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American Muslim Networks and Neotraditionalism

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Religious Studies

by

Brendan Peter Newlon

Committee in charge:

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American Muslim Networks and Neotraditionalism

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Brendan Peter Newlon

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The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was reported to have said, “one who has not thanked the people has not thanked Allah.” I owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude to my parents and family, my patient wife, and my daughter who is still too young to have patience. I could never have done any of this without the wise guidance of all of my teachers, both in and out of the academy.

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VITA OF BRENDAN PETER NEWLON

June 2017

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ABSTRACT

American Muslim Networks and Neotraditionalism

by

Brendan Newlon

American Muslims are diverse in many ways, but is it appropriate to imagine American Muslims as one community, or are there really several different communities of American Muslims? If there are several, are there senses in which the social and aesthetic expressions of such communities could be referred to as “American Islam”? What follows is a multifaceted approach to answering these questions. This dissertation demonstrates that several distinct communities of American Muslims can be identified, and introduces one of these communities, which I refer to as the “Neotraditional” Muslim community, in detail.

Chapter One, *The Paths of Neotraditionalism*, introduces several ways the term “neotraditonal” and its variants have been used in scholarship and clarifies how the term will be used in the present work. Chapters Two through Four demonstrate

the application of a novel three-part theoretical approach to identifying the center and boundaries of any community through analysis of its social discourse, networks, and aesthetics. This model provides a basis from which to objectively conclude that Neotraditional American Muslims constitute a clearly defined community that is distinct from other communities of American Muslims. In light of this, scholars studying Islam or religions in America are urged to recognize the Neotraditional community and other communities described below as distinct, and to account for the differences between them for the purpose of analysis in all future research relating to American Muslims. In addition to underscoring how this dissertation contributes to scholarship on Islam in America and American religious diversity, the concluding chapter suggests directions for future research and anticipates significant aspects of how the Neotraditional American Muslim community is likely to develop in the coming decades.

Although describing core features of the Neotraditional American Muslim community is the primary focus of this dissertation, the three-part theoretical approach it models for identifying a community through analysis of its discourse, networks, and aesthetics offers a programmatic means to identify and describe a community which will be of general interest to any scholar in the Humanities or Social Sciences.

Preliminary Notes on Style

I. Transliteration

Throughout this dissertation I will provide transliteration of Arabic words in a simplified style based on the American Library Association – Library of Congress (ALA-LC) standard, omitting diacritical marks. This results in a transliteration which should allow words to be recognizable to any reader already familiar with Arabic language or the technical terms of Islamic Studies, even if correct pronunciation may not be immediately apparent to readers who haven't studied Arabic. For example, the pronunciation of *hujjah al-Islam* (“Proof of Islam,” a traditional honorific title often used to refer to Imam Ghazali) might be better approximated as *hujjatul Islam*, but providing an intuitive guide to pronunciation for readers who may never need to actually speak the term aloud has not been made a priority here. Chinese words are represented in the *hanyu pinyin* transliteration style in lieu of Chinese characters, omitting tonal markings.

Occasionally, the communities discussed in this study make deliberate use of alternate transliteration styles as a form of group signaling. In such cases I have attempted to retain the relevant orthographic variation while also highlighting the symbolic significance of those choices within the text. I have included a few examples of this phenomenon in the chart below, but this topic will be discussed below in Chapter 4, *Aesthetics of Culture*.

Examples of signaling group belonging through spelling conventions:	
Neotraditional	Salafi
Hadith	Hadeeth
Rasul	Rasool
Shaykh	Sheikh

II. Pluralizing Arabic in Transliteration

Throughout this dissertation, I have used what could be called chimerical plurals or English plurals. Thus, transliterated Arabic words are usually pluralized by adding an “s” at the end instead of transliterating the correct Arabic plural form of the word. For example, *madhhab* is pluralized below as *madhhabs* instead of *madhahib*, *hadith* is written as *hadiths* instead of *ahadith*, and *shaykh* is written *shaykhs* instead of *shuyukh*. Where Arabic plurals appear in quotations, I have silently replaced them with the English plural form to preserve readability. This is to make the words and their relationships more recognizable to an English-language readership, so that a plural will not be misinterpreted as being an unrelated word. It also accurately reflects the way these words are often casually pluralized by English-speaking Muslims in speech and writing that uses Arabic loanwords.¹

1. Oxford Dictionaries online comments that “the plurals of words which have come into English from a foreign language such as Latin or Greek often have two possible spellings: the foreign plural spelling and an English one. For example, you can spell the plural of aquarium (from Latin) as either aquaria (the Latin plural) or aquariums (the English plural).” This phenomenon is therefore an indication that these words and their attending conceptual world have “come into English” and may be considered naturalized within the English-speaking culture of the speaker. “Plurals of Nouns - Oxford Dictionaries,” accessed March 15, 2016, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/words/plurals-of-nouns>.

III. Dates

Dates are always given in terms of common era (CE) rather than according to the Islamic *hijri* calendar unless otherwise specified.

IV. Religious Titles

I have followed the guidelines of the Chicago Manual of Style (16th edition) in referring to religious figures with their titles, capitalizing the title when used to name the person but not when used as a descriptive noun. For example, “Imam Zaid serves as the imam of his mosque.”

V. Designating Muslim Modes

To distinguish between religious modes as discreet community phenomena that can be named and described, I have opted to capitalize the terms Neotraditional, Salafi, and Progressive-Muslims and their derivatives.

