Cyber-Islamic Environments and Salafī-Ṣūfī Contestations

Appropriating Digital Media and Challenges to Religious Authority

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DECLARATIONS

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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Date 20 January 2019

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s). Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TRANSLITERATION

Arabic Letter	**Transliteration**
أ	Ā/ā
ء	ʾ
ب	B/b
ت	T/t
ث	Th/th
ج	J/j
ح	Ḥ/ ḥ
خ	Kh/kh
ذ	Dh/dh
د	D/d
ر	R/r
ز	Z/z
س	S/s
ش	Sh/sh
ص	Ṣ/ṣ
ض	Ḍ/ ḍ
ط	Ṭ/ ṭ
ظ	Ẓ/ẓ
ف	F/f
ع	ʿ
غ	Gh/gh
ق	Q/q
ك	K/k
ل	L/l
م	M/m
ن	N/N
ه	H/h
و	Ū/ ū
ي	Ī/ ī

Vowels: ◌ُ◌ِ◌َ   u/i/a
Doubled vowels يّ: -iyya (as in Ibn Taymiyya)

Note: For spellings and transliterations of quoted sources and formal names of institutions and websites, the rendition of the authors and institutions will be maintained. For example, 'Salafi Sounds' does not transliterate its formal name. Thus, it will be rendered as 'Salafi Sounds', with no transliteration.

ABSTRACT

 The present study focuses on significant online intra-Islamic ideological contestations with particular focus on the schisms between Salafism and Sufism. The main attention is on the content and strategies of Salafī contestations with Sufism and, to a lesser extent, with certain creedal schools of thought. The study addresses a gap in Cyber-Islamic Environments studies and raises thesis questions addressed through a research design (case study), analytical framework (religious authority), and methodology (qualitative ideological analyses). The purpose is to contribute to a greater understanding of the role of digital media in understudied and yet far-reaching online contestations within Islam—those that seek to define orthodoxy in contemporary Islam. First, the study locates and examines significant loci of Salafī contestations with Sufism, namely, the *mawlid* (celebrating the Prophet Muhammad's birthday), grave visitation, and *tawassul* (seeking intercession through the Prophet and past saints or spiritual masters). Second, the study unpacks and analyses recurring *themes* and *vocabulary* that occur in Salafī polemics against Sufism. The arguments against Sufism rely on the strategic usage of well-known judicial-ethical and creedal terminologies of Islamic scriptural sources and intellectual traditions that are now used to challenge the very orthodoxy and orthopraxy of Sufism. These terms have pre-modern roots in Muslim scholarship. However, the terms are repurposed in Salafī discourse to create idioms that cast aspersions upon non-Salafī ideologies in Islam. Third, the study analyses the strategic value of these loci of dispute and terminologies through the analytical framework of ***religious authority***, and, toward that effort, the study proffers a methodology of examining online content and the key arguments and support terminologies that speak to authority in what is essentially transnational and de-territorialized discourses. This dissertation thus seeks to contribute original research that helps to fill a lacuna in the study of consequential online intra-Islamic contestations.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Society not only continues to exist by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication.

— John Dewey[1]

1.1 Introduction

The study of new media and religion is a field of research that has attracted increased attention in the last two decades—perhaps more so than most other fields of study during that timeframe.[2] Research into the media–religion 'interface' in the digital age has become not only a growing academic discipline but a *distinctive* one that has roots in two legacy fields—media studies and religious studies—and has also attracted allied disciplines within the humanities and social sciences.[3]

Thus, the diverse relationships between media and religion—their mutual influences, negotiations, and ruptures—continue to invite original and merged approaches that seek out and analyse how contemporary media increasingly exercise 'transformative power potential for religions' and their followers today.[4] The field also pursues a better understanding of interpretative frameworks that address *how* 'communication technology is influencing' the very practice, materiality, and profile of religion in personal and public spaces.[5] As such, methodologies and frameworks from previously disparate fields have seemingly merged into interdisciplinary syntheses that are now needed to effectively examine what is arguably an inseparable and progressively consequential bond between

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[1] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: McMillan, 1916), at 4.
[2] Daniel A. Stout, *Media and Religion: Foundations of an Emerging Field* (London: Routledge, 2013), at 1.
[3] Knut Lundby, 'Theoretical Frameworks for Approaching Religion and New Media'. in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, ed. Heidi Campbell (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2012), 25–37, at 25–26.
[4] Gary R. Bunt, 'Religion and the Internet', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Peter Clarke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 705–22, at 705, 711.
[5] Heidi Campbell, ed., *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2012), at 1.

two mighty forces of modernity: contemporary media systems and expanding spaces of religion. Digital platforms have decentralized religious content, praxis, and authority, and are 'now crucial' in the fragmented affairs, discourses, and performances of religion online: so much so that they are studied together in order to 'understand contemporary religious issues' and what stirs these issues in the online realms and, quite often, how the online realm affects the real world.[6]

A researcher cannot presume to comprehensively examine aspects of religion today 'without understanding the traits of religious practice online and how they reflect larger trends in religious beliefs and practices offline'.[7] Bunt, for example, asserts that studying contemporary religion and its close association with digital media is vital 'for the understanding of contemporary religious issues' and their connections with how information is conveyed and received.[8] But, in advancing this argument, it can be claimed that researching almost any field in the contemporary world would, at the very least, benefit from studying the subject's relationships with ubiquitous media systems.

While there is increased interest and production in digital media and religion scholarship, the field has retained its status as a 'unique area of scholarship' primarily because of the swiftness with which digital media evolve. Emerging technologies continue to proliferate and add to emerging human communication avenues and raise new questions about their purposes in matters of religion.[9] In other words, the field is anything but inert. When conducting such research, it is thus important that researchers accentuate in their studies what is actually *new* about new media, answering the large and persistent question of how digital media uniquely affect, for example, religious representation, knowledge production, conveyance, authority, and ritual performance of religion in what

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[6] Bunt, 'Religion and the Internet', at 705.
[7] Campbell, *Digital Religion*, at 10.
[8] Gary R. Bunt, '#Islam, Social Networking and the Cloud', in *Islam in the Modern World*, ed. Jeffrey T. Kenney and Ebrahim Moosa (New York: Routledge, 2013), 177–208, at 178.
[9] Heidi Campbell and Brian Altenhofen, 'Methodological Challenges, Innovations and Growing Pains in Digital Religion Research', in *Digital Methodologies in the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor and Suha Shakkour (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 1–12, at 1–3.

is seen as an increasingly 'networked society' and in a new realm of 'networked religion'.[10]

More parsed, this area of scholarship has necessarily come to involve not just a partnership of diverse disciplines—religious studies and media studies—but their convergence. The study of religion in the modern world summons scholarly attention with regard to the details of the promulgation of religious ideas, doctrines, practices, contestations, and, quite significantly, the media systems that convey them.[11] In addition, each field—religion and media—has an elasticity that lends itself to a broad range of inquiry and methodologies; and each has durability, in the sense that they have continued to attract scholarly attention without stint. As such, it is perhaps better not to view this area of inquiry as the study of two autonomous fields. Rather, religion and media often join together as a bona fide social phenomenon, which should naturally draw appropriate academic notice.[12] In proffering a list of suggested frameworks for the study of religion and new media, Lundby, for example, says that the 'forms of mediation should actually be regarded as an integral part of religion'. Religions, therefore, are informed or 'shaped by their dominant means of communication'.[13]

This present study seeks to contribute original work toward that inquiry by locating and analysing an underrepresented area of digital media and religion research. While individuals or communities of an array of religious experiences employ digital media for varied purposes and objectives, one area calls for further investigation: namely, the uses of digital platforms as means of transmitting contestations or polemics—that is, views that challenge the orthodoxy of rival ideologies within the creedal and intellectual history of a common faith. These are intra-religion debates that occur in digital spheres,

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[10] Heidi A. Campbell, 'Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 1 (2012), 64–93, at 67–68.
[11] Bunt, 'Religion and the Internet', at 705.
[12] Stewart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark, *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media: Explorations in Media, Religion, and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), at 1–3.
[13] Lundby, at 226.

have potential real-life consequences, and are generally under-examined and under-analysed. In an effort to remedy this lacuna within the field, this study investigates significant ideological contestations within contemporary Islam as they occur in digital space and as they involve a synergy of digital platforms as a strategy in their production.

More specifically, the research examines critical areas of disagreement within the intra-Islamic debates regarding Salafism and its contestations with Sufism and related creedal thoughts and considers how the disruptive effects of new media have altered the nature and reach of both these major ideological religious disputes and the constructs of sacred authority. In doing so, the study analyses online Salafī texts that challenge the orthodoxy of Sufism and scrutinizes Sufism's very place within Sunnī Islam by appropriating digital media platforms to convey arguments and juridical–ethical nomenclature that essentially summon claims to 'religious authority' in contemporary Islamic discourse. The research also proffers a methodology that collates and probes key terminologies and arguments that the polemics rely on and that indicate how the arguments should be framed at a conceptual level.

In researching digital-religion associations, researchers 'are studying a unique aspect of digital culture'. They are conducting their studies in 'relation to the frame of religion and religious cultures', which requires them to apply 'fluency and sensitivity to the different offline religious traditions and how their truth claims and worldviews are translated and negotiated in online spaces'.[14]

Before expanding upon the research questions, research design, and interpretive framework outlined here, it should be mentioned that, in the midst of my composing this introduction, a major event claimed international headlines and commentary. The event and subsequent news reporting merit inclusion here because they implicitly speak to the themes and ideological substrates that are submitted in this dissertation, and highlight the

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[14] Campbell and Altenhofen, at 2.

importance of the uneasy, complex, non-linear, and perhaps elusive lines of demarcation between the content or texts of the online world and actions in the offline or real world.

On 24 November 2017, Muslim militants attacked a 'Sufi mosque', as it has been described, in Bir al-Abed, a township located in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, killing at least 305 worshippers and injuring more than 100, many of whom were children.[15] Embedded in many of the news articles were brief explanations of what Sufism is and why Ṣūfī institutions and devotees have been a target of attack by Muslim extremists. *The New York Times*, for example, reported that the 'attack injected a new element into Egypt's struggle with militants because most of the victims were Ṣūfī Muslims, who practice a mystical form of Islam that the Islamic State and other Sunni extremist groups deem heretical'.[16] Thereafter, major news agencies (legacy and new) published 'explainers': articles or videos meant to educate audiences about Sufism and why some Muslim groups oppose it.

The bombing occurred a week before public celebrations of the Prophet Muḥammad's birthday (*mawlid*) were to take place in Egypt, including at the Bir al-Abed mosque. (The celebration of the *mawlid* is a point of contention between Salafism and Sufism that will be explored in this study.) *The Guardian* reported that 'Egypt's Sufis will stay indoors to mark birth of prophet Muhammad', since 'elders in the village' were warned not to hold Ṣūfī rituals to commemorate the birth of Prophet Muḥammad.[17] The militants behind the attack were described in several ways—as ISIS militants, radical Islamists, jihadists, or other extremist groups who, according to the reports, view Sufism

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[15] Declan Walsh and Nour Youssef, 'Militants Kill 305 at Sufi Mosque in Egypt's Deadliest Terrorist Attack', *The New York Times*, 24 November 2017. Accessed at: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/24/world/middleeast/mosque-attack-egypt.html. A Google search of articles on the attack shows wide usage of the term 'Sufi Mosque' (or similar iterations associating the mosque with Sufism). They include: *The Washington Post, Al-Jazeera English* (online), *CNN* online, *National Public Radio* online, *Haaretz* online, *The Guardian*, and others.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ruth Michaelson, 'Egypt's Sufis will stay indoors to mark birth of prophet Muhammad'. *The Guardian*, 27 November 2017. Accessed at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/27/egypts-sufis-mark-muhammads-birth-indoor-celebrations-mosque

as 'heretical' in Islam—while their ideological underpinnings have been characterized as Wahhabism and/or Salafism, the militants 'sometimes [being] called Salafists-jihadists'.[18]

While the Sinai attack was particularly severe, it was not without precedent. Since the so-called 'Arab Spring' of 2011, scholars and reporters have noted that Salafism (*jihādī* or quietist[19]) has been aggressively on the rise in the public spheres of Muslim countries. In fact, 'After the Arab Spring the Sufi-Salafi conflict became more violent'.[20] Certain iterations thereof have claimed territory, political authority, and military assets in failed states or regions such as post-Qadafi Libya and Somalia and in ISIS territory in Iraq and Syria, claiming responsibility for violence committed under the pretence of an ideological dispute that emphasises the stated aim of eradicating the ritual and creedal impurities that have been inserted into Islam, as will be explored in this study.

Some months before the Sinai attack, on 16 February 2017, a suicide bomber killed more than 80 people and injured at least 60 at the Ṣūfī shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, in southern Pakistan. A *New York Times* reporter mentioned that 'Sufi shrines and mosques have been targeted in the past by Taliban militants, who view Sufi Islam as contrary to their beliefs' and that ISIS 'regards members of other Muslim groups as nonbelievers deserving death'.[21] Just months prior to that event, a suicide bomber killed more than 50 worshippers at another shrine, that is, the shrine of Shah Bilal Noorani, in southwestern Pakistan. Citing local media sources, press accounts reported that extremist 'groups have attacked Sufi shrines and gatherings in recent years. The Sufi tradition offers a tolerant version of Islam that is spurned by extremists like the Taliban'.[22]

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[18] 'Politics and the Puritanical', *The Economist*, 25 June 2015. Accessed at: https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2015/06/25/politics-and-the-puritanical
[19] The distinction between *jihādī* and quietist or purist Salafism is explored in Chapter 3.
[20] Anna Zajac, 'Between Sufism and Salafism: The Rise of Salafi Tendencies after the Arab Spring and Its Implications', *Hemispheres. Studies on Cultures and Societies* 29, no. 2 (2014), 97–109, at10.
[21] Salman Masood, 'Pakistan Shrine Bombing Kills Scores in Worst Attack in Months'. *The New York Times*, 16 February 2017. Accessed at: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/16/world/asia/pakistan-shrine-bombing.html
[22] Salman Masood, 'Bombing at Sufi Shrine in Pakistan Kills Dozens'. *The New York Times*, 12 November 2016. Accessed at: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/13/world/asia/pakistan-bombing-sufi-shrine.html

Besides the human toll of militant action, there have been dozens of attacks on Ṣūfī shrines and other Ṣūfī structures (such as *zāwiya*s, lodges or dedicated physical spaces in which devotional litanies are performed regularly by members of a Ṣūfī order) in the Middle East and North Africa in the post-Arab Spring tumult.

The destruction of such sites was so widespread in post-Qadafi Libya, for example, that UNESCO issued statements demanding an immediate end to the destruction of 'Sufi sites in Libya', namely in 'Tripoli and Misrata'.[23] The prominent sites that suffered destruction or damage included the burial place and shrine of the famed Ṣūfī master Aḥmad Al-Zarrūq (1442–1493), in Misrata, while the shrine and library of the Shaykh Abdul Salam Al Asmari site were severely damaged. In 2014, a group known as the Islamic Youth Shura Counsel declared eastern Libya to be part of the Islamic State. Subsequently, many other 'acts of vandalism' were conducted against Ṣūfī sites.[24] Groups 'inspired by Salafi ideology' in Benghazi 'were responsible for a number of attacks against Sufi mosques and tombs in Benghazi, Misrate and Zliten. They bulldozed the Sha'ab mosque (and more than 50 Ṣūfī tombs that it contained) in the centre of Tripoli'.[25] In Tunisia, Salafī-affiliated groups, most notably Ansar al-Sharia, committed 'an unprecedented number of acts against Sufi places of worship. At least 38 such places have been vandalized since [Tunisian president] Ben Ali was ousted' early in the Arab Spring of 2011.[26]

In Egypt, Syria, Somalia, Mali, and elsewhere, Ṣūfī shrines were attacked, damaged, and/or destroyed. In Timbuktu, Mali, the Tomb of Asia was attacked and

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[23] 'UNESCO Director-General calls for an immediate halt to destruction of Sufi sites in Libya | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization', 28 August 2012. Accessed at http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/unesco_director_general_calls_for_an_immediate_halt_to_destr/
[24] M. Lostal, *International Cultural Heritage Law in Armed Conflict: Case-Studies of Syria, Libya, Mali, the Invasion of Iraq, and the Buddhas of Bamiyan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), at 126.
[25] Anna Zajac, 'Between Sufism and Salafism', at 10.
[26] Ibid., at 11.

severely damaged by Ansari Dine,[27] a 'Salafi-jihadist group of Mali'.[28] O'Dell writes: 'Those who are driven to destroy such heritage out of a "Salafi" ideology also believe that they are preserving the past—by demolishing all "idols" to "re-create" the conditions under which Islam was practiced in the 7th century'.[29] In O'Dell's analysis of the violence, the destruction is 'not just a battle over ideology or heritage—but also sovereignty over the past.'[30] (It should also be mentioned that parts of the ancient ruins of Palmyra in Syria and pre-Islamic antiquities of Iraq were destroyed by ISIS forces.[31])

Ṣūfī shrines are an anathema to Salafists, who claim that shrines attract visitors who engage in what Salafists call 'grave worshipping'. While the recent wave of violence in Africa is complex and at least partially represents political power struggles in the abrupt absence of strong central governance in the post-Arab Spring, it should be noted that even if the shrine-violence is politically motivated, the urging of such violence relies on religious authority refracted through the prism a purification campaign that follows closely the Salafī–Ṣūfī chasm within Sunnī Islam, as scholars have noted.[32] In other words, if there is a political strategy that encourages the violence—particularly intra-Muslim violence—then it borrows heavily from a polemic that has gained ascendancy in the last 15 years (particularly in post-9/11 climes) and, in fact, has spread widely through digital media—sidestepping traditional, slower, and more localized means of conveyance.

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[27] Lostal, at 138.

[28] A full description and history of the organization is found online at: Standford University (2016), 'Ansar Dine', *Mapping Militant Organizations* (Stanford: Stanford University online resource). Accessed at: http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/437

[29] Emily J. O'Dell, 'Waging war on the dead: the necropolitics of Sufi shrine destruction in Mali', *Archaeologies* 9, no. 3 (2013): 506–25, at 510.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Jason Farago, 'The Ancient Syrian City ISIS Is Destroying, Preserved Online'. *The New York Times*. *The New York Times*, 15 February 2017. Accessed at: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/15/arts/design/palmyra-syria-isis.html

[32] See, for example, Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defense, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (Richmond, Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1999); and Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke, *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). These sources have extended accounts of modern and pre-modern criticisms of Sufism.

1.2 Study Purpose

This dissertation is not a study of the necropolitics of the destruction of heritage and Ṣūfī sites.[33] Nor is it an ethnography of violent groups and/or contexts in which the violence and destruction are conceived and, at times, released. However, mentioning the events above underscores the importance of the current study, as it examines ideological contestations in digital space that claim to define Islamic orthodoxy—contestations that often cast aspersions upon certain Muslims for their beliefs and practices, which are deemed to be heretical or even outside the bounds of so-called 'pure' Islam. Undoubtedly, these are serious claims. Setting the violence aside, the language of the vituperations found in online polemics, at the very least, has the *authority* of directing negative attention toward the criticized groups, most prominently those associated with Sufism and its creedal foundations.

The present study focuses on the discursive communication and strategies of Salafī ideologies as they appear in digital space. Discursive communication may allude to 'social practices, discursive practices, and the text themselves'.[34] The texts of the case studies under examination represent a significant attempt on the part of self-described Salafīs to convey polemics against Sufism, as well as other ideologies, creedal schools of thought, or rites within contemporary Islam. The study raises research questions and attempts to answer them through a research design, framework, and methodology that seek to add original contributions to the present academic understanding of the role of digital media in the religious affairs of Islam today. It seeks to close the lacuna in the study of online intra-Islamic contestations.

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[33] O'Dell, at 510.

[34] John E. Richardson (*Mis)representing Islam: The racism and rhetoric of British broadsheet newspapers.* Vol. 9. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2004), at 34.

What follows in this introduction are the research questions of the study and a description of how addressing them contributes original work to this growing field. Thereafter, the outline of the dissertation is presented, followed by concluding remarks.

1.3 Research Questions and Original Contributions

Research Question One: In researching contestations in the Salafī–Ṣūfī rift online, the first research question (RQ1) asks: what are the key categories and areas of contestation that occur online within Salafī disputes with Sufism in contemporary Islam? The question places emphasis on *performative* Islam: that is, contestations over certain devotional actions of Muslims groups and questions about the validity of these practices or rites. A descriptive component is involved in addressing RQ1 that consists of providing a specific account of the typologies and major loci of disputes within contemporary Islamic ideologies and/or groups. However, the question also probes the consequences of such loci of disagreement. With RQ1, therefore, the research advances the inquiry in part through a phenomenological methodology that Bunt applied in his studies and that has evolved as new technologies emerged.[35] While Bunt's earlier work surveyed a growing field of Islamic discourse online and commented on the content as they relate to conceptual religious matters, his methodology applies to RQ1 in terms of detecting, gathering, and presenting key ideological disputes that proponents of Salafism consistently make. It is the anticipation of this study that texts under review in this study have analytical or representational value, in that they exemplify a wider trend or pattern in intra-Islamic debates, and help to determine the larger, contextual meaning of the loci of disputation through qualitative textual analyses, which interpret the symbolic meaning of these disputes.

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[35] Gary R. Bunt, 'Studying Muslims and Cyberspace', in *Studying Islam in Practice*, ed. Gabriele Marranci (London: Routledge, 2014), 190–203, at 192–93.

The present work examines and locates *themes* and *vocabulary* that occur in aggressive Salafī polemics against Sufism and related ideological cognates, such as Ashʿarī creedal thought and, more specifically, its metaphorical interpretation of the names or attributes of God. In doing so, the study seeks answers to the questions: what patterns can be observed in online contestations in this intra-Islam dispute? How are digital platforms appropriated to advance polemics? What strategy of media usage can be seen from the investigation? How does the inquiry proffer original research and advance the area of study?

The research advises that single-platform case study methodologies do not sufficiently account for complex appropriations of digital media in polemic-making today. It is demonstrable that the dynamic and synergetic uses of multi-platforms or the multi-modal employment of digital media (written documents, sound, and social media content) are applied to promote a common argument or achieve a common aim in the advancement of online polemics. This study thus contributes original research that demonstrates that the disruptive qualities of digital media offer easier strategic appropriation of various and trending digital platforms: social media (as feeders to more substantial online content); podcasts (a digital product that is increasing today); well-kept websites with PDFs of various articles; and e-books. These platforms are managed by Salafi Publications, a key case study, to deliver cross-platform content that frequently criticizes points of view that are purportedly in conflict with the theology and practices of the 'pious generations', as Salafīs claim. The findings and analyses are presented in Chapter Six. The study helps to fill a gap in contemporary media and religion studies regarding Islam by researching and presenting consistent points of contention within contemporary Salafī–Ṣūfī polemics and their patterns in digital space.

It should also be noted that the Salafī mission—purifying Islam from syncretic practices and creeds introduced from either Hellenic (neo-Platonic) thought or non-Muslim faith communities—represents one of four essential 'domains' of religion, as

delineated by Bruce Lincoln: 'A set of practices whose goal is to produce a proper world and/or proper human subjects, as defined by a religious discourse to which the practices are connected.'[36]

Research Question Two: The examination of online content and the location of patterns of thought and strategy therein are important activities in this changing and developing field of research. Emerging digital technologies expand the forms of digital space and exert pressure on academe to continue to map out the new iterations in which religious content appears. However, description of the content raises questions: What larger frameworks do the analyses of such texts and strategies indicate? What higher conceptual significances and connections do such analyses signify? In other words, once parsed, demonstrable appraisals are required of the content (language and themes) of online texts as they connect to an interpretative framework that both situates the study and advances the understanding of contemporary Islam, its interfaces with new media and its historical connections with Islamic intellectual tradition. In other words, the study *contextualizes* the meaning of online texts in conversation with the past and the present. The disputes under analysis here have roots in Islamic intellectual history. But what has changed is how advocates of the competing ideologies have appropriated emerging technologies to not only advance their arguments against the other but also to stretch their rhetoric in a borderless manner, with all the effects that this implies and the unprecedented reach and strategies it presents.

It is argued here that, upon a disaggregation and analysis of the terminologies and arguments located in Salafī polemical literature online, the texts are suited to be framed as contestations for *religious authority,* the key interpretive framework of this study. To elaborate: the texts represent an appropriation of the disruptive qualities of digital media

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[36] Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), at 5. See also Jeffrey Halverson, *Theology and Creed in Sunni Islam: The Muslim Brotherhood, Ash'arism, and Political Sunnism* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), at 4.

and the new media theoretical paradigm of *mediatisation* in order to seek out the authority to strictly define the boundaries of Islamic orthodoxy.

While increased attention has been given to digital media and religious authority, including that of Islam, the treatments thus far have not fully explored—at the level of language analysis—religious authority in online Islamic texts in intra-religious contestations. Scholars have noted that religious authority is undergoing significant change (if not challenges) that is driven by forces of modernity, primarily globalization as compelled by new technological communication means.[37] The disruptions of digital media, therefore, have permitted unprecedented numbers of content producers to dispatch content far more easily than was previously allowed by print technology, for example; and, quite often, the impact is felt in the digital media ecology in the form of challenges to religious authority as traditionally understood, since authority is now more accessible and embedded 'in a marketplace' of religious content and choice.[38] Mandaville holds that new media has 'vastly enlarged' the possibility 'for knowledge (and contestations of knowledge) to mingle with a historically unprecedented intensity'.[39] These observations apply also to online contestations, as argued here. Thus, in order to situate the present study and connect it to a larger framework and developments of academic research, it is argued here that online contestations are acts of authority-making within contemporary Islam. The study thus proceeds with an analytical or interpretative framework (religious authority) and a methodology of examining online Salafī texts that contest Sufism's place in Islam—challenging its very orthodoxy and orthopraxy in contemporary Muslim milieus.

The focus here is on an important 'node' of religious authority, as Lawrence indicates: namely, juridical arguments and nomenclature of Islamic sacred law but used to

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[37] Peter Mandaville, 'Globalization and the Politics of Religious Knowledge: Pluralizing Authority in the Muslim World', *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 2 (2007), 101–15, at 101–2.
[38] Stewart M. Hoover and Knut Lundby, *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), at 292.
[39] Mandaville, 'Globalization', at 108.

support ideological contestations online.[40] Turner states that new media technologies 'provide alternative, deregulated, devolved and local opportunities for debate and discussion' and have 'the unintended effect of corroding traditional forms of authority that are either based on oral transmission or […] print-based'.[41] But the challenge of new media as far as a print-based knowledge economy is concerned is their particular effect on religious law, which 'becomes ever more urgent, and hence there is a sort of bidding war in which competing authorities attempt to out-do each other in terms of the strictness of their interpretation of legal norms'.[42] The analysis also emphasizes the use of phrases that attempt to establish boundaries of orthodoxy in Islam, such as *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa*, 'People of Sunna [the normative practice of the Prophet Muḥammad] and the Community'.

This realm of authority was chosen to be the focus of this study for two reasons, both of which are supported in scholarship: (1) the evocation of Islamic law, its terminologies, and creedal claims carry religious authority import, for they are meant to exert power over the defining Islamic orthodoxy at a conceptual level; and (2) the weights of sacred law and creedal nomenclature have the power to exercise authority on the individual level, that is, the individual's choice with regard to extra-canonical practices and beliefs.

Thus, this dissertation adds original contribution to the study of Islam in digital space (cyber-Islamic environments) in the following manners as summarized. It examines and situates within the 'wave-research' convention, *as well as* a media theory appropriate for digital media studies, of an under-studied area of religion and digital media studies within Islam, namely, intra-Islamic contestations that have a dual function of (a)

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[40] Bruce B. Lawrence, 'Allah on-Line: The Practice of Global Islam in the Information Age', in *Practicing Religion in the Age of Media*, ed. Stewart M. Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2002), 237–53, at 237–39.
[41] Bryan S. Turner, 'Religious Authority and the New Media', *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 2 (2007), 117–34, at 132.
[42] Ibid.

reproaching Muslim groups and ideologies and, in the process, (b) attempting to claim greater authority in appropriating pre-modern Islamic phrases for the purpose of creating new idioms meant to create hegemonic definitions of orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

The study pursues a media theory that helps to explain the effects of digital media, as opposed to pre-digital mediation theories. Mediatisation …

Focuses on a trending digital product that extends the capacity of what is arguable a key feature of digital media functionality, that is, mobility. Podcasts represent a growing digital media product that represents a [get from podcast section. And distinguish it from other forms of digital media]

1.4 Organization of the Dissertation

For the purpose of situating the present study in the recent and past literature of media-and-religion studies, **Chapter 2, Literature Review** presents an outline of the key literature of the more general fields of media and religion studies, including their conceptual foundations, theoretical frameworks, current literature, and relevance to contemporary studies on digital media interfaces with religion. The chapter next presents how religion and digital media studies have evolved and attracted various fields into the discipline, indisputably rendering it an interdisciplinary field. Following this, the chapter examines research that relates more closely to the purposes and arguments of this dissertation and that highlights the gaps that need to be studied and further explored. It situates the study according to recent important trends in the study of religion and new media and shows where the study fits in this growing field of scholarship.

Before presenting the premise and findings of the thesis, it is necessary to examine the nomenclatures and support terminologies of the ideological groups under review, as their meanings have evolved and, in fact, have been altered over time. Thus, in responding to the research questions of the dissertation, it falls to the researcher to 'identify the key terms and attempt to define and explain what they mean, and then

address the specific question'; this is the function of **Chapter 3, Defining Terminologies**.[43]

This chapter, therefore, focuses on articulating conceptually and historically valid definitions of key terms on which this study relies. The term 'Salafism' has varied and often conflicting meanings, which, without appropriate resolution, may create confusion and weaken the analytical value of the term's use. Thus, 'Salafism', in this chapter, is examined according to its two major historical iterations: a) the early modern reform movements of the late 1800s and early 1900s and b) the contemporary iteration of Salafism and its typologies, taking into consideration Wiktorowciz's 'anatomy of Salafism'[44] and similar typologies offered by Haykel.[45] Further, the term is parsed according to its recent use and ascendency in the public sphere in developments after the Arab Spring. One aim of Chapter 3 is to present the nominal, analytical, historical uses of 'Salafism': in other words, to 'conceptualize and operationalize'[46] the term and to establish a connotation that best represents the online material discussed in this dissertation.

Similarly, the definition of 'Sufism' examines the origins and connotations of 'Sufism' as they pertain to the research at hand. It is arguable that in an important way 'Sufism' is a less problematic term than 'Salafism' because of the ascendance and variant definitions of Salafism in recent years, particularly after the so-called 'Arab Spring'. However, there is complexity in 'Sufism' that needs to be addressed. In the chapter, the term and phenomenon are distilled to normative and ideation articulations, with particular focus on rituals, creeds, and performances that draw disapproval from advocates of

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[43] Lloyd Ridgeon, *Sufis and Salafis in the Contemporary Age* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), at 1

[44] Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (2006), 207–39.

[45] Bernard Haykel, 'On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action', in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (London: Hurst & Co., 2009), 33–57.

[46] Bruce L. Berg and Howard Lune, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 8th edn (London: Sage Publications, 2012), at 38–9.

Salafism. The chapter includes the key areas of performance that are frequently criticized by Salafists, namely: *Mawlid* (celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muḥammad) and grave visitations of Ṣūfī saints and/or shrines, seeking spiritual benefit (*tabarruk*) or intercession from the interred (*tawassul*). The chapter will briefly explore key creedal schools of thought that are often associated with Sufism. These sections fulfil a specific purpose, contextualizing and distilling the significant connotations and uses of these terms located in this study, as supported by scholarly sources and cognate studies. But, in and of themselves, they also contribute to and advance a contemporary discussion in academia on the challenges of defining Salafism in the post-Arab Spring tumult.

Chapter 4, which concerns framework and methodology, addresses the second research question more directly. It presents a review of the literature related to the media and their association with religious authority, seeking to demonstrate that the media have long been viewed as a challenge to authority (political and religious) perhaps from as early as the invention of the printing press. However, in examining what is 'new' in new media, the chapter argues that digital media represent the greatest (certainly the swiftest) technological shift in the media–authority sphere. The 'disruptive' attribute of new media is defined in this chapter, and how they relate to challenging authority is discussed. As such, applying the analytical framework through which the textual analyses will be interpreted, the chapter addresses the relatively recent theory of 'mediatisation', which suggests that new media technologies have not only expanded the reach of communications and their effects, as traditionally theorized by 'mediation' theory, but they now have affected the *social conditions* in which religion is conducted; technologies are in themselves 'agents of change' in religion, beyond serving as avenues of communication.[47]

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[47] Stig Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society* (London: Routledge, 2013), at 78–9.

Thereafter, the study discusses religious authority more specifically in terms of Islam and important nodes of authority in that religion. It compares the 'traditional' norms of qualified authorities and the changes in the concept of 'traditional' authority brought about by new media, as various scholars, such as Bunt, Lawrence, and Mandaville, have mentioned in their works.[48]

In following the convention of Lawrence's 'nodes' of religious authority, this chapter examines the juridical node in contemporary Salafī cyber-Islamic environments and presents the rationale for selecting this node. An examination of online Salafī texts shows that several terms appear regularly. These are terms that exert authority by impressing upon the audience where the boundaries of orthodoxy and orthopraxy are drawn in Islam. The phrases have both juridical and ethical import because they evoke words that are common in the vernacular of most Muslims. For example, a declaration that a certain act, such as celebrating the birthday of the Prophet Muḥammad (*Mawlid*), is a heretical innovation (*bidʻa*) is meant to censure a *performative action*: that is, it implicitly exerts pressure to refrain from such celebrations. Several other phrases with similar intended impact are described and defined. (In the following chapter, the frequency of the phrases will be demonstrated.)

The discussion employs Weber's view of authority types as a conceptual background to the framework. However, Foucault's view of authority as a function of an epistemology adds an important nuance to the discussion of authority in the context of power.[49] In addition, Edward Said's critique of Orientalist scholarship holds a particular appeal for the examination of the foundations of Salafī polemics. For Said, knowledge production in Orientalist scholarship is often employed in the service of empire and

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48 Gary R. Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments are Transforming Religious Authority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), passim; Lawrence, 'Allah on-Line', at 237–39; and Peter Mandaville, 'Globalization and the Politics of Religious Knowledge', at 101–05.
49 Stuart. Hall, 'Foucault: Power, knowledge and discourse', in *Discourse Theory and Practice: A reader*, ed. Margaret Wetherell, Stephanie Taylor and Simeon J. Yates (London: Sage, 2001), at 72, 81.

imperialism. This dissertation turns Said's critique inwardly within Islam: namely, critiquing the use of knowledge production and conveyance in Salafī discourses to ostracize Sufism and other schools of thought and to challenge their very place within Islamic orthodoxy.

In this dissertation, the discussion of the methodology is placed in close proximity to that of the analytical framework, rather than after the literature review. This is because the link between framework and methodology is so closely bound that one necessarily follows the other. The framework of religious authority relies on locating a pattern of argument and on the uses of key nomenclature that evince attempts at claiming authority in religious discourse; identifying the arguments and isolating the nomenclature are integral to the choice of methodology. The methodology of this study relies on a qualitative analysis of online texts that comprise a significant part of the intra-Islamic contestations examined in this study. The methodology section reviews the development of hybrid methodologies derived from various disciplines but distilled to methodological principles and practices that produce results that reliably demonstrate the rationale and argument of a given study.

Qualitative research draws attention to more than the mere 'forms of information'[50] and inferred meanings rendered by way of numerical processes. Rather, qualitative inquiries place emphasis on the contextualized meanings of the language of narrative streams that, as in this case, connect with larger themes linked with past Islamic intellectual history and, presently, a new media space created by digital media. Appropriate for this study, the emphasis of the qualitative approach is 'language-based'[51] and considers strategic uses of terminologies that speak to religious authority. The works of scholars in religion and digital media studies who discuss methodological

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[50] David Morgan, *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2008), at 12.
[51] Larry Z. Leslie, *Communication Research Methods in Postmodern Culture: A Revisionist Approach* (London: Routledge, 2017), at 40.

developments in the field are presented. Thereafter, the precise process of data collection is explained, and the relationship of the methodology and the collated data to the study's interpretive framework is discussed.

Chapter 5 discusses data collection methodologies, presentation of Salafī texts, and offers immediate analyses of the strategies, terminologies, and contestations located in Salafi Sounds podcasts. Careful review and consideration of digital content that relates to my study suggest that two important matters stand out with regard to Salafism online. Also, to address the ethics of a study proposal, a continuous conversation about the proposal with advisors, the development of the research, and its ongoing progress must take place. This study is focused entirely on texts that occur in digital space. The study does not include, to any degree, the involvement of human subjects or intervention in or with online texts and their content-makers. No surveys or interviews were carried out. The study does not analyse texts occurring in online forums or chat rooms, not even those that are open-source and require no sign-in credentials to join and/or observe. It does not review comments left, for example, in YouTube videos' comments sections. Its sole focus is on texts that are purposively posted and made available to be consumed by audiences, as any book, pamphlet, or cassette tape would be. In this study, the focus is on podcasts. The only requirement to access the texts is a connection to the Internet. The texts under review here do not require sign-in credentials and the social media accounts do not require the researcher to 'follow' or 'like' or 'friend'. They are completely open-sourced. The researcher has not commented, 'shared', 'liked', or 'retweeted' any of the texts. The research paradigm adopted in this dissertation has not changed from its very initial formulations. Any change in approach that would raise new ethical considerations.

Chapter 6 presents findings and aggregate analyses of the case studies, and it organizes its analyses to important categories of Salafi contestations with Sufism and offers a contextualization of the varied arguments and the symbolic language and nomenclature of the texts gathered. As one example, the findings suggest that collectively

the contestations located in major Salafī online discourses and their specific loci of disagreement are proxy attempts toward the acquisition of the authority to define the proper *manhaj* of Islam. In reviewing and analysing a significant amount of online Salafī content, a common exhortation has emerged, one that pivots on this term *manhaj*—whether implied or explicitly alluded to. One may even claim that, in order to examine the main positions and ideologies of modern Salafism, it is essential to probe the Salafī usage of *manhaj* as the very substrate of its core argument. *Manhaj* refers to the proper methodology used in deriving guidance and rulings both from Islam's sacred texts (Qurʾān and Ḥadīth literature) and from a strict interpretation of the sacred past: that is, the known acts and intentions of the Prophetic period and of generations of al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ—the pious ancestors (from which the name Salafism is derived). As such, it speaks to critical matters of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, and to persuasive language that seeks to define what is heretical, blasphemous, and impious in contemporary Muslim practices. The larger reasons, perhaps pretexts, is that if Salafism hopes to be successfully persuasive that it represents or is the only movement that can restore 'real' Islam, as has been suggested,[52] then it must rely on the conceit that it represents the proper *manhaj* of the religion. Other significant terminologies and phrases that have pre-modern roots in Islamic intellectual history are likewise presented and pursued.

Chapter 7 includes a summary and commentary about the current study and thereafter addresses the next steps—the potential for a future research agenda that advances the substance of and arguments made in this dissertation. It considers, for example, a wider range of methodologies and research designs, including ethnographic case studies that probe the motivations of the main content-makers of Salafī texts and, thus, the new ethical paradigms that are appropriate for that kind of study. The chapter

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[52] Roel Meijer, *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (London: Hurst & Co., 2009), at 15.

suggests case studies based on embedded or field studies of Sufism and usage of digital technology in conveying liminal or numinous information, a growing interest in itself.

1.5 Summary

It should be noted that digital media have swiftly moved from being *new phenomena* to becoming integral aspects of everyday professional and personal lives in many parts of the world. They have become integral in the human experience with culture, politics, religion, and social institutions, for digital media have become fully immersive in the lives of many.[53] In fact, 'digital natives', who grew up with new media and have the majority of their contact with those types of media, will probably not be able 'to recall an era when there were no blogs, Twitter, or social networking'.[54]

As such, the effects of digital technology on perennial human matters as important as 'religious discourse' require further assessment and undoubtedly 'will continuously be a topic that needs to be addressed by scholars with very different approaches'.[55] Questions first put many years ago have, at the very least, kept their urgency today: 'What does the Internet do to religion? How are religious experiences mediated online?'[56] What do content providers (website managers) and users hope to achieve from their Internet experience?[57]

This study seeks to offer original research that advances understandings of the Salafī–Ṣūfī divide within the Muslim world, which is a serious transnational schism that has spilled into Western Muslim thought and communities. The contestations studied here

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[53] Dominic Power and Robin Teigland, 'Postcards from the Metaverse: An Introduction to the Immersive Internet', in *The Immersive Internet: Reflections on the Entangling of the Virtual with Society, Politics and the Economy*, ed. Robin Teigland and Dominic Power. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1–12, at 1-3.
[54] Gary R. Bunt, 'Mediterranean Islamic Expression and Web 2.0', in *Arab Society in Revolt: The West's Mediterranean Challenge*, ed. Cesare Merlini and Olivier Roy (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2012), 76–95, at 76.
[55] Morten Hojsgaard and Margit Warburg, *Religion and Cyberspace* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012), at 9.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Bunt, *iMuslims*, at 5.

have a robust representation in the English-language digital media, which is an expansion of reach beyond the traditional languages and geographies of the so-called 'Muslim world'. Some would further contend that the ideological rifts have real-world consequences in terms of extremism and acts of violence. The study also makes recommendations, in terms of methodology, about how to distil voluminous online content and properly contextualize the content with an interpretative framework that speaks to Islamic intellectual history and ideological dispute.

Research into the role of digital media in ideological sectarianism within the Islamic milieu needs more research to fill in the gaps. By necessity, the work is interdisciplinary, reflecting a gathering of expertise and research frameworks primarily from the fields of media studies and religious studies but also from others. It is important, however, to decipher how the frameworks (or theories) represented by legacy research in each of these fields mesh together in order to produce scholarship in which the disciplinary arrangement is nearly invisible. The discourse about media is not one about technology per se, but an area of research that pertains to a perennially powerful force in human life and history—religion—making great use of media for a variety of reasons and arguably leaving a wide range of effects—on communities, individuals, and religion itself. As such, Bunt states that studying religions in digital space acknowledges the 'complex and field emerging in response to religious, social, and technological changes in Muslim contexts and shows how work in this multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary subject continues to develop'.[58] The field of religious studies recognizes that understanding the digital world has become imperative for a fuller accounting and understanding of religious communication in the contemporary world.

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[58] Gary R Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), at 18.

In 2005 Jonathan Sterne questioned the academic value of digital media studies as a discipline unto itself.[59] The push to move the field in that direction is more 'strategic' than it is supported by academic criteria informed by the works of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, as Sterne argues. It has been 13 years since his comments—and 13 years in a digital lifespan is significant. He may have changed his thoughts on this matter since 2005. Sterne's observations, perhaps unwittingly, were prescient in an important way: digital media studies seem to call for interdisciplinary research. If digital media are influencing important aspects of human life, then those aspects almost invariably fall under the scholarly gaze of the historian, the anthropologist, the sociologist, the religious studies scholar, and experts in other fields.

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[59] Jonathan Sterne, 'Digital Media and Disciplinarity', *The Information Society* 21, no. 4 (2005), 249–56, at 249–51.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The scholarship that is relevant to this dissertation includes significant studies that

examine digital media and religion in a broad sense. It also includes literature that is

specific to Islam online and, deeper yet, studies that implicitly concern the research

questions of this dissertation. This study focuses on an underrepresented area of

digital media–religion research: namely, online religious contestations in

contemporary Islamic discourse. There are substantial ideological disputes within

Islam that occur in digital space, but those of particular import today, in both the

online and real worlds, are centred upon Salafī/Wahhābī substrate ideologies

represented in online texts that reproach certain Muslim ideologies or practices,

especially Sufism and related creedal aspects of Sunnī Islam. The specific areas of

dispute and the nomenclature used in the polemics are presented in the chapters

ahead, and their significance and symbolism, as argued in this study, are best

understood through the interpretive or analytical framework of religious authority;

that is, the language, themes, and multi-platform strategies of Salafī contestations

ultimately seek claims of authority in a critically important religious discourse in the

world.

      While anti-Sūfī polemics pre-date digital media—in fact, they have pre-

modern roots[60]—what is observed today represents a substantial rupture from the

past. Digital platforms have altered and expanded the breadth and deployment of

contestations, bypassing erstwhile hurdles of what is loosely called mass

communication, such as expense, knowledge acquisition, and rigour. The

technologies have permitted users unprecedented access to content and 'private

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[60] For a well-documented historical analysis of premodern anti-Sufism polemics see de Jong and Radtke.

media consumption' in the privacy of their homes, which, for some scholars, appears to represent not a trivial arrangement of consumption but 'a shifting media ecology and cultural anthropology'.[61] And the technologies have made content-production and assertions of knowledge much easier and far less expensive to convey. They also broaden the strategies of polemic-making and their potential influence and audience reach—bypassing traditional constructs of knowledge production, conveyance, and religious authority—all of which are intellectual issues, if not crises, of Muslim milieus.[62] The ruptures of the age of digital media represent an accelerated erosion of the 'traditional system of knowledge production and dissemination in the Muslim world'.[63] In the past, the religious authority of 'earlier generations' derived its gravitas from the 'mastery of authoritative texts studied under recognized scholars'.[64] One significant aspect of media disruption, then, is the opening of access to sources without the tutelage of a scholar, with the benefits and drawbacks thereof. In addition, Salafism, as an ideology, is a modern phenomenon that focuses on a purification of Islam that is unique to the contemporary age, as discussed in Chapter 3, wherein the word and constructs of 'Salafism' are unpacked and operationalized for this study.

Aspects of the present work are connected to a longer tradition of scholarship on the affinities between religion and media. While new and emerging technologies have hastened the evolution of the field of study, in this literature review it is prudent to touch upon earlier (pre-digital) research in the media–religion field. In doing so, this dissertation is thus situated in an important scholarly tradition of insights, theory-building, and

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[61] Glen Creeber and Royston Martin, *Digital Culture: Understanding New Media: Understanding New Media* (Maidenhead, Birkshire: Open University Press, McGraw-Hill Educationn, 2008), at 110–11.
[62] Susanne Olsson and Carool Kersten, *Alternative Islamic Discourses and Religious Authority* (New York: Routledge, 2016), at 5. Richard W. Bulliet, 'The Crisis within Islam', *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976) 26, no. 1 (2002), at 11–12.
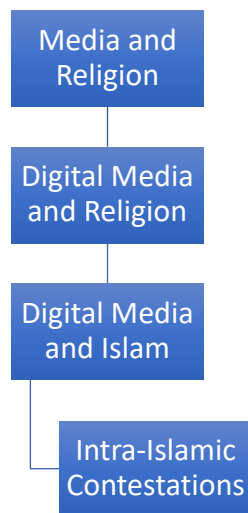[63] Mandaville, 'Globalization', at 102.
[64] Dale F. Eickelman, 'Mass Higher Education and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary Arab Societies', *American Ethnologist* 19, no. 4 (1992), 643–55, at 643.

findings that persist in their relevance. This, in turn, helps to underscore more emphatically what is actually 'new' about new media: namely, how digital media have not only altered the range, ubiquity, and speed with which religion messaging and contestations have evolved but have done so in conversation with both past scholarship and more contemporary factors, such as globalization[65] and post-modern constructs of community, selfhood, identity, and individuality.[66] This literature review also seeks to position the arguments and research questions of this thesis and connect their contribution to continuous threads of media–religion scholarship, as well as to frameworks that speak to the new affinities between religion and media today.

The present chapter presents the scholarly literature as follows: first will be discussed digital media and religion in conversation with pre-digital scholarship; following that, scholarship on digital media and Islam will be examined. The review of the literature related to religious authority will be presented in Chapter 4, which is devoted to the study's interpretative framework.

THE PEDIGREE OF THE RESEARCH PRESENTED HERE

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[65] Mandaville, 'Globalization', passim See also Miyase Christensen, André Jansson, and Christian Christensen, *Online Territories: Globalization, Mediated Practice, and Social Space*, Digital Formations (New York: Peter Lang, 2011).

[66] Charles Ess, 'Selfhood, Moral Agency, and the Good Life in Mediatized Worlds? Perspectives from Medium Theory and Philosophy', in ed. Knut Lunby, *Mediatization of Communication* 21 (2014), at 626–28.

2.2 Traditional Media, Digital Media, and Religion

The complex and increasingly intertwining relationships between religion and media have attracted scholarly attention for more than 60 years, but such work accelerated in the 1970s with 'a flurry of research' prompted by the rise of televangelism and its new and expansive dissemination of religious content.[67] Research in this area continued well into the 1980s (and to a lesser extent even today).

What was of particular concern was how televangelism, and 'religious broadcasts' in general, represented a departure from more traditional or centralized means of religious communication—via church-authorized publications and at church institutions, for example. For one thing, the broadcasts were not 'sanctioned by religious and secular authorities' and, as such, symbolized a change in authority of religious messaging fronted by broadcast media technology.[68]

In media scholarship, 'departure' narratives—noticeable shifts in public communication practices and perspectives—have consistently attracted interest because of what these major shifts have shown in the relationship between technology, culture, and other aspects of human life, notably religion. As such, preaching the gospel on television (and radio beforehand) represented an early change from a more coordinated (or traditionally constructed) representation of religious authority to one that was more dispersed and often separated from denomination-bound institutions. In addition, the context of the rise of the broadcasts added urgency to the question of the emergence of televangelism, as the role of religion in domestic and international politics in the United States at the time was palpably on the rise.[69] Horsfield also examined at length religious television programming in the United States—its development and the advent and marketing methods of the 'electronic evangelists'—and carried out work in other key

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[67] Stewart M. Hoover, 'Religion, Media and Identity: Theory and Method in Audience Research on Religion and Media', *Mediating religion: Conversations in media, religion and culture* (New York: T & T Clark, 2003), 9–19, at 9.
[68] Hoover and Clark, at 1.
[69] Ibid.

areas of television research.[70] Frinkl spoke in terms of marketing as well, because of the expanded audience reach of electronic broadcasting that created competition between various religious programmes and even with commercial television programming, in which Frinkl points out that ' ministries are combining religious norms and broadcasting norms', which may seem at odds with one another.[71] For others yet, the existential nature of electronic broadcasts was of primary concern, since 'a new age of information' and 'a new technological era' had the potential to challenge historical religions, 'which can lead either to humankind`s next integrative steps toward new religious insights and meaning, or to a collapse of religious development and the emergence of a period of anarchy and despair'.[72]

Moreover, intra-Christian debates about the validity of preaching through television attracted scholarly notice. Public intellectual and satirist Malcom Muggeridge objected to the fundamental notion that the gospel can be transmitted through television with fidelity, since the main concern of Christ—his passion, as it were—was the truth and the chief concerns of television were fantasy and illusion.[73] For Horsfeld, the rise of religious television broadcasting in America generated alarm among Christian leaderships in America, for it was perceived as a threat to the quality and gravity of what was preached, as the strength and appeal of the broadcasters were attributed to skills in adapting to technology more than the substance of theology. Also, among 'fearful observers, the growth of evangelical broadcasting represented a massive takeover by the

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[70] Peter G. Horsfield, *Religious Television: The American Experience* (New York: Longman, 1984), at 12

[71] Razelle Frankl, *Televangelism: The Marketing of Popular Religion* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), at 137.

[72] William F. Fore, *Television and Religion: The Shaping of Faith, Values, and Culture* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987). Accessed online at: http://www.religion-online.org/book-chapter/chapter-two-the-technological-era-and-its-threat-to-religion/

[73] Myrna R. Grant, 'Christ and the media: Considerations on the negotiation of meaning in religious television', in *Mediating religion: Conversations in media, religion and culture*, Jolyon P. Mitchell and Sophia Marriage, eds, 121–130, at 121–22.

political and moral right and a plot to establish a religious republic with the evangelical and fundamentalist broadcasters as the major spokespersons'.[74]

The broadcast phenomenon raised other issues attracting early research, such as the relationships between meaning and media, namely, the personalized ability of broadcast audiences to negotiate their own, more autonomous sense of religious meanings. Audiences, therefore, interpret a personal reception of symbolic significance of religious content conveyed through new mediation that gradually diminishes the charismatic authority of religious figures, as well it raises alternative contexts to address 'metaphor, symbol, and story' with television.[75] Proselytization became a subject of study from an *instrumentalist* perspective, in which the means of communication seemed as important as the content of the messaging, thus influencing spiritual alternatives, such as conversion.[76]

It should be noted that academic interest in religious broadcasting 'remains an important aspect of the study of media and religion'.[77] In their edited book, Thomas and Lee introduce research that investigates the notion of 'global and local televangelism' from a variety of religious groups and with a range of purposes that vary from the 'commodification of religion' to matters of 'authority'.[78]

Past research and theory-making continue to help frame media effects in the digital age. The reason, perhaps, is straightforward: one of the major conceits of religion and media studies is the fact that mediation always matters: that is, whenever 'meaning' is conveyed, its reception is influenced, at least in part, by the means of its conveyance. According to Marshall McLuhan, the matter is quite stark: 'In a culture like ours, long

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[74] Horsfield, *Religious Television*, at xiii.
[75] Myrna R. Grant, 'Christ and the media', at 128.
[76] Rosalind I.J. Hackett, 'Proselytism/Proselytization', in *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert A. Segal and Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, 2015), at 3:154.
[77] Pradip N. Thomas and Philip Lee, 'Global and Local Televangelism: An Introduction', in *Global and Local Televangelism*, ed. Pradip N. Thomas and Philip Lee (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), 1–17, at 2.
[78] Ibid.

accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message.'[79] He also remarked that media are 'active metaphors in their power to translate experience into new forms',[80] which has significance for contemporary digital media studies, as technology continually raises non-technical issues of human agency, ethics, quality of content, and metaphoric meaning.[81] This prospect also suggests broader notions of hyper-individuality, a highly personalized experience with media interactions, all of which is arguably associated with individualism as a product of modernity.

Carey likens the means of communication to the actual means of transportation that 'brought the Christian community of Europe into contact with the heathen community of the Americas'. Transportation was thus viewed as a means to 'establish and extend the kingdom of God, to create the conditions under which godly understanding might be realized'.[82] Carey thus located 'moral meaning' in communication as comparable to physical transportation and its effects—sacred or vehicular. In other words, media forms are transporters of information and are in themselves imbued with cultural and religious significance.[83]

Media theory, as a descriptor used by McLuhan and other scholars, seeks to construct a pattern of in the 'influences of communication technologies' on the content they convey.[84] Lundby classifies McLuhan's theory as 'technological determinism' and states that the theory 'focuses on the distinct characteristics and influences' of media forms, such as those of print and television technologies.[85] Communication technologies,

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[79] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of* Man (New York: Signet, 1964), at 23.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Birgit Brauchler, throughout her book, expands on the notion of 'the metaphor of cyberspace' with regard to the study of the relationship between the Internet and the question of identity. Birgit Bräuchler, *Cyberidentities at War* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013).
[82] James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, Vol. 1 (London: Psychology Press 1989), at 15.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Lundby, 270.
[85] Ibid., 227.

then, are more than passive means of conveyance; rather they exert influence upon such seminal aspects as 'modes of thinking' and 'value systems'.[86] For Ess, one of the fundamental claims of media theory 'is that our primary communication technologies correlate with different emphases within our conceptions of selfhood and identity', a concern that begins with oral transmission.[87]

However, despite this initial flurry of media scholarship and theory-building, early media scholarship did not place religion in the foreground or centre of research. Essentially, the field remained a media-centric discipline.[88] But subsequently that disciplinary framing changed, as it became increasingly evident that media and religion occupy, to an important extent, a common conceptual and practical space in the lives of people in a more mediated age.[89] Therefore, at the close of the twentieth century and the beginning of the present one, there has been 'a blossoming of academic interest in media and religion'. [90] Media and religion were once independent areas of study, but that changed. 'One can speculate about the reasons for this—the growth of religious television programs and websites, concerns about how the media should portray religion following 9/11'. The speculations aside, research of media and religion 'has now emerged as one full of potential for researchers'.[91]

This pronounced transition took the study of media and religion in a more explicit direction as an emerging subfield, field or discipline of academia[92] that involves a range and merging of methodologies (qualitative, quantitative, discourse analysis, ethnographic,

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[86] Ibid.
[87] Ess, 619.
[88] Hoover, at 10.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Luís Mauro Sá Martino, *The Mediatization of Religion: When Faith Rocks* (London: Routledge, 2016), at 30.
[91] Luís Mauro Sá Martino, *The Mediatization of Religion: When Faith Rocks* (London: Routledge, 2016), at 30.
[92] Stout, 1.

etc.) native to media studies, religious studies, sociology, history, psychology, and theology, among other fields.[93]

The 'disciplinarity' of digital media studies may still have been only a decade ago a debatable matter for some scholars. Sterne, for example, suggested that digital media studies have developed into a new scholarly discourse or field. He asks, 'Is it an emergent discipline? Should it be?'[94] Thus, what was once considered a growing, albeit provincial, area of academic interest within media studies, the research of religion and media has developed into a distinctive academic area that has contributed significant original scholarship to the larger questions raised in the media–religion ambit. The very notion of an audience, for example, has attracted studies that have proffered impact theories and narratives relating to the new medium, producing scholarship that examined the 'theological origins of the digital',[95] 'virtual religiosity' and 'virtual rituals',[96] and 'digital religion' (a phrase meant to describe the practice of religion in 'digital media and spaces').[97] These analyses of the existential meaning of digital conveyance are upheld in part by the transformation of the very notion of a media audience from passive receivers of information to active participants in 'information gathering and exchange', as Gary Bunt describes.[98] In other words, the audience—the nucleus of a media ecology—has undergone a 'participative turn' that has expanded to a marked extent the sheer number of content producers who appropriate digital media disruptions to proffer content with noticeable ease and with or without vetted rigour[99]—a noteworthy concern of scholars who study extremist groups and recruitment content online. Other facets of digital media,

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[93] Campbell and Altenhofen, 1–2.
[94] Jonathan Sterne, 'Digital Media and Disciplinarity', at 250.
[95] Charlie Gere, *Community without Community in Digital Culture* (Houndmills, Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), at 18–25.
[96] Lorne Dawson, 'The mediation of religious experience in cyberspace', *Religion and Cyberspace*, ed. Hojsgaard and Warburg, 15–38, at 15–17.
[97] Pauline Hope Cheong, *Digital Religion, Social Media, and Culture: Perspectives, Practices, and Futures*, Digital Formations (New York: P. Lang, 2012); Campbell, *Digital Religion*, at 1, 4–5.
[98] Bunt, *iMuslims*, at 131.
[99] Jolyon Mitchell, 'Emerging Conversations in the Study of Media, Religion and Culture', *Mediating Religion: Conversations in Media, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Jolyon P. Mitchell and Sophia Marriage (London: Continuum, 2003), 337–50, at 337–38.

besides audience, have attracted similar academic responses. For one, research agendas now must take into consideration the social media phenomenon, which has introduced new avenues of communication, each of which influences religious discourse.

Thus, the study of the various intersections of religion and media becomes more poignant 'as we move further into the twenty-first century. It is through the media that much of contemporary religion and spirituality is known.'[100] The very 'contemporariness' of religion, as framed, is increasingly driven in large measure by media.

In response, academia has turned greater attention to the study of religion and media, and now particularly digital media. The work of Gary Bunt, for example (discussed in greater detail below), contextualizes and chronicles 'what happens when two of the dominant elements shaping life in the twenty-first century, Islam and the Internet, combine'.[101] Hoover argues that the religion–media inquiry is 'about the *practice* of religion, the way that religion is *done* in the context of media culture'.[102] Lorne Dawson raises important questions that relate to the effect of digital media on the sense of belonging that religions have always striven to achieve among individuals and communities in pre-digital times, but in the digital space, two social crises seemed to have followed: challenges to religious authority and religious authenticity.[103] Perennial aspects of the religion discourse seemed to be challenged by new media. Heidi Campbell, for example, examines the alteration by digital media of the notion of 'community' in religion, particularly online forums that 'took on community identities as they generated loyal support from members'.[104] and Pauline Hope Cheong shows how the notion of

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[100] Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age, Religion, Media and Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), at 1.
[101] Bunt, *iMuslims*, at 275.
[102] Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age*, at 7.
[103] Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan, *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2004), at 3–5.
[104] Heidi Campbell, 'Community', in Heidi Campbell (ed.), *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 57–72, at 58.

