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From Wahhabi to Salafi

David Commins

Naming the doctrine preached by Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab has never been a simple matter. Early foes classified it as a Kharijite sectarian heresy. The name that stuck, *Wahhabi*, stigmatized the doctrine as the ravings of a misguided preacher. Naturally, Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab and his disciples preferred other names for themselves and their movement: at first, the folk who profess God's unity (*ahl al-tawhid* and *al-muwahhidun*), later, the Najdi call (*al-daʿwa al-najdiyya*).[1] Naming, then, is part of arguments over Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab's doctrine. If the doctrine is known as Wahhabi, it cannot claim to represent correct belief. The tendency to refer to it as Salafi is a recent development that first emerged among Wahhabism's defenders outside Arabia well before Wahhabis themselves adopted the term.[2]

To say that a doctrine is Salafi is to ascribe it the authority of Islam's Pious Fathers. The claim has been part of theological discourse since the ninth century. In modern times, the Salafi label has attained a firm grip on the contemporary Sunni Muslim imagination as a marker for Islam in its pristine form. But variation in which beliefs and practices Muslims count as Salafi makes it difficult to define. It helps to distinguish between claiming to follow the way of the Salaf, which is a common trope in Sunni, especially, Hanbali discourse, and claiming to be Salafi as distinct from other Sunnis. In the former case, we have a set of positions on theology and worship. In the latter case, we have a set of claims that would reshape public institutions (through legal reform) and social identity (dressing a certain way). The first is an artifact

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[1] Najd is the region of central Arabia where the movement was born.

[2] As awkward as it may be in a chapter about the rhetorical deployment of names, I use the terms Wahhabi and Wahhabism as a matter of convention to refer to Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab's teachings and the movement inspired by those teachings.

of classical Islamic thought; the second is an artifact of how Muslims fashion religion as a total way of life.[3]

One instance of Salafism in the second sense is the modernist project associated with Muhammad ʿAbduh and Rashid Rida. They believed it necessary for Muslims to break with their present condition of decadence and return to the glorious past of the Pious Fathers to overcome subjugation to Western powers. The modernist Salafis sought general principles in authoritative texts that permit flexible adaptation to novel forms of governance, law, and education. By contrast, Wahhabis focused on fidelity to what they construed as the creed and cult of the Pious Fathers. For those who regard the modernists as the true Salafis, the Wahhabis' claim to be Salafis is spurious. According to this view, Salafism stood for a modernist outlook until Saudi religious scholars decided to appropriate the Salafi mantle to validate their teachings, reducing Salafism to dogmatism.[4] Although such a narrative may gratify the urge to discredit Wahhabism, it overlooks three significant points. First, the initial impulse to classify Wahhabis as Salafis came from the modernists themselves. Second, the story of Wahhabism's "Salafi" turn raises questions about terminology that do not go away by deciding which group is truly on the path of the Pious Fathers. Considering the political contexts of shifts in meaning ascribed to Wahhabi and Salafi does help answer such questions. Third, the struggle over naming is part of the broader process of Saudi Arabia's incorporation into the Muslim world. These three points are essential to understanding the phases in Wahhabism's Salafi turn. In the late Ottoman period, modernist Salafis outside Saudi Arabia defended Wahhabis against their critics by referring to them as Sunni adherents of the Hanbali law school. Then, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Wahhabism's defenders began to call it Salafi. Finally, in the 1970s, Saudi religious scholars adopted the Salafi mantle.

THE WAHHABIS AS SUNNIS

When Wahhabism emerged in the mid-1700s, Ottoman ulama formed a solid phalanx hostile to its teachings. The Wahhabi view of other Muslims as

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3 For a concise discussion of classical and contemporary manifestations of Salafism, see Bernard Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 33–57.

4 Hamid Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay* (Oneonta, NY: Islamic Publications International, 2002), 46–9. Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: HarperSan Francisco, 2005), 74–94. Henri Lauziere proposes that the concept of modernist Salafism is the product of an Orientalist misconception. See "The Construction of *Salafiyya*: Reconsidering Salafism from the Perspective of Conceptual History," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42 (2010): 369–89.

idolaters infuriated Ottoman ulama, and the Saudi challenge to Ottoman rule in Hijaz alarmed Istanbul. The impetus to legitimize Wahhabism surfaced among modernist Salafi ulama in Baghdad and Damascus in the late 1800s. Like the Wahhabis, they opposed the cult of saints and wished to revive the intellectual legacy of Ibn Taymiyya. Given the taint of disloyalty attached to Wahhabism, it was natural for defenders of saint veneration to denounce the Salafis as Wahhabis.[5] Thus, the motive for rehabilitating Wahhabism's reputation stemmed from common religious convictions and a need to deflect charges of affiliation with heretics. The case for Wahhabism had two elements. First, its enemies circulated fabrications and distortions, ascribing beliefs that Wahhabis did not hold. Second, Wahhabis followed the Qur'an, the Sunna, and the teachings of the four Sunni imams: If one read their treatises, one would find nothing contrary to historical Sunni consensus and the Hanbali law school. It is noteworthy that Wahhabism's defenders described it as Sunni, not as Salafi. That was because in the Ottoman context, Sunni was synonymous with legitimate doctrine whereas Salafi represented a challenge to established authority.[6]

The dynamics behind the urge to depict Wahhabis as Sunnis are evident in the career of Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi, leader of Baghdad's Salafis.[7] He was a vocal critic of practices associated with Sufi orders as innovations (*bida'*). Defenders of such practices incited Ottoman officials against al-Alusi by accusing him of spreading Wahhabism. On one occasion, al-Alusi was deported from Baghdad on suspicion of supporting the revival of Saudi power in Najd.[8]

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[5] For controversy over the cult of saints in Baghdad, see Itzchak Weismann, "The Naqshbandiyya-Khalidiyya and Salafi Challenge in Iraq," *Journal of the History of Sufism* 4 (2003–4): 229–40. For the Damascus setting, see David Commins, *Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 129–31. On connections among Damascus, Baghdad, and Najd, see David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 132–4. The same rhetorical dynamics operated in Egypt, where defenders of saint veneration labeled Muhammad 'Abduh a Wahhabi. *Fatawa al-Imam Muhammad Rashid Rida*, vol. 1, ed. Salah al-Din al-Munajjid and Yusuf Khuri (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Jadid, 1970), 380.