I have hyphenated the term Progressive-Muslims in this work to distinguish it as a single term designating the religious mode of a contemporary Muslim community. This was necessary so that it would not be mistakenly read as an adjective-noun construct. In other words, when I use the term Progressive-Muslims, the reader should understand that it is not my intention to describe a group of Muslims as being “progressive” or championing “progressive” values. Rather, this

refers to a label coined by a particular Muslim community which expresses the *desire* to be thought of by an audience as embracing progressive values. The values in question and what exactly makes them “progressive” is a core theme of that community’s self-identifying discourse.

The exception to the above is when these terms appear in quotations from other authors. In that case, I have left the terms as they appeared in the original citation. The reader should note that these terms and their meaning are central matters of contention between the Muslim communities who use them as well as between scholars who may intend meanings that differ from the way I have used the terms; some of these differences are addressed in detail in Chapter 1, *The Paths of Neotraditionalism*.

VI. Capitalization for Technical Vocabulary

I have used capitalization in other places to distinguish a word being used in a specific sense within this dissertation from its common usage. For example, to describe exemplary roles within the Neotraditional network, I have written “Founder,” “Hero,” and other terms with a capitalized initial letter to indicate that these words have been used to describe specific archetypes within the context of a network, and not in the sense in which someone might be called a founder or hero more generally.

Introduction – Muslim Identities and Communities

In the last decade, it has become common to acknowledge that American Muslims are extraordinarily diverse, but is it appropriate to imagine American Muslims as one community, or are there several different communities of American Muslims?² If there are several, are there senses in which the social and aesthetic expressions of such communities could be referred to as “American Islam”? What follows is a multifaceted approach to answering these questions. This dissertation demonstrates that several distinct communities of American Muslims can be identified, and introduces one of these communities, which I call the “Neotraditional” Muslim community, in detail.

In Chapter One, *The Paths of Neotraditionalism*, I introduce several ways the term “neotraditional” and its variants have been used in scholarship and clarify how the term is used in the present work. In Chapter Two, *Discursive Worlds*, I introduce the major topics of contention by which Neotraditionalism and other modes discursively produce a communal identity in contrast to the identities of competing modes. Although communities take oppositional stances on a variety of topics, the main issues addressed here are core concepts like the nature of religious orthodoxy, sources of authority, and meaning of Islamic tradition. Chapter Three, *Community*

2. C.f. Gallup Inc, “Muslim Americans Exemplify Diversity, Potential,” *Gallup.com*, accessed May 6, 2017, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/116260/Muslim-Americans-Exemplify-Diversity-Potential.aspx>.

Networks, introduces public affiliations and social structures which simultaneously reflect the activity of a Muslim community and function as a means to establish and maintain that community. In Chapter Four, *Aesthetics of Culture*, an aesthetic approach to sociology is proposed as a way to characterize a community through the aesthetic symbols and expressions members use to signal community belonging. The concluding chapter discusses how this dissertation contributes to scholarship on Islam in America, suggests directions for future research, and anticipates some aspects of how the Neotraditional Muslim community may develop in the coming decades.

Although describing core features of the Neotraditional community is the primary goal of this dissertation, the three-part model developed in the following chapters to identify a community through analysis of its discourse, networks, and aesthetics is also significant. Any of these three approaches alone could provide an independent basis for distinguishing separate communities from among the whole pool of research subjects. However, this dissertation demonstrates that each approach is capable of uncovering the same fault lines between separate communities by vastly different means. Doing so provides a compelling validation of the need to recognize the Neotraditional community and the other communities described below as distinct, and to account for the differences between them for the purpose of analysis in all future research relating to American Muslims.

I. Muslim Representations: “Terror Babies” or “Happy Muslims”?

In 21st century American and global discourse, Muslims have often been featured in terms of us-vs.-them dichotomies, and even as belligerents in a brewing “clash of civilizations.” In a sense, Muslims in general have come to be represented as what Benedict Anderson called an imagined community, and one which plays a central role in much of contemporary global identity discourse, especially through the dynamics of minority-majority social tensions in multicultural societies.³

A part of this discourse involves the use of hyphens in describing the identities of Muslims in America. “Muslim-Americans” are imagined as possessing only qualified identities and partial belonging. They are imagined in contrast to other, implied “(True) Americans” whose identities do not require hyphens. This can be compared with ethnicity discourse in modern China, where references to Hui Chinese Muslims and other ethnic minorities were used as a discursive device to construct the contemporary idea of Han Chinese identity and nationalism.⁴ Dru Gladney has described how this process of deploying representations of minority groups to construct majority national identity has been critical in the national identity discourse of a number of societies.⁵ The use of Muslim representations as a counterpoint against which to construct European and American identities also has a

3. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 2006).

4. See Brendan Newlon, *Hui Muslims and the Minzu Paradigm* (Santa Barbara: University of California, Santa Barbara, 2013), <http://goo.gl/MdmKBs>.