'religious authority' may be diminished by digital media, as it 'allows different people to have open access and gain greater control over knowledge and social information'.[105]

McLuhan's evaluation of the media more than 50 years ago seemed to have anticipated what we observe today with the extraordinary reach and power of digital media.[106] In fact, there is more than prescience involved in this observation. What McLuhan's remark (and the pre-digital time frame in which he stated it) implies is that there is an essence to media, mediation, and meaning that is consistent. This is important to remember when considering digital media and their rapport with religion, and the relationship between the online world and real life. While it is true that digital media represent, in an important way, a paradigm shift, historical scholarship has 'demonstrated that many of the trends and capacities of the media age have deep roots'.[107]

These comparisons of new media with the past are useful to bear in mind, as they help to frame the examination of the Internet and emerging digital media forms—from static websites and blogs to audience-driven content producers to highly interactive social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and more: a vast social media phenomenon that nearly each year introduces new avenues of communication.

2.3 Religion and Digital Media Studies as 'Waves'

There are important overlaps and shared theories between traditional and current media and religious studies (as discussed above); however, situating digital media studies in that tradition serves to magnify the significant differences between past and present media systems, highlighting a *unique* relationship between media and religion today. For some, in fact, it signals an altered sense of religion as practised. Digital media offer 'interactivity, hypertextuality, and its method of dispersal',[108] all of which affect not only

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[105] Cheong, 'Authority', at 72.
[106] Bunt, 'Religion and the Internet', at 707.
[107] Stewart M. Hoover, 'Religion and the Media', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Peter Clarke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 688–704, at 688.
[108] Gregory Price Grieve. 'Religion', in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, ed. Heidi Campbell (New York: Routledge, 2012), 104–18, at 108.

the means of communication but also the practice of religion itself. Digital media, for example, broadens the way in which the rites and requirements of a religion may be fulfilled; for instance, paying the required Zakat (Alms-giving) in Islam can nowadays be accomplished from a smartphone. As Campbell states, 'digital culture negotiates our understandings of religious practice in ways that can lead to new experiences, authenticity and spiritual reflexivity'.[109] The realms of both media and religion are 'transforming' and 'being transformed' in a highly mediated age.[110]

These critical findings on the mutual effects of digital media and religion represent a progression of the field of study, which can be seen to have gone through 'waves' of research objectives and paradigms. Thus, before reviewing the literature on Islam in digital space, it is important to speak of the 'wave' convention, its accessibility and imperfection.

Hojsgaard and Warburg have accessibly categorized the progress of research on religion and digital media into major waves,[111] with other waves imminent, as Campbell demonstrates in her expansion on the wave history of this discipline.[112] The wave convention represents 'how research methods and approaches to various research questions have emerged and matured over time'.[113]

Ostensibly, the first wave is the idealistic one that began in the mid-1990s, in which the Internet was yet considered as 'fascinating, new, and extraordinary aspects of cyberspace' that were 'filled with either utopian fascination or dystopian anxieties about the surreal potentials of the new digital communication medium'.[114] The first wave is also descriptive in its approach. Its main contribution is in documenting and mapping out new content of religion in digital space, locating, for example, patterns of religious content

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[109] Campbell and Altenhofen, at 1.
[110] Hoover and Clark, at 2.
[111] Hojsgaard and Warburg, at 1–11.
[112] Campbell and Altenhofen, at 2–9.
[113] Ibid., at 9.
[114] Hojsgaard and Warburg, at 5.

online—primary scriptural sources, rudimentary interpretations, and the semblances of community. In addition, these initial forays in researching religion and the Internet 'tended to offer a general survey of religious experimentation with the internet and suggested observations on the potential religious and cultural implications'.[115] Zaleski, for example, explored how followers of religion made use of the Internet, and how Internet users engaged with the content. He claimed that 'Christian Web sites comprised more than 80 percent of the Web sites of the world's five major (most influential) religions.'[116] Such studies were typical of first-wave Internet research. Hojsgaard and Warburg attribute the start of the first wave to Stephen D. O'Leary, who saw 'computer-mediated communication' as representative of a cultural shift comparable in magnitude to the print technology's effect on the Reformation.[117] Focusing on the technology itself, the first-wave scholarship explored the difference between religions' content in terms of digital and broadcast technology.[118] The first wave, then, drew attention to the technology per se and produced essentialist observations that were 'filled with either utopian fascination or dystopian anxieties about the surreal potentials of the new digital communication medium'.[119]

The second wave is marked by its emphasis on 'the diversity of the field and the need to put new findings into a broader historical and social perspective'.[120] It is called, for convenience, the 'categorical' wave. In other words, researchers focused on a finer parsing of *what* is on the Internet and *who* is 'generating these new forms of religious expression online', moving beyond charting the field.[121] Hojsgaard and Warburg observed how scholars worked to provide categorizations and typologies of the content to

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[115] Campbell and Altenhofen, at 3.
[116] Jeff P. Zaleski, *The Soul of Cyberspace* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), at 99.
[117] Hojsgaard and Warburg, at 2. Stephen D. O'Leary, 'Cyberspace as Sacred Space: Communicating Religion on Computer Networks', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 4 (1996), at 87–93.
[118] Dawson and Cowan, passim.
[119] Hojsgaard and Warburg, at 5.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Campbell and Altenhofen, at 5.

understand common trends within Internet practice. Thus, in the second wave of research, 'the significance of computer networks is not neglected', but is framed and interpreted from various perspectives, since the 'Internet does not generate religion, only people do'.[122] Thus, scholars turned their attention to 'the evolution and development of a typology of cyberspatial religious discourse' through 'category'.[123] Karaflogka, for example, documented the expansion of Taliban presence in cyberspace. Her search in 1996–97 'produced 895 pages related to Taliban, one of which was the official site. On 16 April 2001, the sites were 329000.'[124]

According to Campbell and Altenhofen, landmark edited volumes on religion and the Internet typified the second-wave emphasis. Researchers 'examined the impact of the internet on religious groups and culture', as seen in Cowan and Dawson.[125] Lovheim, moving beyond first-wave concerns, studied identity-making among 'young people' who were increasing immersed in the Internet and, perhaps, have experienced changes in their 'identity construction'.[126] Similarly, Bunt considered the offline–online boundaries against the growing availability of Islamic content online, particularly the Qurʾān and access to various interpretations for 'marginalized or underrepresented groups'.[127] Essentially, the second wave sought answers to the 'what next' query: a study of religion and digital space beyond merely charting the waters of a new form of religious expression.[128] According to Campbell and Altenhofen, researchers contended with and examined how 'text became understood as the embodiment of the person online' and explored the question, 'How do scholars treat and analyse a text that is seen as the

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[122] Hojsgaard and Warburg, at 9.
[123] Anastasia Karaflogka, 'Religious Discourse and Cyberspace', *Religion* 32, no. 4 (2002), 279–9, at 279.
[124] Ibid., at 287.
[125] Campbell and Altenhofen, at 5.
[126] Mia Lövheim, 'Young People, Religious Identity, and the Internet', in *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*, ed. Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan (New York: Routledge, 2004), 59–73, at 59–63.
[127] Gary Bunt, 'Rip. Burn. Pray: Islamic Expression Online', in *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*, ed. Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan (New York: Routledge, 2004), 123–34, at 126.
[128] Dawson and Cowan, at 1–3.

representation of a person's identity and body online?'[129] These second-wave studies attempted to categorize and begin interpretation of online religious content.

At the time of introducing their 'wave' convention, Hojsgaard and Warburg believed that the 'third wave of research on religion and cyberspace may be just around the corner'.[130] This wave would come from 'different backgrounds and […] diverse methodological preferences may very well indicate that the topic is maturing academically, and that it is maturing well'.[131] Since then, the corner has been turned, as it were, and Campbell has advanced the wave framework to incorporate and interpret new research on religion and digital space. The core question of the third wave shifted from 'what next?' to 'so what?' In other words, religious content in new media had become so voluminous and diverse, such that the previous waves of research no longer sufficed to provide for a fuller understanding of this unprecedented expansion of religious ideas and texts online. Thus, a need arose to 'explain and contextualize research efforts to see how studies of religion online illuminated not just trends in digital culture, but pointed to larger shifts in religious culture in general'.[132] Thus, third-wave research is called the interpretative wave, in which content online of necessity attracted theoretical and interpretive inquiries. The phenomenological findings of online research revealed the need for an assessment that, through key analytical frameworks, would enable an understanding of the broader social, creedal, and theological implications—among others— of religion online. Advanced theories of identity-making, religious rituals, and community construction helped frame what digital space had been doing to religion and its followers. A significant framework found in this wave discusses changes in religious authority—the interpretative framework of this study—which will be explored more fully in subsequent chapters.

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[129] Campbell and Altenhofen, at 6.
[130] Hojsgaard and Warburg, at 9. See also, Douglas E. Cowan and Jeffrey K. Haddon, *Religion on the Internet: Research Prospects and Promises*, (Greenwich, CT; London: Jai Publishing, 2000).
[131] Hojsgaard and Warburg, at 9.
[132] Campbell and Altenhofen, at 7.

The present wave, the fourth, expanded upon by Campbell and Altenhofen, is the emerging trend in religion and digital media studies. It concerns itself with 'further refinement and development of methodological approaches'[133] and is represented in contemporary scholarship particularly by studies that are more refined in examining the social implications and impact that online religion may have on such critical matters as identity and authority, which are perennial materialities of religion but now redefined and challenged by new media.[134]

It should also be noted that 'waves' do not always complement or flow from one another in a linear and seamless fashion. A recent wave may offer corrections of previous scholarship or overlap significantly. Early contemplations in the field, for example, contained suggested that 'the nature of contemporary religion might be completely altered due to online engagement […] current research suggests the features of religion online closely mirror changes within the practice of religion in contemporary society.'[135] Thus, the 'wave' convention is not meant to draw fine lines between study types and the timeframe of their growth, since one may find instances of early scholarship that seem to fit more comfortably into the work of later waves. Bunt, for example, in his early work (presumably first-wave research) recommended, as it were, second-wave cautions: that is, scholars should avoid exaggerating the 'transformational' properties of the Internet, a caution that is based on an explanatory or contextualized understanding of new media rather than a descriptive one.[136] Consider also the work of Hoover and Clark on the cultural impact of the practice of religion in the age of new media,[137] and that of Jeremy Stolow, who addressed the 'specious' postulations about the 'putatively distinct realms of religion and media'.[138]

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[133] Ibid., at 8–9.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Campbell, 'Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society', at 65.
[136] Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age*, 107. See also, Bunt, *iMuslims*, at 3–4, 7.
[137] Hoover and Clark.
[138] Jeremy Stolow, 'Religion and/as Media', *Theory, Culture & Society* 22, no. 4 (2005): at 119.

The present study is placed in the third and fourth waves of religion and digital media studies. The work examines online contestations, a type of online text that requires more than description to unpack its contextual and analytical meanings. In other words, the study seeks to answer the question 'so what?' as described above in third-wave research. Intra-religious contestations online, with regard to Islam, have not received sufficient scholarly attention and would be well-served by phenomenological, descriptive treatments of such content. However, they also require examination through an interpretive framework that addresses the advancement of third-wave considerations. As such, even with a thorough descriptive account of online polemics, new research should seek out and discuss the analytical value of intra-religious contestations, as this study does in the forthcoming chapters. But, as a necessary part of a growing fourth wave in digital media and religion studies, a considered methodological approach to interpreting these online texts needs to be discussed at length, as described in Chapter 5, the chapter on methodology. The study of 'Islam and Muslims on the internet has necessitated the development of new methodological approaches' that have evolved in recent years.[139] The section below provides a review of the major works that have treated Islam and digital media specifically in the last two decades. The purpose is to situate this study in this growing field and discuss its original contribution to the field.

2.4 Islam and Digital Media

In this section, the literature review moves from a general treatment of religion and digital media to the multifaceted expressions of Islam and Muslims online. It begins with an examination of the work of Gary Bunt, who has researched Islam and digital media since the late 1990s, and continues to this day. His research examines the wide-ranging activities of Muslims in the realm of digital communication and has allowed this inquiry to be situated in pertinent broader contexts, as explained below.

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[139] Bunt, '#Islam, Social Networking and the Cloud', at 179.

In coining the phrase 'Cyber Islamic Environments' early in his research, Bunt introduced an operating taxonomy for subsequent researchers to rely on.[140] The descriptor is suitable not only toward the classification of a 'variety of contexts, perspectives and applications of the media' utilized by self-identifying Muslims.[141] The phrase offers a contextualization from which research analyses content of a veritable library of 'worldviews and notions of exclusivity, combined with regional and cultural understandings of the internet and its validity' in knowledge acquisition and conveyance. An overarching purpose in Bunt's work is examining the potential of Cyber Islamic Environments to change 'aspects of religious understanding and expression, and […] to enable elements within the population to discuss aspects of religious interpretation and authority with each other', which does not preclude 'subverting what were conventional channels for opinions on religious issues'.[142]

In *Virtually Islamic*, Bunt shows that there has been a surprisingly robust and swift embrace of the Internet among Muslims, even among those who had moral qualms about the medium. *Virtually Islamic* is a thorough look at the early presence of Islam online that covers the full gamut that online tools offer: websites with the textual sources of Islam, namely, Qurʾān, Ḥadīth (the sayings, descriptions, and accounts of the Prophet Muḥammad), and scholarly commentaries; sites that are (or were) formally part of an institution or of leading scholars; sites that promote and facilitate marriage; sites that advocate or defend doctrinal slants and even lifestyles; online magazines; and blogs and chat forums that give named or anonymous users opportunities to offer their views on topics du jour. Many of these sites contain content that advance or at least represent several movements or ideologies active in the Muslim world: Salafī, Wahhābī, Tablīghī, Ṣūfī, and others. Throughout the work, Bunt situates his study in the academic

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[140] Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age*, at 4–8.
[141] Bunt, '#Islam, Social Networking and the Cloud', at 179.
[142] Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age*, at 201–202.

interdisciplinary context of Islamic and religious studies, as well as media studies. He was among the first scholars to raise important aspects of disciplinarity in media-religion research.

In *Islam and the Digital Age*, Bunt turns his focus from a more general accounting and situating of Muslim/Islamic online presence toward a more finely drawn examination of Muslim utilization of the Internet. Bunt isolated and examined two main purposes that inform Muslim 'zones' of content online: (a) 'activism' in the form of 'electronic jihad' or 'e-jihad' and (b) 'decision making'.[143]

Bunt deconstructs activism into the more virulent activism relating to reactions to the poor political conditions in the Muslim world and including recommendations on how to confront or resist them, whether in Palestine, Iraq, or Afghanistan; and that activism which concerns the benign advocacy of intra-Islamic sectarian aspects and movements (such as Ṣūfī orders, Shiites, and others), which advocates good-doing and the general activity called *da'wa*, which literally means to call for something; in its derived sense, it means to educate people about the religion or aspects of it, often with an eye to calling people to Islam itself.

The 'decision-making' realm, which often overlaps with 'activism', is comprised mainly of the various online *fatāwā* (singular, *fatwā*): that is, purportedly authoritative rulings and opinions about issues ranging from domestic affairs and family law to world politics, and they include formal opinions on the permissibility or prohibition of critical matters such as suicide bombing. In deciphering these two 'dominant zones of Cyber Islamic Environments', Bunt establishes a methodological approach to online Islamic content that is based on genres of the content and their unique impressions and influences, as well as their inseparable relationship to the real-life questions and controversies of a Muslim world grappling with disenfranchisement in a globalized context.[144]

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[143] Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age*, at 205–6.
[144] Ibid.

Bunt's book *iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam* magnifies and builds upon his previous works. In key chapters of *iMuslims*, Bunt lays out more explicitly the 'framing of globalization in an Islamic milieu, with notions of so-called orientalism and the media presciently raised by Edward Said'.[145] It is interesting that Bunt mentions Said in this context, since the effect of Bunt's work in a way resembles that of Said's, both drawing attention to knowledge, power, and media narratives concerning the Muslim world. Said locates his observations on media as an extension of the loci of Western imperial power and subsequent framing effects.[146] In other words, Said contemplates Islam and the media from without. Bunt, however, draws attention to new media but mainly from within: that is, he considers largely Muslim-generated content that references major matters, such as globalization, knowledge transmission, the altered notions of authority, audience, and identity. In *iMuslims*, Bunt establishes the manner in which to approach Islamic discourse and Islamic scriptural sources online. In doing so, he necessarily locates the online space with the 'offline' realm: that is, he examines the 'digitization of many long-standing essential concepts and practices associated with Islam'.[147]

A full accounting of Bunt's findings would far exceed the space available in this literature review. But the value of Bunt's work is significant to the current research in many ways, in terms of establishing methodological approaches. In and of itself, the idea of locating 'purpose' in media exploitation and usages is particularly important. The advantage of 'access' associated with the Internet is centred on content producers having greater ease in surmounting the previously prohibitive economic and logistic obstacles required to compete in offline media. As such, digital media and user-based technologies have opened the gates for more participants to express—with marked relative ease—their voices and activism online. The plethora of new voices in digital space raises and

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[145] Bunt, *iMuslims*, at 17.
[146] Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, rev. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), at 142–45.
[147] Bunt, *iMuslims*, at 77.

complicates the question of 'Who speaks for Islam?'[148] The question is complicated by

the sheer widening and multifariousness of a religious media ecology that has been altered

by digital media disruptions. This change from the 'offline world to the online' is

characterized by two significant 'social consequences': namely, a 'crisis of authority and

a crisis of authenticity'.[149] However, this phenomenon places pressure on researchers to

advance the academic discussion from generalizations to the actual location of patterns in

content and the creation of a representative corpus of online texts. Bunt demonstrates an

approach to deciphering from a given pattern and corpus reasonably sound conclusions

about both the discourses themselves and the tools of their conveyance. In doing this,

Bunt's work connects the online realm with 'offline' ramifications of the modern-day

Muslim milieu and its grappling with globalism and the rather unclear frontiers of

'tradition' and 'modernity'. At the centre of this is the battle over the notion of a

collective identity. As Bunt says: 'There are numerous parallel *ummah* frameworks

operating in cyberspace, reflecting diverse notions of the concept of community.'[150]

2.5 Case Studies of Cyber Islamic Environments

Methodological approaches to studying 'Islamic' texts online revolve around, in part,

qualitative content analysis. Usually, this method applies a case-study approach that

analyses a site or forum that has representative authority, an archetype from which larger

conclusions can be drawn. The following are important examples.

Heather Marie Akou examined the online interpretations of *ḥijāb* (headscarf that

many Muslim women wear in public).[151] Akou contends that *ḥijāb* is a point of

controversy among Muslim women themselves with regard to what properly constitutes

Sharīʿa-compliant attire. Because the Qurʾān itself does not detail its stipulation of modest

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[148] Bulliet, at 11.
[149] Dawson and Cowan, at 2.
[150] Bunt, *iMuslims*, at 31.
[151] HeatherMarie Akou, 'Interpreting Islam through the Internet: Making Sense of Hijab', *Contemporary Islam* 4, no. 3 (2010), 331–46.

attire, such details and forms have been relegated to interpretations that have 'resulted in vast differences of dress' in the Muslim world.[152] What, then, is the role of the Internet in ameliorating this dilemma? Akou suggests that the Internet has provided borderless access to assorted views about *ḥijāb*. She properly sets up the discussion by going over typical citations of verses from the Qurʾān and other sources before she delves into the 'use of cyberspace as a multi-media platform for learning about and debating what constitutes appropriate Islamic dress'.[153] Akou focuses her analysis on 'hijablog' (hosted by thecanadianmuslim.ca), which Akou quite confidently says is 'one of the largest in-print discussions on hijab ever recorded in the English language'.[154]

Akou works from the assumption that the online–offline worlds are very much related. Indeed, she argues that one of the major functions of the Internet has been to continue conversations normally limited in pre-digital technologies. She mentions, for example, that digital video recordings—which can 'easily be edited from a desktop computer'—permit 'users to post digital videos for anyone to watch [that] often make use of Hollywood-style rhetoric and plots to form their arguments'.[155]

Eva F. Nisa's research examines Internet use by Indonesian women who cover their faces (with *niqāb*). These face-veiled women, who are known in Indonesian as 'cadari', are 'often understood by mainstream Muslims as oppressed'.[156] So, taking 'advantage of the freedom of speech that has emerged in Indonesia's post-authoritarian period, they use media strategically for their own purposes in ways quite different from those motivating the internet habits of mainstream Muslims in Indonesia'. Nisa explores how these women formed 'subcultures through the internet'. In her case study, Nisa focuses on a mailing list formed by Salafī women, and online businesses operated by the

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[152] Ibid., at 331.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid., at 333.
[155] Ibid., at 337.
[156] Eva F. Nisa, 'The Internet Subculture of Indonesian Face-Veiled Women', *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 16, no. 3 (2013), 241-255, at 241.

veiled woman. As such, the 'web engagements' of the women 'afford them a level of sociability that enables them to maintain their pious projects of self-shaping and learning'.[157]

Celia E. Rothenberg's study offers an 'ontological' inquiry into discussions about Jinn ('creatures made of smokeless fire who can choose to appear to humans in a variety of disguises') on the Internet, specifically relating to one popular Islamic website and one chat forum in which animated discourses about these creatures have taken place.[158] From a methodological point of view, Rothenberg chooses these disparate Internet entities and categorises the quality of the discourses therein in terms of textual sourcing and formality. The website (www.islamonline.net), Rothenberg notes, contains 'formal opinions from contemporary imams, or fatwas', which tend to be based on Islamic texts. On the other hand, on the chat site (www.islamicweb.com), the 'virtual world's equivalent of coffee-house talk or kitchen gossip', the discussions lack 'specific textual references of the fatwas', and they lack contextualisation of the stories.[159] In other words, 'Internet chat about the jinn is often brief and stripped of the detail that, on the ground, makes it meaningful.' It is interesting that Rothenberg cites the work of anthropologists who coined the 'Great and Little Traditions of Islam', which, in Rothenberg's view, correlate with the discourses on websites versus chat forums.[160]

In another study, Nabil Echchaibi applies a single case-study methodology and subject interviews in examining the online Muslim magazine called 'Alt-Muslim' (which has subsequently become part of the popular religion portal 'Patheos' and is now managed by editor-in-chief Dilshad D. Ali). Echchaibi's stated purpose is to demonstrate that in the online world there are multifaceted conversations occurring among Muslims, contrary to popular impressions or the 'simplistic' view that 'banalizes our understanding

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[157] Ibid, at 251.
[158] Celia E. Rothenberg, 'Islam on the Internet: The Jinn and the Objectification of Islam', *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 23, no. 3 (2011), 358–71, at 360.
[159] Ibid, at 358.
[160] Ibid., at 360.

of the complexity of contemporary Muslim discourses and practices as they related to modernity and their negociation of cultural differences'.[161] These conversations contradict the rather simple impression one gains by consuming traditional media means and their managers, who collectively 'banalize' the nuanced and complex conversations among Muslims with regard to negotiating modernity, secularism, and cultural considerations with Islam itself.[162] Echchaibi views Alt-Muslim's founder, Shahed Amanullah, as one of Islam's 'new interpreters' in an 'Internet sociology', as Jon Anderson had termed them.[163] Echchaibi's examination of Alt-Muslim includes extensive interviews with Amanullah and an examination of the various articles on Alt-Muslim, written mainly by Muslims residing in or from the West.

In a separate treatment, but one similar to his Alt-Muslim study, Echchaibi turns his attention to online media activism and 'choreographies of social change' among Muslims in the form of the website Muslimah Media Watch. In this case, Echchaibi conducts his research through interviews with the site's founder and contributors, as well as conducting textual analyses of the content that appears on the site; the content is mainly in the form of blog posts that comment on or contest narratives about Muslims (Muslim women in particular) that appear in mainstream media outlets.[164] Echchaibi situates this study within the context of Muslim activism online, the kind of activism that takes on narratives that seem implacably supported in mainstream media.

Alexis Kort examines Muslim online content dubbed 'Dar al-Cyber Islam', a somewhat awkward attempt to describe Cyber Islamic Environments. The phrase is borrowed from the idea and phrase of 'Dār al-Islām', that is, the abode of Islam in lands

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[161] Nabil Echchaibi, 'Alt-Muslim: Muslims and Modernity's Discontents', in *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, ed. Heidi Campbell (New York: Routledge, 2012), at 191.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Jon W. Anderson, 'The Internet and Islam's New Interpreters', in *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*, ed. Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, 2nd edn (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 45–60, at 51.
[164] Nabil Echchaibi, 'Muslimah Media Watch: Media Activism and Muslim Choreographies of Social Change', *Journalism*, 14, no. 7 (2013), 852–867, at 854.

in which Muslims are the majority population. The sites she examines pursues 'new concepts' in the realm of *ijtihād*: that is, the process by which juristic rulings are considered and communicated, usually in ostensibly new situations and contexts never seen before in Muslim history.[165] But her more important contribution in this study is her contention that cyber environments have led to innovative *ijtihād* activities that ultimately point to 'reforming trends in Qur'anic interpretation [which] can help lead to the further empowerment of Muslim women'. Kort restricted her research to domestic violence. For her case selection, she analysed the following four websites: (1) IslamiCity; (2) the Islamic Society of North America; (3) Jannah; and (4) the Muslim Women's League. In her analyses of the websites, Kort says that she found that long-standing notions of important concepts of community and edict-making (*ijtihād*) have been altered.[166] She noticed, for example, in the website IslamiCity, challenges to the views of traditional scholars, such as Abul Ala Maududi (1903–1979), an Indian thinker and Muslim revivalist who founded the movement Jamaal-e-Islamic. Kort perceives that there are 'strong voices' emerging out of America, where 'Muslims have the freedom and need to seek out modern meanings of Islam. This is evident in the articles cited on the websites, which are all written by Muslim American activists and scholars.'[167] Kort also concludes that her study advances the possibility that 'traditional Islamic notions' of community (*ummah*), the scholarly class (*'ulamā'*) are transforming.[168]

Simona Lavaca investigates the use of the Internet for 'soft' *daʿwa* by Islamist movements in the United States. What Lavaca attempts to establish is an overview of the online work of Islamic organizations in the United States involved in *daʿwa*, that is, teaching or proselytizing Islam to Muslims and non-Muslims. These organizations are

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[165] A. Kort, 'Dar Al-Cyber Islam: Women, Domestic Violence, and the Islamic Reformation on the World Wide Web', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 25, no. 3 (2005), at 363–383, at 363
[166] Ibid., at 364.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid., at 380.

open, not-for-profit organizations that have employed digital technologies and access to 'promote their interpretation of Islam and to attain political goals'.[169]

Murni Mahmud and colleagues have produced a study that pursues an evaluation of user experiences with select Islamic websites, all the users of which were Muslim. The study relies on surveys of users of these websites (Islamic Relief, Challenge Your Soul, Islam A Share, and Islamic FAQ). The statistical results show how users evaluate these sites according to factors such as trust, legitimacy, and credibility. The methodology of this study does not relate to this study per se, but it does demonstrate a quantitative approach to studying user experiences in Cyber Islamic Environments. [170]

2.6 Salafism, Sufism, Extremism, and the Internet

The terminologies and ideological definitions of 'Salafism' and 'Sufism' are addressed in greater detail in the next chapter, in which their meanings, history, and contemporary iterations in Muslim thought are defined and operationalized for this study. In brief, Salafism is a term that broadly refers to modern reform movements in Islam of the late 1800s and early 1900s, and it refers also to contemporary movements generally referred to as 'purist' Salafism in new scholarship. Sufism, on the other hand, is widely referred to as the mystical dimension of Islam that includes beliefs and ritual practices that some believe are external to the religion. This accusation has drawn negative attention from ideological movements such as Salafism and Wahhabism. As such, Sufism receives harsh criticism, if not rebuke, from Salafists. The Salafism–Sufism divide is among the most significant ideological differences in contemporary Islam. In addition, radicalism and extremist views, perhaps indirectly encouraged by the substrate ideologies of Salafism, are also of prime concern in the study of Islam online. What follows is a selection of studies that speak to either the progress of studying Salafism and Sufism in digital space

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[169] Simona Hlavacova, 'US-Based Islamist Network: Presence in Cyberspace and Online Projects', *Masaryk UJL & Tech* 1 (2007), 263–69, at 263.
[170] Murni Mahmud et al., 'Content Evaluation of Islamic Websites', *Age* 20 (2012), 21–30.

and/or the importance of this study that examines an understudied area of media-religion research, namely, online contestations within Islam.

Merlyna Lim, for example, discusses extensively the role of the Internet in fostering Muslim radicalism and anti-Americanism in Indonesia. Her study focuses on a specific region but depends on more generally applicable observations. She contends that, through increased use of the Internet, 'Islamic radicalism in Indonesia has begun to develop links with similar radical Islamic movements in other parts of the world.' Her study shows how these radical groups use the Internet to 'disseminate the messages of Islamic radicalism, anti-Americanism, and other sentiments from local to global scales'.[171] Lim operates from the working postulate that the Internet enables people (including radicals) to develop 'multiple identities', by which she means that one may 'strengthen national identity while also fostering a deterritorialized identity' to connect to global radical angst. In Lim's study, supra-national identity relates to a worldwide phenomenon of religious fanaticism in the Muslim world, the ranks of which represent a small minority of the world's Muslim population but somehow successfully leverage the Internet for their purposes. Lim emphasizes the fact that digital media dispose of the 'one-way' conveyance of information characteristic of traditional media, dissolving the marked 'distinction between producers and receivers of information'. She says that, because 'Internet users can be both producers and receivers', movements (of any ilk) are able to engage audiences more directly and well beyond the immediate city, region, or even country of origin. Lim relies on case studies in her monograph. In one, she looks at the radical movement Laskar Jihad, founded in Indonesia in 1998, the online presence of which has grown stronger over the years.

Carmen Becker looks at Salafī activism in German and Dutch online forums. She begins with the premise that 'recent years have witnessed an expansion of Salafī activism

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[171] Merlyna Lim, *Islamic Radicalism and Anti-Americanism in Indonesia: The Role of the Internet* (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center, 2005), at 3.

into computer-mediated environments like online discussion forums'.[172] She also explains some of the stated core beliefs of Salafism: namely, as the name itself suggests, a return to the 'prophet and the first generations' who 'embody the perfect model of a (Muslim) life which Salafī Muslims strive to emulate'. Without challenging that Salafī conceit, Becker analyses Salafī discussion forums that address religious practices which are purportedly constructed around notions of legitimate 'religious sources' and interpretation. In the process, she dissects four aspects of the practices discussed in these forums. The most relevant aspect of her work to the present research is what she terms 'Fragmentation and re-alignment', a method of applying a 'digitized corpus' of Islamic knowledge that upholds some kind of traditional 'Islamic argumentation' that have pre-modern roots in Muslim intellectual history. In so doing, the 'collaboration' of the members of the forum contributes to 'a broader decentralizing tendency within Islam'. What is important in this observation is that it echoes a popular critique of Salafism and its epistemology in doing away with 'tradition' and its more rigorous requirements in terms of rational argument-making and deriving rules from sources. Becker's approach includes locating common threads that she detects in the forums, which become front and centre of her content analyses.

Birgit Brauchler has done lengthy and extensive work on 'cyberidentities at war'. Although her work focuses on the Moluccan Internet conflict in Indonesia, her study makes a more elaborate and compelling case about identity dynamics and the Internet, in which the author argues that online realms do more than 'constitute a reproduction' of the conflict in real space. The spaces of virtual digital media and those of offline realms can become inseparable in conflict contexts.[173]

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[172] Carmen Becker, 'Gaining Knowledge: Salafi Activism in German and Dutch Online Forums', *Masaryk UJL & Tech* 3 (2009), 79–98, at 80.
[173] Birgit Bräuchler, *Cyberidentities at war: the Moluccan conflict on the internet* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), at 17. The author uses the phrase 'cyberidentities' throughout her work to describe an online conflict in the Indonesian islands and its effect on identity.

She examines Internet-enabling identities as fuelling the larger conflict. In her case study, Brauchler examines a Muslim–Christian conflict in a region of Indonesia and considers how its actors employ the Internet to forge identities in a 'deterritorialized' context, that is, mediated in electronic rather than physical or localized space.[174] Brauchler is detailed in setting up her work in her early chapters, where she describes her methodology (an ethnography or anthropology of the Internet). This work is useful to this study, particularly her finding that the Internet enables the creation of a 'counterpublic to national media' and, by extension, a counter-space to traditional frames of identity-construction within the religion ambit.[175] She also raises a significant point that, even though the percentage of Indonesians who have access to the Internet is low, this does not necessarily or directly correlate to the 'real influence of the Internet' in the context she studied.[176] Like Bunt's view about the dichotomy of the digital divide and ultimate digital effect,[177] Brauchler's case study suggests that Internet penetration rates do not fully inform the evaluation of new media's influence–potential, perhaps, because of the potential of a minority who are influenced by the media having the capacity to influence others who are less connected, as it were.

In his work on online Sufism, Bunt examines its representation in what he calls the 'multimedia Sufi'.[178] He offers a key example of 'how cyber-Islamic environments have evolved—and how Islam can be represented in the modern world'. Taking advantage of the ease, immediacy, and reach of digital venues such as YouTube, Ṣūfī orders have learned to produce or repost content that proffers their perspectives on matters of the heart (prayer requests, dream interpretations, and so on), but also on politics and those groups they perceive to be their ideological opponents—that is, Salafī and Wahhābī groups. Bunt examines the Naqshbandi-Haqqani Ṣūfī Order and their web presence in the form of

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[174] Ibid., at 43–44.
[175] Ibid., at 330
[176] Ibid.
[177] Bunt, '#Islam, Social Networking and the Cloud', at 180.
[178] Ibid., at 187–91.

SufiLive. Just days after the death of Osama bin Laden, for example, the site uploaded a video that was critical of bin Laden and his interpretations of martial jihad.[179]

The responses to the pronouncements against Wahhabism were at times sharp and confrontational, Bunt's research reveals. While it is true that much of what SufiLive posts does not represent mainstream Islam, it does offer a glimpse of the vitriolic and growing divide between Salafism (and Wahhabism) and Ṣūfīs, something that I would like to pursue further, since, in my view, this schismatic has the potential to come close to that of the Sunnī–Shia divide.

Bunt places his examination of SufiLive in the larger context of 'religious authority' online. He then moves on to extremist rhetoric and to calls for jihad online, as well as online activism. For the most part, the texts or videos communicated in cyber-Islamic environments are in fact extensions of what is occurring in *real* life. However, having said that, something different has been happening with the advent of the Internet, something 'shifting,' as Bunts words it. 'Online articulation of religious values, and the use of internet tools as a natural means of acquiring data on a range of issues, has meant that cyber-Islamic environments increasingly dominate conversations about Islam by Muslims', Bunt writes.[180] This is a critical observation to bear in mind when examining the intersections of religion and cyberspace. Bunt studies jihad content and its potential links to intra-Islamic ideas, such as Salafism, and examined the so-called 'Saviour Sect' activism online and its associations with violence.[181]

Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor, in her work on 'online Sufism', adopts a case-study method as well, as she applies a thematic approach, examining three discussion threads found in a UK Ṣūfī forum. They are: 'logic or love' (debates about thinking logically and acting on faith); 'religion and God' (discussion of the stress of formal religion and its

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[179] SufiLive is organized by the followers of Shaykh Nazim Adil Al-Haqqani, who is based in Cyprus, though the site is based in the U.S.
[180] Bunt, '#Islam, Social Networking and the Cloud', at 200.
[181] Bunt, *iMuslims*, at 220.

dampening of an experiential relationship with God); and 'Women's discussions' (a women-only discussion group that took on a range of issues from the exchanging of recipes to matters concerning Ramadan).[182]

Jonas Svensson's work examined videos posted on YouTube that pertained to the celebration of the Mawlid—that is, the birthday of the Prophet Muḥammad. In his study, Svensson seeks to find differences between online and real-world contestations over the debate on the permissibility of celebrating the Prophet Muḥammad's birthday. In so doing, he raised the issue of 'religious legitimacy' in the innovation of such celebrations.[183] Svensson also draws attention to the comments section of YouTube videos and analyses them according to the various expressed positions about the legitimacy of the celebration. In essence, Svensson explores videos and comments about an intra-Islamic dispute over celebrations of the Prophet Muḥammad's birthday in order to demonstrate the vehemence of the participatory culture online 'against the background of existing off-line discourses, attitudes and practices'.[184]

Thus far there have been few studies of quietist Salafī polemics online that pursue a methodology involving the gathering and examination of Salafī patterns of arguments and terminology as predicates to the interpretation that they represent claims to religious authority.

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[182] Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor, 'Online Sufism – Young British Muslims, Their Internet 'Selves' and Virtual Reality', in *Sufism in Britain*, ed. Ron Geaves and Theodore Gabriel (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 161–76, at 169–72.
[183] Jonas Svensson, 'Itz Bidah Bro!!!!! GT Me?? – Youtube Mawlid and Voices of Praise and Blame', in *Muslims and the New Information and Communication Technologies*, ed. Thomas Hoffman and Göran Larsson (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 89–111, at 89.
[184] Ibid., at 90.

CHAPTER 3

DEFINING TERMINOLOGIES

3.1 Introduction

This research concerns the study, analyses, and interpretive framework of significant

online contestations within contemporary Muslim thought. The main content producers of

the polemics and the object of their censure that are the concerns of this study have

descriptors that are readily recognizable and frequently used in popular and academic

discourses. However, despite the regularity of their use, the terms are often unevenly

defined, misappropriated, or presented with insufficient parsing, as scholars have recently

noted.[185] The terminologies used to describe the ideological factions fall under the rubrics

of 'Salafism' and 'Sufism'. The nomenclatures are problematized for good particular to

each term, and thus require individual attention. Therefore, in this study individual

sections are dedicated to the typologies of these ideological streams and their support

terminologies, as their meanings have evolved and have been altered over time, resulting

in definitions that often conflict with one another across the literature. The urgency of the

need to affirm and defend the meanings of these important terms has increased in recent

years, as significant works have been published that directly challenge a long-standing

view of what Salafism means today, which will be discussed below. While it can be

argued that polemics and religion seem always to have been inseparable, it is not possible

to analyse online polemics without understanding the predicates: the ideological purchase

of the makers of the polemics and the key words located in their contestations.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to define the key terms according to their

nominal, *historical*, and ultimately *operational* meanings, which, in turn, confer upon

these separate categories of Islamic visions *analytical* value in this study and, perhaps,

similar studies elsewhere. In addition, this chapter, in and of itself, answers the growing

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[185] See, for example, Haykel.

need to provide a more precise understanding and presentation of terms that have become more complicated because of current events of the post-Arab Spring Middle East region and recent research that challenges long-standing definitions of Salafism, as explored below.

3.2 Salafism

The first part of this chapter focuses on 'Salafism' with the purpose of providing a valid definition of the word from a range of conceptual, historical, and contemporary iterations (linguistic and ideological). At a fundamental level, addressing the main question here— 'What do we mean by Salafism?'—is only partly a linguistic exercise; it concerns more the historical and ideological connotations of Salafism as they have evolved. Thus, this chapter seeks to offer an *operational* definition of the term Salafism in order to 'concretize the intended meaning' in relation to this study.[186] This chapter also addresses a pre-methodological concern: namely, separating the popular or headline use of the term (as mentioned in the introduction) from the ideation of Salafism as a substrate ideology that informs many of the online polemics and their potential impact in the real world.

Salafism, it should be stressed, is an especially problematic term that has attracted significant renewed interest in recent years, with attempts to redefine more precisely what Salafism means as an ideology and as a movement of varied iterations. However, Salafism has a history of being 'ill-defined and often misunderstood in the literature of this movement, and in the studies on Islamism more generally'.[187] In attempts to study Salafism, particularly after 2001, when academic interest in the ideology significantly increased,[188] it has become clear that the definitions and usages of 'Salafism' have 'never

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[186] Berg and Lune, at 39.
[187] Haykel, at 33.
[188] Meijer, at 1–2.

been monolithic', and the term has become 'a catchword' for a variety of phenomena.[189] Lauzière argues that there have been erroneous usages of 'Salafism' in academic literature, some that seem 'mythical', in the sense that the term Salafism has been used to describe certain political movements in the Middle East more than a century ago, but no longer applies today.[190] The word needs to be untangled from past historical frames, political realities, and larger violence narratives that make the usage of the word more *imagined* than substantiated.

As such, 'Salafism' and its various derivatives present a challenge beyond semantics. The variant meanings of 'Salafism' in contemporary discourse (popular or academic) can create confusion or, at the very least, suffer from imprecision, and it is necessary to guide readers toward an intended signification that frames the term's usage in research and affords it *analytical value*. The matter is exacerbated by the fact that 'Salafism' and its derivatives have become increasingly popular in the wake of the so-called 'Arab Spring', which started in the winter of 2010–2011 when the Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak stepped down. His resignation opened the doors for previously suppressed political interests in Egypt, particularly Islamist parties, to publicly contend for authority. Most notable among them were Muslim Brotherhood groups and, in opposition, 'Salafī' parties, the main ones being Jama'at Ansar al-Sunna a-Muhammadiyya[191] and the Nūr Party, 'the political wing of the informal religious organization 'Salafī Mission' (*al-Daʿwa al-Salafiyya*)'.[192]

As a result, Salafism attracted a plethora of analyses from political scientists and commentators who turned their attention to the unprecedented opportunity in modern

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[189] Frank Griffel, 'What Do We Mean by "Salafī"? Connecting Muḥammad ʿAbduh with Egypt's Nūr Party in Islam's Contemporary Intellectual History', *Die Welt des Islams* 55, no. 2 (2015), 186–220, at 187.
[190] Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), at 3.
[191] Shadi Hamid, *Temptations of Power: Islamists and Illiberal Democracy in a New Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), at 127.
[192] Griffel, 'What Do We Mean by "Salafī"?', at 187–8.

Middle East history for Islamist parties to compete for political authority, as was the case in Tunisia and in the most populated country in the Arab world, Egypt.[193] What compounds the Salafism quandary, from the point of view of this study, is the fact that Salafism studies tend to focus 'on the political aspects' of the movement's various—and differing—groups, and in doing so they neglect or dismiss the 'ideational, theology and legal underpinnings' of the phenomenon.[194] In contrast, it is these ideological 'underpinnings' with which this study is primarily concerned, because understanding them is vital to defining the parameters and objectives of the study, and to understanding the ideological roots of splintered extremist groups.

Thus, while the mention of 'Salafism' may evoke thoughts of contemporary political movements, state and non-state actors, and post-Arab Spring militancy, in this study the focus is on the ideological moorings of the Salafist phenomenon today: a 'purist' movement that helps explain the oppositional nature of contemporary Salafism and its project to purify Islam from alleged heretical influences—a project expressed and pursued in the new media frontiers of digital space. In addition, the mere presence of debated meanings, if not controversies over the terminology, does not suggest that it is a hopeless case to attempt to proffer a distinct signification of Salafism from the 'maelstrom of meanings' of the word.[195] On the contrary, it is quite possible to dissect out from the clutter of political frames and variant usages important, stable themes relating to the spectacle called 'Salafism'. Despite the robust discussion surrounding this term, one matter is certain: Salafism exists and it is a phenomenon that exerts significant influence on Muslim communities and public discourses today, and, as scholars have noted, will probably increase its influence in the near future.

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[193] Jonathan Brown, *Salafis and Sufis in Egypt*, The Carnegie Papers (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011), at 9–11.
[194] Haykel, 'On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action', at 34–5.
[195] Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, at 3.

The essential epistemological and methodological features of Salafism—the word and its various manifestations—are sufficiently consistent to enable a study of its contemporary presence and conveyance in digital media. Thus, this section will offer an operationalized meaning of Salafism, locate and analyse key doctrinal stands conveyed in new media and consider the challenge Salafism presents to religious authority.

This section proceeds by (a) tracing the linguistic origins of the word and their evolved relationship to the reform movements of the past and the present; (b) outlining the emergence of the early modern reform movement named 'Salafism', the more recent and often conflicting iteration of it, and the problematic issues with the term 'Salafism' and its cognates as they have been used in academe; and (c) settling upon a more specific definition that adds clarity to this dissertation and the phenomenon it addresses. Ultimately, the chapter identifies an operationalized definition based on modern (late 20th-century) Salafism, often referred to as 'purist' Salafism; the definition includes the epistemological frame and methodological of deriving sacred law from revelatory sources (the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth), as researchers such as Brown,[196] Mandaville,[197] Lauzière,[198] Haykel,[199] and Wiktorowicz[200] have pointed out.

3.2.1 The Etymology of 'Salafism'

'Salafism' is an Anglicized rendition of the Arabic *al-Salafiyya*, which in contemporary discourse describes two movements of recent Islamic intellectual history: 1) the Islamic modernist reform movements of the late 1800s and early 1900s; and 2) contemporary Salafism and its various iterations—purists, politicos, and jihadists, as will be elaborated below. The word's etymology is important to touch upon because the modern appropriations of the term take inspiration from it. *Al-salafiyya* is derived from the Arabic

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[196] Jonathan Brown, *Salafis and Sufis*; Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2014).
[197] Peter Mandaville, *Global Political Islam* (London: Routledge, 2010).
[198] Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*.
[199] Haykel, 'On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action'.
[200] Wiktorowiczicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement'.

word *salafa*, whose basic connotation, according to Arabic lexical sources, refers simply to 'what has preceded' something in time (or in some cases *advanced*), whether it is an event, a person, money, a generation, a deed, or some cultural practice. It originates from the tri-literal root ف ل س (transliterated as *sīn lām fā*), from which all the words of this connotation derive.[201]

Derivatives of ف ل س occur several times in the Qurʾān, each occurrence loyal to the original meaning of *preceding something*. For example, in addressing those who exploit usury—as institutionalized in pre-Islamic times in the western strip of the Arabian Peninsula, a region known as *ḥijāz*—the Qurʾān rebukes the exploiters of such usury, but also offers relief to those who decide to refrain. Such a person 'may keep his *past* gains' (*fa lahu mā salaf*) (Qurʾān, 2:275).[202] In other words, the repentant usurer does not have to remit what he or she had earned *in the past*, so long as he or she adheres to the new ruling. With regard to those who violate the sanctified state of the Pilgrimage, 'God forgives what is *past* …' (Qurʾān, 5:95): that is, one is not required to make expiation for the past violations, so long as one is henceforth constant in the proper observance of the rites of Pilgrimage. Similar meanings occur in other verses of the Qurʾān. But we should also mention that, in one occurrence, the Qurʾān makes mention of the chastisement that befell Pharaoh and his folk, a divine punishment that is a *lesson* or *precedent* for future generations (Qurʾān, 43:56). In other words, the story of Pharaoh is a strong cautionary tale, a *precedent advanced* for future generations to be wary of; in particular, it is a warning to the Makkan elite who opposed the Prophet and the nascent Muslim community, implying that the chastisement that came upon Pharaoh and his elite noblemen may be unleashed upon the leaders of the Makkan opposition to the Prophet Muḥammad.

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[201] Edward William Lane, *An Arabic–English Lexicon*, Islamic Text Society Edition edn (Beirut: Libraire du Liban, 1863).
[202] The translations of the Qurʾān in this dissertation are from M.A. Abdel Haleem, *The Qurʾan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). The bold italics in this citation are from the researcher.

The uses of the derivatives of *salafa* in the Qurʾān do not evoke ethical points of view, per se, although the contexts suggest them. Linguistically the word is a neutral term that frames an event or deed according to the *passage of time*. It should also be noted that a derivative of *salafa* is used when referring to *advancing* loans to someone; in modern parlance, it is a cash advance (without interest), as this meaning occurs in Ḥadīth literature. But its main signification points to what has occurred in the past or has preceded something now present.

From this rather neutral term, the idea of *al-salaf* expanded and became tied to a period of Islam *in the past* that came to be known as the *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* (righteous forebears). This includes the Prophetic period (that is, the lifetime of the Prophet and his companions) and the immediate two successive generations of Muslims. These generations are said to have epitomized piety and scholarship untainted by rationalistic or Hellenistic thought.[203] For most Muslims, 'the temporal proximity to the Prophet Muhammad is associated with the truest form of Islam'.[204] This is supported by a well-known and often-evoked tradition (*ḥadīth*) of the Prophet Muḥammad, who said, 'The best of my nation is my generation, then those who follow them, then those who follow them.'[205]

Thus, this connotation of *al-Salaf*, the people of the earlier generations, may be evoked in a favourable way, without the political or ideological signification that is often now associated with modern Salafism. It would not be considered unusual or strange to hear devout Muslims communicate their aspiration to 'emulate the model of the salaf', although they do not identify themselves as *salafī*s.[206] Trying to conduct one's life in this manner cannot be viewed as a conceit solely of Salafism—the movement, that is. It is

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[203] Mandaville, *Global Political Islam*, at 354; and Meijer, at 3.
[204] Haykel, at 33–4.
[205] This hadith is quoted frequently in scholarship on Salafism and other related fields, although the translations may vary. It also quoted quite heavily by Salafists as well, not to mention Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhābī. The hadith is located in the well-known hadith collections of Bukhārī and Muslim.
[206] Mandaville, *Global Political Islam*, at 262.

possible, then, for *Ṣūfī*s to consider themselves to represent the true *salaf*, but only in the sense of their desire to follow the exemplars of the generations of the Muslim past.[207] Therefore, only in an evolved or more derived sense does Salafism reference modern intellectual and methodological concerns—namely, 'an interpretation of Islam that seeks to restore Islamic faith', perhaps even to save it from the contemporary challenges of modernism and its encroachment into religion.[208] The objective is to purify Islam and restore it to the way it 'existed at the time of Muhammad and the early generations of his followers…. Since this early period represented the golden age of Islam in its pure form, Salafis believe it should be the example followed by all Muslims today.'[209] That is a fundamental connotation of contemporary Salafism.

This background provides an answer to the questions: Why has *al-salafiya* been appropriated in more modern contexts? What makes it appealing? Researchers have prefaced their treatments of Salafism by noting that in the centuries after the passing of the Prophet Muḥammad the need was urgently felt to record and codify important teachings and practices of the religion as informed by scriptural sources, sacred law, and interpretations of qualified Muslim scholars. But none of these matters developed in a vacuum. According to tradition, sacred knowledge and their varied disciplines were conveyed by early generations of the Prophet Muḥammad's *ummah* or community to later generations. Thus, theological and methodological proximity to the prophetic period signifies more reliable and acceptable views and scholarship; and thus their scholarly works and opinions were deemed purer and less diminished by the passage of time and epistemological incursions.[210]

Therefore, an understanding of the etymology of *salaf* underscores how the term has developed to the derived meaning *al-Salafiyya* (Salafism), as a call and movement for

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[207] This is explored in greater detail in Chapter 3.
[208] Brown, *Salafis and Sufis,* at 30.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Ibid.

a theological and methodological reform of Islam that, it is claimed, is based on the early pious generations of Islam (as explored below).

3.2.2 Salafism and the Early Modern Reform Movements

Although it is a single phrase that has remained largely unchanged over the centuries, *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* has become an expression used in disparate ways under the Salafism rubric. There are two significant historical frames that apply to Salafism and the notion of *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*, and it is critical to distinguish between these historical movements in order to carefully deconstruct the usages of Salafism. The early modern reformists of Islam (late 19th and early 20th century) invoked the phrase in accordance with their purposes, and more contemporary proponents of Salafism have done the same, but with important differences in terms of intention,[211] as it will be explained below. While they each make references to the formative generations of Islam, the *pious generations*, deeper probing of early reformist ideas and their association with *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* shows that a marked shift occurred in how the phrase is appropriated in contemporary terms, in a way that often contradicts its former constructs within the reform movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In this study, the two iterations of 'Salafism', or 'two different narratives and characterizations' of it,[212] need to be separated: the 'modernist' reformist Salafism of the early reform movements and the 'purist' Salafism of the contemporary age, nomenclatures that have been revisited in recent scholarship.

One of the main extant connotations of Salafism is derived from intellectual and advocacy positions adopted by the Islamic reform movement generally associated with the well-known thinkers and scholars Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1839–1897) and Muḥammad ʿAbduh (1849–1905): a movement founded near the end of the 19th century and later advocated and advanced by Rashīd Rīḍā (1865–1935) and thereafter inspiring

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[211] Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, at 5–9, 199.
[212] Ibid., at 4.

later scholars of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, each advocating reform (*iṣlāḥ*) of Islam employing various interpretative methodologies.[213] (The Arabic word for 'reform', اصلاح, is, in fact, derived from the second Arabic term in the phrase *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*, translated as *pious* or *righteous* (forebears).)

There is an abundance of scholarly literature on these late 19th- and early 20th-century thinkers (and those whom they immediately influenced) examining the main impetus behind their calls for reform and how the nuances of their views vary, including their intersections with Wahhabism.[214] But what reform meant among the early reform movements contrasts with the idea of reform adopted by contemporary purist Salafist movements.

While there are some variations in their thoughts and approaches, these early reform scholars sought to restore or set aright a Muslim *ummah* (global community of Muslims) that had suffered setbacks politically and socially. Early in his career, for example, ʿAbduh (along with al-Afghānī) advocated and called upon the plurality of Muslims to unite under the banner of Islam, to ignore the boundaries of race and nation,

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[213] Ibid., at 4–5; Meijer, at 6; Anke von Kügelgen, 'ʿAbduh, Muḥammad', in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Third Edition,* ed. Gudrun Krämer, Kate Fleet, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson (Leiden: Brill Online, 2016). Accessed at: http://dx.doi.org.turing.library.northwestern.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_0103

[214] The place and intersections of the 'Wahhābī' descriptor with Salafism is an engaging discussion. In this study, Wahhabism is not explicitly part of the research per se but is mentioned in the context of the ideological connection between Wahhabism and Salafism, rather than a historical construct. Wahhabism is closely associated with a nation-state (Saudi Arabia), while Salafism places emphasis on the ideology itself—the transnational ideation of Salafism's purification project. Thus, it is imprecise to suggest that Salafī arguments are identical with Wahhābī arguments because of the uneasy relationship of the interests of a nation state and pure ideological concerns. But certainly, Wahhabism and Salafism share common conceits. Lauzière writes much about the relationship of early Salafists (such as Rashīd Riḍā, Muḥammad ʿAbduh, and Taqī al-Dīn Hilālī) with Wahhabism throughout his 2016 book *The Making of Salafism*. Wiktorowicz argues, however, that '[o]pponents of Salafism frequently affix the 'Wahhābī' designator to denote foreign influence,' an implicit critique of Salafism as a nationalistic (Saudi) movement that thus lacks independent authenticity. He writes that, in countries in which Salafism is growing, 'local religious authorities have responded to the growing influence of Salafi thought by describing Salafis as Wahhābīs, a term that for most non-Salafis conjures up images of Saudi Arabia.' The foreign quality of Wahhabism thus raises 'the specter of foreign influence.' He also notes that the modern Salafī movement itself 'never uses this term [Wahhabism]. In fact, one would be hard pressed to find individuals who refer to themselves as Wahhābīs or organizations that use 'Wahhābī' in their title or refer to their ideology in this manner (unless they are speaking to a Western audience that is unfamiliar with Islamic terminology, and even then usage is limited and often appears as 'Salafi/Wahhābī')' (Wiktorowicz, at 235).

to repel the influences of the Europeans, and to regain strength and greatness by relying on ways of *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*. However, later in their careers, ʿAbduh and al-Afghānī were less concerned with the details of piety and the canons of orthodoxy of the religion (a pronounced concern of modern 'purist' Salafīs) and more interested in Muslim advancement: that is, a desire to see the Muslim world emerge from the pre-modern age into a more rationalistic and even scientific age in the 19th and 20th centuries.[215]

At the time, many areas of the Muslim world—countries or regions with a Muslim-majority population—had been in sharp economic, cultural, and political decline, very slow to react to modernity, and colonized and exploited by Western powers that, apparently, had created, advanced, and taken advantage of the accoutrements of the modern age—all of which afforded the West significant cultural, intellectual, and martial advantage over Muslim milieus. The early Islamic reformers examined the condition of the Muslim world and located and problematized aspects of Islam's intellectual and methodological practices or assumptions that were seen as hurdles to new opportunities and scales of advancement. Regardless of the sensitivities with regard to addressing definitions of orthodoxy, these methodological strictures, according to the reformers, required re-evaluation or restructuring for the express purpose of reform, if not replacement. One of the changes involved a break or 'rupture' from the methodologies of pre-modern Muslim scholars (but after the generations of al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ), who were seen as having an inflexible attachment to the four canonical schools of Islamic law, as over-privileging a precedent-based approach to interpreting the Qurʾān (particularly its legislative passages) and the traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad, and as being reluctant to consider new interpretations. More important, there was an unwillingness to consider new methodologies to interpret these sources in order to address the new conditions of

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[215] For a concise treatment of ʿAbduh's works and thoughts, see Anke von Kügelgen, 'ʿAbduh, Muḥammad', Encyclopedia of Islam, Third Edition, (Leiden: Brill Online) and for an elaborate treatise about Abduh, see Mark Sedgwick, *Muhammad Abduh* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2014).

modernity with dexterity and freedom, even if such a rupture in approach would create a 'crisis in confidence' among more traditional scholars.[216] As such, the reformers tried to break the inertia that gripped Islamic law and kept it from adjusting to new currents—in, for example, scientific advancements, print technology, modern (or public) education, financial institutions, gender roles in the public sphere, and even political structures. In turn, this anchored Muslim societies in an anachronistic state and stunted their advancement. In other words, the Muslim world was incapable of keeping up, as it were, with Western societies because traditional Muslim scholarship and methodologies did not permit the necessary plasticity in reinterpreting sources of Islamic law for a new age.

The arguments of the reformers pivoted in part on evoking *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* (pious forebears) for the perceived malleability in the way they engaging scriptural sources. The early reformers saw in the pious forebears a flexibility of hermeneutics that diminished over the passage of time. This was before later generations of the Muslim world wavered from the path of simplicity and purity characteristic of the forebears—from their direct, unfiltered interpretative reading of the Qurʾān and words and deeds of the Prophet, the 'second revelatory source of guidance and law in Islam'.[217] This was before the canonical schools of law had been established and legal theories and methodologies coalesced from the fourth century onwards. These subsequent generations had become entrenched in a rigid interpretative relationship with the sources of Islamic law, which ultimately rendered the Muslim *ummah* and scholarship locked into *taqlīd*—blindly following previous interpretations—thus rendering Muslim societies unprepared to adjust to modern life. The evocation of *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* by the modernist reformers was a theological and hermeneutic stand more than a descriptor of a movement.

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[216] Jonathan Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2014), at 184–90.
[217] Aisha Musa, *Hadith as Scripture* (New York: Palgrave, 2008), at 1.

But it should be noted as well that these reformists problematized Sufism just as purist Salafists do; they pointed to the acceptance of alien (Hellenistic) philosophies into Islamic intellectual life and piety and censured what they saw as syncretism and accretion in Ṣūfī practices. Thus, the reformists saw Sufism as a misguided foray that took the Muslim world away from the straight path of the pious forebears. In a way, the reform thinkers had 'a poignant realisation of the contrast between the present state of subjection to an infidel power and Arab might and glory in the days of the Salaf'.[218] However, it is critical to point out that the underlying misgivings that early reform movement leaders had about Sufism related to Sufism's claim to an epistemology that permitted otherworldly experiential knowledge (mysticism) and advocacy of a reliance on canonical schools of law and loyalty as part of their ascendance to the path of gnosis—a primary concern of mysticism. For the reform movements, like (or in association with) the pre-modern Wahhābī movement, Sufism became the main target of reproach. Ṣūfīs then, as they are today, were declared to be 'deviators from the true path of Islam, held responsible for [Islam's] so-called decline, and depicted as a major impediment to its adaptation to the conditions and needs of the modern era'.[219]

Researchers argue that the modern era raised vital questions—informed by the scientific age and, perhaps, the Enlightenment—that were, in part, ignored or even belittled by those scholars entrenched in classical thought in favour of the established Sunnī methodological traditions that the reformers viewed as in need of change.[220] And change cannot occur, the reasoning continues, unless the very conception of religious

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[218] P. Shinar and W. Ende, 'Salafiyya', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs (Brill Online, 2016). Accessed at: <http://dx.doi.org.turing.library.northwestern.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0982>
[219] Itzchak Weismann, 'Modernity from Within: Islamic Fundamentalism and Sufism', *Der Islam* 86, no. 1 (2011): 143.
[220] Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, at 45–6.

authority—the unfettered and decentralized right to derive new rulings for the unprecedented contexts of modernity—is reformed.[221]

The modernist reform movements represent the 'first paradigmatic conception' of the Salafist phenomenon, as it is discussed in the literature, and remain a topic of discussion in current historical studies, as well as the social sciences and humanities. As Lauzière points out, researchers continue to use the term when describing 'a multifaceted movement of Islamic modernism that took shape in the late nineteenth century and lasted until the mid-twentieth century'.[222]

In sum, in advocating a more scientific epistemology and a cautious and select acceptance of Enlightenment conceits, early reformists were critical of aspects of traditional Islamic learning. They viewed traditional hermeneutics as outdated and as creating inertia that hindered Muslims' reasoned response to the modern age. As Roy points out, Afghani was 'more of an activist than a theologian' and his primary concern was calling for a 'return to the true tenets of Islam', but as a means of 'castigating the backwardness of the religious establishment rather than an appeal for the application of sharia'.[223] The latter, however, is more of a central concern of contemporary Salafism, now treated below.