[6] Commins, *Islamic Reform*, 109. On Ottoman promotion of Sunni Islam and the Hanafi law school as the official religion, see Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), 44–92.

[7] Hala Fattah, "Wahhabi Influences, Salafi Responses: Shaikh Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi and the Iraqi Salafi Movement, 1745–1930," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14 (2003): 127–48. Edouard Metenier, "Que sont ces chemins devenus? Reflexion sur les evolutions de la Salafiyya Irakienne de la fin du xviiie au milieu du xxe siècle," in *Le courant reformiste musulman et sa reception dans les societes arabes*, ed. Maher Charif and Salam Kawakibi (Damas: IFPO, 2003), 99–107.

[8] Fattah, "Wahhabi Influences," 138–9. Dina Rizk Khoury cites a source that ties al-Alusi's expulsion to a visit by Rashid Rida, allegedly to see if there might be backing for an Arab caliphate, tantamount to fomenting secession from the empire. Dina Rizk Khoury, "Fragmented Loyalties

His defense of Wahhabism contained religious and political threads. He rejected the charge that Wahhabis disrespected the Prophet and authoritative ulama, asserting that they were, in fact, muwahhid[9] Muslims upholding the beliefs of the Pious Fathers, adhering to Hanbalism, and respecting believers who followed the Sunni law schools.[10] Moreover, Al Saud deserved credit for their political achievements, such as ending tribal warfare and bringing security to Arabia. He admitted that they went astray in the early 1800s when they rejected Ottoman authority and interfered with the pilgrimage. Recent Saudi rulers, however, concentrated on their own domain and sent religious teachers to instruct Bedouin in correct religion.[11]

In Damascus, controversy over Wahhabism exhibited similar contours: debate over correct religious practice, ad hominem attacks for holding Wahhabi sympathies, and entanglement with Ottoman sensitivities over loyalty to the sultan. The Damascus setting differed from Baghdad's in one important respect: Young men educated in state schools represented a dynamic element in cultural and political discussions. As youths, they had come under the influence of the modernist Salafis, who blended the call for religious purification with a progressive outlook on education, science, and politics.[12] Modernist Salafis also transmitted a favorable disposition toward Wahhabism. For example, in 1909, one of the young educated set, Salah al-Din al-Qasimi, published an article about Wahhabism in a popular Egyptian magazine where he noted that "Wahhabi" had become a catchall term for denouncing reformist religious leaders, newspapers (such as Egypt's al-Ahram and al-Muqattam), and literary societies. In fact, he contended, the Wahhabis were merely pious Hanbali Muslims renowned for their moral rectitude and avoidance of idolatry in worship.[13]

Al-Qasimi belonged to a cohort of Syrians whose outlook took shape in late Ottoman institutions that naturalized the culture of nationalism.[14] They

in the Modern Age: Jamil Sidqi al-Zahawi on Wahhabism, Constitutionalism and Language," in International Congress on Learning and Education in the Ottoman World, ed. Ali Çaksu and Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu (Istanbul: Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture, 2001), 342–3.

9   That is, proclaimers of God's unity.
10 Fattah, "Wahhabi Influences," 145–6.
11 Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi, Tarikh najd (Cairo: al-Matba'a al-Salafiyya, 1929), 90–105.
12 Commins, Islamic Reform, 95–103.
13 Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, al-Duktur Salah al-Din al-Qasimi, 1305–1344: Safahat min tarikh al-nahda al-'arabiyya fi awa'il al-qarn al-'ishrin (Cairo: al-Matba'a al-Salafiyya, 1959), 250–6. The Egyptian publication was al-Muqtataf.
14 James L. Gelvin, "Modernity and Its Discontents: On the Durability of Nationalism in the Arab Middle East," Nations and Nationalism 5 (1999): 71–89.

adopted the modernist Salafi outlook because it was congruent with the project for Arab national revival. Their chief concern was not the restoration of religion according to the Pious Fathers but the political destiny of the Arabs, freshly conceived as a national community. Religion mattered to them, but more as an emblem of national authenticity than the ground of thought and action.

WAHHABIS AS SALAFIS

The passing of the Ottoman Empire and deepening of European colonial domination altered the political context of the meanings ascribed to Wahhabi and Salafi in three ways. First, "Salafi" shed the connotation of opposition to legitimate authority embodied by the Ottoman sultan. Second, nationalist themes became salient in arguments over religious doctrine. Third, Al Saud gained respectability by virtue of their independence of foreign rule, a quality duly emphasized by their agents and supporters. Under these conditions, modernist Salafi writers outside Saudi Arabia shifted from calling Wahhabism an expression of Sunni Islam to claiming that it was Salafi. Their writings on Wahhabism juxtaposed and jumbled religious and political themes as the anticolonial climate pressed on writers to formulate arguments in terms of national interest rather than classical Islamic texts. These discursive shifts are conspicuous in Egypt, where Ibn Saud's agent Fawzan ibn Sabiq distributed Najdi historical and religious treatises to provide raw material for a new wave of Wahhabi apologetics.

