

## LEGITIMACY AND EXCHANGE

### THE MORAL ECONOMY OF AUTHORITY AMONG HUNGARIAN MUSLIMS

**Abstract:** In this chapter, we aim to outline, in the realm of the possible, the parameters of the field of Muslim authority in Hungary. For this purpose, it is appropriate to apply three types of approaches: first a conceptual study which analyses some key concepts (those of authority and legitimacy, in particular) from the perspective of the socio-anthropology of Islam. The next step is a longer exercise of mapping the sources of legitimacy among Hungarian Muslims. We do this second exercise following a back-and-forth movement between Islam in Hungary, Muslim societies and Islamic doctrines, all of which are contributing factors to the structures of authority and modes of legitimating that explain the production and obedience to authority among Hungarian Muslims. A final ethnographic approach describes and analyses debates between Hungarian Muslim women on the authority to decide over questions such as the problematic of legitimate preachers, celebrating birthdays in the family and female beauty care.

The aim of the article is to examine the legitimacy of symbolic capital that allows Hungarian Islamic figures to claim the status of the authority and to initiate the production of this authority and to conduct an authorization process. From the outset, therefore, we raise the question of the moral economy<sup>1</sup> of authority in Islam in Hungary. We base our study on observations and interviews with members of the two major Hungarian Muslim communities: *A Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza* and *Magyar Iszlám Közösség*.

**Keywords:** Legitimacy, authority, leadership, moral economy, Islam in Hungary

---

\* MTA-SZTE Research Group for the Study of Religious Culture, H-6722 Szeged, Egyetem u. 2. Hungary. Email: belhaj.abdessamad@gmail.com; biaspeidl@gmail.com

1 Joakim Sandberg defines moral economy as "a. a set of moral or values-based attitudes or beliefs concerning economic agents, practices or structures that are shared by a certain population or group and (b) the actualization or institutionalization of these attitudes in a certain social practice or structure, common tradition or general 'way of life' of the population". See: SANDBERG 2015. 177.

## Conceptual framework I: The concept of authority

According to Max Weber, the authority is the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of people.<sup>2</sup> This notion is operative, but must be qualified in the Muslim contexts. Often individuals do not follow a particular authority all the time, or in any situation. Thus, Hungarian Muslims might change affiliation, mosque or outright stop attending mosques, as they disagree with the discourses preached by imams in the mosques; they can also change their affinity to the Muslim Brotherhood or the Salafis, Sufi or otherwise. In this respect, the turnover of the authorities is not surprising. Some prominent members of the *Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza* were earlier members of the *Magyar Iszlám Közösség*, and left it to establish themselves as independent authorities.

F. Peter (for French Islam) and T. G. Jensen (for Danish Islam) have shown that religious authorities are persons or institutions involved on a regular or professional basis in the authorization of Islam.<sup>3</sup> The authority inflates as a configuration because it is relational and contingent.<sup>4</sup> Thus, authority takes place at the junction between discourses and audiences, assuming the role of authorizing beliefs and practices, which are favourably received by audiences. It, therefore, appears that where some see the fragmentation of authority as a synonym of decay, and thus of degeneration and weakness, it is in reality a flexibility required for the reconfiguration and the regeneration of a field of authority. In other words, this relational character deploys both a capacity of structuring and restructuring, inherent, as it stands, to the Islamic field of authority.

The positioning of authority is constantly changing. For the first generation of immigrant workers arriving in Europe, for example, the authority of the Imam tended to be minimal, based on a minimalist and limited moral economy also in the first group of workers gathered around relatives, village or region of origin. This minimalist and local moral economy is based on small donations by the small groups of immigrants. It is also noteworthy that this first generation of Muslims were economically a manpower of the European economies, fully employed, and therefore, their moral economy was relatively dominated, even in their daily lives, by market economy. The exile of the Islamist associations, and the influence of Muslim countries among other factors, and especially the family reunion policy (establishing the first anchor of an autonomous local moral economy, the family) have created different expectations of the imam, now at the heart of a more complex moral economy, supported by international funds and more powerful communities; the expectations cannot remain the same for the

2 WEBER 1978. 53.

3 PETER 2006. 708–709; JENSEN 2006. 643.

4 KRÄMER – SCHMIDTKE 2006. 2.

third generation whose relationship to authorities in the host society and religion is different.

## The Conceptual Framework II: The notion of legitimacy

In the theological and Sunni legal doctrine, legitimacy was formed around three pillars: scriptural texts, the consensus of jurists and community,<sup>5</sup> which all emphasize the idea of unity. As Mr. Sulok expressed it, the unity of Islam is guaranteed by the unity of creed. However, the norm cannot exist but as a result of a social, economic or political process of which it stands as a norm. Thus, in its religious and social history, Sunnism mobilized other legitimacies outside or with these three pillars, such as charisma, social reproduction or action. When an authority figure uses a Sunni doctrinal legitimacy, it does so in relation to a social anchor, and to a moral economy which sanctifies its social and religious legitimacy.<sup>6</sup>

In this context, the thesis of normative justification developed by J. Raz helps us to understand better the common Sunni reference of legitimacy. According to Raz, legitimacy is a moral force which is justified within acceptable moral reasons for the subject: the latter agrees that someone exercises power over him insofar as he accepts that the holder of power is best suited to deal with matters concerning the subject. Thus, the subject is willing to entrust the management of its affairs to the person in power, rather than managing them himself.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, the legitimacy has a social function, that of justifying the submission or contesting an order seen as the best possible world or the world to change. For audiences to adhere to any normative justification, a discourse built on the basis of mere assumptions, reasonable or morally justifiable, it is necessary that these audiences see in it the greatest benefit for the largest number (of members). Hence the moral economy is inseparable from the Sunni legitimacy and therefore of Islam: the discourse of legitimacy reflects a discourse on the moral economy and vice versa. The legitimacy of discourses circulating among Muslims in Hungary can maintain and produce meaning only insofar as they are useful to the moral economy of the concerned Muslims. Intrinsic to the idea of justification, which is epistemological as well as moral, and even cultural in the most basic sense, there is a process of construction and selection. In all Sunni discourses of legitimacy, figures of authority build from selected elements a posture of legitimacy, without jeopardizing the common foundation of Sunni legitimacy.

