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Agreeing to Submit: Authority Constructions in Modern Sunni Islam

A Thesis

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

In the modern age, Sunni communities are often claimed to be in a moment of crisis. However, despite outward arguments about this crisis, Sunni communities are more accurately described as within a state of transformation. By analyzing constructions of authority from Sayyid Qutb, the clerical establishment of Saudi Arabia, and the greater American Muslim communities, Sunni theology is best seen as seeking out methods to transform and re-center authority within Sunni communities.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Authority is often seen as a complicated issue in modern Sunni Islam, or more essentially who is allowed to represent the communities of Sunni Islam. The Sunni traditions boasts multiple jurisprudences, spans across multiple continents, and yet is often centered on the practices and rituals of Arab Sunnis. In the contemporary era, Sunni Islam is often spoke of as if there is a growing crisis of authority, that there is some metaphorical termite gnawing away at the foundation of the faith itself. The supposed reasons for this fracture range from globalization, secularism, the growing disillusionment with the traditional model of Islamic authority, or the suppression of local practices and rituals by status quo leaders in various nations. Yet, despite these myriad criticisms, many Sunni communities in the modern era continue to discuss and move their ideas of Sunni authority forward. These discussions and disputes within these communities have brought forth lasting and influential new ways of understanding the role of Islam on the human world, specifically because of these communities' desire to interact and accept novel ideas outside the traditions that held authority within the community in history.

The later 20th century created new drives for Sunnis to re-understand and re-interpret Islam and who draws authority from it from generation to generation comes from a new issue of the modern era. The modern era created new pressures on Muslims

leaders, communities, and religious authorities to secure and legitimate their own authority for their own populations. The rise of the internet and global digital media allowed Sunni communities to interact on more profound and intricate levels despite separations in language, geography, or culture. Previous authorities were able to be compared and shared, and the increasingly globalized world put Sunnis in more contact with other Muslims and non-Muslims alike. These changing social conditions put pressure on Sunni theorists to explain and justify certain authority models that existed in the time. While a multiplicity of authority constructions were created and strained, there are three authority paths that seem to have gained traction and continue to influence subsequent ideas of authority within some Sunni Muslim communities. One major path is the entire rejection of the traditional clerical-theological establishment in favor of a non-establishment thinker. The Egyptian theorist Sayyid Qutb's writing is a useful case-study into this specific mentality about the future of Islamic practice for the modern era. He also represents a radical re-orienting of Islamic interpretation specifically because Qutb is anti-establishment, anti-traditional, and seeks to move beyond the idea of a religious elite. Meanwhile, another major path is that of the Saudi Arabian clerical apparatus and its relationship to the state.

This path is important to analyze specifically because it takes the idea of a state-religion relationship to one of its farthest conclusions, and can be used to extrapolate and partially understand how some Sunni religious establishments interact with their state governments. Also, the Wahhabi-Salafi doctrine is a growing influence within the global Muslim world and understanding its dynamics from the original center of Wahhabi-

Salafism within Saudi Arabia provides context on how it may be formatted to other nations and communities. Finally, a growing number of Muslims exist semi-comfortably outside of traditionally Muslim localities and as such exist in a more multi-cultural, complex religious environment than many of their fellow Muslims that reside in Muslim-majority countries. American Muslims serve as newly influential case study for these Muslims that reside in larger non-Muslim communities and nation-states specifically because of the United States's complex relationship with Islam itself. Understanding how American Muslims interpret authority can then also shed light on how other Muslim communities in Muslim-minority countries may interact both with their fellow Muslims and their neighboring non-Muslims.

In order to best understand these specific case studies and how they may influence the modern Sunni world and its ongoing theorization, I have found it helpful to embrace an version of Max Weber's authority construction models. Weber states that there are three major ideas of how authority is gained and created within communities.¹ There is the charismatic leader, the person capable of intense and powerful connection to masses of people and able to inspire trust and loyalty through sheer force of character.² There is the traditional leader, who bases their authority on the long-standing traditions and cultural standards that have already granted the pre-requisites for this person to be an

¹Albarghouthi, Ali. "Authority and Representation in North America: The Ijtihad Criteria and the Construction of New Religious Authority." *Journal of Islamic Law and Culture* 13, no. 1 (2011): 19.

² ibid 20

authority at all.³ Then there is the legal-rational leader, who does not seek to construct and maintain authority through any independent action on their own but instead by strictly adhering to and interpreting the formal laws and norms within a society itself. Now, these categories are helpful for understanding general authority construction but do not entirely format well to the unique environment of Islam.

As a result, I have chosen to understand Weber as foundational influence for specific categories of Islamic authority construction. There is the professionally educated Muslim authority, where the authority is granted through their ability to speak about multiple different ideologies and able to succinctly communicate why Islam continues to be the correct response for the modern world. They gain their authority through their ability to understand Islam as a worldview and less as a purely theological exercise. There is the traditional-legal Muslim authority, where authority is granted through the ability to be traditionally trained in Islamic jurisprudence and to speak eloquently on the various laws imbedded within the Qur'an and subsequently the hadith and the sunnah. They gain and maintain authority through the ability to project Islam as a uniquely religious enterprise that influences all aspects of a person's daily life and practice. Then there is a semi-racialized Muslim authority, where authority is gained and maintained through a theoretical lens that places **Muslim** as a identity marker in a similar way to race and ethnicity. These leaders arise through community influence and ability to speak within the community, as well as between the community and other non-Muslim

³ ibid 20

communities. This is a growing authority model in the wake of the Muslim diaspora and their rootedness in non-Muslim majority nations and the need to simultaneously form community identity while responding to outside cultural pressure.

In order to best analyze and understand how these authority models interact and influence Muslim communities, I primarily seek to understand these authority models through the texts and writings of influential thinkers within these models. Authority is a fluid concept that is in perpetual need to be negotiated between leaders and the led. Therefore, it is needed to engage with these specific thinkers and communities on their own merits based on their writings and textual communications rather than through other methods. Text is a powerful method of transmission within communities and the modern age's ability to expand into digital spaces means that writings can be accessed rather easily and ideologically traced from their inception to the modern era. Further, understanding the texts and the ideological rhetoric espoused by these specific communities and thinkers then allows for an analytic where the abstract theory of the writing can be traced to concrete practice in everyday life for Muslim communities engaging with these particular authority constructions. This methodology comes from the precept that Islam is a religion firmly embedded in an interpreted practice of textual analysis itself. Much of Islamic practice comes from the analysis of a text (the Qur'an) and therefore Islam can be in some ways defined as the attempt to extrapolate textual analysis into pure practice. These authority models (professional/anti-establishment, state-religion establishment cooperations, and racialized community formation) also

engage on a similar method, working to interpret a text and then place that interpretation into writing itself that can then be interpreted and enacted yet further.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Authority within Sunni communities is a growing research interest in the field of religious studies specifically because of the complex relationship Sunni Islam maintains with the theory of authority. Unlike Shia Islam with its relatively hierarchical cleric structure and emulation models, Sunni communities are more fluid in granting authority due to the foundational idea of consensus within the Sunni theological model. However, the Sunni theological model also allows for different authority models to be constructed and implemented due to the nature of community consensus and who is considered part of the community. This idea of a consensus is often what drives research on Sunni authority construction, rather than looking to how specific ideologies, theories, or individuals may be able to influence larger sections of the community into changing what exactly is now considered consensus. This modern understanding of consensus can best be described as the need to transform and relocate authority, rather than remove, delegitimate, or decentralize Sunni authority models.

For example, Robinson's "Crisis of Authority: Crisis of Islam?" is an attempt to understand why exactly there seems to be a growing divide across the Sunni global community in the modern era. Robinson's central argument revolves around the idea that the traditional methods of Qur'anic interpretation and creation of authority are in direct

conflict with the modern democratization process.⁴ He draws a timeline by citing the influences of European colonization of the 19th century first removing aspects of authority from the traditional Islamic clerical structure of various Muslim communities.⁵ He furthers this argument by continuing the timeline into the 20th century, showing that lay interpretation grew as information was expanded and more communities were able to access that information.⁶ Robinson argues that this is the final crack in “traditional” Islam’s foundational authority and that this may be “a cause of despair or a source of hope.”⁷ While Robinson does accurately cite the growing literacy and access of the Qur’an in indigenous languages as one major influence on changing authority, he falls into a trap of assuming that there was a status quo Islam that was accepted broadly in the greater Sunni community before the modern era. “Traditional” Islam is more accurately described as authoritative Islam, or the Islamic interpretation that was able to be enforced by political leaders of various stripes. Therefore, traditional Islam is not the orthodox or authoritative Islam for all communities, and the growing Qur’anic access for the lay Muslim is not a crisis of authority, but a transformation of authority. Authority is innately a construct, and therefore it cannot be entirely lost, only moved or transported to different centers within society. Robinson’s question is quite similar to many researchers, but his answer is quite different. Robinson implies that there was an abstract universal authority

⁴ Robinson, Francis. "Crisis of Authority: Crisis of Islam?" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 19, no. 3 (2009): 345.

⁵ *ibid* 347

⁶ *ibid* 346

⁷ *ibid* 339

within the Sunni theology before the modern era, whereas some researchers argue the opposite.

Consensus and the ideas of community within authority are intertwined and what Robinson seems to miss on, Peter Mandaville gets closer. In “Globalization and the Politics of Religious Knowledge”, Mandaville is quite insistent that there has never been a singular authoritative center of Islam throughout its long history and that globalization should be seen instead as an attempt to pluralize knowledge for the global Muslim community.⁸ The article argues that pluralizing knowledge, at least for Islam, is not simply a process to seek out new interpretations within the body of historical jurisprudence or even from within the Qur’an. It is instead a process by Muslims to recenter the normative bases of Islam itself. Mandaville also quite articulately argues that this normative base reconfiguration is due to the ever growing issue of globalization, where many Muslims live with “semi-diasporic identities-in-limbo” and need new centers of authority that can be easily accessed no matter where they are.⁹ These decentralized bases seem more accurate than Robinson’s authority crisis, yet still do not entirely reveal the fact that the modern era is not attempting to decentralize authority, but focus it. Mandaville writes from a perspective that does not include the increasingly localized authority in Saudi Arabia’s *‘ulama* or the unique mixture of American Islamic authority that in many ways could only survive in the United States. Globalization has not

⁸ Mandaville, Peter. "Globalization and the Politics of Religious Knowledge." *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 2 (2007): 102.

⁹ *ibid* 107

decentralized Islamic authority, but instead allowed for authority to become local, where authority can shift rapidly based on the social constructions that shape authority in a specific community. Yet, both Mandaville and Robinson see authority as this passive process that happens *to* Sunni communities rather than created *by* Sunni communities. Very little focus is given to the idea of specific leaders or authority figures within authority construction. They instead imply that all Sunni communities absorb opinions through osmosis and organically spur consensus without personality or theory differences.

Yet Sayyid Qutb, one of the most prominent and well known Muslim theorists, is usually acknowledged for his unique theories of Islamic authority and its influence on Sunni communities, predominantly within Egypt. However, much of the characterization of Qutb is based around his supposed anti-authority, partial anarchic theology. Ana Belen Soage refutes this view and sees Sayyid Qutb outside of the traditional intellectual models that hold him as an anti-authority, near-anarchical Muslim radical. Soage argues that Qutb's theology and theorizing is the result of a very specific combat between Qutb and the Egyptian government.¹⁰ She argues that Qutb's philosophy was shaped primarily while he was imprisoned by the Nasr regime in the mid-1950s and became radical through his relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood while he was imprisoned.¹¹

¹⁰ Soage, Ana Belén. "Islamism and Modernity: The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb." *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 10, no. 2 (2009): 192.