5. See Dru C. Gladney, *Making Majorities: Constituting the Nation in Japan, Korea, China, Malaysia, Fiji, Turkey, and the United States* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

long history: Sophia Arjana described the history of Muslim “monster” representations in European and American discourse, and Timothy Marr addresses tropes in 18th and 19th century popular discourse that defined American culture and values vis-a vis Muslim cultures and Islamic values.⁶

In recent decades, the same kind of oppositional discourse has been popularized by Huntington's “Clash of Civilizations” thesis, and it has become central to American identity discourse through the messages promoted by media outlets such as Fox News. Other media producers, such as Comedy Central's programs *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, aggressively challenged the culture clash narrative and highlighted the role of such representations in the spread of Islamophobia, Antisemitism, racism, and other forms of bigotry and discrimination. At the heart of these representations and the bigoted “clash ideology” which Huntington popularized is the unspoken question, “what does it mean to be an American?” With alarming frequency, the answers offered in response to this question could be summarized in a phrase: “not Muslim.” The perception that American cultural identity is existentially challenged by the Muslim other drives Islamophobia, but a similarly bigoted nervousness about the future of European societies is more tense because of the higher relative proportions of recent immigrants to European countries and the ghettoization of immigrant enclaves in European cities. While my dissertation will focus on Muslim Neotraditionalism in

6. See Sophia Rose Arjana, *Muslims in the Western Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Timothy Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

the context of America, the globalization of Muslim identity discourse will oblige me to sometimes include information as it moves among people without regard for national boundaries, and the phenomenon of translocal communities will also be addressed below.

In 2010, Texas Republican congressman Louie Gohmert raised an alarm and proposed that the 14th Amendment should be changed to no longer grant automatic citizenship to babies born in the United States. The basis for his proposal was an unsubstantiated theory that Al-Qaeda terrorists were plotting to send pregnant women to deliver babies in the U.S. and then train those “terror babies” to (...eventually, decades later...) carry out terrorist attacks against Americans. The uncritical assumptions implicit in his argument are, firstly, that there exists a clash between America and Al-Qaeda (read: “Islam”) that will continue for at least another generation, and secondly, that Muslims are destined from birth to cause problems for America. This is a striking instance of *clash ideology* as an unconscious premise at play in identity politics, and how such ideologies can affect American politics. As a counterexample, consider the 2014 YouTube video “Pharrell - Happy British Muslims! #HAPPYDAY” that sparked a viral video phenomenon worldwide. These videos feature the song “Happy” by Pharell and show images of smiling Muslims – many of them prominent religious teachers or community leaders – singing along, dancing, or walking in rhythm with the song. Beyond the song itself and the images, the video contained no additional overt statements. The simplicity of the message

sparked a global response, with Muslims around the world uploading videos of similarly “Happy Muslims” in their own countries and communities. The depiction of Muslims as ordinary human beings out having fun in recognizable public venues challenged the often dehumanizing “clash” representations, and generally avoided controversy by not proposing any limited or specific representation of Muslims in its place. However, “terror babies” and “happy Muslims” are both two-dimensional representations, and neither provides any substantial insights about Muslim communities.

In recent years, new modes of identity expression have been challenging the vision that being American should necessarily be understood in contradistinction to being Muslim. Instead of relating Islam to a “mainstream American” identity, these identities engage with American subcultures. Often these new American Muslim identities are identified through labels that do not make use of hyphens, and therefore reflect simultaneity and integration rather than conjunction or hybridity. For example, coining the term “Mipsterz” suggested a lifestyle and cultural aesthetic that is simultaneously Muslim and hipster – and wholly American.⁷ A similar aesthetic is at play in the term “Muppies,” used as a hip abbreviation for “Muslim urban professionals.”⁸ By engaging with recognized American subcultures, young

7. “Mipsterz - Muslim Hipsters - Home,” accessed May 6, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/Mipsterz/>; The Mipsterz identity was popularized by a video on YouTube, which, like the “Happy Muslims” trend, featured images of Muslims having fun in public to the soundtrack of a popular song without adding any explicit commentary. See *Somewhereinamerica #MIPSTERZ -By Nad-*, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-93VGjL3S4&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

8. “Muslim Urban Professionals - Muppies - Home,” accessed May 6, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/MuslimUrbanProfessionals/>.

Muslims are able to avoid positioning themselves in relation to imagined hegemonic identities. Instead, they engage with a flexible space in America's cultural diversity and pluralism. The discourse of pluralism, which has historically been a distinguishing feature in American national identity discourse, allows Muslims to express religious identities as belonging to America's cultural mosaic, rather than as its antithesis.

Recalling popular discourse about terror babies, anti-Sharia laws, Happy Muslims, Mipsterz and Muppies helps to set the stage for a conversation about Muslims in the social context of contemporary America. However, while all of these can be considered entries into American Muslim identity discourse and may involve labeling various real or imagined groups of Muslims, none of those groups has developed to the extent that it can be said to represent a Muslim community.