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[221] Advocates of Salafism were careful to frame the inspiration of the call to reform by claiming, in part, one of their inspirations in the person of Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328). As one of the 'the most controversial figures in Islamic history', Ibn Taymiyya advocated important ideas that modern Salafism claims as inspiration, such as resisting a loyal devotion to a single school of Islamic sacred law (or madhhab) and schools of theology. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad*, at 62–3; Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*. In addition, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, has a helpful treatment of Ibn Taymiyya's life and reform activism, 'which might be defined as a conservative reformism, whether it was a case of the formulation of the credo, the rehabilitation of idjtihād or the reconstruction of the state.' See H. Laoust, 'Ibn Taymiyya', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. Gudrun Krämer, Kate Fleet, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson (Brill Online, 2016), accessed at: <http://dx.doi.org.turing.library.northwestern.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3388>
[222] Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, at 4–5.
[223] Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), at 233.

3.2.3 'Purist' Salafism: The 'Salafism' of this Study

The apparent motivations of the early reform movements associated with 'Salafism' differ significantly from those of contemporary Salafism, although they both evoked the term and ethos of the pious forebears (*al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*) and both attempted to diagnose, as it were, the perceived malaise of the Muslim world, a malaise produced in particular by the oppressive conditioning of Western imperialism and the processes of debasement that widely affected Muslim lands, as the reformers viewed it; but also, and perhaps more significantly, the debasement was ultimately caused by *syncretic* or *heretical* beliefs and practices that had been accepted in Islam, as in the case of Sufism. Thus, while early reform intellectuals turned their attention and hopes of deconstruction to traditional methodological matters of pre-modern Islam and, thus, to reconciling sacred texts and previous scholarly activity with reason,[224] particularly in terms of the influence of the Enlightenment and modernity,[225] Salafists today resist this connotation of the term 'Salafism' and redefine it as part of their purification project, which dismisses, for example, European Enlightenment influences.

In this section, the focus is on a dominant iteration of 'Salafism' in contemporary Muslim societies, which has limited connections with the early reform movements mentioned above. Purist Salafism is the main concern of this study because of its incontestable importance and influences in contemporary Muslim discourse and in contemporary Muslim societies, whether they are Muslim-majority countries or Muslim minorities in Western nations. Moreover, this iteration of Salafism constitutes much (if not most) of the digital content that self-identifies as Salafism in thought and in perceived actualization of religious piety.

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[224] Jonathan Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad*, at 8.
[225] Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, at 44–45.

Thus, the 'Salafism' that is of particular importance in this thesis is the 'second paradigm conception of Salafism' known in research literature as 'purist' Salafism,[226] which, as intimated above, is a movement with few similarities to that of the early reformers of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Lauzière is adamant that the attachment of the Salafism label to the early reformers was probably a description after the fact, rather than a term used by the reformers to describe their own ideology. In the case of the purists, the terminology is applied by the Salafist advocates to themselves. This is a key distinction.

Contemporary Salafism is said to be 'a revivalist current within Islam'.[227] In this context, this means that the aim of Salafism, unlike that of early reform movements, is to restore Islam as previous conceived by the pious generations, but as a restoration of Sharia, which was not the express intent of the early reform movements.

The purist model of Salafism has a far greater presence and influence today than the early reform movements of the 19th and 20th centuries. The most recognizable feature of this brand of Salafism is the notion of purity and the project of restoring Islam and Muslim orthodoxy to a pure form: that is, freeing it from what are seen as alien and heterodox views and practices. Thus, the purist project of contemporary Salafism is seen as a practical necessity, for it is these impurities in the religion that have invited God's displeasure and, hence, the debasement of the global community. Purist Salafists make no claim to the Enlightenment or scientific age or to navigating a reasoned response to modernity as the *ummah* enters it. Rather, the purity they seek in and of itself suffices to raise the community from its moribund state. As such, Salafists claim that what they adhere to is 'nothing other than Islam as it was first revealed, unsullied by an innovation (*bidʿa*), deviation (*inḥirāf*), or accretion (*ziyāda*) and uncontaminated by exogenous

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[226] Ibid., at 4–10, 95–102.
[227] Carmen Becker, 'Muslims on the Path of the Salaf Al-Salih: Ritual Dynamics in Chat Rooms and Discussion Forums', *Information, Communication & Society* 14, no. 8 (2011), at 1186.

influences. It is the pure Islam to which the pious ancestors of the first three generations conformed'.[228]

Purist Salafism focuses on key terminologies that are often and consistently evoked by activists in this ideological stream. They are *da'wa*, often translated and/or interpreted as 'mission' or 'proselytizing', by which activists hope 'to establish what for Salafists counts as correct *'aqīda* and the right practice of *ṭahāra*': in other words, the purification of Islam from improper beliefs that have seeped into the religion. Even for 'quietist' Salafism, these terms (*'aqīda* and *ṭahāra*, orthodox creed or tenets of faith and purification of alloyed beliefs) are transformed into 'ideology' and 'political action'.[229]

It is helpful to make a further distinction in contemporary Salafism: that between purist (sometimes referred to also as 'quietist') Salafism and political and jihadist Salafism. The latter strand seeks to achieve its purification project by political means and by way of armed struggle and violence. The Salafism studied here, however, is the former iteration: so-called 'quietist' Salafism. Studying this form of Salafism involves the important work of parsing out the *ideological* aspects of contemporary Salafism, without delving into the violence narratives of organizations, such as al-Qaida and ISIS and their arguable origins in Salafism. That discussion is outside the purview of this study and tangential to the study's framework and methodology. While one can argue that even quietist Salafism seeks or at least hopes for (or advocates) an 'Islamic state' of some kind, the strategies for achieving such a grand goal differ markedly from jihadi ideologies and the groups they inspire. For the quietist purists, it is first imperative to establish an *Islamic society*—built on the restoration of 'proper' faith within individuals—before any such *state* can be achieved. As such, true Islamic 'society, in turn, relies on the prior purification of the doctrinal commitments and practices of the individual'.[230]

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[228] Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, at 6.
[229] Griffel, at 190.
[230] Ibid.

The 'purist' project, however, even among non-violent Salafists, ultimately becomes a negative force—that is, the activity of rejecting what was not present during the age of the *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*—because of the inherently problematic nature of arresting narrative control over what purity means in absolute or universally accepted terms. Thus, in their 'search for impurities', Salafīs 'reject all forms of speculative theology' (*kalām*), because proffering interpretations of such weighty matters as the attributes of God necessarily invites a discursive methodology of foreign philosophies, which 'distort the meaning of the scriptures'.[231] The objectives of the purist agenda of contemporary Salafism takes particular aim at Sufism and practices associated with Sufism, such as building tombs over the graves of Muslim saints or seeking divine favour through their auspices, because they are implicit endorsements of idolatry. Salafīs 'attack' Sufism and Ṣufīs, who 'visit graves and engage in ritual practices that are deemed to be contrary to Islam's creed, such as celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (*mawlid*) and seeking to make the dead a means to God (*tawassul*), or need for assistance (*istighatha*), or an object of intercession with God (*tashaffu'*)'.[232]

The 'deculturing' effects of Salafism mentioned by Roy and Mandaville, which are an important part of the rupture with traditional Islamic methodologies, apply more to the purist Salafism grouping than the early reform movements. They underpin Salafism's challenge of traditional religious authority in Islam and its dismissal of the *madhhab* system of sacred laws or of any practice or theological point that appears to be the product of 'syncretism', which, 'in the salafi view, is the enemy'[233]—it is usually associated with Sufism, and represents an 'epistemological' break from pre-modern scholarly class.[234] Such a purification protocol renders, perhaps unwittingly, Islamic teachings and interpretations outside the confines of time, culture, society, and other aspects of human

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[231] Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, at 7, 97–8.
[232] Haykel, at 41.
[233] Mandaville, *Global Political Islam*, at 79, 246–7; Roy, *Globalized Islam*, at 302.
[234] Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, at 120.

life. In this sense, Islam, as envisioned, is deemed pure, however impossible it may seem to arrive at restorations and interpretations excised of context.

Thus, purist Salafism espouses a more literal understanding of the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth, unchaperoned by the restrictive readings of classical scholars and their canonical interpretations. Purist Salafism places the culpability for the current state of Muslim affairs on the separation of the Muslim nation or world (*ummah*) from a more direct and, therefore, purer understanding of the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth, as the *Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* themselves had understood them. A rigid adherence to the opinions and views of the scholars of the classical age—who 'strayed' from the ways of the pious generations—blocks the Muslim condition from improvement; the hurdles to progress (and God's pleasure), therefore, include those spiritual practices deemed outside the realm of the *Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*.[235] Based on this argument, it follows that Muslims have strayed from the early and, hence, true teachings of Islam and its forebears (the *salaf*) and so have lost their way, have become clients of or compromised by the West, worthy of divine wrath, and caught in a dormant state. Sufism and 'deviant practices' such as 'the worshiping of saints and other dangerous forms of *bidʿa* ("innovation")'[236] are symptomatic of how astray the *ummah* has gone. Salafism opposes the 'understandings of Islam "distorted" by centuries of legal, theological, and mystical debates, self-serving *ʿulamāʾ*, and despotic rulers'.[237] The logic of this diagnosis continues: if Islam were purified of such deviations, then the Muslim world would regain its dignity and stature. As such, Sufism became and remains one of the key objections of Salafism.

Therefore, the 'Salafism' engaged with in this study is not the generic usage of the word that has no sectarian or methodological import to speak of. Nor is it the historical advent per se of 'Salafism' described above—the early reform movements of the late 19th

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[235] Haykel, 33; Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, at 5–9, 41–2, 96–7.
[236] Mandaville, *Global Political Islam*, at 44.
[237] Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Modern Islamic Thought in a Radical Age: Religious Authority and Internal Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), at 7.

and early 20th centuries. The *epistemological* rupture and methodologies that animate

Salafism are at the centre of the Salafism–Sufism schism. This appears to hold true

whether it is the Salafism inspired in the late 19th century with Rashīd Riḍā—who called

himself a 'Salafī Muslim' who rejects *taqlīd* (that is, blindly following a previous ruling

of Islamic law)[238]—or the Salafism of today. As far as influence and impact are

concerned, contemporary Salafism is undoubtedly the most active movement under the

Salafism label.

Purist Salafism has been the dominant, if not triumphant, form of Salafism since

the 1970s[239] and in the post-Arab Spring Middle East its profile has become more

prominent;[240] its appeal to Arab youth, for example, is notable. Perhaps the reason for this

is that Salafism 'offers a very modern form of socialized spirituality' and projects 'a

discourse of authenticity and prophetic originality' that appeals to young Muslims

today.[241]

While there is little contestation over the term itself now, it is necessary to further

refine the definition by distinguishing purist Salafism from its contemporary kindred

Salafī iterations. As noted above, purist Salafism differs from two forms of contemporary

Salafism, 'politicos' and 'jihadists'. While they share ideological underpinnings, each is

distinguished in important ways. Purists do not advocate violence as a means of carrying

out their purification project. In fact, they tend to 'view politics as a diversion that

encourages deviancy'. Their focus is on *da'wa*: that is, calling upon Muslims to cleanse

their faith and practice from foreign elements. Salafīs see 'syncretism as a major source of

innovation. Culture is thus seen as the enemy of pure Islam,' since *culture* is not

necessarily related to or informed by the sacred. Rather, purist Salafīs perform their

obligation of *da'wa* through verbal and written persuasion. On the other hand, the

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[238] Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, 96.
[239] Ibid., 199.
[240] Meijer, at 1–2.
[241] Emin Poljarevic, 'In Pursuit of Authenticity: Becoming a Salafi', *Comparative Islamic Studies* 8, nos 1–2 (2014), at 139.

'politicos' stress the need for the 'application of the Salafi creed' in the political realm, since the political structure 'dramatically impacts social justice and the right of God alone to legislate'. Jihadist Salafism advocates militancy 'to achieve their goals'.[242] All three factions share a common creed but offer different explanations of the contemporary world and its concomitant problems and thus propose different solutions. The matter of categorization between contemporary Salafīs has added complexity, further increased by internal discord among the purists themselves.

The case studies in this dissertation present purist or quietist Salafīs with a significant digital footprint. The digital spaces they occupy, Salafi Sounds podcasts, Salafi Publications' website, and Salafi Publications' Twitter account, are closely associated with one another. Representing purist Salafism, they are explicit in their rejection and critique of violence as a means of purification. They have 'for years opposed rebellion against Muslim governments and had reproduced a fatwa by Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Bin Baz, condemning the theology and tactics of Bin Laden and his followers'.[243] However, despite purist Salafism's harsh criticism of extremist violence, scholars state that the ideological bases of the violent groups are similar to those of the purists. When purist 'Salafists criticize the jihadists, they restrict their objections to the practices and exclude the worldview'.[244] Thus, the ideology of purist Salafism is, to an important degree, a distillation of Salafī ideology more broadly.

3.2.4 Additional Important Matters of Definition

It is worth mentioning that some scholars favour the word 'fundamentalism' (or some form thereof) when referring to ideological features of Salafism or the movement or ideology itself. Therefore, when researching Salafism, it is useful, perhaps necessary, to

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[242] Wiktorowicz, at 208.
[243] Sadek Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism* (London: IB Tauris, 2016), at 126.
[244] Bassam Tibi, *Islamism and Islam* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), at 40.

consider 'fundamentalism' in academic and archival searches. Roy, for example, expresses his preference for the term 'neofundamentalism' over 'Salafism'. Although the term is, by Roy's own admission, 'less elegant', it is preferable to Salafism because, as he contends, Salafism can be delimited to the historical associations with the early reformers and their objectives, as described above 'program to [purify] Islam from cultural influences that encumber the Muslim world's advancement *vis-à-vis* modernity.[245] Roy's position is actually a commentary on the confusion between the Salafism of the contemporary world and the Salafism of the early reform movements.

Brinton problematizes 'fundamentalism' in her study, but nonetheless she uses it as a contradistinctive term to the reformist Salafism of a century ago. When defining what 'fundamentalism' means, she points out features that speak of early reformist Salafism: a political movement that is more concerned with worldly authority over mysticism, rejects reason-based interpretations of the scriptural sources of Islam, and is critical of exegetical sources after the time of the pious generations—here relying on Euben's usage and definition of the term fundamentalism.[246] However, when finding an ideological descriptor for the well-known Egyptian scholar and popular teacher Mitwalli Sha'rawi, whom Brinton studied, 'fundamentalism' does not apply.[247] In his study of Salafī–Ṣūfī strife, Weismann uses the term 'Islamic fundamentalism' for what seems to be Salafī discourses and their long history of vituperations against Sufism. Weismann's 'working definition' of Islamic fundamentalism, which he sees as a hegemonic discourse in Islam, is: 'the contemporary religio-political discourse of return to the scriptural foundations of the religion as developed by Muslim scholars, mystics, and increasingly laypersons and

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[245] Roy, *Globalized Islam*, at 233.
[246] Jacquelene G. Brinton, *Preaching Islamic Renewal: Religious Authority and Media in Contemporary Egypt* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), at 1–2. Throughout her book, Euben uses the word 'fundamentalism' and refrains completely from 'Salafism' and its derivatives, which perhaps underscores Meijer's observation about research 'Salafism' becoming prominent in the post-9/11 world. See Euben Roxanne L. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism: A Work of Comparative Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
[247] Brinton, *Preaching Islamic Renewal*, at 2–3.

movements, which reinterpret these foundations on the basis of their living traditions for application to the sociopolitical and cultural realities of the modern world'.[248]

However, any preference for 'neofundamentalism' or 'fundamentalism' suffers from its lack of acceptance among most contemporary scholars; and, in fact, it is rejected among Muslim activists, who identify themselves as Salafīs. In addition, the use of 'fundamentalism' with historical specificity to describe some aspects of contemporary Evangelical Christianity argues against applying it to Islam. For Sedgwick, 'fundamentalism' has become a less desirable descriptor in academia, as it is 'an etic term applied from the outside rather than an emic term used by those it described'.[249] In contrast to 'fundamentalism', 'Salafism' is an emic term that 'seems to describe a phenomenon that is far less varied than those described' by the word fundamentalist and its various derivatives. As such, Salafism is 'anything but an "imagined category"'.[250]

Perhaps to distinguish between the early modern reform movements and contemporary Salafism, Duderija relies on the term 'Neo-traditional Salafism' to describe the Salafī method of interpreting the scriptural sources of Islam 'as understood by the most eminent authorities belonging to the first three generations of Muslims'. This Salafī interpretative method results in teachings that Salafism advocates, teachings that should 'literally [be] adhered to and imitated in a temporal and spatial vacuum by all subsequent generations of Muslims, primarily by being faithful to a literal and decontextualized Qur'an–Sunna hermeneutic epistemologically and methodologically anchored in Ḥadīth-based literature'.[251]

It is worth noting that discussions on Islamists in Egypt (and likely elsewhere, such as Pakistan) that took place decades ago employed the word 'Salafism' and

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[248] Weismann, at 146. Weismann states that he prefers 'fundamentalism' because of its flexibility, allowing it to encompass other movements under the rubric, such as the Muslim Brotherhood.
[249] Mark Sedgwick, 'Salafism, the Social, and the Global Resurgence of Religion', *Comparative Islamic Studies* 8 (2012), at 59.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Adis Duderija, 'Constructing the Religious Self and the Other: Neo-Traditional Salafi Manhaj', *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 21, no. 1 (2010), at 76.

'Salafists' when referring to the Muslim Brotherhood. For example, Yudian Wahyudi

states that his use of 'Salafism' in his research 'will always designate the Muslim

Brotherhood, whereas secularism stands for liberalism, Nasserism, and Marxism'.[252]

Wahyudi is not necessarily misguided in using 'Salafism' for the Brotherhood of the

1960s and 1970s, as at that time the term was far less defined (and even studied) than it is

today[253] and could be applied to any modernist Islamic movement that, at least ostensibly,

took interpretive inspiration from the 'salaf'—that is, the early generations of the post-

prophetic period. Also, perhaps 'salaf' was appropriated for *strategic* purposes, since

evoking the pious forebears appeals to Muslims as a sign of authentic or well-founded

understandings of Islam—a useful designation for movements such as the Muslim

Brotherhood. But what is particularly interesting is how this particular use of the term had

changed in a relatively short period of time. It would now be considered incorrect to

describe the Muslim Brotherhood as Salafists, mainly because Salafists in Egypt today

readily distinguish themselves from the Brotherhood and often cast harsh aspersions on

the movement, particularly in post-Arab Spring political contestations.

In Syria, as well, Salafists have distinguished themselves from the Muslim

Brotherhood's struggle against the Assad regime. The Brotherhood is one distinct social

and political entity, whereas political Salafists have separate political parties and

aspirations that are almost invariably at odds with the politics of the Brotherhood.[254]

Similarly, Roy speaks of the 'opposition between the Muslim Brothers and Salafist[s]',[255]

an opposition based on the suspicions that the Brotherhood had taken political positions

and made compromises that demonstrate a weakening of connections with the righteous

forebears of Islam. As such, contemporary Salafīs 'claim to be the most authentic bearers

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[252] Yudian Wahyudi, 'Hassan Hanafi on Salafism and Secularism', in *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).
[253] Meijer, at 1–3.
[254] Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists*, at 22, 127.
[255] Cesare Merlini and Olivier Roy, eds, *Arab Society in Revolt: The West's Mediterranean Challenge* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2012), at 44–5.

of [the Prophet Muḥammad's] authenticated words and deeds',[256] a claim they deny for the Muslim Brotherhood, as it became apparent in the textual analyses of online Salafī content presented in the study.[257]

In his exploration of the idea of 'reform' within 'Modernist-Salafiy', Saeed distinguishes between the various phenomena associated with or incorporating the Salafiyya descriptor, such as 'the Islamist-Salafism of the Muslim Brotherhood' in Egypt; the 'Puritanical-Salafism' of the followers of Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb; and the 'Militant-Salafism of Usama Bin Laden'.[258]

Finally, it should be noted that Lauzière's careful and critically sourced arguments recontextualize the claim that Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and Muḥammad ʿAbduh, founders of an intellectual trend in the late 19th- and early 20th-century Egypt, were 'Salafis' as it is understood today. Salafism, as a particular and recognized term that refers to a movement, was constructed much later,[259] and it is important to point out Lauzière's criticism of the usage of Salafism when in association with early reform movements. He argues that 'Salafism' has been misappropriated and misinterpreted by contemporary scholars, who seem to have been instrumental in popularizing Salafī 'labels' for early Muslim reformers.[260]

Thus, Salafism as an ideological construct has undergone dramatic changes since the era of ʿAbduh and Riḍā. To study Salafism today, it is imperative to make the distinction between the usages of Salafism, as an operational terminology, from previous applications of the word. This section has aimed to make that distinction, but it also unpacked and framed the term in order to further contemporary discussions on the

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[256] Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad*, at xiii. (Quoting Omid Safi's foreword.)
[257] See Chapter 6.
[258] Abdullah Saeed, 'Salafiya, Modernism, and Revival', in *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*, ed. John L. Esposito and Emad El-Din Shahin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), at 27.
[259] Ibid., at 42.
[260] Ibid., at 14.

nomenclature and, ultimately, in order to then proceed with the analyses of Salafī texts online.

3.3 Defining Sufism and its Key Doctrines and Practices
3.3.1 Introduction

The study's attention now moves to the second ideological or theological phenomenon of Islam under examination, namely Sufism, and a definition thereof—a definition that, first, suitably defines the phenomenon and, second, relates to this study's framework. Given that Sufism is 'so broad' a phenomenon, with 'its appearance so protean that nobody can venture to describe it fully',[261] and that it 'cannot be stereotyped or reduced to a single paradigm',[262] this section, out of necessity, draws attention to key features or aspects that are arguably fundamental qualities of Sufism and that offer a definitional framework through which the study may examine digital content that animates Ṣūfī–Salafī contestations. The qualities described are those that have received affirmation across a number of academic works on Sufism.

In proffering a generalized account of Sufism, this chapter also pivots on those aspects of Sufism that have attracted criticism in modern and pre-modern history within Islamic circles. Intra-Islamic critiques of Sufism and its advocates and followers remain 'crucial forces shaping' and influencing 'socio-political configurations in the world of Islam while constituting an integral part of an ongoing debate inside Islamic tradition':[263] while the 'currents of dissatisfaction with Sufism had long been present in the umma, they were to grow substantially from the middle of the eighteenth century'.[264] This study would argue that these types of contestation have been given unprecedented range by

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[261] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), at 3.
[262] Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age*, at 198.
[263] de Jong and Radtke, at 1.
[264] Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis*, at ix.

digital media, permitting active content-makers to produce and/or convey polemical

communications in such a way that challenges religious authority when taken as a whole.

     This section thus proceeds by (a) giving a general connotation of 'Sufism'

supported by scholarship and examining (b) the linguistic roots of the word and (c) the

key doctrines of those so defined, with special, though not exclusive, focus given to those

doctrines and practices that have received (and receive) critical disapproval from

Salafists.

3.3.2 Defining Sufism

A word commonly used in treatises on Sufism is 'mysticism' (along with its various

derivatives). For example, Sufism has been said to be the 'major mystical tradition of

Islam', a 'mystical' dimension of the religion,[265] 'mystical Islam',[266] or the 'phenomenon

of mysticism within Islam'.[267] While the terms 'Islamic mysticism' or even 'Islamic

esotericism' have received criticism for being oversimplifications of Sufism, tangential

interpretations thereof, implications of 'a negative value judgment',[268] or

dehistoricized,[269] the 'mysticism' descriptor does offer a good starting point, particularly

when considering the original import of 'mysticism' and its connection with the esoteric.

For some scholars, it is, in fact, proper to call a Ṣūfī a 'mystic', when it 'denotes one who

has access, or seeks access to the "mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven"'.[270] As such, it

may be said that 'mysticism' does fairly represent the meaning and objective that Sufism

claims for itself as the ultimate goal of Islam's spirituality project: namely, attaining a

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[265] Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, at 3.
[266] Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism* (London: IB Tauris, 2012), passim.
[267] Nico Kaptein, 'Mawlid', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al. (Brill Online, 2012). Accessed at: <http://dx.doi.org.turing.library.northwestern.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0716> The list of early Islamic studies scholars who have applied the word 'mysticism' to Sufism is quite long, but it includes Louis Massignon, R.A. Nicholson, and A.J. Arberry.
[268] John Obert Voll and Kazuo Ohtsuka, 'Sufism', Oxford Islamic Studies Online, (Oxford University Press, 2016). Accessed at http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236MIW/e0759
[269] Karamustafa, at 1–2.
[270] Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Aḥmad Al-ʿAlawī: His Spiritual Heritage and Legacy*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), at 34.

realm of awareness whose veils cannot be breached by means of sheer rational contemplations. In other words, the 'intellect by itself', or any other sheer human effort, 'cannot lead to God', since only God Himself can take an aspirant to the experiential knowledge of God.[271] To become an *ʿārif*, a gnostic or a knower of God, involving walking a pathway, according to a paradigmatic view of Sufism, that varies widely among Ṣūfī orders (*ṭuruq*), most of which require the aspirant to be devoted to specific litanies and other practices that are beyond what is otherwise obliged in Islam: the canonical five daily prayers, the fast of Ramadan, the performance of the Pilgrimage (Ḥajj) and the paying of the alms. It is through the practice of these supererogatory litanies, observing them with consistency and presence of heart, that one may—with the guidance of a Ṣūfī shaykh—attain gnosis (*maʿrifa*), a direct experiential knowledge of God. It is thus important to bear this in mind, for modernistic movements of Islam, such as purist Salafism, argue that this outlook leads to a claim of an inner dimension that cannot be attested to by scholastic means or, more importantly, explicitly found in traditional sources, namely the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth (sayings and accounts of the deeds of the Prophet Muḥammad). It is the claim of Sufism, however, that the common practices obliged by Islam are not sufficient to bring one to gnosis—a point of agreement, it seems, with various faiths of which mysticism is an aspect,[272] which adds to the suspicions that some may have toward Sufism. Some also accuse followers of Sufism of giving preference to the inner and unseen world of religious devotion, going beyond scriptural evidence and opening the opportunity for antinomian views to seep into Ṣūfī Islam (a possibility that even Ṣūfī personages and scholars, such as Muḥammad Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), have strongly warned against).[273]

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[271] Karamustafa, at 13–14.
[272] Margaret Smith, *The Way of the Mystics: The Early Christian Mystics and the Rise of the Sufis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), at 1–3.
[273] Carl W. Ernst, 'Tasawwuf (Sufism)', in *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, ed. Richard C. Martin (New York: McMillan Reference, 2003), at 686.

This generalized connotation of Sufism depicts one of the core aspects of Sufism as a methodology (*manhaj*) or sciences (*hilum*) within Islam—a *supererogatory* practice of litanies and rites that helps a devotee to ascend from the worldly realm of common faith and knowledge to the realm of certitude in the unseen and, ultimately, gnosis—as Sufism is often defined.

How, then, does Sufism bring an aspirant to such a lofty degree of faith? While Sufism builds upon the exoteric and canonical qualities of Islam (namely the *Sharīʿa*), as Ṣūfīs contend, what it seeks—the esoteric or non-rational awareness of the supernal—requires an extraordinary regime bequeathed by a Ṣūfī shaykh to his (or her) disciples, as will be explored below.[274] It is this aspect of Sufism, the supererogatory practices and litanies, particularly those that appear to have originated after the Prophetic period and the age of the Righteous Forebears (al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ), along with attachment to the saintly figures (*awliyāʾ*) who Ṣūfīs claim to be possessed of knowledge that they alone can pass on to their devotees through inspired litanies, that have attracted negative attention and contestations in the past and the present.[275]

An important aspect to consider when studying Sufism is the stance from which a researcher approaches the subject and its relationship to origins narratives. In other words, is Sufism founded in Islam or from outside? The answer is contested, as mentioned above. Those scholars or advocates of Sufism 'who take seriously the self-understanding of the Ṣūfī authorities usually picture Sufism as an essential component of Islam'. In contrast, those who are 'hostile toward Sufism, or hostile toward Islam but sympathetic toward Sufism, or sceptical of any self-understanding by the objects of their study, typically describe Sufism as a movement that was added to Islam after the prophetic period'.[276]

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[274] Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, at 102–03; Zachary Valentine Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam: The Sufi Community of Ibrāhīm Niasse* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), at 21.

[275] de Jong and Radtke. This edited volume contains chapters covering various historical periods and geographies of the Muslim world in which Sufism was contested by religious authorities and figures.

[276] William C. Chittick, John O. Voll, Kazuo Ohtsukal, 'Sufism', in *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). Accessed at:
http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236MIW/e0759?_hi=0&_pos=11#match

Modern scholarship, it appears, has spent a great deal of ink on the 'origins of Sufism in Islam', often tracing it to Christian Gnosticism and other sources.[277] The debate within Orientalism scholarship about the origins of Sufism, while interesting, however, is a distraction in terms of this study. Nevertheless, a discussion of the intra-Islamic contestations involving Sufism is appropriate because the arguments and language of contestations among Muslims draw on the theories of the extra-Islamic origins of Sufism. As such, considerations of Sufism's origins are not off-topic, per se, but are better framed as strategic points of contestations within Islam itself; in this case, contestations waged by Salafists.

Thus, following the approach of Chittick, Schimmel, Rahman, and others, it is the self-understanding of Sufism—from within, as it were—that serves best to offer a definition,[278] just as it is the self-understanding of purist Salafism that animates its operationalized definition. This will facilitate the analyses of Salafī contestations in digital media platforms. Both Voll and Schimmel suggest that scholars of Sufism would benefit from approaching the subject as it is understood by followers of Sufism, but with the added provision that the approach should be defensible as an objective foundation for the analyses, rather than a tool of advocacy.

To understand what Sufism is, then, it is necessary to examine one of the overarching, articulated goals of Sufism itself, which, as scholars have often noted, is the purification of the heart of spiritual diseases, the attainment of an 'experiential knowledge of God, *Maʿrifat Allāh'*, and the methodology of arriving at this knowledge.[279] The origin of this impulse, as Ṣūfīs often state, is found within the revealed sources of Islam: namely, the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth of the Prophet Muḥammad.[280] Ṣūfīs often invoke the statement of

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[277] Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, 2nd edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), at 131.
[278] Annemarie Schimmel, *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), at x–xv; Chittick, 'Sufism', *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*.
[279] Wright, at 3, 131.
[280] Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*, at 34–5.

the Prophet Muḥammad, known popularly as the 'Ḥadīth of Gabriel',[281] in which the Prophet said that faith has three levels: submission or commitment to exoteric religious obligations (*islām*), firmness of faith in the tenets of Islam (*īmān*), and excellence in worship, an extraordinary station in which one virtually or metaphorically 'sees' God or, as Chittick describes it, has a 'realization of the inmost reality'.[282] This third level, called *iḥsān*, is prominent in the literature of the various Ṣūfī orders, or *ṭuruq*.[283] In other words, upon the 'plane' of *iḥsān* the 'origin of the Sufic brotherhoods' lies.[284]

Chittick argues that the level of '*islām*' draws a distinction between the outward form of religious praxis and the 'more inner dimensions' of faith and piety. Moreover, it may 'designate the voluntary submission of any prophet or any follower of a prophet'; thus, *islām* in this tradition of the Prophet Muḥammad is a descriptive noun that addresses exoteric aspects of the religion, rather than the formal name or the proper noun of the religion, Islam.[285] Chittick thus sees the three aspects of religion as body, soul, and the 'innermost reality'—namely, the 'spirit', which is the main focus of Sufism.[286]

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[281] In Sufi literature and academic treatises thereof, the 'Hadith of Gabriel' is cited with regularity and, more recently, for the purpose of arguing for the orthodoxy of Sufism in Islam. According to the narration of the hadith, the Companions of the Prophet were sitting in his company when a man with pitch-black hair, dressed in pure white clothes, came upon the gathering. He bore no signs of travel on him. None of the Companions recognized him. None amongst us recognized him. The stranger came toward the Prophet and knelt before him, placing his palms on his thighs, and said: "Muhammad, inform me about Islam." The Prophet said to him that Islam means that you testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, and that you establish Prayer, pay the obliged Zakat-Alms, observe the fast of Ramadan, and perform pilgrimage if you have the means. Upon which, the man said: "You have told the truth." It amazed us that he would put the question and then he would himself verify the truth. The inquirer said: "Inform me about Iman." The Prophet replied: "That you affirm your faith in Allah, in His angels, in His Books, in His Apostles, in the Day of Judgment, and you affirm your faith in the Divine Decree about good and evil." The inquirer said: "You have told the truth." The inquirer again said: "Inform me about al-Ihsan." The Prophet said: "That you worship Allah as if you are seeing Him, for though you don't see Him, He, verily, sees you" … Then the inquirer went on his way but I stayed with the Prophet for a long while. He then said to me: "Umar, do you know who this inquirer was?" I replied: "Allah and His Apostle know best." The Holy Prophet remarked: "He was Gabriel. He came to you teach you your religion."
[282] William C. Chittick, *Divine Love: Islamic Literature and the Path to God* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), at 197.
[283] Chittick, *Divine Love*, at 196–9, 212–13, and 292–93.
[284] Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*, at 45.
[285] Chittick, *Divine Love*, at 199.
[286] Ibid., at 197.

Thus, to reach *iḥsān*, the realm of the heart—the metaphorical heart—receives attention, as the 'purification of the heart' is a pathway that Sufism insists on being taken. An aspirant thus learns to cleanse his or her heart of vices (such as hatred, arrogance, miserliness, love of the world, overwhelming ego (*nafs*)) because, ultimately, these vices distract a person from the unseen and thicken the separation or 'veil', as Lings calls it, between a person and knowledge of God. 'When one's heart is purified, the manifestation of the Divine is reflected in the mirror' of that heart.[287] The claim to achieving purification of the heart is not a conceit of Sufism per se, but a more general aspect of Islam as a whole. However, what attaches the 'purification' discourse particularly to Sufism is the purpose behind the purification of the heart, for the 'pure heart thus becomes the locus of divine manifestation, where the aspirant comes to "see" God and gain direct, experiential knowledge of the divine essence (*dhāt*)'.[288] It is preparatory for what comes next.

Thus, the 'experiential knowledge of God, *Maʿrifat Allāh*' is said to be the central quest of a Ṣūfī, 'the height of mystical aspiration', a path shown and taught by a Ṣūfī master through a system of extra-Sharīʿa training known as *tarbiya*, which focuses on constancy and commitment to supererogatory religious performance, such as the repetition of certain litanies.[289] These goals and their pathways constitute the 'quintessential Ṣūfī concept', and the history of Sufism can be (sympathetically or emically) viewed as 'the history of *maʿrifa*'.[290] Chittick describes it in a different way but comes to a similar conclusion: namely, Sufism is 'the intensification of Islamic faith and practice, or the tendency among Muslims to strive for a personal engagement with the Divine Reality'. Chittick adds that Ṣūfīs are those 'Muslims who take seriously God's call

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[287] Nahid Angha, *Principles of Sufism* (Fremont, California: Jain Publishing Company, 1991), at 2.
[288] Wright, at 149.
[289] Ibid., at 244–5.
[290] John Renard, *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism: Foundations of Islamic Mystical Theology* New York: Paulist Press, 2004), at xi–xii. (See Ahmet Karamustafa's preface to John Renard, *Knowledge of God in Classical Sufism: Foundations of Islamic Mystical Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), at xi–xii.)

to perceive his presence in the world and the self. They generally stress inwardness over outwardness, contemplation over action, spiritual development over legalism, and cultivation of the soul over social interaction.'[291] Lings is more evocative: 'From time to time a Revelation "flows" like a great tidal wave from the Ocean of Infinitude to the shores of our finite world; and Sufism is the vocation and discipline and the science of plunging into the ebb of one of these waves and bring drawn back with it to its Eternal and Infinite Source.'[292]

3.3.3 The Linguistic Origins and Significations of *Taṣawwuf* (Sufism)

The debate over the origins of the word Ṣūfī and its derivatives connects with the larger discussion about the origins of Sufism itself, for one of the points of contestation against Sufism relies on problematizing what is perceived to be the strangeness of its name. To this, however, the defenders of Sufism have replies. It has been said that 'Sufism' was once a reality without a name, but then became a name without a reality. Implicit in this observation is an internal critique of those who claim an association to Sufism but do so only nominally. Ṣūfīs have emphasized the first half of that aphorism to make the point that the religious outpouring of Sufism is rooted deeply in Islam, from its earliest days; indeed, the aphorism itself is far from a modern convention. Abū'l-Ḥasan Fushanjī said, three centuries after the Prophet Muḥammad, 'Today Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) is a name without a reality. It was once a reality without a name.'[293] A century later, a scholar commented on Fushanjī's aphorism, saying, 'In the time of the Companions of the Prophet and their immediate successors the name did not exist, but its reality was in everyone. Now the name exists without the reality.' However, those who rejected opulence and preferred a devotional and more ascetic life became distinguished by the

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[291] Chittick, et al, 'Sufism', *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*.
[292] Martin Lings, *What Is Sufism?* 2nd edn (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1988), at 11.
[293] Ibid., at 44.

title Ṣūfī.[294] As Ṣūfīs themselves would agree, and as has been outlined above, 'Sufism' is a descriptor that became associated with those who adopted ascetic practices, made regular supererogatory devotions, and attached themselves to living saints as their spiritual guides, all of which practices were codified and described as the Muslim world expanded.

Linguistically, Ṣūfī is derived from the Arabic root letters transliterated as *ṣād fā waw*, from which the Arabic word for *wool* comes: *ṣūf*. A Ṣūfī, as such, is said to signify a person who, metaphorically, wears woollen material.[295] Historically, and before the Islamic period, the traditional garment of ascetics was wool, particularly among early Christian penitents. The mystics or Ṣūfīs of Islam were not known to be wearers of woollen garments per se; however, some scholars argue otherwise, saying that 'some renunciants and pietists […] wore wool as opposed to other renunciants and the majority of Muslims who wore linen and cotton'.[296] Whatever the case may have been, wool became symbolic of an ascetic life or a life devoted to spirituality, often separated from worldly life.[297] Linguists have also argued that Ṣūfī is related to *ṣafā* or *ṣafwā*, a state of *purity* or station of the *elect* or the *chosen*, respectively. Finally, it has also been suggested that the word is related to a group of indigent followers of the Prophet Muḥammad, who were called the Companions of the Bench (*Aṣḥāb al-Ṣuffa*); this was a group of people known for longing always to be near the Prophet Muḥammad, although they were otherwise materially impoverished.[298] The bench, or veranda, was an outdoor area adjacent to the mosque of the Prophet Muḥammad in Madina. Their apparent attachment to this bench or veranda is hypothesized as the origins of Sufism's ascetic practices and the word itself.

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[294] Ibid.
[295] Ibid., at 46–7.
[296] Karamustafa, at 6.
[297] Ernst, '*Tasawwuf* (Sufism)', *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, ed. Richard C. Martin, (New York: Macmillan, 2003), at 684; Lings, *What Is Sufism?* at 46.
[298] Ernst, at 684.

Ernst examines the origins of 'Sufism' as a suffixed term. The word 'Sufism' was introduced by Orientalist scholarship at the close of the eighteenth century and was 'inspired by accounts of dervishes and ascetics that Orientalist researchers came across. In their accounts, they cited Ṣūfī poetry in which the word and metaphor 'wine' was mentioned. As Ernst suggests, 'wine' in Ṣūfī poetry was cited in order to advance the claims that Sufism was detached from the precepts and proscriptions of Islam's laws, if not the religion altogether. Ernst cites Orientalists such as William Jones (d. 1794) and John Malcolm (d. 1833), who argued that Sufism was not only disconnected from Islam, but originated from Hellenistic philosophy and Hinduism. Subsequently, the 'concept of the non-Islamic character of Sufism has been widely accepted in Euro-American scholarship', which, Ernst continues, is a 'classic example of Orientalist misinformation'.[299] The irony of this classification or typology of Sufism is that opponents of Sufism mimic these Orientalist tropes in their contestation with Sufism, although, generally speaking, Orientalist scholarship is harshly criticized by these same opponents of Sufism and is viewed with great suspicion. In contrast, researchers who accept 'the self-understanding of the Ṣūfī authorities' conduct their qualitative textual research premised the emic view that view 'Sufism as an essential component of Islam'.[300]

3.3.4 Origins, Key Doctrines, and Practices of Sufism

As such, among the bases upon which criticisms of Sufism rest, notably from modern Salafī advocates and early reform movements, is the claim that Ṣūfī practices (perhaps Sufism itself) are extra-Islamic phenomena—rooted in Neo-Platonism, Christian monastic mysticism, and other sources[301]—framed in the language of Islam. For example, the

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[299] Ibid., at 684–5.
[300] Chittick, et al, 'Sufism', *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*.
[301] Margaret Smith, *The Way of the Mystics: The Early Christian Mystics and the Rise of the Sufis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), at 47.

celebration of the Prophet Muḥammad's birthday (*Mawlid*) among Muslims, particularly those influenced by or formal devotees of a Ṣūfī order, is borrowed from the practice within Christianity, opponents of such celebrations claim. Salafism views any practice or theological position that appears to be a construct of syncretism as an anathema to pure Islam,[302] and public practices of Sufism, such as group recitations of litanies (often to the beating of drums and so on), exist outside the boundaries of Sacred Law (*Sharīʿa*).[303]

Therefore, the 'origins' of Sufism as an expression of Islam itself, as the Ṣūfīs contend, needs to be engaged with here.[304] It is important because it relates to an essential dissonance between the advocates of Salafism and Sufism in modern discourse, which this study seeks to examine; it does not necessarily reflect the views of this researcher. The response of Sufism to this discourse may be seen as predicated on pre-modern scholarly assertions of the scriptural authenticity of Sufism, even (and perhaps ironically) among the *salaf* of Islam in the early generations of Islam.

Both contemporary Ṣūfī and academic specialists cite Muslim scholars of the pre-modern age to support the assertion of the ties between Sufism and Islam itself. Ernst, for example, as previously mentioned, is highly critical of European oriental scholarship viewing Sufism.[305]

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[302] Mandaville, *Global Political Islam*, at 246–7; Roy, *Globalized Islam*, at 302.
[303] Sirriyeh, at 92–3.
[304] It is important to distinguish between Sufism, which developed within historical Islam, and its scriptural sources, personages, and precepts, and neo-Sufism, which came about in the modern age and attracts followers of a variety of faiths who keep their religious identities but are drawn to some Sufi aspects for spiritual inspiration. Islam—the religion itself and its exoteric obligations and proscriptions—is not what they seek per se. The focus of this study is on the former, with no intention to disparage the latter. But, since this study examines the contentious use of digital media in the Ṣūfī–Salafī schism, it is only the Sufism of historical Islam per se that is relevant—the Sufism that has historical roots in Islam, as Ṣūfīs trace it, back to the Qurʾān, Prophet Muḥammad, and his immediate companions, for the scripture itself 'may be taken as a major source of Sufism', as may the revelatory experience that 'descended upon the Prophet Muhammad'. See Ernst, 'Tasawwuf', at 685.
[305] His full quotation, abbreviated above, is as follows: 'The discovery of Persian Sufi poetry, filled with references to love and wine, allowed Europeans to imagine Sufis as freethinking mystics who had little to do with Islam …. Scholars such as Sir William Jones (d. 1794) and Sir John Malcolm (d. 1833) advanced the thesis that Sufism derived from Hindu yoga, Greek philosophy, or Buddhism. This concept of the non-Islamic character of Sufism has been widely accepted in Euro-American scholarship ever since, despite (or perhaps because of) its disconnection with the Islamic tradition, in which tasawwuf and its social implementations have played a central role. Thus, in terms of its origin, the introduction of the term Sufism into European languages may be regarded as a classic example of Orientalist misinformation, insofar as Sufism was regarded primarily as a radical intellectual doctrine

A prominent example often cited in support of tasawwuf as within Islam is Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406), one of the most well-known Muslim historians and historiographers. He is frequently mentioned to add gravitas to the assertion that Sufism existed in the early generations of Islam but was too widespread and ubiquitous to have been given a name. He stated:

> The Ṣūfī training is a religious one. It is free from any such reprehensible intentions. The Ṣūfīs aspire to total concentration upon God and upon the approach to Him, in order to obtain the mystical experiences of gnosis and Divine oneness. In addition to their training in concentration and hunger, the Ṣūfīs feed on *dhikr* exercises by which their devotion to that training can fully materialize. When the soul is reared on *dhikr* exercises, it comes closer to the gnosis of God, whereas, without it, it comes to be a Satanic one.[306]

The claims of Sufism hold that the very first manifestations of Sufism existed in the time of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Companions, and with the revelation of the Qurʾān itself. In the Prophetic generation, 'there were persons who wanted more than just to strive after the outward observance of the religious law and of the usages founded by the Prophet'. While they were observant of their formal religious obligations, as prescribed by Sacred Law (*Sharīʿa*), 'they paid attention to what was happening to their souls, and tried to harmonise these internal experiences with the external observances by means of renunciation of the world and asceticism'. These devotees saw in many of these characteristics qualities that mirrored the Prophet's message. However, the material success of the Muslim world had proved to be overwhelming for many Muslims, whose religious outlook, it seems, was dampened by 'a certain secularisation of life and luxury, contrary to the ideals of the original Islamic community, and from which the truly Godfearing person could save himself only by withdrawing from the world'. [307]

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at variance with what was thought of as the sterile monotheism of Islam.' See Ernst, 'Tasawwuf', 684–5.
[306] Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal and abridged by N.J. Dawood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), at 358–66.
[307] Ibid., at 358–66.

3.3.5 *Ziyāra*: Visiting Graves of the Saints

In the methodology section, the practice of celebrating the Prophet Muḥammad's birthday are discussed more fully, as is the act of grave visitation as a rite.[308] However, the practice of visiting graves merits special mention here, to elucidate the place and meaning that grave visitations have within Sufism. It is this practice that is central to the Salafī critique of Sufism, at least equal to, if not more, than the reproach of the *Mawlid* celebrations.

The basic meaning of *ziyāra* relates to the act of *visiting* someone or a place. The essential linguistic connotation of *ziyāra* is not associated with doctrine or ritual practice, since the simple act of *visiting* may have entirely social motives of no doctrinal or ideological import. However, in the context of Sufism and its performances, *ziyāra* assumes a more complex meaning that has historically drawn both approbation and criticism—criticism particularly, in modern times, from Wahhabism and Salafism. This permutation of *ziyāra*, then, is the practice of visiting a living saint or, especially problematically, his or her grave, for the purpose of gaining providential grace or blessing (*baraka*), realized by the process called *tabarruk*; or for intercession with God (*tawassul*). This form of *ziyāra* is often vested with ritualistic meaning as part of the path to sacred knowledge and often as an obligation of members of a Ṣūfī order to have *suḥba*, that is, to have a close association with the order's spiritual figure, alive or otherwise. As such, this form of *ziyāra* is imbued with a sacred meaning normally preserved for the canonical obligation of the Pilgrimage (Hajj). While visits to a grave of a saint (*walī*) may be made privately (as they often are) and at any time of the year, in some areas of the Muslim world *ziyāra* took on a more formal celebratory meaning. 'The practice of pilgrimage (*ziyāra*) to the tombs of saints was generally considered to be beneficial, but was especially valued at the anniversary of the moment when the saint was joined with God; all this assumes the saint's ability to intercede with God on behalf of pilgrims.'[309] In

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[308] See Chapter 5.
[309] Ernst, 'Tasawwuf (Sufism)', at 684.

Egypt, India, and other countries (including those of North Africa), 'hundreds of thousands of pilgrims may congregate for days at the annual festival, with many distinctive local rituals and performances'.[310] It can be argued that such major outpourings of festivals around a Ṣūfī saint attracted the disapproval of scholars of the pre-modern age, but 'with the rise of the Wahhābīs in Arabia and kindred Salafī reform movements elsewhere, there has been extensive criticism of pilgrimage to tombs and the notion of saintly intercession, all of which is considered to be sheer idolatry. Although in Saudi Arabia the tomb of practically every Ṣūfī saint and family member of the Prophet has been destroyed, elsewhere pilgrimage to saints' tombs continue to be popular.'[311]

The visitation of graves for the purpose of intercession and/or attaining blessings is, as noted, an anathema to Salafī thought and is a major point of Salafist disputation with Sufism. The practice is pejoratively referred to as 'grave worship', a phrase that in itself imputes to the ritual the status of cardinal sin or deviation from the oneness of God, the preeminent doctrine of all of Islam: 'A proper understanding of God's singularity means that no other being other than Him shall be worshipped, no other human, not material wealth, not worldly power or institutional authorities, and particularly not the graves of bygone humans.'[312]

It should be noted that the seemingly inherent anti-Sufi bias in Salafism has been problematized by Sirry, who contests the 'general assumption' that Salafism is necessarily vehemently anti-Sufi. Sirry bases his argument on a Syrian Salafī thinker, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, who actually defended Sufi paragon Ibn ʿArabī (1165–1240) and opposed Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), who is claimed to be the inspiration of Wahhābī/Salafī thought. Sirry states, 'The main argument put forward here is that the Salafis took a more nuanced position towards Sufism than is sometimes supposed.'[313] However, the Syrian scholar

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[310] Ibid., 688.
[311] Ibid.
[312] Griffel, at 93.
[313] Mun'im Sirry, 'Jamāl Al-Dīn Al-Qāsimī and the Salafi Approach to Sufism', *Die Welt des Islams* 51 (2011), at 76.

upon whom Sirry bases his argument died in 1914, long before contemporary Salafism came into being and coalesced into an ideology, as discussed in this dissertation and supported by recent scholarship. What this demonstrates is an unparsed use of the term 'Salafism' in recent scholarship. In purist Salafī thought Ibn ʿArabī, for example, is not spoken of favourably, and Ibn Taymiyya's works are not challenged. Sirry's argument is more convincing when referring to Salafism as developed by the early reform movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. But, as regards the Salafī ideology of today, Sirry's contention is weak.

Similarly, a recent academic article by Yasir Qadhi examines pre-modern theological debates, particularly in the eighth century, concerning the Āthārī ideological criticism of Ashʿarī creedal thought. However, he describes the debates as 'Salafī–Ash'ari polemics', although the term 'Salafī' was not in currency at that time.[314] Though Qadhi does reference Āthārī thought per se, his assumption that Āthārī views are synonymous with Salafism appears to be unfounded or, at the very least, is an assumption and a choice of terminology that required a more vigorous defence of in the study. In this case, the use of 'Salafism' to describe an anti- Ashʿarī school of thought is, at best, anachronistic.

What these researches show is a need to carefully define and defend the use of 'Salafism' in scholarship. Without doing so, the research can be challenged or is diminished in terms of its methodological and analytical values, since *defining* Salafism is an important part of presenting the significance of contemporary research on Salafī polemics.[315]

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[314] Yasir Qadhi, 'Salafī-Ashʿarī Polemics of the 3rd & 4th Islamic Centuries', *The Muslim World* 106, no. 3 (2016), 433–47.
[315] The author presented the observations and findings of this chapter at the 2016 British Society for Middle Eastern Studies annual conference in Lampeter. The presentation was entitled: 'Defining Salafism for New Research'.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK:

RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY AND MEDIATISATION

This chapter discusses the analytical framework of this study and an emergent

media theory (mediatisation) that helps to explain and theorize the manifest shifting

media ecologies, particularly those affecting religious authority. The chapter proceeds as

follows: 1) an exposition on the authority construct; 2) religious authority and its

relationship with mediatisation theory; 3) general overview of media and authority; and 4)

a contextualization of Islam and authority, and then media, authority, and Islam.

4.1 Introduction

With its varied meanings and diverging iterations, religious authority has attracted

research in the fields of religious studies, social sciences, and history for several decades,

if not longer. The impetus to carefully address the matter of religious authority stems from

the proposition that it is 'an elusive concept and notoriously difficult to define'.[316] In

recent years, however, there has been a *repositioned* interest in religious authority, mainly

as a consequence of its more synergetic relationship with contemporary media platforms

and technologies. It is argued that religious authority has seen significant shifts in public

and private spheres in the digital age.[317] The purported changes have attracted evolving

interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary academic interest[318] that includes research into new

media's roles in or effects on important aspects of religion and religious practices,[319] and

on the concept and nature of the 'public sphere' in 'transnational' Muslim identity

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[316] Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke, *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), at 1.
[317] Many scholars have made this observation in their research. See, for example, Bunt, *iMuslims*. See also Olsson and Kersten.
[318] See Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor and Suha Shakkour, 'Introduction: Digital Methodologies in the Sociology of Religion', in *Digital Methodologies in the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor and Suha Shakkour (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).
[319] Bunt, 'Studying Muslims and Cyberspace', at 91.

politics.[320] The advent of new media, as such, is said to be a 'watershed [moment] for Islam and Muslims with regard to textual, exegetical, and legal authority' in Islam today.[321]

Inquiries into religious authority have raised questions that have become more urgent as a result of 'disruptive' emerging media technologies that have permitted more voices—multifarious and vast—into the media ecology regarding religion-focused discussions and inquiries: 'What is religious authority in Islam';[322] and, more fundamentally, 'Who speaks for Islam?'[323] And who may claim interpretive control of scriptures and the drawing of the boundaries of orthodoxy? What authority or qualifications—ecclesial, charismatic, or formal knowledge acquisition—must one have to issue religious pronouncements that potentially affect the choices or lives of the faithful? How, then, have new media technologies transformed Muslim concepts of traditional authority itself?[324] Finally, what do content providers hope to achieve in the new media ecology, and how will 'rewire the House of Islam" as Bunt states?[325]

These critical questions—contentious and often unevenly framed—stimulate research in this field because of the extraordinarily voluminous, varied, cacophonous,[326] and often contradictory expressions and 'texts' of religion and ritual performance online. They also speak to the participation of numbers of previously locked-out individuals who *normally* would not have access to a new 'public sphere' and, more specifically, often do

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[320] Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), at 1–3, 8.
[321] Thomas Hoffmann and Göran Larsson, 'Muslims and the New Information and Communication Technologies: Notes from an Emerging and Infinite Field – An Introduction', in Thomas Hoffmann and Göran Larsson (eds) *Muslims and the New Information and Communication Technologies* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), at 7.
[322] Lawrence, 'Allah on-Line', at 239.
[323] Bulliet, at 11.
[324] Peter Mandaville, 'Digital Islam: Changing the Boundaries of Religious Knowledge?', *ISIM Newsletter* 2 (1999), at 23–24.
[325] Bunt, *iMuslims*, at 226.
[326] Nathan J. Brown, 'Islamic Legal Authority in a Cacophonous Age', in *New Islamic Media*, ed. Marc Lynch (Washington, D.C.: Project on Middle East Political Science, 2017), at 6.

not meet the authority threshold, as traditionally established, to comment on issues that tend to be juridical in nature, as shown below.

But, first, where does interpretative framework fit in the history of recent media and religion studies? This needs to be addressed here in order to further situate the study in this developing field. As expanded upon in the literature review, the progression of digital media and religion studies has involved 'waves' of research, each wave defined according to the objectives of the research. The first wave tended to be descriptive, mapping out the content of religious texts or communication in what was then considered a new and expansive medium; and it also sought to place the digital phenomenon in existential terms, as, for example, utopic or dystopic markers of a new age. The second wave concerned itself with 'the evolution and development of a typology of cyberspatial religious discourse', as accrued forms and categories of content became more distinct in what began to be viewed as digital 'space',[327] which arguably provided the venue for a new genre of rhetoric or 'digital rhetoric'.[328] The third wave saw research directed to 'theoretical and interpretative inquiry', through which the digital texts examined in a given study are scrutinized through an analytical framework.[329] This wave ultimately seeks to provide an answer to a post-descriptive inquiry: namely, 'so what?'[330] As if to say, now that it has been determined that there is an extraordinary and growing quantity of content that relates to religion, how does this formidable actuality impinge upon such substantial matters of religion as identity, authority, ritual, pedagogy, and community formation?

While research in the third wave has proceeded within select frameworks to an important degree, scholars 'point out that there is still a gap between the increasing number of studies concerning media and religion and the few attempts to develop a

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[327] Karaflogka, at 279.
[328] Aaron Hess and Amber Davisson, *Theorizing Digital Rhetoric* (London: Routledge, 2017), at 3.
[329] Cheruvallil-Contractor and Shakkour, at 7.
[330] Campbell and Altenhofen, at 7.

conceptual or theoretical framework with which to analyse it'.[331] The present research seeks to help close that gap by putting forward a framework that goes beyond typologies of online texts and examines their symbolic meanings as discourse. It seeks a framework by which online texts are interpreted and thus connected with discourses rich with historical and contemporary representation, and attempts to answer the question: what analytical framework best presents itself as a means of constructing research designs for and interpreting the online polemics and intra-religious contestations in contemporary Islam?

This chapter argues that the framework through which the online texts studied in this dissertation are best investigated is through the prism of religious authority, and, it should be noted, that religious authority operates in close association with *mediatisation*, a media theory that is increasingly evident in the digital age. Scholarship has demonstrated that emerging media technologies are bona fide players in the sphere of religious authority. Online texts—websites, social media, forums, podcasts—are thus interpreted and analysed through religious authority to expand upon the role of these media and their effects on essential aspects of religion. As Turner points out, new media technologies 'provide alternative, deregulated, devolved and local opportunities for debate and discussion'.[332] New media systems, therefore, have 'the unintended effect of corroding traditional forms of authority that are either based on oral transmission or on print-based forms of textual learning that is linear, hierarchical, imitative and repetitive'.[333] Roy's remarks about authority and knowledge in digital space are underscored. He writes: 'The new intellectual has an autodidactic relationship to knowledge. Knowledge is acquired in a fragmented (manuals, excerpts, popular brochures), encyclopaedic, and immediate manner: everything is discussed without the

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[331] Martino, at 31–2.
[332] Turner, at 118.
[333] Ibid.

mediation of an apprenticeship, a method, or a professor.'[334] The rise of new media, as such, represents a *subversion* of what is referred to as the genealogy of religious knowledge.[335]

However, as Campbell points out, 'It is not enough to say that the Internet transforms or challenges traditional authority; rather, researchers must identify what specific form or type of authority is being affected'[336] and then decide upon a methodology. In part, the methodology is used to identify and collate *language* in online content which speaks to authority. This study seeks to follow Campbell's injunction by locating claims of religious authority in the language of Salafī online contestations that evoke juridical–moral connotations, which, in turn, attempt to define or perhaps narrow the confines of Islamic orthodoxy with regard to certain Muslim practices and creedal thought.

Thus, this research addresses how online contestations speak to the changing profile of religious authority in contemporary Islamic milieus. While there is increasing research in this field today, as explored below, lacunas still exist in the study of Islam, digital media, and religious authority, particularly in describing and then framing the *pathways* of such media effects on religious authority. This study contributes original research to an under-attended field by proffering the process by which digital media actually alter or influence traditional notions of religious authority.