The best-known defender of Saudi interests in Egypt for this period was Rashid Rida, publisher of the leading religious periodical of the era, *al-Manar*. Due to *al-Manar*'s reach in the Muslim world, with a readership from Java to Morocco, Rida essentially "owned" the Salafi brand. Therefore, his position on Wahhabism was bound to be influential. One of his first comments on the Wahhabis appeared in the late Ottoman period, in a 1904 issue. A reader wrote to ask about the standing of the Shiite, Zaydi, and Wahhabi *madhhabs*. Rida responded that they were all Muslim (contrary to the Wahhabi view of the others as idolaters). He added that the Wahhabis were the closest of all Muslims to acting according to the Sunna but he did not yet refer to them as Salafis.[15] During the 1920s, Rida's terminology shifted. He now supported the Saudi political cause against the Hashemites in the struggle over Hijaz. Consequently, he published more articles about the Wahhabis, casting them

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[15] Article from *al-Manar*, 1904, cited in al-Munajjid, *Fatawa al-Imam*, 1:111–12.

in favorable light, speaking of them as Salafi in creed and Hanbali in law school, or as Salafi Sunnis.[16]

In addition to attaching new descriptors to Wahhabism, its defenders in Egypt inscribed new meaning in "Salafi" and "Wahhabi" to make them suit the rhetorical purposes of nationalist and state-building discourses. Such rhetorical sculpting is evident in an essay on the history of Wahhabism by Muhammad Hamid al-Fiqi, the founder of a pro-Wahhabi organization in Egypt. Al-Fiqi's essay is notable for its emphasis on nation building. He praised early Saudi rulers for establishing secure, lawful conditions in Hijaz. He also commended Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab for encouraging the spread of literacy so that each believer may understand God's word. Al-Fiqi attributed to Wahhabism the modern aspiration for mass education that would make it possible for each Muslim to have direct contact with scripture rather than relying on the mediated authority of religious experts. That notion became a commonplace in sympathetic writings on Wahhabism, but it was not part of writings by Wahhabi ulama. Along similar lines, al-Fiqi's discussion of the ills caused by *taqlid* (imitation of established legal opinions) asserts that it destroyed the spirit of independent thinking, leaving Muslims vulnerable to imperialist conquest. Instead of placing *taqlid* in the scales of Islamic legal theory, he related it to the nation's welfare, a common trope in modernist Salafi discourse.[17]

More extensive reshaping of Salafi and Wahhabi appears in a 1936 treatise with the striking title *The Wahhabi Revolution*. Its author, ʿAbdallah al-Qasimi, came to Egypt from Saudi Arabia to study at al-Azhar. He is better known for his later radical writings, but his first publications were fierce attacks on al-Azhar's ulama and arguments for Wahhabi strictures against innovations in worship.[18] His essay on the "Wahhabi revolution" embodies the assimilation of the Arabian religious purification movement to nationalist and state-building purposes. Al-Qasimi referred to Wahhabism as the *Najdi Salafi daʿwa* and the modern *Salafi nahda*, mixing the nationalist emphasis on rebirth (*nahda*) with religious call (*daʿwa*). In place of terms used in conventional Saudi-Wahhabi historical narratives to describe the old order in Najd – idolatry, innovations,

16 "Al-Wahhabiyya wa-l-ʿaqida al-diniyya li-l-najdiyyin," *al-Manar* 27 (1926): 275–8; "al-Wahhabiyya wa daʿwat al-Manar ila madhhab al-salaf," *al-Manar* 28 (1927): 3–5; "Rasaʾil al-sunna wa-l-shiʿa," *al-Manar* 29 (1928): 683. Hamadi Redissi, "The Refutation of Wahhabism in Arabic Sources," in *Kingdom without Borders: Saudi Arabia's Political, Religious, and Media Frontiers*, ed. Madawi Al-Rasheed (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 174–5.

17 Muhammad Hamid al-Fiqi, *Athar al-daʿwa al-wahhabiyya fi al-islah al-dini wa-l-ʿumrani fi jazirat al-ʿarab wa ghayriha* (Cairo: Matbaʿat al-Nahda, 1935), 6, 33, 43–6.

18 On al-Qasimi's life, see Salah al-Din al-Munajjid, *Dirasa ʿan al-Qasimi* (Dirʾawn, Lebanon: Dar al-Kitab al-Jadid, 1967). For his criticism of al-Azhar, see ʿAbdallah ibn ʿAli al-Qasimi, *Shuyukh al-Azhar wa-l-ziyada fi al-Islam* (Cairo, 1932/33).

jahiliyya – he drew on nationalist concepts to characterize the old order as one of weakness, misery, and ignorance.[19]

Al-Qasimi's narrative of the Saudi-Wahhabi enterprise made it a nationalist saga. At a time when Christians were invading Muslim lands, Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab established a model not just of zeal for religion, but of revolution against oppression and for democratic equality. Najdis became attached to Al Saud leadership, which enjoyed divine support in vanquishing Arabian foes to form a single kingdom out of petty principalities. Al-Qasimi called Ibn Saud the genius of the twentieth century, the first Superman, and compared him to Hitler and Mussolini, claiming his accomplishments were greater because they occurred in a backward land immersed in chronic warfare. Thanks to him and to Wahhabism, Saudi Arabia enjoyed complete independence of foreign influence. In nationalist terms, Ibn Saud personified the nation's integrity: He preceded speeches with citations from the Qur'an and the Sunna unlike other Muslim leaders who cite Mister so and so, or Monsieur so and so, as though memorizing the Qur'an and citing *hadiths* were contrary to modern civilization.[20]