In addition to the normative justification, the Sunni legitimacy must ensure sustainability and spatiality; it must function over time, or it may collapse. This

---

5 BELHAJ 2010. 63–65; SCHUCK 2013. 485–506.

6 SHARON 1984. 121–141; DÉCOBERT 2004. 23–44; FILALI-ANSARY 2015. 72–92.

7 HERSHOVITZ 2003. 206.

failure indicates, in the end, the lack of resources, which challenges the moral economy of the community, which will turn to another authority figure. For legitimacy to operate sustainably, it must be rooted in social structures and, therefore, in a place; for example, the legitimacy of the action may not work in reality only if it is exercised in a place reserved for it. It is for this reason that mosques and Muslim associations multiply, not because of the number of believers who need worship places. Since the field is segmentary and mimetic, in order to establish their credibility and to justify their legitimacy, even a couple of active people - in quest for a place in the moral economy of the community - need to dispose of a religious place. The offer to establish a congregational place might be in advance of the demand, because creating such place might be connected to the will to initiate a centre of preaching Islam. Thus the offer creates the demand, and creates an opportunity for other mimetic and competing offers.

A discourse on legitimacy discards another discourse on legitimacy and, subsequently, a conflict of legitimacies is inevitable. In the Sunni world, the legitimacy of discourses tends to converge, while maintaining always a kind of divergence in check, with the exception of radical Salafism, which is soon excluded by the mainstream Sunnism. The Sunni discourse on legitimacy is, above all, a discourse of expansion and exclusion: 1. expansion because it reflects the will of the community, and the number that must necessarily increase so that the strength of the argument increases. 2. And exclusion as any other discourse that "deviates" from the base of legitimacy endangers the growing community. Not only the Sunni legitimacy has a phobia of minorities, Shiites or others, but especially in a European context it has a phobia of difference and diversity. Any Islamic legitimacy of discourse is ultimately a discourse against integration and diversity.

## **The sources of Sunni legitimacy**

To establish their legitimacy, Sunni actors employ four main strategies: charisma, social reproduction, religious knowledge and action. Few preliminary remarks about the four legitimacies should be made here. First, that they are flexible and adaptable resources, and can be used together or separately depending on the situation of discourse or action. Furthermore, the mobilization of these resources meets the qualifications or skills of a figure of authority. It is a social daily trial and error process in which the actor learns to highlight the resource that makes it capitalize the most influence. Finally, we included the pillars of the Sunni doctrinal legitimacy in the mode of legitimating by religious knowledge because it is through a scholarly tradition that the scriptural sources, the consensus of jurists or community agreement are, from a socio-anthropological point of view, intelligible.

## 1) *Charisma*<sup>8</sup>

Charismatic authority played a vital role in the emergence and development of Islam.<sup>9</sup> The Sunni traditionalists who have written the history of the first three centuries of Islam wanted, in particular, to highlight the charisma of the community, probably too disappointed with the state of Islam in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Additionally, the schisms in the different Islamic sects, Sunni, Shiite or Sufi, historical and contemporary, reflect a segmental logic around a figure of authority that claims to revive the true Islam.<sup>10</sup> Managers or the heirs of the charismatic figure mobilize various strategies to preserve the charisma of the founder, in order to preserve the gains that charisma generates.<sup>11</sup>

One can designate the Sunni charisma as a recurrent mimetic movement: the famous Sunni mimetic of the Prophet through his *sunna* which is both the practice of the Prophet and reproduction of this practice. The imitation of the Prophet is highly recommended, if not compulsory; it is a rewarding act, albeit very demanding. The Prophet is an inexhaustible charismatic resource, many figures of authority, the *ʿ*ulama and Sufi masters in particular, but also intellectuals, constantly rebuild, and take “a shade of the Prophetic light” (*qabas min al-nubuwwa*) for their benefit. The descendants of the Prophet, the Sufis, the traditionalists and the martyrs of jihad, all fascinated by the Prophet; they use voluntarily this legitimacy resource.<sup>12</sup>

From the moment a person adheres to *ahl al-sunna*, it reasserts the need for a charismatic legitimacy. The candidate to the authority will be compared to the Prophet. The establishment of Islamic bonds of brotherhood or *umma* is concomitant to the charisma of the Sunna as this prophetic charisma emphasizes the charisma of the community. In other words, there is a correlation between the supply of charisma that seeks to create a community, and the need of charisma in a Sunni community.<sup>13</sup> The “cult of the Prophet”, which also has pronounced manifestations among Hungarian Muslims is a symbol of the quest for charisma.

The largest section on the website of the *Magyarországai Muszlimok Egyháza* is dedicated to the Prophet Muhammad: 215 documents on the Prophet’s life and teachings, the function of which is less to *inform* than to *connect* the audience to the source of Sunni charisma. In Mr Sulok’s words “One cannot follow the *sunna* without the *sira*”. The head of the community described the Prophet as a role model and intermediary for Muslims in everything. Mr. Sulok lists justice as the most important characteristic of the Prophet and explains the emphasis on

8 We use the notion of charisma defined as “a power of personal authority such as to allow one to lead people or inspire devotion [...] authority derives from the volition of the leader’s followers, rather than from legal status or tradition”. MORRIS 2012. 35.