¹¹ *ibid* 194-196

This is not to state that she sees his theology as a merely political vendetta against the Egyptian government and Nasr, but she presents his theology as a form of revelation from his experiences at the hands of a nominally non-Muslim secular government in his home country. Soage's projection of his philosophy into the modern era as a distinct birth of Islamism for the modern era seems relatively accurate and succinct, also portraying his Islamist political theology as a closed system with all answers to all questions. Soage does marginalize the theological ideas of Qutb and does not speak much on the fact that he does have very specific ideas on how a government shall act and govern in his new world order of global Islamic governance. By focusing on the Islamist elements of Qutb's theology, Soage does miss the crucial aspect of Qutb's longevity which is the specific realm he sees leadership acting within as the embodiments of Islam's law. Again, we see a researcher missing the idea that Sunni authority construction is not about delegitimizing or removing authority, but instead transforming and relocation authority to its perceived "proper place."

However, no conscious transformation can be a type of transformation itself. Not all Sunni authority models seek to re-center proper authority but instead to re-center attention on what is proper authority. "The Saudi State as an Identity Racketeer" by Ben Rich and Ben MacQueen tries to highlight and shed light on this particular process through the Saudi government's relationship with the Saudi *'ulema*. Rich and MacQueen push a theory that the Saudi state has mostly co-opted the religious establishment as a

form of authority supplementation.¹² They argue that the Saudi government engages in a four-step program, encouraging revivalists within its citizens, offering protections against ontological insecurities created by the revivalist theology. Yet, the Saudi state creates the very circumstances that cause ideological insecurity in its practices.¹³

It then repeats the cycle of offering protections for those suffering from this insecurity, which continues to shore up whatever spiritual authority the state is lacking in any particular moment.¹⁴ This could easily be seen as logical from the perspective of the Saudi state, but it also does ignore the assumed philosophical buy-in from the religious apparatus within Saudi Arabia. The state is not co-opting religion and spirituality for its authoritative ends but engaging in a form of authority sharing. If Rich and MacQueen's assertion is that the state continues to expand the religious revivalism within Saudi Arabia to manage authority gaps, then the religious establishment would be invested in the outcome that results in more strict adherents for its own spiritual-political ends. Rich and MacQueen do not refute this, but their characterization does assume a lack of clerical buy-in that is not in evidence from observation. The fact that the Saudi state is continually able to repeat Rich and MacQueen's four-step cycle would speak to the fact that the clerical authority is willing and able to lend its authority

¹² Rich, et. al. "The Saudi State as an Identity Racketeer." *Middle East Critique* 26, no. 2 (2017): 108.

¹³ *ibid* 109

¹⁴ Rich, et. al. "The Saudi State." 109.

to the state. By lending its authority to the state, the 'ulema is able to re-center Saudi Sunni attention to where the theological authority ultimately comes from: the 'ulema.

Yet, even researchers are often aware that Sunni practice is often too tied to the location of where these communities reside, rather than seeing them as different expressions of the same Islamic faith. Zareena Grewal's "Destabilizing Orthodoxy, De-territorializing the Anthropology of Islam" states that orthodoxy is a too-loaded term, primarily used by constructivist and nominalist analytics in order to either apologize for Islam or overly criticize Islam.¹⁵ Analysts in the past, according to Grewal, have either reduced religion to a complete irrational philosophy removed from lived practice or they interpret Islam as such a broad theological practice that there is no need or reason to define a concrete idea of Islam. Grewal's understanding of orthodoxy can be extremely successful in understanding modern ideas of authority specifically because she presents orthodoxy as a term used to delegitimize theorizing outside of the status quo Islam.¹⁶ However, Grewal also argues that orthodoxy is a term primarily to delegitimize Islamic theorizing within the United States, particularly from Black Sunni converts. While this may in fact be an accurate representation of the term's use, it does center the United States Sunni community within a vacuum, ignoring the history and practice of American Muslims seeking more traditional Muslim venues for granting Islamic knowledge and authority. Grewal's article attempts to reveal a particular American center of Islamic

¹⁵ Grewal, Zareena. "Destabilizing Orthodoxy, De-territorializing the Anthropology of Islam." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 84, no. 1 (2016): 47.

¹⁶ *ibid* 49-52

theorizing, but at the price of avoiding the relationship between American Muslims and other Muslim localities for their theorizing.

Research on Sunni authority construction is robust and focuses on many aspects. It touches on the relationships between theorizers, communities, and state apparatus. It is able to swiftly and succinctly speak to the many pressures modern Sunni authority models face in the wake of globalization, multi-culturalism, the digital environment, and even the reflections of historians. However, much of this research is still too focused on decentralizing Sunni communities and breaking the threads that often connect them. Even in the modern era, Sunni communities are not seeking to exclusively center themselves as authorities at the expense of other authority models. Instead, a better characterization missed by the majority of literature is that authority models seek to re-center Islamic authority in relation to Sunni communities broadly. Qutb's theology and political theorizing, the state relationships of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi *'ulema*, and the American Muslim desire to connect to the global Sunni Muslim network are all attempts to recenter authority models through community transformation.

Chapter Three: Qutb and the All-Encompassing Islamic Authority

Sayyid Qutb is often regarded as one of the most influential thinkers on Islamic authority for the modern era, and the relationship between Muslims, God, and the leaders who unofficially served as the bridge between them. Qutb was an Egyptian theorist and social activist who rose to prominence in the early years of Egyptian independence. Qutb's early life was marked through a desire to work within Egypt by relating his homeland to the greater "West" as it was constructed (The United States, Western Europe).¹⁷ Qutb as a young boy and young man was quite critical of the religious establishment throughout Egypt, and was well educated in both religious and secular thought for the time.¹⁸ Qutb attended university in Cairo at Dar al-Ulum to learn the British methods of education and teaching, focusing on literature reviews and religious theory in his spare time.¹⁹ Already a published author by 25, Qutb continued to work within education, both as a teacher and as a bureaucrat in the Egyptian Ministry of Education.²⁰ His understandings formed a ideological foundation, for him, that required religion to be the cornerstone of thought and action in the world. Religiosity did not

¹⁷ Qutb, Sayyid. *Milestones*. Edited by A. B. Al-Mehri. Birmingham, England: MAKTABAH, 2006. Accessed March 22, 2018. 7.

¹⁸ *ibid* 7

¹⁹ *ibid* 7

²⁰ *ibid* 8

simply require lip service but an active attempt to bring about a more faithful and faith-led society.

This ideological foundation was solidified and strengthened when confronted with the Western value system when he attended what is now University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, Colorado, from 1948-1950.²¹ Qutb saw Western/American society as a spiritually repressive place, where people were not allowed to access their spiritual health from the amount of discipline and self-control required in Western individualism.²² This lack of access of the spiritual health was simply social and government authority pushing their citizens away from faith and religion in favor of the cultural norms of society outside the religious sphere. In some ways for Qutb, this was similar to the issues of the Egyptian clerical structure.²³ They too were more concerned with enforcing a specific set of practices and cultural norms rather than attempting to deepen the peoples' connection to the faith and spirit, or even serving as a check against un-Islamic leadership in the government.²⁴ These experience would lead Qutb to shift his theological understandings to a more radical emphasis on a closed system of Islamic governance where no authority other than that of God would be recognized in society.²⁵

²¹ Qutb. *Milestones*. 8

²² *ibid* 8

²³ *ibid* 8

²⁴ Khatab, S. "Hakimiyyah and Jahiliyyah in the Thought of Sayyid Qutb." *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 3 (2002): 145-70.

²⁵ *ibid* 149

Qutb's influence on Egypt and greater Arab Muslim thinking cannot be over-expressed. Often cited as the original Islamist for the modern age, Qutb sought out to explain a holistic Islamic society for Egypt, and by extension the Muslim world itself. Qutb's Islamism is unique specifically because it is based on the idea that Islam is a total and closed system, without any need for influence or importation from other ideological system.²⁶ Qutbi ideology relies specifically on the Qur'an as the social and religious document that creates the boundaries for all Muslims. This means that Islam does not need any man-made modifiers such as "Islamic democracy" or "Islamic socialism" or even an "Islamic authority."²⁷ Islam was its own complete system that, to Qutb, addressed all of humanity's needs, desires, and spiritual requirements.²⁸ If such a system is indeed perfect and addressed all needs, adding on imperfect human systems such as democracy, socialism, marxism, nationalism, or really any "-ism" would be marring the perfection of Islam.²⁹ Islam needed to be quarantined and be addressed on its own terms, not modified or predicated with human systems to become more attractive to the masses. Islam was the truth of the universe regardless if people believed it or not. In fact, for Qutb, many of the so-called "natural laws" of understood by the secular world were in fact simply

²⁶ Soage,. "Islamism and Modernity." 189-203.

²⁷ ibid 194

²⁸ Yahya Bouzarinejad, et. al. "Sayyid Qutb and Political Islam: Islamic Government from the Perspective of Sayyid Qutb." *Tarih Kültür Ve Sanat Araştırmaları Dergisi* 5, no. 4 (2017): 92-112.

²⁹ ibid 98

manifestations of the *shariah*, God's law.³⁰ Attempts to section off the perfection of God's creation into discrete categories that were overlapping yet distinct were merely attempts to separate the wholeness of God's creation. God's creation was whole and perfect from its inception, and his law was no exception. The perfection of the Qur'an as a document of law, or *hakimiyyah*, requires no outside interpretation or influence, just obedient adherence.³¹

This adherence of course was not simply a physical action. Muslims must then also understand that their internal dialogue, their internal ideologies and reasoning behind their practice must also be examined and re-asserted into a proper Islamic headspace. While traditional view of the *jahiliyah* refers to the time before Islam's revelation and before Muhammad's ascension to prophethood, Qutb instead believed that the *jahiliyah* was a mindset, a powerful and tempting ideology that could easily spring up again each generation if not controlled and eradicated.³² Just as the Islamic principle of *tajdid* meant that Islam could be renewed each generation, formatted for the trials of the times, so could the *jahiliyah*.³³ The greatest of the *jahiliyat* was to be a non-Muslim, to reject the message of Islam itself. However, even if one was an acknowledged Muslim, one could still fall into the patterns of ignorance just as easily as one could fall into the patterns of

³⁰ Qutb. *Milestones*.

³¹ Khatab. "Hakimiyyah and Jahiliyyah." 161.

³² *ibid* 161

³³ *ibid* 161

renewal.³⁴ Being a Muslim would require a constant vigilance and a type of crowdsourcing, requiring others to constantly police each other and consistently draw consensus of practice and belief from the Qur'an. Of course, this model of an Islamic world meant that it was not simply enough to "be" Muslim. One could give *zakat*, perform *salah* five times a day, fast during Ramadan, and perform *hajj* and yet still not be a true Muslim. This is because for Qutb, the first pillar, the supreme pillar of Islam, the Shahada, was not a simple acknowledgement of the supremacy of God's authority but also required people to live as such.³⁵ This meant a rejection of any and all thoughts that were non-Islamic in origin.