Nationalist logic is also evident al-Qasimi's defense of the Wahhabi ban on tobacco. He stated that Wahhabism bolsters the believer's will to refrain from temptations like tobacco and drugs that harm body and mind, wealth and freedom. But rather than citing proof-texts from scripture, he argued that smoking is a waste of money, especially in poor developing countries. Workers who earn a few piasters a day cannot afford to squander them on rolled poison that burns their sick lungs when they have dependents to provide for. Furthermore, when Egyptians and Syrians buy cigarettes, they put money into the pockets of foreign companies at the expense of local enterprises.[21]

Besides putting a nationalist spin on Wahhabi Puritanism, he conflated Ibn Saud's efforts to introduce modern technology with the goals of Wahhabism, when, in fact, Ibn Saud had to overcome Wahhabi leaders' objections to technical advances. Al-Qasimi claimed that Wahhabism was open to benefits from industrial techniques and inventions because no religious text contradicts the natural sciences. In fact, that was a modernist Salafi position typical of the 'Abduh-Rida school. Al-Qasimi praised the Saudi ruler for the spread of hospitals, doctors, scholars, and schools, and for introducing scientific inventions like the telegraph, telephone, automobile, and aircraft. It is noteworthy that

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[19] 'Abdallah ibn 'Ali al-Qasimi, *al-Thawra al-Wahhabiyya* (Cairo: al-Matba'a al-Rahmaniyya, 1936), 1, 3.

[20] Ibid., 15, 30–5, 44, 47, 70–1, 79–83.

[21] Ibid., 18–20.

modernist Salafis were not alone in making nationalism and technical progress criteria for judging the merit of Muslim rulers. Conservative ulama in Syria had used the same criteria in arguments for their religious outlook in the late Ottoman period.[22]

The tendency for Muslims outside Saudi Arabia to frame Wahhabism in terms of Salafism was partly a token of the incorporation of Al Saud's domain into the cosmopolitan Muslim sphere. That process moved in two directions. Ibn Saud's subsidies for publishing collections of Wahhabi treatises represented movement from Arabia to other Muslim lands, as Najdi texts became widely available outside their homeland for the first time. Traffic moved in the other direction as well, with foreign Muslims arriving in the 1920s to serve the dynasty. Ibn Saud's absorption of Hijaz, with its pluralist religious landscape, was yet another facet of the process. Through immigration and annexation, modernist Salafism became part of the religious landscape in Saudi-ruled Hijaz.

In three respects, Hijaz was a propitious site for the emergence of Salafism in the late Ottoman period. First, proximity to Yemen exposed religious scholars to Muhammad al-Shawkani's reformist teachings that upheld Salafism's theological positions and sympathy for the Taymiyyan legacy.[23] Second, as site of the holy cities, Hijaz attracted ulama from India, including members of the *Ahl-i Hadith* movement, which shared Salafism's puritanical thrust. Third, a handful of Wahhabi ulama resided in the holy cities. These factors converged in the career of a Meccan shaykh, Abu Bakr Khuqir (1867–1930).[24]

Khuqir's teachers included a Wahhabi shaykh, Ahmad ibn 'Isa, and a leading *Ahl-i Hadith* scholar, Nadhir Husain.[25] In a treatise attacking intercessionary practices, he cited Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim, al-Shawkani, and Siddiq Hasan Khan; and he gave the modernist rationale for denouncing intercession,

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22 Al-Qasimi, *al-Thawra*, 26, 66. On Wahhabi ulama opposition to wireless telegraphy at the time al-Qasimi was writing, see Hafiz Wahbah, *Arabian Days* (London: A. Barker, 1964), 57–60. On conservative ulama in Damascus deploying modern "proofs" to buttress religious arguments, see James Gelvin, "Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc? Reassessing the Lineages of Nationalism in Bilad al-Sham," in *From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon*, ed. Thomas Philipp and Christoph Schumann (Würtzburg: ERGON-Verlag, 2004), 127–44. Observing the ostensible paradox of positing compatibility between Wahhabism and nationalism, Werner Ende referred to a "mismatch of national consciousness and neo-Hanbalite convictions." Cited by Redissi, "The Refutation of Wahhabism," 174–5, n. 57.

23 Bernard Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam: The Legacy of Muhammad al-Shawkani* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

24 Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad Khuqir, *Majmu'at mu'allafat al-shaikh Abi Bakr ibn Muhammad 'Arif Khuqir*, 2 vols., ed. 'Abdallah ibn 'Umar al-Dumayji (Mecca: Umm al-Qura University, 2004).

25 Abu Bakr Khuqir, *Hadha thabat al-athbat al-shahira* in *Majmu'at mu'allafat*, 2:31–4, 55.

calling it a cause of intellectual and moral decline. He wondered whether
defenders of seeking help from the dead ever read scientific publications.
His affinity for Wahhabism surfaced when he noted that were it not for the
ulama of Najd, graves would be crowded with worshipers. Like the Salafis of
Baghdad, Damascus, and Cairo, Khuqir asserted that Wahhabis followed the
Qur'an and the Sunna, the Hanbali law school, and the way of Ibn Taymiyya
and Ibn al-Qayyim.[26]

Khuqir labored in obscurity during the Ottoman and Hashemite periods,
when Mecca's religious establishment evinced little interest in the religious
purification trend. In nearby Jidda, modernist Salafism found a foothold
among merchants and educated youth. For example, Muhammad Nasif, the
scion of a wealthy merchant family, participated in a letter-writing network of
Salafi ulama and publicists, and recruited Saudi royalty to patronize publish-
ing activities.[27] Another leading voice of educated youth, Muhammad Hasan
`Awwad, expressed modernist Salafi ideas in the 1920s. In an essay condemn-
ing conservative ulama, he declared that they were incapable of giving straight
answers to simple questions about the benefits of fasting; they had no com-
prehension of Western scientific thinking and technical advances; and their
books on grammar and law were confused and full of contradictions. If Mus-
lims wanted insight into such matters, they should ignore today's ulama and
consult the books of Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim, and al-Shafi`i among the
ancients, the works of Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahhab, and the books of
Muhammad `Abduh and Farid Wajdi among the moderns.[28]