9 LINDHOLM 2012. 177–84.

10 GEAVES 2009. 37–60.

11 STENBERG 2008. 65–73.

12 BERGMANN 2008. 467–479.

13 GEAVES 1996. 169–192.

the history of the 7<sup>th</sup> century by stating that the Prophet committed no mistakes as opposed to later Muslims.

However, Mr. Sulok distances himself from celebrating the Prophet's birthday, *mawlid nabawī*. His argument is that the *sunna*, that is the sayings and the acts of the Prophet himself, do not promote this celebration; it was invented centuries later, and as such it is "violation of the sunna". The love of the Prophet should appear in following his teachings as he puts it. We asked our interviewee whether the person who follows the Prophet does not have by extension the highest authority in the community, and he discarded such thing. He prefers to call it respect and trust: the more a person resembles the Prophet, the more it gains respect and trust in the community. We also asked him whether the Prophetic charisma is not a collective charisma, in the sense that his charisma is embedded in that of the community, and that is probably why orthodox Sunnis do not celebrate the Prophet's celebration; he saw no point in our question.

The head of the *Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza* told us an interesting statement about charisma, namely that "charisma is valid within the confines of the *sharia*", which in his understanding means that a charismatic figure might be legitimate in Islam, and Sunni Islam in particular, only if it respects the boundaries of *sharia*, and does not infringe on the law. He stressed that *sharia* is the framework and they operate inside of it confines. Implicit in his argument is the conflict between traditionists and theologians-jurists on the one hand and the Sufis on the other. The latter claimed a charismatic authority, to which the former responded by requiring this authority to be controlled by *sharia*. Thus, the head of the *Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza* admits the need for a charismatic figure to be a guide, but within the confines of *sharia*.

In Hungary, four figures enjoy some charisma in the two major Sunni communities. The website of *Magyar Iszlám Közösség* lists three charismatic figures: Gyula Germanus (d. 1979), alias Julius Abdulkarim Germanus, an Orientalist and Muslim convert. On the first page of *Magyar Iszlám Közösség's* website, two old videos of his speeches are displayed, to celebrate the aura of the "founder" and that of the community. The head of the *Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyház* does not contest his charisma, but emphasized the fact that he was not a traditional Islamic scholar, a familiar argument against orientalists. Two additional figures of the same community are Balázs Mihálffy and Zoltán Bolek. The first is the founder of the *Magyar Iszlám Közösség* (1988) and the second is his successor, founding the mosque of this community in 1996. Implicitly, the head of the *Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza* concedes that these three figures generate charisma, but systematically judges their influence by their traditional knowledge, which he thinks is lacking in their cases, and their political statements and connections undermines their credibility as religious authorities. As for the head of the *Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza*, he said he never considered himself as a charismatic figure. He knows, however, that people ask him about his opinions and trust it regarding the teachings of Islam.

## 2) *Body, clan and reproduction*

Sunni legitimacy by reproduction is a complex historical process; the division of mosques along ethnic or regional or clan identities is a manifestation of this type of legitimacy. The first Sunni communities in Europe have reproduced a field of authority, around similar practices to which they were exposed in the country of origin. In the same vein, the Islamist leadership of European Islam reproduced imported patterns of thinking and doing things from their backgrounds. Once installed, this subsystem is reproduced, in its turn, at the junction between political Islam and popular Islam, not identical to what is done in the home country of course, or what has been imported in the first place, but in a similar logic, with some degree of regularity. The subsystem imitates the system (or systems) of the country of origin while seeking autonomy (segmentarity) and installing a reproduction subsystem of a local authority field. The arrival of young leaders and the converted, currently the major players in Islam in Hungary<sup>14</sup>, do not change the substance of the tools or ways of thinking, in the Islamic moral economy. In contrast, with globalization, import takes a more pronounced pace. Transnational linkages established by families and clans, allow greater flexibility in reproduction.

The Yemeni domination of the *Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza* can be seen in the board of the community's organisation, occupied in majority by Yemenis, in the presidency of the mosque, also led by a Yemeni, and in that the two imams of the mosque of the same origin. The head of the *Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza* acknowledges the Yemeni domination over the community, and considers it an accident caused by a historical fact. He explains it by the active character of Muslim Yemenis who contrary to other immigrants from the Middle East, stayed in Hungary and invested in religion and studies while other immigrants either went back to their countries after their studies or abandoned studies and started business, ignoring religious action. Also, it is attributable to their competence which in the process of selection set them apart from the Egyptians, for example.

## 3) *Religious knowledge as capital*

Although the meaning and the level of Islamic knowledge to be acquired is a subject of debate, it is a major source of legitimacy in Sunni Islam because the link between the founding community and future generations is established through the transmission a symbolic heritage, the *sunna*. This is often a travesty of the original knowledge to the extent that the origin is an invention or imagination of the 9<sup>th</sup> century by the same representatives of the *sunna*. One common question

---

14 The head of the *Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza* is Sulok Zoltán Szabolcs (born in 1970) and that of the *Magyar Iszlám Közösség* is Bolek Zoltán (born in 1959), two converts.

we find in the Salafi discourse, and other Islamist or Islamic discourse is the criterion according to which it is possible to distinguish between good and evil scholars (the distinction is inherent to the moral economy of legitimacy). This conflict of religious knowledge opposes Salafists, the most traditionalist of Sunni groups, to other Sunni interpretations, and divides the Salafists themselves.

