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BOOK REVIEW

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Rivals in the Gulf: Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Abdullah in Bayyah, and the Qatar-UAE Contest over the Arab Spring and the Gulf Crisis by David H. Warren. Published by Routledge, August 2022. pp. 136. ISBN: 9780367758486

This is a terrific book written by David H. Warren. It is about two iconic figures in the world of Islamic scholarship. This book dispels the notion that the *ulema* (Islamic scholars) are cocooned from modern politics. These scholars are not just sandwiched within voluminous books, they are also active in politics. Their politics goes beyond local and transcends to global politics. The central figures in this book (Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Abdullah Bin Bayyah) are very instrumental in shaping the foreign policy of their respective states of residence which are not their natal states. This book, therefore, should be of interest to students of Islamic Studies and the Social Sciences—especially those who specialize in Political Science and Foreign Policy or International Relations.

On Islamic scholarship, Qaradawi excelled and would later be known as a global *mufti* (Islamic scholar and interpreter of shari'a law). He helped, as Warren states, revolutionize education in Qatar (22-23). His dream for educational reforms which he had advocated for in Egypt came to reality in Qatar. He canvassed for modernization of curricula in the Arab World to include subjects such as Mathematics, social and natural sciences and foreign languages. Though this was initially protested, Qaradawi—who is obviously not a conservative scholar both in outlook and orientation—got his way.

Qaradawi would soon be invited to join the new Islamic University of Medina's Advisory Council. There, he recounted his conversation with the then Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Muhammad Ibrahim Al al-Shaykh (d. 1969) who expressed some misgivings about Qaradawi's advocacy for educational reforms. When the Sheikh asked Qaradawi if introduction of subjects like English and Mathematics will not be detrimental for a student of the Islamic Sciences and Arabic Language, Qaradawi responded: "How can a student live so isolated from their own time? Even if he had the ability to work as a missionary or give *fatwas* (legal opinions) he would still be an *'alim* (scholar) engaging a particular social reality" (26-27). This is visionary Qaradawi.

So enamored with the educational reforms he spearheaded in Qatar, Qaradawi boasts of his Qatari graduates becoming ambassadors or heads of various ministries. He, as Warren rightly observes, does not mention any of them joining the ranks of the *ulamā* (scholars). By contrast, Qaradawi's female graduates generally appear to have gone to the Azhar for further study and then returned to Qatar to take up teaching positions (29).

Rather than being the general guide of the Muslim Brothers—a position he declined twice—Qaradawi prefers to be an independent scholar. He thus developed concern for global Islamic issues as he frequently visits countries such as Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Europe, North America, and even as far as Japan and South Korea. Qaradawi's Qatari passport and royal sponsorship facilitates his wide traveling across the globe. He also often visits neighboring Gulf States and plays significant roles in establishing the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in the UAE before local Emirati branches emerged in the mid-1970s (30).

It is indisputable that Qaradawi was the most visible scholar—both in the Arab and the Western World—among his contemporaries due to his early exposure to, and utilization of, the visual media. As Warren rightly explains, beginning in the 1970s, Hamad b. Khalifa, now the Amir, gave Qaradawi a position on Qatari national television with a weekly *fatwa* program called *Hady*

al-Islām (Islamic Guidance). Al-Jazeera's Islamic TV show *Sharia and Life*, hosted by Qaradawi, was its most popular program. At its height, the show garnered approximately 60 million viewers (32). Qaradawi's vision was perfectly in sync with al-Jazeera's supranational framing of the Arab World.

Qatari foreign policy vis-a-vis other gulf states and especially during the Arab Spring was highly influenced by Qradawi and the influx of Egyptian *ulamā* and intellectuals in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Through the influence of Qaradawi's Jurisprudence of Revolution, Qatar became a strong pillar of support for the MB at the heart of the Gulf Crisis. Qatar, through Qaradawi, became a strong voice for democracy in Arab states that have had a long history of dictatorship. This is evident in the roles played by Qatar, along with Qaradawi, in Libya, Egypt, and Syria. Ironically, Qatar is not a democracy.