II. History of Religions and Visions of Community

This dissertation addresses the nature and significance of community and society, which is a longstanding question in the area of History of Religions. Émile Durkheim considered society to be “a *sui generis* reality [...] created when individual consciences interact and fuse together to create a synthetic reality that is completely new and greater than the sum of its parts.”⁹ Max Weber accepted the basic distinction made by Ferdinand Tönnies between community and association,

9. “Durkheim, Emile | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy,” accessed March 4, 2017, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/durkheim/>.

proposing that community is “based on a subjective feeling of the parties, whether affectual or traditional, that they belong together,” while an association “rests on a rationally motivated adjustment of interests or a similarly motivated agreement, whether the basis of rational judgment be absolute values or reasons of expediency.”¹⁰ James Brow cited Weber in proposing a narrow definition of community as “nothing more or less than this subjective state. The sense of belonging together typically combines both affective and cognitive components, both a feeling of solidarity and an understanding of shared identity.”¹¹

William Jordan adapted a similar understanding of community, but described it as expressly religious:

The creation of relationships and the building and extension of community[...] is ultimately a religious task in the fundamental sense that religion is the art and discipline of dealing with the problems of relationship at the psychological and spiritual levels.¹²

This point goes beyond the discussion of what community *is* (i.e. as a noun) to suggest a question about *how* community *is practiced* (i.e. as a verb). This dynamic conception recalls Marcel Mauss's concept of community as a social system maintained through highly ritualized institutions of exchange.¹³ Jeffrey Alexander,

10. Max Weber, Guenther Roth, and Claus Wittich, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* [First Ed. 1921] (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 40–41; C.f. Ferdinand Tönnies and Charles P Loomis, *Community & Society (Gemeinschaft Und Gesellschaft)* [First Ed. 1887] (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1957).

11. James Brow, “Notes on Community, Hegemony, and the Uses of the Past,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (1990): 1.

12. William R. Jordan, *The Sunflower Forest: Ecological Restoration and the New Communion with Nature* (University of California Press, 2003), 56.

13. C.f. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1950).

who, like Mauss, was a follower of Durkheim, described the performative exchanges between individuals that express the structures of a community, but his focus was on symbolic rather than material exchanges.¹⁴ Alexander's performative approach to interaction rituals and their construction of social norms was adapted from Erving Goffman's research on face-to-face behavior from the perspective of social psychology.¹⁵

All of these theorists contributed to prevailing ideas of what community is, how or why communities form, and the outward manifestations of community as expressed through human behavior, such as by giving gifts or interacting with one another in socially prescribed ways. This dissertation developed continuously through reading the works of classical and contemporary scholars including those named above. The approach I have developed here is indebted to the developments in sociological theory mentioned above and relies upon them, however, it applies them in reverse. Rather than observing a community to discover its major concerns, internal structures, and symbolic expressions, I have observed conflicting concerns elaborated in social discourse, social structures forming connected and disconnected

14. Jeffrey C Alexander, *Durkheimian Sociology: Cultural Studies* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Jeffrey C Alexander, *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=316370>; Jeffrey C Alexander, "Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance Between Ritual and Strategy," *Sociological Theory* 22, no. 4 (2004): 527–73; Jeffrey C Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, and Jason L Mast, *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

15. Erving Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963); Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face to Face Behavior* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967).

networks, and divergent symbolic expressions of identity and belonging. This research found that persistent differences can be identified through each type of observation along the same social fault lines. In other words, the individuals who express one discursive position on a contended topic happen to be the same individuals who associate within one network and use the same set of aesthetic symbols to express a communal identity. At the same time, those individuals who held an opposing discursive position associated with each other within a separate network and used a different set of shared aesthetic symbols to express their communal identity. I have argued that this persistent divergence across each of these three areas of discourse, networks, and aesthetics demonstrates the existence of several distinct communities among American Muslims.

III. Modern Muslim Communities

The different communities of American Muslims described in this dissertation reflect competition among contemporary Islamic religious *modes*, or approaches to interpreting Islam and envisioning an authentically Islamic lifestyle. Each mode represents a different response to the challenges of modernity. Below, the term “modes” is often used as a shorthand to mean contemporary “modes of Islamic religiosity.” For the most part, the modes addressed below are Neotraditionalism, the Progressive-Muslims movement, and Salafism. Each of these modes, the labels used

to refer to them, and their distinguishing features will be addressed below. In my view, it would not be appropriate to say that these labels (i.e. Neotraditional, Salafi, etc.) represent groups, schools, sects, orders, or denominations. Rather, they refer to the different ways contemporary Muslim communities understand Islam and relate to Islamic tradition. Other terms from the technical vocabulary of Islamic Studies (eg. *madhhab*, *minhāj*, *ṭarīqa*, *furqah*, etc.) carry meanings and connotations that would also misrepresent the topic. Each of these modes defines itself largely through discursive contradistinction with other modes.

This dynamic of contradistinction is also what impels us to distinguish *Neotraditionalism* from *Traditionalism*, even though Neotraditionalism is essentially the uninterrupted continuation of Traditionalism in the context of modernity. However, it is only after the advent of modernity that Neotraditionalism faced the imperative of defending its normativity against religious reforms other communities have advocated in response to modern challenges. This reaffirmation of traditionalism in the face of modern alternatives has been termed Neotraditionalism in several scholarly works. I have adopted this usage here, using the term “Traditional” when describing premodern phenomena, and “Neotraditional” to highlight the reaffirmation of tradition's value in the face of choices between traditional and alternative ways.

Shaykh Abdullah bin Hamid Ali, an American Muslim scholar of Islam who teaches at Zaytuna College in Berkeley, California, offers a similar introduction to

the community I refer to as Neotraditional and describes its orientation relative to other religious modes, especially Salafism:

During the last few decades of the twentieth century, Muslims in a number of English speaking countries witnessed both the resurgence of and introduction to what has been termed “traditional Islam.” Despite having more than one iteration, the traditional Islam movement as articulated by its main exponents in the West represented a renewed commitment to and revival of the four classical Sunni schools of law (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i, and Hanbali), the “orthodox” schools of theology (Ash’ari and Maturidi), as well as the appropriation of “Sufi” practices and/or induction into one of the law-based Sufi orders which often times entailed offering fealty to a shaykh.