Often cited as one of the first modern Islamic thinkers, Sayyid Qutb was first and foremost a heavily critical thinker towards Muslims within the Arab world. While Qutb did not place heavy emphasis on critiquing or criticizing the practice of individual Muslims specifically, he often argued that Muslims around the world were being misled and directed away from the faith by their leaders and statesmen.³⁶ The leaders and statesmen, in Qutb's eyes, spent far more time orienting themselves towards the two political hegemonies of the time, the United States and the Soviet Union, rather than attempting to reorient themselves and their people towards God.³⁷ Qutb's philosophy on Islamic authority did not allow or accept spaces between religious authority and political

³⁴ *ibid* 163

³⁵ Qutb. *Milestones*.

³⁶ *ibid*

³⁷ Orbach, Danny. "Tyrannicide in Radical Islam: The Case of Sayyid Qutb and Abd Al-Salam Faraj." *Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 6 (2012): 961-72.

authority. Qutb's vision of Islam was a complete system, and therefore Islam functioned as a religious movement, a political theory, and as social norms all at once.³⁸ For a Muslim leader, or the leader of a Muslim-majority country, to even dabble or ally with secular Western powers would be a refutation of Islam in principle, if not in name.³⁹ This is drawn from Qutb's idea that authority in the physical world is ultimately derived from God's authority. If Muslim leaders were to ally themselves with secular powers, they were either opening up their societies for potential *jahiliyah* actions or refuting the authority and lessons of the Qur'an by reciprocally acknowledging the authority of non-Muslim entities.

These are both possible, and for Qutb probable, because by simply engaging in the nation-state model of the mid-20th century was to implicitly grant states authority when that authority should exclusively be the purview of God.⁴⁰ Further, Muslim leaders allowing non-Muslim leaders the social status of "fellow leader" was also a powerfully non-Islamic action, as authority over people came exclusively from God.⁴¹ For a Muslim leader to lend authority, even just in their own interpretation, to non-Muslim leaders was paramount to assuming the role of God. If all authority no matter its sphere comes from God, for any leader to expand their understanding of authoritative is to supersede God's law via the *shariah* and the Qur'an in favor of their own flawed human interpretation.

³⁸ *ibid* 966

³⁹ *ibid* 964

⁴⁰ Bouzarinejad, et. al. "Sayyid Qutb and Political Islam" 92-112.

⁴¹ Soage. "Islamism and Modernity: The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb." 189-203.

Qutb's construction of Islam's authority over the world applied to exactly that—the entire world. There was no method for Muslim leaders to deal critically with non-Muslim leaders because Qutb did not believe in a non-Muslim's right to serve as leader, over Muslims or fellow non-Muslims.⁴² Non-Muslims were the embodiment of *jahiliyah* for Qutb, an almost-physical rejection of God's authority and Islam's domain.⁴³ Therefore, Qutb denied any right for non-Muslims to exist outside of Islamic authority in any capacity.⁴⁴ If non-Muslims were allowed to exist, that would mean that Islam held space in its domain for the existence of non-believers.

Yet, Qutb also heavily argued against the mere idea that a nation-state system would somehow be a viable and sustainable model for Muslims. At best, Qutb's outlook on national leaders could be characterized as a stop-gap measure. The nation-state system, even in Muslim-majority countries, based on a secular Western division of powers and authority within a community. Egypt had functioned in such a way throughout its colonial history, often having the administrative leaders separated from the clerical, religious leaders. This separation was like attempting to divide or corral Islam itself, separating its authority over everything into mere zones of influence. Religious authority had no place in Qutb's world if it had no ability to enforce the totality of Islam as needed. Islam was not meant to be selectively applied to problems, but instead applied

⁴² Qutb. *Milestones*.

⁴³ Khatab. "Hakimiyyah and Jahiliyyah in the Thought of Sayyid Qutb." 145-70.

⁴⁴ Bouzarinejad, et. al. "Sayyid Qutb and Political Islam." 92-112.

to all problems in all spheres. And at worst, the nation-state system was only another form of servitude and spiritual enslavement of the general populace.⁴⁵

While Qutb's understanding of authority as a whole came from its metaphysical Islamic core, Qutb also rejected the principle that any system made would somehow be able to properly administer the plans of Islamic universalist theology. Islam's authority came because it was the law of God, not because of its definition as a "religion." Leaders, no matter how valiant their efforts may be, would always rely on an authority that required the servitude of other men. Their authority was not ultimately based on the Qur'an, according to Qutb, but instead on the agreed servitude of those they led.⁴⁶ This was not just for temporal political leaders, but for the clerical leaders across the Muslim world, and most specifically in Egypt. Qutb saw a major flaw of the clerical structure in Egypt, and by extension the Muslim world, in that the clerical establishment had been made responsible for the understanding and implementation of Islam. This authority did not come from the Qur'an or from the *shariah*, but from human-made systems and an interpretation not founded in the core ideas of Islam.⁴⁷

The clerical establishment of Egypt, much like the secular government structure, was based on a temporal authority structure that required the authority to be granted from those following the clerics, not from God. These leaders were then also rejecting their true purpose in God's plan by attempting to hold on and maintain their authority within

⁴⁵ Soage. "Islamism and Modernity." 189-203.

⁴⁶ Khatab. "Hakimiyyah and Jahiliyyah." 145-70.

⁴⁷ Soage. "Islamism and Modernity:."189-203.

their societies. Their positions are not meant to be kept as true aspects of authority, but instead to be used as a type of vanguard for the future Islamic utopia.⁴⁸ While Qutb wavered on the role of *jihad* within his idea of Islam, *jihad* against non-believers was no doubt a part of his plan in order to establish Islamic authority on all things.⁴⁹ By these leaders, both traditionally religious and political, holding on to their authority within society rather than using it as a spring to eventually make their roles unneeded. Qutb's vision of God's authority truly brought to the world in its purest form did not include a more traditional idea of leaders and religious interpreters, because these positions required humanity to place their trust in the men in those positions. It also required humanity to follow the laws, interpretations, and services presented and controlled by men of these systems. These, to Qutb, were yet more versions of humanity attempting to remove their own duty to God and export it out to other sources. God's authority requires humanity to offer service to God, not by offering service to social institutions or powerful people in return for religious interpretation.

These critiques of the Muslim leadership blended into his critiques of the *'umma* itself. Qutb believed that the true Muslim community had gone "extinct for a few centuries" and that those who called themselves Muslims were actually living in a space of *jahiliyah*, or ignorance of God's law.⁵⁰ This arose from the fact that by Qutb's time, non-Muslim rulers had been leading Muslims in Egypt for multiple centuries. Qutb's

⁴⁸ Khatab. "Hakimiyyah and Jahiliyyah." 145-70.

⁴⁹ Orbach. "Tyrannicide in Radical Islam." 961-72.

⁵⁰ Khatab. "Hakimiyyah and Jahiliyyah." 145-70.

affinity and complicated relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood was generated specifically from this shared desire to remove secular Western influence and to bring Islamic authority and social conventions back into their pillared status for Egyptian society.⁵¹ While Qutb clashed with Brotherhood leaders and his influence often brought about undue state attention to the organization, the Brotherhood was also committed to creating a more just, Islamic world within Egypt explicitly and removing secular Western influence.⁵² Much of the Brotherhood's later understanding of what a just Islamic nation looks like comes from the writings of Sayyid Qutb on his vision of said society, saying in

Milestones that:

A Muslim community is that which is a practical interpretation of the declaration of faith and all its characteristics; and the society which does not translate into practice this faith and its characteristics is not a Muslim society. Thus the declaration of faith provides the foundation for a complete system of life for the Muslim community in all its details.⁵³

Qutb did not see a world where a Muslim could believe in God without specifically following the interpretation and orders given to the Muslim world by the Qur'an. The complicated part for Qutb is that most Egyptian Muslims, and Sunnis at large, believed themselves to be proper-acting, proper-believing Muslims even while living in a secular society or having a secular government. This contradiction is at the heart of Qutb's struggle in society, and for Qutb, the answer means a clean slate for all Muslims.

Milestone's thesis is predicated on a desire and duty for Muslims to renounce anything

⁵¹ Soage, "Islamism and Modernity." 189-203.

⁵² *ibid* 201

⁵³ Qutb. *Milestones*. 37

that is not of Islam, anything of the *jahiliyah*, and to return to their roots and rediscover their practice through the Qur'an, the *hakimiyyah*.⁵⁴

Of course, this is coded as Qutb's beliefs and interpretations of the document, not the interpretations of others and certainly not the interpretations of the religious establishments.⁵⁵ Qutb believed the establishment had been corrupted by capitulations to the Western empires and that a true Muslim leadership must arise to lead Muslims back to the "true" Islam of the fundament. However, Qutb's version of leadership does not mean a leadership in the contemporary sense of a nation-state leader, figurehead, or elite class. Qutb operated under the ideology that Islam and *shariah* were designed to allow "all men to become free from the servitude of some men to others and devote themselves to the worship of Allah alone, deriving guidance from Him alone, and bowing before Him alone."⁵⁶ For example, both capitalism and communism fail people in the West in that they require the servitude of other men.⁵⁷ Leaders are not always without flaw or bias, and can easily encourage the *jahiliyah* upon their people, corrupting by example. These people are then also following a path that is un-Islamic, often times blocked off from Islam due to their corrupted obligations to leaders or other men, and not God and only God. Exclusively through the Islamic way, ideally and theoretically, would allow a type

⁵⁴ Khatab. "Hakimiyyah and Jahiliyyah." 145-70.

⁵⁵ *ibid* 156

⁵⁶ Qutb. *Milestones*.

⁵⁷ *ibid*

of morally righteous anarchic community to arise and maintain God's authority on earth, no leaders required.

Qutb was executed by the Egyptian government under General Nasr in 1966, yet his philosophy continues to live in as an influential aspect of Islamism as a theological-political philosophy. One of Qutb's strongest philosophical points in his authority construction is that all authority is ultimately derived from God. This construction is often seen as Qutb reflecting an anti-hierarchical and anti-authority mindset, but is not what Qutb saw his ideology as performing. Qutb's understanding of Islamic authority was that all human-created institutions would ultimately fail or be corrupted by ignorance, and therefore could not be held in any particular esteem. This is in tandem with Qutb's anti-statist bent to his authority construction. Islam was not revealed to be split and divided between various peoples and nations, but to address the crisis of faith that humanity found itself in.⁵⁸ Therefore, God's authority must be encompassed to all of humanity, and nation-states were simply a method to divide the now-global Muslim community. The divisions then allowed for people to invest their ideas of authority within specific leaders or institutions, rather than in God where it should be. Also, this idea of authority as exclusively being the purview of God removes the theoretical need of societal leaders at all. Instead the community itself was to be a self-policing, utopian anarchy where a true consensus could be achieved.

⁵⁸ Qutb. *Milestones*.

This idea of a community without human leaders is a complicated idea to extrapolate to the greater Islamic world, but Qutb's influence continues to be brought up as a reason for Islamism to exist within the nation-state political sphere as well as also being the argument against national figureheads at all. One of the interesting aspects of Qutb's philosophy for authority construction and its conclusion for an Islamic universalist utopia is that there are no practical, immediate plans or solutions for how to properly implement this system. This philosophical ambivalence then creates space for successive theorists to read their desires into the Qutbi ideal. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, arguably a practical wing of Qutbi ideology and his attempt for a Islamist political system, had no qualms about posting a candidate for the Egyptian elections after the fall of President Mubarak.⁵⁹

While some of Qutb's writings would push against the idea that entering a non-Islamic political election due to the fact that it was embracing an fundamentally non-Islamic system of governance, other aspects would encourage the exact opposite.⁶⁰ Qutb's philosophy also was predicated on bringing Islam back into every aspect of human society. Therefore, the Muslim Brotherhood could also see an argument that they should be attempting to run a true Muslim candidate. A Muslim in the vein of Qutb could bring about a greater Islamic influence on society, spurring future movements towards the Islamic ideal that would eliminate the need for an Egyptian president all together.