In the field of Sunni authority, the question is not about a religious knowledge itself, but about a discursive legitimacy that is to say the ability to transform, using a network of resources, the study of some texts, often within the range of a hundred pages, into *'ilm*, a hallowed legacy. The authorization given, with or without transparency, for sheikhs or peers, is more important than the number of texts, depth of control, or the spirit of research, or even the quality of the memory of the scholar.<sup>15</sup>

The *Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza* highlights religious knowledge, Arabic language, books, videos on Islam, Friday sermons, questions and answers, Islamic studies, literature, etc. in its website as well as in its daily missionary work. The most cherished capital in this community is the knowledge of *sharia*, the most sacred knowledge, and the source of charisma, and the “foundational imagined community”. The legitimacy of a person in the religious service depends on his skills in this religious knowledge. In Hungary, no mufti is appointed by the state. There are the *shuyūkh*, the religious masters, some of which, as the head of the community *Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza*, told us attended the level of independent intellectual activity, *ijtihād*, a highly contested claim; these masters deliver opinions about religious matters. Among the *shuyūkh*, the *mufti*, is the person who “officially” answers the questions of people on religious matters, and therefore constitutes the primary authority in the mosque. The imams have a practical function to assume, that of the daily religious service, mainly the prayers. The *shuyūkh* and the imams have certificates of religious knowledge from higher Islamic institutes in the Muslim world, especially from Yemen. There is also a *qāri'*, a reciter of the Quran who teaches children the Quran and reads the Quran during Ramadan, a less prestigious position. The head of the *Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza* insists that the authority acquired by all these persons does not only depend on their religious knowledge, but also on their morality. The knowledge and the morality (*'ilm wa akhlāq*) of the candidates to religious authority are assessed and authorized by the board of the community's organization. Mr. Sulok emphasized following the soundest opinion based on evidence (*dalīl*). He condemns the non-following of any juridical school, *la-madhhabiyya* which he considers to be a case of “going back to starting point zero”.

15 EICKELMAN 2015. 135–145; MANDAVILLE 2007. 224–243.

#### 4) *Legitimacy by action*

As Weber puts it, the actions are symptoms and underlying expressions of personal ethics.<sup>16</sup> The Islamic ethics of action follow the divine commands, which encompass the daily rules and ethical practices of the life of a good Muslim. These rules of conduct are necessary for salvation, and cannot be known by independent reason as suggested by the Mu'tazila, but must be drawn from revelation, and complemented by human reasoning.<sup>17</sup> There is a moral economy of salvation at stake here.<sup>18</sup> The good Muslim is seeking the best life possible, that of the hereafter and which he prepares in the herein, and is ready to act accordingly. The revelation is the guarantee of the success or failure of the action; action must, therefore, seek to live according to the revelation in this world. I. Lapidus noticed that living and knowing the truth in Sunni Islam are the two faces of the same reality. The quest for perfection through action, through rituals, customs or transactions, makes the person in the world without being of the world.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, this ethics of action is temporary and transient; it sees the best reward in heaven. It invests in our world insofar as it is the best possible passing world, created by God to help us in the transition to the best world (heaven).

The legitimacy of the action does not follow a linear logic; for social actors it is the use of the most appropriate logic that leads to the best possible outcome in a given moral economy. Islam itself is a logic of action: its rituals, beliefs, myths, lifestyle structure the daily lives of individuals and communities, their attitudes and behaviours; the testimony of faith connects the individual to a community, and excludes him/her from another. The ritual – whether financial as almsgiving or bodily like prayer – is collective and presupposes social settings, such as community. The pilgrimage is a global action, and of course Ramadan changes the life in a Muslim neighbourhood for a month. The strategic action in these rituals revolves around exchange, submission and communalism.

The *Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza* is active in several fields: education, charity, etc. The head of this Muslim community explained to us that Islamic action is a way to follow the Prophet's teachings, who asks his community to be active in the world. In this regard, this community organised in May 2016, the first fair and exhibition of Muslim businesses in Hungary<sup>20</sup>, a sort of Muslim expo, organised in the recent years in the UK, France and Belgium. There is probably one particular aspect of the Hungarian expo; it took place after the terrible moral panic in Hungary caused by migration waves, invading Hungarian borders and cities. These migration waves devastated the image of the Muslim community living in Hungary. Thus, this fair offers the opportunity to claim legitimacy as an

---

16 WEBER 1963. 155. For the legitimacy of action in European Islam, see a brief note in: DASSETTO 1996. 150. For ethics as a cultural system see: CSORDAS 2013. 523–546.

17 HOURANI 1976. 69.

18 See in the regard: HART 2013; REDA 2013. 441–462; LAPIDUS 1984. 38–61.

19 LAPIDUS 1984. 60.

20 I. Muszlim vállalkozások Magyarországon c. börze és kiállítás <http://islam.com/hirek/item/2394-i-muszlim-vallakozasok-magyarorszagon-c-borze-es-kiallitas>

economic actor. The head of the community, Zoltán Sulok told us that “We organised the fair to let people know each other and show their products”. He asserted that the event is Islamic because Islam has an economic tradition, which he calls Islamic economy, based on justice, the prohibition of interest, *riba*, and *halal*. He sees the justice of Islamic economy as able to eliminate poverty and inequality. Islamic economy, he told us, is able to sustain development, in a world that failed economically, and that Islamic economy is the solution.

### **Debating of religious authority dilemmas among Hungarian converts to Islam**

The diversity inherent in the institutional structure of Islam and the multiplicity of authorities gain special significance when, in a majority non-Islamic environment a convert has to make one’s way through a mass of legal opinions (*fatwas*). While in a traditional, Islamic context the believer follows the creed of the family and access to jurisprudential opinion is granted, converts face multiple difficulties in finding authentic answers to the emerging dilemmas. In a minority context various trends present themselves and with no proper knowledge of Arabic or English, the convert’s opinion formation starts with logic based reasoning. However, it remains confined by the need to justify the conclusion thus reached from authorised sources. In what follows we examine problems faced by Hungarian Muslim female converts and their strategies to find authentic solutions to such issues.

