

Transnational Networks of ‘*Ulama*

Contesting the Social Sphere

Previous chapters have examined the contestation of Salafi doctrine over Islamism, the Sunni-Shi’a divide, and jihadi Salafism. This chapter deals with the under-examined subject of social issues. The chapter examines how modernization has influenced and transformed Salafi tradition. It analyzes how Salafi ‘*ulama* have responded to social changes taking place domestically, regionally, and globally. There are strong transnational elements in the way in which groups of Salafis approach contentious social issues, but their approaches are shaped also by their local circumstances. As previous chapters have shown in other contexts, Salafis respond to unique conditions in their countries of origin or residence.

This chapter finds that the quietist/*haraki* dichotomy does not reflect the complex and dynamic nature of Salafi theological and jurisprudential evolution. There are a few questions to be asked. Has the politicization of Salafi movements following the development of the *haraki* trend in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Egypt influenced the development of Salafi creedal and jurisprudential rulings on non-political matters? Are the ‘*ulama* united on matters such as the role of women in Islam? Has the contest over theological and jurisprudential issues within the framework of the social destabilized the networks of ‘*ulama*, especially those established along *haraki*/quietist lines?

Contested issues of jurisprudence extend to every aspect of Muslim societies, from prayers to fasting to marriage. It is not possible to conduct a comprehensive study of Salafi jurisprudence on all such aspects; however, the second part of this chapter selects some key highly contested social issues to demonstrate the complex nature of Salafi clerical interactions. The first part of the chapter deals with Salafi responses to modernization.

Evolution of Salafism

As discussed in Chapter 2, Rashid Rida supported and defended Ibn Saud and his cohorts of Wahhabi 'ulama. Henri Lauzière examined the divide between enlightened Salafis, who largely followed Muhammad 'Abduh and Jamaluddin al-Afghani's modernist ideals, and the increasingly puritanical Rida and his disciples. Over time, the enlightened Salafis became disassociated from the Salafi label (which they had never assumed anyway) and became identified as *tanwiris* (enlightened) or modernists.¹ Rida's support for Ibn Saud meant that he needed to accept or at least tolerate the puritanical nature of Wahhabism at the time. In Lauzière's words:

On several other occasions, he intimated that the Wahhabis were prone to extremism, but he asked his readers to over-look this negative side. For him, it was better either to judge the Wahhabis on the basis of their pragmatic and moderate political leader or to accept the fact that some fanaticism was better for the umma than the erosion of Islamic identity.²

Hamid al-Fiqi and the later generations of Ansar al-Sunnah al-Muhammadiyah became closer to the Najdi 'ulama, who were more conservative. They had reservations about some aspects of Wahhabi doctrine, but Ibn Saud's patronage prevented them from challenging those aspects openly. Rida's pupils, including al-Fiqi, never enjoyed Rida's authority. They became subservient to the Saudi state, especially while they lived on its soil. The religious and educational institutions of the Hijaz restricted their ability to act independently.³

When the struggle against colonialism subsided from the late 1940s, and Muslim societies entered a postcolonial era, the Salafis in Egypt and more generally focused their activism on religious purity and authenticity. And, as examined in Chapter 2, Egyptian Salafi 'ulama demonstrated loyalty to the state. They invested their attention to countering westernization, feminism, and the encroachment of American capitalism. The desire to preserve correct creedal and jurisprudential practices led them to campaign against religious innovations (*bid'a*).⁴ The focus on creedal purity magnified doctrinal divides within Salafi circles, previously obscured by the struggle against colonialism.

Hamid al-Fiqi argued in a 1949 article, based on a literal interpretation of sources, that angels were not gifted with *aql* (reason). Other Salafis

reprimanded al-Fiqi. These included the Tajik-born scholar and Mecca-based teacher, Muhammad Sultan al-Ma‘sumi al-Khujandi (d. 1961), who published a rebuttal of al-Fiqi in a Saudi journal.⁵ This is a clear example of the limitations of al-Fiqi’s efforts to mold Salafi thought.

The definition of a “Salafi” became increasingly exclusive. ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Wakil, who headed Ansar al-Sunnah in the 1960s, stated in a Moroccan publication in 1962 that being a Salafi involved more than just preaching the need to return to the Qur’an and Sunnah. A Salafi, according to al-Wakil, was someone capable of drawing from the Qur’an and the Sunnah in the interpretation of Islamic creed and jurisprudence. The advocacy by Salafis of their own hierarchy of sources cemented their ancestors as authoritative figures. In the words of al-Fiqi: “One of the most important instructions I give to my brothers [is] that whoever is not versed in books of the two shaykhs [Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya] cannot be a Salafi in the true sense.”⁶ Although al-Fiqi emphasized the importance of the two scholars, he was adamant that these Salafi figures were not to be treated as infallible.⁷

The postcolonial era attracted many Salafis to Saudi Arabia, particularly from Egypt. Some of these *‘ulama* felt that their new domestic political environments were not conducive to the practice and preaching of Salafism. Others wanted to pursue religious purity and saw the newly founded Saudi state a suitable place for it. The Saudi state invested in establishing religious schools that appealed to purist Salafis who were in search of a supportive environment as well as the possibility of patronage, employment opportunities, and official status and recognition. Saudi Arabia quickly became a destination for purist Salafis and the bastion of Salafism itself. Many non-Saudi *‘ulama* who were seen as purists found jobs within the Saudi religious bureaucracy, often on the recommendation of prominent Saudi counterparts. ‘Abd al-Razzaq ‘Afifi and al-Albani were among the immigrants. Salafi *‘ulama* who held a more modernist outlook were, on the other hand, reluctant to venture to Saudi Arabia.⁸

Resisting Modernization: The Transnational Salafi Mission

Ibn Saud’s efforts to engage with Egyptian and modernist *‘ulama* contributed to the fragmentation of Saudi Salafism. Stéphane Lacroix discusses the “exclusivist” and “inclusivist” trends within the Wahhabi tradition. He

argues that the dividing line between the two first emerged when Egyptian forces invaded Najd in 1818. The Najdi 'ulama were at odds about how to respond to the Egyptians. Sulayman Ibn Al al-Shaykh (Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's grandson) declared their infidelity, arguing that they had acted at the behest of the corrupt and excommunicated Ottomans in violation of the principle of *al-wala' wal bara'*.⁹ He was among the exclusivists, who legitimized the armed struggle against the Egyptians and urged believers to emigrate (*hijra*) in the event of an Egyptian victory. The inclusivists were reluctant to support this position, although they remained within the Wahhabi fold. Their view was that while the Egyptians were sinful, they were Muslims, and it was permissible to reside in areas that they governed.¹⁰

The exclusivists and inclusivists renewed their disagreements on a number of later occasions, with the exclusivists largely emerging as the stronger force. Ibn Saud changed this when he sought to counter the influence of the Ikhwan, who advocated exclusivism and were dismayed by Ibn Saud's growing engagement with the British. After their military defeat in 1929 they were pushed to the margins. The inclusivist 'ulama were more capable of adapting to Ibn Saud's pragmatic leadership and played an important role in justifying his ambitions for the new kingdom.

The intellectual cleavages within Saudi Salafism persisted after the establishment of the modern Saudi state and continued to shape the interactions between Ibn Saud, his loyal 'ulama, and the Salafi scholars who refused to embrace modernization efforts for fear that the authenticity of Salafi thought would be diluted. Salafi 'ulama did not raise any qualms about the discovery of oil and the granting of an oil concession to Standard Oil, a US company. Their quietism did not necessarily mean that they were devoid of reservations. In David Commins's words, "as the economic consequences triggered irresistible forces for social, cultural and moral shifts, Saudi 'ulama strained to judiciously assess these changes to discriminate between the acceptable and the unacceptable."¹¹

Ibn Saud's strong grip over his subordinates and his charismatic force allowed him to challenge the 'ulama in any event of religious doubts about his policy decisions. The 1950s saw an increase in the number of expatriates and the generation of oil wealth; Saudi princes began to commission overseas companies to build palaces with modern facilities. The 'ulama were always concerned about non-Muslims in the home of Islam. In 1944, Ibn Saud summoned an 'alim, Abu Bahz, who had rebuked him for "selling land to foreigners." Abu Bahz was dissatisfied with an American venture to improve

agricultural output in the al-Kharj area. Abu Bahz defended his position in Riyadh in the presence of prominent *ʿulama* and Ibn Saud's counselors.¹²

The king responded by posing a question to the *ʿulama* regarding Prophet Muhammad's practice of employing non-Muslims, and asked why it would not be permissible to follow this example. The *ʿulama* generally accepted Ibn Saud's argument. Abu Bahz initially rejected it but retracted when Ibn Saud insinuated that there would be severe punishment for those who refused to adhere to *fatawa* issued by the *ʿulama*.¹³ This incident demonstrates that the Najdi, and later the Saudi, religious establishment was forced to go through a process of reassessment and configuration.

Ibn Saud was also persuasive in convincing the *ʿulama* to accept modern technology. He relied on religious sources including the Qur'an to introduce new innovations. For example, he introduced the radio as an acceptable contraption by broadcasting a Qur'anic recitation over the air, impressing the clerics who might otherwise have been skeptical.¹⁴ Some exclusivists rejected the use of technology as an innovation that violated the Prophet's tradition, narrated as follows: *Kull muḥdathah bid'ah, wa kull bid'ah ḍalālah wa kull ḍalālah fī al-nār* ("Every novelty is an innovation and every innovation is a misguidance and every misguidance belongs to hellfire").¹⁵ But under the leadership of Ibn Baz and the Egyptian 'Abd al-Razzaq 'Afifi, the Committee for Scientific Research and Ifta' issued a ruling stating that the *hadith* refers to religious innovations that were nonexistent during the Prophet's time. The questioner who provoked the ruling asked specifically about technological innovations including loudspeakers and airplanes. The Committee explained: "The *ʿulama* have divided *bid'ah* into two categories: religious innovations and worldly innovations. Religious innovations are personal acts of worship that have not been sanctioned by Allah."¹⁶ The *fatwa* then stated that worldly innovations could be divided into two categories: innovations that are beneficial and innovations that are harmful. Loudspeakers and airplanes were examples of innovations that were acceptable and beneficial: they did not violate the shari'ah or cause harm or injustice to anyone.¹⁷

After the death of Ibn Saud in 1953, his successors embarked on developing state institutions dealing with administrative, educational and legal matters. They emulated Western institutions. Saudi students were sent abroad for education, returning with technical skills for use in the administration of the modern Saudi state. Despite modernization, the Saudi state continued its alliance with the *ʿulama*. The Saudi ruling family continued to need the religious legitimacy that the Wahhabi establishment had given

to it since 1744. This survival of clerical relevance did not extend to Egypt, where the 'ulama were sidelined upon the bureaucratization and reorganization of the state.¹⁸ The Salafi clerical establishment in Saudi Arabia, which of course now incorporated some Egyptian 'ulama, utilized their grip over Islamic law, their influence on the education system, and their status as social leaders of the majority of the Saudi population, to resist the encroachment of Western-style modernization. In other words, societal evolution took place within the boundaries established by the clerics.¹⁹ Some 'ulama, especially the grand mufti of Saudi Arabia at the time, Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim, attempted to force the state to adhere to strict boundaries and opposed the enactment of some new laws.²⁰ But Ibn Ibrahim died in 1969, and the government exploited the consequent leadership vacuum to prevent the clerics from morphing into a powerful group that might be able to challenge the ruling family's power.²¹

The bureaucratization of the religious establishment under King Faysal brought the 'ulama under state control. The king refused to fill the position of grand mufti, thus avoiding granting to anyone the status and prominence that the title conferred. The new religious bureaucracy was controlled by the *Hay'at Kibar al-'Ulama* (Board of Senior Clerics). The Committee had three branches: the Council of the Committee of the Senior 'Ulama, the Permanent Committee for Scientific Research and Ifta', and the General Office for the Management of Scientific Research, *Fatawa*, Preaching, and Guidance. The Saudi religious establishment developed into a hierarchical institution responsible to the state. Many of the 'ulama hailed from Najd.²² Within the bureaucracy were some clerics from outside Saudi Arabia, including Egyptian Salafi clerics mainly from Ansar al-Sunnah al-Muhammadiyah.

