

# GLOBAL COMMUNICATION OF FUNDAMENTALIST KNOWLEDGE

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**From *'ilm to sihâfa* or: the genealogy and epistemology of the *salafi* turn.  
Muhammad Rashîd Ridâ (1865-1935) and his Journal *al-Manâr* (1898-1935)**

Analysts of Islamic fundamentalism today invariably point a confident, if casual, finger at the 19<sup>th</sup> century Islamic reform movement, AKA Salafiyya, when searching for the ideological roots of Islam's political and ethical validity claims in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. How, one could ask, did a movement that championed scientific inquiry, constitutional and party politics and an individualistic approach to the Scriptures ever give rise to literalism, theocracy-driven polities or collective moral entrepreneurship? This objection, rather than being seriously addressed, is in fact whisked away and even suppressed by the hegemonic paradigm of *revivalism*, which in these readings serves both as analytical framework and historical explanation. Notwithstanding its emancipative calls, or, indeed, because these calls were seen to fail, the Salafiyya thus came down in history as the movement that merely "revived" medieval hanbali 'texts' and 'ideas'. Where a focus on what the Salafiyya was actually doing with these texts and ideas should have been in order, analysts have literally preferred a literalist approach, themselves applying a 'methodological fundamentalism' of sorts whereby precedence was given to ideological contents or units over epistemological procedures.

My purpose here is not to ascertain if and to what extent the diverse agendas put forth by members or dissidents or offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood or the Tablighi Jama'at or

Al-Qa'eda can effectively be traced back to the Salafiyya, but to suggest that this genealogical investigation cannot succeed as long as it relies on the revivalist postulate. If we are to understand whether and how 'liberal Islam' (Hourani) did give rise to totalitarian expressions; if we are to comprehend how a journalistic discourse committed to a celebration, in Islamic terms, of the institutions of the European nation-state, eventually produced movements who took over or advocated the take over of the post-colonial State in puritan, reactionary or violent terms, we must do away, first with the idea of 'old made new', and second with the idea that Islamic reform was itself 'dual'. Aside being weak, such ideas are in the end nothing more than essentialist accounts of Islam's inherent violence or of Islam's conjoining of religion and politics.

In the following lines, I intend to do just such discarding by suggesting we think of Islamic reform in terms of *expansionism*, i.e., that we think of Islamic reform as the historical moment when Islamic discourse, under the joint pressures of colonialism, modernization and the loss of Empire, paradoxically made an original all-out expansion into areas historically not under its jurisdiction, expanding actually into all aspects of life (Dallal). At the helm of this 'turn', which I will call *salafi* for want of a more suitable name,<sup>1</sup> was Muhammad Rashîd Ridâ (1865-1935), one of the three historical figures of the Salafiyya, and whose journal *al-Manâr* became the matrix where this expansionism was enacted. I argue that this expansionism was a function of the rising, and soon overpowering, profession and discourse of journalism which allowed chunks of the vast discursive province of *'ilm* (Islamic science) to become publicized and editorialized. In sum, I contend that a genealogy and epistemology of the *salafi* turn itself rest with a 'thick description' of this passage from *'ilm* to *sihâfa*.

In order to make my point, I first deconstruct another revivalism-related analytical construct—that of the modernist *'âlim*, or reformist—, and suggest that we look at Islamic

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<sup>1</sup> If *salafi* is, as its alleged proponents argue, the way of the *salaf*, i.e., the earliest forefathers, the virtuous companions of the Prophet, then our Nahdâwî *salafis* were certainly not *salafis*, as they did not altogether discard the authority of later scholars, the like, precisely, of the medieval *hanbalis*, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim, to name but the most notorious. I personally would rather advocate the use the term "islâhî" (and thus *islâhî* turn).

reformers as *publicists* in their own right. To show what is meant by this passage from *'ilm* to *sihâfa*, I then take two examples, one of a jurisprudential concept (*maslaha 'amma*), one of a jurisprudential genre (*fatwâ*), and describe how, in the process of their injection in the press, they became, rather than 'revived' jurisprudential concept and genre, the new *deliberative procedures of public discourse*. I end by suggesting that it is with such tools of public opinion that modern science, along other topics, was presented and discussed. In due course, I hope to have shown how certain focuses of Islamicist historiography have not only understated the complexity of the salafî turn, but that they have indeed misunderstood it.