4.2 Religious Authority and Mediatisation Theory

When one examines the mediation of religion in the digital age, the concept of 'mediatisation' comes to the fore as a more parsed and nuanced rendering of 'mediation' theory. Both mediation and mediatisation theories build upon Carey's paradigm linking

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[334] Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (New York: IB Tauris, 1994), at 96.
[335] Peter Mandaville, 'Reimagining Islam in Diaspora: The Politics of Mediated Community', *International Communication Gazette* 63, nos 2–3 (2001), at 176.
[336] Heidi Campbell, 'Who's Got the Power? Religious Authority and the Internet', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12, no. 3 (2007), at 1044.

media and culture: that is, the concept of media as *culture*. However, mediatisation 'has emerged as a new research concept to reconsider old, yet fundamental questions concerning the role and influence of media in culture and society'.[337] In pre-digital terms, scholarship on media effects addressed the influence of mass media 'on political systems and other institutions' of society. The scholarship proceeded mainly through analyses of what happens after the media has conveyed content (in whatever way) and how the means of conveying content affect audiences and social institutions. The traditional views of the role of media in society were 'reworked and labelled "mediatisation" to widen the framework by including new media and new areas of application'.[338] In other words, mediatisation picks up where mediation leaves off, for the former strongly infers that media do not just have a close partnership with religious messaging but are 'intertwined' in a way that *affects religion and society itself* in our contemporary world, with media as an 'agent of change', as Hjarvard words it. Mediatisation does not merely operationalize the process of communication but has generated 'a new social condition in which the power to define and practice religion has changed'.[339] Thus, Hjarvard distinguishes mediatisation from the narrower construct of 'mediation', which focuses mainly on the 'communication process'. With mediatisation, the 'structural transformation of relationships between media, culture, and society' is the focus of attention.[340] The changing complexion of religious authority in the digital age, then, is central to the proposition of the aforementioned structural and cultural transformations of religion and authority, and, as such, directly relates to this study, as explored below. More specifically, what mediatisation *does* is alter the religious economy in important ways, affecting the very performance of religion and rituals (for example, virtual prayers, online church masses, conversions through online confessions of faith, and more).

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[337] Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*, at 1.
[338] Niels Ole Finnemann, 'Mediatization theory and digital media', *Communications* 36, no. 1 (2011), 67–89.
[339] Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*, at 10.
[340] Ibid., 3.

But there is a gap in the literature as it pertains to a more defined framework that examines *how* new media and new content-makers destabilize traditional notions of religious authority in contemporary Islam: that is, how do we frame new media's challenge to religious authority in the Islamic milieu?

First, new media permit members of a religious community to perform religion online: practising rites online (such as scripture readings and meditations); fulfilling obligations, such as the paying of obliged charity (*zakāt*) online; engaging in forums in which congregants can carry out scriptural study, converse about topics of spiritual import virtually, request prayers for trials and illness, and search out religious verdicts (e-fatwas) online and anonymously; and other activities that are normally in done in personal contact with religious figures or among real-life congregations. New media have thus affected religion, according to mediatisation, by encouraging interaction by members of a religious community who might have shied away or have been discouraged from entering physical spaces of religious institutions or communal events. Cheruvallil-Contractor and Shakkour stress this point in their study of online Sufism, for example. Their research shows 'the increasing role of the internet in creating "safe" social spaces for young Muslims to discuss and debate their faith to an extent that would not be possible offline'. In their case study, they said that young people were 'attempting to experience their Ṣūfī practice online, where they felt they had the freedom to interrogate and critically engage with their faith'.[341] For these young people, online space was not limited by the traditional perspectives of community elders. In other words, the mediatisation effects of digital media expanded, for new audiences, choices in the kind of content they now have access to, the discussions they feel safer to engage in, and the ways of even practicing their faith in a way not possible in physical spaces.

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[341] Cheruvallil-Contractor and Shakkour, at 59–60.

Second, the construction of religious identity has been changed by new media, as scholars have noted.[342] In this new media-inflected age, traditional identities with religions were associated with a passive process, whereby a religious identity was something 'inherited' from one's immediate family or forebears or from a single communal religious institution established in one's community. Scholars argue that 'group identity', as a traditional way of constructing identity, has been challenged by new media, as individuals search for and are exposed to an unprecedented 'range of available beliefs, practices, and symbols' online from which they are able to 'pick and choose'.[343] Individuals may thus consider Western and Eastern religious paradigms, as well as mythology and psychology, in their religious identities.[344] As a theoretical framework, mediation is not constructed in a way that allows interpretation of how media affects the very religiosity of people (or groups of people); as scholars argue, however, *mediatisation* is.[345] As for Muslims online, Bunt argues that Muslims have taken advantage of 'technical innovation to galvanise an audience unsatisfied with convention, for which the Net is a natural place to acquire knowledge and converse with peers'.[346]

Another key aspect of mediatisation and religion speaks to 'disruption': that is, the opening of possibilities that providers of religious content have at their disposal, with the potentialities themselves *influencing*, for example, the rhetorical strategies, audience targeting, and actual material that can be conveyed for more directed purposes. As such, the changing concept of *audience* reflects a connotation imbedded in mediatisation, in the sense that the previously conceived 'audience' and the passiveness it suggests of readers, listeners, and viewers is not as applicable in the digital world, a world that permits an

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[342] Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age*. Jeffrey H. Mahan, *Media, Religion and Culture: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2014), at 26–7.
[343] Jeffrey H. Mahan. 'Religion and media'. *Religion Compass*, 6.1 (2012), 14–25, at 20.
[344] Ibid., at 24.
[345] Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*.
[346] Bunt, *iMuslims*, at 119.

interactivity[347] that has no precedent. Therefore, it could be said that, as a research paradigm, the concept of mediatisation applies to the content and approaches of Salafist contestations with Sufism which are *tailored* to contemporary media platforms and resources and to the new iteration of a media audience. The researcher contends that, as a framework for this study, religious authority is an important prism through which to interpret online contestations; however, mediatisation adds a measure of completion to the ties between religion and media studies, contextualizing this framework of religious authority with media studies. In his study of aspects of mediatisation as 'agents of change', Hjarvard offers a framework to 'conceptualize the ways that media may change religion'. For Hjarvard, the framework of mediatisation is apropos since 'religious imaginations and practices become increasingly dependent upon media',[348] meaning that, consequently, 'media have become the primary source of religious ideas, in particular in the form of banal religion … . [A]s cultural environments the media have taken over many of the social functions of the institutionalized religions, providing both moral and spiritual guidance and a sense of community.'[349]

From the perspective of this study, new media alter the balance of the authority–authorization threshold, whereby popularity has the potential to transcend qualification in the authority realm, traditionally upheld and maintained by the community of scholars (*'ulamā'*) and the language of their discourse, as Zaman argues.[350] Media should no longer be equated with passive channels of information; rather, present-day media alter or shape religious discourses from a discursive form toward populist vernaculars. This shift

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[347] The theoretical and operational definitions of 'interactivity' have attracted academic attention since at least 2002. Among the early works considering an operationalized definition of interactivity and the Internet, see Edward J. Downes and Sally J. McMillan, 'Defining interactivity: A qualitative identification of key dimensions', *New media & society* 2, no. 2 (2000): 157–79.
[348] Stig Hjarvard, 'The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change', *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies* 6, no. 1 (2008), 9–26, at 24.
[349] Ibid.
[350] Zaman, Muhammad Qasim. 'The Scope and Limits of Islamic Cosmopolitanism', at 93–97.

in the quality of language of instruction also influences the decentralized and pluralizing state of authority and claims to it in contemporary Islam today.

4.3 Religious Authority and Media: An Overview

Digital media have rapidly become integral to professional, academic, and personal lives in societies in much of the world. O'Leary observed more than 20 years ago—long before the expansion of digital media in everyday life and culture as we know it today—that the 'Internet expanded in a few years from an elite core of academic and science experts to a global network with millions of users'.[351] Now forward 20 years from O'Leary's statement, the inquiry is less about sheer demographics of users but more about a social phenomenon, with digital media becoming 'central to the ways in which we experience others and ourselves as well as the way we interact with all manner of cultural, social, economic, and political processes'.[352] Digital natives will find difficulty remembering an era unaffected by the Internet;[353] and they will not be able to fully experience knowledge acquisition outside the realm of digital media products such as search engines. Thus, the discourse about media is not about technology per se. Rather, this discussion examines a powerful force in human life (religion) making unprecedented use of media for a variety of purposes and leaving a wide range of effects—on communities, individuals, subjectivities of authority, and on religion itself—within the timespan of a single generation. As such, Bunt is correct in stating that studying contemporary religion and its relationship with digital media 'is now a crucial area for the understanding of contemporary religious issues'.[354] Without taking new media into consideration, any understanding of religion today will be incomplete.

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[351] O'Leary, 'Cyberspace as Sacred Space', at 781.
[352] Dominic Power and Robin Teigland, Power, 'Postcards from the Metaverse: An Introduction to the Immersive Internet', ed. Dominic Power and Robin Teigland, *The Immersive Internet* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) 1–12, at 1.
[353] Bunt. 'Mediterranean Islamic Expression and Web 2.0', at 76.
[354] Bunt, '#Islam, Social Networking and the Cloud', at 460.

To locate the contemporary pressures placed by digital media on religious authority in their historical context, however, it is important to connect the issue with previous technological encroachments on authority. Contrary to what one would imagine, the innocuous lightbulb, when first invented in the early 19th century, was 'accompanied by debates on the nature of authority and changing communication barriers between the elites and the masses'.[355] In order to offer historical contextualization, researchers have looked at those media developed centuries ago and their effects on religious thought and the deconstruction of religious authority, gravitating particularly toward the printing press for their analogies.

Hoover, for example, said that the invention of the printing press had a significant impact on religious discourses and authority because it 'provided the means for the development of alternative centres of power based on ideological argument rather than military, political or ecclesiastical power'.[356] Kort extends this idea by comparing the Internet with 'the print revolution' and what it did for 'the Protestant movement (Christian Reformation)'.[357] Loach is more explicit: 'Printing was considered by most sixteenth century Protestants to be a weapon peculiarly suited to their purposes: it was, after all, Luther who had greeted the press as "God's highest and extremest act of grace, whereby the business of the Gospel is driven forward".'[358] New typographic technologies received an apocalyptic reception; they were called a 'great mutation' and the alarm was raised 'about the extent to which a "run-away technology" was severing all bonds with the past' and threatening the Bible-reading culture.[359] Assmaan raises stark comparisons between

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[355] Cheong, 'Authority', at 72.
[356] Peter Horsfield. 'Media, Culture and Religion: An Introduction', in *Belief in Media: Cultural Perspectives on Media and Christianity*, ed. Peter Horsfield, Mary Hess, and Adan Medrano (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), at xvi.
[357] Kort, at 368.
[358] Jennifer Loach, 'The Marian Establishment and the Printing Press', *The English Historical Review* 101, no. 398 (1986), 135–48, at 135.
[359] Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), at ix.

the printing press and the Internet as a function of globalization, though she does not emphasize religion per se.[360]

In terms of religious authority and modern technology, researchers have noted that the radio, classified as an early electronic communication means, was the starting point of the ability of electronic media to address a 'generalized and often national public' and, as a result, it evolved into a 'cultural institution'.[361] The radio, then the television, became part of the experience and identity of the public sphere, only to be challenged by new technologies, such as satellite and cable broadcasts—and then, of course, being eclipsed by digital media.

Research suggests that digital media—including social media—have *influenced* religious authority in two ways, both connected with the idea of 'disruption': first, digital media disruption has permitted an increase in voices that convey or engage with religious content, with or without credentials; and, second, digital media have provided a much broader field and a greater volume of content that audiences can easily reach and learn from. Some researchers, such as Horsfield, compare the changing landscape of religious content with the idea of a 'marketplace', in which religious 'entrepreneurs' circumvent constraints of institutional religious frameworks, as traditionally constructed, to directly access audiences across national boundaries and with little expense. In other words, content makers can compete 'directly in the media market, with packages of branded religious and secular content that ignore old religious loyalties and sensibilities'.[362] While it is possible, indeed likely, that using the nomenclature of capitalism and its markets to describe the Salafī discourses examined in this dissertation would not be well-received by content makers, part of the argument made in this study is that the reach of a local Salafī

[360] Aleida Assmann. 'The Printing Press and the Internet: From a Culture of Memory to a Culture of Attention', in *Globalization, Cultural Identities, and Media Representations*, ed. Natascha Gentz and Stefan Kramer (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006), 11–23.

[361] Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*, at 24.

[362] Peter Horsfield. 'Replacing Religion', *Australian Journal of Communication* 39, no. 1 (2012, at 8.

organization in Birmingham, England, for example, is much broader than it would have been in the pre-digital age.

For scholars such as Aly, media disruption manifests itself as 'a discursive relocation of the Islamic tradition of discussing religious disputes', which, in her study, results in significant demonstrable impacts on extremist religious content. She writes: 'The Internet serves as a marketplace of opinions in which opinion givers vie for the status of leader by adopting communication behaviours that confer authority.'[363]

Cheong, in her review of the nascent literature in this field, locates trends or clusters of perspectives related to media and religious authority. One perspective describes new media as an 'upheaval' that confronts traditional constructs of religious authority, 'supplanting power and furnishing an equivalent authority in place of another'. One authority, typically traditional (patterned in pre-modern eras), is 'displaced' by the presence and proliferation of new actors and content makers, whose admission into the media ecology is smoothed by media disruptions central to digital media. Other scholars see new media as complementary, rather than necessarily confrontational.[364] Cheong shows how the notion of 'religious authority' may be altered and in some respects diluted by digital media, since the phenomenon 'allows different people to have open access and gain greater control over knowledge and social information'.[365]

Turner, however, locates the loci of transformation in the 'social conditions' that new media technologies have ushered in, conditions in which 'political and religious authority are produced'.[366] Political control over new media streams and narratives are not as easily ordered as for a print-based media model. Turner sees new media as having a 'contradictory' effect, suggesting a democratization of information, while at the same time new media '[threaten] to swamp traditional voices', which is hardly an egalitarian

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[363] Anne Aly. 'An Audience-Focused Approach to Examining Religious Extremism Online', *Australian Journal of Communication* 39, no. 1 (2012), 1–16, at 1, 12.
[364] Cheong. 'Authority', at 77.
[365] Cheong, *Digital Religion, Social Media, and Culture: Perspectives, Practices, and Futures*, 72.
[366] Turner, at 117–18.

outcome suggestive of democratization.[367] Barker's study of 'new religious movements'

considers how new religions that were confronted with 'one type of authority structure' in

real life came to be 'affected by the arrival of cyberspace'.[368]

4.4 Contextualising Religious Authority and Islam

Religious authority, it can be argued, has never been an unchanging idea or practice.

However, when there is a noticeable acceleration in the changing profile of religious

authority—particularly when influenced by external forces and social and political

realities—researchers are prompted to examine the changes and the complex forces that

have led to them or exerted important influence thereof. Thus, it is important to note that

the question of religious authority and its changes in contemporary Islam has been well

connected to the digital turn; however, the pressures of the changes in authority are pre-

digital. The issue of authority is arguably one of the key crises in contemporary Islam, as

Bulliet contends.[369] It is, therefore, constructive to first briefly address the main challenge

of authority today for Muslims and Islam, in conversation with the shifts of the Muslim

world and concisely discuss the question of authority with meta-media contextualisation.

Thus, in addressing the relationship between digital media and religious authority,

it is beneficial to start by addressing the key challenge of authority for Muslims and

Islam: namely, the role of traditionally trained scholars in the adjudication of matters

relating to personal and communal Muslim affairs, particularly in seeking to provide

guidance to individuals. At its most basic, if not its most traditional connotation, *authority*

addresses two poles of the religious phenomenon, signifying a 'reciprocal relation always

incorporating two parties':[370] those who produce and convey religious content and those

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[367] Ibid.
[368] Eileen Barker. 'Crossing the Boundary: New Challenges to Religious Authority and Control as a Consequence of Access to the Internet', in *Religion and Cyberspace*, ed. Morten T. Højsgaard and Margit Warburg (New York: Routledge, 2005), at 68.
[369] Bulliet, at 11.
[370] Robert A. Segal and Kocku von Stuckrad, *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), at 1:145.

who receive it—that is, those who, depending on creed and degrees of commitment or scepticism, may (or are expected to) show deference to what is being conveyed, often affecting choices in conduct. Perhaps more formally, 'authority denotes a social positioning of an institution, object, or person that gives direction or a normative standard in terms of thought and action to one or more people'.[371] As Weber would have it, authority addresses the 'probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) from a given source will be obeyed by a given group of persons'.[372]

The concept of authority in Islam does not have a homogeneous definition per se, because of the sectarian divides within Muslim societies and history (consider the notable differences in authority and the qualifications for authority between, for example, Sunnī and Shīʿa Islam). However, there are arguably salient features of authority in Islam that serve as a plausible 'positioning' of authority in contemporary media climates.[373] Few Muslims will argue that within the lifetime of the Prophet of Islam sacred authority was vested in the person of, the statements of, and the revelations that came to the Prophet Muḥammad. In his lifetime, the affairs of the Muslim community in the Ḥijāz (the western strip of the Arabian Peninsula) were 'governed by the special authority' of the Prophet Muḥammad and by the Qurʾān which was revealed to him in his 23 years of prophethood, until his death (the year 632), as Muslims believe.[374] In other words, to his followers, the Prophet's statements and normative practices represented the highest state of authority in a religious paradigm because he was guided by revealed inspiration that 'came down' to him[375]—about which the Qurʾān states: 'Obey God and obey the Messenger'.[376]

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[371] Ibid.
[372] Talcott Parsons, *Max Weber: The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Free Press, 1968).
[373] Segal and von Stuckrad, at 1:145.
[374] Roy Jackson, 'Authority', in *Islamic Political Thought: An Introduction*, ed. Gerhard Bowering (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), at 34.
[375] Ibid.
[376] Qurʾān, at 4:59.

After the passing of the Prophet, however, the role of religious authority continued, but without the 'special authority' of the Prophetic period, since the Prophet Muḥammad was not only the prophet of Islam but the 'seal of the prophets',[377] after whom no new prophet would come, as per Sunni Islam creedal beliefs. However, the affairs of the community of the Muslims (or *Ummah*) were not left without guidance after his death. The community received the Qurʾān (the sacred scripture of Islam) and the statements and normative practice of the Prophet Muḥammad, which would eventually make up the corpus of Hadith literature, the second primary source of Islamic law. Together, the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth form the textual sources of religious authority in Islam.[378] But the affairs of Muslims, which expanded and became multifarious as the Muslim lands expanded, were increasingly in need of direction, particularly in terms of new issues and dilemmas that appeared but lacked precedent. As such, the burden of providing that guidance fell upon the ʿ*Ulamā'*, the 'scholars specializing in Islamic religious sciences'.[347] This scholarly class emerged in the first three generations of Islam who had come to be seen by their contemporaries and successors as especially knowledgeable in matters relating to the Qurʾān, as sources of information on the life and teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad, and as jurists.[379] After a period of autonomy, the scholarly class became increasingly involved in the political dynamics of the Muslim realm (*Dār al-Islām*), which, as a topic, is beyond the purpose of this study.

However, researchers caution against presumptions that the structures of authority in Islam have been and are similar to those of Catholicism or Protestantism. Such generalizations concerning Islam 'are notoriously dangerous and unreliable'.[380] For example, there is no ecclesiastical order of authority in Sunnī Islam per se (and to an

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[377] Jackson, at 34.
[378] Religious authority in this brief introduction differs from political authority in the post-prophetic period. For a helpful primer on the development and challenges of political authority after the life of the Prophet Muhammad, see Jackson.
[379] Ibid.
[380] Turner, at 119.

extent in Shia Islam) as far as knowledge acquisition and teaching are concerned, and no formally ordained clerics (again, particularly in Sunnī Islam). In approaching the question of authority in Islam, then, the perspective that this study takes focuses on the qualifications threshold, which is reached through the acquisition of knowledge (*ʿilm*) and training (*tarbiyya*)—rather than through an ecclesiastical structure. As elaborated below, knowledge acquisition and juridical experience have been historically essential components of religious authority within Islam. With this in mind, there are discernible differences between traditional and contemporary paradigms of, for example, qualifications of a scholar, as well as discernible *parallel* differences between the roles that media have played and continue to play in the question of religious authority.

In Sunnī Islam, the 'authority' vested in the scholars emanated from their demonstrated scholarship. In other words, a qualifications threshold was expected of scholars in order that they might pass judgement and make legal rulings. Those who did not possess advanced learning in the religious sciences were, in general, to be ignored. The alterations that affected scholarship thresholds predated digital media, with the 'rise of new authorities with inferior credentials', but with aptitudes associated with media technologies of their times. This subsequently led to the marginalization of 'traditional Muslim authorities'.[381]

As such, it is perhaps because of the non-hierarchical structure of Islam, which is 'without denominations, hierarchies, and centralized institutions', that an authority crisis emerged within Islamic milieus.[382] Thus, one of the key components of authority in contemporary Islam relates to historical developments of the nation-state and modernity that have impinged upon the question of authority in contemporary and mediated globalized Islam; meaning, the identity of the contemporary Muslim has been influenced by the colonial experience and the challenges that it posed with regard to Western cultural

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[381] Bulliet, at 12.
[382] Ibid.

dominance and its breaching of traditional Islamic teachings and education. It also influenced territorial constructs of an Ummah, the global community of Muslims (however imaginary that category may be) with the development of nation-states in the post-colonial age. The main historical pressures that exerted influence on authority were formidable.

Researchers, such as Bulliet, Brinton, Mandaville, and Roy, have stated that the traditional scholarly class of Islam (the ʿulamāʾ) underwent structural marginalisation in the colonial period. Brinton, for example, traces seminal changes of authority to early 19th century Egypt, when 'changes were set in motion to reform religious institutions for the sake of modernizing the country' under the pressure of Western modernity and its increasing spread.[383] The pressure of these transformations ultimately led to a redefining of the class of scholars, whose public station as Islam's scholarly class of *ʿulamāʾ*, was weakened in order to better negotiate modernization and its perceived benefits as evidenced in the West. In other words, the stagnation of the traditionally trained and valorised *ʿulamāʾ* was considered to be a significant hindrance to modernization. Specifically, the hermeneutics of traditionally trained religious authorities were viewed by reformers, such as al-Afghānī, as obsolete and thus stalled Muslims in accommodating the coming of the modern age.[384]

The effects of the transformation of authority were not perfunctory; the diminished status of the scholarly class as the custodians of the interpretation of the revealed sources of Islam, namely, the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth, was not only undermined but encroached upon by more rationalistic hermeneutics that traditionally trained scholars were said to have lacked. For Roy, the roots of cordoning off the powers of traditional religious authorities led to what he coins 'new Islamist intellectuals' of the modern age and its new mediation

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[383] Brinton, *Preaching Islamic Renewal*, at 6–7.
[384] Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), at 233.

prowess.[385] Muslim reformers, under the influence of 'European anticlericalism', challenged the power of the *'ulamā'* by replacing sacred law edicts and the processes of their derivation in the terminologies and approaches of 'legal codes of European inspirations'.[386]

Thus, the notion of stagnation in the Muslim world when juxtaposed to Western advancement was seem as a crisis that needed a response among the Muslim intelligentsia, who were in search of answers to the question related to the success of Europeans in taking control—colonial and intellectual—of large swathes of areas that were under the rule of Islam's marshal, legal, and religious authority. Thus, the shift in authority began as an attempt of reformers to contest 'European ascendancy through modernization, that is, as an imitation of European models of government and of knowledge production and distribution.' [387]

The very foundation of religious authority constructs concern knowledge and its related epistemologies. It was at the roots of this foundation and their perceived inertia that the unproductivity and sluggishness of Muslim societies were imputed. Thus, it 'could be rectified by giving those who were not religious scholars the opportunity to partake in activities seen to exemplify Muslim intellectual production'.[388] But how? The focus turned toward a new and modern 'rational capacity—and not specialized learning in centuries-old interpretive techniques—became the criteria for interpretive rights'. The resistance of the *'ulamā'* to modernization and their attempt to 'maintain control over the transmission of religious knowledge became more difficult—in fact, almost impossible— as time went on'. What this was leading to can be summarized as 'stripping the *'ulamā'* of their regulating rights over the production and distribution of religious knowledge'.[389]

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[385] Roy, Oiliver, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), at 89.
[386] Bulliet, at 12.
[387] Brinton, *Preaching Islamic Renewal*, at 7.
[388] Ibid.
[389] Ibid. at 7–8.

Since the historical periods mentioned above and their particular pressures on authority, the globalization of knowledge and its correlation with authority have taken a marked turn with the advent of the print press and, later, electronic media, which only further challenged the centres of authority in Islam. (The issue of new media and authority is discussed below.[390])

Religious authority, particularly when applied as a framework of research of contemporary Islam and digital media, may also be contextualized in an *expanded breadth* of such research but in conversation with *globalization* and religion. For Mandaville, the new global or transnational realities generate what he calls the 'pluralizations of Islamic authority'. The phrase denotes 'a situation in which structures of authority become increasingly diffuse, disparate, polyvalent and translocalized'. The pluralization, in turn, exerts influence on 'textual bases, discursive forms and personifications of authority'.[391]

As mentioned above, traditional more centralized forms of Muslim religious authority focused on scholars interacting with and interpreting scriptural texts for the public; and, in terms of discursive forms of textual engagement, the juridical sciences of Muslim intellectual history produced the sciences and methodologies of deriving rulings from sacred texts (the science of *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*) and detailed accounts of the rulings themselves that cover the daily routines of rituals, as well as commerce, family matters, and more. It is thus important to note that 'formal jurisprudence of this sort has been largely confined to a particular class of invested interpreters' who were recognized for their knowledge.[392]

What has been observed as a *reoriented* view of authority—reoriented away from classical religious authority in Islam in the mid 19th to early 20th centuries—has

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[390] Section 4.5 below addresses more pointedly the relationship between media technology and Islamic religious authority.

[391] Peter Mandaville, 'Globalization and the Politics of Religious Knowledge: Pluralizing Authority in the Muslim World', *Theory, Culture & Society,* 24/2 (2007), 101–15, at 103.

[392] Mandaville, 'Globalization and the Politics of Religious Knowledge', at 103.

accelerated from a gradual change to a 'revolution in religious authority', particularly in light of increasing literacy and modern mass education reforms in the Muslim world. Turner views the changes provocatively as a kind of 'deprivatization of religion', that is, breaking the seeming monopoly of authority from the traditionally trained ʿulamāʾ to a broader network of educated people who have non-religious training.[393] In addition, the 'emergence of new technologies and modes of communication, and a shift from 'traditional' to 'modern' attitudes – involves a significant transformation in the constitution of the aforementioned categories'.[394]

At the core of the pluralization of knowledge notion is the decentralized landscape of religious authority in Islam, in which access to media technologies has permitted a plethora of voices to make claims and edicts that may potentially influence choice and conduct among adherents to the faith. The new voices have been termed from the early years of the internet as 'Islam's New Interpreters'.[395] Similarly, Mandaville categorizes the more immediate effects of media on the globalization of Islamic authority by attending to the question of how individual 'Muslims understand the social purpose and ends of knowledge seeking', as well as the space of mediated religious authority. He calls it 'the spatial pluralization of Islamic authority' over distances.[396] Thus, the spatial dimensions of knowledge production and conveyance wield changes in terms of 'how far away and in what kinds of spaces one seeks authority or authorization'.[397] The spatial reorientation of knowledge production and its consequential effects on authority represents a technological enabling of globalization, as explored below in the discussion of media and authority within Islam.

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[393] Turner, 'Islam, Public Religions and the Secularization Debate', at 11-12.
[394] Mandaville, 'Globalization and the Politics of Religious Knowledge, at 102.
[395] Jon W. Anderson. 'The Internet and Islam's New Interpreters', in *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*, ed. Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, 2nd edn (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), at 45.
[396] Mandaville, 'Globalization and the Politics of Religious Knowledge', at 101.
[397] Ibid.

Another point about Roy's view of globalized Islam, his approach and criticism of the failure of Islamists in achieving their aims in a more globalised and trans-territorial world avoids making essentialists arguments. His criticism for contemporary Islam's struggle for a voice and position in a globalization framework is a result of what he believes is a political failure, rather than a failure of the religion itself. Thus, the external influences of post-colonial Muslim contexts are products of Westernisation and globalism, and not necessarily the theology and epistemology of the religion.[398]

But Roy's declaration of the 'failure' of Islamism should be briefly addressed as it relates to Islamism and media. The failure of Islamism in Roy's argument is rooted in the observation that the advocacy of Islamism in producing 'Islamic' nations and governments based on strict teachings of Islam, as framed by Islamists, has been a failure in the sense that such visions have not been actualized. However, 'Islamism' is hardly homogeneous. For the type of Salafism examined in this study, the central message and purpose, as described in Chapter 3, concerns purist Salafism, which deals more with teaching, preaching, and condemning beliefs and practices related to heterodoxy, rather than statecraft. As such, the failure of *global* Islamism, especially in a highly-mediated age, is limited to the failure of the grander, globalized views of political Islamists (including the politicos of Salafism). The emphases of purist Salafist teachings, on the other hand, underscores the importance of the role of modern media, through which the *teachings* are conveyed. For Mandaville, the destabilized and decentralized effects of digital media on authority has permitted the content production of contestations that are generated with 'unprecedented intensity'.[399] And the successes or failures of such goals are thus not dependent on a nation-building conceits of political Islamists.

Now, with regard to intellectual and intra-Islamic contestations, it is useful to consider the views of Weber, whose assessments of power and authority, include the

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[398] Roy, *Globalized Islam*, at 17-20.
[399] Mandaville, 'Globalization', at 108.

power vested in the form of pronouncements that may affect the beliefs and conduct of followers—not through violence or other coercive means, but through the power of persuasion. Authority addresses the 'probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) from a given source will be obeyed by a given group of persons'.[400] For purist or quietist Salafism (as opposed to Jihadist Salafism), the discursive significance of online texts relates to the degree of moral persuasion that they exercise. As such, of the various forms of religious authority that are visible in cyber-Islamic environments, this study focuses on the authority 'to define correct belief and practice, or orthodoxy and orthopraxy, respectively; to shape and influence the views and conduct of others accordingly', as well as to marginalisze those who are said to have deviant views and practices.[401]

As a framework, religious authority is undergoing significant change (or challenges) because of the notion of 'disruption', as a function of 'mediatisation'—principally as it relates to digital media and the challenge they pose to traditional means of knowledge acquisition, conveyance, and access. Media disruption has permitted unprecedented numbers of content producers to make their appearance and, quite often, impact felt in the digital media ecology, challenging religious authority as traditionally understood, since authority is now more 'imbedded in a marketplace of religious choice'.[402]

4.5 Religious Authority, Media, and Islam

Before the advent of the Internet and subsequent emerging technologies, the idea of religious authority in Islam envisioned a public sphere 'exclusively dominated by a group of theologians and religious elites—the *'ulamā'*—who had the ultimate say and

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[400] Talcott Parsons, *Max Weber: The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Free Press, 1968).
[401] Krämer and Schmidtke, at 1.
[402] Hoover and Lundby, at 292.

authority over the transmission of the religious message'.[403] While the definition religious authority of the pre-digital media age is resistant to such a singular description, it seems clear that, with the development and spread of digital media, the domination of the religious elites has been challenged.

The traditional paradigms of knowledge acquisition were viewed as an extension of the tradition of revelation and its interpretation. God revealed the scriptures, for example, through 'charismatic' personages, namely prophets and messengers, and the 'texts' of revelation were first committed to memory, then to parchment. In the post-prophetic period, then, the duty of interpretation fell upon qualified scholars who were presumed to be responsible for the mighty task of interpretation for the masses. In Islam, the traditional elites of religious authority, therefore, 'required specialised hermeneutics as the basis of their authority to interpret'.[404] Thus, the question of media technologies and religious authority touches upon sensitivities that indirectly relate to what is essentially a sacrosanct matter.

The relationship between knowledge and authority in the Islamic paradigm is a representational one, since 'assertions of authority are represented, in some fashion, with validated forms of knowledge'. As such, knowledge is the 'cardinal quality in the legitimization of Islamic authority'.[405] However, with digital media, what qualifies as 'validated' knowledge is brought into question, as the links between scholar and audience, traditionally physical and communal, become within digital media impersonal and highly mediated.

Researchers have 'emphasized the role of the new media … in democratizing Islamic knowledge by breaking the monopoly of the ulama [the scholarly class] on

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[403] Mohammed El-Nawawy and Sahar Khamis, *Islam Dot Com: Contemporary Islamic Discourses in Cyberspace*, Palgrave Macmillan Series in International Political Communication, 1st edn (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), at 79.

[404] Bryan S. Turner and Kamaludeen Mohamed Nasir, *The Sociology of Islam: Collected Essays of Bryan S. Turner* (London: Routledge, 2016), at 196.

[405] Patrick D. Gaffney, *The Prophet's Pulpit: Islamic Preaching in Contemporary Egypt*, Vol. 20 (Oakland: University of California Press, 1994), at 35–6.

accessing and interpreting the sources'.[406] In 2003, Bunt was among the first to document and analyse 'Cyber Islamic Environments' as *transformative* in terms of their 'power to enable elements within a population to discuss aspects of religious interpretation and authority with each other' in new ways that could potentially subvert traditional or 'conventional channels' of opining on religious matters.[407]

In his study of Islam online, Lawrence asks a principal question, 'What is authority in Islam?' It is an appropriate question, and always a good starting point. Lawrence locates three nodes that relate to Islamic religious authority: the scriptural, the charismatic, and the juridical. The Qurʾān and the Prophet Muhammed represent the first two respectively. Observant Muslims accept the scriptural node as sound sources or authorities from which the third node is derived—namely, the juridical, the rules of Islamic sacred laws, which rely on an interpretive epistemology.[408] To an important degree, the 'authority' under examination here concerns the 'juridical' node of authority, which covers the affairs of the faithful, ethical and moral and even creedal matters, and decisions made by individuals influenced by the power of religious authorities.

In connecting the constructs of authority of the present age with those of the recent and pre-modern past, Mandaville examines the 'changing boundaries' in religious knowledge in Islamic intellectual history, beginning with print culture in the Muslim world: namely, books, pamphlets, and newsletters produced in the 19th century. These 'new' forms of text were 'taken up with urgency by Muslims in the nineteenth century in order to counter the threat posed to the Islamic world by European imperialism'.[409] The religious scholars of that time steered this transformation of knowledge transfer, employing means of distribution that challenged the more traditional means and vectors of teaching. But there was a 'side effect'. The growing print culture encroached on the

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[406] Martin Van Bruinessen, *Producing Islamic Knowledge in Western Europe: Discipline, Authority, and Personal Quest* (London: Routledge, 2010), at 22.
[407] Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age*, at 199–200.
[408] Lawrence. 'Allah on-Line', at 238–39.
[409] Mandaville. 'Digital Islam', at 22.

realm of influence of traditional Islamic scholars and loosened their grip 'over the production and dissemination of religious knowledge'. The literate among the masses were now able to circumvent a highly formalized method of knowledge acquisition, since texts were, in theory, available to be read and interpreted by anyone. 'These media opened up new spaces of religious contestation where traditional sources of authority could be challenged by the wider public. […] The move to print technology hence meant not only a new method for transmitting texts, but also a new idiom of selecting, writing and presenting works to cater to a new kind of reader.'[410]

The nuanced matter of modern ruptures within the religious authority terrain is not necessarily new. For Bulliet, the 'crisis' within contemporary Islam relates to crises in religious authority that have grown over a century. When Osama bin Laden 'became the world's best- known Muslim during the 1990s' after the attacks of 11 September 2001, he advocated that all Muslims take up 'jihad' or armed struggle against perceived enemies of Islam, which, in bin Laden's mind, included most the West, particularly the United States.[411] Bulliet's reflections on the forensics of religious thought in contemporary Islam that led to the attacks of 11 September 11, 20011, and the perceived slow reaction of Muslim religious authorities to condemn it, lead to the conclusion that they are firmly related to the ruptures of traditional authority in Islam. 'This strange silence [the lack of condemnation by Muslims] does not reflect the attitude of traditional Islam but is a painful manifestation of a crisis of authority that has been building within Islam for a century.'[412] But, more importantly, Bulliet pointed out that it is precisely this crisis in authority in modern Islam 'that allowed bin Laden, despite his lack of a formal religious education or an authoritative religious position, to assume the role of spokesman for the world's Muslims'.[413]

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[410] Ibid.
[411] Bulliet, at 11.
[412] Ibid.
[413] Ibid.

Brinton thoroughly examines the role of television as an 'extension of religious authority'[414] in her study of a popular Egyptian scholar and preacher, Muḥammad Mutwallī al-Shaʿrāwī (1911–1998), whose sermons and study circles were broadcast on Egyptian television for decades. The show, being broadcast as reruns in much of the Arab world, remains popular, and is readily found on YouTube. Brinton saw that, for the viewers, al-Shaʿrāwī's televised sermons represented 'a new practice that highlighted a reciprocal type of alteration in which viewers were no longer tied to the original space and time of delivery. Instead they now participated in a ritual that was both separate from the ordinary and embedded in its environment.'[415] Brinton's research associates the mediation of television with the popularity of a charismatic learned man who was apparently effortlessly, if not naturally, skilled in two aspects of 'preformativity': namely, rhetoric and theatrics. The image of al-Shaʿrāwī, as a result, came to be regarded as saintly and a means of obtaining *baraka* or blessings, even if mediated by broadcast technology.[416] Brinton's work was among the first to associate television mediation with the subtleties of religious symbolic meaning characteristic of contemporary Muslim figures and the broadening of the confines and reach of religious authorities. (In a similar vein, Messick examined religious radio broadcasts in Yemen, in which formal religious edicts were broadcast by local muftis—scholars qualified to make edicts.[417])

Generally speaking, religious television and radio broadcasts in the Muslim world were part of the political and religious establishment, as was the case in Saudi Arabia, where the national 'visions for education, worship, social services, politics, and entertainment' were conveyed and, to an important extent, controlled by such broadcasts. It was essentially a 'top-down pattern of communication, so that competing voices are

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[414] Brinton, at 180.
[415] Ibid., at 181.
[416] Ibid., at 187.
[417] Brinkley Messick. 'Media Muftis: Radio Fatwas in Yemen', in *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and their Fatwas*, ed. Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick, and David S. Powers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

more likely to emerge through the alternative small media'.[418] The limited alternative platforms for counter-narratives and audience engagement, however, were burst open by digital media technologies reconfiguring access and definitions of what an *audience* actually constitutes, thus 'disrupting' a system that offered narrow pathways of mass communication outside the establishment. 'As is characteristic of all these new media, the social and cultural distance on the Internet between producer and consumer is radically reduced.'[419]

In a similar vein, Turner sees Muslim religious authority as once being almost exclusively a 'local, discursive and popular form of authority'. A religious leader is 'one who has achieved considerable popular recognition and support'. [420] New technologies, however, are confrontational when it comes to religious authority, in part because of the entry into the public sphere of a variety of voices. The 'ideological' effects of new media technologies revolve around providing 'alternative, deregulated, devolved and local opportunities for debate and discussion', qualities, as Turner points out, that are required for 'democratic civil society'. Contemporary media technologies also 'have the unintended effect of corroding traditional forms of authority' that was based in oral transmission and textual learning based on printed texts'. [421]

In his case study of Muslims in Europe, Caeiro examines edict-making systems (*iftā'*) in the Muslim minority community of Europe and the status of religious authority in the production and conveyance of these edicts. He writes that, 'with the spread of literacy and the liberalization of access to sacred knowledge, this relation [between authorities of religion and their audience] has started to change'. But how? He attributes it to the mass education of Muslims in Europe and the rise of 'new media', which have

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[418] Eickelman and Anderson, at 9.
[419] Ibid.
[420] Turner. 'Religious Authority and the New Media', at 119.
[421] Ibid., at 118.

'contributed to the displacement and fragmentation of religious authority', thus admitting that modernity itself has contested established authority.[422]

Bunt addresses authority and the Internet by examining the online presence of religious authorities well known before the digital age, including Egyptian cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Iran's Ayatollah al-Sistani, Shaykh Abd'ar-Rahman as-Shadhili, muftis of Syria and Saudi Arabia, and even the popular preacher Amr Khaled. In his detailed analysis, Bunt writes: 'Those Muslims, living and dead, who have a sacred status within their communities' history hold a prominent place in cyberspace.'[423] Digital media, moreover, create a 'transnational hypermarket' that affects the very notion of 'Muslim publics'[424] and admits new voices into the revered space of religious discourse. The veritable library of online 'worldviews and notions of exclusivity' has the capacity 'to transform aspects of religious understanding and expression within Muslim contexts'.[425] A theme in Bunt's work concerns the potential of digital media 'to enable elements within the population to discuss aspects of religious interpretation and authority with each other', thus 'subverting what were conventional channels for opinions on religious issues'—that is, religious authority.[426]

Brown underscores this observation by parsing out the familiar authorities in Islam—namely the *muftī* (a scholar qualified to advance edicts based on sacred law) and the judge—from popular preachers who are more adept in rhetoric than in deeper scholarship. These two categories of religious personage have deep historical roots. Brown, however, suggests that the authority vested in them has given way in the age of

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[422] Alexandre Caeiro. 'Transnational 'Ulama, European Fatwas, and Islamic Authority: A Case Study of the European Council for Fatwa and Research', in M. Van Bruinessen and S. Allievi (eds), *Producing Islamic knowledge: transmission and dissemination in Western Europe* (London: Routledge, 2010) 133–153, at 136.
[423] Bunt, *iMuslims*, at 112.
[424] Jon W. Anderson and Yves Gonzalez-Quijano. 'Technological Mediation and the Emergence of Transnational Muslim Publics', in *Public Islam and the Common Good*, ed. Armando Salvatore and Dale F. Eickelman (Leiden: Brill, 2004).
[425] Bunt. '#Islam, Social Networking and the Cloud', at 179.
[426] Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age*, at 202.

cacophony, as he terms it. 'The proliferation of new media and the revival of some older ones have led to many new entrants into religious arguments besides mufti and judge'.[427] Elsewhere, in studying Arab politics and new spaces for religious arguments therein, Brown suggests that the 'linkages and classes' of debates do not 'end hierarchies and authority, but they diversify them'.[428]

Van Bruinessen examines the production of 'Islamic knowledge' in Western Europe, identifying two models of knowledge production and dissemination. One resembles a market economy. On the 'supply side' are the specialists of religious sciences or various movements producing Islamic knowledge, and on 'the demand side' is the public, 'who more or less critically make a choice out of what is on offer'. The second model applies mainly to young Muslims, who 'established institutions' and constructed 'their own forms of Islamic knowledge in an eclectic and creative process'. The first model draws a 'strict distinction between producers and consumers of religious knowledge', while, in the second model, 'everyone is to some degree involved in its production'.[429] It is in Van Bruinessen's second model that challenges to traditional authority can be located. For Hoffman and Larsson, the spectacle of new media likely represents a 'watershed moment' in the realms of information sharing and exegetical approaches to Islamic law texts. The 'philosophical and theoretically driven research' of new media represent 'two grand trajectories' that ultimately will 'ushering in a watershed of epochal dimensions'.[430] Scholars have examined the role of digital media in various communities within European nations, drawing attention to specific online Islam within a given nation and its relationship with religious authority.

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[427] Nathan J. Brown, *Arguing Islam after the Revival of Arab Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), at 49.
[428] Ibid.
[429] Martin van Bruinessen, 'Producing Islamic Knowledge in Western Europe: Discipline, Authority, and Personal Quest', in Martin van Bruinessen and Stefano Allievi (eds), *Producing Islamic knowledge: transmission and dissemination in Western Europe* (London: Routledge, 2010), 1–27, at 2.
[430] Hoffmann and Larsson, at 5.

In his review essay, Peter associates changes in religious authority with the notion of 'individualization.[431] Peter's essay focuses on the Muslim minority community in Western Europe, but makes little mention of the role of media in the process of individualization and its association with Islamic religious authority. Several researchers, meanwhile, have examined the role of media in religious authority in connection with globalization. Roy, Mandaville, Anderson, and others have used the frame of globalization more than that of mediatisation per se.[432]

The review of the literature concerning media and Islamic religious authority, while not fully exhaustive, is representative of current research. It also shows a need for more research that takes as its central theme Islam and new media. There is little research, thus far, that centrally concerns itself with digital media, *disruption*, and religious authority in the Islamic milieu. Willemse and Bergh note that 'the demographic "youth bulge" in the region [Middle East], coupled with the growing use of the new media and technologies, has caused political culture to be more individualistic and less attracted to holistic ideologies, whether Islamist or secularist'. New media, the authors state, have permitted a new public to 'bypass state and religious authority and debate the diverse interpretation of religious principles within their own national boundaries and beyond'.

What this chapter puts forward, then, is a media analytical framing, through mediatisation and disruption, of contemporary religious authority in Islam that is significantly underrepresented in the literature.

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[431] Peter, Frank. 'Individualization and religious authority in Western European Islam'. *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 17, no. 1 (2006) 105–118, at 106–07.
[432] See Roy, *Globalized Islam*; Mandaville, *Global Political Islam;* Jon W. Anderson. 'The Internet and Islam's New Interpreters', in *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*, ed. Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, 2nd edn (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 45–60.

4.6 Religious Authority and Modern Salafism

This study argues that the brand of Salafism examined here is adept in utilizing digital media to convey arguments and scriptural texts with a practised skill that makes the ideology attractive, if not seductive, to audiences. For Haykel, Salafī messaging (whether online or offline) has an allure that is rooted in the 'form of authority that [Salafism] promotes, and reproduces, as well as the particular hermeneutics it advocates'.[433] He disputes arguments that the appeal of Salafism lies in its 'de-territorialised' or 'fundamentalist' qualities—that is, a transnational ideological presence that is not associated with seemingly profane facts of geography or citizenship. He also denies that Salafism takes advantage of globalization as a 'condition of modern life'. Rather, Salafism's 'claims to religious certainty […] explain a good deal of its appeal, and its seemingly limitless ability to cite scripture to back these up'.[434]

For purist or quietist Salafism (as opposed to Jihadist Salafism), the discursive significance of online texts relates to the degree of moral persuasion that they exercise. As such, of the various forms of religious authority that are visible in cyber-Islamic environments, this study focuses on the authority 'to define correct belief and practice, or orthodoxy and orthopraxy, respectively; to shape and influence the views and conduct of others accordingly', as well as to marginalize those who are said to have deviant views and practices.[435]

Thus, this dissertation seeks to analyse popular online Salafī texts that make use of or put forward a populist rhetorical style of knowledge transmission, a hagiography of historical figures, a facility with quoting primary and secondary sources, and the use of powerful language patterns and vocabulary that speak to the claim of religious authority.

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[433] Haykel, at 4.
[434] Ibid.
[435] Krämer and Schmidtke, at 1.

The chapter on methodology, below, addresses the means by which this argument is defended.

4.7 Conclusions

In studying the connection between religious authority and emerging media technologies, the discussion must ultimately migrate to the effects that the changing role of authority actually has on the lives and choices on people. What is religious authority if it does not include a parsing of texts, edicts, or content that exert influence on the faithful? For Lawrence, the 'juridical' node of authority cannot be overlooked in discussions of and research on authority in Islam. In this study, the focus is on the juridical node of authority and the *disruptive* qualities that new media introduce, permitting content-producers to enter the media ecology and, in some cases, exert influence and make statements, despite appearing out of their depth.

Digital media have had unique effects that invite study, such as the vast social media phenomenon that nearly each year introduces new avenues of instant communication. Studies have produced impact-theories of 'virtual religiosity'.[436] These forays in the existential meaning of digital conveyance are upheld in part by the transformation of the very notion of a media audience, from passive receivers of information to active participants in 'information gathering and exchange', as Bunt states.[437] In other words, the audience has undergone a 'participative turn' that has greatly expanded the sheer number of content producers who can now easily introduce competing ideological stands within a given religion.[438]

Digital space, and proselytizing therein, are increasingly seen as indications 'of shifting power dynamics in public-religious discourse in Muslim societies'.[439] This

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[436] Hojsgaard and Warburg, at 15–17.
[437] Bunt, *iMuslims*, at 131.
[438] Mitchell, 'Emerging Conversations in the Study of Media, Religion and Culture', at 337–38.
[439] Nabil Echchaibi. 'From Audio Tapes to Video Blogs: The Delocalisation of Authority in Islam', *Nations and Nationalism* 17, no. 1 (2011), 24–44, at 28.

observation was made eight years ago, when Echchaibi noted that, among the power dynamics of digital media, is the contestation or 'control over meaning'.[440] In the following years, Salafists have significantly increased the adeptness of their multi-modal use of new media for their missionary work, known as *da'wa*, at the centre of which are contestations over the meanings of key powerful terminologies within Islamic intellectual history. This study seeks to pursue those important contestations.

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[440] Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY: BACKGROUND AND APPROACH

5.1 Introduction

Nearly three decades ago, researchers anticipated that the study of 'new media' would

undertake a marked transition toward greater interdisciplinarity. This, in turn, would

require methodological approaches that amount to more than the 'extensions of existing

methods', especially those exclusively exercised within a departmental media studies

paradigm. The researcher of new media and religion would thus need to 'consider

alternative methods, or even multiple methods' in studying online religious content,

performances, and messaging in an expanding digital space.[441] The conceptual

underpinning of these projections of the 1990s is rooted in the notion that digital media

signify more than an innovation of instrumentality with negligible disruptive or

epistemological meaning for religious communities, individuals, and leadership.

For O'Leary, who was among the first researchers to have foreseen the

'revolutionary' nature of digital media in the realm of religion, the media forms are

collectively nothing less than a 'cultural force'.[442] To emphasize his argument, O'Leary

quotes Pope John Paul, who commented in 1990 that no one 'thinks or speaks of social

communications as mere instruments or technologies. Rather they are now seen as part of

a still unfolding culture whose implications are yet imperfectly understood and who

potentialities remain for the moment partially exploited.'[443] The significance of this quote

is its emphasis that the transformative nature of digital media was recognized and

commented upon by traditional religious leadership, who had much at stake when it came

to appropriating new media at a pace equivalent to that of their parishioners.

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[441] Panayiota Tsatsou, *Internet Studies: Past, Present and Future Directions* (London: Routledge, 2014), at 174.
[442] Stephen D. O'Leary. 'Cyberspace as Sacred Space: Communicating Religion on Computer Networks', in *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*, ed. Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan (London: Routledge, 2004), at 37.
[443] Ibid.

In contemporary terms, the relationship between digital media and religion is now more than partially explored as a result of new methodologies and research designs. Nonetheless, discussions regarding developing methodologies continue to be appropriate, if not necessary, when introducing new research on this subject because of its complexity, which revolves around the fact that studies in the field are 'interdisciplinary projects', drawing on various fields, such as religious and theological studies, sociology, political science, psychology, and anthropology, as well as traditional media studies.[444] As such, the methodologies available to researchers are necessarily evolving and often involve methods acquired from these various fields and applied to new religious experiences, texts, and engagements made possible by new media. This view has been acknowledged by recent scholars and has naturally 'given rise to new methods of investigation in order to carefully observe and analyse the religious practices and meanings' of online religion[445] and to allow the meaningful 'exploration of the speculated relationship between the Internet and an emerging new religious consciousness'.[446]

The methodology of this study—a selection made in close connection with the study's analytical framework—is situated within the contemporary 'wave' of research paradigms in digital media and religion studies, as first proposed by Hojsgaard and Warburg[447] and elaborated upon by Campbell and Altenhofen.[448] The phenomenological bases of previous studies and methodologies resulted in critically important descriptive treatments of the *varied presences* and purposes of online content of religion and their categories. However, a methodology for *interpreting* online content in dialogue with, for example, an analytical framework that addresses social phenomena (such as the assertive spread of Salafī ideologies in the post-9/11 world and, especially, in the post-Arab Spring

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[444] Campbell and Altenhofen, at 2.
[445] Ibid., at 1.
[446] Lorne L. Dawson. 'Researching Religion in Cyberspace: Issues and Strategies', *Religion and the Social Order* 8 (2000), at 26.
[447] Hojsgaard and Warburg, at 1–11.
[448] Campbell and Altenhofen, at 2.

Muslim milieu) is now more vital. Applying a similar methodological approach, Gaffney's 1994 analysis of sermons in Egypt sought out political messaging. Gaffney's approach represents *political textual analyses*, demonstrating, as Gaffney concludes, that Friday sermons in Egypt are a platform for seeking or establishing religious (as well as) political authority.[449]

The methodology adapted for this thesis builds on the phenomenological approach to studying online texts, as pursued by Bunt in his early[450] and later works.[451] Here it is utilized to locate the critical loci of contestations in which Salafīs censure Ṣūfī practices. However, the analytical methodology used to interpret the texts through the framework of religious authority is categorized as qualitative analysis: 'the nonnumerical examination and interpretation of observations, for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships'.[452] It seeks to locate and interpret qualitative *data* in the form of nomenclatures and displays of argument found in online texts associated with quietist or purist Salafīs, a discourse that exemplifies the 'transformative potential for religions' of the digital form as a 'proselytizing tool'.[453] The methodological approach, to an important extent, may be described as pursuing a 'hermeneutic' approach to 'data extraction and interpretation'.[454] Thus, the nomenclatures and the strategies of contestations, once extracted and collected, are analysed according to ***ideological textual analysis***, which connects language and arguments in online Salafī texts to transcendent claims of religious authority; in turn, this relates to a broader and highly significant public discourse, as previously described. The objective of the qualitative analysis is to 'identity,

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[449] Gaffney, at 20.

[450] See, for example, Bunt, *Virtually Islamic*; *Islam in the Digital Age*.

[451] See, for example, Bunt, *iMuslims*; Bunt, 'Studying Muslims and Cyberspace'.

[452] Earl R. Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 13th edn (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2013), at 390.

[453] Bunt, 'Religion and the Internet', at 705.

[454] Luigi Berzano, 'Research Methodology between Descriptive and Hermeneutic Interests', *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion* 3 (2012), at 73.

interpret, describe and analyse the specific ideas and the specific ideological content'[455] in the following areas:

- Modes of thought as expressed in language use
- Propagated messages designed to influence modes of thought
- Ongoing public debates or ideational struggles, which may be referred to as 'culture wars', with regard to 'whose ideas are "the best", and whose language use and world-view shall prevail'.[456]

This methodological approach is that advocated by Campbell and other scholars in conducting digital media and religion studies.[457] It involves textual analysis, which is applicable in both the social sciences and digital media studies. The objective is to examine the use of language in online content that evokes signs or 'nodes' of power or authority.[458] One of the advantageous aspects of qualitative research is that it is premised on the principle that 'knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon'.[459] A consistent feature of digital media is, in fact, the 'ongoing' development of the media's new applications and technologies.

The methodology takes into consideration religious studies processes (namely, demonstrating the performance or exertion of religious authority) and media studies (that is, analysing *media texts* placed in expanding, and perhaps unmanageable, new spaces and forms). The positioning of a qualitative methodology in close proximity to an analytic framework is done for the purpose of 'linking theory and analysis', as Babbie describes it.[460] In other words, while qualitative analyses may be 'undertaken for purely descriptive purposes', in this study the analyses are coupled with 'the search for explanatory

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[455] Mats Lindberg, 'Qualitative Analysis of Ideas and Ideological Content', in *Analyzing Text and Discourse*, ed. Kristina Breus and Goran Bergstrom (London: Sage Publications, 2017), at 88
[456] Ibid.
[457] Campbell and Altenhofen.
[458] Lawrence, 'Allah on-Line', at 237–38. In his descriptions of the nodes of authority, Lawrence states that one should consider that the nodes may be subject to debates and refinement.
[459] Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), at 23.
[460] Babbie, at 391.

patterns'.[461] The analysis of language found in Salafist material, therefore, is a relevant part of the methodology; as, among the seminal purposes of language, the expression and performance of religion are based on the grouping of 'verbal performativity' of religious discourse with 'power'.[462]

A connection may be observed between our methodology and 'discourse analysis': the latter has become a broad rubric for research methods (including qualitative) that originated in linguistics, semiotics, and other fields.[463] For this study, however, the analysis of online discourses is better described as 'primarily a qualitative method of "reading" texts, conversations and documents which explores the connections between language, communication, knowledge, power and social practices'.[464] In sum, the textual analyses of this study interpret key terminologies and arguments as a *performance* of religion authority.

The analysis of online discourses undertaken here seeks to address the two primary research questions described in the introductory chapter: 1) identify, collate, and examine the key points of Salafī–Ṣūfī dispute *as they appear* in online intra-religious contestations in the contemporary Islamic intellectual economy (an understudied area of research); and 2) through a case-study approach, interpret the *meanings* of *language* and *arguments* (discursive actions[465]) of significant Salafī online texts that speak to claims of religious authority. Of particular interest is the analysis of the meanings of the texts that pass judgment on practices and beliefs of 'other' Muslims and adjudicate whether or not they are properly within the fold of the Islamic canon. These raise sensitive and consequential questions of orthodoxy, orthopraxy, heterodoxy and heretical syncretic practices that purportedly have been introduced into Islam after the generations of the

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[461] Ulrich Demmer. 'Performance/Performativity', in *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert A. Segal and Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, 2015), at 30.
[462] Ibid.
[463] Victor Jupp, *The Sage Dictionary of Social Research Methods* (London: Sage, 2006), at 74–6.
[464] Ibid.
[465] Rodney H. Jones and Sigrid Norris, *Discourse in Action: Introducing Mediated Discourse Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2005), at 21–2.

pious ancestors of historical Islam, and include Salafī evaluations of Sufism and certain practices thereof, with the aim of determining whether they are within or outside the bounds of Islamic orthodoxy. The textual analysis seeks out terminologies and arguments that strongly suggest the evocation of authority, with emphasis on the usage of juridical–ethical language as one of the key nodes of religious authority, as Lawrence proffers[466] and that to a certain degree evokes Weber's dissection of authority, albeit framed in terms of the Islamic experience:

• Scriptural Authority
• Charismatic Authority
• Juridical Authority

Respectively, the nodes listed above refer to the Qur'ān (the Muslim scripture); the Ḥadīth (sayings and normative practices of the Prophet Muḥammad); and the rulings and laws that guide Muslims in their lives—laws that are, it is asserted, derived from the preceding sources. But, as Lawrence points out, while these are authentic nodes of authority within Islam, and few Muslims, if any, would deny their importance as authoritative guides, each node is contested to various extents. Lawrence expands on these differences, but, for our purposes here, these nodes of authority are legitimate sources of authority in Islam and provide a useful framework. It is important to note that the usage of the word 'node' offers a flexible understanding of authority, since each of these nodes (not 'sources' or 'principles') does not exist fully separate from the others. An argument can be made that the nodes are, in fact, branches of the same tree that shows itself in the Salafī texts described and analysed in this thesis.

The relationship between law and religion is an expansive topic. Briefly, the use of juridical language in digital space (opposed to the space of, for example, a nation-state) is not regulated in any formal, state-enforceable or traditional, institutional or societal-enforceable way. However, the moral connection between law and human behaviour

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[466] Lawrence, 'Allah on-Line', 38–39.

remains important for consumers of religious content online. At a conceptual level, moral

pressure is rooted in the fact that law and religion 'function normatively' and that '[l]aw is

one location for thinking and enforcing duty and obligation'.[467] As such, the space in

which normative or, more importantly, *neo-normative* senses of duty, obligation, and

orthodoxy exist has expanded dramatically because of digital media, posing a challenge to

pre-digital, print-based conceptions of authority in Islam. In this new space, 'the appeal to

religious law becomes ever more urgent, and hence there is a sort of bidding war in which

competing authorities attempt to out-do each other in terms of the strictness of their

interpretation of legal norms'.[468] It is likely in the case in Salafism that 'inflationary

expansion of claims to purity and strictness [have] a compulsory upward trajectory'.[469]

The focus on juridical, creedal, and moral language in Salafī texts, therefore, emphasizes

the importance of interpreting the nomenclature as a performance of authority in a new

'relational perspective'.[470] The observations of the 'newness' in media studies are

convincing that digital media is more than an extension of previous media forms.

Scholarship has shown that new media, in fact, do represent a significant and innovative

space for religious messaging (as shown in the previous section). "For religious

communities, the arrival of electronic media can have dramatic implications for textual

authority and oral argumentation.[471] Moreover, as it pertains to this particular study,

'[f]ace-to-face transmission of texts can give way to the emergence of virtual audiences

who consume media without meeting those who produce the content'.[472]

In terms of the changing profile of authority in the digital era, digital media, as

shown previously, provide a platform for ideologues and 'for opinion leaders to construct

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[467] Winnifred Sullivan. 'Law', in *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert A. Segal and Kocku von Stuckrad (Leiden: Brill, 2015), at 2:323.
[468] Turner, at 132.
[469] Ibid.
[470] Alexander Thurston, 'The Salafi Ideal of Electronic Media as an Intellectual Meritocracy in Kano, Nigeria', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* 83/4 (2015), 1058–83, at 1061.
[471] Ibid., at 1062.
[472] Ibid.

asymmetrical communication practices with social networks: a competitive market place of religious ideas where anyone can claim religious knowledge and authority, issue religious rulings, and give advice'.[473] The rise and prevalence of the e-fatwa phenomenon, for example—online religious rulings or verdicts pronounced with the language of Islamic sacred law—is well established.[474] Thus, the language of the juridical node of authority plays a significant role in exerting moral pressure, and is becoming an increasingly important, yet under-attended, topic for research.