⁵⁹ Kirkpatrick, David D. "Named Egypt's Winner, Islamist Makes History." *The New York Times*. June 24, 2012. Accessed May 29, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/25/world/middleeast/mohamed-morsi-of-muslim-brotherhood-declared-as-egypts-president.html>.

⁶⁰ Qutb. *Milestones*.

The other major pillar of Qutb's theory of authority also comes from the premise that the community itself needs to be involved in the process from beginning to end. For Muslim populations, the idea of a clerical establishment dedicated to Islamic interpretation and Islamic jurisprudence defeats the idea of Islamic equality. Qutb saw Islam as the only philosophical system that would be able to truly free people from servitude to other people, whether benevolent or malicious.⁶¹ Therefore, if a Muslim population created a system where the community no longer needed to come to consensus on understanding and interpreting the *shariah*, but instead allowed others to do it for them, they would instead be serving yet another human construct of authority, not the divine authority. The divine authority of God was the true authority, and Muslims needed to engage each other and be willing to communicate in order to create the universalist Islamic world Qutb envisioned for the world.

This authority model is explicitly based on rejecting the need for clerical apparatus and more traditional models of religious authority, yet also the abstract theories of Qutb again leave room for interpretation. It is obviously heavily implied that Qutb's understanding and interpretation of Islam was the only method that should be seen as the "true" Islam. However, Qutb's writings also argued that the Muslim community could not rely on outsourcing interpretations of the *shariah* and that the community was to collectively agree and submit to the authority of God, embracing the true idea of the Sunni Islam foundation.⁶² This obfuscated approach to communicating his theories to the

⁶¹ Qutb. *Milestones*.

⁶² Orbach. "Tyrannicide in Radical Islam." 961-72.

Muslim world is possibly even a method to have more of the Muslim world to engage with his work. Because the work has implementation gaps and Qutb seems to contradict himself in some ways throughout his writings, one could easily argue that Qutb's vagueness is a rhetorical choice. While Qutb clearly believes that he has discovered the path towards universal Islamic implementation for humanity, Qutb seems to also want people to critically engage with his work rather than simply read it and treat it as canon. In many ways, this is the authority model Qutb proposes, a model where Muslims must always be willing to re-analyze and re-critique and re-invest in Islam and the Qur'an and the ultimate authority of God. God's authority is always being reified on Earth and it is the Muslim community's duty and obligation to continually remind themselves and others that God's authority is the only authority that matters, not the authority of secular political leaders or traditional religious leaders, because both are merely parts of a political-religious-cultural Islamic system.

However, with all the influence of Sayyid Qutb on modern Sunni authority construction, Qutb's model is not the only method that has arisen in the later 20th century. Qutb's philosophy was, and is, quite radical in its call for the elimination of separated Muslim identities and nation-states. Weaving this call into Qutb's general philosophy that Islam was a closed system that was religious and political with no space between the two, it was not entirely taken well by all Sunni Muslim communities. For other Sunni communities, Islam was not a separate universal system, but instead a religious system that must work in tandem with the state apparatus, not supersede and overturn the state apparatus.

Chapter Four: The State as Authority Confirmation in Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has existed in various forms since the mid-18th century, named after the founding member of the dynastic monarchy Muhammad bin Saud. What makes the Saudi kingdom distinct from various other governments within the modern Sunni Muslim world is that the Saud dynasty rose to power explicitly on an authority-sharing agreement with religious leaders. The original King Saud partnered together with the cleric Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, a radical and strict interpreter of the Qur'an, primarily concerned with Muslims not properly showing allegiance to God alone and instead engaging in *shirk*, or apostasy.⁶³ The House of Saud was to run the political agenda of the fledging kingdom while the adherents of al-Wahhab's theology would maintain influence over how Islam was practiced within the kingdom. Over a century later, This authority allegiance has continued to manifest itself powerfully within Saudi Arabia, yet with a far more uneven split that originally anticipated.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is one of the most opaque in the world, and its clerical apparatus even more opaque than most institutions, but by observations it appears that throughout the modern age the state has subsumed some parts of religious authority traditionally held for the clerical establishment.⁶⁴ This religious interpretation has

⁶³ Rich, et. al. "The Saudi State as an Identity Racketeer."108.

⁶⁴ *ibid* 111

continued to connect the Saudi royal family to the clerical establishment within the kingdom and has created one of the most puritan, traditionalist schools within the Muslim world. In Saudi Arabia, Sunni Muslims are required to adhere to a strict understanding of the Qur'an and hadith.⁶⁵ In recent decades, the Saudi religious establishment has also partnered with the state to further expand its interpretation into other Islamic nations, mostly non-Arab Muslim nations that are former Soviet republics.⁶⁶ The Saudi religious community has spent hundreds of millions of dollars since the late 1990s in order to establish religious education centers and Islamic seminaries with the aim of training students in the Wahhabi-Salafi interpretation of Islam.⁶⁷ These schools were quite common in Albania for over a decade and continue to grow and become more influential for Muslim communities in Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan in the 21st century.⁶⁸

Saudi Arabia is also notorious for funding radical Islamic groups across the greater Middle East, with Saudi funds being used to supplement resources for organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and even militia groups in the 2013 Syrian civil war.⁶⁹ The one caveat attached to these funding structures is that not all

⁶⁵ Ayoob, Mohammed, et. al. *Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia : Wahhabism and the State*. 2009.

⁶⁶ Farquhar, Michael. "SAUDI PETRODOLLARS, SPIRITUAL CAPITAL, AND THE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY OF MEDINA: A WAHHABI MISSIONARY PROJECT IN TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE." 47, no. 4 (2015): 701-21.

⁶⁷ *ibid* 705

⁶⁸ *ibid* 705

⁶⁹ May Darwich; The Ontological (In)security of Similarity Wahhabism Versus Islamism in Saudi Foreign Policy, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Volume 12, Issue 3, 1 July 2016, Pages 469–488, <https://doi-org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/fpa/orw032>

are done under the banner of the Saudi official government, but sometimes by influential Saudi royal family members and business leaders. However, the political environment within the kingdom is such that any large money transfer or donation is most likely approved, however tacitly, by the Saudi government.⁷⁰ This relatively radical interpretation of Islamic thought within Saudi continues to grow and change, despite its historical adherence to the tenets and teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, and by extension, the interpretations of the contemporary clerics within Saudi Arabia. One of the most prominent clerics is Sheikh Abd al-Aziz bin Baz, former grand mufti and legal scholar who influenced much of Saudi legal interpretation throughout the mid-20th century.

Wahhabi-Salafism is a strain of Islamic ideology very much concerned with the ideas of authority and proper obedience towards those in the faith. However, Wahhabi-Salafism is explicitly and irrevocably tied into the idea of a Muslim state, with a Muslim leader at the apex of society who is meant to lead the faithful in society. This particular view of Islam also pushes back against the idea that a Muslim ruler must somehow be the philosopher-king, able to perfectly embody *shariah* as if it were natural behavior. Instead, Wahhabi-Salafism relies on a particular model of authority, where the leader is to be the representative for the entire community and exist as a physical manifestation of God's authority on earth. Because Wahhabi-Salafism is predominantly concerned with issues of heresy and apostasy, it is less important on whether or not its adherents are believing

⁷⁰ Farquhar. "SAUDI PETRODOLLARS". 701-21.

something than whether or not they practice it in public or private.⁷¹ Heresy is a issue of praxis, where certain behaviors or traditions may be seen as un-Islamic or as an affront to God. For Wahhabi-Salafism, this can be things such as venerating a tomb, holding onto local traditions or rituals that are not mentioned in the Qur'an or the hadith, or even improperly honoring Muhammad (usually by being too invested in his tomb or birth place).⁷² Praying to saints openly would also be a form of heresy, or *shirk*, specifically because it would implicitly reject the idea that Islam is a monotheistic religion, for all prayers in monotheisms should be sent towards God, and only God.⁷³

Wahhabi-Salafism is also inherently an insecure ideology within the Islamic sphere. This is not to state that it should be seen as “weak” or ineffective, but instead that the ideology requires insecurity in one’s status in the faith in order to be effective.⁷⁴ In order for Wahhabi-Salafism to continue to be prominent and influential on religious practice, it must continually push the idea that *shirk* is mere footsteps away, waiting for a practitioner to wander into its clutches. Wahhabi-Salafism does not attempt to define the inherent characteristics of Muslims (read: Sunni Muslims) like Qutb’s *jahiliyah/tajdid* paradigm of belief, but instead as a piety/heresy paradigm of behavior.⁷⁵ Wahhabi-Salafism does not generally claim that a Muslim can somehow fall out of *being* Muslim,

⁷¹ Rich et. al. "The Saudi State." 105-21.

⁷² Ayoob et. al. *Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia*.

⁷³ *ibid*

⁷⁴ Darwich; *The Ontological (In)security*.

⁷⁵ *ibid*

but instead that they are a Muslim betraying their duties to the ruler, the state, and to God. This is also why the ruler as a physical representative of God's authority is so important. The ruler is not put on Earth in order to interpret or embody *shariah*, but instead to enforce the *shariah* as it is understood by the clerical structure and set an example for all adherents to model and follow after. The Wahhabi-Salafi doctrine specifically needs the authority of God invested in the state so the state can mitigate, control, and enforce normative standards of behavior that will allow the ideology to continue, and in theory prevent the community from collectively falling into *shirk*. However, since for Saudi Arabia the authority model is not entirely invested within the state, there is overlap and occasional friction between the authority of the ruler as the state and the authority of the cleric as religiosity.

From this friction comes Sheikh Abd al-Aziz bin Baz as one of the most influential Wahhabi-Salafi clerics within modern Saudi Arabia. Bin Baz served as head of the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia and Head of the Council of Senior Scholars from 1992 until his death in 1999, President of the Muslim World League, and judge of the al-Kharj district from 1938 to 1952.⁷⁶ Sheikh bin Baz was a controversial figure within Saudi religious politics specifically because of his religious decrees in relation to the state. Sheikh bin Baz operated within the traditional Saudi education system for Islamic jurisprudence, allowing his religious authority to enhance and support state authority. Bin Baz issued thousands of fatwas over the course of his life, yet one of his most historic and

⁷⁶ *Who's Who in the Arab World 1990-1991*, pg. 123. Part of the Who's Who series. Edited by Gabriel M. Bustros. Beirut: Publitec Publications, 10th ed. ISBN 2903188076

influential is the fatwa authorizing a wealth tax to fund *mujahideen* fighters in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union, implicitly confirming the Saudi state as an enemy of the Soviet state.⁷⁷ This is noted as the first case of a fatwa being used to encourage inter-state violence in the international system. Bin Baz also frequently issued fatwas to support the Saudi state internally, routinely and categorically condemning the right for violent uprising by citizens towards their leaders.⁷⁸ Bin Baz's fatwa on the matter argued that the only reason citizens may overthrow or act out against their government leaders was if the leader issued an order that was against God.⁷⁹ Bin Baz is also seen by many scholars as one of the original motivators for the Saudi Dawah system, in which the state has invested in foreign Muslim nations to establish Wahhabi-style religious school and Islamic centers in order to help create a more "pure" Muslim community outside of the Arabian Peninsula.⁸⁰ This was considered to have been done in conjunction with the Saudi state apparatus and fatwas were issued by bin Baz in order to help support the Saudi government effort to expand religious authority over Muslims that were not Saudi themselves.