#### **MUHAMMAD RASHÎD RIDÂ: 'ÂLIM, REFORMER OR JOURNALIST?**

Though contradictory evidence abounds, Rashîd Ridâ has consistently been portrayed as a (modernist) *'âlim* or as an Islamic reformer. While the first qualification fails to acknowledge the radical professional change and takes modernity as an adjunct (rather than a transformative) quality, the second pins him as a religious entrepreneur with an undecided trade: what indeed did an (Islamic) reformer usually do? Write books? Teach? Preach? Hold administrative appointments responsible for curricular overhauls? Put in other terms— is a reformer a bureaucrat? an intellectual? a consultant? a politician? a party leader? The fact that the portrayal of Rashîd Ridâ has evaded any such questioning and that he has systematically been cast either into old-made-new or into undecidedness is all the more remarkable that his journalistic trade and his attendant socio-economic status are part and parcel of, and written all over, his journal *al-Manâr*, his 28.000-page strong and 38 year-long legacy.

Of course, one might argue, Ridâ's self-portrayal is itself cast in the role of the Reformer, he himself repeatedly calls himself a *muslih* (though never a *'âlim* or an 'Islamic' reformer!). My purpose here is by no means to do what I criticize others for doing (selective readings), but rather to ask to what extent a self-designation ought to constitute an analytical category.

Francois Burgat in *l'Islamisme en face* has put this very question at the heart of his fieldwork, as he warns of the dangers of what he calls la “convergence sujet-objet”, i.e., the convergence between the discourse of the object with that of the subject. In a more recent paper on Yemeni Salafis, Burgat has translated this principle into more pedestrian terms by writing: “Ce n’est pas parce qu’ils le disent qu’ils le sont” (It is not because they say they are (so and so) that they are (so and so)).<sup>2</sup> This basic, if, in the case of Islam, overlooked principle of social sciences as well as textual analysis, was put to work by Ahmad Dallal in his seminal essay on Ridâ’s reconstruction of the thought of a pre-modern Yemeni scholar (al-Shawkânî, 18<sup>th</sup> century). Dallal demonstrates how Ridâ’s elaboration of a historical galerie de portraits of reformers is intended to provide him, the last in the chain he traces, with the solid and legitimate backing of undisputed authorities, for purposes foreign to such historical figures and even if in the process this implies a flagrant distortion of their thought. In his essay, Dallal’s case study is Ridâ’s plain misreading and deviation of Shawkânî’s position on *Qiyâs* (analogy), a fundamental methodology of Islamic law, which Ridâ “needs” him to advocate when he most unambiguously rejects it.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, Mohamed Haddad has shown for his part the conscious manipulations of ‘Abduh by Ridâ.<sup>4</sup> For reasons of space and purpose, I cannot unfortunately go into the fascinating details of what Dallal calls Ridâ’s “creative appropriations” but will confine myself to saying that the legitimization he obviously sought through these appropriations and divestments, beside being blatant contradictions to his “salafi” or *anti-taqlîdî* claims, an almost graphic illustration of Ridâ’s struggle with establishing his new journalistic calling. I.e. the newer the trade or purpose, the greater the likelihood of it being clad in recognizable trappings.

***Al-mihna: sihâfi.*** The scion of a village notable family claiming prophetic descent, Ridâ held the distinctive and honorific title of *sayyid*. However, and as if to signify that this status

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<sup>2</sup> Francois Burgat & Muhammad Sbitli , « Les Salafis au Yémen ou... la modernisation malgré tout. "Ils le disent... c'est donc qu'ils le sont !" ou les pièges du discours de l'objet », *Chronique Yéménite*, n°10 2002.