As stated above, the appearance of juridical–ethical nomenclatures in the Salafī texts are of primary importance here, since 1) they represent both a valid node of authority and a *product* of the first two nodes of Islamic authority; 2) they potentially wield a high degree of moral pressure on observant Muslims audiences; and 3) they are prevalent in Salafī discourse. As a result, juridical–ethical nomenclatures represent a rich vein of qualitative 'data' consisting of language that has 'a qualitative meaning co-shaped by complex forces located not only in the technological context … but also in the broader social settings wherein information is distributed and aims to have some impact'.[475] In other words, the content under examination can be best understood more completely in the 'broader social' setting, as Salafī contestations and points of views—in competition with co-existing views of Islam—are among the most influential and consequential discourses in contemporary Muslim milieus, if not in all of religion today.

Before introducing the case studies and the nomenclature and arguments of Salafī discourses, it should be stated that research in online and/or digital content has attracted approaches that, in one aspect, relate to the degree to which researchers interact with online communities or individuals. These approaches include interviews with online content providers and with users of forums or other online communities, focus groups,

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[473] Aly, at 4.
[474] Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age*, at 184–204.
[475] Tsatsou, *Internet Studies*, at 24.

and online surveys. In contrast, this study is organized around an observational, non-interactive approach, one that may be categorized as Internet research, referring specifically to the 'Internet as an object of research'—that is, its content—as opposed to the Internet as a tool for 'innovative methodological practices'.[476] The 'texts' of online content are the focus here. As such, interviews, surveys, interactions in forums, and imbedded ethnographic techniques are not appropriate for the analytical framework these texts speak to in this study. It also seems counterintuitive to attempt a content analysis, in which coding and statistical computations are utilized, for this study seeks language usage informed by ideology, indicating an active interpretative framework; in contrast, classical content analysis is a process of 'counting' textual material because it is assumed that 'the fact that there is more or less of something in texts, [is an indication] of something outside of the texts'.[477]

As regards the word 'ideology', it should be noted that this term is vulnerable to misinterpretation. In popular discourse, 'ideology' may carry a derogatory connotation, in that it may signify the view or ideas of 'others' who are not in possession of 'truth'.[478] Hence, this use of the term implies a belittlement of those who are associated with a given ideology. In this study, 'ideology' follows, with modification, van Dijk's definition: namely, 'general systems of basic ideas shared by members of a social group, ideas that will influence their interpretation of social events and situations and control their discourse and other social practices as group members'.[479] The modification of 'ideology' as used herein expands on the 'interpretative' function to include scriptural exegeses: that is, the prism through which thought-leaders of Salafism employ passages from scriptural sources to affirm their ideas, inform their discourses, and censure others with charges of

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[476] Ibid., at 165.
[477] Kristina Boréus and Göran Bergström, *Analyzing Text and Discourse: Eight Approaches for the Social Sciences* (London: Sage, 2017), at 24.
[478] Teun A. Van Dijk. 'Discourse and Ideology', in *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, ed. Teun A. Van Dijk (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 379–407, at 379–81.
[479] Ibid., at 380.

heterodoxy. In addition, the term 'member' does not apply in this study, since formal membership of Salafism (or Islam itself) would be problematic to defend. The methodological approach of the thesis seeks simply to 'identify and describe the ideas and the ideological content irrespective of their truth or falsity'.[480]

With regard to Salafism per se, the process of the 'ideologization' of Salafism began, according to Lauzière, in the 1970s, when scholars and thinkers 'recast purist Salafism as a totalizing system … '.[481] Salafism, in other words, moved from a doctrinal or epistemological approach to the interpretation of Islam's scriptural sources to 'a worldview that encompassed the whole of existence, from knowledge to practice, from morality to etiquette, and even from religion to politics. Salafism was now a total ideology.'[482] From the purchase of this ideology, then, Salafism and its advocates engaged in its purification-of-Islam project, which almost by necessity employs the casting of 'religious warnings and accusations' against other Muslims whose views are judged an anathema to an imagined pure Islam. The vocabulary of such warnings and accusations are directly appropriated from the juridical–ethical vocabulary of Islamic sacred law and creedal thought, as expanded upon below.[483]

The case studies examined here are prominent Salafī digital spaces: namely, the digital presence of **Salafi Publications**, which includes a rich corpus of texts in the form of podcasts (an expanding mode in digital space, as discussed in the next section) produced and posted by the **Salafi Sounds** website, the main body of content under review; a Twitter account that serves primarily as a feeder with links to Salafī Sounds; and a website with hundreds of articles. Information about the content sites will be expanded upon in the next chapter.

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[480] Lindberg, at 93.
[481] Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, at 201.
[482] Ibid. Lauzière quotes sociologist Daniel Bell's definition of *ideology*: 'A total ideology is an all-inclusive system of comprehensive reality, it is a set of beliefs, infused with passion, and seeks to transform the whole of a way of life'. See Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York: Free Press, 1965), at 399–400.
[483] Ibid., at 201.

5.2 Salafi Sounds Case Study and Approach

Podcasts posted in 2017 on the Salafi Sounds website made up the primary corpus of texts examined. These comprise 25 podcasts, varying in length from 25 minutes to more than one hour. Some podcasts posted before 2017 were also selected because the content was highly indicative of the loci of contestations between Salafism and Sufism. In addition, certain podcasts from 2017 were excluded because they addressed issues that were not related to the chief arguments of the study, such as podcasts on marriage counselling, health and diet, and the like. They were nonetheless reviewed to ensure that no pertinent content was embedded in the course of the podcast.

Each podcast was listened to in its entirety, from the opening benediction to the concluding prayer, both of which were in Arabic. The language of the actual lectures and sermons was English. Each podcast required frequent stops and periods of rewinding, and extensive notetaking, to document the language usage and the arguments the speakers made in the course of their presentations. The relevant nomenclature and arguments were extracted, contextualized, and documented. The findings, which are parsed and presented in the following chapter, found two major areas of Salafī contestations.

The **first major area** comprised arguments or loci of disputation that were anticipated in Salafī texts concerned with Sufism: 1) celebrations of the birthday of the Prophet Muḥammad; 2) grave visitation; and 3) the seeking of intercession. What was unanticipated were the frequent vituperations made toward creedal schools of thought such as the Asharite school of thought, as presented below.

The **second major area** consisted of distinct terminologies that evoked a node of authority: namely, juridical–ethical nomenclature. These terminologies are further divided into 1) terminologies related to the categories of actions addressed in Islamic sacred law, in terms of their degrees of permissibility or proscription; and 2) terminologies related to 'proper' and 'deviant' creedal schools of thought, as described below.

5.2.1 Category One: Loci of Disputation

To address RQ1, the practices of Sufism that are most commonly reproached by the texts in the case studies were elucidated.

5.2.1.1 Celebration of the Prophet Muḥammad's Birthday

The word *Mawlid* is an Arabic noun that may refer to both the time or place of one's birth.[484] Its bare linguistic meaning is disassociated from any doctrine or ritual practice, since someone's birthdate has no ideological value per se. However, *Mawlid* assumes a more specific meaning in the context of Islam that has historically drawn both favour and criticism in Muslim circles—more vehement criticism in modern times from proponents of Wahhabism and Salafism.[485] This connotation refers to the practice, quite common in the Muslim world, of celebrating the birthday of the Prophet Muḥammad as an act of veneration and piety. It is said that the Prophet was born on Monday, the 12th day of Rabīʿ al-Awwal, the third month of the Muslim lunar calendar (there is some disagreement on the actual date, though the month is generally agreed upon).[486] The significance of *Mawlid* lies in the fact that it is vested with ritualistic meaning, for it represents an important path to sacred knowledge that is said to begin with reverence and love of the Prophet Muḥammad, which, often, is an obligation of members of Ṣūfī orders in Islam or highly recommended, for the Prophet is 'primarily the intercessor at Doomsday; as the only prophet, he will intercede for his community, as the Koran has promised'.[487]

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[484] Nico Kaptein, 'Mawlid', in P. Bearman et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Leiden: Brill Online, 2012). Accessed at: http://dx.doi.org.turing.library.northwestern.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0716

[485] Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defence, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2014), at 22–24.

[486] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), at 216.

[487] Ibid., at 217.

Critics of the celebration, however, claim that the practice is a heretical innovation or *bidʿa*,[488] as the Prophet Muḥammad himself did not institute the practice of celebrating his birthday. His immediate followers, and the generation that followed them, did not institute it either, the argument continues. It is a practice that represents a syncretic insertion of a foreign rite into Islam. Katz, however, says that the origins of the *Mawlid* cannot be narrowed to one historical moment. 'The origins of the mawlid can be traced, not to the single innovative act of some identifiable authority, but to the slow coalescence of a constellation of devotional narratives and practices that eventually converged to form a single, highly flexible, and attractive form of ritual action.'[489] The debates about celebrating the *Mawlid* have premodern roots, and those in the past who issued edicts or engaged in public debates for or against the celebration were largely learned people or scholars who had the credentials of religious authority, as historical treatises on the subject show.[490]

5.2.1.2 The Ritual of Visiting Graves (*Zirāyatu'l-Qubūr*)

Islamic law permits and even encourages Muslims to visit graves for the purpose of being reminded of their own mortality and to pray *on behalf* of the loved ones interred.[491] However, the matter becomes a point of reproach, as Salafīs claim, when visiting graves or shrines is viewed as a rite of worship or even pilgrimage, or is undertaken for the purpose of *tabarruk*: that is, seeking blessing for being in the presence of a saint in his or

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[488] Jonas Svensson, 'Itz Bidah Bro!!!!! GT Me??–Youtube Mawlid and Voices of Praise and Blame', *Muslims and the New Information and Communication Technologies* (Springer, 2013), 89–111, at 89–91. This study primarily examines the reactions to the Mawlid among viewers as posted on YouTube and comments therein.

[489] Marion Holmes Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam* (London: Routledge, 2007), at 208.

[490] For comprehensive historical and contemporary treatments of development, texts, scholarly disagreements, charges, and counter-charges regarding the Mawlid, see de Jong and Radtke. Nicolaas Jan Gerrit Kaptein, *Muḥammad's Birthday Festival: Early History in the Central Muslim Lands and Development in the Muslim West until the 10th/16th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

[491] Ondredj Beranek and Pavel Tupek, 'From Visiting Graves to Their Destruction', *Crown Papers* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University, 2009), at 6.

her grave. The source of contention is that Salafīs consider that seeking blessings from anyone other than God is tantamount to idolatry.

5.2.1.3 Seeking Intercession (*Tawassul*) and Seeking Aid (*Istighātha*)

These practices are often associated with the preceding locus of dispute, although they may be performed anywhere. They are unambiguously declared to be acts of idolatry (*shirk*) or outright disbelief (*kufr*) by Salafī ideology (both terms are further defined below). Essentially, they represent 'the act of supplicating' to God through the intermediary or 'intercessionary powers' of the Prophet Muḥammad or a saint.[492] Though they are similar in nature, *tawassul* and *istighātha* differ in that the former is a general term that refers to the practice of 'seeking closeness to God by petitioning a deceased pious person', while the latter implies 'asking those in the grave for assistance' for a specific need. For Salafists, both practices are 'infested' with heretical meaning and idolatry.[493] Such practices are sometimes alluded to by way of the neutral descriptive word *tawassul*, but more frequently by the pejorative use of the words 'grave worshippers' and *Qubūriyya*, the Arabic term for those who are accused of 'worship graves', as it is commonly stated. The most common form of *Tawassul* is praying to God, but through the auspices or intercession, that is, the 'intermediation of saints or the Prophet Muḥammad'.[494] This is usually performed at the gravesite of the intermediary, owing to the belief that physical proximity adds spiritual value to such prayers. These gravesites can be found in the *zāwiyas* (lodges) of Ṣūfī orders: that is, the places of gathering for the purpose of performing litanies (*awrād*) of remembrance (*adhkār*) and religious practices such as the Mawlid and *tawassul*. However, the presence of graves in mosques draws ire in Salafī teachings, and, placing online discourse in the context of

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[492] Zajac, 10.
[493] Hamid, *Sufi, Salafis, and Islamists*, at 55.
[494] Richard J McGregor, 'Grave visitation/worship', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Third Edition,* edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson (Leiden: Brill Online). Accessed at: http://dx.doi.org.turing.library.northwestern.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_27519

recent historical momentum, it is worth considering that 'after the Arab Spring, [the words] became more violent. The earlier war of words, both written and spoken, was transformed into a real one, during which many Ṣūfī *zawiyas* were destroyed'.[495]

5.2.2 Category Two: The Recurring Use of Juridical–Ethical Terminologies

Two grouping of texts and their supporting terminologies attempt to exert the frame of authority. They are the focus of analysis. While they are related to one another, if not, arguably, inseparable, nevertheless they are divided here for the sake of further parsing. They are 1) the 'moral–legal' terminologies of the 'five norms'[496] of Islamic sacred law (two of which are censuring), as well as terminologies that position an act or belief within or without the bounds of Islamic orthodoxy and orthopraxy—creedal terms and phrases associated with *ʿaqīda* (the codification of essential beliefs and creeds of Islam); and 2) the communal terminologies that seek to claim authority over the orthodoxy question or the contest over what is the proper *manhaj* of Islam, as discussed previously.

5.2.2.1 Juridical-based Terminologies

These can be divided into ***ḥarām*** or 'prohibited'—that is, a forbidden act considered sinful, and for which the perpetrator would be ultimately answerable to God and/or society—and ***makrūh*** or 'reprehensible',[497] indicating an act to be *disliked* but which is not necessarily sinful. The ***creedal terminologies*** fall into the following groups:

> ***Bidʿa*** or 'heretical innovation':[498] a practice accused of being introduced into Muslim devotional life without proof in scripture or precedent, such as a syncretic custom derived from another faith and appropriated by Muslims.

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[495] Zajac, 6.

[496] Wael B. Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), at 20.

[497] 'Makruh', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al. (Brill Online, 2012). (The brief entry is unauthored by name.) Accessed at: http://dx.doi.org.turing.library.northwestern.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_DUM_2483

[498] J. Robson. 'Bid'a', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al. (Brill Online, 2012). Accessed at: http://dx.doi.org.turing.library.northwestern.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_1393

Shirk or 'polytheism' or idolatry:[499] a deed that is not only sinful but a violation of an inviolable tenet of the religion: namely, an unalloyed belief in the oneness of God; thus, as it is viewed, it is problematic to venerate the Prophet Muḥammad to a degree that is due only to God and not man, not even the Prophet of God.

Kufr or disbelief:[500] the most serious accusation a Muslim can level against another Muslim, for it suggests that the person is no longer within the theological confines of the religion or part of the *ummah*, the larger community of the faithful.

These terms appear in Arabic (transliterated, a phonetic rendition of the Arabic into English). They are often translated as well. Although there are several ways in which to translate these words, for the most part, they are easily recognizable. A speaker declaring an act to be a 'deviant innovation' is, in fact, referring to *bidʿa*. Other terms appear that imply or point to a category of conduct.

The application of these terms seems simple enough on the surface. However, they are words packed with legal implications and historical meaning and, as such, are expected, as it were, to include a stringent process whereby rulings are derived (*ijtihād*). This traditionally required a thorough understanding of Islamic law (*fiqh*) and the legal theory of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), which is 'concerned with the sources of the law and the methodology for extrapolating rules from revelation'.[501] A scholar in law, as defined in classical Islamic intellectual history, must master 'a bundle of disciplines (or literary genres) which constitute the academic articulation of Islam'.[502] It was these scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*) who had the gravitas to issue edicts and debate them, for 'they are regarded as

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[499] D. Gimaret. 'Shirk', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al. (Brill Online, 2012). Accessed at: http://dx.doi.org.turing.library.northwestern.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_6965

[500] W. Björkman. 'Kafir', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al. (Brill Online, 2012). Accessed at: http://dx.doi.org.turing.library.northwestern.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3775

[501] Ahmed Al Shamsy. 'Fiqh', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Third Edition*, ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas and Everett Rowson (Brill Online, 2012).

[502] N. Calder. 'Usul Al-Fikh', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al. (Brill Online, 2012).

the guardians, transmitters and interpreters of religious knowledge, of Islamic doctrine and law'.[503]

Other words commonly used in the podcasts mentioned without a stated Arabic equivalent include: deviation, evil, dark forces, and despicable, as will be presented in the next chapter.

5.2.2.2 Terminologies of Communal Orthodoxy

Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa is a phrase commonly used in modern Muslim parlance, and it frequently appears in the podcasts, although its roots go deep into Islamic intellectual history. The phrase translates as 'People of the Way [of the Prophet Muḥammad] and the community [of believers]'. This suggests a *descriptor of delineation* between those who follow the normative behaviour of the Prophet Muḥammad and his companions and early salaf, as it is understood by those employing the phrase, versus those who have fallen outside this community. It may be applied as a pretext to declare individuals or groups as outside this designation, which may either permit or incite harmful reactions.

Manhaj refers to the proper methodology for deriving guidance and rulings from sacred texts, and, for Salafism, it relates to a strict interpretation of the sacred past—that is, the known acts and intentions of the Prophetic period and generations of al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ. As such, it speaks to orthodoxy and orthopraxy and thus *otherizes* what is deemed heretical, blasphemous, and impious. The usage of *manhaj* in the podcasts arguably aims to convince listeners that Salafism possesses the original and valid methodology that has the capacity of restoring 'real' Islam, as it has been suggested.[504]

Daʿwa literally means 'the call'. In a derived and contextual sense, it is commonly used in Salafī discourse to refer to the need to call Muslims (mainly) to return to the proper path or way of Islam, as originally revealed and lived by in the formative

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[503] C. Gilliot. 'Ulama', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al. (Brill Online, 2012).
[504] Meijer, at 15.

generations of Islam. Embedded in the use of this term is the claim that, after the generations of the pious ancestors, impure beliefs and practices were inserted into Islam. Thus, *da'wa* is an important term of Salafī discourse that seeks to reclaim authority in determining (and calling people to) pure Islam.

The significant terminologies in this study, as found in the texts under examination, are removed from their original or linguistic connotations and have acquired meanings that are associated with contemporary Salafī activism. In this context, the Salafī methodology is described as 'scriptural literalism and revolves around a set of binary opposites: tawhid (oneness of God) and opposition shirk (all forms of divine association-ism)'[505] Another binary is cleaving to what is considered the normative practice of Islam (preserved by *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a*) as envisaged by the early pious generations (*al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*) or indulging in *bid'a* (heretical innovation). Implicit in the *da'wa* is a call to take restorative measures that lead to true Islam, which includes the rejection of having loyalty to one of the four canonical schools of Islamic law, which developed after *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*.[506]

About the researcher: In order to position the researcher in terms of this study, he has had extensive extra-institutional experience in Islamic studies, mainly acquired through translation projects. He has translated or has been part of team efforts to translate texts from such influential figures as Muḥammad Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (1058–1111), who historically has been closely associated with Sufism, as well as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (1292–1352), who is one of the most famed students of Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), the principal inspiration of modern Salafism. Al-Jawziyya is also claimed as an inspiration to Salafism and, in fact, is mentioned in the Salafī texts presented in this study. The researcher has a postgraduate degree (MS) in journalism and media, and he has worked in the fields professionally as well academically for decades. He believes his

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[505] Sadek Hamid, 'The Development of British Salafism', *Isim Review* 21 (2008): at 10.
[506] Ibid.

experiences in media and in translation work of Islamic texts complement one another. He was born in Chicago of immigrant parents and was raised in the Chicago area. He trusts that he maintains critical distance with the subjects of this study. After teaching at the university in the United States, he has been teaching at Northwestern University in Qatar for almost 11 years, essentially immersing himself in a critical region of the Muslim world. He teaches courses in 'Media and Religion' and 'Islam, America, and Media Narratives', as well journalism classes.

CHAPTER 6
DATA COLLECTION: SALAFĪ DIGITAL CONTENT

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data collection, synopses, and individual analyses of online

content, addressing the research questions and framework of this study. It is organized

according to the multi-platform content production of UK-based **Salafi Publications**, a

significant producer of purist ideological Salafī content.[507] The case studies presented are

from a variety of forms of digital content (primarily podcasts, followed by articles posted

on a website, an e-book, and social media posts that serve primarily as 'feeders' to content

(podcasts and articles). The expansions of Salafī content and platforms represent what

Bunt has observed as an increasing use of digital media for propagation and community

building. For some Salafī-influenced authors of the past, there was a conscious awareness

to avoid using the words 'Salafism' or 'Wahhabism' as a point of identity. Rather, they

insist that their views represent Islam itself, the terms were to be avoided.[508] In the UK,

organizations associated with Salafism would post content without a Salafī identifier. [509]

However, that has changed in this regard. The current study, the emphasis and

focus is on Salafi Sounds, a platform of Salafi Publications that represents a wider trend

of religion podcasting, which expands the notion of digital mobility from screen-based to

auditory content, as discussed below. In addition, an e-book is briefly examined to

emphasize the cross-platform *consistency* of the Salafī contestations, themes, and

vocabulary representing loci of disagreement and the strategies that Salafī proponents

mobilize in their contestations with Sufism in digital space.

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[507] Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists*, at 46, 61.
[508] Bunt, *iMuslims*, at 35.
[509] Bunt, 'From Mosque to YouTube: UK Muslims Go Online', in *Postcolonial Media Culture in Britain*, eds Ross Brunt and Rinessa Cere, 68–81 (London: Palgrave: 2011), at 74–75.

6.2 Salafi Publications Case Study

This study selected Salafi Sounds, an online project of Salafi Publications, for the following reasons: 1) the value of institutional, self-described Salafism and its content production, as opposed to individuals claimed to be Salafi thought leaders; 2) background and history of the founding organization; and 3) the strategic decision of the organization to pursue a growing trend in digital production, namely, podcasts.

In pursuing the substrate ideology of Salafism in digital space, it is consistent with the methodology of qualitative ideological textual analysis to focus on the texts themselves rather than high profile individuals who are purported to represent contemporary Salafism. Textual analysis draws appropriate attention to the promulgation of ideological arguments with a focus on texts in new digital media spaces. The 'unit of analysis'[510] is represented by textual discourses, that is, documents that have been accessed in this study and kept for permanent recording. The choice of institutional content is of greater value to this study than individual Salafists, who are not invulnerable to shifts in ideology and advocacy, as well as controversy. Bilal Philips, for example, is a well-known *personality* and is considered among the 'representatives' of contemporary Salafism in the English language,[511] but whose positions have become part of an intra-Salafi scrutiny and, moreover, for controversial views that ostensibly have made him banned in several countries.[512] His part in an internal Salafi dispute adds little value to a large study of Salafism as an ideology and its growing presence in digital space.

Also, it is helpful to consider Salafists like Umar Lee, an American convert to Islam and once a vocal advocate of Salafism in America, but who underwent a period of disillusionment with Salafism and wrote a self-published memoir and his critique of

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[510] Altheide, David L., and Christopher J. Schneider. *Qualitative media analysis* (London: Sage Publications, 2013), at 39.
[511] Duderija, Adis. 'Neo-Traditional Salafi Qur'an-Sunna Hermeneutics and Its Interpretational Implications'. *Religion Compass* 5, no. 7 (2011): 314-325, at 315.
[512] Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists*, at 60–61.

Salafism in America.[513] While analyses of Lee and his personal experience with Salafism in America, as well Phillips and his shifting positions over the decades, have their place in ethnographic academic papers on Salafism's personalities in the West, however they contribute less substantial textual evidence of Salafism's substrate ideology mediatised in digital space. A such, in the view of this research, it is more analytically valuable to give preference to texts that are produced by an organization that describes itself and its content as Salafī, and whose content have greater potential to shine light on ideology over personality, that is, individuals who have been *celebrified* as so-called 'super-Salafis'.[514] While well-known individuals, such as Phillips, Naik, and Lee, would be interesting to study; however, examination of their public performances and publications would need to be reframed and become the focus of an academic *paper*, rather than a dissertation.

Also, the study of texts presented with emerging media technologies pertains to the larger thesis of this study, which seeks to contribute to the study of Islam in digital space and, more broadly, add to the growing corpus of academic literature in the field media and religion studies. Institutional Salafism, particularly of an organization that has consistently produced purist Salafist texts for decades and now has decidedly focused on podcasts lends itself to seminal analytical analyses of Salafism on a highly-mediated scale.

As for background information, Salafi Publications has been a consistent voice of purist Salafism in the UK and other English-speaking Muslim communities for more than two decades. Though it started as a producer of print books and booklets, Salafi Publications now 'comprises a bookstore, publishing house, primary and secondary schools (both fee-paying), and two mosques in Birmingham', and has affiliations with centres throughout England.[515] However, it has also actively embraced digital platforms

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[513] Lee, Umar. *The Rise and Fall of Salafi Da'wa in America* (St. Louis: St. Louis Stranger: 2014).
[514] Sadek Hamid, 'The Attraction of Authentic Islam: Salafism and British Muslim Youth', *Global Salafism: Islam's new religious movement,* (2009), 384–403, at 393–95.
[515] Anabel Inge, *The Making of a Salafi Muslim Woman: Paths to Conversion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), at 30.

as an extension of its *da'wa* (or proselytizing mission). Its online presences thus include Salafi Sounds, the Salafi Publications website (currently static, as discussed below), the website AbuKhadeejah.com,[516] electronic and downloadable books, and social media.

Since 1995, the website Salafipublications.com has posted content in the form of articles by various Salafī scholars, some of whom have also produced content posted on Salafi Sounds. Salafipublications.com also contains excerpted translations from books and lectures of Salafī scholars of the Middle East and south-east Asia,[517] thus providing content originally produced in Arabic and other languages of Muslim-majority countries. However, the website's direction changed in the post-9/11 age. In addition to older content explaining or defending purist Salafī ideas, the website has become engaged in confronting extremist violence. The various articles of its previous mission have not been updated in the past nine years, as the website's mission has been altered, and the website's list of '50 latest additions'—that is, the latest articles posted—shows that only one article was posted in all of 2018 (May 31), and none since.[518] The original objective of the website, as a repository of texts advocating Salafī ideals, has seemingly been abandoned as it pertains to maintaining the site with new material, and it has transitioned to focus on the condemnation of transnational jihadi organizations, most notably Al-Qaeda and ISIS. The anti-violence stand of the Salafi Publications website has essentially become the main purpose of the site. The top bar of the website's home page contains a link that takes the visitor to a website dedicated to anti-jihadi groups: Islamagainstextremism.com (a Salafi Publications product: see Figure 1), which contains several downloadable publications that condemn jihadi violence, terrorism, and advocacy—content which essentially rebukes extremist organizations and individuals reported to be associated with Salafī proponents and ideologies in the UK.[519]

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[516] Accessed at: https://www.abukhadeejah.com/
[517] Duderija, at 76.
[518] Last accessed January 15, 2019, at: http://salafipublications.com/sps/
[519] Inge, 31–2.

The repurposed mission of the site may serve also to distance Salafi Publications from extremist groups and individuals. While Salafi Publications has received negative coverage in the news media when known extremists apparently attended conferences organized by Salafi Publications,[520] purist Salafīs, such as the leaders of Salafi Publications, have long stood in opposition to *jihādī* groups and individual extremists, which they consider to be an anathema to Islam and the Salafī ideology and methodology and to operate in counter-distinction to Islamic principles and beliefs. While the transformed bearing of the Salafi Publications website can be viewed from a strategic point of view, it is consistent with purist Salafism ideology, which reproaches not only violent groups but any participation in the political arena of any kind—peaceful or violent—for they 'view politics as a diversion that encourages deviancy'.[521] As such, the website's altered aim is not within the purview of this study, which focuses more on Salafī contestations with Sufism and the *ideological* implications of the contestations. However, it is important to mention the anti-extremist positions of Salafi Publications' leadership because, by taking those positions, it preserves the 'ideological' positions of purist Salafism unencumbered by accusations of violence and thus is free from the pressure to refute claims of associating purist Salafī thought with violent groups. The original mission of Salafipublications.com—as an advocate of Salafī purist ideology—has been assumed by AbuKhadeejah.com, a newer Salafi Publications online source.

The analysis of the content of this website focuses on the ideological substrate of purist Salafism, demonstrating a consistent reliance on common arguments, themes of contestation (vis-à-vis Sufism mainly), and vocabulary—all of which serve to promote the purist Salafī ideology, as presented and argued here.

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[520] Ibid.
[521] Wiktorowic, at 208.

6.3 Salafi Sounds

The case study focuses on the Salafi Sounds website, which presents podcasts of lectures and sermons. It connects with the @SalafiPubs Twitter account, which serves mainly as a feeder to Salafi Sounds; that is, the overwhelming majority of tweets from this account contain links intended to send followers to the Salafi Sounds website (see appendix). When compared with the older model and entity of the Salafi Publications website, Salafi Sounds represents a trend in auditory content in digital space. It has recently received more input from the producers of the site than has the Salafi Publications website, as described later in this chapter. In fact, the @SalafiPubs Twitter account provides only one link in its Twitter identification column, namely, a link to Salafi Sounds.

Figure 1. Screengrab of @SalafiPubs Twitter account

Upon examination of the content selected through a purposive sampling method, as detailed below, important thematic arguments and terminologies emerge as strategies in Salafī online contestations and exclusivist truth-claims. To assist in presenting and analysing the texts, the content is further organized as follows: 1) **detailed linear synopses and brief analyses of select podcasts** that represent the larger trend in the online content of the website and in Salafī discourse, followed by **summarized synopses** of the remaining podcasts of interest, for the purposes of concision and the avoidance of unnecessary repetition; 2) the collection of data relating to key **themes** and **terminologies** that engage with the framework of the study and the research questions it pursues.

A fuller and contextualized analysis of the themes and terminologies found in the texts of the case studies will be presented in the next chapter. This chapter attempts to

determine the main *thematic claims* of Salafism against Sufism, and it seeks to draw out related religious thoughts and Salafī assertions of its *exclusivist claim* to the pure form of Islam. These claims amount to severe creedal and juristic decrees regarding 'other' views and schools of thought within Islam, and delimit the boundaries of orthodoxy and orthopraxy in Islam. They are supported by the consistent evocation of key *pre-modern* phrases that have deep roots and hermeneutical resonance in Islamic intellectual history, but are essentially presented and interpreted in a manner that seeks to arbitrate in determining what is a valid part or practice of Islam (orthodoxy) and what are invalid creeds or syncretic practices (heterodoxy). The themes and nomenclature collected from the podcasts of formal lectures or sermons are presented as outlined below.

First, **detailed synopses** are given of select podcasts that are broadly representative of the content of Salafi Sounds. They are presented in a linear or chronological manner. The detailed synopses are lengthy, to allow a faithful representation of each podcast. The purpose is to preserve the order and process of argument-making of a given speaker and to contextualize the themes and vocabulary on which the arguments rely. Thereafter, **summarized synopses** of other relevant podcasts are presented with the aim of achieving concision without sacrificing facts or literal transmission, or subtracting from the observable reliance on the themes and vocabulary of Salafī contestations.

Thematic contestations are collated, that is, *themes of dispute* presented in the podcasts, such as Salafī contestations over the validity of celebrating the *Mawlid*. The texts that pertain to that dispute—that is, the loci of Salafī disputations. They are considered themes, since they regularly occur and their argumentations are spread throughout many of the podcasts.

Key terminologies reference Salafī contestations that rely on nomenclatures that this study argues are vested with the significance of 'authority', such as *juridical*

authority, listed by Lawrence as a node of authority in Islam.[522] These terms are essentially intended to cast formal aspersions at competing ideologies. For example, to claim that a certain practice (such as grave visitations) is an act of '*shirk*' (idolatry) is a formidable assertion to make, for the charge of idolatry calls into question the very right of a person to call him- or herself a Muslim. The terminologies are found throughout the case studies. Thus, this study concentrates on the analytical value of these terms in accordance with their 'ideological' import as 'established modes of thought residing in the language use'[523] of purist Salafism.

Salafi Sounds podcasts as a case study and emerging trend in digital media production: The voice is the oldest form of mediated transmission of information or storytelling, with oral transmissions of religious knowledge and scriptural texts being the main source of knowledge instruction at one time. In the pre-modern context, the direct voice sufficed in teaching, not requiring technology per se. In 1877, the voice itself was first subject to external mediation. Thomas Edison is credited with inventing the phonograph, which allowed the first replay-enabled recording of the human voice.[524] It was the advent of 'schizochronic' sound, splitting the voice away from the time it was actually uttered.[525] But, since then, the distribution of the human voice has expanded. With the help of contemporary media technologies in our highly media-inflected age, the distribution of the spoken voice is on the rise in the form of 'podcasts'. Collectively, the rise of podcasts—in academic and popular circles—is representative of a non-visual digital disruption. Podcasting emerged as a digital product with 'unexpected rapidity' in 2005 and has since then increased markedly in popularity.[526]

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[522] Lawrence, 'Allah on-Line', at 237–39
[523] Lindberg, at 88.
[524] Andre Millard, *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), at 26.
[525] Virginia Madsen and John Potts. 'Voice-Cast: The Distribution of the Voice Via Podcasting' (Cambridge, Massachussets: MIT Press, 2010), at 41.
[526] Madsen and Potts, at 35.

There are three reasons for the popularity, two of which relate to convenience, while the third takes into consideration an unprecedented expanded sphere of the voice. The two benefits related to convenience are **time-shifting** and **mobility**.[527] One can listen to a podcast at any moment and anywhere, while, for example, 'listening to scripture readings is possible while jogging or at work'.[528] For scholars such as Madsen, podcasts represent not just a 'new distribution of the voice' but 'a new and extended sphere for the performance of the essentially *acousmatic* voice' [Madsen's emphasis].[529] Podcasts permit 'voiceless bodies' to transcend time and to transport their voices (including the content and authority they carry) into an 'extended auditory space'.[530] When listening to a podcast, listeners hear a voice connected to a body, a person, who in religious contexts represents an authority.[531]

Within the institutional frameworks of academia and the media industry, the trends of digital media usage studies have largely centred on a 'screen metric': that is, measuring which screen is used more commonly by users of digital media: streaming television, laptops, tablets, smartphones, or wearables (such as the Apple Watch and Virtual Reality headsets).[532] However, the emergence of podcasts represents an extension of the concept of mobility unbound to the screen metric of most digital productions. The media 'experience' is 'secondary'; but not in the sense that visual engagement is considered more important. Rather it is secondary because it does not require a visual commitment, which tends to restrict media mobility and consumption.[533]

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[527] Ibid., at 41.
[528] Heidi Campbell and Paul Teusner, 'Internet and social networking', in John C. Lyden and Eric Michael Mazur (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2015), at 164.
[529] Madsen and Potts, at 33.
[530] Ibid. Among the first usages of podcasts for formal religious purposes are purported to be those produced by GodCast Network.
[531] Ibid.
[532] The longitudinal study of media usage in the Middle East, conducted by Northwestern University in Qatar for several years, monitors 'media use patterns' (including screen technologies) for accessing news and entertainment in the region. It also surveys people living in the region on the matters of censorship, media trust, and media freedom. Accessed at: http://mideastmedia.org/.
[533] Based on a conversation with Prof. John Pavlik of Rutgers University (New Jersey, USA), who is a well-known researcher of new media. John Pavlik, interview by Ibrahim Abusharif, 26 July 2018.

The growth of sound as a tool of Islamic entertainment and teachings (including *da'wa*, proselytizing) has attracted academic attention in recent years. This area of study, often referred to as 'Islamic sonic practices', traces its roots to the oral transmission of the Qur'ān in the Prophetic period, and, in recent iterations, the studies examine the use of loudspeakers in mosques and, at present, the digital transmission of sound. The trend towards transcending the limits of a text-based paradigm to provide a 'sensorial experience' is an important development,[534] particularly now in digital space.

Podcasts are now among the forms in communicated 'Islamic ideas of the sacred'.[535] In a 'competitive internet knowledge economy' the availability of multimedia products such as podcasts represents a 'marketing strategy, as well as a contemporary approach to religious propagation'.[536]

According to Hamid, online Muslim environments have appropriated post-9/11 trends in technology to offer 'structured educational courses, faith-sensitive services, multimedia tools, CDs, DVDs, MP3s and podcasts'[537]; these digital media have become the 'most popular means of accessing religious information, and pre-recorded or live programmes can now be broadcast from community radio stations or widely viewed on satellite stations and watched or listened to on their corresponding websites'.[538]

As a growing digital phenomenon, the auditory content in the case study below represents the most recent significant product of Salafi Publications (in the form of Salafi Sounds), thus expanding the multi-modal approach to digital proselytization: after written texts, now a rich corpus of podcasts of lectures and Friday sermons.

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[534] Jeanette S. Jouili and Annelies Moors. 'Introduction: Islamic Sounds and the Politics of Listening', *Anthropological Quarterly* 87, no. 4 (2014): 980.
[535] Bunt. '#Islam, Social Networking and the Cloud', 180.
[536] Ibid.
[537] Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists*, 46, 115.
[538] Ibid.

6.4 Salafi Sounds Podcast

The Salafi Sounds website, a self-described Salafī producer of auditory content in the form of lectures and sermons, was founded by preacher Abu Khadeejah and Dawud Burbank in Birmingham, UK.[539] Its director is Abu Khadeeja Abdul-Wahid, who heads Masjid al-Salafī in Birmingham. The registrant and administrative contact is Waheed Alam, with the address 472 Coventry Road, Birmingham, UK[540]—the address of the Salafī Mosque, as posted on its website.[541] Salafisounds.com was registered on 29 December 2013 and, since then, has consistently added content, avoiding the common tendency of online sites to post a plethora of content initially, only to recede, as it were. Even at five years old and in a broad digital field of Salafī online content, Salafi Sounds is a significant producer of auditory content that promotes Salafī positions and reproaches non-Salafī groups (such as Ṣūfīs) and other self-described Salafīs who have diverged from strict purist Salafism. As a result, the purists—including those who produce and manage Salafi Sounds—have been accused of pursuing a 'theological McCarthyism'.[542] Together with a group of other Salafī preachers, Salafi Sounds's founders were considered by these preachers as a 'rival group' of pietistic or quietist Salafīs who opposed Salafī groups who advocated greater involvement in political processes—something shunned by purists.[543]

The lectures and sermons posted on the Salafi Sounds website are usually recorded in a physical institution located in Birmingham. Thus, the 'location' of Salafi Sounds occupies two spaces: one is a physical mosque or centre, but the other is digital space, the focus of this study. In the digital space, Salafi Sounds offers an auditory platform to pursue a post-textual strategy involving the making of truth-claims as so-called 'Super Salafis', who go to perhaps extreme lengths to draw two lines of identity

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[539] Innes Bowen, *Medina in Birmingham, Najaf in Brent: Inside British Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), at 65.
[540] <https://www.whois.com/whois/salafisounds.com>.
[541] <http://www.salafimasjid.com/>.
[542] Ibid., 62.
[543] Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists*, 46, 61.

construction. One is drawn between 'true' Salafīs and those Salafīs who are untrustworthy or are judged to be 'deviant', in which case the strategy is part of a 'policy of boycotting' other Salafis', using vituperative language to undermine their legitimacy. The second line of demarcation is between Salafism, the defenders of Islam's proper *manhaj* (methodology), and non-Salafī groups. In a majority of the podcasts the speakers point to Salafism as the ideology that uniquely maintains and advocates fidelity to a pure Islam of the past, and, in the process, the content is highly critical and intolerant of Muslim ideological differences. Pertaining to this study, Ṣūfīs and Sufism are paramount among the 'deviant' groups and as a consequence are reproached. Because of their inflexible and strident reproach of rival Salafīs and non-Salafī groups, the Salafī preachers of Salafi Sounds have acquired from other Salafīs and Islamic activists a number of labels in addition to 'Super Salafis': 'Saudi Salafis', or 'Madkhalis'.[544] The organizers and presenters of the podcasts are thus well-known Salafī personalities in the UK and have attracted research internationally.[545]

The choice of Salafi Sounds, then, offers two significant constituent aspects for study. One is the media form itself, which, as alluded to previously, is connected to a trend of auditory content production, a 'sensorial turn' in digital media.[546] Second, the producers and speakers of the podcasts are well-known voices in a Salafī discourse that represents a purist Salafism that apparently wishes to sharply distinguish itself from what are perceived to be compromised Salafīs and, of course, non-Salafī groups (such as Sufis). A relatively new and well-kept site for Salafī discourse, the content it provides connects with broader matters of academic concern, as shown here. It should also be noted that the use of the term 'Salafī' in the products of Salafi Publications represents a significant

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[544] Ibid.
[545] Ibid.
[546] Jouili and Moors, 980.

choice 'to propagate openly under the Salafī banner', a choice endorsed by the Salafi

Publications leadership, including Abu Khadeejah.[547]

6.4.1 Data Collection Methodology

In this study podcasts that concern Sufism were located using the search function of the

website Salafi Sounds. A significant challenge in searching for key words or phrases in

online texts is the possibility that Arabic vocabularies may be phonetically reproduced in

English script in a variety of ways. Additionally, podcasts are not searchable in the way

that written texts are; however, and fortunately, Salafi Sounds presents searchable 'key

words' posted alongside the graphics of the podcasts in the website. Given this, the

likelihood of achieving consistency in tagging key words and in transliteration is greater,

though should not be presumed. One should anticipate that inconsistent transliteration

patterns in the key words and the titles of the podcasts may represent a complication. The

gathering of the appropriate podcasts involved the following searches for words and

concepts associated with the research questions:

- For podcasts regarding **Sufism**, the search terms included: [Sufi], [Sufism],
  [Soofy], [Soofi], [Sufiya], [Sufiyya], [taṣawwuf], [tasawuf], and others.
- For the **celebration of the Prophet Muḥammad's birthday**, the search included:
  [birthday], [Prophet Muhammad birthday (with various renditions of
  'Muhammad' such as 'Mohamed')], [*Mawlid*], [Maulid], [Mawlad], [Eid al-
  Mawlid], [*Mawlid*-e-nabi], and others.
- For the **Saved Sect** claim, the search terms included: [saved sect], [saved group],
  [firqa Najiya], [al-firqa al-Najiya], [firqa Naajiyya], [firqa], [salvation], and
  others.
- For the **exclusive claim to *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa***, the search terms were
  simplified because of the length of the phrase and the greater possibility of error
  and of missing relevant podcasts. Thus, the search included broad terms that
  would produce sweeping results that were subsequently culled for relevance. The
  phrases searched were: [Ahl al-Sunna], [Ahl], [Jamaa], [Jama'a], [Jamaa'a], and
  others. Academic styles of transliteration were not followed by the content

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[547] Inge, 30.

producers or managers of the site.

- For the **practices associated with grave visitation and intercession**, the terms included: [grave], [grave worship], [quburiyya], [quburiya], [qubuuriya], [tawassul], [tawasul], [tauwasul], and others.

- For the **creedal claims of heterodoxy**, the majority of the terms found within the podcasts were generated by the above searches, since the creedal claims on which this study focuses concern Sufism and would be located in the same content as those found via the other searches done.

The search terms were successful in gathering podcasts that focused on the arguments, creedal themes, and key terminologies related to the research questions. The researcher listened intently to each of the relevant podcasts multiple times, with headphones. The purpose of the first pass was to ensure that the researcher heard the entirety of the podcast without interruption and without the distraction of stopping, rewinding, noting, and preparing analyses—from the opening benediction (invariably in Arabic) to the closing prayer (also in Arabic). It should be noted that the researcher is fluent in Arabic and is a native English speaker, having been born and raised in the United States.

This first pass, therefore, minimized errors in interpreting the speaker's intent and strategy by inadvertently disconnecting the flow of an argument made early in the podcast, for example, which gained more nuance (or became contradictory) near the end. In addition, it helped the researcher avoid arriving at premature inferences and conclusions. All the podcasts examined here were full presentations—that is, not excerpted from or partially represented on the Salafi Sounds website.

During the following passes, the researcher closely observed patterns of vocabulary usage and themes of contestations, frequently stopping in the course of the podcast to rewind and carefully note the key themes, using a timestamp so that the reader can locate for him- or herself the texts of the podcasts. Because of the uninterrupted first pass, the passages in which the key themes and terms were introduced by the speaker were contextualized in accordance with the full presentation during the second pass.

6.4.2 Content Overview

Salafi Sounds is a website that offers content originally produced as lectures and sermons, later converted into podcasts. The recordings showcase several speakers who take on a wide range of topics typical of religious content and preaching: patience, sin, penitence, stories of the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad, family concerns, and more. However, the podcasts also contain a significant amount of content stressing the importance and validity of Salafism itself and problematizing and reproaching what opposes it. Overall, as will be expanded upon in the next chapter, the content and its message defend Salafism as representing nothing less than the true *manhaj*: that is, the way of Islam or the true way of guidance and interpretation of the scriptural sources of Islam as understood in the texts themselves or according to the understanding of the immediate generations of the pious forebears (*Al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*). In the course of listening to the podcasts, the core themes and vocabulary that speak to religious authority were collated.

6.4.2.1 Types of Content

The two main forms of content in the podcasts were originally Friday *Khuṭub* (sermons) (singular *Khuṭbah*) and lectures before an audience. It is important to discuss the significance of the Friday sermon and its relationship with media technology. The Friday *Khuṭbah* and congregational prayer are obligatory rites that adult Muslims must attend when not travelling. The practice goes back to the time of the Prophet Muḥammad and his *Khuṭbah* in the mosque in Madina. The basic positioning of the institution involves a 'one-way communication through which the religious authority tells the audiences what to think and what to believe'.[548] The preaching has two discursive purposes. One offers 'the audiences a specific position as a righteous Muslim' and the other offers 'rhetorical re-descriptions of Muslim history and events, present[ing] them as social and religious

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[548] Ehab Galal. 'Friday Khutba without Borders: Constructing a Muslim Audience', in *Political Islam and Global Media*, ed. Noha Mellor and Khalil Rinnawi (New York: Routledge, 2016), at 91.

icons'.[549] However, when the Friday *Khuṭbah* proliferated through satellite media technology, as Galal notes, the 'universalizing of the Muslim Ummah' was among the potentialities of the media effects.[550] Most relevant to this study is Galal's findings that those sermons that addressed intra-Islamic 'conflicts'—however 'abstract or concrete'—seemed to have demanded that the audience 'not only […] identify themselves as a universalized category of Muslim, but also […] take a position against other Muslims'.[551]

The Friday prayer and sermon 'has a fixed place in Islamic ritual'[552] and is representative of the authority of the Prophet's mantle and legacy. The Friday sermon, in other words—form and forum—has, in itself, dimensions of authority. For this reason, great care and thoughtfulness are expected when delivering content. The form of the Friday *Khuṭbah* is recognizable, even through a podcast; hallmarks are the opening benediction, the momentary respite when the preacher sits for some seconds before resuming the sermon, and the closing communal supplication.

This study proceeds by offering several **detailed synopses** of the podcasts that give accurate and detailed descriptions of the content, the flow and logic of the arguments the speakers make, and the language and themes their arguments rely on. Thereafter, the **summarized synopses** present a concise summary of other the podcasts (with the main themes and arguments parsed), though each of the podcasts presented here (whether they are given in detailed or summary form) were examined with the same data-gathering methodology involving intense, multiple passes and notetaking examination.

A final note, it has become a caution observed by researchers of internet content that texts (voice, image, or textual) may be taken down or otherwise disappear from given websites. Thus far, the texts this study pursues have largely remained accessible online on

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[549] Ibid.
[550] Ibid., at 92.
[551] Ibid., at 99.
[552] A.J. Wensinck. 'Khutba', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al. (Brill Online, 2012). Accessed at: http://dx.doi.org.turing.library.northwestern.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_4352

the Salafi Sounds website. Still, to ensure that reviewers and future researchers will have access to the podcasts, this researcher has downloaded the podcasts and has made them available on portable storage flash drive.

6.5 Detailed Synopses of Select Podcasts

Podcast Title:	Shaikh Fawzan's Insight – The Battle of Truth Against Falsehood Until the Era of Imam Muhammad 'Abdul-Wahhab[553]
Narrator:	Abu Khadeejah Abdul Waahid
Posted:	19 September 2017
Length:	45:29
Setting:	Lecture before an audience

Detailed Synopsis

Prominent British Muslim Salafī preacher Abu Khadeejah Abdul Waahid narrates a series of podcasts in which he delivers lectures based on a book written by Shaykh Ṣāliḥ ibn Fawzān ibn ʿAbdullah Al-Fawzān (b. 1943), a well-known Saudi cleric and senior member of the Saudi Islamic counsel responsible for formal religious edits (*fatāwā*). The book is entitled *Sharḥ Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd Lil Shaykh Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb*,[554] which is an explication of Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's most well-known book, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (Book of the Oneness of God). The speaker expands upon Shaykh Fawzān's book on the life and mission of Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, the namesake of the Wahhābī movement. But, throughout the course of the lecture, it is not always possible to distinguish the speaker's own commentary from the actual content of the book the speaker is basing his speech on.

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[553] Accessed at (20 January 2019): https://www.salafisounds.com/2-shaikh-fawzans-insight-the-battle-of-truth-against-falsehood-until-the-era-of-imam-muhammad-abdul-wahhab/
[554] This is a two-volume work published by Dar al-Jawzi (Saudi Arabia), no date available.

In this podcast, Abu Khadeejah offers a biographical treatment of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (1703–1792), based on Shaykh Al-Fawzān's book. The narrator's tone and changes in volume, vocabulary, and tenor indicates that he is an advocate of arguments and hagiography of Shaykh Al- Fawzān's book. The presentation lacks the temperament and logical argument-making of an academic who speaks with critical distance and is generally dispassionate in his or her tone. Abu Khadeejah's tone, for example, is often histrionic and surges in volume when emphasizing the sins, evils, and heresies of Muslim groups, including Sufism—heretical sects who flourished in the 'dark' phases of Muslim history.

After the opening benediction in Arabic, in which the speaker praises God and makes prayers of peace and blessings upon the Prophet Muḥammad (a common opening of formal Muslim discourse), Abu Khadeejah narrates that, after the generations of the pious ancestors, there 'came an era in which Muslims were living … in a period of darkness'. One of the main markers of this age of darkness was the rise of ideological groups that represented heretical points of view, such as 'Jahmiyya,[555] Qubūriya, Sūfiyya [Sufism], the Muʿtazila,[556] the Shīʿa'—groups that had gained ascendancy in the Muslim world until the time of Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, as Abu Khadeejah narrates. The inclusion of Ṣūfīs in a list of heretical groupings is discussed below.

The narrator continues by stating that ʿAbd al-Wahhāb 'revived the *dīn* [the religion], *sunna* [normative practice of the Prophet Muḥammad], and *ʿaqīda* [creed of Islam]', restoring these key areas of religion as they were once constituted in the first

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[555] The Jahmiyya represents a school of theology that essentially denies that God has attributes or 'names', since having them would suggest that God is human-like, which is an anathema to the very essence of God and His oneness, which is the core tenet of Islam. However, the attributes of God are unequivocally alluded to in the Qurʾān and in the statements of the Prophet Muḥammad. Other schools of theological thought have variant views on what the attributes or names of God truly mean, but they do not deny them, for to deny their very existence is considered heretical. Watt, Montgomery, 'Ḏjahmiyya, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 05 January 2019: http://dx.doi.org.turing.library.northwestern.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0176

[556] This references a school of thought that was short-lived but which privileged the role of reason in the determination of legal rulings, a role that was perhaps equal to or overrode scriptural sources.

three centuries (4:09). The speaker's narration on the cycles of decline and ascendance repeatedly includes Sufism as part of the decline narrative, or 'darkness' before revivalists rose to expose and criticize dissenting opinions and views. There was a 'tremendous revival' in with such scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) and his student Ibn al-Qayyim (1292–1350), who successfully waged intellectual battle against *ahl al-bidʿa* (people of heretical innovation) and cleansed the religion of them. But this period did not last long: '… after them came another era of decline', reintroduced by the 'thoughts and forces' of heretical innovations, among them the Ashʿarites, Jahmiyya, and Ṣūfī orders, who worshipped graves, according to the narrator. [5:50][557]

The narrator's historical treatment passes over centuries of history of intellectual achievements to reach what appears to be the main point of the presentation: that is, the time in which the 'days became darker and darker' continued until the providential coming of Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb. The narrator claims that among the signs of darkness was the reappearance of heresy, with 'the people [of the age] nearly all of them [living] on the ways of *Ṣūfiyya* [Sufism], *Qubūriyya*'. Other groups are categorized among censured factions of heresies mentioned by the narrator: namely, 'magicians, fortune-tellers, and soothsayers'; they had gained ascendency at the time and, in fact, were given status and privilege in society by the Ottomans, the speaker asserts. Abu Khadeejah next states that Muslims were in the custom of visiting graves to gain blessings and of wearing amulets, as Ṣūfīs are known to do, and, as a result, people forsook the revealed authority or scriptural sources of Islam—namely, the Qur'ān and Sunna—and reverted to tribal norms and authority—a claim of '*jāhiliyya*', pre-Islamic norms of 'ignorance' and 'idolatry'. However, 'It was in this time that Allah raised and made apparent Shaykh al-Islām,[558] Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb'. [7:32]

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[557] The bracketed numbers represent the timestamp in the recording.
[558] This is a title given to those who are recognized for their pre-eminence in knowledge and authority.

The narrator proceeds to laud the qualities of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb and attributing

divine grace for his coming, for 'Allah endowed upon him intelligence and insight that

gave him realization of what the people were upon': that is, the calumny and misguidance

of the age. The speaker then repeated that ʿAbd al-Wahhāb was in possession of

intellectual and inspired qualities endowed by God, as evinced by the narrator's

hagiographic account that are replete with references to sacred intervention. The narrator

extolls ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's main intellectual or ideological influences, which were

primarily the works and teachings of Ibn Taymiyya and his student Ibn al-Qayyim, as

well as 'other books of the Salafiyya'. [9:03] According to the narration, ʿAbd al-

Wahhāb's reform was motivated by the fact that he 'was saddened and grieved' by

heretical practices and beliefs that he had seen in his town in Eastern Arabia—beliefs that

'opposed' the creed of Islam and the way of the pious forebears. [11:30]

After migrating, then returning to his town of birth (ʿUyayna[559]), ʿAbd al-Wahhāb

was at first well received by the tribal ruler, ʿUthmān ibn Muʿammar. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb

'gave *daʿwa*' (preached) to the tribal leader—that is, he *called upon him* to consider the

principles of purifying the faith of Islam from foreign or heretical practices and beliefs of

his times. The narrator then describes how ʿAbd al-Wahhāb began to rectify the 'evil' that

had claimed the land. He ordered, for example, the demolition of 'the dome' over the

tomb of the grave of Zayd Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who was an admired and respected companion

of the Prophet Muḥammad. [13:11] It was not Zayd or any of his qualities that inspired

the demolition, but the fact that there was a dome over the grave, which attracted visitors.

Grave visitation is among the chief loci of dispute that Salafī ideology emphasizes in its

contestations with Sufism.

Interestingly, the narrator boasts of and praises ʿAbd al-Wahhāb for the

resumption of the punishment for illicit sexual relations—namely, the 'stoning to death

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[559] An oasis town 33 km northwest from the present-day city of Riyadh.

[for] adultery'. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb also ceased and prevented what the narrator called the worshipping of the graves. [15:30] However, currents of the times had shifted. Under pressure from the residents of ʿUyayna, Ibn Muʿammar was pressured to no longer permit ʿAbd al-Wahhāb to preach freely, at which point ʿAbd al-Wahhāb travelled again, but this time to the town of al-Dirʿiyya, approximately 65 km from ʿUyayna. This led, as the narration proceeds, to the critical meeting between ʿAbd al-Wahhāb and Muḥammad Ibn Saʿūd (1710–1765), the forebear and eponym of the Saudi Family.

This historically significant meeting would lead to the now well-known relationship between the Family of Saʿūd (and later Saudi Arabia) and Wahhabism. [21:29] The narrator speaks of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb preaching to Ibn Saʿūd and convincing him of the 'daʿwa of tawḥīd' (proselytizing the restoration of belief in the oneness of God). The meeting also led to an alliance that eventually produced 'an army to wage jihād'—that is, an armed confrontation under the banner of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's view of tawḥīd—under the standard of orthodoxy, in other words, to battle against heresies and to battle 'people who were living under darkness' and in the state of 'ignorance' (jāhiliyya). [25:00] The family of Ibn Saʿūd was able to consolidate power in al-Najd (in central Arabia) and sought to cleanse the land of a population who, in the main, as the speaker argues, 'were worshipping graves' and 'wearing amulets'. [26:30] Implicit in mentioning these two aspects is the reproach of Ṣūfīs, for many of whom amulets of Quranic verses and visiting graves are not problematized.

The narrator's historical account continues by mentioning that the establishment of the Family of Saʿūd allied with ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's religious views was challenged and destroyed twice by the Ottomans, who were 'enemies who didn't want to see' the oneness of God established and 'didn't like the fact that people worshipped Allah alone and […] stopped worshipping the graves'. In fact, the narrator makes serious claims that the Ottomans (who were Muslims) rejected not only the creed of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb but the creed of the Prophet of Islam himself and the way of the pious generations. The

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'Ottomans were treacherous' in lining up and killing innocent people, and had a further moral failing, according to the narrator—one that seems strangely out of place in a narration focused on creedal matters—'They came with dancing women and musicians'. [27:33]

The armies of Ibn Saʿūd were re-established and prevailed in the 'path of Allah' during a 'period of the innovators and evil-doers' who sought to 'deceive people' and 'started to spread rumours' slandering ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, although the whole of his book (*Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*) is based entirely 'on Qur'ān and Ḥadīth', the scriptural sources of Islam, as the speaker asserts. It was in this manner and timeline that the mission of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb established itself. [29:40] The narrator stresses repeatedly that ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's book is based on 'nothing other than the words' of God and words of the messenger of God. 'That is the beauty of [ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's] book'. Essentially, the narrative claims that ʿAbd al-Wahhāb revived the books and teachings of Ibn Taymiyya and their application and veneration. [37:25] The speaker narrates that the books of Ibn Taymiyya were neglected, remaining unstudied and even unknown 'because of the deceptions of people of innovation'. The narration then repeats itself, reiterating the great revival of Ibn Taymiyya's works by ʿAbd al-Wahhāb; thereafter the speaker states, seemingly sardonically, that the people of innovation did a 'good job in trying to bury Ibn Taymiyya and his writings'. [39:30] However, by God's providence, as the speaker concludes, the books were rediscovered and studied anew upon the coming of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb.

Brief Analysis: Significance and Key Themes and Terminologies

The nodes of religious authority alluded to here include creedal claims of the heterodoxy of Sufism in which its practices are considered as heretical innovation (*bidʿa*). The use of vituperations against such contested factions has the effect of 'otherizing' the traditional practices of Sufism. A cyclical view of Islamic creedal history—narratives of the rise,

decline, and recovery of an imagined, pure Islam—is a central theme of the Salafī argument. With regard to Sufism, the speaker alludes to the significance, if not the greatness, of the *salaf* (the early generations), which were followed by 'an era in which Muslims were living … in a period of darkness'. The 'darkness' of the era, he states, was caused by or marked by the rise of heterodox sects and ideologies, notably Sufism, and was a departure from the ways of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa*, the normative teachings of Prophet Muḥammad and the community of true believers.

Through hagiographic historical narratives of ideological figures, such as Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, the style of narration speaks to Salafism's project of restoring pure Islam through a quasi-historical interpretation that disparages Muslim groups in manifest terms. Consider, for example, the account that after the generations of the pious ancestors 'darkness' and 'heretical innovation' (*bidʿa*), notably that of Sufism, overtook Muslims in their creed and practices. The notion of the purity of the faith was restored by Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), only to decline once more into another historical moment of 'darkness' and 'evil' (*sharr*), until the rise and mission of Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb. The language of the presentation speaks to two nodes of religious authority: creedal, as mentioned above, and scriptural, since the speaker mentions that the opposition Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb faced represented an opposition to the teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad himself, thus straying from the Qur'ān.

It should also be noted that the inclusion of Ṣūfīs in a list of heretical groupings relies on guilt by association. While Ṣūfīs (like many other Sunnī schools of thought) are critical of the Jahmiyya, the narrator makes no distinction in his heresiology by including Sufism with the Jahmiyya, doing so without defending his inclusion. In other words, although these ideological/spiritual groupings are distinct from one another, Abu Khadeeja mentions Sufism in the sentence string of groups that are generally viewed as heretical in Sunni Islam, creating what can be viewed as a false equivalence.