Notably, “traditionalism” stood at odds with and in response to the reformist efforts of certain Salafi scholars who viewed uncritical imitation (taqlid) of the Four Schools, Ash’ari-Maturidi theology, and Sufism as major obstacles to reviving their ideas of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. This was in addition to Salafi calls to eschew any hadith unworthy of the designations sahih (“authentic”) or hasan (“good”). One of the leading Salafi scholars, Muhammad Nasir al-Din Al-Albani (d. 1999), even carried out a radical reevaluation of the major hadith canon seemingly attempting to cleanse the canon of any heretical accretions.

In reaction to these challenges, “Traditional Muslims” reasserted their commitment to the classical schools of theology, jurisprudence, and virtue ethics. But, they also attempted to undermine the credibility of their Salafi opponents by underscoring that their educational credentials were insufficient for any valid claim of representing Muslim orthodoxy.¹⁶

This description is concise and specific, but not unique. In fact, Shaykh Abdullah wrote almost the same description four years earlier in 2012.¹⁷ However, in his earlier article he used the word “neo-traditionalist,” which he distinguished from

16. Zaytuna Staff, “The Place of Isnad in Islamic Education: Demystifying ‘Tradition’ -Shaykh Abdullah Ali and Shaykh Muhammad Al-Ninowy,” *Zaytuna College Blog*, December 16, 2016, <http://blog.zaytuna.edu/the-place-of-isnad-in-islamic-education-demystifying-tradition-shaykh-abdullah-ali-and-shaykh-muhammad-al-ninowy>.

17. Abdullah Ali, “‘Neo-Traditionalism’ vs ‘Traditionalism’ -Shaykh Abdullah Ali,” *Lamppost Productions*, January 22, 2012, <http://www.lamppostproductions.com/neo-traditionalism-vs-traditionalism-shaykh-abdullah-bin-hamid-ali/>.

Traditionalism in the same way that I have outlined above. Abbas Barzegar also offered a nearly identical description of “Neo-Traditionalism” in 2011.¹⁸

Another important similarity to note between the descriptions of Neotraditionalism offered by Shaykh Abdullah Ali and Barzegar is that each is presented as a matter-of-fact summary description; neither author presents the description as if anticipating that readers would be surprised by it, much less skeptical (although Barzegar did receive some critical responses to his article). This is because both authors know that most Muslims, particularly those living in America, are already familiar with what designations like (Neo)Traditional Islam and Salafism refer to, and are fully cognizant of the radical differences between these religious modes and their corresponding communities. The reason I want to highlight this point is that it hints at one of the most interesting questions that this dissertation leaves unanswered: if the existence of these different communities is common knowledge among Muslims, why has that difference been ignored in most scholarly works on Islam in America? More critically, since these communities are characterized by their mutual opposition on even the most basic issues, to what extent have the divergent trends driven by each community been obscured in research that did not distinguish between communities for the purpose of analysis? It may be considered a primary goal of this dissertation to inspire other scholars to carefully consider how to account for the differences between these communities in

18. Abbas Barzegar, “Discourse, Identity, and Community: Problems and Prospects in the Study of Islam in America,” *Muslim World* 101, no. 3 (2011): 532.

the design and analysis of future research on Islam in America.

The Paths of Neotraditionalism

Muslim communities in America are diverse in many ways. While a great deal of scholarly literature addresses some aspects of this diversity, very little is available on Muslim Neotraditionalism, which is one of the most popular modes of Islamic religiosity in the West and worldwide.

In this dissertation, I apply a three-part model of discourse, networks, and aesthetics to the study of the type of Muslim communities in America that form primarily through voluntary associations based upon shared ideas about how to interpret and practice Islamic teachings.¹⁹ It is research into this type of religious community that I believe will yield the most coherent information about trends among Muslims in America or anywhere else.²⁰ In the following sections, I will use the concept of religious “modes” to describe this type of voluntary community and introduce Neotraditionalism as the particular mode that will be the focus of this dissertation.

19. In his 1835 observations of American society, Alexis de Tocqueville commented that “as soon as several of the inhabitants of the United States have taken up an opinion or a feeling which they wish to promote in the world, they look out for mutual assistance; and as soon as they have found one another out, they combine.” He concluded that “the science of association is the mother of science; the progress of all the rest depends upon the progress it has made.” Alexis A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: The Complete and Unabridged Volumes I and II*, trans. Henry Reeve, Bantam mass market reissue / June 2004 (New York: Bantam Dell, 2004), 632.

20. The same model of discourse, networks, and aesthetics can be equally applied in studying any community that forms through voluntary association, no matter how many participants are involved or what discursive content unites them as a community.

I. Genealogy of Neotraditionalism as a Descriptive Term

The term “neotraditional” does not have an agreed upon meaning in Islamic Studies scholarship. Barzegar provides a description of American Muslim Neotraditionalism that is parallel to the sense in which I will use the term, and he underscored it as a topic deserving of future scholarship.²¹ He describes Neo-Traditionalism as “a conservatively religious mode...in direct contradistinction to the Salafi-Sunnī project in that it seeks to revive participation in the traditional Islamic sciences – inclusive of the *madhhab* system and Sūfī institutions of pedagogy and ritual.”²² Significantly, Barzegar's definition of Neotraditionalism departs from the way the term has been used in some previous scholarship.