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henceforth failed to properly convey the real identity of its holder, Rida adjoined to it, during his life-long career, the title of founder of *al-Manâr*. *Al-sayyid Rashîd Ridâ, sâhib* or *munshi' majallat al-Manâr* was indeed to be the systematic signature of Ridâ, his calling card, indeed, his identification, as the mention of his journalistic profession (*al-mihna: sihâfi*) in his last passport actually testifies.<sup>5</sup>

It is crucial to keep in mind that this profession of journalism was neither accidental nor a casual hobby for the odd Sunday (rather, for the odd Friday): journalism was a positive choice, a professional decision which consumed Ridâ literally and metaphorically, eating up all his finances<sup>6</sup> and keeping him up and about at his press all through his life.<sup>7</sup> This professional decision not only meant a spatial translation from Tripoli to Cairo, but remarkably, a consciously assumed downward social mobility from the status of village notable and *'âlim* with an annual income of 50 Egyptian pounds from his orchards to that of a chronically indebted lower middle-class émigré whose suspiciously new and non-prestigious journalistic profession had still to gain social recognition at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, this choice and this decision were neither perceived as, nor taken for, improving or upgrading the impact of his teachings, i.e., journalism was not thought of as *continuing elsewhere and differently* the time-old teachings for which he was qualified.<sup>9</sup> Rather, the choice of journalism implied as much as generated a clear break – a break in outlook, vocation and profession. I quote:

« All I wanted to do before I had read *al-'Urwa al-wuthqa* was to teach the tenets of Islam and the transitory nature of life on earth. Now I saw a new light: to work for the unification of the Muslims of the World. My duty I now knew lay in guiding the faithful to the ways of progress and civilization ».<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Passport delivered in 1930 and which expired July 1935, i.e., one month before Ridâ's death: Sharabâsî (1970), p. 210. Sharabâsî is also the only author who actually titled a biographical work on Ridâ as *Rashîd Ridâ, al-sihâfi, al-mufasssir, al-shâ'ir, al-lughawî*, (1977, Le Caire, al-Hay'a al-'Amma li-Shu'ûn al-Matâbi' al-amiriyya).

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<sup>10</sup> *Târîkh*, i, p. 84. Citation and translation in Jamal Ahmad, 1960, *The Intellectual Origins of Egyptian Nationalism*, London, Oxford University Press, p. 29.

This break in outlook, vocation, and profession was itself brought about by the reading of a journal -- *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqa*, the archetypal reformist journal which Afghani and Abduh launched and animated during their year in Parisian exile (1884). This is to say that Ridâ's move from *'ilm* to *sihâfa* was not dictated by the necessities of *'ilm* but by the avenues of *sihâfa*, i.e., the move was not dictated by an impending sense of crisis within the "tenets of Islam", but was motivated by the state of backwardness and disunity of the world's Muslims. Put yet in other terms the project and the crisis are not theological but political and the means to their end is not a *reformation* in any protestant sense but very much a *formation* (of public opinion, of agency) in the subaltern sense. A Nota Bene: I am not saying that Ridâ ignored the need and did not call for a theological reformation: but that his struggle and self arrogated mission was not one of theological reformation: in division of labour of sorts, he specifically left this gigantic task for the ulama themselves, whom he incessantly criticized, blamed and urged to codify the sharia and revise their methods and curricula.

In order to understand the move from *'ilm* to *sihâfa* as an *epistemological* shift or break, i.e., a shift or break that brings about a fundamental reconfiguration of the coordinates of truth and reality, one has to appreciate the sense in which this shift was sustained by a mental conversion akin to what psychologists describe, albeit in disputed terms, as crepuscular crisis, conversion disorder or even dissociation. The full scope and force of Ridâ's encounter with *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqa* will become clear as I quote again from his autobiographical insight:

« I found several copies of the journal among my father's papers, and every issue was like an electric current striking me, giving my soul a shock, or setting it in a blaze, and carrying me from one state to another... My own experience and that of others, and history, have taught me that no other Arabic discourse in this age or the centuries which preceded it has done what it did in the way of touching the seat of emotion in the heart and persuasion in the mind ».<sup>11</sup>

When in 1897 Ridâ finally sets out on his Egyptian journey, it is with that very power of persuasion that he means to approach its initiator, Muhammad 'Abduh, in order to convince

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<sup>11</sup> *Târikh*, i, p. 303 : citation et traduction dans Hourani (1962) p. 226.