⁷⁷ Wayback Machine. "Ibn Baaz's fatwa in support of the war against the soviets." https://web.archive.org/web/20150420084024/http://www.qsep.com/modules.php?name=ilm&d_op=article&sid=500

⁷⁸ Bin Baz, Abdul Al-Aziz. "Fatwas of Ibn Baz." Fatwas of the Permanent Committee. Accessed June 04, 2018. <http://www.alifta.net/Fatawa/fatawaDetails.aspx?languagename=en&BookID=14&View=Page&PageNo=1&PageID=1029>.

⁷⁹ *ibid*

⁸⁰ *ibid*

Sheikh bin Baz is a complicated and often unreliable figure within Saudi history specifically because of the opaque nature of the Saudi regime and its internal politics. However, based on the behavior and fatwas of Sheikh bin Baz, at best guess the religious leader had a firm grasp of the Saudi political system and saw his duty within the clerical apparatus as one to help support and sanctify the state for Muslim eyes. Sheikh bin Baz repeatedly and consistently issued fatwas that gave religious justification for Saudi government policy, both in dealing with neighboring countries and in regards to its own citizens. The sheikh offered justification for Saudi political machinations against the Soviet Union, encouraged the Saudi government structure to continue “spreading” Wahhabi-Salafi doctrine outside of the Hijaz, and repeatedly issued condemnations of disobedience towards the Saudi state.⁸¹ This is not just a matter of offering justification for Saudi policy, but also to enhance and grant multiple layers of authority to the policies of the Saudi state throughout his career.

Presumably Sheikh bin Baz had the ability to simply remain quiet and neutral towards state policy if he did not feel it appropriate or within his understanding of Islam. Instead he actively sought out opportunities to lend his religious authority to the state’s authority on policy decisions. In fact, most likely this could be seen as the sheikh’s small attempt to help influence the Saudi policy apparatus towards maintaining paths he saw worth following for the future of Saudi Arabia and the Wahhabi-Salafi doctrine. This could be due to the fact that Sheikh bin Baz was very much a cleric in the upper echelons

⁸¹ Bin Baz. "Fatwas of Ibn Baz."

of Saudi society and Saudi government. He served as judge, grand mufti, and global Muslim leader and Islamic influencer.

Sheikh bin Baz was very much a person whose career was predicated on and maintained by its relationship to the state of Saudi Arabia. Just as he often granted his religious authority credentials to Saudi policy, his relationship to the Saudi state in turn strengthened his own authority presumably because the state used its authority to continually promote him.⁸² This authority sharing model incorporates the clerical structure and makes it an unofficial arm of the government system, and can then draw other religious adherents into its influence. After all, if the state is the faith and the faith is through the state, any other adherents to the Wahhabi-Salafi state will begin to feel limited loyalty and affinity for the Saudi regime. They will become reluctant or unaware allies specifically because the influential leaders of the Wahhabi-Salafi doctrine receive and share their authority with the state, creating a dualist theocracy of sorts. The authority simply cannot be removed or understood without the context of the state embedded within it.

Because the state and the faith cannot be separated or understood without their influence on each other, it also makes Saudi Arabia a rather unique Sunni Muslim state within the global order. Saudi Arabia often co-opts the rhetoric of Wahhabi-Salafism in order to further its own political agendas, even when religion is not always at the forefront.⁸³ It frequently holds its status as the state which contains Mecca, and thus is the

⁸² Rich, et. al. "The Saudi State." 105-21.

⁸³ *ibid* 105-121.

administrator of the yearly *hajj* to Mecca, as a powerful item for holding Islamic authority in the greater world. The Hajj is a complicated network of political affiliations in the modern age specifically because the religious act cannot be separated from the Saudi state. The Saudi state administers the Hajj, prepares for the Hajj, is required to screen all potential arrivals for the Hajj. The Saudi state is then also able to exert control over the Hajj process and maintain its own personal standards of who and what is considered Muslim and therefore allowed entry into Saudi Arabia and more specifically Mecca. Hajj cannot be removed from the state. Similarly, the network of *madrasas* and even larger *dawah* system endorsed by Sheikh bin Baz cannot be removed from the state. The Saudi state contributes a fair amount of money to the *dawah* fund and is responsible for the negotiations that allow the indigenous locations to receive Saudi money.⁸⁴ The Saudi elite also apparently donate to the system as well, understanding their duty as Muslims within Saudi Arabia to help the state spread Wahhabi-Salafi doctrine as the “true” Islam and their authority must be heard and respected.

This constant practice by Saudi Arabia as it frequently seeks to expand its control and use religion as a form of soft power can also be seen within the lens of the authority merger between the clerical structure and the government structure. As stated before, the Wahhabi-Salafi doctrine is an inherently insecure doctrine. It is not just based on the idea of repelling heresy within Muslim communities, but based in using the state as the primary motivator and apparatus to root out and prevent heresy.⁸⁵ Therefore, an insecure

⁸⁴ Darwich; *The Ontological (In)security*.

⁸⁵ Rich, et. al. "The Saudi State." 113.

doctrine that is limited to only one region or one nation-state is not ideal for its ideological security. This is where instead the doctrine begins to hijack the state apparatus's authority in attempts to diffuse itself further. The dawah system can be seen as the inverse of the Hajj model. While the Saudi state uses religious authority in order to establish political authority over Mecca and the Hajj, the religious establishment uses the state's political authority in order to help spread itself to other Muslim nations where it might be able to take root and thrive.

The Saudi government's choices in Albania, Pakistan, and parts of Central Asia are easily understood when seen through the lens of ideology diffusion. These specific nations have complicated and often tense relationships with Islam due to their personal history. Albania, Pakistan, and the Central Asian nations were all colonized in some form and many of them were forbid religion as public praxis.⁸⁶ Therefore, Wahhabi-Salafism would not have to fight against a regularly practiced indigenous form of Islam. It would instead be able to easily take root and convince many Muslims that their religious practices had instead been corrupted by the influence of the secular colonizers. These Muslims would then be "shown" that their was a pure Islamic path for them, a path towards Wahhabi-Salafi doctrine in particular.

By spreading this doctrine further and into multiple localities, the Wahhabi-Salafi doctrine also is then able to create circumstances where various versions of a state-religious alliance are possible. Saudi Arabia, as the first, remains the concept for the

⁸⁶ Ayoob, et. al. *Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia*.

religious franchise but the Wahhabi-Salafi doctrine is ideologically comfortable with some variety. This means that not all localities where Wahhabi-Salafi doctrine can thrive attempt to create a clone of the Saudi model; but instead to create political incentive within these nations to operate similarly to Saudi Arabia. Operating similarly to the Saudi model then allows religion to co-opt and share authority with the state apparatus in each nation. Of course, many of these religious leaders are not stationed within local communities, but instead looked to from Saudi Arabia and their widespread clerical establishment.⁸⁷ This then feeds back towards political authority as cultural movements, and grants Saudi Arabia a small degree of security in the face of regional disputes. The Wahhabi-Salafi movement is also partially influenced by the needs of the Saudi state's foreign policy, namely Iran. As Shiite denominations of Islam operate in a much more hierarchical slant than Sunni denominations, the political conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran can also be seen to influence the methods and goals of Wahhabi-Salafi missions. The needs of the political authority create pressure for the religious apparatus to provide political support, hoping to give Saudi Arabia the ability to create a zone of influence similar to the Iran model in the Muslim world.

Yet, despite all of these attempts to co-opt and share authority between the political and religious sectors, the question still remains on whether or not the attempts to share authority are ultimately fruitful. The state authority model for Saudi Arabia is powerful, but very much tied into a specific authority granted by the religious

⁸⁷ Darwich; *The Ontological (In)security of Similarity*.

establishment. If for any reason a large segment of the Saudi population begin to reject the authority of the Wahhabi-Salafi clerical apparatus, it would be hard-pressed to maintain its own credit line of authority as the two establishments frequently use the other to support their authority. This also moves back to a central issue of what is seen to be “true” Islam. While the state itself may be largely protected from the persecutions and endgoals of the Wahhabi-Salafi movement, its population is not. For those who practice more idiosyncratic or less endorsed forms of Islam within Saudi Arabia, the clerical establishment can easily co-opt the rhetoric and authority of the state to enforce a specific version of Islamic interpretation. This co-opt then also can tie the hands of the Saudi state which may be ambivalent or supportive of certain practices not supported by the clerical establishment, again specifically because the state and clerics share an overlapping idea of authority within Saudi society.

Authority sharing also binds the hands of the clerical establishment on certain matters. By no means is the power sharing system an officially protected government system, and the Saudi government clearly maintains the upper-hand in any disagreement between the state and the clerical establishment. The overlapping authority does not prevent the state from being able to exercise its right to censor certain speakers, to arrest on suspicion of treason against the state, or even just use the powers of the state to theoretically intimidate the religious sphere into supporting their demands. While there is no evidence that the Saudi religious sphere is somehow completely under the thumb of the Saudi state, Saudi Arabian law grants nearly no rights to any citizen and the

government maintains widespread authoritarian control over Saudi society.⁸⁸ The Saudi religious system does not share any true political influence or control beyond that which is given by the state itself. Therefore while the Wahhabi-Salafi clerics in Saudi Arabia may have influence over the population and lower-level religious leaders, the clerics do not possess any enshrined political power and are kept safe from state influence only through societal norms and unofficial deal-making between religious leaders and political leaders.⁸⁹ For the authority that is based in statist ideology and statist language, the religious apparatus will always be subservient to the political apparatus, in practice if not in name.

Weaving between this power-sharing arrangement, as it does in much of Saudi society, is the question of wealth and representation within Saudi politics and greater society. Saudi Arabia has been gifted with a large deposit of crude oil and the autocratic slant of the government has allowed for a great expansion of wealth to the elite class in the kingdom. Compared to other governments' relationships between oil and their citizens, the oil wealth in Saudi Arabia is largely kept within the royal family and is not universally shared with all Saudi citizens. The official argument by the Saudi government is that the oil is the national property of the government itself, and it is responsible for using the wealth for the good of the nation, implicitly separating "the nation" from "the people." This is in some part due to the unique situations of the rentier economy within

⁸⁸ "Saudi Arabia." Freedom House. December 01, 2016. Accessed June 05, 2018. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/saudi-arabia>.

⁸⁹ Rich, et. al. "The Saudi State." 117.

Saudi Arabia (and the greater Gulf region), which does not require taxes from their population and is then used as a reason on why the Saudi government is not in a foundational position to maintain a representational relationship with its broader citizenry.

Yet, as the oil period in Saudi Arabia begins to wane and the global oil use drops, an economic crisis within Saudi Arabia could easily emerge. One of the major rhetorical defenses of the autocratic state in the kingdom is that the economic wealth and prosperity of the state in general is a gift from God and justification for the strong grasp the Sa'ud family has on national power. If the nation is no longer prosperous in economic and natural resources, the Sa'ud family loses a major and influential argument on why they deserve to maintain singlehanded control. As the potential economic crisis looms larger and encroaches on Saudi politics, there are a few options available to the Saudi royal family. They can open up the social economy to more people and reluctantly allow citizen representation in a greater precedent in modern history for the state. They can reach towards the clerical structure and lean harder upon the religious establishment to further shore up their argument for legitimacy. Or they can reject both approaches and simply renounce the lable of royalty and become simply a large, powerful, wealthy family within Saudi society. Now obviously, the third option is extremely unlikely in current Saudi society and most likely the Saudi government will attempt to straddle the line between religious authority and social liberalization. Some evidence is shown by the crown prince (as of 2018) Muhammad bin Salman pushing for more women participation in society (e.g. lifting the ban on women drivers) as well as committing a purge in elite classes of

individuals seen as suspect of the government and the ruling faction of the Saudi family. However, whether or not the government can continue this balancing act is very much up for debate and suspicion.