The Saudi ruling family was careful to ensure that the religious establishment did not lose credibility as a result of their co-option into the state structure. Ibn Baz exemplified this. He was not always a compliant figure: he was briefly jailed for having criticized Ibn Saud for his decision to permit the presence of American companies in the Kingdom. This incident strengthened Ibn Baz's religious credibility, which in turn became crucial for his later appointments to prominent positions. He was appointed as a member of the Council of the Committee of Senior 'Ulama in 1971, became the president of the Permanent Committee for Scientific Research and Ifta' in 1975, and later was appointed to the General Office of the Management of Scientific Research, *Fatawa*, Preaching, and Guidance.²³ Oil wealth enabled the state to finance the religious establishment. In the words of Lacroix: "The

distributive function became an essential aspect of the General Office for the Management of Scientific Research and Fatwas, Preaching, and Guidance, which received the largest part of the budget allocated to the religious field and distributed it according to its own judgments.”²⁴ This arrangement allowed the *‘ulama* to appear independent and powerful but also tied them financially to the state and lessened the likelihood of them becoming an anti-regime force.

Despite their limited independence, the *‘ulama* were able to use their positions as bureaucrats to promote their ideas to the broader population. Commins attributes this to two factors. First, the *‘ulama* were armed with financial resources to employ staff and intensify their *da‘wa*. Second, Saudi Arabia’s rapid development in modern communications and transportation facilitated the dissemination of religious messages. Despite decolonization, the influence of Western economic prowess and culture remained strong. The result was that a divide emerged between Western-educated bureaucrats and the *‘ulama*. King Saud and King Faysal employed ministers who had been educated abroad. King Faysal and other members of the royal family sent their children to Britain and the United States for secondary and tertiary education; they would return and take up prominent state positions.²⁵

The 1970s witnessed the expansion of the Sahwa networks and their growing influence. This can be attributed to the support they received from the Saudi religious establishment who, having been undermined by modernization, responded by working with Muslim Brotherhood activists fleeing their home countries. Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim himself was receptive to exiled Brothers. For the establishment *‘ulama*, the Brothers’ commitment to re-Islamize Muslims was viewed positively and as congruent with Salafi objectives.²⁶

Salafis in Egypt maintained their political quietism and drifted into obscurity. Some Salafis became involved in student politics, but the larger Salafi movement, including Ansar al-Sunnah al-Muhammadiyah, maintained its transnational affiliation with the highest religious institutions in Saudi Arabia and focused on scholarly endeavors. Ansar al-Sunnah al-Muhammadiyah had been re-established in 1972 after it had been forced to merge with Jam‘iyyah al-Shar‘iyyah during Nasser’s rule. The Salafi magazine *Al-Tawhid* became an avenue for Egyptian Salafi *‘ulama* to share their activities at home and abroad, including at conferences in Saudi Arabia. In 1973, for example, Rashad al-Shafi‘i was invited to attend a conference in Saudi Arabia on the topic of Muslim youth.²⁷

Al-Tawhid published *fatawa* and works of Salafi 'ulama in Egypt, focusing on social issues, including the dangers of smoking.²⁸ In 1973 clerics in charge of female education in Riyadh commended *Al-Tawhid* in a letter and solicited the magazine to be distributed for learning purposes within Saudi Arabia's female education system.²⁹ In the same issue that reported this fact, the magazine announced that both Ansar al-Sunnah al-Muhammadiyah and *Al-Tawhid* had been featured in the Jeddah-based newspaper, *Al-Madinah wal-Bilad*.³⁰

Although their influence was limited, Egyptian Salafis were tireless in their efforts to lobby for a more religious Egypt. In 1978, they issued a letter to the Ministry of Education, published in *Al-Tawhid*, appealing to authorities to correct mistakes in religious textbooks distributed to students.³¹

Egyptian 'ulama who were based in Saudi Arabia, including 'Abd al-Razzaq 'Afifi and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Wakil, were involved in the dissemination of knowledge back home. They continued their support for Ansar al-Sunnah al-Muhammadiyah. Salafi 'ulama who remained in Egypt would take every opportunity to meet with Ibn Baz and their homegrown figure-head 'Afifi. *Al-Tawhid* would document these meetings.³² For example, in 1979, it was reported in *Al-Tawhid* that Salafi 'ulama of Ansar al-Sunnah al-Muhammadiyah were invited by Saudi Arabia (presumably Saudi Salafi 'ulama) to deliver lectures and classes during hajj. The names of the 'ulama included Muhammad Ghazi, Mustafa Burhami, and 'Abd al-Baqi al-Husayni.³³

The Awakening Salafi Mission: Preserving Conservatism in the Face of Modernization

The influence of the Muslim Brotherhood imported into Saudi Arabia led to the creation of the Sahwa movement. Saudi universities were filled with Brotherhood-leaning activists who were given teaching posts and responsibilities for curriculum design. They were crucial in complementing the Saudi regime's ideological warfare against Gamal 'Abdel Nasser's pan-Arabism. The Sahwis were committed to the idea that Islam was supposed to govern every aspect of human life, including the political arena. The political aspect of this doctrine set the Sahwa movement apart from the establishment Saudi Salafis; but in terms of creed and jurisprudential matters generally, the Sahwa adopted Salafi religious doctrines and practices. The Sahwa turned these

practices into standards appropriate to every Muslim. In fact, the Sahwis were stricter on certain issues, seeking to distinguish themselves from the establishment *‘ulama*. The Sahwis prohibited men from wearing tunics falling below ankle-length, declaring the act *haram* (forbidden).³⁴ The establishment *‘ulama* only labeled the act *makruh* (undesirable). The Sahwis also forbade men from shaving off their beard, arguing that it was obligatory to emulate the Prophet and his companions.³⁵

To strengthen Sahwa identity and distinction in public, certain traits were adopted that were not necessarily religious in nature. They included, according to Lacroix, “wearing the *shmagh* or the *ghutra* without an *‘iqal*, which was not in response to an explicit prohibition but to a much vaguer legal principle: wearing an *‘iqal* would be ‘contrary to what is most appropriate’ (*khilaf al-awla*).”³⁶ In their manner of speaking, the Sahwis adhered to certain norms by using phrases such as *Allah yu‘inak* (“God help you”) and *Ittagallah* (“fear God,” but in a Gulf dialect), again to separate themselves from others socially. There was a focus on avoidance of the religiously prohibited.³⁷

Ibn Baz maintained good relations with the Muslim Brotherhood in Saudi Arabia, the Sahwis, and the exclusivist *Ahl al-Hadith* that would later inspire JSM. These movements attempted to derive legitimacy from their associations with him and with Ibn ‘Uthaymin, the second-in-command within the Saudi religious establishment.³⁸ Each of the three movements consisted of non-Saudis as well as locals. Some were prominent *‘ulama* and others would be in the future. Some would join JSM, including ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Khaliq.

Salafi *‘ulama* who remained in Egypt were appalled by Egyptian society’s liberal values, which far exceeded those of Saudi Arabia. *Al-Tawhid* conflated social liberalization with Western imperialism. Unlike in Saudi Arabia, where the main struggle of the various Salafi groups during this period was against Western-educated Saudi liberals, the Salafi *‘ulama* in Egypt were also critical of Sufi-oriented *‘ulama* occupying prominent positions in al-Azhar. The Sufis were viewed as distorted in their lack of commitment to ensuring religious purity in the face of modernization. In 1978, *Al-Tawhid* published an article penned by a Salafi *‘alim*, Jabir Ibrahim al-Hajj. Al-Hajj criticized a Sufi *‘alim*, Muhammad Sa‘ad Jalal, who was based at al-Azhar’s shari‘ah department. Al-Hajj was appalled by a *fatwa* of Jalal to the effect that viewing immodesty in motion pictures was permissible. According to al-Hajj, Jalal rationalized his *fatwa* by

emphasizing that the images were not real, as they were not physically present. The magazine also published Ibn Baz's endorsement of al-Hajj's letter in the following terms: "I urge you to publish this letter in your magazine at the earliest opportunity."³⁹

After the 1979 siege of the Grand Mosque of Mecca, the Saudi state, under the leadership of King Khalid, empowered the religious establishment as a measure to strengthen its own religious legitimacy to rule. The *'ulama* denounced Al-'Utaybi and his followers. This denunciation was echoed by other Salafi *'ulama* in both Egypt and Kuwait. Ibn Baz and al-Albani managed to disassociate themselves from Juhayman and his followers, whom they labeled as extremists. These clerics in turn became the main beneficiaries of the ruling family's desperation for religious credibility. They were given more control over Saudi Arabia's social arena and education system, at the expense of liberal intellectuals. Reporting experiences of ordinary Saudi citizens, Robert Lacey states:

"Modern science, geology, the history of civilisation, the history of Europe—I remember studying all that in my Saudi school in the 1970s," says Mahdi al-Asfour, an Aramco planning consultant. "That vanished. Now it became just the history of Islam and the al-Saud, with hours of extra religious studies—and even science and maths had to include some Islamic content. When my child went to school, he came home crying one day because one of his teachers told him that he would be going to hell. Why? Because he listened to music and because his thobe was not cut short enough."⁴⁰

The Saudi religious police, officially established only in 1976, assumed real street power. The Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice was the organization responsible for implementing public morality in Saudi Arabia under the purview of the Saudi religious establishment.⁴¹ Lacey added:

People noticed that imams and religious folk seemed to have more money to spend . . . with the religious police benefiting most obviously from government injections of cash. They started to appear in imposing new GMC vans, with their once humble local committees of mutawwa . . . taking on the grander, "Big Brother" aura of their original, collective name—Al Hayah, "the Commission." They developed the attitude to match.⁴²

In the 1980s, the Egyptian Salafis of Ansar al-Sunnah al-Muhammadiyah, who of course remained marginal figures, focused on discussing public morality. Their obsession with Sufi traditions was often tied to their concerns about the insufficient religiosity of al-Azhar and the influence of Egyptian liberals. *Al-Tawhid* published a number of articles condemning Sufi practices, including their celebration of Mawlid al-Rasul (the Prophet Muhammad's birth). The magazine accused al-Azhar of filling a religious void with *bida'* (plural "innovations") and, more egregiously, combating Salafism, which, according to the magazine, was the correct doctrine for Muslims. The Najdi influence cannot be underestimated here. Discussions of the correct creed were supported by references to Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and Ibn Taymiyyah.⁴³

Egyptian Salafi *'ulama* and activists tried to lobby the government and local councils to enforce public morality through measures such as prohibiting the selling and drinking of alcohol. They also made an effort to entice young Muslims to follow the Salafi way by emphasizing religious purity. An article penned by Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahman al-Husary, a Salafi *'alim* who wrote for *Al-Tawhid*, was highly critical of Sufi leniency on sins and prohibited practices. He argued for the Salafi conviction that: "Disobedience leads to disbelief, just like kissing leads to sexual intercourse, and music leads to fornication, and looks lead to passion and illnesses lead to death."⁴⁴