The cases referred to below have been discussed in a “closed” Facebook group for females pertaining to one of the big Muslim centres in Budapest, therefore the anonymity of the group and the participants is respected. The problems raised range from doubts regarding what the authentic Islamic practice is (e.g. in performing prayer, following legal schools, credibility of religious scholars, taking the Prophet as role model for the believer) through proper – moral – behaviour (especially regarding female-male relations, dress code) to various daily issues (such as health care, celebrations, bad habits such as smoking, house decorations etc...).

The fact that the focus group consists of Hungarian females, accentuates two factors. First, the problem of access to authoritative opinions that correspond to the principles of the Hanafi *madhhab* (legal school) followed by the mosque which they attend in Budapest. Second, the necessity to deal with the intrinsic feeling that a born Muslim or native Arab knows better, a conviction that vests their husbands with a kind of religious authority over them. These traits are explicitly or implicitly present in all the discussions. Compared to questions published in official *fatwa* providing websites, the issues discussed in the group refer to ongoing practices in which the person has already taken a position – although often with a

hint of doubt – and in the intimacy and anonymity guaranteed by the group, tries to acquire post-justification for her individual stance.

### 1) *The problematic of legitimate preachers*

A good example of the difficulties in discerning between authentic and manipulated sources of legal opinions is the discussion about Mustafa Islamoğlu who, according to the first writer of the opening post “fools Muslims all over the world...His ideas spread like a virus and it is only a matter of time that they reach the Hungarian public as well.” In the following the initiator of the discussion – the first commentator referred to as C. 1. – lists a number of opinions attributed to Islamoğlu with special emphasis on his claim that “Allah does not know the future”. She goes on describing how she met the disciple of Islamoğlu who “first said things with which I fully agreed with and emphasised that as a Turkish and born Muslim he deserves my trust. He supported his statements with Quranic verses. And here comes the problem as this method can be absolutely convincing for people who lack the basics of religious knowledge.” Then C. 1. addresses the new converts calling them “to get rid of the inferiority complex that leads us to think that an Arab or a Turkish knows better. On the contrary, they have a strong tendency to mix religion with local traditions, while for us, Hungarians it is easier to reach out to the clear source.” Then she links to another topic, stating “we have to close the debate about whether it is necessary to follow a *madhhab*, since it is a must. Everybody needs to follow one Sunni *madhhab*, because it completes the theory exposed in the Quran with the practice of the Prophet. However, it is up to the individual to decide which one. In general, the most applicable to urban life is the Hanafi School, but the choice belongs to the believer.” Here a fourth theme is introduced to the post: “the importance of being united and unanimous as a group. We can get knowledge only from authentic scholars, accepted by and known to the community.” At the end of the discourse C. 1. adds that the Facebook group provides a platform for getting informed about the credited, mainstream scholars.

The responses to the post evolve around the criteria of authenticity. C. 2. takes a defensive position and responds saying that she listened to the teachings of Islamoğlu, and she refuses to be graded as “worse Muslim” than C. 1. for this. C. 2. claims that Islamoğlu’s statements are quoted out of context. She emphasises that the preacher’s discourse is fairly complicated “although after some time one can get used to the Arabic terms he uses”. Then she goes on criticising Harun Yahya – “a Masonic” in her words – and Fethullah Gülen – “an American agent” according to her – and concludes that “everybody can make mistaken statements and one should not follow blindly one single preacher while condemning others”. In the following C. 3. addresses C. 2. in order to explain that the discourse is not about labelling some as better Muslims than others, rather about the awareness of whether the preaching is in line with “The [i.e. mainstream] Islam” or

not. Furthermore, C. 3. emphasises the duty to remind others of what one feels non-Islamic and harmful. Then, as she says “it is the individual’s responsibility to follow such teachings or refuse them.”

In the discussion we can notice crucial statements on authority and authenticity. First, it states that the danger to be misled is present especially for those who are new to Islam and lack the basics of religion, meaning here the accepted rules of deduction in formulating a legal opinion. Second, the weight of being a born Muslim or native Arab or Turkish in judging one’s credibility is debated and contested. Being deprived of cultural background is presented as an advantage in performing a pure, non-distorted Islamic practice. However, the admitted difficulty in understanding a complicated discourse in a foreign language which is rich in a specific Arabic terminology implies that getting knowledge faces obstacles and remains a concern to the convert. Third, the importance of following a *madhhab* (acknowledged legal school) – self-evident in a traditional environment –, a question typical of minority context is reasserted, but completed with two, characteristically convert arguments. One of them emphasises individual decision in choosing a *madhhab* – contrary to being born into one or following it by marriage –; the other is that a particular legal school – the Hanafi – is more adaptable to urban life than the other three – or it is better to say that urban life can be structured to meet the requirements of Hanafi legal system.

Individual choice is reasserted again in the responses where its scope is expanded to accept or refuse false teachings. The fourth aspect is the importance for the micro community to be united – meaning here those who attend the same mosque or belong to the Facebook group – in discerning the right teachings from the false. If a charismatic imam with proper scholarly credentials had been present in the community, the charisma – meaning here wisdom – of the community was not highlighted in defining authoritative versus avoidable. Fifth, in the responses, the anxiety over being a good Muslim emerges coupled with the fear of being labelled as worse or less Muslim as a result of an individual choice. This concern together with the conviction that a mainstream Islam exists, sets a standard from which individual reasoning, freedom of choice and undertaking responsibility cannot relieve the believer.