In addition, the content of this podcast is seemingly influenced by the works of and commentary about ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, as proffered by Saudi clerics. This is significant, as it lends authority to the contention that contemporary Salafism is closely identified with Wahhabism and its present-day scholars, especially in Saudi Arabia. The substrate of their ideology is similar: they consider that, after the generations of the pious forebears, Islam had been infiltrated by impure beliefs and practices, syncretic beliefs originating in non-Muslim sources and religions, such as Hellenistic philosophies and Hindu and Christian practices, and the overwrought conjectures of speculative theology (*kalām*).

Finally, the speaker alludes to the rise of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb as a seemingly divine advent, for God had chosen ʿAbd al-Wahhāb as a reformer and had endowed upon him the necessary intellect and purity of heart, as described above. To imply that the advent of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb was a product of divine providence evokes authority, since objecting to this sacred interpretation of history would be tantamount to objecting to a selection that God Himself had made in the course of history.

Podcast Title:	The Reality of Sufi Shaikhs[560]
Narrator:	Abu Khadeejah Abdul Waahid
Posted:	17 May 2016
Length:	25:55
Setting:	Friday Sermon (*Khuṭbah*)

Detailed Synopsis

In this podcast the speaker, Abu Khadeejah Abdul-Waahid, claims in a broad way that Ṣūfīs of today are 'people of deviation'. The speaker notes that those Ṣūfīs 'who ascribe

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[560] Accessed at (20 January 2019): https://www.salafisounds.com/the-reality-of-sufi-shaikhs-by-abu-khadeejah/

themselves to the *manhaj* [methodology] and to the *ʿaqīda* [creed] of *taṣawwuf* [Sufism]' are deviants. [1:29] The speaker rejects unequivocally the claim that Sufism is an integral part of Islam and, in fact, the spiritual energy of the 'Sunna' of Islam—that is, integral to the normative practice and creed of the religion. He says that it is an 'oxymoron' and a 'contradiction in terms' for anyone to claim that he or she is both a Ṣūfī and a Sunnī Muslim. In other words, to be a Ṣūfī and to be an observant Muslim who follows normative or orthodox Islam are mutually exclusive states and, therefore, it is impossible for them to coexist in one person. Stressing his point, he states that 'the people of Sufism in our times … are the furthest from the Sunnah of Allah's Messenger'.[561] He contends that Ṣūfīs are most remote from the centre of normative Islam. This contention is unsourced.

At times, the speaker appears to qualify which Ṣūfīs he is referring to. For example, he speaks of those Ṣūfīs who follow Shaikh's blindly and show them deference to an extent that is excessive or outside the bounds of what is permissible in the religion.[562] He says that 'some of the deviated Sufis' follow their Shaikh's to the point that they believe that their Shaikh's 'will intercede for them in the grave', as well as on the Day of Judgement. He offers no textual support or examples of such a claim, however. The speaker then mentions an anecdote relating a student posing a question to the late Saudi cleric Shaykh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz bin Bāz about Ṣūfīs, specifically, the permissibility of showing reverence and deference to their spiritual guides.

> So then Shaykh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz bin Bāz as in accordance to the *madhhab* of the *salaf* and
> to the *daʿwa* of *salafiya* and in the path of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa*, he responds so the
> questioner mentions that there are shaykhs in their land and with them that are followed
> and whomsoever that does not follow a Shaykh, then he is a loser, and that he is from the
> *khāsirīn* [the losers]—that he is from those who is [sic] lost in this life and in the

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[561] Ibid.
[562] Through his rebuke of what he sees as Ṣūfīs' extreme deference to their shaykhs, he admonishes those among the 'Salafiyya' who have fallen into *taqlīd*, the blind following of clerics. In other words, after condemning Ṣūfīs, he moves toward a critique of some Salafīs who do the same, though again we are not given sources.

Hereafter. And they claim that if the Shaykh is not obeyed, then indeed, that he is one who is destroyed.

The response of the Saudi cleric, as narrated by Abu Khadeeja, draws a sharp contrast between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. The way or *madhhab* of the *salaf*, as the speaker states, is the way of the pious forebears, implying that Sufism is exterior to the proper way of Islam (heterodox). Continuing, the speaker accuses Ṣūfīs of making exclusive claims to salvation: that is, claiming that only Ṣūfīs will attain salvation, safety from Hell. He makes the assertions, however, without proof or sourcing, and the listener does not know which Ṣūfī iteration, if any, makes such a claim: 'some of the people [of Sufism] … claim that whoever does not follow' their path, then 'he is a loser in this life and a loser in the hereafter'. He censures such a position in language that is both sweeping and absolute. It is, as noted, impossible to know how the speaker arrived at this point.

The speaker next rejects the assertion that Ṣūfīs genuinely follow the known canonical schools of sacred law in Sunnī Islam, stating that Ṣūfīs wear the 'garment of claiming' that they cling to the schools of Islamic law, but this is essentially pretence or prevarication on their part for the purpose of creating the appearance of orthodoxy, which masks reality and dissuades others from a proper interrogation of the true beliefs of Sufism 'beneath the surface', as it were. He states that 'all of this is merely a veil for their corruption and their deviation'. [7:36]

He then proceeds to levy the most severe judgement one can pass upon a Muslim: that is, one of outright disbelief: '… you will find that their practices, indeed many of them, if not most of them, that they contain *shirk* [idolatry] and *kufr* [disbelief]' with regard to the singular right of God to be worshipped. Moreover, he states that Ṣūfīs 'disbelieve in Allah in much of that which they propagate', such as 'claiming knowledge of the unseen or claiming that the dead ones in their grave can aid them or claiming that they are the ones who have knowledge of the hidden affairs or they claim that you can call upon them even though they are absent from you'. And the dead will 'hear' and

'respond', the speaker says of Ṣūfī beliefs. He accuses Ṣūfīs of corruption and deviation, before culminating in commenting that Ṣūfīs' 'ways' or 'affairs' are 'most sickening', and that they hold the 'most abominable of beliefs' because, he states, Ṣūfīs assert the idolatrous beliefs that there are 'others besides Allah … who can bring them benefit and who can ward off harm'. [8:07]

Next, the speaker unexpectedly takes his sermon in a different direction. Instead of continuing with his criticism of Ṣūfīs and the status of their spiritual guides, the speaker turns his attention to 'Salafī youth', who show a zeal toward their Salafī scholars that is comparable with that shown by Ṣūfīs toward theirs. However, his language with regard to the Salafī zeal is softened, and he does not claim a departure from normative practices of Islam or orthodoxy. He says that 'there are individuals among them who will race towards making the *taqlīd* [blind following]' of a given scholar or charismatic leader among the Salafīs. And, with regard to this behaviour, the narrator claims that 'this is not the way of the people of Sunnah', drawing finer lines of division within Salafism [12:44].

The ideological grounding of this position regarding the devotion to religious leaders or shaykhs connects with Salafī rejection of finding guidance beyond the pages, words, or narrations of Islam's scriptural sources, as interpreted by scholars of the *salaf*. As mentioned in the chapter on Salafism,[563] the main Salafi claim of proselytizing or advocating for the return to the ways of the pious ancestors is tantamount to claiming a certain, rigid, form of epistemology and hermeneutics regarding knowledge acquisition and scriptural interpretation. The call for purifying Muslim thought includes the severing of what is considered a zealous attachment to scholarly and charismatic figures of the religion, as mentioned above. In a broader context, this implies an interpretation of the scriptural texts and the voluminous exegetical and juridical works of post-*salaf* Islamic intellectual history as unspoiled by traditional scholars. As some may argue, this has led

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[563] See chapter three.

to egregious interpretations of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth—disconnected from and unguided by the balance of scholarly methodologies that have developed over the centuries—a position that ignores intellectual legacies and, it can be argued, undergirds interpretations that inspire contemporary extremism.

The speaker continues to argue that the original state of affairs in Islamic methodology was to take 'evidence' exclusively from 'the Book of Allah and from the Sunnah's of Allah's Messenger' and the pious forebears. In saying this, the speaker tacitly negates the intellectual accomplishments and contributions of the scholarly class (*'ulamā'*) during the long centuries of Muslim intellectual history after the generations of the pious forebears.

The speaker next criticizes *taqlīd*, which is translated as the *blind following* of pre-formulated positions in religious teachings or law made in the post-*salaf* past. There is extensive discussion on *taqlīd* in past and contemporary scholarship, too voluminous for this present study, but its wide-ranging meanings include—relevant in this context—an attachment to the four well-known canonical schools of law that took shape in the third Islamic century and thereafter. For Salafism, it is problematic to have loyalty to one particular school of law as a guide for one's affairs in life, whether it regards ritual performances, family law, business transactions, and larger social issues. Loyalty to schools of law that were codified and developed after the generations of the pious forebears is a core critique put forward by Salafist *manhaj* (methodology).

Abu Khadeejah next reproaches those who attack Salafism, presumably from within (Salafīs) and from without (Ṣūfīs or other Muslims who themselves are subject to Salafī censure, such as the Muslim Brotherhood). His response to these attacks is noteworthy. First, he does not address specifically what the attacks are, the arguments that are applied, or the reasoning behind them. Thus, he has made it difficult, perhaps deliberately so, to independently weigh the accusations or arguments against Salafī thought in contemporary Islam. But in the process of responding to these vague attacks,

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the speaker expresses his umbrage through a common trope of Salafism: namely, demanding evidence for the criticisms. In other words, the response to accusations is the demand for evidentiary material based on textual proofs. The evidence that is asked for must come from the scriptural sources. As such, one cannot make an expository critique of Salafism. Second, the speaker uses two words in defence of Salafism. Each is symbolic in its own way. One is the '*manhaj*' of Salafism: that is, the methodology used in interpreting the scriptural foundations of Islam and the reliance on the unalloyed scholarship of the generations of the pious forebears. The other word, which he uses interchangeably with the first, is the '*madhhab*' of Salafism, which is the 'school of thought' of Salafism. Both of these terms will be discussed in the following chapter, as they represent the culmination of the effort of uphold the central conceit of Salafism, namely, it best represents the works and intentions of the pious generations, and its methodology of scriptural interpretation is authorized by the pious generations. As such, any critique of Salafism, the speaker claims next, must be supported by direct scriptural sources, verses from the Qur'ān and narrations of the Prophet Muḥammad. The speaker contends that 'those who attack the *salafiyyūn* … [should] to come forward and stand up like men, and bring the evidence, then what is their response?' Such critics will attempt a response by citing their learned scholars, but without textual support, the narrator says. But Salafī methodology dictates that criticisms should not come from scholars; the critiques must be exclusively based on revealed sources: 'Bring your evidences from the Book and the Sunnah that we have opposed the *manhaj* and the *madhhab* of the *salaf* [pious forebears]'. [15:00]

The speaker recounts a question posed to the well-known Saudi cleric Shaykh al-Fawzān about the qualifications of an authority in Islam: should he or she be a graduate of an 'Islamic university' or have received authority by way of a certificate? The response of the Shaykh, according to the narrator, is that one cannot rely on university credentials as proof of one's knowledge and authority, for it is possible that diploma-bearers of a

university, even an 'Islamic university', may not be in possession of an understanding of the religion. Credentials conferred by universities are sufficient proof of knowledge, the narrator states. 'The waving of certificates from Islamic universities is not the distinguishing factor between right and between wrong. The distinguishing factor between *ḥaqq* [truth] and *bāṭil* [falsehood] is the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of Allah's Messenger]. [15:45]

The narrator calls those who criticize Salafīs but who do not come forward with proofs as 'cowardly individuals' who 'don't have the manliness to stand before us and then substantiate their accusations with evidence'. Confirming modern Salafī approaches to criticism, the speaker challenges the credentials of critics, which, the listeners are told, are of no use in challenging the truth. Then he suggests that they should produce evidence and counsel from *ahl al-ʿilm* (people of knowledge), many of whom are renowned Salafī scholars, as he lists below. [18:00] The phrase *ahl al-ʿilm* is noteworthy. It is part of the nomenclature used to draw boundaries around the proper *manhaj* of Islam, but it goes beyond that, suggesting that it is not only the scriptural sources that evince the true confines of orthodoxy; the demarcations also include individuals (scholars and preachers) whom the Salafīs claim to be the bearers of true knowledge, if not the exclusive bearers of such knowledge in contemporary Muslim milieus. The speaker names them in the following manner:

> Shaykh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Bāz; Ibn ʿUthaymīn; Al-Albanī; Rabīʿ bin Hādī; Muqbil bin Hādī; ʿUbayd al-Jābirī; Shaykh al-Islām Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb; and his sons and his grandsons; Imam ash-Shawkānī; Ibn Taymiyyah; Ibn al-Qayyim; ibn Qudāma; Barbahārī; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal; Mālik ibn Anas.

The narrator notes that these scholars did not demand from their students that they learn only from them, which, he states, is unlike the Ṣūfī scholars, which, again, he claims without specificity. Thus, he returns to the original thesis of this podcast: namely, the over-reliance of Ṣūfīs on their shaykhs. While it may be a genuine source of consternation among Salafī scholars and preachers, like Abu Khadeeja, the topic, it seems, does revolve

around a core Salafī principle of sourcing orthodoxy from the scriptural foundations of Islam. However, it does not stop there. The scholars of the present age and the past that one may rely on are either restricted or appropriated according to the Salafī paradigm.

As for the 'affair of the people of Sufism', the narrator criticizes Ṣūfīs for placing the 'whole affair' of religion in the hands of their shaykhs. Without sources, the speaker claims that Sufis must follow their Shaykh in all matters, and anyone who dissents 'is destroyed', according to Sufism. He observes that this 'is not the way' of Salafism: 'This is not our way, and it has never been our way'. And, beyond that, he states that such attachment, 'without knowledge and insight', is not permitted 'according to all of the' scholars. In fact, as a statement of delineating orthodoxy such attachments are rejected by scholars and by *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa* (the people of the normative or orthodox practice of the Prophet Muḥammad and the plurality of the earlier followers). As 'those Sufis, who have evil and deviated' creeds, make claims that are not corroborated by the teachings of the scholars of Islam, then it is 'obligatory to rebut' them because, the narrator concludes in a direct manner, Sufism 'opposes the truth', and truth is 'the distinguishing mark … of the people of the Sunnah, and the people of the *al-Jamāʿa*'.

Brief Analysis: Significance and Key Ideological Themes and Terminologies
This podcast demonstrates the use of the status of a Friday sermon to criticize Sufism and the relationship between Ṣūfīs and their spiritual leaders. The sermon relies on the repeated use of words and phrases that represent nodes of creedal and juridical religious authority, explicitly claiming that Ṣūfī practices are forms of idolatry and disbelief. The relationship between Ṣūfīs ('people of deviation') and their shaykhs (scholars and spiritual guides) is presented as an over-zealous bond between a Muslim and his or her spiritual guide, rendering this bond more important than one's attachment to the *scriptural sources* of Islam, as the narrator suggests. This rhetorical approach makes an apparent exaggeration—the construction of an unsourced argument—to give emphasis to a

common Salafī conceit: namely, that Muslims should not over-rely on human agencies for their guidance; rather, they need to return to the Qur'ān and the normative practice of the Prophet Muḥammad—a method of interpretation that intentionally ignores centuries of pre-modern scholarship and warnings of errant interpretations. Finding guidance in the Qur'ān and statements and practices of the Prophet Muḥammad 'is common for all Muslim groups'. However, the 'Salafis are distinct from more traditional Muslims in denying any validity to other sources for knowledge' including 'the exercise of reason'.[564] The key words are *bidʿa* (heretical innovation), *shirk* (idolatry), *kufr* (disbelief), *manhaj* (the proper methodology of Salafism), and *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa* (the people of the normative teachings of Islam). Finally, *daʿwa al-salafiyya*—that is, the proselytizing or missions of the pious forebears—are paramount, and those who oppose them are losers (*khāsirīn*), a significant word the speaker evokes, as it is found in the Qur'ān to refute those Makkans who were belligerent in their opposition to the Qur'ān and the Prophet Muḥammad. They are 'losers' in this life and the next, as the speaker states. Using the word *khāsirīn* to describe a Muslim is provocative, if not problematic, in that its usages in the scriptural sources of Islam were not applied to Muslims but to the polytheists of the Arabian Peninsula.

Podcast Title:	Tawassul: Seeking A Means of Nearness To Allaah[565]
Narrator:	Abu Iyaad Amjad Rafiq
Posted:	22 January 2014
Length:	1:09:55
Setting:	Lecture

Detailed Synopsis

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564 Lloyd Ridgeon (2015), *Sufis and Salafis in the Contemporary Age*, at 3.
565 Accessed at (20 January 2019): https://www.salafisounds.com/tawassul-seeking-a-means-of-nearness-to-allaah-by-abu-iyaad/

The speaker, Abu Iyaad Amjad Rafiq, devotes this lecture to one of the key areas of difference between Salafism and Sufism. It is important to note that not all Ṣūfīs perform *tawassul*, the act of seeking intercession at the graveside of a Ṣūfī saint. But many, if not most, do. The speaker begins by defining *tawassul*, which, he says, relates to the issue of 'intermediaries between Allah and His creation'—namely, seeking 'nearness' to God or intercession from 'creation', which essentially means seeking help or intercession from anything that is not God per se—for God is God, and everything else ('creation') is not. Abu Iyaad immediately frames what he believes are the high stakes inherent in the practice: it 'has great connection' with the core tenet of Islam, the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*), and its antithesis, idolatry (*shirk*) or disbelief (*kufr*). For this reason, his strategy in making his address begins with a definition of *tawḥīd*: the inviolable belief that there is no one worthy of worship except God. Throughout the sermon, the speaker makes repeated mentions of idolatry (*shirk*) and its derivative *mushrikīn* (people of idolatry or those who ascribe partners or deities to Allah or who ascribe God-like attributes to human beings). It references the creedal foundation of Islam, the very identity-marker of a Muslim, saying both directly and by implication that *tawassul* connects with the very identity of what a Muslim is.

The narrator reveals the main sources he relies upon when speaking of this sensitive, creedal topic. They merit mention here because they are religious figures both of the historical past—Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), as well recent and contemporary scholars, such as the late Shaykh Ibn ʿUthaymīn (1929–2001) and Saleh As-Saleh (d. 2008)—leading scholars of contemporary Salafism.

In the course of his introduction, the narrator mentions the important differences between belief and idolatry—specifically, as they pertain to those 'innovators' who 'disguise' their practice of seeking means of intercession 'as [a] legitimate' forms of worship despite its being *shirk* (idolatry), one of the key words related to the evocation of authority. He outlines his strategy in the sermon, beginning by defining the terms of

engagement: namely, *tawḥīd* (the oneness of God), *al-ʿibāda* (worship), *duʿāʾ* (supplication), and *shirk* (idolatry), how 'it is the greatest oppression'. The speaker's focus on *tawḥīd* (the core tenet of belief in one God) begins by citing Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb. [7:21] In essence, he says that *tawḥīd* is to 'single out' God for worship. It is the first of the testimonies of Islam—'there is no God, but God'—that 'we all make as Muslims and on account to which we enter into Islam'. However, Abu Iyaad takes issue with how the testimony of faith (*lā ilāha illa Allāh*)—which he translates as 'There is nothing which is worshipped in truth except Allah'—is commonly translated ('there is no God but God'), claiming that the translation is problematic, or, as he says, 'false' or '*bāṭil*', since it evokes the notion of *waḥdat al-wujūd,* the unity of all existence—a common expression of Sufism. [8:14] He explains that this is a false translation or formulation of the testimony because it implies that 'everything which is worshipped, which anyone takes as a God' is God. The purpose of this synopsis is not to contest the ideas of the speakers, but it should be said here that the common translation of 'there is no God but God' in fact does not necessarily imply his interpretation. He continues this line of argument by mentioning the practices of worship of Christianity and Judaism, arguing that the translation 'there is no God but God' can thus mean only 'that everything which is worshipped by anybody in the creation, all of that is God'.

The speaker then jumps to a topic that seems out of place, quoting Shaykh Fawzan's refutation of the late Muḥammad Quṭb, the brother of Sayyid Quṭb (1906–1966), one of the most prominent leaders of the Muslim brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s. It is not clear what aspect of Muḥammad Quṭb's teachings or books the speaker is refuting, but nonetheless he contends that Quṭb's teachings were refuted because what he advocated was the 'same as the belief of the Ṣūfīs, those who believe that Allah is everything and in everything'. The speaker offers no evidence for this view.

The narrator next recites several verses from the Qurʾān that address worship and supplication in order to stress not only that only God is worthy of worship but also that to

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call upon anything apart from him is idolatry. In setting up the terms of his lecture—worship and supplication (and their Arabic originals)—as a preface to his treatment of *tawassul*, he seeks to add scholarly credence to his translation of the passages of the Qur'ān and his defence of it by citing the most commonly mentioned figures of Salafism, Ibn Taymiyya and Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, and their modern-day interlocutors: namely, Shaykh Fawzān and 'the *ʿulamā'* [scholars] of Saudi Arabia'. To stress the authenticity of the knowledge of Ibn Taymiyya and his definition of worship, the speaker veers into an elegy: reading Ibn Taymiyya's definition, it 'is as if this definition is literally being read from the Book of Allah'. The speaker is assured of this, for he says that since the term *ʿibāda* (worship) finds expression in the speech of the heart and the tongue, and embracing the deeds of limbs and the performance of rites, Ibn Taymiyya's definition, as the scholars he cites conclude, is complete. The speaker's attachment to the scholars of Salafism as sources of orthodoxy (*ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa*, one of the key terms meant to establish orthodoxy) is unambiguous and seems to resemble the kind of attachment Salafīs are wont to criticize with regard to Ṣūfīs and their bonds with their spiritual guides.

The speaker next talks on supplication: its various types, its valid form, and its purposes. He suggests that supplication and its forms as established and formulated during the generations of the pious forebears represents the only valid form of supplication and worship. Departures from these forms represent a departure from the claims of monotheism, or *tawhid*. Having completed his treatment on the meanings of worship and supplication, he takes up the issue of *shirk* (idolatry), speaking of *shirk* and the chastisements that await idolaters in the Hereafter. Any worship or supplication with regard to anyone or anything but God is *shirk*. There are two kinds of *shirk*, which the speaker expands upon. First is *al-shirk al-akbar* (greater or manifest idolatry), which denies—implicitly and explicitly—belief in the oneness of God and therefore 'expels' one from Islam, as he states. Among these deeds is calling upon anyone or anything, dead or

alive, other than God. Secondly, lesser or more subtle forms of idolatry are related to committing major sins and unknowingly attributing powers to anything other than God. He quotes ʿAbd al-Wahhāb as saying that if anyone directs worship, in any form (of the tongue, practice, or heart), away from God to something else, then he is a *kāfir*, an outright disbeliever, the most grievous accusation one can make about a Muslim. It nullifies any good that a Muslim has done, which is 'completely wasted'. [25:40–32:50]

The speaker spends considerable time on the story of the people of Noah, as related in the Qurʾān, and their idolatry, which involved worshipping people of the past the names of whom are mentioned in the Qurʾān. These were people who were at one time people of considerable piety and good character. After their passing, the pious men became so revered over the generations that Noah's people eventually sought their benefactions through intercession and so venerated them they became objects of worship and supplication.[566] [42:40] Having related the characteristics of *shirk*, the speaker then addresses *tawassul*, equating it as an act of worship meant not for God but for an intermediary. Quoting Ibn Taymiyya, the speaker asserts that this is the most severe idolatry. In other words, if *tawassul* is concerned with seeking benefit or protection, or seeking provision from an intermediary, then this is the precise reason that the idolaters of Makkah in pre-Islam times were declared as *kuffār* (disbelievers). In direct terms, *tawassul*, as he contends, is an act of disbelief, which God does 'not forgive'.

Brief Analysis: Significance and Key Ideological Themes and Terminologies

This podcast is an example of a lecture presented in order to criticize the practice known as *tawassul*, seeking spiritual benefit or intercession from interred pious individuals at a grave of a Ṣūfī saint or at a shrine or *zāwiya* (see above). *Tawassul* is one of the main loci of dispute between Salafism and Sufism that is identified, defined, and analysed here. In *otherizing* those who practice *tawassul*, the speaker makes numerous references to idolatry

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[566] The story of Noah and the names of the gods of his people are found in the Qurʾān, 71:1–28.

(*shirk*), disbelief (*kufr*), and the ways of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa*, one of the key terms used to evoke and define Islamic orthodoxy and religious authority.

Podcast Title:	The Reality of Sufism: It's [sic] Beginnings and Rise in the Muslim Ummah[567]
Narrator:	Abu Khadeejah Abdul Waahid
Posted:	17 July 2018
Length:	42:02
Setting:	Lecture

Detailed Synopsis

The speaker, Abu Khadeejah Abdul Waahid, bases this lecture once more on a book by Shaykh Ṣāliḥ Fawzān (b. 1933), a leading scholar of Saudi Arabia, whose works are often cited by Salafist speakers and quoted in their books. Abu Khadeejah speaks of the six principles of worship in Islam, on which he bases his reproach of Sufism. Among the principles are: worship can only be known through the revelation given to the Prophet Muḥammad and must be 'done sincerely and purely' for God and 'be free from the pollution of shirk and idolatry'; and the exemplar of worship is only the Prophet Muḥammad, as conveyed by his companions. [4:23]

The speaker thereafter addresses the central theme of the lecture, Sufism. His reproach of Sufism begins by challenging the origins of the name itself: '*Sufism*' or '*taṣawwuf*'. Neither name was known in the time of the Prophet, the speaker states. As such, it was 'something that the Muslims invented after the time of revelation', after the time of the companions of the Prophet. It therefore lacks roots in the scriptural sources of Islam and 'is an incursion' 'introduced by other nations' (of religious legacies) who were

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[567] Accessed at (20 January 2019): https://www.salafisounds.com/the-reality-of-sufism-its-beginnings-and-rise-in-the-muslim-ummah-lessons-in-aqidah-and-dawah-of-shaikh-salih-al-fawzan-lecture-by-abu-khadeejah/

not Muslims (6:01). Sufism, he repeats, was not well known during the time of the three generations of Islam, the term becoming widespread only thereafter. [8:15] The speaker offers a lengthy discussion of the invalidity of the word, according to Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), the authority cited, who refutes linguistically and historically the contention that *taṣawwuf* has early Islamic roots. [9:03] The refutation of the origins of the name implies the refutation of the phenomenon itself.

At this juncture in the podcast, the speaker offers a commentary on Sufism and its origins in the 'excesses' and 'extremism' of ascetic practices found among people living in or near Basra (in present-day Iraq). [14:30] He then returns, without giving a reason, to the relation between the term Sufism and the wearing of wool (*ṣuf* in Arabic) as among the extreme ascetics in emulation of Jesus, although, the speaker contends, the model of the Prophet Muḥammad is worthier of emulation, as the Prophet 'used to wear cotton' and other materials. In essence, the speaker unevenly attempts to make a refutation of claims that the word *Ṣufiyya* traces its roots to the pious generations. Rather, he argues, the word relates to contexts and practices representing extreme ascetic practices (*zuhd*) introduced from other faith traditions.

The speaker next describes how Sufism broke into a plethora of 'sects' and 'divided' into various types. He notes derisively, 'How many different sects of Sufism there are in the world today, each of them having their own particular ideas and ideologies and *shaykhs that they worship* [researcher's emphasis] and follow and devote themselves to'. [16:55] Each of the Ṣūfī sects, he contends, as their own litanies of prayers. Immediately thereafter, however, he asserts, with no textual proof or reference, that 'Some of them [Ṣūfīs] smoke hashish' and indulge in 'different types of intoxication', thus appealing to Islam's juridical prohibition of intoxicants, including alcohol. [17:55]

Citing and paraphrasing Ibn Taymiyya, the speaker contends that 'Sufism infiltrated the lands of the Muslims by way of other religions, such as Hinduism and Christian monasticism.' (He repeats this near the end of the lecture, but with the addition

of Jewish mysticism as the source of Sufism.) As such, he argues, Sufism's syncretic aspects, such as the way that 'they gather around their shrines who they are say are their saints'—although the Prophet dispraised the practice of turning such graves into places of worship—are rooted in religions other than Islam (besides Hellenistic thought). [19:01]

The heresies of Sufism, the speaker states, are evinced by the fact that Ṣūfī practices are not based on the revelatory sources of Islam (the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth). There is nothing in the scriptural sources of Islam, he asserts, that permits the smoking of 'hashish' or 'dancing in circles', which the speaker believes are practices among Ṣūfīs. Again, he offers no proof or concrete example thereof. According to the speaker, 'they [Ṣūfīs] are the foremost in *shirk* [idolatry]', for they go to the graves seeking intercession (*tawassul*), which is 'major *shirk*' (*al-shirk al-akbar*), a significant act of idolatry. There is nothing in Ṣūfī worship practices, he contends, that conforms with established Islam: 'all of their *'ibāda* (worship) has nothing to do with the Sunna'—the normative practice of the Prophet Muḥammad. This includes, he says, ritual visiting of the graves and 'their celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muḥammad'. [24:55] He later censures the Ṣūfī practice of wearing amulets. [29:00]

The speaker ends his lecture with an anecdote offered as a cautionary tale concerning an unnamed Ṣūfī man who seemingly would forsake the dawn prayer (the first of the five-daily obliged ritual prayers), despite being known to be pious and saintly. When queried about why such a person would forsake an obligation, his family explained that his soul was taken in the liminal realm at dawn to Makkah, where he would perform his prayer before returning to his home in Pakistan. The speaker attempts to ridicule Sufism with this tale, claiming without equivocation and in a broad-brush manner: 'This is *taṣawwuf* [sufism]'. The speaker warns of the spreading of Ṣūfī 'sects' of modern times, before ending with another fantastical story of Deobandi Sufism and metaphysical feats meant to demonstrate the extremism found in Sufism and characteristic of Sufism as a whole. [31:17]

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Brief Analysis: Significance and Key Ideological Themes and Terminologies

This podcast demonstrates all three of the Salafī contestations with Sufism examined here: *Mawlid*, grave visitation, and seeking intercession through *tawassul*. The various categories of strategic argument are presented: attributing Sufism to extra-Islamic origins and excessiveness; condemning Sufism through the direct use of creedal–theological language—that is, *shirk* (idolatry); and inferring juridical connotations—namely, the illicit use of drugs (hashish) to promote trance-like states. By stating that *this is* Sufism, without providing supporting evidence, the speaker makes a straw-man argument. In addition, the speaker narrates fantastical stories in order to cast aspersions on the entirety of Sufism and to lead his audience to general conclusions about Sufism and its distance from normative, orthodox Islam. Key nomenclature used include *shirk* (idolatry) and *shirk al-akbar* (major idolatry); Ṣūfīs are 'foremost in shirk'. Key ideological themes include Sufism and syncretic practices; Ṣūfīs 'worshipping' their spiritual leaders. The loci of contestations are, as mentioned, *Mawlid*, grave visitations, and intercession.

Podcast Title:	The Saved Sect [3rd lecture] The Meaning of Imān, Tawhīd and the Angels – The 'Aqeedah [Creed] of Imām Muhammad ibn Abdil-Wahhab[568]
Narrator:	Abu Khadeejah Abdul Waahid
Posted:	19 September 2017
Length:	45:29
Setting:	Lecture

Detailed Synopsis

In the podcast on 'The Saved Sect' the speaker, Abu Khadeejah, continues with his multi-part series on the creed of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb. In this podcast, the speaker offers

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[568] Accessed at (20 January 2019): https://www.salafisounds.com/the-saved-sect-the-meaning-of-iman-tawhid-and-the-angels-the-aqidah-of-imam-muhammad-ibn-abdil-wahhab-by-abu-khadeejah/

commentary on a letter written by ʿAbd al-Wahhāb in response to those among his contemporaries who criticized him. The letter itself is explicated by a contemporary Saudi scholar, Shaykh al-Fawzān, on which the narrator of the podcasts relies. The title of the podcast, the content of the letter and Fawzān's commentary are taken from a statement of the Prophet Muḥammad, who mentioned that 73 sects will emerge, but only one will be saved in the afterlife—that is, 'saved' from Hellfire. The speaker addresses the overt meaning of the Ḥadīth and how each deviant sect (with the noticeable exception of the saved one) with be 'pleased' with their sect, however misguided they may be. In the process of parsing the meaning of the Ḥadīth, the speaker lumps together an untenable grouping of disparate, anachronistic sects who have only one thing in common: namely, that they are unsaved. The grouping, according to the speaker, includes Ṣūfī orders (such as the Nakhshabandiyya), the Muʿtazila (the rationalist school of thought), and others. But then, quite remarkably, the speaker in the same rhetorical frame includes modern movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, ISIS, and al-Qaida (23:12). According to the speaker, all of the aforementioned groups are among the condemned or unsaved sects. This represents a rather unambiguous case of appropriating a source of Islamic law, Ḥadīth, to condemn a broad, highly disparate group of schools of thought, among them Sufism. The speaker states that the condemned sects have their 'own books' in which they record their creed and interpretation of the sources of Islam (the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth). However, the narrator insinuates that these 'books' of the Muslim Brotherhood, ISIS, and Jamāʿat al-Tablīgh are revered more than the Qurʾān and the interpretations of the pious generations. This insinuation is a strong condemnation of non-Salafist groups, for the condemnation represents more than dissent or disagreement. The implication is that the very identity of Muslims who give deference to 'their own books' over the scriptural sources of Islam is tantamount to blaspheme, if not apostasy.

The speaker mentions these sects and/or ideologies using their acquired names: 'Jahmiyya, Qubūriyya, Ṣufiyya, the Muʿtazila,[569] the Shīʿa'. Both the mention of al-Qubūriyya with Ṣufiyya (Sufism) reference practices associated with Ṣūfīs and Sufism itself. The former is a derogatory term that refers to those who visit graves for the purpose of seeking blessings and intercession from interred sages and saints. Here again, the term refers not to a formal historical ideological phenomenon but to the practice of grave visitation that is usually associated with Sufism. The word for *grave* in Arabic is *qabr* (singular) or *qubūr* (plural). The term 'Jahmiyya' refers to a school (or schools) of theological thought ostensibly originating with the theologian Jahm Ibn Ṣafwān (d. 745). As such, the Jahmiyya are said to represent a number of schools of thought that essentially deny the distinct reality of the names or attributes of God (which are explicitly mentioned in the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth collections). For such schools of thought, attributes that appear to be anthropomorphic—such as God having 'hands', a 'face', or 'sight' (or 'eyes')—are merely metaphorical usages; these attributes should never be considered to be attributes of God per se, since they would attribute human physical qualities to God, if taken literally. 'They denied that God had a distinct eternal attribute of knowledge, considering that his knowledge of temporal events followed the occurrence of the event. More generally they denied the distinct existence of all God's attributes'.[570]

The Salafīs (as most other Sunnīs) regard these positions as heresy, as it is obvious in the podcasts. This creedal position rejects the apparent or literal meaning of passages of the Qur'ān in favour of a highly figurative interpretation that essentially is at variance with what the revealed sources of Islam say about God's attributes or names. *Jahmiyya* does necessarily comprise a single sectarian movement in the contemporary age, and it is certain that the ideas and views of the historic Jahmiyya have not survived to a significant

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[569] See footnotes 533–35.
[570] Watt, Montgomery, 'Djahmiyya, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 05 January 2019: http://dx.doi.org.turing.library.northwestern.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0176

degree today. Both past and contemporary Muslim authorities, even those who hold to a figurative interpretation of the physical attributes of God in order to avoid anthropomorphism, have commented that the historical views of the Jahmiyya were indeed outside Islamic orthodoxy in terms of the attributes of God. However, little attention is given to the 'sect', as Watt called them, and it seems that Jahmiyya is given prominence only through the auspices of those who decide to criticize them.[571]

This raises interesting questions: why do the podcasts of Salafī Sounds consistently condemn the Jahmiyya? And how does this relate to Sufism? The figurative interpretation of the attributes of God is a theme in one of the primary creedal schools of Islam: that is, the Ashʿarites, which are also associated with many Ṣūfī thoughts and personages, such as Muḥammad Abu Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (1058–1111), who is closely associated with Sufism and the Asharite creedal school. To pass judgement against the Jahmiyya constructs an ideological foil to criticize the Ashʿarite theological school, which is one of the dominant schools of thought in contemporary Muslim milieus.

In addition, in several podcasts (as will be shown below) Sufism is criticized through what can be described as guilt by association. The heterodoxy of the Jahmiyya and the Muʿtazilites, for example, is a heterodoxy that most Sunnī Muslims are likely to agree with, perhaps including Ṣūfīs. But in the process of trying to stressing the heterodoxy of the Jahmiyya the speaker mentions in a single breath Sufism and Ashʿarism as being outside the bounds of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa*, which is one of the key phrases that is used to demarcate Sunnī orthodoxy.

This point of contestation is relevant to Salafī–Ṣūfī polemics for another reason. Mentioning these heterodox views is part of the historical narration found in the account of the rise of the rescuer of impure or syncretic Islamic phenomena: namely, the rise of Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb. Thus, the speaker mentions these ideologies as having

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[571] Watt, Montgomery, 'The Political Attitudes of the Mu'tazilah'. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 95*(1–2) (1963), 38–57.

'gained ascendancy' in the Muslim world until the time of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, the namesake of contemporary Wahhabism. 'He revived' the *dīn* [the religion], *sunna* [the normative practice of the Prophet Muḥammad], and *ʿaqīda* [the creed] as it was known in the early centuries of Islam. [4:09] This is the crescendo of the speaker's account of this history, as it forms part of the strategy of contesting Sufism.

Brief Analysis: Significance and Key Ideological Themes and Terminologies

This podcast demonstrates Salafī discourse as part of the 'triangle of power, knowledge and subjectivity', in that the use of 'knowledge' as a tool of 'power'—in this case the use of the semblance of religious authority to declare contemporary Sufism as a foreign 'ideology', one that is disharmonious with the way of the Salaf—is an attempt to *otherize* Sufism. [572] The anti-Ṣūfī contestations shown in the podcasts examined here rely on casting aspersions on Sufism in a general manner, without specificity (in addition to more pointed accusations made against such practices as grave visitations and seeking intercession (*tawassul*)). It is thus significant to note the strategy employed in attacking Sufism in an unparsed way. This method, ironically, amplifies Salafī polemics, distinguishing them from more individual criticisms. In other words, the general censuring of a wide and varied religious experience within Islam demonstrates an uncritical and sweeping approach to Sufism. For example, Sufism is referenced as being part of the 'darkness' that overwhelmed the Muslim world in the aftermath of the pious generations, the first three generations of Islam; often, too, it is caught in a wide net of invective meant to describe the impurities that had seeped into Muslim life, thought, and movements (some of them sectarian, as will be shown). This strategy also demonstrates claims of an exclusive or proprietary association with pure Islam and its proper and acceptable interpretation, and seeks religious authority by highlighting the prospects of being unsaved—that is, of suffering chastisement in the afterlife. This evokes an implicit

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[572] Segal and von Stuckrad, 430–31. The entry quotes Johannes Angermuller.

usage of the third, juridical–ethical node of authority in the link asserted between the creed and the hereafter.

Podcast Title:	The Path of Those Who Attempt to Dilute the Salafī Manhaj[573]
Narrator:	Abu Hakeem Bilaal Davis
Posted:	8 August 2014
Length:	27:51
Setting:	Friday Sermon (*Khuṭbah*)

Detailed Synopsis

In this Friday sermon the speaker, Abu Hakeem Bilaal Davis, begins with a warning concerning the affairs of religion in the present day. These are times of *fitan* (trials and tribulations) akin to the 'portion of a dark night'. The speaker associates these trials with the affairs of faith: that is, the erosion thereof. A person, the speaker states, quoting the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, will wake up in the morning as a believer and by the evening, as a result of the temptations of the material world, he is a disbeliever. He urges his listeners to 'learn' the religion, which he specifies as learning the 'methodology and this *manhaj al-salafī*', the Salafī method of interpretation and ideology—an ignorance of which, the speaker infers, is the main crisis in religion today [3:49].

He quotes, as well, a companion of the Prophet Muḥammad and his well-known exhortation to 'cling to knowledge' of the original affairs of religion and 'beware of innovation'. The speaker interprets this exhortation as a call to 'cling to the *manhaj al-salafī*' and to return to the *dīn*, the religion. [5:08] The 'true *dīn*' is exemplified by the early believers, but their 'methodology' was 'diluted by individuals who came later'; in contrast, the Salafīs are 'ardent' in preserving the *manhaj* from those who otherwise

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[573] Accessed at (20 January 2019): https://www.salafisounds.com/the-path-of-those-who-attempt-to-dilute-the-salafi-manhaj/

would dilute it. [6:34] The speaker next warns of the usurpation of the *manhaj* of Salafiyya by such movements as the Muslim Brotherhood, who 'climbed upon the methodology of the *salaf*, claimed it, and then spring-boarded [sic] off it into other' extra-Islamic methodologies.

The speaker then seems to implicate former Salafīs or those who disagree with the purist Salafism of Salafi Publications as among those who dilute the Salafī *manhaj*. It is 'an issue that it is imperative that the people of Sunnah understand because surely but surely, we see our brothers being plucked off by those who call to this methodology' although, in reality, they dilute it. The speaker exhorts that is 'imperative' 'for the vanguard of this *daʿwa* to remain firm upon it'. [8:50] This includes the role of vanguard against those who 'wage war' against the Salafī *manhaj*. [9:40]

Next, quoting a scholar, the speaker denies the accusation that there is harshness among Salafīs or that they face difficulty today that compares to what the Salaf of the past had to confront, and follows up his previous contention that the 'people of innovation' dilute the Salafī *manhaj*, stressing again an exhortation to be aware of those who alter the *manhaj*, yet offering no details as to what that might entail. However, he likens the plots concocted by contemporary people of misguidance and 'innovation' with the plots and trials of the prophet period—that is, those disbelievers who 'plotted and schemed' against the Prophet Muḥammad. It seems that the speaker is likening contemporary dissidents to disbelievers among the pre-Islam Arabs and allied nations who plotted against the Prophet Muḥammad. In fact, the speaker infers that the Prophet foretold that this would happen in later generations. [14:56]

The speaker then draws a provocative analogy comparing those today who spread lies about and imputations against 'the sunna', the Salafī *manhaj*, with the 'hypocrites' of Madina in the Prophetic era, who showed love and reverence to the Sunna by day, but at night mocked it and plotted against it (citing a verse of the Qurʾān). The contemporary dissenters against Salafism (or 'the Sunna'), he asserts, pattern their criticisms after the

hypocrites of the Prophetic period. They lie and take statements out of context to portray a false representation of the 'people of the Sunna'. [16:25] The speaker continues by repeating his descriptions of the attacks against those whom he calls consistently 'the people of the Sunna', characterising such attacks as fabrications and other intentional misrepresentations.

Next the speaker claims that among the methodologies the malcontents use to attack 'the people of the Sunna' is *secrecy*. They gather, he says, for the purposes of 'secretly conspiring' and 'secretly mentioning' lies. He quotes from a prophetic tradition that essentially states that Satan, having given up on trying to persuade the people of the Arabian Peninsula to worship him, turns to tempting people by sowing dispute and division; and the speaker infers that the divisions regarding 'the people of Sunna' are thus inspired by demonic forces. Some of the dissenters, he claims, intentionally align themselves with the Salafiyya in order to split with them subsequently, so as to sow discord. [20:14]

He closes his sermon with a warning and exhortation for people to keep proper company with those who cling to the *manhaj* and to be aware of those who hold apparently reasonable values—such as balanced views and open-mindedness—but who in reality oppose the Sunna and the *manhaj*.

Brief Analysis: Significance and Key Ideological Themes and Terminologies

In this Friday sermon, the speaker took the opportunity to speak of what can be described as the *politics* and *contentions* of intra-Salafī dynamics, although Friday sermons traditionally offer inspirational exhortations. In terms of the key nomenclatures, the speaker frequently mentions the exclusivity of Islam's *manhaj* to Salafists, particularly those who shunned the temptation to adapt to what he claims to be a diluted version thereof. He calls upon the audience to appreciate the 'imperative' of being in the 'vanguard of this *da'wa*', another key term that expresses the mission of Salafism to

maintain its standards despite the encroachments from within Salafism and from without—an indistinct reference to 'people of [heretical] innovation', including the Muslim Brotherhood. Key ideological themes apparent include the exclusivity of Islam's pure methodology, reflecting an embattled posturing of the preservers of 'the Sunna of Islam' from those who would wish to detach it from the righteous forebears and, through conspiracy and otherwise, would seek to alter the purity of the manhaj. Again, it is important to note that taking the authority vested in the *minbar* (the place in a mosque where a preacher stands to deliver the *khuṭba*) to cast aspersions on other Muslims has particular symbolic value and adds emphasis to the claims of authority over Islam's interpretative methodology or *manhaj*. The speaker makes liberal, provocative comparisons with well-known episodes and aspects of prophetic biography (*sīra*) and the contemporary climate of intra-Salafī dynamics in a strategic use of the *authority of the past* to make gains in the present.

Podcast Title:	The Origins of The Mawlid[574]
Narrator:	Abu Hakeem Bilaal Davis
Posted:	30 December 2015
Length:	32:54
Setting:	Friday Sermon (*Khuṭbah*)

Detailed Synopsis

As the title indicates, this podcast contains the main arguments against the validity of the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muḥammad that are regularly found in Salafī

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[574] Accessed at (20 January 2019): https://www.salafisounds.com/the-origins-of-the-mawlid-eid-milad-an-nabi-by-abu-hakeem/

refutations of this act: 1) the lack of precedent in early Islamic history; 2) it represents an over-praising of the Prophet Muḥammad, and thus may be idolatrous, as praise is reserved for God alone, not any human; and 3) it represents a syncretic addition with Christian, Jewish, and/or even pagan origins. In the course of the speaker's presentation he makes these arguments in a non-linear fashion.

The practice of celebrating the *Mawlid* is not exclusively a Ṣūfī practice, but is often closely associated with Sufism and is a point of contestation in the Salafī–Ṣūfī divide, as described previously. The speaker establishes the premise of his argument (and the larger Salafī argument) by pronouncing that 'we follow what [the prophet] commanded us', with the further elucidation that 'God is not worshiped except by that which He has prescribed' [2:50].

The celebration of the *Mawlid*, then, is an act of veneration unsanctioned by the scriptural sources of Islam (or revealed authority): namely, the Qur'ān and Sunna (the statements and normative practices of the Prophet Muḥammad). In addition, the celebration is not a recorded practice of the generations of the pious forebears, the Salaf. As such, those who claim that the *Mawlid* is a celebration that is intended to strengthen one's love of the Prophet and, by extension, is an act of worship of God, are confronted with the argument represented by the speaker here, who makes the sweeping, unequivocal statement that Muslims are proscribed from engaging in any acts of worship that are not known to have been a practice of the Prophet Muḥammad or of the generations of the Salaf.

He also quotes a ḥadīth in which the Prophet is said to have related: 'Do not go in 'excesses' in 'praising me'. [4:09] On this basis, the speaker suggests that the *Mawlid* in fact resembles the Christian veneration of Jesus and the status they attribute to him. (It should be noted that the sermon was delivered on Christmas Day (December 25) 2015 and posted days later.)

The speaker turns for a moment from his line of argument against the *Mawlid* per se and interrogates the Christian celebration of Jesus's birthday. [4:45] Although the sermon is about the *Mawlid*, his use of Christmas follows two threads common in Salafī literature: first, Christmas Day is not the actual day of Jesus's birth and, therefore, is not valid even for Christians; and second, Muslims are emulating Christians in celebrating the birthday of prophets, although Christians appropriated the practice from pre-Christian sources. The speaker pursues the main challenges of the accuracy of December 25 as the day of Jesus's birth, stating that 'Christians have gone beyond bounds' in celebrating Jesus's birthday, because 'in reality they have no knowledge' of the actual day of his birth. The likening of the *Mawlid* with the Christian celebration of Christmas is an argument that seems compelling on the surface. The creedal differences between Islam and Christianity, such as the salvation narratives of the sacrifice of the Son of God, are well known and seemingly irreconcilable theologically, so the case against the *Mawlid*— without explicit authority in Islam to claim that it is absolutely heretical—is often buttressed by citations of creedal and sacramental differences between Islam and Christianity. In other words, it is a strategic tangent of the speaker's presentation that perhaps compensates for the absence of revealed texts that explicitly state that *Mawlid* celebrations are unequivocally proscribed.

The speaker then continues and circles back to the confrontation on Christmas and cites the New Testament as saying that Jesus was born in the season of the harvest, which he says does not fall in December. It was a 'festivity imported [into Christianity] from the pagans' of the Roman Empire; their celebrations of the 'new sun' was taken on by Christianity when the religion began to spread. [5:43] This sets up the emulation argument more distinctly. The speaker cites the Prophet Muḥammad as stating that, some day, Muslims will follow the steps of previous religious communities, 'footstep by footstep, handspan by handspan', to the point that if they go into a 'lizard's hole' Muslims will follow them. He then states: 'We see likewise the celebration of the *Mawlid*' of the

Prophet Muḥammad, which is a celebration emulating 'the example of the Christians and the Jews'. The speaker's contempt is further evinced with this tone, which, quite frankly, adds to the bellicosity of his position not merely with Christian holidays per se, but with the Mawlid celebration among Muslims.

The speaker next delves into the origins of the *Mawlid* in Muslim history. Here, instead of citing Christian creedal conventions, he turns towards the Shiites. First, he states that none of the earlier generations of Islam practised *Mawlid* celebrations. So how did the *Mawlid* come into being in Islam? It was started in the fourth century of the Muslim calendar, he states, 'not by the people of Sunna and Ḥadīth, but by the Fāṭimids, the Shiites'. The Fāṭimids, who were Ismāʿīlī Shiites, established a state in Egypt that spread across North Africa, as the speaker explains, and the leader of the Fāṭimids needed to curry favour with the surrounding Sunnī world; because Ṣūfīs, he says, were 'on the rise at the time' and the Fāṭimid leadership sought out a religious practice that would attract a celebratory veneration of the Prophet Muḥammad and thus attract Ṣūfīs. (The purpose of the insertion of the rise of Sufism in this narrative is not clear, but it seems to be a method intended to add value to the speaker's overall rebuttal.)[575] So, the leader of the Fāṭimids (who is unnamed in the podcast) 'brought' about the celebration of *Mawlid.* [11:41] None of the history he recounts here is substantiated or supported by anything other than the authority of the *minbar* (the raised platform from which a sermon is given in a mosque). However, in other works that will be examined in this study—particularly a freely downloadable e-book—the Shiite origins of the *Mawlid* are drawn out.

Continuing, the speaker deconstructs the rationales often employed in favour of the *Mawlid*, addressing and seeking to rebut the claim that the celebrations are an expression of the love of the Prophet. Celebrants of the *Mawlid* cite a verse of the Qur'ān

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[575] Further description of the Fāṭimids is beyond the purview of this study. See Marius Canard, 'Fāṭimids', in P. Bearman et al. (eds.), *Enclyopaedia of Islam* (Second Edition edn.; Leiden: Brill Online, 2012).

in which people are encouraged to *rejoice* at the 'mercy' sent by God, which, the speaker points out, is often interpreted as the Prophet Muḥammad. He rejects this interpretation in two ways. First, he states that the verse speaks of *rejoicing*, not *celebration*—not 'parties', as he states. And the word 'mercy' in the verse, he claims, refers not to the Prophet Muḥammad but to the revelation of the Qur'ān itself. While there are differences of opinion about the meaning of 'mercy' in the verse, the speaker quotes the exegesis of Ibn Kathīr (1301–1373), a well-known Qur'ān scholar who lived in Damascus and was influenced by Ibn Taymiyya's works.

Brief Analysis: Significance and Key Ideological Themes and Terminologies

The narration exemplifies Salafī contestations regarding the celebration of the Prophet Muḥammad's birthday and the strategies of refutation used: 1) Intra-Islamic syncretism, through Shi'ism; 2) extra-Islamic syncretism from Christian sources; 3) a lack of precedent in the early generations of Islam; and 4) a denial of the presence of any reverence for the Prophet Muḥammad or other spiritual value in the practice. The speaker deconstructs the textual proofs of the proponents of the *Mawlid* by calling their proofs *'shubahāt'*, or insertions of *doubt* or *unfounded* speculation, the anathema of certitude in faith. In deconstructing the validity of the *Mawlid*, the speaker implies a more general Salafī concern to define the limits not only of the *manhaj* of Islam in legal matters, but also with regard to supererogatory acts or devotions. Also, the aggressive handling of the Fatimids in Egypt is not uncommon in Salafist discourse, and it is employed here to stress the heterodoxy of birthday celebrating by associating celebration to Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlī Muslims and their leadership.[576]

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[576] In the Salafī Publications e-book on the Mawlid, the author describes the founder of al-Azhar University in Cairo as: 'He was a vile, cursed Bāṭinī Ismāʿīlī Shiʿite and these celebrations were a means to entice people away from the legislated actions of the Sharīʿah and towards innovations leading to a superficial attachment to Islām which eventually revolved around veneration of graves and saints as a means of easy salvation'. See Abū ʿIyaaḍ Amjad Rafīq Rafīq, *Concerning Celebration of the Mawlid*, (Birmingham: Salalfi Publications, 2014), at 35.

Podcast Title:	Iman in the presence of Sins & Iman in the presence of Unbelief[577]
Narrator:	Abu Iyaad Amjad Rafiq
Posted:	12 December 2016
Length:	1:09:55
Setting:	Lecture

Detailed Synopsis

In this podcast, the speaker offers a critique of various 'sects', as he calls them, and interestingly includes among them the Ḥanafi school of law, the most popular school of law in the Muslim world. He cites defects in their creeds, pivoting beyond the Salafī critiques regarding the names or attributes of God, which are taken to be figurative rather than literal in the named sects. But also, he references the notions of faith (*īmān*) held by the 'sects'. [2:35–3:42] These sects, the speaker asserts, view *īmān* to be static, that is, reserved for the realm of the heart, disassociated from deeds. A lengthy discussion follows on the differences between a Muslim *weak* in faith but without idolatry in his or her heart and those 'Muslims' observant of the pillars of Islam but with idolatry, such as 'worshipping' at graves, in their hearts. The former will enter hellfire but eventually will be saved and sent to heaven, while those who had done many good deeds but had shirk in their hearts would be in hell forever. This, the speaker says, is the position of Ahl al-Sunna— taking a position between the *khawārij and its opposing theology known as marji'a*, meaning those who believe that faith is entirely a matter of the heart and that there is no increase or decrease in faith on account of deeds done; and those who believe that Muslims who commit major sins are *kāfirs*, outright disbelievers who should be punished in this life and in the next. The modern-day version of the *khawārij* are those—

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[577] Accessed at (20 January 2019): https://www.salafisounds.com/iman-in-the-presence-of-sins-iman-in-the-presence-of-unbelief-the-aqidah-of-imam-muhammad-ibn-abdil-wahhab-by-abu-khadeejah/

presumably ISIS—who pass judgements on Muslims for their sins and visit violent retribution upon them, says the speaker. [38:00] In the question and answer session of the event recorded in the podcast, one audience member asked if a person joins *Jamāʿat al-Tablīgh* in their gatherings that makes him an innovator. The speakers says that if he joins them and is aware of their innovative ways, then he too is an innovator, adding, directly, that people of innovation are *Jamāʿat al-Tablīgh* and *al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn* (the Muslim Brotherhood): these are *ahl al-bidʿa*, or people of innovation. [41:00–42:00]

The speaker addresses following a Prayer leader in worship. One of the 'pillars' (canonical practices of the faith) of Islam is the Prayer Ritual or *Ṣalāt*. As the speaker mentions, it is best to perform the Prayer in congregation, in which case there is a Prayer leader (an *imām*) who stands in front of the worshippers to lead them in the recitation and postures of the Prayer Ritual. The worshippers behind the *imām* follow his/her lead in the moves (bends and bows) that are established parts of the Muslim prayer. A question arises, however, as to the qualifications of the one who leads, and this includes the creedal beliefs of the *imām*. In this podcast, the validity of praying behind an imam who follows a creed that significantly differs from the Salafī point of view is questioned, meaning that Salafīs are cautioned to perform the Prayer Ritual behind an *imām* whose creedal beliefs are deemed heretical, even if the *imām* performs the prayer impeccably. Here we have an example of a real-life issue of 'performance' associated with creedal thought. As mentioned previously, the modes of dispute that relate to actual performance when determining the foundation of Salafī–Ṣūfī contestations and Salafī polemics are a focus of this study.

Brief Analysis: Significance and Key Ideological Themes and Terminologies
This podcast extends the realm of heresy or heretical innovation to include how faith itself operates in the Salafī creedal view. The speaker reproaches the Ḥanafī school of law along with other groups or 'sects' with regard to the dynamic or static nature of faith or

*īm*ān, the center of Muslim piety. Does faith increase or decrease in connection with the deeds of worshippers? What animates this discussion is the implied assumption that practices (deeds, in essence) do indeed affect the level of faith and creedal beliefs of Muslim worshippers. This view adds significant authority or power to Salafī strategies in their critiques of Sufi extra-canonical practices and associating them with the centrality of faith. Also, the podcasts demonstrate an example of a real-life issue of 'performance' ritual and the validity of participating in it based on the unseen creeds held by the prayer leader. As mentioned previously, the modes of dispute that relate to actual performance when determining the foundation of Salafī–Ṣūfī contestations and Salafī polemics are a focus of this study.

6.6 Summarized Synopses of Select Podcasts

Podcast Title:	Praying In Jamaah & Praying Behinf [sic] Innovators[578]
Narrator:	Abu Khadeejah Abdul Waahid
Length:	24:49
Posted:	15 December 2017
Setting:	Lecture

Summarized Synopsis

The speaker begins by declaring that if one prays any of the five daily ritual prayers behind an imam and it turns out he is a *jahamī* then the prayer should be repeated, as praying behind an imam who is a *jahamī* is not valid [1:20–3:00] because a *jahamī* prayer leader 'denies the names and attributes of Allah in totality' [2:26]. If imam happens to be the ruler of the land, then one does not repeat the prayer. The purpose of this distinction between prayers behind an *imām* and prayers behind a ruler who simply leads the prayer is to keep people united, especially during the Friday worship, the speaker states.

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[578] Accessed at (20 January 2019): https://www.salafisounds.com/praying-in-jamaah-praying-behind-innovators-sharhus-sunnah-al-barbahari-lesson-by-abu-khadeejah/

The main contention is formulated by the speaker as follows: Because of the spread of Asharism today, most of the mosques in the world are led by *imām*s of such creedal thought. So, if people have no choice then they should pray behind such *imām*s in order to keep the congregational prayer alive. However, if people find *imām*s who are of *Ahl al-Sunna* then one should pray behind them, rather than *imām*s of heretical creedal persuasion. In discussing this well-known, detailed and carefully thought-out thread of Islam sacred law relating to the qualities of a prayer leader and his qualifications, with some variation in opinions and such, the contemporary polemic adds a distinction: that is, castigating the Ashʿarīs and Māturīdīs as outside the community of *Ahl al-Sunna*.

Podcast Title:	Types of Bid'ah' (part 1) Types of Bid'ah (part 2)
Narrator:	Abu Khadeejah Abdul Waahid
Posted:	25 Ramadan 1436 (25 July 2015)
Length:	27:05
Setting:	Lecture in Ramadan

Summarized Synopsis

Part One: In this part, the narrator methodically presents the various types and definitions of *bidʿa* (heretical innovation) in Islam. He bases his talk mainly on a book by Imām al-Shāṭibī, a well-known scholar, and quotes from other scholars occasionally. In brief, the two main types of *bidʿa* are, first, those that are innovations in the religion with no basis in Islam's chief sources of law, the Qur'ān, the Sunna, and the Consensus of Muslim scholars; and, second, those that have a partial or apparent basis in the scriptural sources of Islam, but feature additions that do not have such a basis. The former is fully recognizable. The latter gives the appearance of acceptability, but upon closer review is pernicious—in essence, these innovations are 'evil' (*sharr*). The speaker attributes the introduction of illicit innovations into Islam to demonic sources, Satan especially. In

doing so, he assigns a non-textual, unseen cause to the growth of heretical innovation. Next, he mentions Ṣūfīs, whom he claims hold their shaykhs as infallible, although he produces no evidence for this. He mentions several of the major Ṣūfī orders (*ṭuruq*) that, he claims, consider their leaders infallible. Subsequently he says that the reserving the night of the Prophet Muḥammad's birthday for special prayers and festivities—a major locus of contestation—is *bidʿa*, and that taking one of the names of God and repeating it over and again—a common practice among Ṣūfīs, though not exclusive to them—is a heretical innovation. The group chanting of the name of God is thus *bidʿa*, but '[t]his is what they do, those Sufis'. He also makes mention of the practice of dancing around graves as a manifest demonstration of heretical innovation, though the speaker offers no specific example of this practice.