Kuwait was also confronted with modernization that shaped the country's sociopolitical environment. Like the Saudi and Egyptian Salafis, Kuwaiti *'ulama* promoted "authentic" Islamic creed and focused on reinforcing religiosity. In the words of a student of 'Abd al-Khaliq, interviewed by Zoltan Pall:

In the beginning we, a few dozen Salafis, only made excursions every night to the beach where we sat around the shaykh and took courses on the Qur'an and Sunna. At this stage we never touched on political or even social issues that went beyond personal, religious behavior. When our numbers became larger, we were able to have our study groups in mosques, until three mosques were entirely Salafi. The continuous arrival of migrant workers definitely increased our numbers.⁴⁵

Earlier chapters examined the development of Salafism through 'Abd al-Khaliq and his student 'Abdullah al-Sabt. Through the establishment of a Salafi center, Dar al-Salafi, they were able to promote Salafi ideals that focused on religiosity. In the words of al-Khaliq: "People were preoccupied with material goods and did not have many concerns about religion. When

I first arrived in Kuwait [1965], I was surprised to see that only old people visited the mosques.”⁴⁶ He narrated that he did not see a single young Kuwaiti praying at mosques and suggested that Kuwait was far from the Islamic faith. He also made a point to state that he saw only two bearded men in the first two months after his arrival in the country.⁴⁷

Kuwaiti Salafis were far more politically oriented than their Egyptian counterparts, who devoted their attention to countering al-Azhar 'ulama and promoting religious purity.⁴⁸ The Salafi magazine *Al-Furqan* (estb. 1989) became a vehicle to highlight RIHS activities in Kuwait and abroad. It featured 'ulama from both Egypt and Saudi Arabia as part of its collectively Salafi solidarity. Although the contents largely dealt with the plight of disenfranchised Muslims in other countries, it also canvassed the corruption of the faith and contentious social issues, both internally and externally.⁴⁹

We will now examine how Salafi 'ulama have negotiated social issues and Salafi identity over time.

Negotiating the “Muslim Woman”

Salafi 'ulama propagate a conservative interpretation of the role of women in Muslim societies. The obsession of the 'ulama with the impact of foreign ideas permeating Muslim societies often leads them to focus on women and their behavior. Women's attire, movements, and participation in public activities, including politics, are constantly debated.

Again, domestic circumstances influence how these issues are negotiated. In the case of Saudi Arabia, the 'ulama were part of the newly established state predicated upon “religious nationalism,” in which the ruler granted the 'ulama a monopoly over religion in exchange for religious legitimacy to rule. The project called for religious authenticity that returned to the sources and rulings of the early Najdi 'ulama and was grounded in what Madawi al-Rasheed terms “piety, propriety, and conformity.”⁵⁰ Women became a symbol of what was morally and religiously acceptable for Saudi society and any other aspiring Salafi movement. In a Saudi context, al-Rasheed discusses the Wahhabi propagation of family at the heart of society and the preservation of public morality. The 'ulama were preoccupied with the purification of the public sphere by enforcing gender segregation. As a result, women “became a religious and ethical subject rather than a social agency, and were required to be at the service of a masculine religious state.”⁵¹

The Saudi *‘ulama* were concerned with almost every aspect of womanhood, including religiosity, outward appearance, mobility, education, employment, property and personal status. The clerics’ relationship with the Saudi state gave them the space to promote their vision of the ideal “Muslim woman.” The Saudi Salafi establishment jealously guarded laws that ensured that women did not venture into the public sphere. Women were reduced to performing reproductive functions. The clerics and their religious police were given license to monitor public morality, which to them included women’s behavior and movement.

In the period after the 1979 siege of the Grand Mosque of Mecca, the clerical obsession with regulating women’s mobility and behavior witnessed an avalanche of *fatawa* about women. Al-Rasheed attributes this to the limited outreach of the *‘ulama*, who were restricted by the state from talking about political and economic matters. The clerics gravitated toward the social sphere of Saudi life in which they had far more latitude. In al-Rasheed’s words: “From 1980s onward, the pious nation was dependent on the visible signs of piety and the nation’s commitment to Islam.”⁵² One example of the *fatawa* issued by the Permanent Committee for Scientific Research and Ifta’ was about women’s visibility in the public sphere. In a question asked:

What is the ruling on a woman who leaves her house repeatedly to visit her relatives: is she permitted? What about leaving the house for safety reasons? As well as leaving with a male guardian on occasions, and without a male guardian on other occasions? If a woman leaves her house, what is a suitable time for leaving, and returning?⁵³

The Committee answered:

A woman is permitted to leave her house if she needs to, with the permission of her husband. She must be protected by proper veiling and ensure that she does not accessorize. She should be permitted to leave the house for safety reasons, [. . .]. As for suitable times for leaving the house, that depends on different circumstances and national preferences.⁵⁴

Another common topic was that of veiling, which the *‘ulama* defined as covering of the face, hands, and whole body. Many *fatawa* emphasized the impermissibility of *tabarruj*, meaning the gratuitous display of one’s body. The

source for these *fatawa* was a Qur'anic verse that commanded the Prophet's wives to stay at home and avoid *tabarruj*.⁵⁵

Salafi 'ulama in Egypt have never enjoyed real influence on women's issues, or for that matter, any issue, as they have never been part of the Egyptian religious bureaucracy, largely represented by al-Azhar. Egyptian women have tended to enjoy greater education and employment prospects than Saudi women. Gamal 'Abdel Nasser's efforts to promote the "working woman," despite its limitations, allowed Egyptian women a degree of independence.⁵⁶ The rise of Islamist fervor after 1967, propagated by the Muslim Brotherhood, created a more conducive environment for social conservatism. Ansar al-Sunnah al-Muhammadiyah, represented by its 'ulama such as 'Abd al-Rahman al-Wakil, fostered a traditional conception of the role of a woman that reduced her to the private sphere.

The Egyptian Salafi 'ulama through *Al-Tawhid* would often re-publish the *fatawa* of Salafi 'ulama, endorsing their views on the place of women. These included Ibn Baz and Ibn 'Uthaymin, whose tutelage was a source of bragging rights for individual Egyptian Salafis who had known or studied under them.⁵⁷ The Egyptian Salafi 'ulama had largely the same views about women as the likes of Ibn Baz. There was, on the other hand, heated debate between Egyptian Salafis and clerics of al-Azhar.

In a newspaper article in *al-Liwa' al-Islami*, published in 1987, the views of Egyptian 'ulama (Salafi and non-Salafi) on women were compared. Safwat Nur al-Din, who later became the head of Ansar al-Sunnah al-Muhammadiyah, argued: "A woman who leaves her house is permitted to only expose her eyes to see her way"; indicating the compulsory nature of the *niqab*. Al-Din quoted Ibn Taymiyyah to support his position.⁵⁸ Needless to say, they were similar to Ibn Baz and 'Afifi's *fatawa* emphasizing the *niqab* as an obligation for women.

By the 1960s, Kuwait had embraced modernization following the discovery of oil and the inflow of foreign investment. Kuwaiti women became more visible in the public sphere and were, for example, able to undertake higher education. National independence led to the development of a collective Kuwaiti national identity that had little regard for gender and sectarian affiliation. These changes galvanized the Salafi and the Muslim Brotherhood movements as reactionary forces. They preached for a return to religious purity, especially after the setback to Arab nationalism brought about by the 1967 war with Israel. However, the Kuwaiti Salafis were far less effective than their Saudi counterparts in implementing their vision of the role of a woman.

For both Kuwait and Egypt, domestic circumstances remained an obstacle. Despite this, rising conservatism allowed them some space to preach. Kuwaiti *‘ulama*, like the politically impotent Egyptian Salafis, advocated proper dress codes for women and defended the *niqab* as an obligation in Islam.

The debate over Muslim women's correct attire and public visibility is both domestic and transnational. Salafi *‘ulama* in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia made it their business to comment on debates over the *niqab* that occurred in Egypt when al-Azhar banned the garment from campus grounds in 2009. Al-Azhar declared the *niqab* as a cultural practice that had no place in Islam. Their decision to ban it entirely may have been a defensive response to the growing influence of Salafism. The Salafi *‘ulama* were empowered during the Mubarak era, especially since 2005, to counter the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁵⁹ Egyptian Salafis argued that al-Azhar's war against the *niqab* was itself un-Islamic. From Muhammad Hassan to Ishaq al-Huweiny to Muhammad Zoghbi, the *‘ulama* issued statements and delivered lectures and sermons on the subject. Al-Huweiny argued that the ruling was a political decision and not religious, as there was enough evidence in Prophet Muhammad's tradition to support the *niqab* being obligatory. He labeled arguments that the practice was un-Islamic as founded upon ignorance—a grave charge against al-Azhar, which he did not mention by name.⁶⁰ In summarizing the sermons of Muhammad Hassan and al-Mahmud al-Masri, Richard Gauvain states: “The distinction between *niqab* and *tabarruj* marks the divide between insider and outsider, sister and whore, and ultimately, faith and disbelief. *Tabarruj* is the means by which conservative Egyptian society endeavours to keep Muslim women secluded.”⁶¹

Appearing on a television program in 2010, Sa’d ‘Arafat, an Egyptian quietist *‘alim*, framed his views on the *niqab* through the chauvinistic lens of sexual harassment. ‘Arafat blamed women for wearing revealing clothes that attracted men who were unable to contain themselves when tempted. A woman who called into his show informed the cleric that she wore the *niqab*, but that doing so had not prevented her from being targeted by harassers. ‘Arafat suggested that the caller's wandering eyes may have enticed men to harass her. He noted that the woman had been outside her house and claimed that her experience was a reminder from God of the requirement to maintain her purity.⁶²

‘Arafat was confronted with the same question on another television program in 2017. He modified his views, claiming that in 2010 he was speaking during a time of instability and was concerned for women's safety. Despite his

more carefully constructed response to the question the second time around, he continued his emphasis on women's attire as an important factor that contributes to sexual harassment.⁶³ The scrutiny he received after his 2010 interview may have forced him to change his tune somewhat. The anti-Islamism and anti-conservatism that emerged following the demise of Morsi's presidency may also have led some 'ulama to be more careful to avoid controversies, especially for quietists like 'Arafat.

The Egyptian-born Kuwaiti-based 'Abd al-Rahman al-Khaliq responded to al-Azhar's decision by directly criticizing the grand shaykh of the university. Al-Khaliq declared that those who constructed the argument to justify removing the *niqab* from Islamic practice were ignorant, akin to those who lived during the pre-Islamic period. Al-Khaliq did not deny that Muslim scholars were conflicted on the subject, with some arguing that the *niqab* was not a religious obligation. However, he characterized the views of scholars who denied its obligatory nature as still propagating the *niqab* as highly desirable and certainly not as censuring the practice.⁶⁴ Thus, in al-Khaliq's view, al-Azhar was far removed from Islamic scholarship. Despite his intense criticism of al-Khaliq on political issues, the Kuwaiti Salim al-Tawil agreed that the *niqab* was essential, grounding his view in the works of Ibn Baz. He nimbly argued that modernization highlighted the need for the *niqab*. In his words:

In today's world, there are more people, and mixing of the genders has increased as women venture out to study and teach. This exposes them to men. It was said that before, even in this country [presumably Kuwait], women leave the house twice in their lives: once, when she leaves to her husband's house, and second, to the grave. Today, they leave their houses on a daily basis even during holidays, [. . .]. Therefore it is important for women to avoid dissension for themselves and others by covering their faces as well as their hands.⁶⁵

Muhammad al-Hamud al-Najdi, a prominent member of RIHS and a television personality in Kuwait, argued that a correct reading of the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Salafi tradition compels the *niqab*. He criticized women who wear the *niqab* but apply eye makeup, which, according to him, undermines the obligation to preserve women's religiosity and chastity.⁶⁶ Salafi 'ulama generally advocate the *niqab* regardless of their political persuasion. The preceding Kuwaiti example shows the non-partisan nature of the issue.