Shepard used “neo-traditionalism” to describe the situation of a traditionalist who developed self-reflective concern for traditionalism in light of the threats of “the Western challenge.”²³ Liebman had made the same distinction in identifying “neotraditionalism” as one of four Orthodox Jewish modes of responding to modernity.²⁴ Amrajani uses “neotraditionalism” as a fundamentalist orientation that

21. Abbas Barzegar, “Discourse, Identity, and Community: Problems and Prospects in the Study of Islam in America,” *Muslim World* 101, no. 3 (2011): 532–534.

22. *Ibid.*, 532.

23. William E Shepard, “Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology,” *Int. J. Middle East Stud. International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 03 (1987): 319.

24. Charles Liebman, “Religion and the Chaos of Modernity: The Case of Contemporary Judaism,” in *Take Judaism, for Example: Studies toward the Comparison of Religions*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 149–152.

exists in opposition to “Islamic modernism” or “Islamic liberalism.”²⁵ This usage is particularly unclear because of its reliance on the assumption that fundamentalism and liberalism or modernism are necessarily opposite poles with simple meanings. To the contrary, many “liberal” Islamic opinions may be advanced as the result of what might be called a fundamentalist interpretive process. Esposito has used the term “neotraditionalism” to designate movements seeking to distinguish Islam from Western culture²⁶ and “neotraditionalists” in reference to Muslims expressing a Salafi identity.²⁷ Duderija proposed “Neo-Traditional Salafism” (NTS) as a synonym for Salafism.²⁸ I disagree with Esposito and Duderija’s formulations for three reasons: firstly, “Salafi” is already an established designation, both in Islamic Studies scholarship and in common parlance, so introducing an additional, synonymous term for it fails to provide any additional meaning, and only generates confusion.²⁹ Secondly, Salafi discourse is distinguished by its advocacy of individual and unmediated interpretation of religious source texts without regard for – and sometimes in direct opposition to – the religious opinions developed and transmitted

25. Jon Armajani, *Dynamic Islam: Liberal Muslim Perspectives in a Transnational Age* (New York: University Press of America, 2004), 12.

26. John L Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 181 (?).

27. John L Esposito, *Oxford Dictionary of Islam* ([New York]; [Oxford]: Oxford University Press, 2003), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=273112>. “Neotraditionalists.”

28. Adis Duderija, “Islamic Groups and Their World-Views and Identities: Neo-Traditional Salafis and Progressive Muslims,” *Arab Law Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (January 1, 2007): 341–63.

29. See Jonathan A.C. Brown, “Salafism,” Oxford Bibliographies, December 14, 2009, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/id/obo-9780195390155-0070>; Yasir Qadhi, “On Salafi Islam | Dr. Yasir Qadhi,” *MuslimMatters.org*, April 22, 2014, <http://muslimmatters.org/2014/04/22/on-salafi-islam-dr-yasir-qadhi/>. Brown and Qadhi discuss a range of differences among Salafi movements, but certain common features remain to justify the category, at least insofar as it will be used in this dissertation.

through traditional schools of Islamic thought or scholarly lineage. As a movement largely defined in terms of its radically anti-traditional stance, it would be misleading to describe Salafism as “(neo-)traditional”. Thirdly, since Barzegar neatly described the discursive community that is the subject of this dissertation and identified it with the label “neo-traditionalism,” the ability to use that label lends terminological convenience to my research.³⁰ I will use the term “Neotraditionalism” in a sense parallel to Barzegar's use throughout this dissertation.

I will explain my adaptation of Barzegar's “Discursive Themes” in terms of “modes” as a categorical structure for my research, and how this structure differs from existing categories that have already been used in scholarship to address Muslim diversity in America. Barzegar writes:

The aim of this essay has been to problematize the way in which the subject of Muslim diversity in America has been managed analytically and to configure a provisional framework wherein the diversity of the Muslim practices in the United States can be organized under a coherent methodological and conceptual umbrella. Such a paradigm hopes to supplement, if not challenge, existing approaches such as the immigrant/indigenous bifurcation, class analyses, sectarian demarcations and ethnic distinctions. Instead, a discourse-centered approach focuses upon patterns of language, rhetoric and practices that underlie the many ways in which Islam is constituted in the United States.³¹

In his proposal, Barzegar acknowledges that “any attempt to circumscribe a body of discourse and pigeonhole it into a contrived category will forever remain a tenuous project” due to the dynamic and shifting nature of discourse and the diversity of

30. I use the term “modes” as a way to refer to these discursive communities. Its use as a term within this dissertation is valuable as a way to distinguish this concept from other terms that have been used to describe community differences in terms of groups, movements, schools, and sects.

31. Barzegar, “Discourse, Identity, and Community,” 524.

individual opinion within the imagined boundaries of discursive engagement.³² In the broadest sense, human categories allow us to identify and describe patterns that only appear clearly when people are grouped according to one or another imagined taxonomy. These taxonomies are always a methodological tool for study and never a fixed reality for the subject, and structuring research according to one taxonomy does not negate the validity or usefulness of alternative analytic categories.