Part Two: Here the narrator summarizes the previous principles mentioned in Part One of this podcast, and adds that any act declared to be an act of worship but that is not a practice of the Prophet Muḥammad is considered *bidʿa*. He then provides examples of such innovation, some repeated from the previous part. Innovation is also implied in excessiveness in worship, such as monasticism and extreme asceticism. The speaker offers detailed examples that illustrate the main point of the speech: that all worship must have precedent in the deeds and normative practice of the Prophet Muḥammad (the Sunna). He lists six principles that comprise a valid act of worship and gives examples of what, therefore, invalidates certain acts. One of them is the *Mawlid*, the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muḥammad. Celebrants may praise the Prophet, make prayers of blessings upon him—even if the form of the prayer is acceptable—but to do so because of the birthday means that the act is not acceptable (by God), because it has no precedent— one of the six principles. The celebrants, in fact, become sinful.

The speaker is strident in denouncing Sufism and those who have fallen from the path of the *Ahl al-Sunna*, likening the growth of the 'deviation' of Sufism to the spread of

'rabies'. To reinforce his undisguised dislike of Sufism, because of its separation from the norms and practices of Salafism, he flippantly mentions 'those Sufis' who 'bang their heads around' and speaks sarcastically of the American scholar Yasir Qadhi, who seemingly praised Ṣūfīs because he found that being around them inspires him: in a surprising retort, the speaker says that Satan was in great company (before his fall) in Paradise among a better company that Yasir Qadhi experienced, but then Satan went astray. This sharp refutation parallels with his general censuring of Ṣūfīs and those who praise them. Yasir Qadhi is often identified as a Salafī himself, but has been accused in the podcast of straying from proper Salafism for praising Ṣūfīs. The speaker considers him 'deceived' and a 'deceiver as well'. This entire episode is an unexpected diversion in a talk that commenced with a methodical and textual approach. However, the vehemence of the speaker's language in describing Qadhi is telling: 'This deviant who removed himself of *salafiyya* anyway. We did not remove him, he removed himself, *al-hamdulillah* [praise God]. Good riddance'.

Brief Analysis: Significance and Key Ideological Themes and Terminologies:

The speaker lectures on the definitions of *bidʿa* as explained in the book of Imam al-Shāṭibī (1320–1388), an Andalusian (Granadan) Sunnī scholar of law, particularly the Maliki School of Law [*madhhab*]. The narration tends to be in the style of a methodical summary, including the kinds and definitions of *bidʿa* in Islamic law. But, at key points, the speaker mentions the pernicious nature of *bidʿa* among Ṣūfīs. Key words in this podcast are *bidʿa* and practices that are 'Satanic'. In Part Two, the celebration of the Prophet's birthday is described as a heretical innovation that is 'not accepted' by God. The speaker becomes acerbic in his sardonic discussion of Ṣūfī practices and he becomes vituperative in his tone when strongly condemning the American scholar Yasir Qadhi for his comments seeming to praise Ṣūfīs. As such, this is a prime example of a Salafī

scholar, as Qadhi has been described, who is censured for demonstrating a degree of empathy toward Sufism.

Podcast Title:	'The Salafis are Ahlus-Sunnah, Ahlul-Hadīth, Ahul-Athar, The Aided Group & The Saved Sect'[579]
Narrator:	Abu Mu'aadh Taqweem Aslam
Posted:	12 August 2016
Length:	1:03:06
Setting:	Conference Lecture

Summarized Synopsis

The speaker discourses at length on the important discussion regarding the lines of demarcation between those who are part of and those who are outside the *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa* (those who are counted as among those Muslims who are safely within the bounds of normative Islam). Those who cleave to normative Islam (the *Sunna*) are part of this society. Those who are not include the people of 'innovation', also called the *rāfiḍa*—those who literally *reject* the Sunna. The term also refers derogatorily to Shiites. First, however, he cites Ṣūfīs as contradicting or transgressing the norms and practices of *Ahl al-Sunna*. Quoting Ibn Taymiyya, he then goes on to list others who fall outside the normative Islam frame, such as those who deny the attributes of God (Jahmiyya), a school of thought that essentially no longer exists. He lists the qualities of those who are part of the *Ahl al-Sunna*, and he distills the definition thus: If one is Ahl al-Sunna, then he is 'Salafī'.

He then discusses those who use the phrase as a point of identity, though they are not in reality not among the *Ahl al-Sunna*; the speaker claims that Ṣūfīs seek to define themselves with the phrase, even though they are not from the *Ahl al-Sunna*. Innovations

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[579] Accessed at (20 January 2019): https://www.salafisounds.com/the-salafis-are-ahlus-sunnah-ahlul-hadith-ahul-athar-the-aided-group-the-saved-sect-by-abu-muadh/

and misguidance arose in Islam after the pious generation and heretical groups emerged and proliferated. Without parsing or citation, the speaker states that 'the Sufis do this'; that is, they make claims to be followers of the *sunna*, but are heretical in their practices and creeds because they do not follow the methodology (*manhaj*) of the Salaf. In essence, as the speaker points out, the phrase *Ahl al-Sunna* is meant to distinguish the people of 'the truth' from the 'deviants who emerged', such as those who are 'the deviated Sufis'. The 'saved sect' are those who follow the Salafī *manhaj*.

Brief Analysis: Significance and Key Ideological Themes and Terminologies

The speaker relies on the abundant usage of various key terminologies that bolster claims of the exclusivity of the Salafī 'methdology' (*manhaj*) and teachings as the true paradigm of pure Islam, to which he also brings eschatological connotations. Thus, among the abundant strategic uses of the key terminologies employed in many of the podcasts and other online Salafī discourses examined in this study, the speaker, without equivocation, adds an *afterlife* category. Those who follow the true *manhaj* of the Salaf are collectively *al-Firqa al-Najiya* (the Saved Sect), a phrase which references salvation in the Hereafter. These phrases associated with the salvation narrative are expanded upon in following chapter, as they have significance as a declamatory approach to the gaining of authority.

Podcast Title:	From the Methodology of the Salaf—Defending and Guarding the Manhaj[580]
Narrator:	Abu Hakeem Bilaal Davis
Posted:	25 November 2016
Length:	27:05
Setting:	Friday Sermon (*Khuṭbah*)

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[580] Accessed at (20 January 2019): https://www.salafisounds.com/from-the-methodology-of-the-salaf-defending-and-guarding-the-manhaj-khutbah-by-abu-hakeem/

Summarized Synopsis

Like previous podcasts from Salafi Sounds, this sermon begins by establishing the foundation of the 'methodology of Ahl al-Sunnah' or the *manhaj* thereof. The approach the speaker takes in this podcast involves a staging of an attack on the *manhaj* by non-Salafīs, thus requiring the faithful to come to its defence; in fact, it is a religious 'responsibility' to serve in the 'vanguards' to protect the *manhaj* from innovations and accretions. He implies that the central tenet of Islam's creed—that is, the belief in one God or *tawḥīd*— is threatened: the introductions of innovations are a gateway religious phenomenon that leads to idolatry and the very 'downfall' or 'destruction of *tawḥīd*'. Muslims who introduce innovation are, in fact, paving 'a path of destruction' for the nation of Islam to follow. More specifically, it is the phenomenon of *ḥizbiyya* (partisanship toward an ideology or a leader) that invites such destruction. The speaker instils a mistrust of those people who sound like they are part of the *ahl al-Sunna*, while in reality they are not. He makes glancing references to nameless Muslims of notoriety who gain a following, write their ideas in 'magazines' and 'books', and pursue projects for people to support. Some of them, he contends, are 'extreme *ṣūfiyya*' (Ṣūfīs) who raise their leaders and 'saints' above the station of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Finally, the speaker returns to popular Muslim figures who, he says, attract followers numbering 10,000 or even 30,000 at events. The gathering of numbers, the speaker contends, is not the hallmark of truth. Truth is known and clear, and it is in the possession of *ahl al-Sunna*. These unnamed persons seek 'to attract as many people to their misguidance as possible', so the speaker cautions against being deceived by such followers and events, and advises his listeners to measure the value of a person of notoriety against the *manhaj* of Islam, the *manhaj* of the Salaf. He then quotes from the Qur'ān to support his claim that, frequently, the majority will misguide and deceive.

Brief Analysis: Significance and Key Ideological Themes and Terminologies

In this podcast, the speaker builds an argument about the exclusivity of the Salafī interpretation of Islam by applying key creedal terminologies, including *manhaj* and *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama'a*, and urges the necessity of defending the 'methodology' from syncretic incursions into Islam, including Sufism. He makes a straw-man argument that Ṣūfīs 'raise their saints and their peer and their leaders to a station that is above the station of the Prophet'—one of the significant loci of Salafī contestations with regard to Sufism—and devotes a significant amount of time to cautioning people against being deceived by popularity or a cult following. The admonition is vague, and is thus applicable to anyone, any group, or any Muslim institution that differs in their beliefs and practices from Islam's *manhaj* as defined and defended in much of the content under review. In addition, the speaker seeks to instill a generalized mistrust of people who, although they appear to be part of the *ahl al-Sunna*, in reality are not.

Concluding Analytical Comments of the Podcasts

The next chapter contains the analyses of the strategies and nomenclature of the Salafī texts and their contestations with, most prominently, Sufism. It would be appropriate, however, to outline key and perhaps more immediate observations regarding the podcasts at this juncture, as it pertains to 1) **Saudi influence**, 2) **tonality**, and 3) **populist rhetoric** that the researcher perceived in the process of data gathering.

Several of the podcasts examined in this study were lectures based on the works of Saudi religious figures and scholars, most notably Shaykh Ṣāliḥ ibn Fawzān ibn ʿAbdullah Al-Fawzān (b. 1943), a senior member of the Saudi religious elite and a senior member of the counsel responsible for formal religious edits (*fatāwā*) in the Kingdom. A series of podcasts, in fact, are structured according to Shaykh al-Fawzān's writings on creedal matters (*ʿaqīda*), such as the nature of the attributes of God, and Shaykh al-Fawzān's hagiographic biography of Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, the eponym of

Wahhabism. The works of Shaykh al-Fawzān were interwoven within the lectures. However, in each case, it became problematic if not impossible for a listener to distinguish between the embellishments, commentary, and vehemence of the podcast presenters and the actual texts and arguments of Shaykh al-Fawzān himself. It is possible, if not likely, that this style of presentation created an unintended disservice to Shaykh al-Fawzān, whose actual prose could be more tempered and methodical than the podcast presenters' approaches.

Thus, the tone and strident language of the speakers, at times, dominated the overall timbre of the podcasts, which can cause an uncritical listener to accept the shift in language and tenor of a given presentation and suppose that the variations in modality and temperament reflected the deportment of a scholarly figure, like Shaykh al-Fawzān, and his publications. But more importantly, it is interesting to note that while Salafists have an aversion to being described as Wahhābīs,[581] the texts of Salafi Sounds frequently reference Saudi-Wahhābī scholars in general. The significant presence of Saudi clerics in Salafi Sounds texts can be said to legitimate or affirm contemporary research that associates the modern history of Saudi scholars with external, transnational advocacy of purist Salafism globally. It is also possible to consider that the combative tone of the speakers in fact resemble the works of Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, which is said to be 'combative in tone: those who did not share his vision of the doctrine of tawhid were dismissed as unbelievers'.[582]

Historically, the definition of Salafism was not entirely settled until the 1970s in which it was 'no longer up for grabs' or when the definition and 'its basic interpretation was less likely to shift'.[583] In consideration of the growing authority of the Saudi-Wahhabism category, starting in the pre-digital age, and in consideration of the influence

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[581] Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement', at 235.
[582] Richard Gauvain, 'Salafism in Modern Egypt: Panacea or Pest?', *Political Theology,* 11/6 (2010), 802–25, at 806.
[583] Henri Lauziere, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), at 200.

and the reach of petrol funding, Saudi Arabia became Salafism's de facto and 'main intellectual center of gravity' and framers of the concept of 'Islamic purism'.[584] To stress this point, Shaykh al-Fawzān wrote a noteworthy opinion in one of his books of formal legal edicts (*fatāwā*) in which he stated that to consider Salafism as simply one movement that 'resembles any other Islamic movements is wrong'.[585] In his view, Salafism singularly and exclusively represents the proper methodology (*manhaj*) of Islam which must be followed by Muslims. 'Therefore, Muslims are not permitted to follow any other movement, since all others are straying movements'.[586] As such, transnational voices of Salafism 'defer to and constantly reference the senior scholars of Saudi Arabia', ostensibly 'to bolster their claims of authenticity and silence those with an inferior command of scholastic frames of reference'.[587] The most mentioned figures of Saudi Arabia (by birth or influence) include, in order of prominence, Shaykh al-Fawzān, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz bin Bāz (1910-1999); the latter of whom served as the supreme religious figure (grand *muftī*) in Saudi Arabia for decades, upon his passing. Also mentioned is Muḥammad ibn al-ʿUthaymīn (1925-2001), a prominent cleric whose views and works remain influential in contemporary Salafism.[588]

It thus follows that the Salafi Sounds podcasts reviewed here—their style and references—demonstrate explicitly what researchers have inferred about Salafī epistemology or approach to knowledge acquisition. The scholars and advocates of Salafism 'resist the possibility of subjective knowledge, textual ambiguity and metaphor and dismiss the validity of interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith outside of a narrow cluster of Salafi scholars', many of whom are Saudi or Saudi trained.[589] They tend to rely

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[584] Ibid., at 200–01.
[585] As quoted in: Muhammad Al-Atawneh, 'Wahhabi Self-Examination Post-9/11: Rethinking the 'Other', 'Otherness' and Tolerance', *Middle Eastern Studies,* 47/2 (2011), 255–71, at 256.
[586] As quoted in: ibid.
[587] Sadek Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism* (London: IB Tauris, 2016), at 54.
[588] Richard Gauvain, *Salafi Ritual Purity: In the Presence of God* (London: Routledge, 2012) at 173.
[589] Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists*, at 54.

on a literalist approach in interpreting Islam's sacred texts and thus strictly avoid 'theological, philosophical and speculative meanings of the Qur'an and attributes of God. In essence, Salafism disregards almost all of Muslim intellectual history'.[590]

As such, what also became distinctive about the podcasts, the disembodied conveyance of the human voice, is the *populist* quality of the lectures that do not sound like scholarly or academic presentations. It is populist in the simplicity of the vocabulary, in argument construction, and in purposively producing apprehension about being within or without Islamic orthopraxy. It must be stated that the speakers demonstrate a high degree of aptitude and oratory facility with quoting verses of the Qur'ān and statements of the Prophet Muḥammad—often with an unambiguous vehemence of tonality—all of which indicate a level certitude that listeners may accept without critical scrutiny.

As Sadek points out, populist discourses affect the 'framing process' through which two critical areas of activism are constituted. First, the framing influences what 'Muslim activists should be thinking and talking about' in their communal and personal lives. Second, the framing affects 'what target audiences should be doing' or should accept in their creedal and performative aspects of their lives.[591] Populist discourses, as such, find most resonance with non-academic audiences, who, as it were, are more prone to be influenced by the appeal and simplification of Salafī discourse. 'These framings are most potent and likely to be accepted when they resonate with a person's life circumstances and work best when they correlate with an individual's personal values, experiences, and viewpoints'.[592]

Among the significant findings and observations of the voice-texts examined herein relate to the tenor and populist qualities of the podcasts in another dimension, namely, these qualities significantly inform the overall *oppositionality* of contemporary

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[590] Ibid.
[591] Ibid., at 93.
[592] Ibid.

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Salafism with non- Salafi thought. For the purpose of analogy, contemporary populist rhetoric in significant political debates and global discourses of today rely on oppositionality but in the form of anti-immigrant, anti-terror, or, ironically, anti-Islam (or 'dialetic Islamophobia') security frames as part of electoral strategies.[593] As a result, identity politics informed by fear-rousing and demonizing of the other takes precedence over critical assessment of political promises and policies. The tonal demeanors of the podcasts thus rely on unparsed declarations of oppositionality employing severe accusatory language, such as 'deviance' (and 'deviants') and 'evil' (or 'most evil') and 'devils', as well as references to such imagery as 'rabid dogs' when speaking of Sufism and wayward Salafism.

It is also important to consider the revisionist or hagiographic accounts of the proto-development of the Saudi-Wahhabi nation-state. The historical treatments in several of the podcasts examined herein may also be referred to 'Salafi historiography', as it has been used to describe Wahhabi interpretations of not only the past, but the larger and contested category of 'Islamic heritage'.[594] The interpretations and Salafi historiography, ideologically influenced recounting and interpretation of the past, are employed toward bolstering the legitimacy of Salafī oppositionality and the attainment of popular creedal authority. The podcasts, as cited above, for example, present what appears to be an indiscriminate or weakly sourced *good-evil* binary in the narration of the Wahhabi-Ottoman 19th-century historical conflicts in the Arabian Peninsula, in which the virtuousness of the former is juxtaposed to the heterodoxy and even licentiousness of the Ottomans with their promotion of grave worship and 'singing girls' (as mentioned above). As demonstrated in the historiography presented in the podcasts, the Wahhabi/proto-Saudi

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[593] Khaled A Beydoun, 'Islamophobia: Toward a Legal Definition and Framework', *Columbia Law Review Online,* 116 (2016), 108–25, at 119–20.
[594] Ömer Can Aksoy, 'Framing the Primordial: Islamic Heritage and Saudi Arabia', in Trinidad Rico (ed.), *The Making of Islamic Heritage: Muslim Pasts and Heritage Presents* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 67–88, at 68.

'struggle with the Ottoman Empire was framed as a struggle between believers and non-believers'.[595]

Moreover, it is valuable to mention that in the voice-texts examined herein, the speakers advance their comments and advocacy with noteworthy facility in citing and reciting verses of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth of the Prophet Muḥammad, as one can perceive more immediately while listening rather than reading a text. However, citations of scholars of theology of Muslim intellectual history are conspicuously absent or, very rarely, mentioned for the purpose of criticism. The scholarly traditions that the podcasts reference are mainly of Ibn Taymiyya, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, and modern Saudi clerics, such as those named above. The reproach of Sufism employs a system of referencing—elaborated upon in the next chapter—that is categorical and essentialist in nature. It should be noted here that such an approach to censure other Muslims who are deemed heterodox affirms the epistemological bearing of contemporary Salafism. The literalist and historically restrictive epistemology is referred to as the Salafī *manhaj*, the 'Arabic term that best encapsulates this process of ideologization' of contemporary Salafism.[596]

Finally, the podcasts are English-language productions. As expected, Arabic (the authoritative language of Islam and its scriptural sources) is frequently used when citing verses of the Qur'ān. But Arabic is also used when describing affirmatively the orthodoxy of Salafism, such as in the important framing effects of phrases as *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa*, which is mentioned both in Arabic and liberally and ideologically rendered into English as, for example, 'true Islam' or 'the way' of the Prophet Muḥammad and his Companions; as well as other English equivalent terms suggesting rectitude and orthodoxy. The key terms of Salafism's methodology are also mentioned in Arabic. For example, *manhaj* is mentioned in Arabic and referenced in English with a modifier of commendation, such as 'the proper methodology' of Islam. The next chapter elaborates

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[595] Meijer, *Global Salafism,* at 10.
[596] Lauziere, *The Making of Salafism*, at 201.

on the strategies and vocabulary that the Salafī texts depend upon in their contestations. The purpose of this section's analysis is to draw intention to the audible properties and potential effects of the podcasts.

Chapter 7

FINDINGS AND ANALYSES

7.0   Introduction

In this section, the study turns toward a comprehensive presentation of the findings of the

study based on the aggregate analyses of the various texts examined in the previous

section. Concise and specific analyses presented in the preceding chapter represent

examinations of individual texts, key words, tonality, and arguments of Salafism, and they

present a linear and summarized synopsis from which patterns of anti-Ṣūfī positions have

been shaped *in* and *by* emerging digital technologies, particularly podcasts. The Salafist

positions rely on and make regular uses of critical juridical-ethical and creedal (ʿaqīda)

themes and vocabularies in their anti-Ṣūfī pronouncements. However, they are

promulgated and amplified by digital media and their disruptions, with particular

emphasis on podcasts as a single-sensory listening practice of religious content—an

engagement that demands from the audience a greater participation of the imagination,

according to McLuhan's cold-hot media theory convention, as opposed to television (or

video), which invites a passive consumption.[597]

The findings presented in this chapter are organized according to critical

categories of analyses, grouped and constructed from the indications of the Salafī texts

reviewed individually in the previous chapter. The purpose is to provide a contextualized

and considered examination of the findings as they relate to the research questions of the

study and to a broader academic discourse concerning religious authority and new media.

It proceeds by examining the role of new media and their conveyance of pre-mediatised

Salafī-Ṣūfī contestations. It next addresses the particular choice of podcast digital media

and their populist inflections. And in presenting the main loci of disputes in Salafī

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[597] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of* Man, at 36-37.

contestations, specific analyses are provided, in addition to the analyses provided for each podcast presented in the previous chapter.

With regard to established contestations and new media, it is important to stress that while the loci of disputes between Salafī and Ṣūfī thoughts are not new, digital mediatisation of longstanding disputations does represent something new: mainly *new* 'territories' of mediated space and their effects,[598] as well as developments that Campbell calls the 'evolution of religious practices'.[599] And 'practice' in this context is not limited to rituals; rather it is inclusive of digital knowledge production and conveyance.

It is hardly necessary for contemporary ideological activism—as supported by new media technologies—to rely mainly on *new* arguments per se. Just as the viewpoints of the Reformation predated Martin Luther's protestations, it was the invention of the printing press that altered the media economy of the day in such a way that the invention led to 'alternative centres of power based on ideological argument' conveyed beyond the traditional confines of ecclesiastical authority.[600] The press facilitated the church's revolt in unparalleled ways, as discussed previously.[601] Likewise, just as the advocacy of decentralized church teachings predated modern televangelism, the advent of religious broadcast television in the 1970s accelerated the reach and amplification of evangelical Christianity's teachings and the 'commodification' of preaching and, eventually, mega-churches.[602] As such, digital media platforms and outlets for 'preachers today have proliferated at an unfathomable rate as digital technologies have expanded to every corner of the nation and the far reaches of the planet'.[603]

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[598] Stig Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society* (Routledge, 2013) at 32.
[599] Heidi Campbell, *Digital Religion : Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2012) at 1.
[600] Peter Horsfield. 'Media, Culture and Religion,' at xvi.
[601] See Chapter 4, section 4.4.
[602] Pradip N Thomas and Philip Lee, 'Global and Local Televangelism: An Introduction', *Global and Local Televangelism* (Springer, 2012), 1-17 at 1-3.
[603] Einstein, Mara. *Brands of faith: Marketing religion in a commercial age* (New York, Routledge, 2007), at 120.

Power structures and digital media have likewise emphasised the role of social media populism in political processes. A notable example is the 2016 American electoral events, in which questions arose about the survival of democracy in space of the internet.[604] The differences and disputed policies of American political parties, however, relied on policies and advocacies that were not new per se. Political authority, like its religious counterpart, has seen changes and challenges that pivot on media technology disruptions that have fundamentally surpassed, for example, the value of relatively inexpensive newsprint and seeming outdated broadcast television. Digital platforms, such as Facebook, 'have a dramatically different structure than previous media technologies. Content can be relayed among users with no significant third party filtering, fact-checking, or editorial judgment'.[605] In other words, the disruptions of digital media have expanded the capacities of once media-restricted populist ideologies, such that digital populism represents a significant challenge to the democratic elections of powerful democracies, exposing media-inflected vulnerabilities of manipulation by foreign (transnational) actors through new media.[606]

While this thesis does not relate to democratic politics and populism—even when considering the aggressive role of American Evangelicals in American politics—it does emphasize that new media have altered the landscapes of power, whether religious or political—not necessarily with new arguments per se, but with new capacities of mediation and the distribution of content.

Now, the connections between new media spaces and established Salafī ideological arguments have altered the strategies and reach of such accustomed arguments, especially as far as digital mobility is concerned and the rhetoric of Salafī contestations, in which old terms and established arguments have become new powerful

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[604] Nathaniel Persily, 'The 2016 Us Election: Can Democracy Survive the Internet?', *Journal of democracy,* 28/2 (2017), 63-76, at 63-65.

[605] Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow, 'Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election', *Journal of economic perspectives,* 31/2 (2017), 211-36 at 211.

[606] Persily, 'The 2016 Us Election', at 63-65.

idioms that are at the vanguard of Salafī conceits of purifying Islam from heterodox rituals and syncretic practices borrowed from other faiths and philosophies. The pre-mediatisation of established Ṣūfī reproaches add gravitas to Salafī contestations and its ideology construction.

As this chapter discusses the loci of Salafī contestations with Sufism rely almost entirely on previously constructed arguments. This is significant because it demonstrates that mediatisation within contemporary Salafī exclusive claims of Islamic orthodoxy does not rely on nor require novel ideas or new constructs. The loci of contestations that were once theological and juridical in their origins have become ideological constructions proctored via new media forms. As such, among the effects of 'technologised' texts—that is, conveying texts in electronic form—is the 'capacity to "naturalise" ideologies', such that the texts received through digital means result in 'greater acceptance' because they are viewed to be natural-sounding 'common sense' texts, rather than ideological advocacy.[607] As this dissertation argues, the digitization of contestations—particularly voice-only texts produced by advocates who convey with words and tone their severe certitude—the common sense is translated as natural orthodoxy that not subject to debate or dissent.

As an extension of the voice, podcast consumption relies on a listening practice that affords greater privacy and mobility. Since the advent of consumer-friendly digital media, research focused on disruptions to authority in terms of an offline-online binary. However, with podcasts, the technology represents a 'new distribution of the voice'.[608] The digital product has come to denote an *offline-online-offline* evolution, in consideration of the fact that podcasts can be accessed offline once downloaded to a plethora of apps that cater to the technology. This reality expands on an early research

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[607] Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (New York: Routledge, 2013), at 30.
[608] Madsen and Potts. 'Voice-Cast: The Distribution of the Voice Via Podcasting', at 41.

paradigm of digital mobility. With podcasts, however, one does not have to be connected to the internet to access the texts.

The manifest move of Salafi Publications from a static website to podcasts offers the content producers what voice-only texts extend to listeners. These claims of exclusivity possession of a 'pure Islam' can be read, of course, but the claims of the voice take advantage of distinctive fluctuations of tone and audible shifts in the volume of the voices of the speakers. In other words, it is not merely the substance of the audible texts that are employed to frame the semantics of oppositionality; rather the mode and tonality of the presentations support the strategy of creating strict and apparently semantically supported binaries between this interpretation of Salafism and other Islamic phenomena or movements, which, in this case, signifies important and consequential intra-Islamic contestations in the world today. The tonality of the podcasts, as such, demonstrates a meta-textual affirmation of Salafism's resistance to the possibility of legitimate alterity within the confines of Islam.

The reasons for the popularity of podcasts and perhaps a significant rationale why content producers, like Salafi Publications, would emphasise this digital product over static websites are as follows. Among the important benefits of voice-casts relate to time-shifting and mobility.[609] At any moment and in any place—public or private—podcasts can be consumed. Salafi Publications' podcasts are, for all intents and purposes, an *extended private sphere* for the distribution of an authoritative voice making established arguments to stake new claims in drawing the boundaries of Islamic orthodoxy.

To expand upon the comments in the previous chapter, podcasts have accelerated as a digital product in the last several years. However, beyond the product-narrative, the extension of the voice through digital media has likewise expanded the notion of mobility, podcasts have permitted digital content that expands tonality as part of the populist

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[609] Ibid.

function of digital activism. The voice requires a single sense, auditory, and … Digital media represents a 'rapid transformation' of digital activism.[610] Moreover, 'listening to podcasts on the go is becoming a common practice in urban centers' and the practice 'raises many intriguing questions concerning a person's subjective understanding of the world'. In other words, podcasts and the applications are 'among the latest instantiations of mobile digital communication technology that represent further digital-based alterations to the phenomenological experience of everyday life'.[611]

For Salafi Sounds, produced by an active, self-described Salafī organization in the UK, the transition from web- or text-based activism to mobile voice (podcasts) is an accelerated appropriation of new digital or emerging technologies to pursue their activism, namely, the purification of Islam. Salafi Sounds does so by relying on established arguments or loci of disputes with a major advancement in media mobility, as exemplified by the podcast trends. It is a technology that researchers say 'fundamentally alter the meaning and import of certain kinds of content. Especially where clichés and generalities are regularly employed as a key feature of discourse (as in the cases of religious and political discourse)'.[612] This observation is significant since the podcasts studied here rely on the repetition of ideological generalities and phrases that approximate powerful clichés.

Contextualizing the Loci of Contestations

The present research argues that the main loci of contestations of online Salafī texts, with regard to Sufism, revolve around the ritual celebration of the Prophet Muḥammad's birthday and the practices associated with visiting graves of saints— practices associated with Sufism. It is important to note that the Salafī contestations of

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[610] Paolo Gerbaudo, 'From Cyber-Autonomism to Cyber-Populism: An Ideological Analysis of the Evolution of Digital Activism', *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique. Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society,* 15/2 (2017), 477-89.

[611] Robert C Macdougall, 'Podcasting and Political Life', *American Behavioral Scientist,* 55/6 (2011), 714-32 at 715.

[612] Ibid.

these ritual performances inform a strategic authority to define 'true Islam'. The contestations, thus, have implications beyond targeted reproaches of certain practices or groups; they concern an important and consequential purist Salafī dialect today, which issues from Salafism more as an *ideology* than an epistemological and hermeneutic method, as scholars have noted.[613] Collectively, the use of a given digital medium as a 'proselytizing tool' of an ideology, as Bunt points out,[614] is tantamount to 'an activist worldview' in which one party sees itself as 'pure' and the *others* in need of purification.[615]

In essence, aspects of Salafism today represent an 'Islamic project' that is concerned with 'creating legitimacy for certain kinds of authority and perceptions of authenticity'.[616] Thus, in problematizing Ṣūfī emphases on the esoteric, certain religious performances, and the great (perhaps 'extreme') degrees of deference that Ṣūfīs are said to offer to their spiritual teachers or masters, the Salafī discourse serves to impute upon itself a certain kind or even brand of 'theological purity'[617] vis-à-vis other Muslims and their rituals that are deem heterodox or, more severe, acts of idolatry. Reformations of Islam, especially Salafī contemporary purification mission, are 'no longer unselfconsciously traditional, *sui generis*, but rather, in an expanded world, oppositional in character, defining itself against popular custom of the Ṣūfī shrines', as well as non-Muslims.[618] The expansion of Salafi Publications in digital space is perhaps impelled in part by the observation that 'there is a widespread and still increasing interest in Ṣūfī ideas and Sufism as a more irenic alternative to Islamism and Salafism'.[619] As such, Salafism's

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[613] See, for example, *Wiktorowicz*, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement'; and Lauziere, *The Making of Salafism.*
[614] Bunt, 'Religion and the Internet', at 706.
[615] Haykel, 'On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action', at 37.
[616] Susanne Olsson, 'Proselytizing Islam—Problematizing "Salafism"', The Muslim World, 104 (2014), 171–97, at 177.
[617] Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists,* at 58.
[618] Philip Lewis and Johnathan Birt, 'The pattern of Islamic reform in Britain: the Deobandis between intra-Muslim sectarianism and engagement with wider society' in Martin van Bruinessen and Stefano Allievi (eds), *Producing Islamic knowledge: transmission and dissemination in Western Europe* (London: Routledge, 2010), 91–120, at 92.
[619] Martin van Bruinessen,'Producing Islamic Knowledge in Western Europe', at 17.

reproach of Sufism is an important area of study because the contestations would appear to have dual implications, one theological and the other strategic, framed as a contestation for religious authority.

In order to contribute to the scholarship in this field, this study deconstructs the contestations according to key terminologies and themes of Salafī disputations linked to religious authority on two fields of examination: the ***ideological analyses of the texts*** and the *'globalized' nature of digital religious content*, as notable scholars have explored.

The section proceeds by addressing the following areas, in consonance with the research questions:

1) The main **loci of disputations** of Salafī discourse with regard to Sufism and related practices (ritual performances); the main thematic or strategic bases of the disputations; and the connection between the loci of dispute to the question of the authority to declare Ṣūfī practices as exterior to Islam of the formative generations of al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ.

2) **Creedal themes**: examination of the meanings, symbolic import, and religious authority significance of select terminologies that appear in the Salafī discourse that seek to establish or delimit the norms and confines of Islamic orthodoxy, essentially inserting *category* into contemporary Islam in accordance with the subjectivities of the substrate ideology of Salafism and its conveyance in new media space. The creedal themes are linked to key terminologies, particularly (a) *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa* (people of normative or orthodox Islam), (b) *Daʿwa* (calling to the proper way of Islam or, more simply, proselytizing); (c) *Al-Firqa al-Nājiya* (the saved sect), and, perhaps most significant, (d) *Manhaj* (the methodology of accessing and interpreting Islam's scriptural sources according to the precedent of the pious ancestors), and (e) descriptors indicating heterodoxy or heresy, such as *bidʿa* (heretical innovation), *shirk* (idolatry), and *kufr* (disbelief).

4) **Contextualization** of Salafī discourses in major research paradigms, such as, globalization of Islam, modernity, and Islam's 'new interpreters'; as well as reflections on the connection between the present Salafī discourse and the public sphere.

7.1 Main Loci of Disputation

The main loci of contestations of Salafī texts, particularly with Sufism—which purist Salafīs believe to among the 'most dangerous' religious innovations in Islam[620]—are expanded upon below, each analyzed according to the themes of arguments and nomenclature found in the Salafī digital texts. The references the texts make to non-Muslim religions—Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism—are almost exclusively presented when these faiths are imputed to be the sources of syncretic practices inserted into Islam, mainly through the auspices of Sufism, speculative theology, and certain creedal schools of thought. The background and roots of these contestations are presented below for the purpose of showing that the contestations relied upon in the podcasts have been replicated in a new media form and distributed through a significant digital platform. Also presented are analyses of how digital media have conveyed or globalised these arguments with unprecedented pace and portability. In order to present the analyses with concision, the roots of the contestations are discussed, followed by analyses. However, when appropriate, the loci that have common media effects are gathered before the analyses, as it will be clear below.

7.1.1 *Mawlid*: the celebration of the Prophet Muḥammad's birthday.

The Salafī arguments established in pre-digital (if not pre-modern) times have been carried over in digital media. The Salafī texts problematize the celebration of the Prophet Muḥammad's birthday in the following ways, reflecting what are arguably 'strategies' of disputes: a) The dubious or heterodoxical origins (from within Islamic realms) of the practice in history and lack of precedent in the generations of the pious ancestors (*Al-Salaf al-Sāliḥ*); b) syncretism of the practice (mainly Christian sources).

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[620] Lauziere, *The Making of Salafism* at 165.

A) Intra-Islamic Origins: Salafī contestations of the *Mawlid* practices rely on the purported extra-Sunnī origins of *Mawlid* celebrations. The argument proceeds by presenting a quasi-historical sketch of how the *Mawlid* came to be institutionalized in Fāṭimid Egypt (909–1171), that is, the historical period in which Egypt was ruled by the Fāṭimids, an Ismāʿīlī sect of Shīʿite Islam that gained ascendancy in North Africa and beyond. Linking the origins of the *Mawlid* celebrations to Shīʿite Islam, however, serves a strategic *prima facie* accusation of the heterodoxy of the celebration through 'guilt-by-association', which may appeal to many observant Sunnī audiences. The tone of the speakers, namely the tenor of reproach, forwards the argument with a singular presumption and logic: since Shīʿite Islam represents an historically and most well-known sectarian split in Islam, associating the origins of any practice with Shīʿite Islam casts doubt on the practice—particularly for many Sunnī Muslims, the main audience and sectarian frame from which Salafism emerges and which Salafism claims to vociferously defend. Often the language used to implicate the Mawlid practice as a Shīʿite insertion into Islam is strident. For example, 'It is now firmly established by the historians that the first group to celebrate the birthday of the Prophet (H) were the Bāṭinī Ismāʿīlī Shīʿite *disbelievers* and *enemies* of Islām known' (researcher's italics for emphasis).[621] Another pejorative term used in the Salafī texts for Shīʿites is *rāfaḍiya* (Anglicized as *rafadites)*, literally those who 'reject' or 'refuse to accept' important creedal aspects of normative Islam.[622] According to the speakers of the podcasts, the Shīʿites encouraged the Mawlid 'as a means of deceiving the Sunnī Muslims'.[623]

The Salafī preachers rely deductively on an *absence-argument* that asserts that the *Mawlid* celebrations never took place in the Prophetic generation or the generations that

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[621] Rafīq, 'Concerning Celebration of the Mawlid', at 6.
[622] Jacques Waardenburg, *Official and Popular Religion as a Problem in Islamic Studies* (New York: Mouton, 1979) at 360–61. As Waardenburg suggest, 'normative' Islam signifies an understanding of Islam or a claim thereof.
[623] Further description of Fāṭimids is beyond the purview of this study. Canard, 'Fāṭimids'.

followed. Their absence-contention concerns the *Mawlid* not only as a prohibited public practice or ritual; it also precludes the possibility of the *Mawlid* in personal, pre-ritualized or pre-communal religious affairs of the early generations. The burden of this spoken argument—conveyed with unassailable certitude—lies in accepting an argument of the unequivocal *absence* of an act. Epistemologically, Salafī preachers contend that the time-range in which an acceptable Islamic practice to occur is limited to the pious generations. All religious practices that are claimed to have started or originated after the period of *al-Salaf al-Sāliḥ* are summarily dismissed or considered heretical innovation based on a precedent-argument, a frame of argumentation that does not permit even supererogatory (*nawāful*) ceremonies that were, to a certain extent, legitimized in Sunnī Islam for centuries.

As such, this aspect of anti-*Mawlid* arguments extends beyond the refutation of a practice and represents an assertion of constrained Salafī hermeneutics and literalism with regard to the scriptural sources of Islam and to an imagined past, in which the absence of a given act among in the early generations of Islam presupposes its proscription in later generations. Also, Salafist confidence that an act did not occur in the distant path proceeds without a decipherable methodology establishing the absence.

As such the emphases in the podcasts—in terms of arguments, tone, and selective sourcing of the presenters—focus on an emotional appeal to Muslims, particularly young Muslims, who, in response to the arguments, are likely to experience *fear* of not only participating in heterodox practices, but engage in practices that have roots in Christianity or pagan philosophies. The populist appeal of such a threat becomes manifest in the course of the podcasts when the speakers imply through words and tones that this practice is a *conspiratorial* insertion into Islam, in which the ruin of Islam is advanced by the inclusion of non-Muslim practices. It is not only a matter of heterodoxy to celebrate the Mawlid; it is pronounced to be more severe, namely, one actually is complicit in the dilution of Islam by such practices.

While it may be an individual choice to celebrate the Mawlid or not—seemingly at one's personal peril—the voice aesthetic stresses that a celebrant is also an active participant in the anti-Islam collusion. Herein now are the arguments against the Mawlid, framed with populist tones and language.

B) Extra-Islamic Syncretism: In both the podcasts of Salafi Sounds and the e-book, the *Mawlid* is said to have been inspired by the Christian practice of the celebration of the birth of Jesus, that is, Christmas. And since Islam and Christianity have theological differences (as well as commonalities), any practice that Muslims participate in that resembles Christian celebratory holidays is rejected in Salafī thought. In essence, the argument makes no distinction between a given practice and the theological differences of the faith community.

Modern Salafism's view toward the *Mawlid* is categorical and perhaps more rigid than one would expect, given the somewhat more flexible point of view of Ibn Taymiyah (1263–1328), who is often invoked as the pre-modern inspiration of modern Salafī thought. Ibn Taymiyah acknowledged that the early generations of Islam did not 'institute' the *Mawlid,* and that the 'absence of a precedent' is tantamount to proscription.[624] However, Ibn Taymiyah also acknowledged 'that people observe the *Mawlid* for different reasons and should be recompensed [by God] according to their intentions'. For those who celebrate the *Mawlid* in order to emulate the Christian celebration of Christmas, the act is considered reprehensible or forbidden. However, Ibn Taymiyah also acknowledges that some Muslims celebrate the *Mawlid* 'out of great love and reverence for the Prophet', and, as such, their pious *intentions* are laudable, though their decision to do so remains misguided.[625] It is outside the purpose and framework of

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[624] See also Nico Kaptein, 'Mawlid', in P. Bearman et al. (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Leiden: Brill Online, 2012).
[625] Raquel Margalit Ukeles, 'Innovation or Deviation: Exploring the Boundaries of Islamic Devotional Law', (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2006), at 230.

this dissertation to consider the pre-modern debates on the *Mawlid*, but it is important to note that modern Salafī ideology, particularly the texts under examination in this study, takes a stand against the *Mawlid* in terms more severe than those used by one their leading scholarly inspirations. It can be argued, with a fair degree of confidence, that the inflexible and unalterable stands of Salafī discourses on certain practices associated with Sufism are more than positions on Islam's devotional law or theoretical value, and quite possibly represent proxy wars in the larger attempt of gaining greater authority over the boundaries of deriving Islamic law and limits of orthodoxy of the religion itself.

7.1.2 Revisionist history and Grave Visitations and *Tawassul*

It is a common and encouraged practice in Islam to visit the graves of loved ones or of revered persons for the purpose of making supplications on their behalf and for the purpose being reminded of one's own mortality. However, grave visitation, as reproached by Salafīs, involves an element of ritual, namely, seeking grave visitation for the express purpose of attaining blessings (*tabarruk*) by simply being in the presence of the interred scholar-saint. Often, the act involves invocations of intercession (*tawassul*) performed in two manners: first by supplicating God to grant one's needs by means of the numinous presence of the interred, or second by asking the interred him- or herself to supplicate God on the visitor's behalf. Both practices are reproached, the latter more severely.

The practice of *tawassul* has been a subject of debate in pre-modern Muslim scholarship, with proponents and opponents in Sunnī intellectual circles engaged over the topic, with some scholars advancing proof from the Qur'ān for the validity of *tawassul* and others who proffer their own proofs.[626] It's untenable to deny the prerogative of Salafī scholars to opine on a controversial topic such as grave visitation. But it is critical to

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[626] See for example. David Commins, 'Wahhabis, Sufis and Salafis in Early Twentieth Century Damascus', *Guardians of Faith in Modern Times: 'Ulama' in the Middle East* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 231–46, at 236.

examine the word choice used in the Salafī podcasts, namely, the word *qubūriya*, which is used frequently to reproach the practice. *Qubūriya* is a derived term from *qubūr* (singular, *qabr*), the Arabic word for graves or gravesites—without any ritual implication in the linguistic origins of the word. However, the suffix in *qubūriya* alters the normative usage of the term—from 'graves' (*qubūr*) to a *practice* of so-called 'grave worship', which unambiguously imputes a critical meaning of *heresy* or *idolatry* as implied in the word itself.

The terms are repeatedly used in the course of the podcasts without prevarication and without reference to a longstanding juridical debate about such practices, wherein one will find arguments rooted Islamic intellectual history that permit such practices.[627] In pre-modern Muslim intellectual history, the juridical debate was not as rigid and unequivocal as intoned and implied in the podcasts and their populist strategies. In other words, the repetitions and certitude of the speakers—which are best suited for the voice aesthetic—in describing the practice, disconnected from intellectual deliberations of the past, introduce inflections that frame the matter as unequivocal and singularly sinful and idolatrous. The term is referenced in the contestations in Arabic, as well as its English translation of 'grave worship' or 'grave worshippers'. The descriptor is pejorative, since people who practice visitation do not believe they are worshipping the interred. The word choice in Salafī contestations does not permit debate. On the contrary, it is a censuring of a practice whose name in and of itself implies a challenge to the central tenet of Islam: *nothing is worthy of worship except God*. As such, grave worship, unambiguously implied in the term *qubūriya*, suggests that those who participate in this ritual performance fail to keep the prime testament of Islam and pursues a larger Salafī argument over the heterodoxy of Sufism because they are accused of worshipping the interred by supplicating to them.

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[627] See, for example, Necdeddin Guney, 'Visiting Graves, Tombs and Shrines in Islamic Law', *Conflicts, Religion and Culture in Tourism,* (2017).

It is important to note as well that early Wahhābī/Salafī leaders in the Arabian Peninsula made a point of evoking *qubūriya* in the context of their military strife with Ottomans who ruled much of Arabia, even in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah. The Wahhābī scholars of the peninsula relegated 'the Ottomans in this category of polytheists, probably because of their allegedly strong connections to Sufism and to popular practices such as visiting graves'— but in 'the context of Saudi–Ottoman rivalry, added a new political dimension'.[628] This is significant because the Salafi Sounds podcasts (as shown in the previous chapter) censured grave visitation as *qubūriya* but also in narrating the history of the life of Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, whose initial victories over the Ottomans were interpreted by the narrator of the podcast with religious symbolism and sacred import. As such, the 'believers' defeated the Ottomans, restored true Islam, destroyed tombs that were once frequented as a ritual, and put an end to the 'evil' of *qubūriya* (of the Ottomans) in the land that holds Makkah and Madinah. The 'invading armies' of the Ottomans were interpreted to be more than a conflict over territory, but a conflict over the core tenant of Islam, that is, *tawḥīd*, the incorruptible belief in the oneness of God. The Ottoman incursion was not viewed by Salafī hagiography as a variant intra-Islamic position, rather it was depicted as an Ottoman attempt to aggress against the very creed of the oneness of God by instituting or supporting such practices as ritual grave visitations.[629]

It should also be mentioned that the assertions made by speakers in the podcasts made unsourced, seemingly misrepresented claims that Ṣūfīs 'bang their heads' in worship, twirl until 'they pass out', 'smoke hashish', worship graves, burn 'pepper' in their supplications, and other inflammatory descriptions of Sufism *without* elaboration

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[628] Joas Wagemakers, 'The Enduring Legacy of the Second Saudi State: Quietist and Radical Wahhabi Contestations of Al-Walāʾ Wa-L-Barāʾ', *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 44/1 (2012), 93–110 at 95.
[629] Ibid., at 99.

and citations that affirm or support that these practices are normative Sufism. For a written piece (print or online), a lack of sourcing would likely be more conspicuous. But with vocal aesthetics and the distribution of the voice,[630] attribution and source flaws are less likely be noticed because the emphases in intonation and, at times, shrill exclamations draw attention to the certitude of the speakers and their perceived authority. Also, in a highly mobile and personalized space proffered by podcasts, the questions of attribution and proof are less urgent or perhaps less important. For an audience that may be vulnerable to simplistic depictions, the Sufism described in the Salafī discourse has the potential to be uncritically accepted as being essentialist Ṣūfī practices.

Additionally, in terms of disruption analysis, as briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, the acts of destruction directed toward Ṣūfī shrines have spread in recent years.[631] Such destruction is motivated by the doctrinal arguments promulgated by violent or jihadi Salafī, as well as quietest Salafism. They share a common doctrinal outlook on shrines and the associated heterodox or idolatrous rites associated with such shrines. The spread of such destruction across continents in a rather narrow frame of time implicates the ubiquity and speed attributed to digital networks. They are, essentially, 'socially mediated terrorism' that are spread via social media.[632] As mentioned previously, the Salafist material studied herein do not promote violence. But the podcast texts do echo the doctrinal contestations against shrines that resemble other forms of Salafism; additionally, they effectively stress and repeat key words and phrases, namely, 'grave worship' and, the Arabic equivalent, '*qubūriya'*, in the censuring of Ṣūfī practices associated with grave visitation. The repetition of these words in digital texts, particularly when they are voiced as adjudicated points of law (or *fatāwa*) results in unparsed and highly overly simplistic

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[630] Virginia Madsen and John Potts, 'Voice-Cast: The Distribution of the Voice Via Podcasting', (2010).
[631] Emily Jane O'dell, 'Waging War on the Dead: The Necropolitics of Sufi Shrine Destruction in Mali', *Archaeologies,* 9/3 (2013), 506-25.
[632] Claire Smith et al., 'The Islamic State's Symbolic War: Da'esh's Socially Mediated Terrorism as a Threat to Cultural Heritage', *Journal of Social Archaeology,* 16/2 (2016), 164-88.

blame-language that is not conveyed with scholarly deliberation. With regard to auditory-only digital space, the content producers of such texts have the added advantage of tonal stress on these words. The combination of intonation *and* repetition produce an effect that correlates with digital branding.

Attacking the practice of grave visitation has been a point of dispute for generations. However, in the digital age, one can argue that the resurgence of Salafist contestations has been advanced by the rapid, immediate, personalized, and inexpensive qualities of digital media. As such, the major differences between previous disruptions of previous media advances and the contemporary one is the degrees to which external upheaval instigated the eventual usage of media technologies versus the irresistible opportunities presented by new media forms themselves. In turn, new media presents 'new forms of religious communication' which are 'characterized by unstructured, open and non-hierarchical interaction'.[633]

7.1.3   Digital Texts and Creedal Themes and Defining Orthodoxy

An important point of discussion in the field of new media and religion focuses on the online potential of religious authority disruptions in connection to identity-making. Before discussing with more detail how creedal themes and terminologies are used in the Salafī texts examined in this study, it is valuable to introduce the discussion in consideration of Salafī texts and changes in religious authority and identity disruptions. The roots of the changes focus on redefining the limits of orthodoxy in digital space with pre-modern phrases and constructs.

The key words and arguments of Salafī claims of belonging to proper Islam include terms that speak to one's association or identity with salvation and the normative identity of Islam itself. The terminologies and what they refer to are examined below, and

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[633] Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan, *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

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they pivot on the 'saved-sect' dialect and a 'community' of the that represents normative teachings and path of the religion, *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa*, that is, the people of the normative practice of the Prophet Muḥammad and the larger community. Salafī Publications podcasts studied in this research take full advantage of 'applying the internet to present their concepts of religious identity and understanding' even with relying on established terminologies.[634] Such media applications result in 'a reconfiguration of understandings of models of religious authority and the dissemination of Islamic knowledge'. [635] In other words, new forms of mediation alter the signification and reception of well-known traditional phrases.

Media theories have always concerned themselves with questions of religious identity and medium. One of the main claims of media theory, in fact, is that 'communication technologies correlate with different emphases within our conceptions of selfhood and identity'.[636] While seeking narrative control over the meaning of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa* predates digital media, one cannot ignore how the Salafī texts examined here relate to an exceptional and highly mediated, technologized consciousness of religious belonging.

One element of the following treatment is descriptive, but the larger interpretative analyses deconstruct the contestations as a kind of *primitivism*, which, on one hand, accentuates the superiority of the early forbears in their piety and fidelity to the original understanding of Islam's scriptural sources. But on the other hand, this impulse in contemporary Salafī discourse strives to deprecate most scholarship and hermeneutics that developed thereafter; and it informs a key aspect of a method Salafī proselyting, namely, the appropriation of pre-modern terminologies for the purpose of defining intra-Islamic religious phenomena according to their stance vis-à-vis *true*, *pure*, or normative Islam.[637]

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[634] Bunt, *Hashtag Islam*, at 4.
[635] Ibid
[636] Ess, 619.
[637] Waardenburg, *Official and Popular Religion as a Problem in Islamic Studies.*

In other words, the terminologies used to define Islamic orthodoxy informs a rather 'muscular discourse that is directed at reforming other non-Salafī Muslims', who are said to be 'in need of purification in both belief and practice'.[638] In practical terms, it may be viewed as a 'hostile othering' of non-Salafī Muslims.[639] In regularly invoking important, if not powerful, terminologies in Islamic theology, authority, and identity, the overall objective appears to be in creating and then establishing power through *a critical idiom* in Islam's discourse today. The idiom involves text—words and themes that resonate with authenticity—and a 'globalization' (that is, homogenization) through the new space of digital media.

It is important to note that the usages of these terms in the Salafī discourses studied herein represent a 'religious primitivism' that oversimplifies complex topics for a digital audience. As such, in vehemently distinguishing themselves from 'other Muslims', Salafīs are known to 'take an uncompromising position on these creedal matters and frequently condemn fellow believers for compromising tawhid', the central creedal tenet of Islam, namely, belief in the oneness of God.[640] As such, Salafism pursues a 'rhetoric of "othering" to justify itself' as it does in determining who belongs in the 'category of true believers and who remains outside' in a process coined as 'othering theology'.[641] The question remains, however: Which terminologies found in Salafī discourses seek to promote this stance? What follows are the key terminologies that appear frequently in the Salafī texts and their import.

Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa: This phrase represents perhaps the most dominant theme of Salafī discourse. The phrase has pre-modern roots and may be translated as 'the people of the normative practice (Sunna) of Islam and the plurality (or the fidelity) of the

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[638] Haykel, 'On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action', at 37.
[639] Ibid.
[640] Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism*, at 55.
[641] Naser Ghobadzdeh and Shahram Akbarzadeh (2015) Sectarianism and the prevalence of 'othering' in Islamic thought, *Third World Quarterly*, 36:4, at 691.

faithful'. More simply, it refers to 'the community of orthodox Islamic beliefs'.[642] In the discourse under examination here, the phrase has strategic value in seeking greater authority over the meaning of what is normative (orthodox Islam) versus heterodoxy. Essentially, it is a call that encapsulates the refrain of 'returning to the Qur'an and Sunnah' (also a common invocation of Salafism), which is the interpretive methodology that defines what is *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa* (or **Ahl al- Ḥadīth**). The call to return to a primitivistic, highly literalistic approach to 'the Quran and Sunna' is 'one of the most well-known of catchphrases in the linguistic repertoire of Salafis and indirectly hints at the impurity/ deficiency of non-Salafī Muslims'.[643] The terminology attempts to uphold the overarching claim of Salafism 'to be the sole custodians' of the teachings of the pious ancestors (*al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*).[644] The phrase also seeks authority by claiming 'a direct line to the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad', which is 'an affiliation that many Muslims would have'. It should also be noted that the phrase is used by Salafī/Wahhabi ideologues who promote violence as well, as Bunt relates. [645]

This phrase and its related wordings used in the Salafī texts (such as *ahl al-Ḥadīth*) help to secure the main claim of exclusivity of pure Islam. The claim to 'theological purity', thus, relies on key terminologies that reference a category of Islam, in this case, the true and proper Islam of Salafism. Thus, *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa* (ASWJ) is essentially a call to action, a call for a return to a singularly defined and accepted understanding of 'mainstream' Islam by returning to the Qur'ān and Sunnah.[646] The returning to the two dominant sources of all of Islam is pursued by a 'simple, seductive phrase', as an act of resistance to 'the possibility of subjective knowledge, textual ambiguity and metaphor' and an act to deride extra-literal interpretations of

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[642] Mustafa Kabha and Haggai Erlich, 'Al-Ahbash and Wahhabiyya: Interpretations of Islam', *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 38/4 (2006), at 360.
[643] Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism*, at 54.
[644] Adis Duderija, 'Constructing the Religious Self and the Other: Neo-Traditional Salafi Manhaj', *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations,* 21/1 (2010), 75–93, at 77.
[645] Bunt, *iMuslims*, at 220.
[646] Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism*, at 76.

Islamic scriptures.[647] As such, the Salafī call of 'returning to Qur'an and Sunna' and, therefore, taking shelter in a narrower construct of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa*, creates a strict and thin-lined binary between *tawḥīd* (belief in one God by way of testimony and practice) and *shirk* (idolatry) and *bidʿa* (heretical innovation). Subsumed under this heading are other cognate or related terms to similarly seek to define the limits of normative Islam and the methodology in defining it: *ahl al-Ḥadīth* (the people or way of Islam exemplified by traditions and sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad), a phrase that, by way of implication, denies speculative theology, metaphorical interpretations of Islam's revealed sources (Qur'ān and Sunna), scholarly opinion (*ra'y*), contextualized interpretation, as well as juristic and esoteric hermeneutics. Human reason and other '[a]pproaches that are guided by human logic' are accused of being vulnerable to caprice and whim that serve personal interests over the pure affairs of religion.[648] Shunning these approaches—which have significant standings in pre-modern Islamic intellectual history—promotes the casting of doubt, if not aspersions, on non-Salafī methodologies and perhaps discourage consumers of Salafī discourse to consider other interpretations at all or treat them with skepticism. A motto describing the difference between relying a literal interpretation of Hadith and contextualized interpretations or relying on reason is susceptible to whisperings of Satan.[649]

The phrase *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama'a* does not directly translate as 'orthodoxy'. However, the word 'orthodox' occurs in the Salafī texts studied here in connection with the *Ahl al-Sunna* concept. And 'orthodox' does not seem to be offensive to the speakers of the podcasts to use a word whose origins are extra-Islamic and, in fact, are more associated with Christianity as a 'loanword'.[650] But it should be noted that Salafī claims to

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[647] Ibid.

[648] Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement', at 210.

[649] As cited by Duderija, 'Constructing the Religious Self and the Other: Neo-Traditional Salafi Manhaj', at 77.

[650] Robert Langer and Udo Simon, 'The Dynamics of Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy. Dealing with Divergence in Muslim Discourses and Islamic Studies', *Die Welt Des Islams,* 48/3/4 (2008), 27–88, at 273.

be the inheritors or protectors of the *Ahl al-Sunna* concept—as an implied or explicit reference to orthodoxy— does not have a theoretical value; that is, it does not engage a scholarly discourse on the nature and 'location' of Islamic orthodoxy in terms of essentialist or non-essentialist constructions of orthodox, that is, a universal orthodoxy or local ones. [651] It also does not acknowledge the contestations and debate over *orthodoxy*, as a term but also its various connotations. In Salafī discourse, it appears that the conception of orthodoxy is meant to underscore or serve as a standard or criterion from which Salafī discourse deploys imputations of heresy or heterodoxy against other Muslims, which again seems to ignore the debate concerning normative Islam and the contracted view of Islam as an entirely discursive tradition. However, the Salafī allusions (direct or indirect) to orthodoxy do not acknowledge the debate concerning Islam as a 'discursive tradition' in which the question of Islamicate orthodoxy is pursued as a binary between 'universal' or 'local' orthodoxy.[652]

Voice-distributing pronouncements of orthodoxy, conveyed through the podcasts, make serious claims and contentions regarding a Muslim's status in the religion itself. Such challenges of orthodoxy are conducted in an *alternative media spaces* and in *alternative intellectual ecologies* that tend to ignore scholarly methodologies that have developed in Muslim intellectual history and the legacies of knowledge production. As such, this research suggests that these claims of exclusive orthodoxy as conveyed in voice-only digital space constitute a major shift in authority because they are distributed with the known features of digital media disruptions—ease, transnational reach, and inexpensive processes. And they are severed from a more centralised and credential-based production of knowledge. Thus, the podcasts represent a kind of cyber-activism that seeks a mediated space to ultimately seek to deliver people from heterodoxy and resituate them

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[651] Mohammed Sulaiman, 'Between Text and Discourse: Re-Theorizing Islamic Orthodoxy', *ReOrient: The Journal of Critical Muslim Studies,* 3/2 (2018), 140–62, at 142.
[652] Ibid., at 158.

an imagined 'pure Islam'. This reality privileges cyber-activism of modernity over intellectual legacy and the terminologies developed therein.

The Salafī usages of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa* or *Ahl al-Sunna* or *Ahl al- Ḥadīth* or a clarion call 'to return' to the Qurʾān and Sunna are thus references to a kind of orthodoxy (unparsed and without explication), and collectively it is predicated on the notion of an orthodoxy in which 'the primacy of the texts and the law derived from the texts'[653] is stressed—an emphasis that leaves little room for a multiplicity of 'nodal points' of meaning in Islam that have been considered in Sunni Islamic intellectual history.[654]

The Saved Sect (and the Victorious Group): As is the case with the above terms, the phrase *the saved sect* (or *al-Firqa al-Nājiya*) appears in several of the Salafī texts presented here. Saved-Sect discourse implies an eschatological argument for the exclusivity of Salafī positions, namely, the claim to 'salvation' in the Hereafter. The phrase is based on a well-known hadith of the Prophet Muḥammad in which one sign of the later times is the splitting of the Muslim community (*ummah*) into '70 sects', all of which will end up in Hell, with the exception of one of them. The quietist Salafī texts decidedly state that the saved sect among the 70 is that which is on the Salafī *Manhaj* (methodology or way of understanding Islam). The 'Saved-Sect' discourse implies an over-simplified eschatological argument for the exclusivity of Salafī positions, namely, the claim not just to 'salvation' in the Hereafter, but a select claim. In other words, 'Salafis believe that only they constitute "saved sect"', the only one to enter paradise.[655] Salafī discourse also uses a closely allied term, namely, the 'victorious group' (*al-Ṭāʾifa al-Manṣūra*).