Qaradawi's influence on Qatari foreign policy became even more pronounced in its support for Egyptian Revolution which culminated in resignation of Mubarak on the 11th February. Support for Egyptian Revolution was, to Qatar, a pet project with much emotional investment. Warren alludes to this: ""Qaradawi said at a celebration of the Egyptian community in Doha. "When I learned about the victory of the Revolution, I called the Amir [Hamad b. Khalifa] of Qatar to congratulate him and thank him. He told me that I played an essential leadership role. I told him that if al-Jazeera had not been there, my voice would not have reached [Tahrir] Square and the people of Egypt." (43).

Quintessential Qaradawi, having being exiled from Egypt for decades, returned to Cairo to deliver a carefully crafted sermon in Tahrir Square following the Revolution. Being an *ʿālim* (scholar) returning from exile, Qaradawi was soon labelled "the Egyptian Khomeini" in comparison with the 1979 Iranian Revolution (44). He evidently played a starring role by lending his voice to the Revolution via al-jazeera and he was widely commended for that. Yet, Qaradawi's role was viewed with suspicion. He was criticized in some sections of Egyptian media "as part of an MB effort to hijack the Revolution." Accordingly, placing

Qaradawi at the center of the Revolution clearly steered it away from its original secular impulse. With the aid of al-Jazeera, it is argued, Qaradawi and the MB supplanted the voices of a liberal secular Egyptian youth (44). In 2011, Qaradawi and his like-minded peers among the Qatar-based International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS) began to articulate what is called the Jurisprudence of Revolution—*fiqh al-thawra* (1).

However, Qaradawi's cold attitude towards the protesters in Bahrain calls his advocacy for popular government into question. Why the advocacy for democracy in Egypt and Libya but not in Bahrain? Could it be because the protesters in Bahrain are majorly Shiites? Being a Sunni, Qaradawi's conception of democracy and justice vis-a-vis protests in Bahrain is understandable.

Like Qatar, patronizing the MB by Al-Nahyan (the Emirati rulers) was an easy way to bolster their image as advocates of pan-Islamic solidarity to counter pan-Arab nationalism at the time socialist pan-Arab nationalism was considered a far greater threat (77). But later, the Emirati rulers became suspicious of the MB especially after the Arab Spring which shook Arab autocratic rulers to the marrow. Subsequently, the Al-Nahyan started gravitating towards the United States for protection against external threats to its territorial integrity and local demands for democracy.

Like Qaradawi, Bin Bayyah—the most influential scholar that helps shape the UAE's foreign policy—is not also from the UAE. He is from Mauritania. It was after the Arab spring that Abdullah Bin Bayyah who was a former deputy to Qaradawi's IUMS strengthened his relationship with the Emirati Rulers. He resigned from the IUMS after the Arab spring to start a new organization, Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies (FPPMS) in December with the support of the An-Nahyans. FPPMS is a transnational grouping of mostly Neo-traditionalist *ʿulamā* and sought to articulate the Jurisprudence of Peace to rival Qaradawi's Jurisprudence of Revolution (74).

Unlike Qaradawi, Bin Bayyah fell out of love with democracy. He is more cautious of democracy in relation to *Shura* (Qur'anic consultation) while Qaradawi is too embracing. Bin Bayyah opines that the solution to terrorism is justice; not democracy which was considered "the cure for all ills, particularly terrorism" (88). That is correct. However, Bin Bayyah does not envisage any constitutional constraints on the authority of the ruler. In fact, Warren explains, he expresses no animosity toward dictatorships and authoritarian governments (86). To Bin Bayyah, a dictatorship can promote justice and be consultative as a democracy, and even a better system, if it maintains social cohesion (88).

There is a clear deification of rulers in Bin Bayyah's political thought. To espouse his antagonism towards democracy, Bin Bayyah asserts; "In societies that are not ready, the call for democracy is essentially a call for war" (94). This is not in dispute, but what if the society is ready but their rulers are not? Bin Bayyah shied away from this.

Warren writes: "Bin Bayyah's call for peace above all else relegates justice and accountability into the background" (98). It is very unfortunate that the '*ulama* (scholars) who should position themselves as advocates for justice and make rulers accountable chose to be establishment's mouthpiece. Warren then concludes that "Bin Bayyah's prioritization of peace and unwillingness to propose any constitutional restraint on the ruler's power inevitably means that the people must choose to postpone any call to justice indefinitely" (100). Warren's concern is my concern; I cannot express it better. David Warran's conclusion should strike every reader.