With the Saudi annexation of Hijaz, Ibn Saud enlisted local and immigrant
Salafis to the cause of Wahhabism by writing for the official Saudi newspaper,
Umm al-Qura, under the direction of Yusuf Yasin, a Syrian comrade of Rashid
Rida.[29] A common thread in the newspaper's early issues is "clarification" of
the true nature of Najdi religious doctrine. The first issue reproduced a speech
by Ibn Saud stating that Najdis followed Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahhab only
to the extent that the Qur'an and the Sunna supported his ideas.[30] Six months
later, the newspaper published an article explaining that few people knew the

[26] Abu Bakr Khuqir, *Fasl al-maqal wa irshad al-dall fi tawassul al-juhhal* in *Majmu`at mu'allafat*,
    1:19–21, 33, 40, 42, 52, 70, 109, 113–14. Al-Manar Press published the treatise in 1906.
[27] Muhammad ibn Ahmad Sayyid Ahmad, *Muhammad Nasif: Hayatuhu wa atharuhu* (Beirut:
    al-Maktab al-Islami, 1994), 20–4, 199, 302–4.
[28] Muhammad Hasan `Awwad, "Khawatir musraha," and "Muda`aba ma`a al-`ulama'," in *A`mal
    al-`Awwad al-Kamila* (Cairo: Dar al-Jil li-l-Tiba`a, 1981).
[29] On Yusuf Yasin's connection to Rashid Rida, see Joseph Kostiner, *The Making of Saudi Arabia*,
    1916–1936 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 105.
[30] *Umm al-Qura*, no. 1, Dec. 12, 1924.

truth about the religion of the Arabs of Najd; some imagined the Najdis to believe in a new *madhhab* or even a new religion. In fact, the Najdi *madhhab* adhered to the Qur'an and the Sunna, adding nothing and leaving nothing out, preserving the way of the Prophet and the Salaf. In short, the Arabs of Najd followed Islam; there was no other name for it.[31] During the pilgrimage of 1925, Ibn Saud gave a speech to Indian pilgrims, explaining that his folk were loyal to the doctrine and *madhhab* of the Salaf.[32]

Umm al-Qura was an official expression of Saudi Arabia's engagement with the outside. It propagated the state's conception of itself and of the religious ideas it championed; its articles included defenses of Wahhabi doctrine as the expression of Sunni Islam. Dynastic favor extended to private initiatives as well. A few months after Ibn Saud's forces took over Jidda, he met with Muhammad Nasif, Muhammad `Awwad, and others to encourage them to establish an "Islamic Sciences" committee to improve schools. Among its tasks was to compose schoolbooks on theology and law according to the Pious Fathers.[33] Apart from direct backing, Nasif took advantage of the favorable political setting to advance his project to gather, edit, and publish classical texts deemed part of the Pious Fathers' legacy. From the 1920s until the 1970s, he was a pivotal figure connecting Saudi Arabia to Salafi scholars and publishers in Arab countries and South Asia. His most enduring associations were with Rida's Cairo associates and Muhammad Bahjat al-Bitar's circle in Damascus. On the Saudi Arabian side, Nasif was in touch with prominent scholars like Hasan ibn `Abdallah Al al-Shaikh, head of the Hijazi religious estate for nearly thirty years, and Muhammad ibn Salih al-`Uthaimin.[34]

For several decades, Salafis and Wahhabis mingled on the pages of *Umm al-Qura* and in publishing and educational endeavors. But when it came to terminology, the official line of Saudi ulama maintained that their doctrine

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[31] *Umm al-Qura*, no. 27, June 26, 1925. The same point is in no. 59, Feb. 12, 1926.

[32] *Umm al-Qura*, no. 28, July 10, 1925. He expressed the same idea in his annual address to pilgrims in later years. Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Rahman al-Khamis, `*Inayat al-Malik `Abd al-`Aziz bi-l-`aqida al-salafiyya* (Riyadh: al-Amana al-`Amma li-l-Ihtifal bi-Murur Mi'at `Amm, 1999), 20–2.

[33] On the formation of al-lajna al-`ilmiyya al-islamiyya, see *Umm al-Qura*, no. 70, May 7, 1926. Nasif, `Awwad, and committee member Hasan Abu al-Hamayil were subscribers to *al-Manar* and appear in its pages as seekers of its fatwa on various issues. For Nasif's letters seeking fatwas, see al-Munajjid, *Fatawa al-Imam*, 2:580–92, 2:630–1, 2:633–41, 3:832–3. For `Awwad and Abu al-Hamayil, see al-Munajjid, *Fatawa al-Imam*, 5:1867–77. Another committee member, Muhammad Husain Ibrahim, was head of Jam`iyyat Ansar al-Muwahhidin and wrote a newspaper article for razing tombs over graves.

[34] An extensive sample of Nasif's correspondence is reproduced in Ahmad, *Muhammad Nasif*. Contacts with Rida, 20–4; Bitar, 431–8; `Uthaymin, 331–2, 457–60, 525; Hasan ibn `Abdallah, 505.