This model of authority construction could also create a model for other nations looking to implement and incorporate the Islamic ideal into the state apparatus rather than reject it. While the nation-state system is largely the norm in the modern global system, there are usually factions and sectors of any population that disagree or push against the state apparatus. Whether these opposition factions are pushing against the abstract ideas of the nation-state or the minutiae of governing, the incorporation of the religious authority apparatus reveals a new vein of authority to tap, even if the Saudi model is not without its own flaws. Authority often seeks to maintain authority and offering new models with different resources to maintain the status quo of authority within Sunni-majority nations will continue to appeal for many Sunni states around the world.

One of the complexities of the Wahhabi-Salafi authority construction and its near-permanent connection to the Saudi state apparatus is that the religious authority espoused and supplemented relies on a near-homogenous idea of a population and how they interact with the authoritative institutions. Saudi Arabia, in order to properly work in theory as a hybrid of state and religious authority, needs its populace to agree on ethnicity, nationality, and religious identity as specific Saudi Arabian Sunni Muslim Arabs. However, many other Muslim-majority and even Muslim-minority nations do not create communities under the idea of homogeneity and therefore must create new versions of how to understand their faith and the authorities within the community.

Chapter Five: Comfortable Disagreement in American Sunni Communities

For Sunni Muslims that live in Muslim-minority nations, their understanding of authority can often be interpreted as complex and less invested in traditional and cultural religious institutions. While the foundational cornerstones of Islam, the Qur'an and the hadith, are still primary foci in these community practices, cultural institutions and norms are much less front and center. In nations such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, authority is very much based institutional Qur'anic interpretation and the ability to explain Islamic ideals in relation to a ephemeral "pure Islam."⁹⁰ The regional theorists such as Qutb and bin Baz are basing their interpretations on an idea that their entire society should be based on the core of Islamic rule. In what manner that is manifested as and how it is implemented are the subject of heavy debate, but the ideal is to create a society entirely ruled by the *shariah* and the Qur'an.

For Muslims that do not live in Muslim-majority, or even Muslim-plurality, nations, a different question arises. In the United States, American Muslims constitute approximately 1% of the population, or about 3.3 million adherents.⁹¹ They are by far the

⁹⁰ Grewal, Zareena., and Ebooks Corporation. *Islam Is a Foreign Country American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority*. S.I.]: New York University Press, 2013.

⁹¹ Mohamed, Besheer. "New Estimates Show U.S. Muslim Population Continues to Grow." Pew Research Center. January 03, 2018. Accessed June 03, 2018. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/03/new-estimates-show-u-s-muslim-population-continues-to-grow/>.

most ethnically diverse religious group in the United States and come from a variety of traditions, cultures, and understandings of authority.⁹² For these Muslims living within the American culture, a non-religious, multi-cultural society where freedom of religion is enshrined within a constitution, the question is less about how to create a purely Islamic society. Instead, this population's intent is more about how to forge a unity of identity and to create space for a diverse set of practices that can still be seen under the umbrella of Islam itself.

American Muslims are a far more diverse religious community than other communities within the United States for a variety of reasons. One major reason is that a significant segment of American Muslims are self-identified converts.⁹³ This means that rather than technically inheriting their religious practices from their family or local communities, these Muslims often find Islam as adults and convert on a strictly individual understanding of the faith and its effect on their lives. A large majority of these converts are African-American, and in fact the overwhelming majority of American Muslims were native-born Black Americans up until the 1990s.⁹⁴ The shift in American Muslim demographics comes primarily through immigration from Arab and Southeast Asian nations, bringing a wide set of Sunni Muslim immigrants spanning from Morocco to Saudi Arabia to Bangladesh and India to Senegal and Malawi. These Muslim

⁹² Greenwood, Shannon. "1. Demographic Portrait of Muslim Americans." Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project. July 26, 2017. Accessed June 03, 2018. <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/07/26/demographic-portrait-of-muslim-americans/>.

⁹³ Mohamed. "New Estimates Show U.S. Muslim."

⁹⁴ Grewal. Islam Is a Foreign Country.

immigrants have their own culturally-centered interpretations and practices within the Islamic sphere that cannot be simply reduced down to a single “Islam.”

This heterogeneous religious population is now usually put into interactions that are less common within Muslim-majority nations. Because of the relatively low number of American Muslims in relation to the overall U.S. population, mosques must be able to communicate and interact with a diverse community of American, Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African traditions; all of which are coined as Islam. This community exposure also leads to a diversity of thoughts and opinions within the American Muslim community, specifically because the only thread that connects these disparate populations is their identity as Muslim.

This population also, in many ways, cannot rely on the semi-traditional ideas of religious authority from Muslim-majority nations. Whereas many Muslim-majority nations attempt to validate or even enact aspects of *shariah* into their legal systems, the United States has a relatively secular legal system that does not allow for a concurrent religious court with legal authority. While American Muslims are completely allowed to live their individual lives according to the precepts of *shariah*, there is no socio-legal apparatus to define what exactly *shariah* is to the American Muslim. For a heterogeneous religious population, attempting to define *shariah* would also be in many ways a fool’s errand, requiring a hypothetical national *fiqh* council willing to isolate a portion of their constituents at any given moment. Further, American Muslims in many ways are

formatted within the United States like a ethnic or cultural group.⁹⁵ This can be seen as a rational logic for a nominally secular nation like the United States, attempting to flatten out discrepancies and disagreements within the local Muslim community in order to address community concerns in an efficient fashion.

Yet, this also feeds back into the American Muslim community, creating an environment where authority is derived more from an ethnographic understanding of the Muslim identity than a religious one. Authorities within the community then come less from the specific religious leaders or Islamic theorists, but instead from leaders that are able to stand up and lead the community as an ethnic/racial block, similar to American Asian community, Black American communities, American Latinx communities, or the American LGBTQ community.⁹⁶ Their authority can be derived not exclusively from their standing as a leader of Islamic interpretation, but instead based on their ability to advocate for the community itself through the use of particular Qur'anic verses in addition to their community standing in general.

However this can cause rifts and complexity within the community. While some sections of the community are willing to embrace the idea of Muslim as a more cultural/ethnic identity (the rise of "secular" Muslims, Muslim as a cultural label), other community sections still maintain an idea of Islam as a uniquely religious phenomenon that links communities together, not as a religious culture than has embedded itself in multiple localities. This creates circumstances where a certain individual may be lauded

⁹⁵ Grewal. "Destabilizing Orthodoxy." 44-59.

⁹⁶ Grewal. Islam Is a Foreign Country.

as the leader of the “Muslim community” and seen as a spokesman to the greater American population, while the community itself may instead attempt to receive understanding from more traditional community leaders such as imams and religious scholars.⁹⁷ To add more contradiction to this phenomenon, many community leaders exist in a fluid space between the two. While very few community leaders are traditionally trained Islamic scholars, they still often are able to cite Qur’anic passages, hadith, and fiqh in order to explain their arguments or understandings within the American culture.⁹⁸ Their authoritative status is not primarily based in their understanding of traditional Islamic theology and jurisprudence, but they frequently reinforce their authority by employing specific knowledge of aspects of Islamic theology. Yet, the diversity of thought within the American Muslim community also means that no one source of authority can be seen as foundational.

While many American Muslim communities seek leadership from within their communities regardless of their specific grounding in Islamic theology training, there still is desire to tie authority into the traditional Islamic sphere.⁹⁹ A significant portion of young Muslims seek out ways to understand Islam and their faith from more traditional faith centers located in the Arab Middle East.¹⁰⁰ In some ways, these American Muslims are following a long tradition of Americans relocating and spending time in traditionally

⁹⁷ Leonard, K. "American Muslims and Authority: Competing Discourses in a Non-Muslim State." *Journal Of American Ethnic History* 25, no. 1 (2005): 5-30.

⁹⁸ *ibid*

⁹⁹ Grewal. *Islam Is a Foreign Country*.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*

Islamic lands, rather for short or long periods of time, in order to reclaim an aspect of authority lost to many indigenous American Muslims (predominantly converts compared to second-generation immigrants or later).¹⁰¹ Malcolm X was a notable Black Muslim in the 1960s who spent time in pilgrimage throughout the Middle East, attempting to learn Arabic and gain better insight into Islamic culture to bolster his Muslim credentials in the United States.¹⁰² He also became a focus for specifically Black American Muslims to seek out similar training in nations such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, although his mantle of authority for Black Sunni Islam was largely forgotten after his death in the late 1960s.¹⁰³

This tradition of American Sunni Muslims to travel to areas such as Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia continued specifically because of the desire to recover and transmit Islamic traditions from the “pure” Islamic lands to the United States.¹⁰⁴ The majority of these travelers specifically seek to achieve knowledge and authority from institutions within the Middle East specifically to then return to the United States with a thread of authority in order to cover up blemishes and supplement lax authority ideals from their own communications and charisma.¹⁰⁵ This is not necessarily a poor method in order to claim authority within American Muslim community, but it does create a

¹⁰¹ Grewal. *Islam Is a Foreign Country*.

¹⁰² *ibid*

¹⁰³ *ibid*

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*

circumstance where the Middle East continues to be the center for Islam and sets up the United States as an innately never-Islamic location, despite the fact that Islam is often coined as a universal religion.

This desire to seek knowledge abroad is not just for the people who seek to learn and transmit this new knowledge within their communities, but also for the people who are seeking their knowledge and assistance within the United States. Many young Muslims within the United States see themselves as part of an Islamic revival, seeking to become more pious than previous American Muslim generations in the wake of the Islamophobia after the September 11 attacks.¹⁰⁶ This idea of authority comes from a specific desire to become a beacon of Islam within the nominally secular United States, and often create ideas of authority as purity from within the community. These young Muslims, often male and descended from Arab Muslim immigrants, tend to split themselves off from the seemingly-corrupting influences of the United States and greater American culture.¹⁰⁷ This separation and effort to interact only intra-communally is an attempt to showcase their authority by their adherence to theological study, communication with fellow-minded isolationist Muslims, and even virtue-signaling by outwardly performing Islamic practices more forcefully than other Muslims in the United States.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Herrera, Linda, et. al. *Being Young and Muslim : New Cultural Politics in the Global South and North*. Religion and Global Politics. 2010.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*

This spark of growing piety can usually be cited, anecdotally, from experiences these young men have had with the United States government and national culture in relation to their ethnic identity and faith. One young man cites his father's deportation back to Jordan as a reason to turn more intensely towards Islam and the faith.¹⁰⁹ Another sees his intention to live more piously as a growth from the increased hate crimes towards Arab Americans and American Muslims throughout his lifetime.¹¹⁰ Of course, these Muslim American seek a very specific identity for their authority, using their group motivations as a method to secure their own standing within the community and their virtue-signaling as an attempt to demand respect from those who may not originally respect their authority. Further, these Muslim men see their process and practice as a way to serve as the vanguard of the Muslim community, to outwardly establish a powerful presence for the community and for non-Muslims alike. Living within the secular and growingly-Islamophobic United States has pushed these young men to desire a protection for their community.¹¹¹ They see their faith as a method to gain authority and respect within the community and want to use that respect and authority in order to serve as unofficial leaders and protectors of the community itself, knowing that the authority will want the community to protect them in turn.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*

¹¹⁰ Herrera, et. al. *Being Young and Muslim*.