him to support his *Manâr* project. Ridâ is a stranger in town. Although trained as an *‘âlim* in Tripoli, he does not belong to the Cairene Azhari establishment. And although a Syrian émigré with a certain editorial talent,<sup>12</sup> he does not belong either to the Christian-dominated journalistic community of the Cairene Syrians. Given these facts, it is of course difficult not to see in the self-proclaimed master-disciple bond uniting him to ‘Abduh, an opportunistic association. However that may be, it is as difficult to ignore Ridâ’s symbolic rewriting of the traditional master-disciple relationship, in terms apposite to his new profession and vocation. In his biography of ‘Abduh, Ridâ indeed elaborates on the two reasons for his association with ‘Abduh: besides the *suhba*, the fellowship that traditionally binds an aspiring disciple to his master, Ridâ mentions *sihâfa*,<sup>13</sup> journalism, in lieu of *riyâsa*, the leadership in a given scholarly field and the outcome of the *suhba* phase of the studentship.<sup>14</sup> This apparently innocuous substitution is in fact of considerable import: it testifies most definitively to Ridâ’s extra-scholarly aspirations and goals by setting journalism as the ultimate horizon of his enterprise. In one of the very first issues of *al-Manâr*, Ridâ will define journalism as pursuing three interrelated goals: *ta‘lîm*, *khatâba* and *ihtisâb*, i.e, teaching, preaching and commanding good and forbidding evil.<sup>15</sup> Evidently, the most remarkable aspect of Ridâ’s conception of journalism lies in the fact he lends it the self-arrogated mission of intermediacy that the ulama have historically upheld between the rulers and the ruled. *Al-Manâr* reads: “the press is the link between those who govern and their subjects, demonstrating for each party its rights and duties with respect to the other party.”<sup>16</sup> But this is not to mean that the press should in anyway side with the State or succumb to Party politics; or that it should promote private group or individual interests: ‘Abduh’s warning of the disruptive quality of politics loomed

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<sup>13</sup> On *suhba/sihâfa*, see *Târîkh*, i, p. 1000

<sup>14</sup> G. Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges*, p. 128 sqq

<sup>15</sup> Ridâ, “*al-Jarâ’id*”, *al-Manâr*, 1(1898), pp. 655-661.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*. The translation is that of Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen (1997), *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State. Muftis and Fatwas of the Dâr al-iftâ’*, p. 69.

large over the Journal as long as the master lived<sup>17</sup>. After his death in 1905, Ridâ openly engaged in politics and declared his panislamist stance<sup>18</sup>, but not without having inscribed his agenda in a medium whose function he saw as being the social contract itself<sup>19</sup>.

**AL-MANÂR: MAJALLA ‘ILMIYYA, ADABIYYA, TAHDHÎBIYYA, MILLIYA, IKHBÂRIYYA...  
...LI-MUNSHI’UHA AL-SAYYID MUHAMMAD RASHÎD RIDÂ.**

Now if the journal launched in 1898 introduced jurisprudential concepts and used them not only to forge public discourse and shape public opinion but also as templates for its own self-understanding, how are we to understand this introduction other than in terms of a religious discourse being propounded by media technology? The point I here wish to make is that the legacy of Islamic reform did not lie in propounding religious discourse *as religious discourse*, but in their propounding it, through public fora, as *public discourse*. Not only were they addressing the literate (and illiterate!) public at large (i.e., not just the corporation of scholars), by shedding the technicity of a jurist’s language (‘Abduh: *Waqâ’i’ Misriyya*), adopting spoken dialects (A. Nadîm: *al-Tabkât wa-l-tankât, al-Ustâdh*), devoting rubrics to explaining foreign terms (Ridâ: *Manâr*), they were also doing so with aims extraneous to the production and reproduction of Islamic science (*‘ilm*). In other terms, in the journals they published, Islamic reformers did not embark on a theological reformation, editing, publishing and discussing scholarly works through scholarly standards, formats and jargon but they launched campaigns of political liberation and social regeneration with the discursive resources at their disposal, and which naturally originated from the fabulous conceptual and lexical reservoirs of *‘ilm*. They published no treatises and no commentaries in the formal sense, and even their most authority-laden works were but compilations of seminar notes