What Barzegar proposes is a taxonomy that groups people according to the patterns that appear through their voluntary discursive practices, rather than the patterns that appear, for example, in their immigration history or their ethnic heritage. As an example, Barzegar mentions the work of a contemporary scholar, Edward Curtis:

While the incorporation of African American Muslim history into Islamic history more generally is a valuable contribution to the literature, the result of such an approach nonetheless illuminates (and reifies) more the sociological category that Curtis begins with – African American Muslim – than it does demonstrate the *Islamic* dimensions involved in the continuity and change of the tradition he examines. If the great differences within the variety of black American Muslim *Islams* can all be subsumed under the sociological category of African American, then it follows that there should be something distinct and denominative about *being* African American – a conclusion Curtis actively resists given that that is in fact one of the objects of his study.³³

Important patterns can certainly be studied by grouping American Muslims according to their racial identity, and Curtis has contributed excellent scholarship through that method. Obviously, different patterns would be observed if American

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., 518.

Muslims were grouped according to their gender (with or without taking race into consideration), or according to national origin or cultural heritage even to the possible exclusion of variations related to gender. The distinguishing feature of Barzegar's discourse-based taxonomy is that it imagines a type of sociological category that people can deliberately enter or exit through discursive practices. Since membership in the various communities identified within this taxonomy is determined by active discursive engagement, I believe “modes” is a suitable term to describe these ways of relating to religion. Since this taxonomy itself reflects fundamental disagreements among Muslims, scholarship approaching Muslims in terms of *modes* will reveal trends that would be obscured in research grouping Muslims by other sociological categories like race, gender, ethnicity, age, national origin, cultural heritage, or mosque attendance.

Of course, I hope that future research will combine these taxonomies in several configurations. For example, researchers should look for discursive patterns differentiating Neotraditional Muslim women from Neotraditional Muslim men, or wealthy young African American Neotraditional Muslim women who regularly attend mosque events from wealthy young Bangladeshi American Neotraditional Muslim women who regularly attend mosque events. For such scholarship to occur, however, the Neotraditional mode first needs to be identified and described in a general study. I hope my dissertation will accomplish that.

As a religious subcategory, *modes* mirror the relationship between cultures

and subcultures (or countercultures). For members of a broad cultural group (or so imagined), subcultures are alternative modes within that culture. Just as hippies and hipsters represent subculture/counterculture identities in America, modes of Islamic religiosity such as Salafism and Neotraditionalism are alternatives for engaging Islamic hermeneutics in a modern context. Also similar to subcultures, Neotraditionalism and Salafism are each expressed through discursive practices relating to community values and group identity signaling. Furthermore, Muslims may choose to shift between modes just as an individual could “convert” from a hippie to a hipster lifestyle and demonstrate that discursively and aesthetically through expressions that signal their new identity.

This “conversion” possibility is played upon in a humorous article published by Yasir Qadhi in the popular blog MuslimMatters. In the article, “My Conversion – Admitting One's Mistakes and Moving On,” Qadhi writes allusively about his decision to convert from one to another of the “two great traditions in our times competing with one another.”³⁴ At the time, Qadhi was best known for his work creating Al-Maghrib Institute, an online Salafi education organization in competition with Neotraditional organizations like SeekersGuidance, both of which mix online content and local events to teach and promote their respective visions of Islam. The humor of the article rests in the extent to which Qadhi convinces the reader that he is writing about his decision to convert from Salafism to Neotraditionalism – without

34. Yasir Qadhi, “Yasir Qadhi: My Conversion - Admitting One’s Mistake and Moving On - MuslimMatters.org,” accessed June 7, 2015, <http://muslimmatters.org/2009/05/18/yasir-qadhi-my-conversion-admitting-ones-mistake-and-moving-on/>.

ever using either term – before the surprising irony of his final sentence: “I hereby renounce any affiliations I previously had with the PC, and am now a die-hard Mac fan.” The success of the joke’s punchline depends upon the wide readership of MuslimMatters sharing a common understanding of the tension between Salafism and Neotraditionalism as well as familiarity with the discursive tropes used to identify each which Qadhi plays upon in his writing. The fact that this kind of joke can be made indicates that Salafism and Neotraditionalism enjoy nearly universal recognition among the English-speaking Muslim readers of MuslimMatters, despite the fact that only one of those “two great traditions” has a familiar name; Salafism is a well-established label for the mode it designates, but Neotraditionalism is a well-established reality without a well-established label. This is precisely because of Neotraditionalism’s positioning as Islamic orthodoxy, so that the phrase “non-Salafi” is sufficient to denote Neotraditionalism in conversations with most American Muslims, and particularly those who connect themselves discursively with Neotraditionalism. The impression of Neotraditionalism as “classical,” “traditional,” or “normative” Islam is enhanced by the fact that it seems not to require a label, while any mode that differs from it does require one, such as Salafism or the more recent Progressive-Muslims mode.