Al-Khaliq belongs to the *haraki* fold, al-Tawil is a Madkhali (radical quietist), and al-Najdi is a quietist.

Salafi clerics are concerned not only with the requirement to wear the *niqab* as a matter of doctrine, but also with the enforcement of the requirement in practice. Salih al-Fawzan in a *fatwa* placed responsibility with husbands. In his words: "Men have authority over women. It is an obligation on the husband to enforce proper veiling on his wife. This is because the *niqab* is part of *al-amr bi-l-ma'ruf wa-n-nahy 'ani-l-munkar* (enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil) [. . .]. Proper veiling protects and secures Muslims from evil practices."⁶⁷ Ibn 'Uthaymin has said much the same thing.⁶⁸

Some 'ulama make exceptions concerning the *niqab*. 'Aidh al-Qarni in 2010 stated that women could remove the *niqab* when traveling overseas. This permission was granted largely in response to France's ban of the garment. Al-Qarni rationalized his position by reference to the principle of avoiding exposure to danger, but reiterated that the *niqab* was otherwise mandatory.⁶⁹

A small number of Salafi 'ulama have gone even further, destabilizing the Salafi position by arguing that the *niqab* is not a religious obligation. None of these 'ulama goes so far as to endorse al-Azhar's declaration of the *niqab* as a cultural practice devoid of religious justification. These 'ulama see the *niqab* as desirable but not a duty. The principal cleric within this group is the revered Nasir al-Din al-Albani. A questioner directed a query about al-Albani to the Permanent Committee for Scientific Research and Ifta'. The question read:

A man by the name Nasir al-Din al-Albani authored a book titled *Hijab al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fil-Kitab wal-Sunnah* [The Veiling of Muslim Women in the Qur'an and Sunnah]. The book has become a source of dissension founded upon ignorance. There were men who had previously ensured that their wives covered their faces before they saw the book but now allow their women to uncover their faces on the road and in markets, using the book as evidence.⁷⁰

The male questioner provocatively described himself as someone committed to correcting misconceptions and re-educating those who were influenced by al-Albani's ruling on the subject. He appealed to the Committee: "Some of them have been influenced by the evidence provided by Nasir al-Din [. . .]. I ask you to answer in writing to strengthen the veiling of Muslim women

and discuss the issue of women uncovering their faces.” In a cursory reply, the Committee stated: “A woman is obligated to cover her face in the presence of men unrelated to her and it is prohibited for her to expose her face in the presence of men who are not her *mahram* [unmarriageable kin].”⁷¹ The brevity of the *fatwa* shows the Committee’s reluctance to criticize al-Albani directly and engage with the questioner’s provocative sledge. The Committee was reluctant to disavow al-Albani’s views on a jurisprudential issue. Ibn ‘Uthaymin and Ibn Baz would often defend al-Albani for his sound scholarship. Moreover, al-Albani’s criticism of political activism shielded him from being part of the ideological divide that emerged within the Salafi fold. He had an aura of political neutrality.

Salafis who have advocated similar positions to al-Albani have faced far more intense opposition from their brethren. Ahmad al-Ghamidi is a Saudi ‘*alim* who headed the religious police in Mecca. He argues that the *niqab* is not a religious requirement and should not be imposed on women. In a daring move, he appeared with his wife on a television program in 2014. His wife explained her husband’s ruling and noted the views of al-Albani.⁷² This enraged other ‘*ulama*, including the Saudi grand mufti, Al al-Shaykh,⁷³ and Salih al-Luhaydan.⁷⁴

‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Tarifi, a Kuwaiti-born Saudi-based Salafi and a well-known *haraki*, said of al-Ghamidi in a bizarre metaphor: “The intellectuals have differentiated between disagreements among jurists and the methods of idiots; those who permit wine in the alcohol market are like those who encourage a chaste woman to uncover her face amongst naked women.”⁷⁵ This metaphor was meant to ridicule al-Ghamidi’s ruling and disregard al-Ghamidi’s religious credibility as a jurist. The meaning of it is unclear, but the insinuation that al-Ghamidi is an idiot is not. Al-Ghamidi found some support for his position from ‘Adel al-Kalbani, who had become more lenient on a number of jurisprudential matters.⁷⁶

Then there is Hatem al-‘Awni, known for his critical approach to the Salafi tradition of which he is a member. Al-‘Awni argues that one cannot ignore the rulings from the four principal schools of Sunni Islam on the permissibility of women uncovering their faces and hands. Three Sunni schools, referring to Hanafi, Maliki, and Shafi‘i schools of thought, do not obligate the covering of a woman’s face and hands.⁷⁷

The former Egyptian Madkhali, or “radical quietist,” Usama al-Qusi supports the arguments of the likes of al-‘Awni. Al-Qusi has been subjected to denunciation from other radical loyalists for his liberal views. Rabi‘

al-Madkhali himself criticized al-Qusi as someone who used to subscribe to the Salafi ideals but had moved away from Salafism.⁷⁸ In 2015, al-Qusi refuted Yasir Burhami's advocacy of the *niqab*. Al-Qusi was bolder than al-ʿAwni and al-Kalbani, stating that the *niqab* was neither a religious garment nor obligatory in Islam, but rather was derived from nomadic tradition.⁷⁹ His fellow Madkhali Saʿid Raslan criticized his statement.⁸⁰ This was despite the fact that both men were politically aligned in their absolute loyalty to the state.⁸¹ In 2018, Al-Qusi announced that the "Madkhali" movement of which he had been a part was more problematic than the Muslim Brotherhood.⁸²

Hatem al-ʿAwni, Adel al-Kalbani, Usama al-Qusi, and Ahmad al-Ghamidi could all claim to have been inspired by al-Albani's rulings, but to other Salafis, they have destabilized the Salafi tradition through incorrect reinterpretations. The condemnation of these *ʿulama* is transnational, with Saudi, Kuwaiti, and Egyptian *ʿulama* all contributing. However, the matter has not produced any lasting schism in the Salafi movement. The *ʿulama* involved seem to agree to disagree. The Kuwaiti ʿUthman al-Khamis was asked by a questioner whether those who permit women to uncover their faces were the enemy of the religious community. Al-Khamis responded by arguing that many scholars did not call for the *niqab* to be enforced. According to him, it is a matter of jurisprudential preference. Al-Khamis himself continued to advocate for the *niqab* while cautioning against wearing it with heavy eye makeup, ostensibly because doing so attracts male attention and defeats the purpose of the *niqab*. But he refused to articulate a position against the more socially progressive *ʿulama*.⁸³

The donning of the *niqab* is often associated with the influence of Salafi ideals, at the forefront of which is the preservation of religious purity for all. Women's physical movements and conduct are equally the subject of scrutiny and discussion by Salafi *ʿulama* of both *haraki* and quietist persuasions.

The Driving Ban: Not Just a Saudi Concern?

Saudi Arabia was the last country in the world to deny women the right to drive, until it lifted the ban in June 2018. The topic had been contentious in the kingdom for decades. In November 1990, more than fifty women from high-profile Saudi families defied the ban and took to the road. They were detained and had their passports confiscated. Ibn Baz issued a *fatwa* that read: "Discussions over women driving have increased in the newspaper

Al-Jazirah; it is known that it [women driving] leads to corruption.”⁸⁴ Ibn Baz outlined the possible corrupt outcomes, including being alone with unrelated men and mixing of the genders without restrictions.⁸⁵ The Ministry of Interior similarly stated that “driving by women contradicts the Islamic traditions followed by Saudi citizens.”⁸⁶ As John Voll concluded, “the real power to determine social policy remains with the more actively fundamentalist people like Shaykh Ibn Baz.”⁸⁷ The Salafi *'ulama* in Saudi Arabia resisted all initiatives to allow women to drive and, regardless of political persuasion, issued rulings, delivered sermons, and published articles on the issue.

One theme that emerged was the issue of foreign drivers. Ibn 'Uthaymin was asked by a questioner: “I request a clarification on the subject of permitting women to drive: what is your opinion on those arguing that allowing women to drive is less harmful than having women ride with foreign men”? Ibn 'Uthaymin replied: “I view both concerns [women driving and riding with foreign men] as problematic. However, there is no need to permit one over the other.” Ibn 'Uthaymin did not answer the question but emphasized the importance of protecting Saudi society. He blamed “enemies” of Islam for duping Saudis, referring to people in Saudi Arabia who were impressed by the economic and worldly development of non-Muslim countries. These people, according to Ibn 'Uthaymin, believed that non-Muslim countries achieved their prosperity by freeing themselves from the “chains of virtues” only to be “chained by vices.”⁸⁸

A principal and openly articulated concern of many Salafis is the ability of women to control their own movements. Salih al-Fawzan argued that women being able to drive would lead to men having no control over women and in turn to women being lured into corrupt practices.⁸⁹

Saudi activists pushed for the end of the driving ban following the Arab uprisings. As the movement gained momentum, the arguments put forward by the *'ulama* ventured beyond religious justifications. In 2013, Salih al-Luhaydan, not a noted obstetrician, stated that driving has a “physiological impact on women and could affect her ovaries and push the pelvis higher as a result of which their children are born with clinical disorders of varying degrees.”⁹⁰ He also argued that allowing women to drive would violate religious and societal ethics.⁹¹ Al-Luhaydan was ridiculed, especially by members of the medical profession both in Saudi Arabia and abroad.⁹²

The *'ulama* cited in the preceding paragraphs are all quietists and represent the publicly stated views of the overwhelming majority of establishment clerics on the subject. The *harakis* are not much different. The

prominent *haraki* Yusuf al-Ahmad in an interview blamed a liberal and externally driven movement for the bout of activism around the time of the Arab Spring, mentioning statements by Barack Obama and Bill Clinton on women's rights in Saudi Arabia. He argued that Saudi Arabia was the last bastion of religious purity and that women, whom the liberal project had targeted, lay at its soul. He then criticized the Saudi government's efforts to allow the mixing of genders in the media and the education system, in the latter case referring presumably to King 'Abdullah's Science and Technology University. This university, launched in 2009, was the first mixed-gender Saudi university. Al-Ahmad claimed that the *'ulama* had demanded greater rights for women but that the state had focused on the wrong issues. For him, the priority for women was the development of women-only hospitals and markets.