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[653] Ibid., at 142.
[654] Ibid., at 153.
[655] Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea* (Oxford University Press, 2016), at 7.

To claim one's group to be the only saved Muslim group is on the surface an unusual conceit to make, since details of salvation are of God's providence and hardly a trifle matter to claim, as widely understood in Islamic ethics. But through the lens of authority, the appeal of the phrase evokes a noteworthy *strategic* meaning. The evocation of belonging to the Saved Sect occurs in the process of criticizing practices and beliefs of non-Salafī Muslims. Though the speakers of the Salafi Sound texts do not state directly that Ṣūfīs and others who have creedal errors will suffer in Hellfire. The implication by deduction or a process of elimination certainly infers that conclusion. For audiences who turn to these texts for inspiration or knowledge, the Hereafter dialect is a powerful idiom to wield, for the limitation of this life and the eternity of the next one is among the fundamental tenets of Islam and thus a fundamental concern of observant Muslims or even curious Muslims. Thus, they may be persuaded to adopt the beliefs, *manhaj*, and ideological assertions of Salafism persuaded by a kind of demagoguery that appeals to fear and thus causing many to consider belonging to the 'saved' or 'victorious' sect and thus 'enter paradise'.[656]

The associating of Salafī thought with the saved-sect referenced in the hadith is related to the question orthodoxy, in a similar way to the phrase of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa*. The usage of the saved-sect dialect is wielded by Salafist discourse to persuade audiences and it does not address the wider discussion on the phrase wither or not it 'takes for granted orthodoxy's temporal priority over heresy'.[657]

The Saved Sect is not necessarily the plurality of Muslims or a generalized group, as the Salafī discourse herein seems to claim. In fact, it may be a select group of contemporary scholars who advocate Salafī/Wahhabi ideologies, the names of whom are repeated in the podcasts, such as Shaykh Ṣāliḥ ibn Fawzān ibn ʿAbdullah Al-Fawzān (b.

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[656] Meijer, *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, at 5.
[657] Keith Lewinstein, 'Heresiography', in Richard Bulliet et al. (eds.), *The Princeton encyclopedia of Islamic political thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), at 217.

1943), Shaykh Rabīʿ al-Madkhalī (b. 1931), the late grand *muftī* of Saudi Arabia ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz bin Bāz (1910–1999), and others. However, associating contemporary personalities *by name* within the context of the 'Saved Sect' discussion represents a bold eschatological projection of *individuals* who are not only revered by purist Salafists, but who are claimed to be among (or the epitomizing) of the Saved Sect grouping, those who are thus saved in the Hereafter. In the ethos of Islam, it is generally discouraged to claim salvation (or damnation) with such specificity. However, for analytical purposes, the naming of individuals (most of whom are Saudi scholars) in association with the Saved Sect represents more than breach of *adab* (proper comportment) but reveals the degree to which the Saved Sect discourse figures in the identity-formation of Salafism. Religious ideologies, if not *religion* itself, 'owes its legitimizing force to the fact that it draws its power to convince from its own roots. It is rooted, independently of politics, in notions of salvation and calamity (*Heil* und *Unheil*) and in corresponding practices of coping with redemptive and menacing forces'.[658] Finally, it should be noted that the "Saved Sect" phrase also served as the name of a UK-based organization, known as a 'The Saviour Sect', who maintained a website in Gloucester originally then moved to an address in Birmingham, 'apparently owned by Salafi Bookstore and Islamic Centre'. The group 'underwent a subtle change of name, replacing ''Saviour'' with ''Saved''.'[659] A banner of the site claimed it was owned 'by followers of Ahl us-Sunnah wal-Jamaa'a … suggesting a direct line to the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad'.[660]

Daʿwa: The mission of apolitical, quietist Salafism shuns violence and discourages participation in political processes, such as those found in democracies and even autocratic states, with such participation considered prohibited by some.[661] A

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[658] Judith Butler et al., *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), at 17.
[659] Bunt, *iMusli*ms, at 220–21.
[660] Ibid., at 220.
[661] Susanne Olsson, 'Shia as Internal Others: A Salafi Rejection of the "Rejecters"'', *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations,* 28/4 (2017), 409–30, at 413.

question is thus raised: how does quietist Salafism achieve its goal of seeking the purification of contemporary Islam from extra-Islamic influences and incursions? The method of its mission is thus through teaching, propagation, and persuasion. It is the means of choice through which it seeks to purify contemporary Muslim societies from syncretic practices and heretical beliefs (as well as a means to introduce Islam to non-Muslims). Therefore, the mission relies on what is commonly invoked in Salafī texts as *daʿwa*, which literally means 'calling' or 'inviting' people, but in the context of religious messaging, it refers to calling people to return to the right path of Islam. The phrase, in and of itself, suggests that the invitation to invite people to true Islam is actually the *calling to God* the Qurʾān alludes to.[662]

The word's earliest connotations in Muslim scriptural sources and history thus reference preaching to Muslims so that they may become more observant and pious in their lives, 'a means to inspire fellow Muslims' toward this objective.[663] This connotation remains extant. However, the politicization or modernization of the word is traced to the colonial period of the 19th century, when the semantic field of *daʿwa* expanded to include the mission to call Muslims to confront colonialism and the ideological threats of modernity and the spread of secularism.[664] For Salafist and more generally Islamists of contemporary history, *daʿwa* is seen as part of the 'solution' to the problems of the Muslim world—including a solution to 'westoxification'—namely to call upon fellow Muslims to go back to or 'embrace' what has become called 'the true Islam' as exemplified by al-*Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*.[665]

The phrase, as such, implies a *positioning of rectitude* from which one makes the call or invitation, and it implies that those who are being called are thus in need of

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[662] See the Qurʾān, 12:108.
[663] Kathleen Marie Moore, 'Daʿwa in the United States', in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane I. Smith (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of American Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 268–85, at 268.
[664] Ibid., at 271–73.
[665] Ibid., at 273.

guidance and those who make the call (*dāʿī*s) are in position to do so. However, the word implies an activism—cyber-activism—invested into *daʿwa* that involves religious authority disrupted an important way. In most minority Muslim communities, particularly in the West, the practice of *daʿwa* is praised and, often, considered an obligation—the legitimizing of living outside the lands or Abode of Islam (*Dār al-Islām*). The authority question arises, though, over the fact that there are no 'explicated agreed upon rules' that addresses the qualifications threshold of one who is, in a sense, making the calling or invitation, the one reaching out, as it were. While this approach can exist in door-to-door proselytizing, it is extenuated and even normalized in digital spaces. A speaker of considerable rhetorical skills—and who is well-practiced in the citations of verses of the Quran—applies also *intonational* voice authority, in which the questions of rules or credentials become less important to listeners. As such, anyone may proclaim him- or herself to be a *dāʿī*, that is, a caller to Islam even if 'without having the "right" authoritative position or any higher Islamic education' to do so.[666] The methodology of proselytizing does not assume or demand the rigor or sourcing of a more formal presentation about the faith. The teaching mission is to persuade and to guide through a style of address that is simplified but relies on repetition. These realities are amplified in a voice-only mediated environment.

In the texts examined in this study, the phrase is often rendered simply as *the daʿwa* or modified as *al-daʿwa al-Salafiyya* or Salafī *daʿwa* —the call to return to the Islam of purer times, a retrotopia or 'Utopian Kaleidoscope', perhaps, an 'historical version of the City of God' of Medina in Western Arabia during the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad and immediately thereafter.[667]

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[666] Olsson, 'Proselytizing Islam', at 181.
[667] Emin Poljarevic, 'The Power of Elective Affinities in Contemporary Salafism,' *The Muslim World* 106, no. 3 (2016): 474–500, at 484.

The processes, credentials of content producers, and goals of *daʿwa* have an evangelizing purpose: it makes claims and also promises something to an audience.[668] In fact, among the attractions to religious messaging is the promise of return, whether immediate or ultimate. With the Salafī texts examined here, the promise is to present a pure Islam free from the faults and heterodoxy of other Muslims, mainly. The tonality of the voice and populist language rely on casting aspersions on the practices and beliefs of other Muslims, particularly Ṣūfīs. The appeal is rarely intellectual and is mostly emotional, as is most populist arguments. While religious proselytizers occasionally pursue material gain, it must be said that the Salafī texts reviewed in the course of this dissertation, not one content producer pursued marketing for any material gain.

The dynamic of the *daʿwa* purpose is 'missionary' in its outlook, a 'mobilization' to call or convert non-Salafī individuals into Salafī activists. In the view of this study, *daʿwa*, as a concept and practice, depends on an important supposition of religious authority—whose mission is predicated on the right and the need to correct perceived errant beliefs of fellow Muslims. The emphasis in the podcast is on the purification of one's soul in seeking God's salvation for believers, and, on a larger scale, to cleanse the faith of heterodoxy, as Salafism claims. As such, with no material purpose in mind, the extension of the *voice* in the podcasts represents a missionary platform that relies on repeated words and aggressive tones to evoke apprehensions of a Muslim about his or her heterodoxy; all of which is produced by a disembodied orality that asserts authority through voice. An authoritative voice of podcasting, a listening practice, can more readily convey messages without the type of immediate sourcing, other than practiced reliance on a handful of verses of the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth and tonality.

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[668] Einstein, *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age* at 208.

Manhaj: In reviewing and analysing significant online Salafī content, a common rhetorical exhortation emerges, one that pivots on the term *manhaj*. It is tenable to assert that the broader dialect of modern Salafism relies on the simplified, minimalized concept of a proper *manhaj* (methodology), mainly both as an *authoritative dais* and as *a strategy*. Salafi Publications sites have been cited as asserting 'proprietary rights over Salafī manhaj'.[669] From this frame, casting aspersions on Ṣūfī practices cannot be accused of being a recasting of pre-modern critiques. Rather, the anti-Ṣūfī polemics of the contemporary age (and liberal usage of strawman arguments) produces a claim—through the mirror of what is errant with other Muslims—that the original intent and pure understanding of the words of God and His Messenger (the first two nodes of religious authority) are protected in Salafī hands—ensured by a process considered to be the proper *manhaj*. One may further assert that in order to examine the conceits and ideologies of modern Salafism and its claims of religious authority, it is essential to probe the Salafī usage of *manhaj* as the very substrate of its core arguments.

Therefore, *manhaj* refers to a *way of life* of Islam, but its derived meaning in the realm of law and theology indicates the *proper methodology* in deriving guidance, verdicts, and rulings from the sacred texts, and a strict interpretation of the sacred past, that is, the known acts and intentions of the Prophetic period and generations of *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*. As such, it speaks to orthodoxy and orthopraxy and, thus conversely, it speaks to the criteria by which practices are deemed to be heretical, offensive, or impious. The reason for this is that if Salafism indeed seeks to be successful in persuading people (mainly Muslims) that it represents or is the only movement that can restore 'real' Islam, as it has been suggested,[670] then it must rely on the claim that it represents the proper *manhaj* of the religion.

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[669] Musa Maguire, 'The Islamic Internet', *Media on the Move* (London: Routledge, 2006), 209–21, at 219.
[670] Meijer, *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, at 15.

It could be argued that the Salafī 'overall claim to [be] the sole custodians' of pure Islam—as exemplified by the pious forbears—is based on or perhaps contingent upon claiming to be the holders or revivers of Islam's original *manhaj*, 'the way in which the nature and the scope of the Qur'an and Sunna were understood and interpreted from the time of the Prophet until now'.[671] To interpret the scriptural sources of Islam by way of reason, discursive discourses or 'non-textual sources of knowledge', a methodological feature of scholars of the established schools of Islamic law (established mainly after the generations of the pious ancestors), are judged to be external to the proper capacity of 'valid' religious knowledge.[672] As such, rulings and practices that are derived from analogical reasoning, philosophical deliberations, local customs, and other non-textual means should not be trusted nor should they be considered authentically Islamic or authentic methodologies of interpretations.

From this attitude of religious authority, Salafī discourses proceed to reproach practices and theological positions as sinful, forbidden, heretical, idolatrous, or even outright disbelief. Thus, the claim to be *exclusively* reviving, following, and/or preserving the proper *manhaj* of Islam animates, to a significant degree, the edifice of the contestations and polemics of Salafī texts in digital space.

Haykel suggests that this usage of *manhaj* is a 'modern development' and a central argument Salafī discourse emerges that serves as the ideological substrate or basis of their objections and contestations to Ṣūfī practices or, as such, practices that are associated with Sufism. The loci of contestations are the branches, as it were, while the tree trunk is comprised of the Salafī ideological conceit to define the limits of what is properly evaluated as the valid *manhaj* in Islam, that is, the proper way of life and creed that requires a rather restrictive interpretation and narrow attachment to the prophetic period of Islam and the immediate generations thereafter, al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ (the pious forbears).

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[671] Duderija, 'Constructing the Religious Self and the Other: Neo-Traditional Salafi Manhaj', at 77.
[672] Ibid.

And what falls outside of those parameters is considered deviation. Thus, trying to take narrative control of what is the proper *manhaj* seems to be what rouses Salafī discourse online, which is certainly manifest with regard to contestations with Sufism.

Therefore, the meaning and function embedded in the term *manhaj* as used in Salafī discourse and as evinced its repeated usage in the present case studies are significant, particularly as a governing principle in the method of Salafī hermeneutics. As mentioned previously, the interpretation of the scriptural sources of Islam tends to be literal or based only the immediate generations after the Prophet Muḥammad. The interpretations of the scholarly class after the Salaf al-Salah are not entirely dismissed, but they if appear to conflict with the literal meaning of a verse of the Quran or statement of the Prophet Muḥammad, then the literal meanings take precedence over the methodologies of the *'ulamā'* (scholarly class) of classical Muslim intellectual history. The metaphorical or situational or rational meanings (and rulings of *Sharī'a* based on them) of the scriptures of the Islam are dismissed because they are perceived to be influenced by intellectual currents rooted in, for example, Hellenistic thought or other extra-Islamic perspectives. The insistence of this method of hermeneutics is, as the Salafīs tend to claim, is the proper *manhaj* of Islam itself.

The *manhaj* discourse plays a significant role in 'iterating their conceptual and methodological separateness'.[673] While the evocation of 'manhaj' ('our manhaj', 'the manhaj of the Salaf', etc) was frequent, the burden of listener was to accept the conceit without a rigorous defence of the word's usage or application to Salafism. The power of the word is vested with certitude that it is indeed upheld by a higher authority. The articulation of the manhaj was reproduced in a publication made by UK Salafīs, in which the 'theological and methodological framework of British Salafī thought' that is marked by bare references to the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad *and*

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[673] Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism,* at 54.

contemporary and past Salafī scholars.[674] While that articulation of the Salafī manhaj was produced in 1993 and is stamped with 'British' contexts, the manhaj described decades ago seems to be the foundation of Salafī thought in a digital 'space' that is 'de-territorialized', that is, unassociated with geography and produced in digital means that proffer a timelessness and nationless, features of digital media and transnational mediation effects.

The contestation over *manhaj* is so critical to Salafī thought examined in this study, it eventually turned on other Salafī organisations as well. Though it is beyond the purview of this particularl study, it should be noted that the *manhaj* dialect became essentially a 'sort of purist inquisition' not only for Ṣūfīs and other groups but a process 'that began to label other Salafi Muslims as religious innovators'.[675] This demonstrates the centrality in the authority framework of claiming exclusive ownership of the proper *manhaj*.

Also, scholars interpret the Salafī delimitation of the orthodoxy of Islam and its constituted community as part of a political discourse pivoting on the phrase *al-Wala' wa al-Bara'*, that is, 'loyalty to Islam, Muslims, and God and disavowal of everything else'.[676] While Wagemaker's study examines the usage of this terminology as a means of setting apart Saudi/Wahhābī ideals, he asserts that this declaration of determining Islamic orthodoxy is, in fact, part of the Salafī literature. As such, while quietist Salafism shuns political involvement, the restriction of Islam's normative and accepted practice (or

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[674] Ibid., at 57.

[675] Ibid., at 31. Hamid notes that the intra-Salafī vituperations and 'name-calling' were part of 'a tactic in the power struggles to delegitimise the credentials of fellow Salafīs. Due to the harsh condemnation of other Salafīs for their alleged adulterations of true Salafi belief and methodology, Abu Khadeejah [of Salafi Publications and Salafi Sound] and his colleagues were labelled 'Super Salafis', 'Saudi Salafis', or 'Madkhalis' by other Salafīs and Islamic activists. This resulted in a form of theological McCarthyism, producing blacklists and character assassination which continue to divide British Salafis', at 62.

[676] Joas Wagemakers, 'The Enduring Legacy of the Second Saudi State: Quietist and Radical Wahhabi Contestations of al-Walāʾ wa-l-Barāʾ', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 44 (1), 93–110, at 93.

orthodoxy) as determined by their 'Manhaj' or methodology evokes a political ideology rather than hermeneutics.

Analyses of the repeated usage of the term Manhaj in the Salafī discourses studied is consonance with the findings in contemporary scholarship of the 'important role in understanding Salafism' through 'concept of manhaj', which raises questions about Salafism concerning both politics and methodology.[677] The renewal of the term in Salafī texts is linked to the teachings of Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (1914–1999), a prominent Salafī thinker and hadith commentary, who is of Albanian ancestry but who lived most of his life in Jordan. A native Arabic speaker, al-Albānī's re-definition implies an activism in the word that calls for Muslims 'to shun all affiliation and participation with any formal group, be it a political party (ḥizb) or civic association (jamʿiyya) and therefore to eschew, on principle, all organised forms of political life'. [678] Thus, to an important extent, the defining of the proper *manhaj* advocates a posture of rejection—the need to avoid and reject as a social practice, rather than a set of principles to follow. 'The Arabic term that best encapsulates this process of ideologization [of Salafism] is *manhaj*'[679] The *manhaj* invoked repeatedly in Salafī discourse in this light seems to provide a framework of the ideology from which heretical intra-Islamic positions are based, particularly claims against Sufism. Its purpose is thus twofold: define 'religious self' and 'religious other' through the *manhaj* perspective.[680] In other words, Salafīs hold that 'every Muslim is obliged to follow the Salafī manhaj, the path of the pious predecessors. For them, the Salafī manhaj is the third source of Islamic teachings after the Qur'an and the hadith'.[681]

The usage of *manhaj* has a modern history of appropriation, and thus, it is not surprising that Salafī discourse seeks its own appropriation. The meaning and repurposing

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[677] Haykel, 'On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action', at 47.
[678] Ibid.
[679] Lauziere, *The Making of Salafism,* at 201.
[680] Duderija, 'Constructing the Religious Self and the Other: Neo-Traditional Salafi Manhaj', at 78–79.
[681] Din Wahid, *Nurturing the Salafi Manhaj: A Study of Salafi Pesantrens in Contemporary Indone*sia, (Universiteit Utrecht, 2016), at 20.

of *manhaj* became pronounced in the 1960s with Egyptian academic circles, according to Lauziere, the term was used by Egyptian academics in the 1940s. But, in the 1960s the term 'had become something of a buzzword' when referring to academic rigor. Then Islamists used the word in reference to 'the practical and systemic nature of Islam as an ideology'.[682] While Haykel traces the modern ideological usages of *manhaj* within Salafism to al-Albānī, as mentioned above, Lauziere contends that although al-Albānī 'played a major role in the dissemination of this new presentation of Salafism', but the actual coinage of 'Salafī manhaj' is more accurately associated with Mustafa Hilmi (b. 1932). Hilmi, an Egyptian philosophy professor, was 'influenced by Islamist thinkers and close to the purist Salafī circles in Alexandria'.[683] It was Hilmi in the 1970s who actively contributed to 'the systematization of purist Salafism as an ideology and a "method"' or manhaj. Through the manhaj framework, in part, Hilmi 'reframed Salafism as a comprehensive way of thinking, a blueprint for action, and an Islamic civilizational worldview'.[684] For Hilmi (and Salafist thinking today) 'this method contained all the necessary principles for organizing the social, economic, and political aspects of life. He thus subsumed Ibn Taymiyya's views on politics under the label Salafism'.[685]

As such, the strategic value of stressing the term *manhaj* in the Salafist texts examined in this study becomes clearer, though its presentation demonstrates none of its semantic lineage as described above. The notion of rigor in an academic sense is not what is being referenced in the Salafī texts. Rather, *manhaj* represents an unparsed and generalized attempt to affirm narrowly constructed hermeneutics in the purported methodology of purist Salafism and the ideological nature of Salafī thought, upon which charges of heresy and blameworthy innovation are put forth and defended in intra-Islamic contestations a new public sphere ushered by emerging digital technologies.

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[682] Ibid.
[683] Lauziere, *The Making of Salafism*, at 201–02.
[684] Ibid.
[685] Ibid., at 221.

While it may be true that we are in a 'golden age'[686] of podcasting, it is important to connect podcasts and Salafī messaging as representing more than a 'relatively new beast in the digital media menagerie'.[687] One of the key aspects of podcasts, 'particularly, the podcast listened to on the move' is that it may be viewed as 'part of an evolution in parasocial phenomena'.[688] Such interpersonal media consumption, highly personalized and decentralized from formal social settings, such as family participation with pre-digital media (such as television and radio), affords a marked advantage in religious or ideological conveyance without the benefit (or hindrance) of a group setting, in which ideas may be challenged more readily. In other words, a listener of podcasts can consume information with greater privacy and secrecy in a post-internet environment, that is, downloaded podcasts that can be accessed without internet connection. It is a 'new form of mediated interpersonal communication' that affords greater mobility and privacy.[689] The Salafi Sounds podcasts, as discussed previously and individually analysed in Chapter 6, have a clear activism, also known as cyber-activism or cyber-populism.[690] The podcast texts analysed herein represent 'a formidable power of the dis-embodied human voice' that exerts authority in such persuasive realms as defining a rigid dichotomy between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, between pure belief in the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*) and idolatry (*shirk*). Essentially, podcasts—and digital media more broadly—reorients religious discourses to an important extent toward digital proselytization, relying on classical phrases but conveyed in the idiom and effects of the digital age.

Final Remarks of the Chapter: The Public Sphere

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[686] Richard Berry, 'A Golden Age of Podcasting? Evaluating Serial in the Context of Podcast Histories', *Journal of Radio & Audio Media,* 22/2 (2015), 170-78.
[687] MacDougall, 'Podcasting and Political Life', at 714.
[688] Ibid., at 716.
[689] Ibid.
[690] Gerbaudo, 'From Cyber-Autonomism to Cyber-Populism: An Ideological Analysis of the Evolution of Digital Activism', (

Analysing polemical texts, as Seesemann writes, 'can be very illuminating' with regard to 'the reconstruction of intellectual history.' He then observes that such texts can convey a 'subtext' that affords a 'better understanding not only of the text itself, but also of the circumstances of the production of the text'.[691] While Seesemann comments concern Ṣūfī literature in Nigeria, his statement applies to this study and, perhaps, most studies that explore texts in digital space that seek to contest competing ideological streams.

Ideologies, religious or secular, have always required mediation in order to pursue wider promulgation. Yet in the contemporary world, the close syrgy between media systems and religion communication exceeds previously theorized *mediation* constructs. This reality is one of the important *subtexts* of contentious material in cyberspace that will continue to attract academic attention. The competing and newer theory of mediatisation, for example, explicitly ascribes to digital media the role of agents of change, rather than conduits of information. If true, the study of religion in the contemporary world seamlessly connects with deliberations on not only the medium through which people engage religion, but the mutual influences of the consequential unions of media and religion.

Inquiry into religious authority has raised questions that have become more urgent as a result of disruptive emerging media technologies that have permitted more voices into the media ecology. The production of texts in digital space that allude to religion have proliferated with unprecedented volume and ubiquity. These texts online represent an innovative kind of textuality. It is not a surprise, then, to find evocations of religion and its nodes of authority on topics that are more politically driven and subservient to pressures of globalization, as Mandaville argues.[692] The Arab Gulf crisis is an example of this phenomenon.

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[691] Rüdiger Seesemann, 'The Takfīr Debate: Sources for the Study of a Contemporary Dispute among African Sufis, Part 1: The Nigerian Arena', *Sudanic Africa,* 9 (1998), 39–70, at 39.
[692] Peter Mandaville, "Globalization and the Politics of Religious Knowledge: Pluralizing Authority in the Muslim World," *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 2 (2007).

The space of digital media has led to "spatial pluralization" of Islamic religious authority, in terms of "what kinds of spaces one seeks authority" and how authority is exerted.[693] But how does this affect methodology? As Campbell points out, "It is not enough to say that the Internet transforms or challenges traditional authority; rather, researchers must identify what specific form or type of authority is being affected."[694]

Direct usages of religious language—and their semantic fields—that are found in digital texts and that become fields of analysis include the quotation of textual sources of Islam, namely, the Qur'ān (the Muslim scripture) and Hadith (the statements and normative practices of the Prophet Muḥammad), also known collectively as Sunna. These sources are the very foundation of authority in Islam. It also includes the juridical-ethical nomenclature that are based on the primary sources of Islam. However, with digital media, the shared idioms of these primary authoritative sources have become, in the view of this study, technologized, such that mediation seems to be as important as what is being mediated. The digitization of Salafism's discourses has resulted in a public sphere that is not centralized as it has been in previously conceived of spaces, such as the nation-state, such as Saudi Arabia, though the inspiration of Salafism is rooted there. The space has transcended previous centres of authority and geographies.

In *Hashtag Islam*, Bunt advances the question of authority within the current 'phase of sustained information technological development'. As a result, critical media technological innovations 'have combined with diverse Islamic agendas to create a significant shift in the ways in which command and control of Muslim contexts are driven'.[695] One important matter in the authority question that Bunt examines is the increasing consequential realm of 'e-fatwas', that is, the abundance of formal edicts made and spread through digital media. The edicts pertain to benign affairs of personal

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[693] Ibid., at 103.
[694] Heidi Campbell, 'Who's Got the Power? Religious Authority and the Internet', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12, no. 3 (2007): 1044
[695] Bunt, *Hashtag Islam,* at 1.

relationships, as well as more serious considerations regarding violence. The proliferation of such material in Cyber Islamic Environments tests the pre-modern constructs of the manifest qualifications of those passing such edicts. The e-fatwa phenomenon is inconsistent with transparency about the qualifications of the persons offering the edicts. It becomes possible, if not likely, that the opinions are based on erroneous scholarship or referencing, or perhaps more nefarious purposes of seeking to radicalize youth.

However, Bunt further develops the contemporary authority-fatwa question by linking it with Jürgen Habermas's influential treatises on the public sphere. For Habermas, public opinion and the public sphere were closely related to mediation, if not a product of mediation, even rudimentary mediation. His public sphere included a 'realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed', which included 'conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body'.[696] Habermas's evaluations of the public sphere on important matters such as democracy and state authority have been frequently cited in the decades after Habermas published them. Bunt, however, raises the important question of the continued relevance of Habermas's public sphere in light of the digital age. Habermas's theory, as Bunt states, 'played a distinct role within the development of theories associated with the impact of mass media on formulating public opinion'.[697]

In deliberating at length about Habermas and his continued relevance—despite differing cultural and technological frames—Bunt expands the intellectual paradigms of studying contemporary Islam and Cyber Islamic Environments in an important way. It is perhaps easy to be dismissive of pre-digital insights of sociologists, but ultimately Bunt argues that Habermass remains relevant in studying Muslim frameworks online, when considering the incessant exposure to and consumption of information.

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[696] Jurgen Habermas, 'The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article', *New German Critique,* 3 (1964), 49–55, at 49.
[697] Bunt, *Hashtag Islam*, at 11.

Chapter 8
SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS, FORWARD RESEARCH,
AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

This dissertation pursued a study that seeks to fill gaps in a growing and evolving field of

digital media and Islam studies. The study focused on intra-Islamic contestations located

in cyber-Islamic environments. Specifically, the contestations under examination are

represented by texts that are produced and posted in support of an influential and growing

religious ideology in contemporary religion, which has both online and offline

implications. The content producers are advocates of Salafism, and they post mainly

voice-only presentations that argue for the purity of Salafism as the true embodiment of a

pristine Islam that professedly follows most closely the early generations of Islam, known

collectively and, perhaps, canonically as *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*, the righteous (or pious)

forbears.

 The texts analysed were purposively posted online and remain open to anyone

with Internet access, and thus they exist and are available beyond narrower online

environments, such as chat rooms and forums, which often require login credentials and

passwords to access. The texts also unambiguously pursue an argument for the *unique*

role of Salafism as the vanguard of Islam as envisaged, primarily in challenging what is

considered heterodox views and practices, largely associated with Sufism, that have

seeped into the tenets and praxis of Muslim orthodoxy, as contended. The study pursued

the research by examining the texts of self-described Salafī preachers and scholars, posted

online not only in defence and promulgation of *purist* Salafī thought and its

oppositionality to Muslim 'others', which happens to include non-purist Salafī views that,

for example, advocate violence or political involvement. The study pursued the texts that

represent a flourishing digital product that has expanded the meaning of digital mobility

and the performance of acousmatic voice, as argued in the study.[698] The voice transmitted in digital formats (podcasts in this case) is rich in symbolic meaning with regard to religion and culture. They also represent a trend in digital media instrumentality that is not measured with a screen-metric.[699]

The use of digital technology for such contestations represents a significant disruption of traditional means of knowledge transmission and textual production, as argued in several places in this study. But the import of associating media disruptions with intra-religious contestations requires an analytical framework that seeks out the broader meanings and purposes of such discourse; as such, the strategies and repeated terminologies found, collated, and analysed herein are integral to the argument-construction of present-day Salafism and integral to the endeavour of claiming *religious authority* in contemporary Islam.

The digital age has destabilized and decentralized constructs of authority and, in fact, knowledge construction and distribution, such that the production of knowledge and its contestations are generated with 'unprecedented intensity'.[700] As such, the analyses seek to situate and demonstrate that the online texts represent an attempt in defining, if not restricting, the notions of the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of Islam by relying on important pre-modern terminologies and their semantic fields conveyed with new digital media technology. In essence, the strategies of the contestations are employed to argue that Salafism is the best representation of Islam's formative generations, *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ*—which a plurality of Muslims (including Salafīs *and* Ṣūfīs) hold in high regard. Salafism approaches its purification or restoration program, however, through a 'relentless assault' against religious innovation, particularly Sufism.[701]

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[698] See Chapter 6.
[699] Norie Neumark, Ross Gibson, and Theo Van Leeuwen, *Voice: Vocal Aesthetics in Digital Arts and Media* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2010), at 33–37.
[700] Mandaville, 'Globalization', at 108.
[701] Lauziere, *The Making of Salafism,* at 165.

The study focused on two central questions. The first sought out and isolated key areas of dispute—loci of contestations—that Salafism contends with Sufism and Ṣūfī practices. The first question encompasses a descriptive process of identifying, in the online texts, the main loci of dispute, as well as arguing for the analytical framing of these loci. The research emphasized areas of dispute that relate to *performance* rather than those that are entirely of conceptual or theological import, since the performance of rituals, such as grave or shrine visitations of Ṣūfī saints and intercessory supplications and/or rituals performed therein, is stressed in the polemical texts themselves. It is important to note, as well, that ritual performances are observable manifestations of what Salafism considers heterodoxy or heretical innovations. Because they are observable, such practices lend themselves to consistent demonstrable reproach in Salafism's oppositionality, that is, the 'attitudes' attributed to Salafism in pursuit of deviances 'with non-Muslims, and often with lapsed and/or errant Muslims'.[702] However, Salafism's reproach of errant Muslims ultimately serves a purpose beyond censuring, as argued in the study.

Hence, the second research question focused on *religious authority* as an analytical framework in conducting the qualitative ideological textual analyses of the Salafī texts. The analyses stressed the strategies of argument-construction and the regular usage of nomenclature that have pre-modern roots in Islamic intellectual history. The usage of these terminologies in the contestations examined herein is meant to expand the semantic fields of the pre-modern phrases to produce contemporary idioms deployed to claim narrative control and authority over the bounds of Islamic orthodoxy and orthopraxy and to raise the profile of Salafism as the surviving faction of Islam that is true to the religion's original form.[703]

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[702] Richard Gauvain, 'Just Admit It Man, You're a Spy!' Fieldwork Explorations into the Notion of Salafi "Oppositionality"', *Fieldwork in Religion,* 13/2 (2018), 203–30, at 204.
[703] The terms and their analyses are presented in Chapter 7.

While the majority of Muslims acknowledge the importance of the forebears, 'what sets Salafism apart' and the question and framework of authority revolves around the Salafism's approach, which combines *advocacy* and, perhaps most vociferously, an inflexible and broad rejection of 'all innovations that have entered Islam since its early foundational period', and a purification of the religion achieved by testing everything 'in accordance with the sources and methodology' of Salafī-approved scholarship as 'the ultimate authorities'. Therefore, 'Salafi practices build upon the notion of purifying the legacy of Islam accumulated in the centuries after the *al-salaf al-salih*'.[704] With this pronounced mandate, the religious authority framework comes into clearer focus and its importance more prominent. To challenge the orthodoxy of any religious ideology or manifestation should be based on some foundational premises. For Salafism, the foundation is rooted in the premises of a religious 'purity'.[705]

In pursuing the research questions, the study seeks to add original research, analyses, and methodological approaches that help to advance an understudied area of, first, media and religion more broadly, and, second, intra-Islamic contestations in digital space specifically. The study focused on so-called quietist or purist Salafism, which advocates against violence and shuns participatory political activity of any form. The choice of studying purist Salafism is guided by the intent to underscore a core or substrate ideology that is distilled and separated from more complex, controversial associations with violence, as with Jihādī Salafism. Extremist violence is an important phenomenon to study in digital space. However, the violence narratives can detract from the core conceit of Salafism—the substrate ideology—that, in fact, permeates to an important degree all forms of Salafism, quietist or violent iterations thereof: that is, the desire to purge Islam from foreign practices, beliefs, as well as foreign, non-Muslim influences—a restoration

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[704] Becker, 'Gaining Knowledge', at 81.
[705] Lauziere, *The Making of Salafism,* at 216.

of an envisaged pure Islam. It is possible, if not likely that the ideals and ideas of purist

Salafism 'have been pre-empted by extremist organizations'.[706]

 As such, the growth of Salafī thought has attracted much research and will very

likely continue to do so, particularly as it relates to the disruptive opportunities provided,

if not created by digital media. Thus, this study examines the critical relationship between

religious authority and digital media in Salafī online texts and helps to contribute to the

research in this field.

The literature review, framework, methodology, textual case study, and findings

demonstrate the associations between the strategies and language of Salafī polemics and

claims of authority in defining what is proper and pure Islam and delineating the creedal

boundaries of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, and, in the process, it essentially places Sufism

(and other Islamic phenomena or movements) exterior of the boundaries of the claimed

'real Islam' or, at the very least, essentially indicating that Sufism tests the demarcations

of orthodoxy. The polemics pursue a concerted effort to advance 'control over

meaning'—that is, meaning over key terminologies examined in this study.[707]

The dissertation pursued careful consideration of the meaning of the term

'Salafism' and its derivatives.[708] The reason for this is twofold. First, Salafism has had

two major connotations, namely, the earlier reform movements of the late 18th and early

19th centuries. In more recent times, however, 'Salafism', as indicated by very same

descriptor, has come to mean an austere ideology that seeks to remonstrate and purge all

creedal positions and religious rites of Islamic phenomena that are considered heretical

innovations or deviations. Second, it was important to come to an operationalized

designation for contemporary Salafism, as applied in this study. However, the treatment

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[706] Sanjeev Kumar, 'Responding to Western Critiques of the Muslim World: Deconstructing the Cliché of Islamophobia and the Genealogies of Islamic Extremism', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* 42/4 (2015), 579–98, at 591.

[707] Nabil Echchaibi, 'From Audio Tapes to Video Blogs: The Delocalisation of Authority in Islam', *Nations and Nationalism,* 17/1 (2011), 25–44, at 28.

[708] Chapter 3 is devoted to defining the main terminologies the study uses consistently.

on Salafism's meanings seeks to respond and to contribute to the contemporary academic deliberations on Salafism because the term is unevenly used and is often poorly defined in research, particularly after the so-called Arab Spring. In light of the fact that Salafism has become 'shorthand for a complex myriad of positions and definitions of Islam',[709] the implications and purposes of defining Salafism in research become more distinct, if not more urgent.

The dissertation also contributes original research as it pertains to theory building, specifically a relatively recent media theory that responds to and seeks a greater understanding of the unprecedented disruptive qualities of digital media phenomena and their effects as *agents of change* on society and on religion itself.[710] Mediatisation addresses the findings of research on digital media and religion and proposes that digital media technologies have done more than merely expand the reach of communications, as theorized by the long-standing 'mediation' theory. Rather, digital media per se have affected the *social conditions* in which religion is conducted, with the technologies serving as 'agents of change' in religion, beyond serving as avenues of communication.[711] The original contribution this study seeks to offer, with regard to theory building, is in its argument that the media theory that appears most suitable to explain and expound upon the effects of digital media disruptions on religious authority and religious performance within Islam is *mediatisation*, an argument the researcher would like to pursue further in future research.

Future Research

Intra-Salafī Contestations Online: Important research trajectories have manifested themselves during the course of this study. They are research projects the researcher

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[709] Bunt, *Hashtag Islam*, at 88.
[710] See Chapter 5.
[711] Stig Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2013), at 78–9.

would wish to pursue in the future. The first of them concerns an unexpected finding in the examining of the Salafī texts under review here, namely, the observable and often *vehement* intra-Salafī contestations, even within non-violent, purist Salafism. As scholars have noted and documented, Salafism does not enjoy agreed upon methodologies of pursuing the purification project of Islam, and it does not have consensus on the degrees of acceptance or tolerance for 'other' Muslims (including those who incline toward Sufism).[712] However, the digital texts posted online demonstrate passionate, if not aggressive contestations toward *other* Salafīs in, for example, the United Kingdom. Essentially the contestations *otherize* dissenting Salafīs with a tenor and bellicosity observed in anti-Sufism critiques. In one of the podcasts examined here, for example, the speaker offers a severe critique of Yasser Al-Qadhi, a prominent American Muslim academic and public speaker, and his ostensible praise of some aspects of Sufism. Al-Qadhi's apparent fall out with Salafi Publications scholars invited the latter to proclaim about the former's departure from the Salafī fold as 'good riddance' and other phrases of reproach, however unsophisticated they may be.

Intra-Salafī disputes have been studied in discussions and research on the differences of approaches and intentions among distinct Salafī typologies that scholars have delineated, namely, *jihādī*, politicos, and purists (or quietists). The intra-Salafī contestations of interest, as a result of this study, concerns ideological analyses of English-language, online Salafī texts, produced by so-called 'super-Salafis',[713] that reproach prominent Salafīs, like Yasir Qadhi and Bilal Philips, who have been accused of parting from pure Salafism.

Sufism, Digital Media, and Authority: It should be noted that the framework of religious authority with regard to Ṣūfī online texts assumes a differing approach. With

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[712] See, for example, Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism*, and Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafi Movement'.
[713] Sadek Hamid, 'The Attraction of Authentic Islam: Salafism and British Muslim Youth', *Global Salafism: Islam's new religious movement,* (2009), 384–403, at 393–95.

regard to Sufism in digital space, it is mainly Lawrence's second node of authority that best suits Ṣūfī discourses. That is, it is the charismatic aspects of religious authority within contemporary Islam that inform much of Ṣūfī discourses and online strategies. In both emic and etic definitions of Sufism, the Ṣūfī discourse is not a polemic per se. The self-definition of Sufism is not framed within the ideation of *oppositionality* in expelling syncretic practices per se, while the *raison d'être* of Salafism, as Lauziere states, the very foundation of its ideology, is premised on the ideas of purifying Islam, with 'purist Salafis' seeking 'new targets for religious condemnation' *within* Islam.[714]

For Sufism, the matter is considerably different because Ṣūfīs discourse concerns the esoteric or mystical environment of Islam and a pedagogy for attaining it. The discourse of Sufism is said to be categorized in 'the realm of emotional discourse as opposed to' theological discussions, since, as a 'practice', Sufism's main goal pertains to the esoteric path spiritual accomplishment[715] and the concept of *tazkiyya al-nafs*, the purification of the soul.[716] As such, Ṣūfīs tend to 'lay emphasis on the inward life and call to spiritual purification and seeking closeness to God'.[717] The religious authority framework for Ṣūfī discourse and digital media, therefore, would involve *pedagogy* rather than contestation of power or conceits of orthodoxy.

As part of his research agenda, the author hopes to have the opportunity to develop a research design and methodology that addresses the research question of the 'effects of digital media on charismatic religious authority' in transnational Ṣūfī communities. The research would involve both field study and online content analyses. The question would centre on the concept (or pedagogy) of 'embodied knowledge', as observed in West

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[714] Lauziere, *The Making of Salafism*, at 164.
[715] Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor, 'Online Sufism: Methodological Thoughts on Researching Esoteric Islam in an Online Context', in Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor and Suha Shakkour (eds.), *Introduction: Digital Methodologies in the Sociology of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 59–60, at 59.
[716] Gavin Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam: The Life and Works of Al-Muhasibi* (London: Routledge, 2011), at 123–30.
[717] Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists,* at 12.

African Ṣūfī communities. The pedagogy of embodied knowledge conveyance of the sacred placed high emphasis on 'person-to-person knowledge transmission … where the student's disposition or character is primarily emphasized, and the teacher's physical presence represents the actualization' of knowledge and spiritual disposition.[718] Schulz, in her thoughtful research on the notion and phenomenon of 'soundscape and religious mediation' in West Africa, addresses numinous religious transmission through a 'sound-touch' or 'synaesthetic' modality. She locates a distinction in West African experiences with charismatic authority that transcends text-based approaches to inspiration and learning found elsewhere in the Middle East; as such, she conceptualizes the distinction as a 'locally or regionally specific discursion tradition of Islam'.[719]

In broader terms, the research questions related to the following: does social media *necessarily* represent a threat or challenge to traditional knowledge transmission of the numinous? Can technology serve as a 'transference' of charismatic meaning as traditionally conceived? Do social media platforms, at the service of conveying the orality of sacred knowledge, result in new 'epistemological categories and mechanisms' legitimating a 'new orality'?[720] Is new media simply a 'new means of learning and retaining oral genres' of Africa?[721]

The researcher expresses genuine interest in continuing to pursuing the relationships between religion, new media platforms, disruption, and authority, through methodological approaches that would have to adapt to new applications of this consequential framework.

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[718] Zachary Valentine Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam: The Sufi Community of Ibrāhīm Niasse* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), at 192.
[719] Dorothea E. Schulz, 'Soundscape', in David Morgan (ed.), *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2008), 172–186, at 180–81.
[720] Antonio De Diego Gonzalez, 'A New African Orality? Tijani Sufism, Sacred Knowledge and the Icts in Post-Truth Times', *New Directions in the Study of Islamic Scholarship in* Africa Conference (Harvard University, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, 2017), at 1.
[721] Karin Barber, 'Orality, the Media and New Popular Cultures in Africa', *Oralité et nouvelles dimensions de l'Oralité. Intersections théoriques et comparaisons des matérieux dans les études africaines,* (2009), 7–26.

Concluding remarks

Initial studies of any new or burgeoning academic field are known to include future projections of the discipline and the role of new technologies and their instrumentality in society that may exert influence on that discipline. At times, researchers are consigned to the roles of futurists in determining important trends in the near and far futures. Such projections, however, can be vulnerable to exaggerations at times. The study of digital media and religion is not exempt from this reality, as scholars have pointed out.[722] The initial academic responses to digital media in 1990s and early 2000s have produced amplifications about the degree of the *revolt* in the *revolutionary* nature of digital media—to the point of causing some academics to subsequently amend their prior projections.[723]

There is, however, a reasonable expectation to anticipate a robust future in digital media and religion research, specifically addressing *how* digital media would ultimately affect religion in the contemporary world,[724] a particularly urgent pursuit as digital media increasingly become destabilizing forces in traditional constructs of knowledge acquisition and conveyance and the subsequent challenges of the form and credentials of traditional religious authority constructs. as addressed in this study.[725] By seeking *how* something as significant as digital media produces its 'impact' on contemporary religion is a query that is 'often underrepresented or absent from the otherwise credible output of academics'.[726] As such, the question of the way digital media makes its impact must be advanced by researchers in the field. Digital media studies have received much attention, most often as 'new' media. Though the digital phenomenon is 'new' in important

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[722] Bunt, 'Religion and the Internet', at 705.
[723] Stephen D O'leary, 'Cyberspace as Sacred Space'.
[724] See, for example, ibid. And with regard to Islam and digital media, see Gary R. Bunt, *Virtually Islamic: Computer-Mediated Communication and Cyber Islamic Environments* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000).
[725] See Chapter 5.
[726] Bunt, *Hashtag Islam*, at 15.

respects, researchers should move beyond historical-linear references and turn more attention toward challenging questions, such as pursuing more explained understanding of how the impact on religion is ultimately generated. This is especially important for further studies on Salafism and digital media.

In studying Salafism, one cannot help but notice that, at a fundamental level, Salafism raises the modern spectacle—if not a product—of some 'real Islam'. At which point, young Muslims in search of their faith naturally gravitate toward 'real' over 'false'. Consequently, the real-Islam construct generates an ideological product that is likened to 'a market', as Adraoui words it.[727] To succeed in this market and in 'claiming to supply products that represent the true Islam', Salafists employ strategies of *oppositionality* to distinguish their product and to 'undermine' competing, if not flawed, ideologies within contemporary Islam. 'For this purpose, they develop sales strategies, expand their communication abilities and launch advertisement campaigns, claiming they alone are capable of fulfilling their consumers' needs'.[728] At the forefront of the strategies, digital media appears prominent.

It should also be mentioned that the rise of the profile of Salafī ideologies, particularly in the post-Arab Spring world, has been well observed by scholars, some of whom see a 'triumph' of Salafism in seeking authoritative control over the concept pure representations of Islam as embodied in the first three generations of Islam.[729] The appeal of Salafism, particularly among 'second-generation Muslim youngsters' in the West today, stems from their rejection of 'the mosque-centered Islam of their parents' and their subsequent 'search for a "pure," "de-localized" and "deculturalized" Islam', and find

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[727] Mohamed-Ali Adraoui, 'Salafism in France: Ideology, Practices and Contradictions', in Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (London: Hurst, 2009a), 364–83, at 366.
[728] Ibid.
[729] Lauziere, *The Making of Salafism,* at 199.

themselves attracted to Salafism and its austere and straightforward discourses'.[730] Hence, the 'growth and spread of Salafism' is in itself a religious development that will likely gain ascendance in the near future, perhaps as part of the 'resurgence of Islam' in general, as Sedgwick has suggested.[731] Thus, in part, it is the simplicity of the message of Salafism that renders it appealing especially for young Muslims, and the direct and highly personalized conveyance of the ideology in digital space contributes to its attraction. From a theological point of view, the message (a neo-Ḥanbalī reductionist construction of the image of the generations of the pious forbears) makes the Salafī ideation plain and disarming: for example, the appeal of simplicity is in such evocations of 'describing God as He described Himself and as the Prophet described Him (that is, by affirming divine attributes in their plain sense, without alteration, metaphorical interpretation, denial, and anthropomorphism and, above all, without modality)'.[732] For Haykel, the matter is simpler and less of a matter of deculturalized Islam and such; in his view, 'it is Salafism's claims to religious certainty that explain a good deal of its appeal, and its seemingly limitless ability to cite scripture to back these up'.[733]

In the West, the process of embracing Salafism evolves through a stage in which young, secular Muslims undergo a *conversion* and are usually first introduced to a 'peaceful' message of Islam before being convinced of Salafism.[734] The main distinction between Salafī messaging and other Muslim discourses is associated with what is called 'Salafi clarity'. The youth become convinced through demagogic rhetoric of Salafism embodying 'true Islam', one which epitomizes the religion in 'its pristine form'.[735] Thus, there is an appeal in the message of 'Salafi Puritanism' in the manner in which it permits

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[730] Dick Houtman, Paul Heelas, and Peter Achterberg, 'Counting Spirituality? Survey Methodology after the Spiritual Turn', *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion: Volume 3: New Methods in the Sociology of Religion,* 3 (2012), 25–44, at 36.
[731] Mark Sedgwick, 'Salafism, the Social, and the Global Resurgence of Religion', *Comparative Islamic Studi*es, 8 (2012), 57–69, at 62.
[732] Lauziere, *The Making of Salafism,* at 98.
[733] Haykel, 'On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action', at 36.
[734] Adraoui, 'Salafism in France', at 367.
[735] Ibid., at 366.

frustrated and alienated Muslims in 'not only opting out of society but of creating an alternative, superior community based on the unity of God'; and, in turn, the new converts to Salafism carry out the mission and assume the language of Salafī discourses in making *takfīr* (accusing Muslims of disbelief) and pointing out the heresy of non-Salafī Muslims, especially those who incline towards Sufism.[736]

The Salafī argument, moreover, as constructed through literalism, resides in the 'argument that something ought to be done because there is a Qur'anic verse or a hadith that commends or forbids it'.[737] The foundation of this approach is drawn from a 'convincing' or fair-seeming epistemological approach that the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth are the only 'legitimate sources of Islamic practice', though most scholars in Islamic intellectual history 'rejected these arguments, holding that individual texts must be understood with a much larger textual, intellectual, and social context', a principle that most purist Salafī devotees tend to shun.[738] The question of identity (perhaps the question of identity crises) among young Muslims in the West contribute to their attraction to Salafism, given the appeal of *immediacy* seen in a literalist approach to Islam. For disenfranchised Muslim youth in Western Europe who seek out 'existential answers' find the 'absolute Islam' of Salafism to be compelling.[739]

Salafism is among the 'various Islamic trends' that are said to 'operate in a highly competitive marketplace for religious seekers'. As such, there is pressure on Salafism to stand out from among the competing ideologies 'when addressing issues and concerns shared by wider Muslim communities.[740] Furthermore, competing for *religious authority* is integral to the branding, as it were, of Salafism and its claims to represent real or pure Islam. Thus, the role of digital media in the authority question warrants greater attention

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[736] Ibid.
[737] John Walbridge, *God and Logic in Islam: The Caliphate of Reason* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), at 175.
[738] Ibid.
[739] Adraoui, 'Salafism in France', at 367.
[740] Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists,* at 93.

in academia, as inevitably new digital spaces and applications introduce elements not yet anticipated. Thus, competition for representing Islam, then, is at least as important as articulating the core beliefs of an ideology. As Jackson frames the issue, within his discussion on Islamophobia in the United States, the question for Muslims in America, for example, of 'what does it mean to be an American' will persist.[741] Perhaps for many Muslims, the issue of a 'collective identity construction' is in play. This descriptor occurs in the context of 'contesting religious, political and nationalist movements'.[742] Thus, the importance of contesting Salafī messaging is increasingly intertwined with and strategically reliant upon digital media platforms. The analyses of the Salafī texts presented in this study hope to contribute to a better understanding of simple-seeming but ideological-laced texts that are part of the allure of intra-Islamic competition for souls.

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[741] Sherman Jackson, 'Muslims, Islam(s), Race, and American Islamophobia', in John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin (eds.), *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 93–108, at 93.

[742] Cezar M Ornatowski, 'Rhetoric and the (Re)Constitution of Collective Identity: The Example of Poland', in Ton Van Haaften and Henrike Jansen (eds.), *Bending Opinion: Essays on Persuasion in the Public Domain* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2011), 291-305, at 291-92.

Chapter 9

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Appendix

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Aḥkām: Rules or rulings derived from the principal sources of Islamic law. Rulings describe the virtue or vice of acts. Some acts, for example, are obligatory, while some are proscribed.

Ahl al-Ḥadīth: Scholars of the traditions and statements of the Prophet Muḥammad, as narrated and passed down from generation to generation. It may also refer to schools of thought that rely mainly on hadith to generate legal rulings and positions, and tend to dismiss intellectual or reason

Ahl al-Sunna: The people who follow the normative practices of the Prophet Muḥammad. The term is usually used to distinguish

Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa: Similar to Ahl al-Sunna, with the addition people who belong with the group of people who have fidelity to the practices of the Prophet Muḥammad and the early generations of Islam.

ʿAqīda: Central tenants of belief of Islam, also defined as the articles of faith, including: belief in the oneness of God, the unseen (particularly angels), scriptures, prophets and messengers of God, the Hereafter, and destination. There are variant schools of theology on Islam's creeds, over which there is a history of debate.

Asharism: A widespread creedal school of thought in Sunnī Islam that, for the purpose of this study, permits the metaphoric interpretation of God's attributes of God.

Bāṭil: An act or agreement that is considered invalid—like ritual Prayer performed without ablution or a contract that includes a proscribed matter.

Baraka: A blessing or providential benefit bestowed upon people by God.

Bidʿa: Heretical innovation. Usually, a ritual act or belief that has no valid precedence in Islam, particularly the first three generations of Islam.

Dhikr: The remembrance of God, usually articulated as brief but repeated words or phrases of glorification. In Sufism, the remembrance is usually a formal part of a litany performed every day.

Dīn: Religion, often used in polemics to emphasise the importance of an ideology in preserving the *religion*.

Fāsiq: An ungodly, corrupt person, whose beliefs or deeds are claimed to be in contradistinction of religious norms.

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Fiqh: The study of the details of sacred law and their various rulings and categorizations.

Fuqahā: Scholars of law or legists who specialize in extracting precepts (or rulings) from the sources of Islamic law.

Ḥadīth: Statements and normative practices of the Prophet Muḥammad as they have been transmitted over the generations.

Ḥajj: Pilgrimage, one of the five canonically required rites of worship in Islam, wherein Muslims travels to Makkah and nearby sacred sites to perform certain rituals. By extension, the term has come to mean the ritual visitation of a shrine of a saint.

Ḥarām: An act that is forbidden according to Islamic law, such that the performance of anact is sinful and may call for punishment.

Ḥizb: Political or religious party or civic association. *Ḥizbiyya* refers to sectarian divisions and loyalties.

Ḥijāz: The western strip of the Arabian Peninsula, in which Islam's sacred cities are located: Makkah and Madina.

Ḥukm: Rule derived from the sources of Islamic law. See *aḥkām*.

Ijtihād: The exertion of qualified scholars to reach an independent legal judgment based on scriptural sources and methodological approaches of the derivation of rulings. See also *mujtahid*.

ʿIlm: Knowledge of various kinds and of various fields, but usually beneficial knowledge associated with the affairs and sciences of religion.

Imām: Prayer leader for congregational ritual prayers in Islam. It may also refer to the leader of a tribe or nation.

Jahmiyya: A school of theology that essentially denied that God has distinct attributes. However, the attributes of God are unequivocally alluded to in the Qur'ān and in the statements of the Prophet Muḥammad. Other schools of theological thought have variant views on what the attributes or names of God truly mean, but they do not deny them, for to deny their very existence is considered heretical.

Jinn: Sometimes translated as 'spites' or 'spirits'; these are normally unseen creatures made of smokeless fire.

Kaʿba: Located in the sacred mosque in Makkah, the cubed-shaped structure serves as the point of direction toward which observant Muslims stand when performing the ritual prayer.

Kalām: Theology or dialectical theology that often refers specifically discussions on God, His attributes, and His relationship with creation.

Khuṭbah: Sermon or formal talk. More commonly, it is the formal sermon of the Friday congregational prayers.

Kufr: Disbelief or any act or creed that is considered in violation of Islam's articles of faith. It is most serious accusation a Muslim can level against another Muslim, for it suggests that the person is no longer within the theological confines of the religion and is no longer part of the community of the faithful.

Makrūh: An act or deed that is considered *reprehensible*, which one is discouraged from performing, although there is no sin or punishment associated with its performance per se.

Mandūb: A recommended act in which one is encouraged and rewarded for its performance, although there is no punishment associated with its abandonment.

Manhaj: The way or method of Islam. More specific, it refers to the methodology employed to interpret the scriptural sources of Islam.

Maʿrifa: Experiential knowledge, usually knowledge of God. It is knowledge that is achieved through constancy in the remembrance of God, as opposed to philosophical knowledge and discursive knowledge.

Mawlid: The birthday of the Prophet Muḥammad or the celebration thereof. The term may also refer to the celebration of a saint. The practice has ritual significance, which has attracted the ire of Salafism for representing an innovated act of worship that has no precedence.

Mufassir: A qualified exegete or scholar of Quran interpretation.

Muḥaddith: A scholar of Ḥadīth, the statements, normative practices, and deeds of the Prophet Muḥammad,

Mujtahid : A scholar who is qualified to make independent legal judgments, with the assumption of rigorous investigation.

Mutakallim: A scholar of Islamic theology.

Muʿtazilites: A school of theology that started in Basra (in present-day Iraq) in the second century of Islam. The Muʿtazilites hold to a rather strict rational interpretation and view of religion, often privileging reason over textual proofs from the Quran and Ḥadīth.

Mandūb: An act that Islamic law *recommends* as virtuous, though neglecting it does not result in sin.

Nafl: Any supererogatory act of worship, an extra devotion beyond canonical obligations, that one is encouraged to perform, though there is no blame in abandoning it, such as the ritual prayer late at night.

Qubūriyya: A pejorative word to signify 'grave worshippers', a charge that Salafīs accuse Ṣūfīs of when visiting graves of their *shaykhs*.

Ramaḍān: The ninth lunar month of the Muslim calendar in which able Muslims are obliged to fast from dawn to sunset.

al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ: The first three generations of Muslim history, which includes the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad and two following generations.

Salafism: A modern movement and ideology that seeks to purify contemporary Islam of syncretic practices and creedal views that are considered to be heterodox or heretical innovations.

Ṣalāt: The prescribed ritual Muslim Prayer that is performed five times a day.

Sharīʿa: The entirety of religious values, laws, ethics that guide the Muslim way of life. Sharīʿa often references more specifically Sacred Law.

Shirk: Idolatry, associating other gods with God or attributing God-like attributes to people or things.

Sufism: Often defined as the mystical aspect of Islam, that encourages constancy in observing the remembrance of God and, often, refraining from the worldly affairs. (*Taṣawwuf* in Arabic.)

Ṣuḥba: Visiting and spending time with the Shaykh of a Sufi order in order to derive spiritual benefit from him or her.

Sunna: The second source of Islamic law after the Quran. It encompasses the deeds, statements, and practices of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Tabarruk: Seeking blessings from someone or something, which includes seeking blessings in the proximity to a living saint or at the grave or shrine of an interred saint. It is one of the loci of disputation between Salafism and Sufism, since the former accuses practitioners of such an act of seeking blessing from a source other than God.

Ṭahāra: Ritual purity that people acquire through formal ablution and bathing.

Takfīr: Accusing Muslims of disbelief because of creedal beliefs that are considered outside the articles of faith of Islam.

Tafsīr: Commentary or exegesis on the Quran.

Taqlīd: Blind or mere imitation in which one follows the ruling of a scholar without inspection.

Ṭarīqa: A formal order of Sufism, such as al-Qādiriyya, al-Naqshabandiyya, al-Shādhiliyya, al-Tijāniyya, and others.

Tawassul: The act of seeking intercession with God through the aegis of the Prophet Muḥammad or saint.

'Ulamā': The class of scholars in every generation in Muslim intellectual history, who specialize in one or several Islamic sciences, such as, law, jurisprudence, scriptural exegesis, theology, Arabic language, rhetoric, family law, and more. Also, they are scholars of the Quran and Ḥadīth.

Ummah: The universal global community of Muslims.

Walī: Literally, a friend or ally. In the context of religious standings, a *Walī* is someone who is a Friend of God, also referred to in translation as a *Saint*.

Wird: A specific litany of worship that Ṣūfī orders oblige upon their followers. (Plural is *awrād*.)

Zakāt: One of the five canonical pillars of Islam, in which an adult Muslim man or woman must pay alms or charity for the benefit of the needy. If one is unable to pay, then he or she is exempt.

Zawiyya: Ṣūfī lodges or other places of gathering for the purpose of performing litanies (*awrād*) of remembrance (*adhkār*) and religious practices such as the Mawlid and *tawassul*.

Ziyāra: The act of *visiting* someone or someplace. The essential linguistic connotation of *ziyāra* is not associated with doctrine or ritual practice, since the simple act of *visiting* may have entirely social motives of no doctrinal or ideological import. However, in the context of Sufism and its performances, *ziyāra* is the practice of visiting a living saint or his or her grave, for the purpose of gaining providential grace or blessing.