## 2) *Celebrating birthdays in the family*

Setting the routines and habits of family life and the upbringing of the next generation is the shared responsibility of the parents. In a non-Muslim minority context being Muslim becomes a special concern and the lack of authentic opinion and common cultural background are sources of tensions between the couples. In the debates the born Muslim husband often claims religious authority. The following case describes a situation of this kind. The discussion of celebrating birthdays in the Facebook group highlights the possibilities and confines the convert

wife faces in her quest for authentic practice when no unquestionable authoritative opinion is available.

The post analysed in this section is started by a Hungarian convert lady (C.1.) who lives in Ireland with her Somali husband and children. C. 1. exposes her problem in the Facebook group asking opinions – in a complaining manner – about her husband’s prohibiting birthday celebrations in the family. C. 2. answers suggesting her to demand a *hadith* from her husband that explicitly prohibits birthday celebrations. She adds that the Prophet did not celebrate it therefore some consider it as *bid’a*. In the same section she explains that *bid’a* means harmful innovation. In the end she claims that it is not *bid’a* since celebrating one’s birthday has nothing to do with religion. C. 3. adds that in Turkey she knew people who condemned birthday celebration and labelled it as a Christian custom and argued against it in a manner that raised sense of guilt in those held it. C. 4. joins the discussion by quoting her Afghan and Kurdish friends who had positive reactions to such celebrations telling that “Allah likes nice things that make people happy.” Then she suggests the *islamqa.info* webpage and adds she will inquire about the scholars who provide opinions there.

C. 2. backs C. 4. in claiming that “Allah likes when people are happy, celebrating birthday is not blasphemy.” C. 5. who lives in Saudi Arabia interferes saying that it is a Western custom. C. 2. answers polemically: “there are many things in Saudi that are western customs (...) Our beloved Prophet never used air conditioner. C. 5. replies saying that no one in her husband’s family knows the date of their birth “because the Prophet did not celebrate it. Air conditioning has nothing to do with religion, it serves comfort.” C. 2. responds that the Prophet had a very simple life style and did not care about comfort. She goes further saying that superfluous luxury contradicts the Sunna (practice) of the Prophet much more than celebrating birthdays. And “by the way – she adds – the Prophet used to fast on Mondays because he was born on Monday.” C. 6. supports C. 2.’s argument by *hadith* 1162 narrated by Abu Muslim. C. 5. asks with a hint of provocation “Then why did the Prophet fast on Thursdays?”. C. 2. answers: “Because it was a custom” and ends the remark with a smile emoticon. C. 6. offers another explanation “Maybe because doomsday will happen on a Friday. But I am not sure.”

Then they start asking C. 1. about the nationality of her husband, if he has always been strict in such matters. C. 1. Reveals that her husband’s family does not celebrate birthdays, but he became stricter after they had moved to Ireland from Hungary. “He changed I think because my parents are not here. Were they here, they would come to celebrate.” C. 2. states then: “It does not matter what customs they have and how they mix it with religion. You chose this and you have to adapt to what you have chosen. C. 7. joins the talk here asking “What do you mean by following a stricter trend in Islam?” C. 5. in her answer gives a brief and shallow description of Salafis “those don’t listen to music and their trousers end above their ankle” and attaches a smile emoticon. C. 8. offers to ask a “knowledgeable *Muslima* who lives in Medina and helps others.” C. 4. raises an

objection that “she is from Saudi too... It is declared that we follow the Hanafi School, while in Saudi Arabia they follow Ibn Hanbal at least this is what I found on the Wikipedia.” C. 8. reminds that “*hadith* is a *hadith*.” C. 2. contests warning that “Yes but it matters who interprets it and what reads into it.” C. 8. Takes the polemic further declaring that “Following a specific trend is an error. The purest is to follow the Holy Quran and the Hadith. How could we know which preacher is right and which one is wrong? And why Muslims are divided into sects? If something is not mentioned [in the Quran and in the *hadith*], it means it is borrowed from other cultures and therefore it is *haram* (forbidden). C. 2. Asks back: “Can you interpret the Quranic verses and the *hadiths*?” C. 8. replies urging C. 2. to decide which path she takes. “I will leave the group if I am obliged to follow a specific school.” C. 2. responds that “You are not obliged to follow a specific school but you have to respect that we follow the Hanafi school.”

C. 5. adds that she found an opinion which says that celebration is accepted but only without candles because when the candles are blown off people usually formulate wish which is wrong. Then she quotes Quran 60:1 and explains it that imitating non-believers is *shirk* (polytheism). C. 2. reflects on this refusing the idea that blowing off a candle is always accompanied by a wish. C. 5. posts in attachment the verse in question scanned. In her response C. 4. asks if candles are mentioned in it explicitly. C.5.’s answer is “No.” She goes on citing an opinion in English which states that “celebrating such an occasion is nothing but an imitation of Kuffars, while a Muslim has to be distinguished from them in all aspects. Imitating Kuffars and trying to look like them is Haram. Rasullullah (s.a.w.s) has said, ‘Whosoever impersonates a nation (other than Islam) will be (resurrected) from them on the day of judgment’. (Sunan Abu Dawud)” C. 8. reacts saying that “You had better follow the Quran and the Sunna and not others”. C. 5. copies a reference to a Shi’i opinion from *islamquest.net* to which C. 8. reacts that the Shi’a should mind their own business because they neglect many rules and have practices that do not accord with the Quran. The discussion ends here.