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<sup>17</sup> Ridâ, *Târîkh al-ustâdh al-imâm*, p. 1009. The risk must have been real, or perceived as such, even before the interwar period, when Badawî sees the role of journalism as growing in importance in Egypt as a result of political parties on the rise trying “to enlist the help of distinguished writers in their partisan daily or weekly newspapers”, *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> *Al-Manâr* 12(1909): p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, 1997, *Op. cit.*, p. 69.

serialized in a journal: this is of course the case of ‘Abduh’s *Risâlat al-tawhid* but also of the joint ‘Abduh-Ridâ Qur’ran Commentary, which, because it was serialized in *al-Manâr*, became known as *Tafsîr al-Manâr*, i.e. a Journal’s Hermeneutics or Publicized Hermeneutics. If the subtitle of *al-Manâr* is anything to go by, the *Majalla ‘ilmiyya, adabiyya, tahdhîbiyya, milliyya, ikhbâriyya* did not exactly advertise its editorial project as theological in the narrow sense or even as religious in the wide sense. The term “milliya” which, given the Ottoman framework, can here only loosely refer to “community” or “confession”, is neither specified, nor prioritized in the journal’s enumerated editorial lines.

In the following sections I therefore give an insight into what I hold to be the 3 major effects of the Salafiyya’s fundamentalist pronouncement, or the mechanisms that allowed it to “islamize” every single item it publicly scrutinized: 1) its reduction of a formidable jurisprudential corpus to a limited and ready-to-use lexicon; 2) its breaking up of its legal and exegetical methodologies into deliberative procedures; 3) the processing of modern science as mere opinion. To exemplify this, I focus on the journalistic avatars of one concept (*maslaha’amma*) and one genre (the *fatwa*), before concluding on modern science’s exposition.

### ***Publicizing jurisprudential concepts: the example of maslaha ‘amma.***

By reduction of corpus and by breaking up of methodologies, I mean the careful, narrow and efficient selection operated inside the discursive field of ‘ilm of *concepts* deemed *communicative* with the aim of processing them as reusable *terms*. An as careful selection of concepts deemed contrary to the Ridâ’s project was operated and were repeatedly pitted against those deemed useful. To further the process of instant recognition and association in the mind of his readership, Ridâ brilliantly devised fictitious figures that were the ideal-types of his age’s drama. Such drama he actually staged in a series of early articles called *Muhâwarât al-muslih wa-lmuqallid*, and were a young reformer engaged an old sheikh on the

Modern times. To this couple of the *Muslih* and the *Muqallid* a third figure would be added, that of the Mutafarnij, the Westernized, an who represented the field of knowledge and know-how that was to be reclaimed in Islamic terms by the *Muslih*. This not only imprinted the enduring idea that “Islam” was only about a Law that could be either liberally or traditionally interpreted, it also reified the “West” into a reality that was reducible to a term-to-term Islamic equivalent.

The criteria of selection was furthermore dictated by a necessity extraneous to *‘ilm* itself: by the need to cover, describe, make sense of the overwhelming reality of colonial supremacy, i.e., by the need to inform and mobilize. Moreover, the selection criteria was as certainly permeated by the European *Zeitgeist*, locally relayed by translation and publication of British and French social, political and economic thinkers. My choice of the concept of *maslaha ‘amma* to illustrate this point is not arbitrary of course as *maslaha* afforded at once a) a legitimacy for writing for and in the name of the public; b) a term resonant and loose enough to mobilize widely; c) an idea resonant with its utilitarian homologue.

Analyzed synchronically or punctually as only it should, given it is fitted into a journal’s columns, *maslaha*, amounts to a consensual catchword, a slogan around which to mobilize, a term mainstreamed by its periodical reoccurrences, a mainstreaming obviously facilitated by the existence of a non technical and common meaning to the term. Being part of informative, analytical or partisan pieces, it certainly is never preceded by definitions or methodological expositions but rather and only specified and determined by the context in which it is used: *maslaha* is at once the political interest of a nation occupied, of a civilization under siege, of social classes in the making. It is, most remarkably, an end in itself and not a means.