Al-Ahmad emphasized adherence to shari'ah as paramount over a woman's rights and freedoms. Besides reiterating Saudi Arabia's special position, he claimed to have had interactions with many people in Kuwait, Egypt, and other countries who bemoaned the corruption that had befallen their societies due to the uncontrolled freedoms granted to women.⁹³ He conceded that there were benefits to allowing women to drive, but blamed advocates of lifting the ban for using the issue to promote religious corruption.⁹⁴

Despite overwhelming opposition to lifting the ban from both quietist and *haraki* *'ulama* since the 1990s, some *'ulama* have challenged the majority view. These *'ulama* are very few but high-profile. 'Adel al-Kalbani,⁹⁵ Ahmad al-Ghamidi,⁹⁶ and Hatem al-'Awni were the same *'ulama* who argued for the permissibility of uncovering of women's faces and hands, contrary to the broader Salafi position. It could be argued that these positions were encouraged by al-Albani's *fatwa* on the subject. In 1990 Al-Albani was asked by a questioner about the prohibition on women driving. He replied: "If it is permissible for her to ride upon a donkey, it is also permissible for her to drive a car."⁹⁷ Not expecting the answer, the questioner responded by commenting on the difference between a donkey and a car. Al-Albani answered: "Which is more concealing? Riding upon a donkey or in a car? I would suggest (riding in) a car."⁹⁸

Al-Kalbani's stated position was that he would allow his daughters to drive if they would like to, as he believed in respecting their decisions and enabling them to be independent.⁹⁹ In an interview, al-Kalbani recalled that in the Prophet's time women were leaving their houses to perform errands. When asked by the interviewer about gender equality in Islam, al-Kalbani

rejected the notion of equality in society, arguing that equality does not exist and cannot be implemented, but said that the priority should be to ensure that rights in full are granted to everyone regardless of their gender.¹⁰⁰

Similar arguments were also made by Ahmad al-Ghamidi, who stressed the benefits of allowing women to drive from the perspectives of religion, the economy, and Saudi society.¹⁰¹ Like al-Albani and al-Kalbani, al-Ghamidi contested the merits of the religious justifications put forward by other 'ulama in support of the ban, arguing that there is nothing in religious sources that specifically prohibits the act of driving.

The divide between clerics on the issue is not along quietist/*haraki* lines but rather between those who are socially conservative and those who are socially progressive.

Driving Ban: Transnational Solidarity of the Salafi 'Ulama

Although women in Egypt and Kuwait have long been allowed to drive, and the subject is barely discussed in these countries, Egyptian and Kuwaiti Salafi 'ulama examine the issue extensively in sermons and lectures and in the media. Ishaq al-Huweiny does not deny that there are some benefits to women driving, but concludes that being able to drive will only encourage women to leave the house for long hours at the expense of their responsibilities at home. To him, this would destabilize families as husbands would be forced to do housework and rear children in the absence of their wives. He also points to the inability of women to fix cars, exposing them to danger on open roads and vulnerability to passing men. Like Ibn Baz, al-Huweiny emphasizes the importance of containing women's movements and placing them at home. He quotes a Prophet's tradition in relation to prayers, which states: "A woman's prayer inside her house is much better than her prayer inside a mosque, and her prayer inside her room is better than her prayer inside her house."¹⁰² He concludes that the more secluded a woman is, the closer she is to her God. He further argues that women are already permitted to go to the market, which means that her rights to leave the house have been fulfilled.¹⁰³

Muhammad Hassan appeared on his television show *Al-Rahmah* to discuss the importance of disallowing women from driving. He emphasized that the act itself was not prohibited in Islam by express terms; however, using a term in Islamic law, *sadd al-dhara'i'* ("closing off the means that can

lead to evil”), Hassan justified the prohibition on the basis of avoiding evil and dangers for women and society in general.¹⁰⁴

The Kuwaiti Madkhali, Salim al-Tawil, addressed the issue in responding to a questioner. In his answer he acknowledged that Islam technically permitted women to drive; however, because of the potential harm of the practice, it is understandable why it had been prohibited in Saudi Arabia even if not in Kuwait. He expressed sympathy for the views of his Saudi clerical counterparts and attempted to justify their position, highlighting traffic conditions in Riyadh to which women drivers would add further complications. Al-Tawil stated that he had prohibited all four of his wives from driving.¹⁰⁵

Al-Tawil’s fellow quietist ‘Uthman al-Khamis expressed support for the ban in Saudi Arabia to ensure the preservation of social mores. He gave Kuwait as an example of a country that had allowed women to drive but was now dealing with the moral decadence of young women interacting with unrelated men due to the ability to leave their homes.¹⁰⁶

When the Saudi government lifted the ban in 2018 at the initiation of Crown Prince Muhammad Ibn Salman, the grand mufti changed his position accordingly. Al-Shaykh stated that there were no objections, according to the shari‘a, to women driving.¹⁰⁷ This was a clear change of position. He had argued in the past that although the act itself (driving) was not a sin, allowing women to drive would cause harm, morally and socially.¹⁰⁸

Through its spokesperson, Fahd al-Majid, the Board of Senior Clerics, headed by the grand mufti, articulated its new position in support of lifting the ban. He highlighted that contrary to common reports, the Board had never issued a ruling on the permissibility or impermissibility of women driving. *Fatawa* supporting the ban had been issued only by individual clerics in their personal capacity.¹⁰⁹ He outlined a number of reasons why the Board supported lifting the ban. First, the official ‘*ulama*’ were of the consensus that the rulers (*umara*) had the responsibility and authority to determine what was in the interests of the Saudi public. Second, the ‘*ulama*’s position on women driving in the past was predicated upon the harmful effects of permitting women to drive but not on the legality of the act itself. He then asserted that the ‘*ulama*’ had never declared that driving itself violated religious norms.¹¹⁰ This maneuvering on the part of the Board gave religious cover to the regime.

The rush of the official ‘*ulama*’ to adopt a position that sought both to adhere to the regime’s new policy and to deny their own contradictions left

them open to the charge of being government lackeys. This charge was felt even abroad. In Kuwait, the quietist 'Uthman al-Khamis was asked by a questioner to comment on the new position of his Saudi counterparts. The questioner pointed to previous Board rulings in favor of the ban. Al-Khamis was visibly annoyed with the question when he responded to it in a television appearance. He demanded the questioner present the previous *fatawa* for verification and in the meantime claimed that such *fatawa* did not exist. He further argued that any previous statements were only opinions propagated by clerics in their individual capacities. In any event, al-Khamis stated that it was common for the 'ulama to change their *fatawa* and that they were entitled to do so. He was adamant that the Saudi 'ulama were not beholden to the whims of the state, and that they were committed to the preservation of the faith. If they ever shifted their position, it was motivated by genuine reassessment. More importantly, according to al-Khamis, the driving ban generated jurisprudential clashes among the 'ulama. He argued that where a settled jurisprudential position could not be obtained on an issue—women driving being an example—the state had the prerogative to intervene and settle the matter.¹¹¹

Al-Khamis's intervention in an exclusively Saudi matter shows that Salafi 'ulama are prepared to deal with issues that have little relevance to them domestically in an effort to promote a collective Salafi interpretation. Sometimes this occurs along quietist/*haraki* lines; at other times it does not.

Women in Politics: Resistance and Pragmatism

The Salafi 'ulama generally view women as entities to be protected, and tie the fate of society to women's behavior. The 'ulama largely oppose women's participation in politics and conceive of their employment prospects as narrow. Ibn Baz's position was as follows: "Women work in areas suitable for them including teaching other women, working in female schools, treating female patients, and other professions strictly involving women only."¹¹² Ibn Baz was aware of the possibility that women may be forced by necessity into situations requiring them to treat men, just as women during the Prophet's time nursed wounded soldiers. He argued that although treating injured men was permissible, women were required to cover and conduct themselves properly and limit their interactions with the opposite sex to the best of their abilities.¹¹³

The majority position on women in politics was articulated by the following exchange between Ibn ‘Uthaymin and a questioner during one of his lectures. The questioner asked:

Some have said that the Prophet used to pray in the mosque with both men and women. There were no barriers. The Prophet went into battles with women. And some of the Prophet’s wives were sources of religious rulings and knowledge. Why do you then prevent women from working and participating in politics?¹¹⁴

Ibn ‘Uthaymin replied:

Everything mentioned is correct. Women during the Prophet’s time prayed with men in mosques without a divider. However, the Prophet was also clear . . . that despite the fact that the Prophet’s companions were morally righteous, women’s “houses were better for them.” Women were encouraged to pray inside their houses. It was [also] said that the best row [in prayers] for women is the last row, and the worst is the first row.¹¹⁵

According to Ibn ‘Uthaymin, the Prophet encouraged women to stay away from mingling with men. The cleric also argued that mosques were different structurally during Muhammad’s era, so that the fact that women prayed near men was irrelevant. He also asserted that women during the Prophet’s time were different from women in contemporary times. Women of Muhammad’s era were truly committed to Islam, but modern women did not seem to adhere to proper ethical standards, wearing makeup and dressing inappropriately. He emphasized that women during the Prophet’s time were not involved in the political affairs of the state. He referred to ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattab’s consultative council, of which there was no evidence of female membership.¹¹⁶

Al-Albani, in answering a question about the permissibility of allowing women to assume leadership positions, pointed to the fact that after the time of Muhammad (presumably referring to the Islamic empires and dynasties), Muslims had not always adhered to the correct interpretation of Islam and that some innovative practices that violated the teachings of Islam had then been introduced.¹¹⁷ However, al-Albani applauded the fact that at no time had women governed the Muslim community. He added that Salafis should adhere to the traditions inherited from the Prophet’s companions,

which suggests that al-Albani found women in leadership positions unacceptable. Al-Albani was confronted with a question similar to that put to Ibn 'Uthaymin. He answered by first talking about democracy, saying that elections were not Islamic even when the participants were Islamists. Electoral democracy was inherited from the West as part of an imperialist desire to control Muslim societies. According to al-Albani, not even military dominance was as dangerous as the permeation of Western thought and ideals in Muslim countries. He then extended his criticism of democracy generally to women's participation as candidates in elections, arguing that the practice was not found in Islamic tradition. Like Ibn 'Uthaymin, he examined the composition of the Shura council during the time of the companions and concluded that women had never been appointed to leadership positions.¹¹⁸ Al-Albani was also asked, by a Pakistani man, about women in leadership positions.¹¹⁹ He responded by quoting a *hadith*: *lan yufliha qaumun wallau amrahum imra'tan* (people who make a woman their ruler will never be successful).¹²⁰

Salafi clerics across Egypt, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia hold nearly uniform views on the unacceptability of women in politics, but the extent of their attention to the topic depends significantly upon domestic circumstances. The issue galvanized Kuwaiti Salafis in 1999, when a royal decree allowed Kuwaiti women to vote and stand in parliamentary and local elections. Kuwaiti Salafis, led by the head of RIHS, Tariq al-'Isa, issued the following statement: "The decree for women's political rights is founded upon external pressures on Kuwait and the Muslim community in general." The decree, opposed also by the Muslim Brotherhood and tribal leaders, was vetoed by the Kuwaiti Parliament and it was not until 2005 that Kuwaiti women were finally given suffrage.

Kuwaiti Salafi 'ulama have not changed their position in line with the country's rulers. In 2017, 'Uthman al-Khamis was asked about women in leadership positions, from the highest office in the country to other leadership roles. Al-Khamis replied by quoting the same *hadith* invoked by Al-Albani: "People who make a woman their ruler will never be successful."¹²¹ He rationalized his position by asking: "How could a woman rule if her testimony is worth half a man's, which is clearly stated in the Qur'an? How can she judge if her testimony is not accepted as credible in comparison to a man?" To al-Khamis, this assessment was not meant to denigrate women but to state simply that women submit to their emotions. Therefore, a woman cannot be a judge in a court, let alone rule.¹²² 'Abd al-Rahman al-Khaliq,

while on the opposite side of the quietist/*haraki* divide in Kuwait, advocated a similar view, arguing that political participation violated the boundaries of the role that Allah assigned for women.¹²³

Not all *ʿulama* promote this view. Hakim al-Mutayri expressed support for women's suffrage in a lecture given in 2017. He drew from the Prophet's tradition which allowed women to participate in public life. He used the Prophet's wife A'ishah as an example of women in leadership roles.¹²⁴ This was not his position in 2000 when he supported the parliamentary veto of the 1999 decree. He then argued that Kuwait had already allowed women to work and study with men, indicating that their rights were well-protected. He cited the social instability that could be caused if women were allowed to vote and run for office, and asserted that Kuwaiti women themselves were not in favor of the decree.¹²⁵ This is yet another example of how the views and positions of *ʿulama* are capable of change. Some *ʿulama* have hardened their conservatism, while others have become more flexible in responding to changing times, circumstances, and laws.