The debate is one of the longest posts in the Facebook group, it consists of some heated arguments and also a whole range of topics. The need for explaining terms such as *bid’a*, concepts like ‘strictness in religion’ and Salafism, the reference to Wikipedia, unfamiliarity with the text of the Quran and the *hadith* corpus signal a clear deficit in religious knowledge from the part of the discussants. This is further proved by their incapacity to differentiate “custom” from dogma (like in the case of fasting on Thursdays which is a *sunna*), to define the criteria of credibility (whom can be considered as knowledgeable) and the problematic of interpreting the sacred sources.

At least three trends can be distinguished in the debate. The followers of the Hanafi school (C. 2; C. 4; C. 6.) combine reason with tradition in stressing that since there is no explicit *hadith* dedicated to this problem, celebrating birthday cannot be regarded as religious concern. The representative of the Hanbali (C. 5.) line gives special weight to the Saudi customs, and emphatic, though selectively, about the Sunna of the Prophet. She shows an ambiguous attitude towards *qiyas*,

analogical reasoning, accepting it in defining birthday celebration as imitation of a Western custom which is forbidden but hinting at that without candles it is possible. The Salafi lady (C. 8.) urges literalism – what is not mentioned in the sacred texts is borrowed custom therefore it is forbidden – condemns the following of specific *madhhabs*, gives special weight to the scholar living in Medina, argues in a polemic style with sectarian undertone – and displays overtly negative comments about the Shi'a.

Due to the differences in the rules of reasoning their respective arguments are not convincing for the others. Any argument for and against therefore lacks evidentiary value. Quests for consensus includes referring to Turks, Afghans, Kurds, Saudis as born Muslims, whose opinion matters, surfing the Internet for accessible opinion, inquiry into the background of the websites, and references to the Prophet as a role model. The participants make efforts to provide arguments from their own resources but the need for a decisive, authoritative opinion is omnipresent in the discussion. The statement that in fact makes the whole debate futile is made by one of the Hanafi participants, saying that once C. 1. has made her choice in marriage, she has to follow the customs of her husband. Here too, we can detect the conviction that a person has freedom of choice in choosing a spouse as well as a *madhhab*. However, with no accessible religious authority present, this vests the husband, a born Muslim with authoritative power over the wife, who is a convert.

### 3) *Female beauty care*

Following a dress code and applying approved methods in beauty care is a moral issue in Islam. For women whose mothers and sisters are not Muslims and the only best practice available is that of the customs in the husband's family, arguing for a treatment that affects their body affects their sense of femininity as well as their sense of morality. Shaping one's eyebrow is a crucial point in beauty care since Muslim dress code in Europe generally leaves the eye and the eyebrow uncovered.

In the debate over what forms of beauty treatment are applicable to this part of the body one of the participants exposed a long discourse dedicated to the methodology of interpreting *hadiths*. She starts her comment by stating that

"[...] the fact that Islam is a message for all humankind and valid until the end of times does not mean the all the technical inventions are described in its sacred sources. The Quran calls us to use our reason, and thus we can tell the prayer before starting a journey by car originally told before riding a steed, or place the fork on the right side of the plate since the Prophet instructed us to eat with the right hand.

The scientific method applied in these cases is called *qiyas* that is analogy which is applied by scholars. Only scholars can apply *qiyas*

because they know what aspects must be considered [...] For example the person who translated this *hadith* and placed the term 'facial hair' in brackets, made a mistaken *qiyas* [...] The prophet meant here only the eyebrow and not facial hair in general which can be a serious problem for non-European women. [...]

And now comes the possibility of various *qiyas* being present. According to one scholar extracting eyebrow hair is *haram*, therefore other solutions such as oxidising or colouring is possible. Yes, it also changes the features of the face but not definitely. Also, if the point was not changing facial features, then dying hair was also *haram*, but on the contrary, it is advised. The explanation is not part of the *hadith* so we don't do it only because the Prophet prohibited it, and we do not search for the logic behind. It is the same with pork meat. We know that it is unhealthy but we do not eat because it is unhealthy but because Allah prohibited it. Other scholars used other ways of reasoning [in condemning colouring because of the potential injuries it can cause].

So, how can we, ordinary Muslims, decide which scholar is right? If the opinion of both are in the confines of Islam, we cannot criticise them. We have to choose one of them – because they are based on knowledge – and follow it without inventing a third opinion from our own resources. The scholars will be rewarded for their knowledge and we will be rewarded for using our reason in choosing the opinion which can be better applied to our situation. But we cannot criticise those who follow the other opinion for it would mean criticising the scholar whose knowledge is much deeper than ours."

The discourse reveals a continuous tension between reason and obedience. The discussant supposes a lack of knowledge regarding the rules of interpretation, and tries to highlight the difference between right and wrong uses of analogy. Here again the starting point is that the first choice can be based on rational consideration. That said, there are various authorities who can be considered as Islamic and therefore can be emulated. The definition of "Islamic" is however missing from the reflection.

Diversity and the possibility of making a rational choice impresses the convert and convinces him / her that Islamic practice is indeed adaptable to the modern and even post-modern context. Moreover, the first rational choice exempts the faithful from further pensiveness. The twist inherent in this logic leads the writer to two conclusions. First, every faithful is obliged to follow one of the many Islamic authorities present in the market of virtual or mosque based *fatwa*-factories. Second, the diversity – which is the guarantee of flexibility and adaptability (or the illusion of it) – has to be respected and the credibility of the various authorities who are branded as Islamic – supposing that there is a "standard Islam" – should not be contested.

## Conclusion

Division can sometimes make the community stronger. The multiplicity of religious authorities create an image of plurality, and flexibility so important for converts the majority of whom cannot immediately get rid of modernist approaches and reason based decision making. Fragmentation is concomitant to the Sunni authority and the Muslim authority in general. It allows the incorporation of the stakeholders as religious actors, through charisma, action and reproduction. The fragmentation of the field of Sunni authority is a resource for the different actors of the field. It allows the multiplication of mosques, associations, interpretative sub-communities, etc.