Quite different is the *maslaha* of jurisprudence if only because of its marginal and highly controversial status as a Principle of Jurisprudence (*Usûl al-fiqh*) and which sharply contrasts

with Ridâ's consensual and casual use. Actually, its disputed meaning and applications are such that they have historically compromised its status as a concept.<sup>20</sup>

In the sections of Usûl al-fiqh treatises devoted to an exposition of the four major sources of the Law (ie, the Qur'an, the Sunna, Qiyâ and Ijmâ'), *maslaha* was sometime discussed as either a fifth source, or a discriminating tool between two contradictory readings of the textual sources or as a general principle guiding and reminding the faqîhof the spirit rather than of the letter of the law.

Developed between the 11 and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries mainly, it was formalized into dichotomous terms by Ghazâlî who asked: 1) was *maslaha* to supersede or be subsumed under legal analogy (*qiyâs*)? 2) in what relation did *maslaha* stand vis-à-vis the intentions of the law (*maqâsid al-sharî'a*): was it part of them or was it the *ad hoc* means for safeguarding them?<sup>21</sup> Not only did the debate rage in such a frame, it was furthermore specified and complexified by the attributes of *maslaha*, which could be attested, non-attested or invalid, and whose adoption could be dictated by necessity, need or improvement.

Needless to say Ridâ's *maslaha* was constrained neither by these methodological considerations, nor by the Ghazalian dichotomous framework. Moreover the historical typologies have simply been shed and the notion collapsed onto its own unity.

Now one could arguably claim that Ridâ's *maslaha* is also liable to a diachronic reading and that if one were to review all the texts in which *maslaha* is used or discussed one would also come upon some brief texts which exposed the theories of medieval scholars (Shatibi, Tufi) or even published their treatises. I do not have here the time to go into how these

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<sup>20</sup> Mawil Izzi Dien

<sup>21</sup> In a newly defended PhD dissertation, Felicitas Opwis has very subtly shown how *maslaha* grew in preponderance as two major changes occurred in legal epistemology and logic: 1) the move from formal to substantive rationality; 2) the shift from deduction to induction in the law finding process. Cf. Felicitas M. Opwis, 2001, *Maslaha: an Intellectual History of a Core Concept in Islamic Legal Theory*, PhD dissertation, Yale University. For groundbreaking analyses of these historical changes in epistemology, cf. Wael Hallaq, 1990, "On Inductive Corroboration, Probability and Certainty in Sunnî Legal Thought", in N. L. Heer, (ed.), *Islamic Law and Jurisprudence: Studies in Honor of Farhat Ziadeh*, Seattle and London, University of Washington Press. And: "From Fatwas to Furû': Growth and Change in Islamic Substantive Law", *Islamic Law and Society*, 1 (February 1194): 17-56.

theories were indeed discussed and published but suffice it to say that the diachronic argument is precisely the argument I vigorously refute given the paradigm shift I have suggested, from *alim* to publicist. While a diachronic reading of any journalist's writings is always a legitimate task in itself, if the purpose is to get at the ideological evolution and maturation of one person's thoughts, it cannot however pretend to account for the effects, and impact of these thoughts on a given readership at a given time. A periodical is by definition a discrete, a discontinuous discourse, a snapshot or a soundbite if you will, that can, and has to, be understood and appreciated without the backlog of previous issues or of issues to come. In this respect, Ridâ's recourse at a given moment in time, to the genre of the fatwâ, not only complemented other rubrics such as news and event reporting, political analysis, scientific discoveries, health and hygiene matters, book reviews, letters to the editor, but precisely allowed for such a discrete treatment of public issues: the example of Ridâ's diverging fatwas on the language of Islam is a case in point,<sup>22</sup> whereby this discretion, and the contradictions it allowed, exactly enacted this ubiquitous and expansionist quality of the islamizing discourse in the making.