In Saudi Arabia, the matter was debated following King Abdullah's decision in 2011 to allow women to vote for, and be appointed to, the Consultative Assembly at the 2015 local elections.¹²⁶ Ibn Baz had spoken out against women in leadership positions, drawing from the Qur'anic statement *al-rijal qawwamun 'ala al-nisa'* (men have authority over women).¹²⁷ To him, the weight of religious evidence pointed to women being barred from leadership positions.¹²⁸ This view has long colored the rhetoric of the *ʿulama*.

ʿAbd al-ʿAziz al-Fawzan answered a question from a woman who wanted to put herself forward as a candidate in the 2015 municipal elections. Like most *ʿulama* who refused to rock the boat, al-Fawzan argued that the matter had been determined by the ruler who had seen the benefits of allowing women to vote and run for seats. He accepted that it had become a reality and endorsed the decision, although he suggested that it could lead to many forms of corruption. He outlined some limitations to ensure that society was protected. He urged female candidates to be properly covered, limiting their exposure to harassment.¹²⁹ He suggested that if a female candidate competed with a pious male candidate, it was imperative for everyone to vote for the male candidate. If two women competed for a seat, it was crucial to vote for the woman who better adhered to Islam so as to ensure the protection of the shari'ah and the rejection of values at odds with Islam.¹³⁰

Salafi *ʿulama* in Egypt also condemn women's participation in elections, both as candidates and voters, despite Egyptian women having had the right

to vote since 1957. The 2011 Egyptian revolution and the establishment of Salafi parties in Egypt revived the issue as a point of debate for Salafi 'ulama. The Egyptian electoral system required party lists to include a minimum number of women. The Salafi party al-Nour had no choice but to nominate candidates for the 2011 election. The party responded pragmatically, nominating women in accordance with the law but reaffirming its commitment to gender segregation and placing its female candidates at the bottom of the list. Their women candidates were kept from the public eye and their images in electoral material were replaced with images of flowers.¹³¹ In the April 2015 elections Muhammad Mukhtar al-Mady, a prominent member of the party, rationalized with the following words the position of the party that female candidates should not be elected: "A Christian president would not know how to apply Sharia, while a woman can go weak when [she] gets her period."¹³²

The Madkhali Sa'id Raslan was appalled with women's participation in the election and criticized Islamist parties who joined the process. This criticism came as part of his broader opposition to democracy. Raslan argued that women should not be allowed to leave their houses without the permission of male guardians. He invoked a *fatwa* issued in 1952 by the Mufti of al-Azhar, Hasanayn Makhluf, that prohibited women's suffrage and active involvement in the political process.¹³³ It must be noted that this is no longer the official position of al-Azhar and Egypt's Dar al-Ifta'.¹³⁴ Raslan's position was supported by some Salafi 'ulama, including Muhammad Hassan.¹³⁵

Like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, marginal Salafi voices¹³⁶ exist in Egypt. Usama al-Qusi supports the proposition that women can assume leadership positions, even in the core religious bureaucracy, the Ministry of Awqaf (Endowments). In his words:

I do not prevent women from assuming the position of Minister of Awqaf, for if Sayyida 'A'ishah [Muhammad's wife] were to be present now, she would have been the best person to occupy the position of Minister of Awqaf. However, Egyptian customs (*'urf*) prevent women from taking up the position. I consider this role an administrative role.¹³⁷

The overwhelming majority of Salafi 'ulama in Egypt, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia support the exclusion of women from public life. Their concern for the role of women has extended to entirely mundane matters such as wearing colored contact lenses (discussed by Sa'id Raslan)¹³⁸ and whether an

engaged couple can speak with each other on mobile phones (discussed by al-Albani).¹³⁹ Their views are consistent and transcend national boundaries, as the Salafi *‘ulama* attempt to shape the “ideal” Muslim woman.

Public and Personal Piety The Beard

Overt religiosity is an important issue for Salafi *‘ulama*, and extends even to physical attributes. Salafi *‘ulama* have argued intensely whether Muslim men are allowed to shave off their beards. Ibn Baz was asked the following question by someone from Syria: “Is someone who shaves off his beard a sinner?” The questioner requested a Qur’anic verse dealing with the subject. Ibn Baz replied: “An individual who shaves off his beard is a sinner.” He quoted a Prophet’s tradition which states: “shorten your mustache and grow your beard, be different from the unbelievers.”¹⁴⁰ In another reporting of the tradition, the word “unbelievers” is replaced with “Zoroastrians.”¹⁴¹ Ibn Baz did not rise to the challenge of identifying a Qur’anic verse to support his views, instead arguing that Islam obligates its adherents to obey the Prophet. He forbade even trimming and shortening of beards as gross violations of Islam.¹⁴² This view is reinforced by most Salafi *‘ulama* in Kuwait, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. Salafi satellite channels such as *Al-Rahmah* and *Al-Naas* argue that Muslim men are required to grow long beards. The Egyptian Mus’ad Anwar stated in a lecture on *Al-Rahmah* that prominent Muslim scholars, including Imam Malik, argued that the beard is compulsory and that only hermaphrodites practice shaving.¹⁴³ Another Egyptian Salafi *‘alim*, Muhammad Ya’qoub, urged Muslims to strengthen their identity by appearing distinct from non-Muslims, and criticized Muslims for dressing similarly to non-Muslims. He emphasized in a sermon that keeping the beard long is required by Islam.¹⁴⁴

The Kuwaiti Madkhali, Salim al-Tawil, revived the debate in February 2019, stating that *‘ulama* were often reluctant to discuss the importance of keeping the beard. He argued that a man who shaves off his beard commits no fewer than four sins. The first sin is committed against the Prophet, as there is clear evidence that he required beards. The second is that the practice involves Muslim men emulating Christians and Jews. A third is committed against Islam on the basis that men appear like women. Finally, shaving off a beard involves changing God’s creation by altering one’s appearance. Al-Tawil questioned the commitment to Islam and love for the Prophet of Muslim men who refuse to keep their beards.¹⁴⁵

The Egyptian Salafi 'alim Muhammad Hassan has argued that the beard is part of the Prophet's *sunnah*, of which there are three categories: *sunnah qawliyyah*, which refers to the sayings of Muhammad; *sunnah fi'liyyah*, meaning the actions and practices of Muhammad; and *sunnah taqririyyah*, referring to the Prophet's silent or tacit approval of the actions and practices of his companions. He then stated that the first category, *sunnah qawliyyah*, must be obeyed, before placing the beard in the category on the basis that the Prophet had said *a'fu al-lihah* (leave the beards).¹⁴⁶

The question of shaving off the beard has generated intense debate between Salafi and non-Salafi 'ulama in Egypt. Al-Azhar and the Egyptian Dar al-Ifta' often question the obligatory nature of the beard.¹⁴⁷ Muslim scholars generally accept that the beard is part of Muhammad's tradition. The debate tends to revolve around the classification of the beard as an obligation (*wajib*) or recommended (*mustahabb*). The majority of Salafi 'ulama consulted, regardless of their political affiliation, propagate the view that shaving off the beard is impermissible. Most of the 'ulama forbid even trimming one's beard as religiously unacceptable.¹⁴⁸

Like other issues discussed in this chapter, Salafi views on the subject are debated internally along socially conservative and socially progressive lines. The latter case is, as usual, the minority. The Saudi quietists Hatem al-Awni and Salih al-Maghamsi, both of whom have short beards, do not view the beard as a religious obligation for Muslim men, but encourage it.¹⁴⁹ Hatem al-'Awni has argued that the religious tradition does not indicate that the beard is an obligation. He acknowledges the *hadith*: "shorten your mustache and grow your beard, be different from the unbelievers."¹⁵⁰ In al-'Awni's view, there is no specific injunction in the *hadith* setting out a clear prohibition. He concludes that shaving off the beard is not *haram*,¹⁵¹ including Ibn Baz, who had an unkempt beard, and al-Albani.¹⁵²

Some 'ulama who often fall on the progressive side of social debates seek to accept the majority Salafi opinion that the beard is obligatory, but permit men to trim their beard. Hakim al-Mutayri¹⁵³ and Salman al-'Awdah propagate similar views on the subject. Al-'Awdah published a video of himself explaining the matter after questions emerged following his decision to shorten his own beard.¹⁵⁴ He ended his video appeal quoting the Prophet's tradition: "Verily, Allah does not look at your appearance or wealth, but rather he looks at your hearts and deeds."¹⁵⁵

An entire book could and perhaps should be written on intra-Salafi discussions about male facial hair. The gist of that book would be that the beard

is part of the Salafi tradition and, while there are occasional voices questioning the authenticity of this tradition, the Salafi *‘ulama* propagate the beard as obligatory. This view is grounded in their desire to foster a uniform religious identity. The minority voices are generally those who belong to the socially progressive trend, such as Hatem al-‘Awni. Dissenting voices, no matter how marginal, are often targeted by the broader Salafi establishment. The Kuwaiti ‘Uthman al-Khamis, for instance, was critical of al-‘Awni’s interpretation.¹⁵⁶ Other Salafi *‘ulama* do not take these marginal voices lightly. They continue to undermine the likes of al-‘Awni and al-Maghamsi¹⁵⁷ for their religious eccentricity regarding the beard. Although this topic may seem trivial to outside observers, it is not to Salafis: it is central to the *‘ulama*’s efforts to cement Salafi identity through appearances and visibility. Muhammad Hassan, responding to a questioner who ridiculed his own prominent beard, responded by arguing that Muslims had been influenced by imperialist ways of life and had become oblivious to the correct religious practices.¹⁵⁸

Music

For Salafi *‘ulama*, visible piety includes refraining from engaging in activities that could compromise or contaminate one’s religiosity. Many Salafi *‘ulama* see music to be one such activity. Music, like the beard, has been debated between and within different Islamic traditions. Some *‘ulama* from al-Azhar argue for its permissibility. ‘Ali Jumu‘ah, for instance, denied any absolute prohibition against listening to music. He noted Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony as an example of an acceptable type of music because the symphony celebrates God’s creation. He examined a number of Muhammad’s traditions which highlighted that the Prophet had not prohibited music.¹⁵⁹

Salafi *‘ulama*, regardless of their political persuasion, have long taken a contrary view, arguing that music in any form, be it listening or singing, is prohibited. It must be noted that some non-Salafi *‘ulama* also take this approach. Salafis who have given clear strictures about the unlawfulness of music include Ibn Baz, ‘Abd al-Razzaq ‘Afifi,¹⁶⁰ and ‘Uthman al-Khamis.¹⁶¹ Ibn Baz issued a *fatwa* that responded to a question posed in the following terms:

It is said that songs are prohibited because of music, is this correct? Is music on its own prohibited or is it the poetry and *ghazal* [poetic expressions of pain and love] contained in the music that are actually religiously

unacceptable? There are also some instruments in music such as the drums, *rebab* [bowed string instrument], flute, oboe and piano?¹⁶²