This multiplicity of authorities in Hungarian Islam appears at first without religious and social logic. However, not providing a clear answer to the question “Who is in charge?” probably has a purpose: to allow the field to expand further. As with any cultural or social dynamic, tension, shifting, confrontations and mutual consolidations take place in the Hungarian Muslim community. For, the community, and in particular influential clans and families, creates Islamic authority.

The four legitimacies we examined – charisma, reproduction, knowledge and action – as sources of authority appear to be communitarian. Choosing the right opinion and authority to follow presupposes religious knowledge. Since most converts lack such knowledge and familiarity with the cultural variants of Islam, they rely on the community to help them make their way in the mess of – often self-proclaimed – authorities.

To be a successful and good Muslim, one has to choose and follow one authority and thus subordinate oneself to the community of his followers. Other opinions and authorities – if considered as Islamic – are accepted as manifestations of the diversity of Islam which in turn makes the community stronger. The reason that legitimacy is communitarian lies in the functioning of the community as a moral economy. As the community lives a subsistence mode of action and thought, it needs religion – diverse and powerful as it is – as a moral justification, a guarantee for the viability of this moral economy.

## LITERATURE

BELHAJ, Abdessamad

2010 Legitimacy. In: MARÓTH, Miklós (ed.): *Muslim Political Theory: A Comparative Terminological Investigation*. Piliscsaba, The Avicenna Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, 63–65.

BERGMANN, Johannes

2008 Der Märtyrer als charismatische Person. In: RYCHTEROVÁ, Pavlína – SEIT, Stefan – VEIT, Raphaela (Hrsg.): *Das Charisma. Funktionen und symbolische Repräsentationen*. Berlin, Akademie, 467–479.

CSORDAS, Thomas J.

2013 Morality as a Cultural System? *Current Anthropology* (54. 5): 523–546.

DASSETTO, Felice

1996 *La construction de l'Islam européen: approche socio-anthropologique*. Paris, L'Harmattan.

DÉCOBERT, Christian

2004 L'autorité religieuse aux premiers siècles de l'islam. *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* (49. 1) 23–44.

EICKELMAN, Dale F.

2015 Who Gets the Past? The Changing Face of Islamic Authority and Religious Knowledge. In: MEUSBURGER, P. – GREGORY, D. – SUARSANA, L. (eds.): *Geographies of Knowledge and Power*. Dordrecht, Springer, 135–145.

FILALI-ANSARY, Abdou

2015 La quête de légitimité dans les contextes musulmans: un drame en quatre actes? *Les Temps modernes* (683. 2), 72–92.

GEAVES, Ron

1996 Cult, Charisma, Community: The Arrival of Sufi Pirs and their Impact on Muslims in Britain. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* (16. 2), 169–192.

2009 Charismatic Authority in Islam: an Analysis of the Cause of Schisms in the *ummah*. In: LEWIS, James R. – LEWIS, Sarah M. (eds.): *Sacred Schisms: How Religions Divide*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 37–60.

HART, Kimberly

2013 *And Then We Work for God: Rural Sunni Islam in Western Turkey*. Stanford, Stanford University Press.

HERSHOVITZ, Scott

2003 Legitimacy, Democracy and Razian Authority. *Legal Theory* (9. 3), 201–220.

HOURLANI, George F.

1976 Ghazālī on the Ethics of Action. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (96. 1), 69–88.

JENSEN, Tina Gudrun

2006 *Religious Authority and Autonomy Intertwined: The Case of Converts to Islam in Denmark*. *The Muslim World* (96. 4), 643–660.

KRÄMER, Gudrun – SCHMIDTKE, Sabine (eds.)

2006 *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies*. Leiden – Boston, Brill.

LAPIDUS, I. M.

1984 Knowledge, Virtue, and Action: the Classical Muslim Conception of *adab* and the Nature of Religious Fulfillment in Islam. In: METCALF, B. D. (ed.): *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*. Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 38–61.

LINDHOLM, Charles

2012 Charisma and Community in Islam: Two Routes to Jihad. *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* (3. 1), 177–184.

MANDAVILLE, Peter

2007 Islamic Education in Britain: Approaches to Religious Knowledge in a Pluralistic Society. In: HEFNER, Robert W. – QASIM ZAMAN, Muhammad (eds.): *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 224–243.

MORRIS, Mike

2012 *Concise Dictionary of Social and Cultural Anthropology*. Malden – Oxford, Wiley–Blackwell.

PETER, Frank

2006 Leading the Community of the Middle Way: A Study of the Muslim Field in France. *The Muslim World* (96. 4), 707–736.

REDA, Ayman

2013 Trading with Allah: An Examination of Islamic Scripture in Relation to Markets. *Journal of Markets & Morality* (16. 2), 441–462.

SANDBERG, Joakim

2015 Moral Economy and Normative Ethics. *Journal of Global Ethics* (11. 2), 176–187.

SCHUCK, Christoph

2013 Conceptual Framework of Sunni Islamism. *Politics, Religion & Ideology* (14. 4), 485–506.

SHARON, Moshe

1984 The Development of the Debate around the Legitimacy of Authority in Early Islam. *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* (5), 121–141.

STENBERG, Leif

2008 Préserver le charisme. Les conséquences de la mort d'Ahmad Kaftaro sur la mosquée-complexe Abu al-Nur. *Maghreb-Machrek* (198. 4), 65–73.

WEBER, Max

1963 *The Sociology of Religion*. Boston, Beacon Press.

WEBER, Max

1978 *Economy and Society*. Berkeley, California University Press.