sunni–Shia Violence and its links to the Middle East* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011).

3. Regarding the nature of the "Islamic university" as a modern form of Islamic seminary, see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "Epilogue: Competing Conceptions of Religious Education", in Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (eds), *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

4. Bekin Agai, "Islam and Education in Secular Turkey: State Policies and the Emergence of the Fethullah Gülen Group", in Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (eds), *Schooling Islam*.

5. Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism*; Sabrina Marbin (ed.), *The Shiʿa Worlds and Iran* (London: Saqi, 2010).

6. Nathan Brown, *Post-Revolutionary al-Azhar* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment, 2011).

7. According to Reetz, between 1866 and 1994, 94 per cent of Dar ul ʿulum Deoband students were from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. With few exceptions, those from outside the subcontinent were also descendants of South Asian migrants. Dietrich Reetz, "The Deoband Universe: What Makes a Transcultural and Transnational Educational Movement of Islam?", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 27(1) (2007): 145.

8. It must be acknowledged that there are variations even within Saudi-inspired Salafism. Quintan Wiktorowicz, for instance, identifies three major Salafi factions: purists, politicos and jihadis. See Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 29 (2006): 207–39. Here, however, the emphasis is on highlighting the difference between the Saudi- and Egyptian-inspired Salafism of the early twentieth century.

9. Roel Meijer, "Salafism: Doctrine, Diversity and Practice", in Khaled Hroub (ed.), *Political Islam: Context versus Ideology* (London: Saqi, 2010).

10. Bernard Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action", in Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism*, pp. 33–57; Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

11. See Malika Zeghal's analysis of how President Sarkozy sought legitimacy for the French policy to ban Islamic headscarves by lobbying the Shaykh al-Azhar. Malika Zeghal, "The 'Recentering' of Religious Knowledge and Discourse: The Case of al-Azhar in Twentieth-century Egypt", in Hefner and Zaman (eds), *Schooling Islam*, pp. 107–30.

12. Scholarship on the emergence of female preachers similarly notes the paramount importance of textual knowledge in establishing religious authority. See Masooda Bano and Hilary Kalmbach (eds), *Women, Leadership and Mosques: Changes in Contemporary Islamic Authority* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

13. The fact that these universities also make effective use of satellite media and online

technology to promote their teachings further helps them to compete effectively against the emergence of new rivals in the form of online global muftis and imams. See Bettina Gräf and Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen (eds), *Global Mufti: The Phenomenon of Yusuf al-Qaradawi* (London: Hurst, 2009).

14. The legitimacy of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia rests on an alliance between the Saudi royal family and the religious establishment. In Iran, the constitution prescribes that the Supreme Leader of the state must be a *faqih*. In spite of these differences, in both Iran and Saudi Arabia shariᶜa is the official basis for state laws, and the rulers of both countries proclaim themselves and their polities to be Islamic. For further comparison of Iran and Saudi Arabia, see Mohammed Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2009), pp. 42–63.

15. Dale F. Eickelman, "Mass Higher Education and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary Arab Societies", *American Ethnologist*, 19(4) (1992): 643–55.

16. Eickelman, "Mass Higher Education"; Vali Nasr, *Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jamaʾat-i Islami of Pakistan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994); Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

17. Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

18. Zeghal refers to them as "periphery ᶜulama". Zeghal, "The 'Recentering' of Religious Knowledge and Discourse", in Hefner and Zaman (eds), *Schooling Islam*, p. 109.