Ibn Baz was clear that everything mentioned in the question was prohibited, and that one should refrain from listening to instrumental or vocal music directly or through the radio. He quoted the Prophet's *hadith*, stating:

Layakunanna min ummati aqwamun yastahillun al-hira wal-harira wal-khamra wal-ma'azif [There will be some from my community people who would legitimize illicit sexual relations, silk, wine and musical instruments]. It is known that al-hira refers to illicit sexual relations; silk is known to be prohibited for men; wine is known to be forbidden for all as it is an intoxicant; and musical instruments refer to songs and other musical tools.¹⁶³

Ibn Baz made an exception for Arabic religious poetry. At the other end of the spectrum, he denounced songs accompanied with musical instruments as the most evil and claimed his position to be that of the overwhelming majority of scholars. Songs without musical instruments were permissible but only if the lyrics did not call for corruption.¹⁶⁴

Once again, a small number of socially progressive Salafi 'ulama differ on the subject. These include al-'Awni, al-Kalbani,¹⁶⁵ al-Qusi,¹⁶⁶ al-Mutayri,¹⁶⁷ and al-Maghamsi.¹⁶⁸ Al-'Awni covered the subject at length in a published piece. He questioned, as unsupported by evidence, the foundational assumption of anti-music scholars that music reduces love for the Qur'an and instills *nifaaq* (hypocrisy) in the hearts of Muslims. He dismissed the proposition that music is in any way comparable to illicit sexual relations, theft, murder, and other serious crimes. The key point for al-'Awni was that the possibility of a particular practice being used as a tool for corruption was not enough to justify delegitimizing the practice if it were otherwise acceptable in Islam.¹⁶⁹ Al-'Awni then referred to the *hadith* quoted earlier as *hadith mu'allaaq* (a hanging *hadith*).¹⁷⁰ This means that the *hadith* is missing links in its historical chain of narration. This in turn, according to al-'Awni, undermined the authenticity of the *hadith* and the rulings of those 'ulama who use it to declare music impermissible.¹⁷¹ The Salafi 'alim Badr Ibn 'Ali al-'Utaybi produced a video denouncing al-'Awni's take on the subject. He argued that despite al-'Awni's criticism of existing *hadith* on the subject as questionable, he had failed to point to a *hadith* that permits music. He further argued that al-'Awni's ruling was not founded upon religious tradition.¹⁷²

The Egyptian Salafi Usama al-Qusi has also declared music permissible and confessed to having been moved by the 2015 song *Ma Balash* by the Egyptian singer Muhammad Hamaqi.¹⁷³ The Kuwaiti Hakim al-Mutayri issued a *fatwa* that stated: “It is permissible for songs to be played with musical instruments for beneficial purposes.”¹⁷⁴ He added that prohibitions arise only for songs that propagate sin, corruption, or impious activities. His position is less progressive than those of al-‘Awni’ and al-Qusi because he acknowledged that music is, generally speaking, undesirable even if not prohibited.¹⁷⁵

Non-Muslim Celebrations

Another contentious social topic for Salafis is the acknowledgment of festivals and holidays of non-Muslim religions and the question of whether it is acceptable to wish non-Muslims well on these occasions. Traditionally, Salafi *‘ulama*, despite the changing nature of social and political landscapes of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Egypt, collectively forbid Muslims from congratulating and celebrating with non-Muslims on their festivals. Ibn Baz was asked to comment on the following observation put by the questioner: “It is noticeable that some Muslims participate in the day of birth [of Jesus] or Christmas as they would call it.” Ibn Baz replied:

It is not permissible for Muslim men and women to engage with Christians, Jews and other non-Muslims in celebrating their festivals. In fact, it is an obligation to remove oneself from these celebrations. This is because [quoting a *hadith*] “whoever emulates a group, he becomes one of them” and the Prophet warned us against emulating them as well as embracing their disposition. Therefore, it is imperative for every Muslim man and woman to warn against such practices and to ensure that they do not assist in the preparation of these celebrations with anything, because they violate Allah’s laws. They are also celebrated by Allah’s enemies.¹⁷⁶

Ibn Baz quoted a Qur’anic verse, “*Ta‘awanu ‘ala al-birr wal-taqwa wala ta‘awanu ‘ala al-ithm wal-‘udwan* [And help each other in righteousness and piety, and help not one another in sin and transgression and remain fearing Allah. Undoubtedly, the torment of Allah is severe].”¹⁷⁷ He then added: “Participating in non-Muslim celebrations is a form of assistance founded upon sin and transgression.”¹⁷⁸ This view is reiterated by

Salafi 'ulama in Egypt, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, including Sa'id Raslan,¹⁷⁹ Muhammad Hassan,¹⁸⁰ Muhammad Salih al-Munajjad,¹⁸¹ Nabil al-'Awady,¹⁸² Nasir al-'Umar,¹⁸³ and Muhammad al-'Arifi. Al-'Arifi invoked a Prophet's tradition in which the Prophet encountered an individual wearing clothes dyed with saffron; the Prophet was displeased and warned the man that it was the clothing of infidels. Al-'Arifi was critical of Muslims who celebrated non-Muslim festivities, arguing that "they [non-Muslims] do not concern themselves with celebrating ours."¹⁸⁴ He particularly singled out Muslims who spent money on Christmas decorations, and television programs that contributed to the celebration.¹⁸⁵ Salafi 'ulama fairly consistently accept that Muslims are required to be fair and just toward non-Muslims but draw the line at congratulating and greeting non-Muslims on the occasion of their religious celebrations.

Even some 'ulama who adopt more progressive stances on issues such as women's rights, male grooming, and music fall in line with the traditional position on non-Muslim celebrations. Hakim al-Mutayri, when asked for a ruling on the matter, expressed adherence to the Salafi norm, drawing from Ibn Taymiyyah to conclude that it was unacceptable for Muslims to congratulate non-Muslims for their religious celebrations.¹⁸⁶ Salih al-Maghamsi has also declared that one cannot congratulate non-Muslims on these religious occasions, as Muslims should refrain from showing any support for or acknowledgment of deviant practices. He criticized some 'ulama for encouraging the practice without mentioning their names. It can be speculated that al-Maghamsi was referring to non-Salafi Egyptian 'ulama based at al-Azhar. He not so cryptically mentioned that these 'ulama hailed from a prestigious religious institution recognized throughout the Muslim world.¹⁸⁷ Al-Azhar's view is reflected in the grand mufti's annual congratulatory messages to Egyptian Copts. The Egyptian *Dar al-Ifta'* similarly issued a *fatwa* stating that congratulating Christians for their religious celebrations was permissible within the framework of Islamic law, founded upon the principle of *ihsan* (kindness). The institution drew from three Qur'anic verses: *Qulu lil-nasi husna* (Utter kindness to people), *Inna Allaha ya'muru bil-'adly wal-ihsan* (Indeed, Allah enjoins justice and kindness), and "Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them, for Allah loves those who are just."¹⁸⁸

Hatem al-'Awni, an inveterate internal critic of the Salafi movement, does question the Salafi ruling on the subject, arguing that there is no clear

evidence in Islamic tradition suggesting that a Muslim cannot greet non-Muslims on their religious celebrations. To him, greetings are cordial. A greeting does not mean that Muslims approve of other religions.¹⁸⁹ The number of “socially progressive” Salafis is small on most topics; on this issue it is only al-‘Awni and Usama al-Qusi who, among prominent clerics, are willing to push boundaries and challenge the established norms of the Salafi tradition. Usama al-Qusi is even bolder, as he has consistently argued that it would be permissible for Egypt to be ruled by a Coptic Christian. Al-Qusi is often invited to attend Coptic gatherings.

Ahmad Salim, an Egyptian Salafi *‘alim*, appeared on *Al-Naas* in 2012 to disparage al-Qusi. He alleged that the outlier was a Qutubist who became a Salafi under the tutelage of Muqbil Ibn Hadi al-Wadi‘. He then supposedly encountered Rabi‘ al-Madkhali and became a subscriber to radical quietism before becoming fond of prominent al-Azhar *‘ulama*, including Ahmad al-Tantawi and ‘Ali Jumu‘ah. Salim concludes that al-Qusi is no longer a Salafi.¹⁹⁰ He is an enigmatic figure: a self-proclaimed Salafi who abhors Islamists (Muslim Brotherhood and *haraki* Salafis), is almost fanatically loyal to the state, and takes progressive approaches to a number of controversial social issues, contrary to other Salafi *‘ulama*.¹⁹¹

Conclusion

Modernization from the mid-twentieth century posed a challenge to the doctrinal foundation of Salafism, a movement based on emulating the traditions of the Prophet and his companions and rejecting innovations. Salafism had spread across the region, through the fostering of relations between Ibn Saud and Rashid Rida and through Saudi Arabia’s patronage. The region’s clerics cooperated, directly and indirectly, to promote a collective Salafi approach to issues perceived as socially significant.

The joint efforts of the Salafi *‘ulama* in Egypt, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia extend to support for the now-rescinded Saudi driving ban for women (despite it being a non-issue politically in Kuwait and Egypt), prohibiting Muslims from celebrating non-Muslim festivals, and promoting the beard as obligatory. It is evident that the overwhelming majority of Salafi *‘ulama* adopt these positions, based principally upon a desire to adopt an outward Salafi identification for both men and women that is seen as authentically Islamic. Despite these transnational ventures, the *‘ulama* are governed by domestic

circumstances and limitations. The Salafi party al-Nour was forced to field female candidates as the price for electoral participation. Choosing participation over doctrinal purity, the Party's reluctant concession set it apart from the long-standing vehement opposition of Salafi 'ulama to women in leadership positions.

Despite the seemingly unified position of the Salafi 'ulama on issues discussed in this chapter, a small number of 'ulama have challenged Salafi orthodoxy. Hatem al-'Awni, Usama al-Qusi, Hakim al-Mutayri, Salman al-'Awdah, and 'Adel al-Kalbani defy to varying extents the conventional rulings of Salafi 'ulama and are willing to question entrenched positions on social issues. Divergences in views on social matters are not along quietist/*haraki* lines. Although the Saudi quietist Hatem al-'Awni criticizes Islamist politics in the region, his views on women in leadership positions are similar to those of the avid Kuwaiti *haraki*, Hakim al-Mutayri. Nor has political affiliation shielded socially progressive 'ulama from being attacked by their fellow quietists or *harakis*. Hatem al-'Awni receives concerted scrutiny from fellow quietists for his relatively liberal social views. Discussions over social issues within the framework of Salafi creed and jurisprudence destabilize the quietist/*haraki* dichotomy.

198. "Hakim al-Mutayri: Mukhtasir al-Hurriyah aw al-Tufan," *Dr Hakem* (no date), accessed at <http://www.dr-hakem.com/Portals/Content/?info=TmpnNUpstJfZbEJoWjJVbU1RPT0rdQ==.jsp> on February 25, 2020.
199. "Limadha I'taqalat al-Sultat al-Kuwaitiyyah Hakim al-Mutayri," *NoonPost*, March 2015, accessed at <https://www.noonpost.com/content/5837> on July 13, 2019.
200. See "Hakim al-Mutayri fi Khaimah al-Gaddafi," *Khalid Al Hail*, April 2021, accessed at [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCvXjVbU1RPT0rdQ==) on May 10, 2021. This is the official channel of Khalid Al Hail, a Qatari dissident based in London who released the recordings. For al-Mutayri's claim of fabrication, see *Dr Hakem*, April 2021, accessed at [Twitter](https://twitter.com/ahakimmutayri): "أ.د. حاكم المطيري: خبتم وخاب مكركم! أبمثل هذه المقاطع المفبركة" on May 10, 2021. تلفق قضية ضدي وتحال للنباة وتجري المحاكمة وترفض مذكرة الدفاع ويحكم بالمؤبد دون تحري أبسط قواعد العدالة؟ لماذا لم تطلب شهادة مالك الصباح الذي كشف هنا حقيقة خالد الهيل والجهات <https://t.co/H5DZLj3TFH> الاستخباراتية التي تقف وراءه والشركات التي تنتج هذه المقاطع؟ / *Twitter* on May 10, 2021.
201. Abd al-Karim Ahmad, "Mahkamah al-Tamyiz Tuayyid Bara'ah Hakim al-Mutayri," *Al-Anba'* (no date), accessed at <https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/kuwait-news/incidents-issues/777328/26-09-2017-> on July 13, 2019.