¹¹¹ *ibid*

¹¹² *ibid*

Despite all of these various ideas of authority, the growing American Muslim population is also a unique model specifically because of the generational shifts happening within the population itself. The American Muslim population is significantly younger than other religious populations in the United States.¹¹³ Almost two-thirds of self-identified Muslims in the United States are below the age of 40, placing this subset of the population in the millennial generation and the iGen generation.¹¹⁴ Similar to their non-Muslim generational counterparts, young American Muslims are increasingly suspect of traditional authority systems and state systems.¹¹⁵ They are distrustful of organized religious practices, governments, and seemingly foundational aspects of America such as capitalism.¹¹⁶ They report more positive than average feelings towards racial equality and racial justice, addressing cultural sexism, and socialist ideas such as state-funded healthcare and education.¹¹⁷ They are more and more likely to be educated with a college degree, and yet are still more likely to report as regularly religious or more pious than their non-Muslim counterparts.¹¹⁸

All of these facts and growing trends make it seem much more understandable about how young American Muslims derive authority in ways different than their

¹¹³ Greenwood. "1. Demographic Portrait of Muslim Americans."

¹¹⁴ *ibid*

¹¹⁵ *ibid*

¹¹⁶ *ibid*

¹¹⁷ *ibid*

¹¹⁸ *ibid*

predecessors. Young American Muslims are increasingly distrustful of traditional authority apparatuses and instead seek more culturally communal consensus. Their understanding of authority comes from a place grounded in the Qur'an (like all Muslims) but instead of expecting individuals to explain interpretation to them, they are increasingly reliant on their own knowledge and community to help them work through Qur'anic interpretation together. Young American Muslims are less likely to attend mosque regularly, but still report regularly discussing their faith with each other.¹¹⁹ These young people are also willing to look outside of their communities for other models of authority and interpretation. Many young American Muslims are traveling outside of the United States to their heritage countries in addition to Qur'anic centers across the Middle East in order to better understand their faith. Young American Muslims clearly do not have a fixed idea of authority, but instead are continually shifting their perspectives, looking for whatever methods and processes that will allow them to reconcile their faith and their specific social and moral beliefs.

This desire by American Muslims to seek out Muslims from various communities, both from their home nations in addition to nations abroad, is not just physical but also digital. American Muslims are often quite spread out throughout the United States, with major loci in some major American cities. However, this then requires that American Muslim communities reach out through digital mediums in order to stay in contact with fellow adherents across the nation. Community advocacy organizations such as the

¹¹⁹ Greenwood. "1. Demographic Portrait of Muslim Americans."

Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) or the United States Council of Muslim Organizations (USCMO) maintain robust digital operations in order to connect Muslims across the United States, and frequently use social media to highlight various American Muslim communities as an attempt to forge identity solidarity, forgoing religious interpretation in favor of ethnic identity formation as *Muslim*.¹²⁰ Conversely, many American Muslims turn to the internet in order to discover like-minded communities outside of physicality to help them understand themselves in relation to their faith. Websites such as Twitter, Tumblr, and Reddit are common places where Muslims debate theology amongst themselves, and the websites also operate a safer spaces where some Muslim sub-communities can express thoughts less understood in mainstream American Muslim culture. LGBTQ Muslims are well-documented on using the internet to forge both a uniquely LGBTQ Muslim identity in addition to justifying and reconciling their existence within the greater Muslim world.¹²¹ This digital environment is similarly used by Muslim feminists seeking religious arguments and theological interpretations that can argue for an anti-patriarchal or pro-feminist interpretation of the Qur'an.

The digital environment can then also reinforce or subvert some ideas of authority while supplementing and strengthening others.¹²² Certain American Muslim subsets will discover Western Islamic scholars that argue for a feminist hermeneutic of the Qur'an and

¹²⁰ Council of American-Islamic Relations. "Council of American-Islamic Relations Facebook page." Facebook, June 03, 2018. [facebook.com/CAIRNational](https://www.facebook.com/CAIRNational)

¹²¹ Fadel, Leila. "America's Next Generation Of Muslims Insists On Crafting Its Own Story." NPR. April 12, 2018. Accessed June 03, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2018/04/12/599215203/americas-next-generation-of-muslims-insists-on-crafting-its-own-story>.

¹²² Mandaville. "Globalization and the Politics of Religious Knowledge." 101-105.

will attribute them with more authority in how to better read the Qur'an within a certain lens. Other American Muslims will encounter unofficial theorists who use Islam as a lens to push back against a perceived Western capitalist neoliberalism and will incorporate their arguments into their own beliefs on Islam's duty for society. The complexity of American Muslim authority is inherently derived from the fact that there is no one single American Muslim community, and therefore no one majority thought on how authority can be derived and validated.

Yet, since American Muslim communities exist under a largely similar cultural and legal circumstances, some questions arise from this complex knot of identity that the American Muslim world finds itself engaging with. First of all, unlike Egypt or Saudi Arabia, the United States is not historically founded on Islamic principles or any religious law in particular. Due to cultural history and military interactions, much of the greater Sunni Muslim world also sees the United States as an occasional ally and occasional adversary.¹²³ By living in the United States and (at least partially) assimilating, can American Muslims properly experience their Islamic faith and submit theories of authority in that environment? Thinkers such as Qutb would drastically argue against the idea that Muslims can live in a non-Muslim culture and still maintain their abstract status as Muslim. However, American Muslims have seen no problems as viewing their existence as a natural tension, whether through assimilation or rejection of specific American cultural norms despite their lives centered in the United States.

¹²³ Grewal. *Islam Is a Foreign Country*.

Of course, within that idea, American Muslims are culturally expected to assimilate and adopt the “melting pot” that is American culture.¹²⁴ This creates its own sets of issues because American culture is based on a very specific set of secularizing norms while still assuming immigrants will effect the overall culture. Therefore, can Islam as a religion and its cultural influences be separated while assimilating? Some would obviously argue yes, as the pop-up success of products like hummus, falafal, shwarma, and general halal delis have had no issue within the American culture. Yet, American culture also is well reported as generally Islamophobic and more distinctly Islamic practices such as *zakkat* and *salah* and Ramadan are often misunderstood and looked at as undesirable practices to be assimilated into American culture.

Muslims in the United States are also in a position where authority must constantly be recreated and reclaimed specifically because there is no endemic Islamic cultural apparatus. Despite the long history of Islam within the United States, Islam does not have a nationally recognized *fiqh* council that can pronounce *fatwas* on behalf of American Muslims nor is there any currently successful attempt to create one. The secular government structure of the United States further complicates this issue, as each state is subject to its own laws and regulations, all fifty of which have their own policies towards religious practice and constitutionality. While there are broad overlaps between states, states separated far enough by geography and with different American Muslim

¹²⁴ Greenwood. "1. Demographic Portrait of Muslim Americans."

communities may face different issues and complications that a national *fiqh* policy might be unable to address.

The American Muslim community also exists in the cultural wake of the September 11 attacks, which has polarized many parts of American on the mere idea of Islam as a religion that exists within the United States. Hate crimes against perceived “Muslims”, which may be anything from South Asians to Arabs to Sikhs to actual Muslims, have skyrocketed over the past twenty years.¹²⁵ American domestic policy towards American Muslim communities can be defined as “generally problematic.” In this cultural climate, many American Muslim communities could see authority within the community based on opposition to the United States and practices that reject current discourse in the United States. This is distinct from grounding authority in the traditional Islamic theology and Islamic science, although still a legitimate form of authority creation. However, this method does lead to a potentiality that authority within these communities, whether religiously or culturally Muslim, will be formed on the principles of opposition to the status quo, regardless of what that means for the community at large.

However, the American Muslim authority model does present a model that could be easily exported and embraced by other nations with a rich religious diversity and multiple denominations of Islam within its borders. Part of the allure of the American Muslim construct is simply that there is the need for growth and change and no clear structures on what that is. The identity marker of “Muslim” is the concrete thread that

¹²⁵ Kishi, Katayoun. "Assaults against Muslims in U.S. Surpass 2001 Level." Pew Research Center. November 15, 2017. Accessed June 03, 2018. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/15/assaults-against-muslims-in-u-s-surpass-2001-level/>.

connects these disparate communities and ideologies even within a national border. This authority construct then only requires that the community agree that someone has the right to call themselves “Muslim” rather than working to establish what exactly a Muslim is. The model would allow for more multi-cultural Sunni Muslim communities to come to agreement on broad strokes and then to influence each other on more detailed aspects of the faith and how it is constructed within communities. Yet, this may also be a lesson that Sunni-majority and Sunni-plurality nations can be influenced by and incorporate into their own authority models specifically because it is easily formatted to the local culture and context of Islam itself. The real question is if these various nations will be willing to listen to the advice of the American Muslim authority model and if the American Muslim model will be willing to listen in return.

Chapter Six: Communication Between Authority Constructions

Of course, within these ideas of authority, it is important to note and understand that Islamic authority is not created or circumscribed within a vacuum. Islam, despite its description or assumption as a religion tied to a specific geographical region, is a religion that exists across multiple continents and multiple peoples. These various Islams are often in discussion and conversation with each other, influenced by regional thinkers and theorists who play off of each other, read each other's works, and disagree adamantly on occasion. This also then means that their understandings and prescriptions are better seen as different theories vying for voice in Muslim communities.

For example, the near-anarchical model of Islamic authority espoused by Sayyid Qutb is clearly rejected by the statist model of Saudi Arabia via Wahhabi-Salafism. Qutb believed that Islamic authority was specifically the purview of God and that leaders, at their best, were merely stewards for the authority of God. If the physical leader began to fail or not properly implement the *shariah*, then it was not just a Muslim's right but their duty to remove the communal legitimacy granted to that leader and overthrow them, freeing the position for someone who actually would fulfill the promises of God.¹²⁶ Meanwhile, the general Islamic jurisprudence within Saudi Arabia specifically would

¹²⁶ Orbach. "Tyrannicide in Radical Islam." 961-72.

argue for the opposite. In order for a Wahhabi-Salafi model to exist, the idea of overthrowing leaders was paramount to heresy itself. Their interpretation of the Qur'an was that Muslims had next-to-no right to overthrow or in any way rebel against their leaders.¹²⁷ They had a selective right to occasionally inform and advise their leader and ruler, but the leader was never explicitly stated as needing to listen or adhere to the advice of his citizens. Instead, it was the ruler's job to properly enforce the practice of Islam and to ensure the continuing space for Islam to flourish. In fact, it was a far worse crime to ignore the prescriptions of the Muslim ruler than it was to try to enforce the community's beliefs upon the leader.¹²⁸

Now, Qutb's theory pushes heavily against the modern iterations of the Saudi Wahhabi-Salafi religious establishment. The very prescription Qutb creates for Muslims around the world is in direct opposition to the theorizing from Saudi Arabia's clerics. Moreover, Qutb's philosophy threatens the very idea of Saudi Arabia's existence from a religious security sphere. A philosophy explicitly based on the idea that the leader of a nation state, in fact the idea of national leaders at all, was a flawed Western idea that would never significantly remove *jahiliyah* from global Muslim communities would not be received well by the Saudi government. In contrast, the idea that Muslims were not to question their rulers and leader and instead were expected to offer obedience in all things does not reflect well in an ideology like Qutb's. To assert that the path to a pure Islamic community was *through* the establishment of physical Islamic leaders rather than by

¹²⁷ Ayoob, et. al. *Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia*.