was the proper expression of Sunni Islam. Salafism and Wahhabism remained distinct currents, the former flourishing as a cosmopolitan tendency and the latter retaining a parochial Najdi accent, albeit with increasing influence outside Arabia. The cosmopolitan tenor of Salafism is reflected in the geographical reach of Nasif's correspondence and the range of his interests. In addition to promoting classical works in religious fields like exegesis, *hadith*, law, and theology, he collaborated on publishing books about modern agricultural techniques, improving journalistic Arabic, and the politics of Mandate powers in the Arab world.[35] That Nasif's outlook coincided with the modernist Salafi agenda is clear from his correspondence.[36] Wahhabism, on the other hand, still had the connotation of narrow-minded dogmatism. Nasif's grandson recalled that when he was growing up in Jidda, where a pluralist Sunni milieu, including Sufi orders, had long been the norm, classmates called him a Wahhabi. He also mentioned that his grandfather had welcomed and held discussions with all sorts of people, implying that a Wahhabi would have shunned others.[37] Suspicion on the part of the Wahhabi establishment toward the Salafis emerged in a plaintive letter Nasif wrote to the leading Wahhabi shaykh of the early 1960s, Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Al al-Shaikh. Nasif asked why the Syrian Salafi and defender of Wahhabism Muhammad Bahjat al-Bitar had been excluded from recent meetings in Mecca and Medina concerning the Muslim World League and the Islamic University in Medina.[38] It seems that Wahhabi ulama recognized the gaps between their doctrine and that of modernist Salafis and therefore wished to limit the latter's influence in Saudi Arabia's new religious institutions.

THE SALAFI TURN IN SAUDI ARABIA

In 1971, a leading member of Al al-Shaikh published a magazine article about Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's life and doctrine. In it he wrote that Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's followers preferred to be known as *al-Salafiyyun* or *al-Muhammadiyyun*.[39] Recent editions of older Wahhabi treatises exhibit

35 Ibid., 216–17, 242–3, 531.

36 Ibid., 160, 230–1, 260–3, 306–7, 339, 365, 368.

37 Ibid., 398–9.

38 Ibid., 232–3. On the Wahhabi shaikh Muhammad al-'Uthaimin's corrections to Bitar's monograph on Ibn Taymiyya, see 457–60. On Bitar's essays defending Wahhabism, see David Commins, "Wahhabis, Sufis and Salafis," in *Guardians of Faith in Modern Times: 'Ulama' in the Middle East*, ed. Meir Hatina (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 241–3.

39 Hasan ibn 'Abdallah Al al-Shaikh, "al-Wahhabiyya wa za'imuha al-Imam Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab," *al-'Arabi* (Kuwait) no. 147 (Feb. 1971), 26, 29. The author spent most of his career in Hijaz.

the same shift to calling the Najdi doctrine Salafi. For example, where a nineteenth-century Wahhabi treatise used the term "Najdi call" (al-da'wa al-najdiyya), the modern editor substituted "the Salafi call in Najd" (al-da'wa al-salafiyya fi najd).[40] The Wahhabi establishment now embraced the Salafi label. The underlying political context was Al Saud's decision in the 1960s to open the kingdom to foreign Muslims to develop public institutions, especially in the field of education. With the influx of Muslims came independent Salafi scholars and Islamic revivalist organizations. The cosmopolitan Salafi world was transplanted to Saudi soil.[41] Newly established religious universities were sites of contact and exchange among non-Saudi religious scholars, their Wahhabi counterparts, Saudi students, and foreign Muslim students.

The religious pluralism that accompanied the influx of non-Saudi scholars had the potential to undermine the authority of Wahhabi ulama, especially among pious youth. Nasir al-Din al-Albani came from Syria to the University of Medina in 1961. Known for his impressive command of hadith science, al-Albani differed with the Wahhabis on matters of principle, such as his rejection of following any law school as opposed to Wahhabi adherence to Hanbalism, and on practice, such as his view that women were not obliged to cover their faces. The leader of the Wahhabi establishment, Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Al al-Shaikh, allowed al-Albani's teaching appointment to lapse in 1963, compelling him to leave the country.[42] Such challenges to Wahhabi doctrine may have provided an incentive to reaffirm it in the rhetorical currency of the day.

In the 1970s, Saudi intellectual production took a new turn as students and graduates of the religious faculties constructed a Salafi patrimony for Wahhabism in three sorts of publications: (1) editions of classical texts, (2) topical monographs on facets of belief and practice "according to the Salaf," and (3) biographies of historical and contemporary luminaries in the Salafi tradition, as conceived by Saudi ulama. An early artifact of the Saudi project to trace a Salafi ancestry is a 1971 volume, *The Saudi Scholarly Anthology: From*

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[40] Salih ibn Muhammad ibn Hamad al-Shithri, *Ta'yid al-malak al-mannan fi naqd dalalat Dahlan* (Riyadh: Dar al-Habib, 2000). The original phrasing is on 123; the modern alteration is in the list of contents on 144.

[41] On Syrian Salafis moving to Saudi Arabia, see Arnaud Lenfant, "L'evolution du salafisme en Syrie au xxe siècle," in *Qu'est-ce que le salafisme?* ed. Bernard Rougier (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008), 163, 167–9.

[42] Stéphane Lacroix, "L'Apport de Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani au salafisme contemporain," in *Qu'est-ce que le salafisme?* 51–4. On the emergence of the Salafi Group and Juhayman al-'Utaybi's splinter group from al-Albani's following, see Thomas Hegghammer and Stéphane Lacroix, "Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman al-'Utaybi Revisited," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39 (2007): 103–22.

the Pearls of the Ulama of the Pious Ancestors.[43] The editor gathered together five classical creeds (by al-Tabari, al-Tahawi, al-Maqdisi, Ibn Qudama, and Ibn Taymiyya), presenting them in chronological order, followed by five essays by Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, including *The Book of God's Unity* (*Kitab al-Tawhid*). No modern authorities are included in the collection, implying a direct, exclusive line from the authoritative formulators of Salafi theological doctrine to Najd. The point is stated succinctly in the title of a 1999 monograph, *The Call of Imam Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab: Salafi, not Wahhabi.*[44] During the 1980s, a series called "Creeds of the Pious Fathers" ('*aqa'id al-salaf*) published editions of works by classical theologians.[45] Topical monographs on belief and practice "according to the Salaf" dealt with public affairs in works on morality,[46] loyalty and dissociation,[47] political practice and Islamic law,[48] and ruling on the basis of secular principles and the causes of excommunication.[49] Biography comprises a third element of the Salafi turn's intellectual output. Saudi publishers issued books about early authorities of the Salafi theological tradition: Sufyan al-Thawri,[50] Ibn Rajab,[51] and al-Marwazi.[52] Monographs on the tradition's modern revivers include Siddiq Hasan Khan and his position

43 'Abdallah ibn Muhammad ibn Hamid, *al-Majmu'a al-'ilmiyya al-sa'udiyya: Min durar 'ulama al-salaf al-salih* (Mecca: Matba'at al-Nahda al-Haditha, 1971).