Chapter 6

1. Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 244–245.
2. *Ibid.*, 88.
3. *Ibid.*, 208.
4. *Ibid.*, 204.
5. *Ibid.*, 203–207.
6. *Ibid.*, 208.
7. *Ibid.*
8. For a more detailed discussion, see *ibid.*, 245–256.
9. Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, translated by George Holoch (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 12–13.
10. *Ibid.*
11. David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 101. For more information on the creation of the modern Saudi state, see Askar H. Al-Enazy, *The Creation of Saudi Arabia: Ibn Saud and British Imperial Policy, 1914–1927* (New York: Routledge, 2009).
12. *Ibid.*, 101–102.
13. *Ibid.*
14. James Piscatori, "Saudi Arabia's Political Development," in *Islam and Development: Religion and Sociopolitical Change*, edited by John L. Esposito (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1980), 132.

15. Al-Lajnah al-Da'imah lil-Buhuth al-'Ilmiyyah wal-Ifta', *Majmu' fatawa al-Lajnah al-Da'imah lil-Buhuth al'Ilmiyyah wal-Ifta'*, compiled by Shaykh Ahmad Ibn 'Abd al-Razzaq (Riyadh: Dar al-Muayyad, 2000), vol. 2 ('Aqidah), 452–454.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Muhammad Al Atawneh, "Is Saudi Arabia a Theocracy? Religion and Governance in Contemporary Saudi Arabia," *Middle Eastern Studies* 45:5 (January 2009): 728–729. Also see Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 104–107.
19. Raihan Ismail, *Saudi 'Ulama and Shi'a Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 25–26.
20. Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 25.
21. See Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 111–113. Also see Nabil Mouline, "Enforcing and Reinforcing the State's Islam: The Functioning of the Committee of Senior Scholars," in *Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights on Social, Political, Economic and Religious Change*, edited by Bernard Haykel, Thomas Hegghammer, and Stéphane Lacroix (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 48–70.
22. Nabil Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia*, translated by Ethan S. Rundell (London: Yale University Press, 2014), 182–183.
23. Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 75.
24. Ibid., 76.
25. Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 107.
26. Ibid., 104–129.
27. Ahmad Fahmy Ahmad, *Al-Tawhid*, Year 1, Volume 11 (1973). The page number cannot be identified. To access this issue, see "Akhbar al-Jama'ah," *AlTawhidmag*, December 1973, accessed at <http://altawhedmag.com/index.php/السنة-1393-لأولى> /هـ-1393-لأولى-السنة-11/عدد-القعدة-وذي-الجماعة-أخبار-11/158 on March 21, 2020.
28. Ibid.
29. Ahmad Fahmy Ahmad, *Al-Tawhid*, Year 1, Volume 8 (1973). The page number cannot be identified. To access this issue, see "Akhbar al-Jama'ah," *AlTawhidmag*, September 1973, accessed at <http://altawhedmag.com/index.php/السنة-1393-لأولى-شعبان-عدد-شعبان-هـ-1393-لأولى-السنة-8/61-الجماعة-أخبار-8/61> on March 21, 2020.
30. Ibid.
31. Fahmy Ahmad, *Al-Tawhid*, Year 7, Volume 2 (1978), 24–25.
32. Fahmy Ahmad, *Al-Tawhid*, Year 8, Volume 1 (1979), 47–48.
33. Ibid.
34. Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 61.
35. According to Lacroix, the establishment 'ulama permitted men to groom their beards if they "grew larger than a fist." However, this research finds that many members of the religious establishment, including Ibn Baz, prohibit men from trimming their beard. This will be discussed later in this chapter.
36. Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 61.
37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.
39. Jabir Ibrahim al-Hajj, "Walimadha al-Dhubbah bil-Dhat," *Al-Tawhid*, Year 7, Volume 1 (1978), 17–18.
40. Lacey, *Inside the Kingdom*, 50. See also Commins, *Islam in Saudi Arabia*, 51–60.
41. Anthony H. Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia: National Security in a Troubled Region* (Santa Barbara, CA: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2009), 286–287.
42. Lacey, *Inside the Kingdom*, 52.
43. Ahmad Taha Nasr, "Haula Dhikra Maulid al-Nabi," *Al-Tawhid*, Year 9, Volume 3 (1981), 6.
44. Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahman al-Husary, "Hadha Huwa al-Tariq," *Al-Tawhid*, Year 9, Volume 12 (1981), 43–48.
45. Zoltan Pall, *Salafism in Lebanon: Local and Transnational Movements* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 46–47.
46. Ibid., 47.
47. "Al-Kuwait Kanat Ba'idah Kull al-Bu'd 'an al-Islam," 'Abdullah al-Salafi (no date), accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hip31Y9vXCo> on May 16, 2020. This is the official YouTube channel of the Saudi 'alim 'Abdullah al-Salafi. The interview with al-Khaliq was initially viewed at a different link, which is no longer available.
48. Discussed in Chapter 2.
49. Issues of the magazine can be accessed at <https://www.muslim-library.com/category/arabic/الفرقان-مجلة/ودوريات-مجلات/>. This site stores hundreds of issues of *Al-Furqan*.
50. Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A Most Masculine State: Gender, Politics and Religion in Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 72–73.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid., 113.
53. Al-Lajnah al-Dai'mah al-Buhuth al-'Ilmiyyah wal-Ifta', "Khuruj al-Mar'ah min Baitiha," *Fatawa al-Lajnah* (17/221), accessed at http://madrasato-mohammed.com/fatawaa_lajna_wa_imameen_02/pg_001_0320.htm on December 23, 2019.
54. Al-Lajnah al-Dai'mah al-Buhuth al-'Ilmiyyah wal-Ifta', "Khuruj al-Mar'ah min Baitiha," *Fatawa al-Lajnah* (17/222), accessed at http://madrasato-mohammed.com/fatawaa_lajna_wa_imameen_02/pg_001_0320.htm on December 23, 2019.
55. See Barbara Freyer Stowasser, "The Hijab: How a Curtain Became an Institution and a Cultural Symbol," in *Humanism, Culture, and Language in the Near East*, edited by Asma Asfaruddin and A. H. Mathias Zahniser (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 97–98.
56. It must be noted that although Nasser's efforts were applauded, reforms to personal status laws were not prioritized. More importantly, Egypt's state feminism made it difficult for women's associations to lobby for more rights. This discussion is beyond the scope of this research. For more, see Earl L. Sullivan, *Women in Egyptian Public Life* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 79–81.
57. Muhammad Hassan, "Muhammad Hassan wa Mawqif Jamil Jiddan ma' al-'Allamah Ibn Baz," *Al-Rahmah* (no date), accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8Czs_uSk0c on December 23, 2019. This is the official YouTube channel for the Al-Rahmah satellite television network. Also see Muhammad Hassan, "Mawqif bayna Al-Albani

- wa Ibn Baz bi-Hudur al-Shaykh Muhammad Hassan,” *Khutaba*’ (no date), accessed at <https://khutabaa.com/forums/%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B6%D9%88%D8%B9/331342#.XgA1zIdDucw> on December 23, 2019.
58. Safwat Nur al-Din, “Al-Niqab Fadhilah . . . walakin Kashf Alwajh wal-Khaffayn Mubah,” *Al-Liwa’ al-Islami*, December 1987, accessed at <http://www.altawhed.net/article.php?i=96> on December 23, 2019.
59. See Chapter 2.
60. Ishaq al-Huweiny, “Radd Abu Ishaq al-Huweiny ‘ala al-Tantawi-Al-Niqab,” *Al-Naas* (no date), accessed at Forsanelhaq.com. The TV appearance is no longer available at this link. For access to the clip, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wpCSiEDeUa0>. Also see Al-Tayyeb’s ruling, Ahmed al-Tayyeb, “Hukm al-Shar‘ fi Hijab al-Mar’ah wal-Niqab,” *Qanat Al-Ghadd al-Mashriq* (no date), accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jKWfHb3pIg> on December 23, 2019. This is the official YouTube channel of the television program *Al-Ghadd al-Mashriq*. The grand mufti of al-Azhar ruled the *niqab* as permissible (*mubah*): not prohibited (*haram*), not obligatory (*wajib*), nor desirable (*mustahabb*), and not disliked (*makruh*). He argued that women wearing the *niqab* were not doing anything in favor of Islam or against Islam.
61. Gauvain, *Salafi Ritual Purity*, 200.
62. Sa’d ‘Arafat, “Sexual Harassment in Egypt,” *Memritv* (no date), accessed at <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/0/0/0/0/79/2583.htm> on June 13, 2011). This clip was accessed in 2011. I am unable to find the clip in other formats.
63. Sa’d ‘Arafat, “Intiqad Sa’d ‘Arafat,” *Misr al-‘Arabiyyah*, March 6, 2017, accessed at <https://masralarabia.net/%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%83-%D8%B4%D9%88/1377844-%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF--%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9--%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A3%D8%A9-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%83%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%B4-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B9> on December 23, 2019.
64. ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Khaliq, “Al-Radd ‘ala Shaykh al-Azhar Alladhi Ankara Mashru’iyyah al-Niqab,” *Islamway* (no date), accessed at <https://ar.islamway.net/lesson/93695/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B2%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B0%D9%8A-%D8%A3%D9%86%D9%83%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A8> on December 23, 2019.
65. Salim al-Tawil, “Hal-Yajuz Kashf al-Wajh wal-Yadayn?” *Qanat Salim al-Tawil* (no date), accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXm8kLf3iYE> on December 23, 2019. This is the official YouTube channel of Salim al-Tawil.

66. Muhammad Hamud al-Najdi, "Hukm Libs al-Niqab," *Al-Anba'*, March 17, 2017, accessed at <https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/kuwait-news/islamic-faith/729985/17-03-2017-%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%85-%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A8> on December 23, 2019. Also see Nabil al-Awady, "Hukm al-Niqab," *Fatakat* (no date), accessed at <https://www.fatakat.com/thread/500064382> on December 23, 2019.
67. Salih al-Fawzan, "Hukm Ijbar Irtida' al-Niqab," *AlFawzan* (no date), accessed at <http://www.alfawzan.af.org.sa/en>. This *fatwa* is no longer accessible at this link and can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZToamAi8l0>.
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 129. "Dukhul al-Mar'ah fi al-Intikhabat," *AlRisalah* (no date), accessed at <https://www.alresalah.net/>. The link is no longer available but there are alternatives at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvkCq9Y9x8A> and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a5qJW9_qbt0. Al-Fawzan was arrested in July 2018 for a tweet criticizing the "War on Religion," which was viewed by some as targeting social reform efforts initiated by Muhammad Ibn Salman.
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Chapter 7

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