¹²⁸ Ayoob, et. al. *Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia*.

removing physical human Muslim leaders is its own philosophical model of authority construction. Meanwhile the circumstances of Muslims that lived in the United States would appall and be condemned by both Qutb and Sheikh bin Baz.

For Qutb, American Muslims would be living in a nation not run by the ideals of the *shariah* and the *hakimiyah*. They suffered to live in a non-Islamic nation, operating under the cultural and legal influences of man-made law rather than that of God's natural law. For Sheikh bin Baz and the Wahhabi-Salafi model, the American Muslim has no Muslim leader to follow and obey. They continually participate in a process that leads them into risk of *shirk* by choosing to hold onto ideals such as the American constitution simply by existing as American Muslims rather than rejecting their identity as Americans. And of course, for both thinkers, American Muslims are in opposition specifically because they choose to exist as Muslims within the anti-Islamic West. Therefore, no matter the logic or rationale behind their betrayal, their existence as Western Muslims can potentially invalidate their Muslim status without any other specific acts.

American Muslims also embody a specific crisis within the need for Islamic authority construction. Since no Muslim nation in the current order can entirely segregate itself with exclusively Muslim peoples and nations, the issue of secularism and outside influences will always remain an aspect of Islamic practice. This secular influence then in some ways creates a need to form consensus on what specifically can be considered Islamic and what is not. Some theorists would argue that Islamic authority comes exclusively from the Qur'an and a metaphysical Islamic backing. Under that logic, anything created and theorized from the non-Muslim world cannot be imported and must

be independently created by Muslims for Muslims. Meanwhile, many other theorists argue that life aspects such as science, agriculture, and general natural science knowledge is innately human and cannot be segregated into “Islamic” and “non-Islamic.” It is Islamic morality and Islamic understanding of the world as a spiritual cosmic whole that must be maintained, not an assumed Muslim purity about products such as WiFi or Starbucks. Authority construction can also easily shift based on the circumstances of specific theorists or communities, specifically because in Sunni Islam authority is created by consensus. Western Muslims may be far more willing to accept ideas such as feminism or LGBTQ equality as value-neutral and not the pure purview of the non-Muslim world, whereas more “traditional” Muslims may instead argue that those philosophies are corrupting importations meant to separate Muslims from the true interpretation of Islam and the Qur’an.

In addition, Islamic authority can also be influenced by the political needs of the cultures and areas, or even informed by their circumstances. It is not irrelevant that Sayyid Qutb’s theorization came from the wake of formerly colonized Egypt. Qutb’s Egypt had been dominated by the British and French, the religious establishment co-opted in order to spread what he saw as Western propaganda, and suffering from a dearth of truly Muslim leaders.¹²⁹ Secular generals and kings influenced by the West ruled in Egypt in the early and mid 20th century, and Qutb instead envisioned a world where the leaders of Muslims would indeed be Muslims in practice as well as name. American

¹²⁹ Soage. "Islamism and Modernity." 189-203.

Muslims exist within the cultural context of geographically separate and yet connected by their shared faith. American Muslims, however, still exist within a matrix of identity, and not as a monolithic community that has one set of needs or desires. Black American Muslims have very different cultural circumstances and economic resources than immigrant American Muslims who may not suffer from endemic institutionalized anti-black racism. Yet conversely, Black American Muslims are much less likely to suffer from Islamophobic actions and policies that predominantly effect immigrant Muslim communities.¹³⁰ The American Muslim community is a patchwork set of communities and therefore has no one true idea of authority, but instead an authority matrix which ebbs and flows based on the needs of any specific community within the United States. Saudi Arabia may be seeking to extend its Wahhabi-Salafi doctrine beyond the confines of Saudi Arabia and the Hijaz in an attempt to increase allyship within the Muslim world. Sunni Islam is broadly based on consensus within the community and the desire for Wahhabi satellite communities could come from the Saudi state's needs being addressed by its Wahhabi-Salafi establishment counterparts.

The effort to understand a subset of Sunni Muslim constructions of authority in the modern era comes from the central tension within Islam itself. Islam is a monotheism based on the premise that Muhammad is the last of God's prophets. There will be no further prophet to expound and recite God's advice and laws to humanity. Therefore, if the last speaker for God is a man who died in 632 CE how does the Muslim community

¹³⁰ Kishi. "Assaults against Muslims in U.S. Surpass 2001 Level."

seek growth and transformation in line with the temporal space it occupies? For Islam, the answer is *islah* and *tajdid*, reform and renewal. According to the theological precepts, Islam has no need for further prophets, further revealers of divine knowledge, specifically because the faith is eternally relevant. For Muslim theorists, the understanding of Islam and its implementation properly into human society will prove a better or worse society. The argument is that if your people are properly following the laws and knowledge of the Qur'an and *shariah* then your society will get better in measurable, understandable ways. Within a single human lifetime, a society will reflect its acceptance or withdrawal of Islamic precepts. This is why the question of who exactly can be considered an authority is relevant yet never fixed. The society's authority can simultaneously stimulate growth even as they may create more circumstances that complicate people's lives. These authority models can also reveal the problems currently entrenched within specific populations and how they can be replicated to the greater Muslim whole.

Now, none of the authority models discussed here are the exclusive purview of a single nation, community, or even Muslim person. The thoughts of Qutb, the fatwas of Sheik bin Baz, even the overlapping and often contradictory authority models of the American Muslim communities are merely three of the authority models in the modern Muslim world. Yet while there are others, these are three of the authority models that continue to hold and maintain influence across the Muslim world, not simply the localities where these authority models arose or were constructed. These authority models are influential also because they address three very specific issues in ways that other authority models may not. In the 21st century, seemingly new standards of society are

falling away or transforming into radically new versions. Qutb addresses the growing conflict against the nation-state model pushed through colonialism and the early modern era. The Wahhabi-Salafi model exemplified through the theorizing of Sheikh bin Baz speaks to the draw and complexity that comes from a religious community that spans multiple continents and dozens of countries. The American Muslim community reveals the issues and possible complications of a multi-cultural community within a locality, even if everyone is identified as Muslim. Further, these ideas of authority are fluid and continue to influence Muslims the world over specifically because they are fluid.

Authority within theology is a fluid foundation specifically because it never exists as a singular pillar. Authority is a process that is dependent on the relationship between leaders, political and religious, and their constituents. Authority models can also grant a method for Muslims to achieve greater theological agency in the modern age. These constructions reveal an implicit permission for these leaders and theorists through their assuming authority. This then also allows for models to conflict and push against each other in order to remove authority from those leaders no longer accepted or to supplement the authority of certain leaders because they are seen as authentic and true in their ambitions. The authority models also, no matter how flawed or complicated they may seem, create legitimacy and standards with the Muslim communities both domestic and internationally. These leaders then actually have methods to address the problems that afflict their community, continuing the cycle.

Of course they also have different solutions to these problems, and even overlap. Qutbi thought pushes for a radical new worldview where all Muslims reject the ignorance

of the not-Islam and fully embrace Islam as a closed worldview. The modern Wahhabi-Salafi thought seeks to espouse its theology to Muslim world, working to remove the possibility on non-Islamic ideals infringing on Islamic practice through a mosaic mentality. It is not a closed worldview but a cautious and ever-vigilant worldview instead. The American Muslim worldview works from a third sphere, looking to allow a kaleidoscope of theories and thoughts that do not work entirely against each other but not entirely with each other. They create a natural tensions that pushes ideas to the forefront of discussion within the community itself, even if there is no clean resolution. These authority models are not meant to offer dogmatic arguments that must be adhered to sentence by sentence. Instead, the attempt to offer more holistic world-views and foundational principles that will allow leaders to continue to maintain and justify their authority whether politically, physically, or philosophically.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Sunni Islam in the modern era is facing a unique set of challenges. For a denomination quite literally named after the idea of community consensus, the theoretical Sunni community is in a state of flux. The advent of group literacy, Qur'anic translations, and the digital realm has allowed for once marginal voices to become much louder and able to be heard. The supposedly traditional authority models from previous ages have fallen away, and communities have been left to decide on models of authority and their integration into the communities. However, this flux state should not be seen as synonymous with a state of chaos or even a state of confusion. This flux state should also not be seen as a temporary state, a process moving these communities towards a single polity where an authority model is universally acknowledged and followed. These Sunni communities are instead seeking a valuable process of authority transformation and re-centering authority in the tradition of *tajdid* and *islah*. These multiple authority constructions are all seeking to reform and renew the Islamic faith. The differences come from the fact that Sunni communities do not face the same challenges and often seek different paths to answer the pressures of the modern era.

These different authority models seek specific answers to specific questions within their communities, even if they can be exported and reformatted to other locations and communities. The professionally educated, anti-establishment is often an answer for

communities who feel betrayed, let down, or simply ignored by the elite religious apparatus that is supposed to address their religious concerns. The state-religion authority cooperation is often the result from states that need a religious foundation in the Islamic tradition and a clerical elite that seeks a method to guarantee their authority's ability to be implemented without infringement. The Muslim community as Muslim identity is from the Sunni experience of cultural diversity while still operating as a minority population within a larger nation. These authority models are not the only models that exist within the larger Sunni world, but they are three specific models that continue to last and influence Sunni communities. Their longevity is because they are largely able to make substantial, applicable arguments on how their specific constituencies are to handle the pressures placed upon them.

This is not to claim that they are without flaws or without their own complications and further questions, but they address specific questions for Sunni communities in a method that seems authentic and logical for those communities. These answers influence Sunni Muslim lives and religious practice, further engendering their theory into the community itself. These authority models also survive and continue to gain traction in communities because they are fluid constructs that can be more easily formatted for future questions and ideas. Authority is by necessity an ongoing and negotiated relationship between those that claim authority and those that accept that authority. The diversity of Sunni practices and Sunni communities means that there is no need or desire to create a single, homogenous identity that can exclusively claim approval and authority

over the community's religious practice. The diversity of Sunnis is instead what fosters the different paths for authority construction itself.

As stated before, Sunni authority is in a state of flux and many interpret that flux as a crisis, a bug of Sunni tradition rather than a feature. Sunni communities do not have a single problem anymore than there is a single Sunni community. The idea of consensus continues to hold true within these communities, and should be seen as true in turn. Many understandings of consensus pretend that consensus is spawned instantaneously, without discussion or argument or disagreement. These authority constructions are attempts to reform and renew Islam within communities specifically because the community is seeking a reformation of authority. The reformation through transformation and re-centering of authority allows Sunni communities to present different paths forward that can be seen and eventually placed in conversation with each other. These paths may answer different questions for Sunni communities, but these paths also reveal the internal diversity of Sunni traditions as its own systematic feature rather than another bug. The internal diversity is what allows these authority models to grow and shift even throughout their own lifespan, continuing to answering new questions presented by the community. Sunni authority construction is in flux because the Sunni community is in flux. The fact that these three models continue to hold influence within Sunni communities is not because they seek to solidify that constant fluidity, but instead embrace it as the needed future. In other words, the only path worth embracing is the path of change, for the good of the community and the good of all.

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