*Editorializing jurisprudential genres: the case of the fatwâ.*

So publicizing the public interest was one strategy of this expansionism, and turning the fatwa into a deliberative procedure was another. By editorializing the genre of the fatwa I mean its casual and original introduction in the columns of a journal, alongside other rubrics, which precisely streamlined it as a journalistic rubric. I insist that it is this very journalistic introduction which constitutes an epistemological overhaul as a fatwa, or legal advice, had never until then assumed a public nature. A very private transaction involving a *mustafti*' and a *mufti*, it brought a very private matter, a litigious one usually, to the attention of an authorized and authoritative scholar, who upon reading the question put to him in writing,

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<sup>22</sup> Fatwas to Indonesian *mustaftis* on translation of Quran and on language of *khutba*.

replied personally and also in writing. The mustafti', unhappy with the advice he came to seek, could always, and did, turn to other mustafti'. By publishing his response in a public forum, not only is Ridâ publicizing a private advice, but because the opportunity of contradicting him is not provided (after all his rubric is not a mufti's rubric where competing advices are exposed), he is also turning it into a binding advice of sorts, which by definition it is precisely not, if only because of the authority lent to it by the publication and the attendant publicity. What indeed essentially defines a fatwa, or at least the historical and pre-modern fatwa, is its non-binding character, a feature that distinctly distinguishes it from the *hukm* of the *qâdî*, the final and binding judgement of the judge.

By the discursive expansionism allowed by the fatwa I do not mean that contents that were not specifically religious started suddenly being discussed through this format: this was also historically the case and my point here is not about contents. The discursive expansionism allowed by the fatwa was in fact a function of its publicity and of the very subtle generic fusion or confusion between specialized and non-specialized opinion. If the fatwa is defined as the opinion of the specialist or the expert, and journalism as the repository of public opinion, i.e., precisely of the opinion of the non-expert, then what exactly is a media fatwa?? By publicizing his fatwas, Ridâ simply imposed an idea with far-reaching consequences: i.e., that public opinion was the affair of the specialist.

The move is all the more spectacular as Ridâ's credentials as mufti are all but certain. In his biography of 'Abduh and his own autobiography, the main 2 sources we have concerning his formative years, he never mentions any *ijâzâ* that would have been bestowed upon him for the issuance of fatwas. The '*âlimiyya* he received from the school of Shaykh Husayn al-Jisr is the only indication we have that he had completed a cycle of religious learning and was apt to teach. However, as is well known, not every alim was a mufti, even in the post-medieval era when the requirement of *ijtihâd* had been dropped.

That the fatwa as journalistic rubric was indeed a journalistic strategy and not a jurisprudential genre that was fit into the journal to revive that art is made absolutely clear by the fact that the rubric had late and arbitrary beginnings: started in 1903-1904, it might not be a coincidence that this was a year before the death of THE mufti, Muhammad ‘Abduh, who might have raised an eyebrow to Ridâ’s arrogation of such an authority. Started 6 years after the launch of the journal, the relatively late date testifies to its unpremeditated inclusion and to its responsive advent. The constant changing names of the rubric,<sup>23</sup> are furthermore a testimony to Ridâ’s quest for a place and status for this ad hoc rubric, which did not always evince different features from the letter to the editor genre.

#### **BY WAY OF CONCLUSION**

In the preceding lines I have argued that the salafi turn has meant more than just the media fatwas of a Yusuf al-Qaradawi on daily life or the fatwa of condemnation of a Khomeini. The media fatwa was not just religious contents relayed by media technology but the identification of public opinion to the opinion of the alim. The salafi turn was also, beyond the editorialization of jurisprudential genres such as the fatwa, the publicization of a jurisprudential lexicon that became part and parcel of public parlance. Another remarkable and far-reaching operation of this expansionist discourse was the presentation of modern science as mere opinion, through these publicized lexicons and editorialized genres.

I unfortunately only have time for suggestions though this in itself is a topic onto itself. By presenting science as mere opinion it can be said that the Islahîs actually completed their expansion into all aspects of life, without actually allowing science to operate a reconfiguration of the coordinates of truth and reality: exposed and discussed because of its *utility*, science actually remained subsumed by the term-to-term equivalencing of “Europe” and “Islam”, i.e., it was fit into Islamic categories instead of displacing them.