44 Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn 'Abdallah al-Husayyin, *Da'wat al-imam Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab Salafiyya la Wahhabiyya* (Riyadh: Dar 'Alam al-Kutub, 1999).

45 'Ali ibn 'Umar Daraqutni, *Kitab al-nuzul* (Saudi Arabia, 1983); 'Abdallah ibn Muhammad al-Harawi, *Kitab al-arba'in fi dala'il al-tawhid* (Medina, 1984); Ahmad ibn 'Abdallah al-Isbahani, *Kitab al-imama wa al-radd 'ala al-rafida* (Medina: Maktabat al-'Ulum wa-l-Hikma, 1987); Salih ibn Fawzan Al Fawzan, ed. *al-'Aqida al-wasitiyya li-Shaykh al-Islam Ahmad ibn Taymiyya* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma'arif, 1987); Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad ibn Mandah, *Kitab al-tawhid wa ma'rifat asma' allah* (Medina: al-Jami'a al-Islamiyya, 1989).

46 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Nasir Jalil and Baha' al-Din 'Aqil, *Ayna nahnu min akhlaq al-salaf* (Riyadh: Dar al-Taiba, 1993).

47 Muhammad ibn Sa'id ibn Salim Qahtani and 'Abd al-Razzaq 'Afifi, *al-Wala' wa-l-bara' fi al-Islam: min mafahim 'aqidat al-salaf* (Cairo, 1985); original Umm al-Qura University master's thesis.

48 Khalid ibn Ali ibn Muhammad 'Anbari, *Fiqh al-siyasa al-shar'iyya fi daw' al-Qur'an wa al-Sunna wa aqwal salaf al-umma; buhuth fi al-nizam al-siyasi al-islami* (Riyadh, 1997). This publication has an appendix containing fatwas by leading Saudi religious authorities, Ibn Baz, 'Uthaymin, and Fawzan.

49 Khalid ibn 'Ali ibn Muhammad 'Anbari, *al-Hukm bi ghayr ma anzala Allah wa usul al-takfir fi daw' al-kitab wa al-sunna wa aqwal salaf al-umma* (Saudi Arabia, 1996).

50 Muhammad ibn Matar Zahrani, *Safahat mushriqa min hayat al-salaf: Sufyan ibn Sa'id al-Thawri* (Riyadh: Dar al-Khudairi, 1998).

51 'Abdallah ibn Sulaiman al-Ghufaili, *Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali wa atharuhu fi tawdih 'aqidat al-salaf*, 2 vols. (Riyadh: Dar al-Masayyar, 1998).

52 Mawsim ibn Munir Ibn Mubarak al-Nufai'i, *al-Imam Muhammad ibn Nasr al-Marwazi wa juhuduhu fi bayan 'aqidat al-salaf* (Riyadh: Dar al-Watan, 1996).

on the doctrine of the Salaf;[53] Muhammad al-Shinqiti and his affirmation of the doctrine of the Salaf;[54] Abu Bakr Khuqir and his defense of the doctrine of the Salaf;[55] and `Abd al-`Aziz ibn Baz, heir of the Salaf.[56]

The modernist legacy of Muhammad `Abduh and Rashid Rida is notably absent in the Saudi roster of Salafi revivers. In fact, according to a recent narrative, they fall outside the Salafi pale altogether. Instead, they belong to the ranks of Muslim thinkers who came under the spell of European thought, along with Rifa`a Rafi` al-Tahtawi, Khair al-Din al-Tunisi, and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. These thinkers assumed that social justice and democratic rights were valid ideas, and they mined the Qur'an and the Sunna for texts to support that assumption. By contrast, the method of the true Salafis, like Ibn Taymiyya and Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahhab, was to base their views on the Qur'an and the Sunna. The adoption of European ideas infected Muslim political thought.[57] To make matters worse, Afghani and `Abduh joined the Freemasons and disguised their rationalist and modernist convictions in Salafi garb. It was therefore inevitable when Rida fell under `Abduh's influence that he would pass along his master's misguided views. They all promoted rationalism under the banner of Salafism, and Western writers gullibly credited them with reviving Salafism when in fact they exploited the call for returning to the Pious Fathers as a slogan for their purely political anticolonial agenda.[58] Thus today's Wahhabi-Salafis have turned against Rida, a spokesman for legitimizing Wahhabism as a Salafi revival.

This reconstruction of Salafism's patrimony is driven by rivalry with the Muslim Brothers and kindred activist organizations. For decades the Saudi government welcomed them as partners in the struggle against Arab nationalist and leftist currents. But since the early 1990s, Saudi religious dissidents, known as *sahwa* sheikhs, inspired by the Muslim Brothers' political analysis and activism, clashed with the government. The Wahhabi religious estate's tradition of polemic found a new target that it construed as a sort of innovation

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53 Akhtar Jamal Luqman, *al-Sayyid Siddiq Hasan Qinnawji: ara'uhu al-i`tiqadiyya wa mawqifuhu min `aqidat al-salaf* (Riyadh: Dar al-Hijrah, 1996).

54 `Abd al-`Aziz ibn Salih Tuwayyan, *Juhud al-shaikh Muhammad al-Amin al-Shinqiti fi taqrir `aqidat al-salaf* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-`Ubaykan, 1998).

55 Badr al-Din Nadirin, "al-Shaikh Abu Bakr Khuqir wa juhuduhu fi al-difa` `an `aqidat al-salaf," thesis, Umm al-Qura University, Mecca, n.d.

56 Mani` ibn Hammad Juhani, *al-Shaikh Ibn Baz: Baqiyat al-salaf wa imam al-khalaf: Safahat min hayatihi wa asda wafatihi* (al-Ahsa': al-Nadwa, 1999).

57 "Historical Development of the Methodologies of al-Ikhwaan al-Muslimeen and Their Effect and Influence upon Contemporary Salafee Dawah," version 2.01 (Mar. 2003), www.salafipublications.com, Part One, 13–15.

58 "Historical Development," Part Eight, 2, 5.

(*bid`a*) stemming from European influence on nineteenth-century Muslims, an influence that ran straight from Afghani, `Abduh, and Rida to Hasan al-Banna to *sahwi* shaykhs Salman al-`Awda and Safar al-Hawali.

The embrace of the Salafi mantle was both tactically convenient in the contest against the Muslim Brothers and their offshoots, and substantially easy, given the Wahhabi ulama's conviction that their theology faithfully reproduced the doctrine of the Pious Fathers. They did not ascribe to Salafi the set of modernist, nationalist, and state-building meanings that prevailed earlier. Instead, Salafism was reworked once again to suit circumstances of time and place. In the Saudi context, it was natural that Wahhabi ulama redefined Salafism to legitimate the official creed through the construction of a narrative that emphasized their unique connection to the Pious Fathers' careers and creeds.

CONCLUSION

One hundred years ago, Ottoman religious reformers did not want to be called Wahhabis. Najdi Sunnis did not want to be called Wahhabis. One or two early twentieth-century exceptions apart, nobody wanted to be called a Wahhabi.[59] The connotations of fanaticism and heresy associated with that name had staying power. By contrast, Salafi became associated with purity and authenticity, giving it a positive connotation in modernist, nationalist, and contemporary religious discourses. But if Salafi can refer to a flexible conception of religion as a set of general principles that allow for adaptation according to time and place, or to a firmly fixed creed that allows for no tampering and regards change with suspicion, is it possible to define the term and classify Muslims who claim it? Without suggesting that Salafi is an infinitely elastic term, we might interpret its permutations as an instance of the ways political context shapes arguments over religious rectitude.

As notions of civilizations' progress and backwardness took root in the Muslim world, religious scholars looked to the Pious Fathers for principles that harmonized with the impulse to adapt to new conditions. Salafi shifted from a term in theological debates to a modernist temperament seeking a foundation for remaking education, law, and politics. In the emergent culture of nationalism, the call to return to the way of the Pious Fathers filled two purposes.

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59 Sulaiman ibn Sahman embraced the Wahhabi label in a 1916 essay, *al-Sawa`iq al-mursala al-shihabiyya `ala al-shubuh al-dahida al-shamiyya* (Bombay: al-Matba`a al-Mustawfiyya, 1916). In the essay, he gave the title as *al-Sawa`iq al-mursala al-wahhabiyya* and twice used the term "Wahhabi" as a positive referent defined as those who follow the Qur'an, the Sunna, the Pious Fathers, and the founders of the law schools. Ibn Sahman, 81, 196–7.

It anchored a narrative of the community's rebirth through rediscovering the values and virtues of the Pious Fathers, and it affirmed the community's special place in the world, in this instance, as bearer of a universal divine mission. The latest twist in the meaning of Salafi, its association with armed struggle (jihad) against the Muslim world's enemies, resulting in the "Salafi-Jihadi" neologism, also reflects the impact of political context on religious discourse.

Wahhabism's rebranding as Salafi accompanied Saudi Arabia's integration with the Muslim world. From its rise until the late Ottoman era, Wahhabism was a purely regional phenomenon, quarantined from the outside by the stigma of sedition and heresy, and from the inside by a strict view of other Muslims as idolaters. The fall of the Ottoman Empire removed the political structure sustaining the quarantine on Wahhabism. Ibn Saud's pragmatic outlook opened Saudi Arabia to other Muslims, taking down the internal quarantine and turning a new page in interactions between his domain and the Muslim world. Furthermore, during the interwar period, Saudi Arabia's independence was a rare quality that made it appealing to nationalists in the Arab world.

The charge that Wahhabism's claim to be Salafi is illegitimate is part of a struggle over who speaks for Islam. The urgency of the controversy owes something to the reversal in power relations between Saudi Arabia's Wahhabis and their Muslim critics. If we think of Muslim religious discourse operating in a political space, we could say that from the mid-1700s until the mid-1900s, Saudi Arabia was in a weak position, possessing sufficient resources to defend its native religious discourse but definitely in a defensive posture, deflecting a steady stream of polemical aggression from surrounding Muslim lands. Saudi Arabia's accumulation of wealth in the second half of the twentieth century altered the balance of power, making it possible to project its native religious discourse to other Muslim countries through proselytizing and hosting students from other countries at its universities.[60] The critics are correct that Saudi religious scholars have constructed an intellectual pedigree that runs from the early Islamic period to Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab to themselves, excluding modernists like 'Abduh and Rida. But such rhetorical sleight of hand is not exceptional; it runs through the entire story of Wahhabism's Salafi turn.

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[60] An overview of Saudi proselytizing is in Saeed Shehabi, "The Role of Religious Ideology in the Expansionist Policies of Saudi Arabia," in *Kingdom without Borders*, 183–97.