The undeniable existence of Neotraditionalism as a reality without a name is the central argument of my dissertation. The question of naming Neotraditionalism is also a fundamental challenge for my research. The term “Neotraditional” has not

been widely established among Muslims to designate the particular mode I will study. I considered parallel terminology such as “evangelical” or “fundamentalist” as each term has been used in academic works, however, I suspected these might introduce confusion; Salafism and Neotraditionalism both position themselves, in their own ways, as evangelical and fundamentalist in the technical sense. I’m also wary of the potential connotative effects of each term on my topic, and for the same reason, I’m confident the subjects of my research would be more amenable to “Neotraditional” than they would be to either “evangelical” or “fundamentalist” as an analytical descriptor for themselves.³⁵ In fact, Abdullah bin Hamid Ali, a faculty member at Zaytuna College, described himself as neo-traditionalist and offered commentary on what he means by the term:

When I say that I am a “neo-traditionalist”, what I mean by it is that I incline towards and participate in the movement to return to the classical adherence to the schools of Islamic law (4 Sunni Schools), the study and contextualization of mainstream Sunni doctrine (viz. Ash’ari, Maturidi), and the study and practice of traditional text-based Islamic spirituality (historically referred to as Sufism).³⁶

He later adds that such an “orientation cannot rightly be called “traditionalism” because truly authentic traditionalism can only be known and practiced by those who have not been influenced by modern thinking.” This explanation, provided by a

35. I have discussed the use of this term with several Muslims who participate in the networks I have identified as Neotraditional, including some former and current students of Zaytuna College, to hear their thoughts on this terminology. Most have said that “traditional” is the term they use, however, upon hearing the definitions for “Neotraditional” used by Barzegar and Liebman, everyone I have spoken to has agreed that those definitions appropriately express their deliberate choice of traditional religious ways in the face of modern alternatives.

36. Abdullah Ali, “‘Neo-Traditionalism’ vs ‘Traditionalism’ -Shaykh Abdullah Ali,” *Lamppost Productions*, accessed February 4, 2016, <http://www.lamppostproductions.com/neo-traditionalism-vs-traditionalism-shaykh-abdullah-bin-hamid-ali/>.

leading member of the community I have identified as exemplary of Neotraditionalism, accords with the way I have used the term throughout this dissertation.

The term is a bit unfamiliar in popular discourse but, in the sense used by most scholars, “Neotraditional” is the most accurate term for the Islamic mode I will describe in this dissertation. It is particularly apt in the way it helps to distinguish certain key elements of Neotraditionalism such as its positioning as an orthodox response to challenges of modernity. Like religion itself, the category of Neotraditionalism is “created for the scholar’s analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization,” and “neither the boundaries of canon nor of community” detract from its usefulness to scholarly research.³⁷ For these reasons, I have adopted the term “Neotraditional” as the most precise technical term available for this dissertation, even though the argument could be made that the more familiar term “traditional” could be applied with equal validity by challenging the significance of “modernity” or by rejecting the claim that modernity has introduced alternatives of a type not already present in premodern times.

II. Identifying The Community

There have been many scholarly works on Islam in America, but most of

37. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, Reprint edition (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1988), xi.

these either attempt a history of Islam in America,³⁸ a general overview following ethnic demographics and key topics,³⁹ or specifically address the intersection of Islam with other social topics (such as law,⁴⁰ gender relations,⁴¹ discrimination,⁴² or popular culture).⁴³

The distinguishing features of particular American Muslim lifestyles and identities are taken up in various works. Examples include Jackson's *Islam and the Blackamerican*,⁴⁴ which addresses Islam at an intersection with Black Religion, the role of race and racialization in forming identities, and majority/minority tensions both between American Muslims and the broader American public and among different groups of Muslims. Those Muslim groups and communities are often

38. For example, see Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order*, 1 edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

39. For example, see Jane I. Smith, *Islam in America, Second Edition*, second edition edition (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2009); Edward E. Curtis IV, *Muslims in America: A Short History* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *Competing Visions of Islam in the United States: A Study of Los Angeles* (Praeger, 1997).

40. For example, see Abd Allah Ahmad Na`im, *What Is an American Muslim?: Embracing Faith and Citizenship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) which explores the relationship between American Muslim identity and the idea of citizenship or *The Unfamiliar Abode* by Kathleen Moore, on the topic of Islamic Law in the United States and Britain. ; Kathleen Moore, *The Unfamiliar Abode: Islamic Law in the United States and Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

41. For example, see Shabana Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus: Undergraduate Social Life and Identity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

42. For example, see Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg, *Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007).

43. For example, see Anne R. Richards and Iraj Omidvar, eds., *Muslims and American Popular Culture* (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2014); or, for representations of Arabs in American popular culture, see Laurence O. Michalak, *Cruel and Unusual: Negative Images of Arabs in Popular American Culture* (ADC Research Institute, 1984); for popular culture in the Muslim world, see Karin van Nieuwkerk, ed., *Muslim Rap, Halal Soaps, and Revolutionary Theater: Artistic Developments in the Muslim World* (University of Texas Press, 2012).

44. Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

identified through key differences, such as being immigrants or non-immigrant, or communities largely made up of Muslims from one or another ethnic background. Ethnic and ideological differences are among the most apparent markers that inform Muslim identity discourse anywhere in the world, but in America, most mosque communities will include members that come together despite ethnic and ideological differences simply because the local Muslim population isn't large enough to provide significant numbers of people from the same background. For these communities (and especially for younger community members and American converts to Islam), cultural diversity has become the norm.

However, especially in America, the Muslim population is diverse, so Muslims often develop networks of association that transcend the boundaries of sect, ethnicity, nationality, class, age, geographic area, or politics, relating instead through modes of religiosity that are defined through discursive practices.⁴⁵ These religious modes reflect a phenomenon of voluntary association within identity categories that are at once sufficiently well defined to be distinguishable by an informed observer and flexible enough to accommodate internal diversity and fuzzy boundaries. Few works provide an in-depth study of any of these modes and the discursive practices that provide structures of social consciousness and collective identity among communities of Muslims in America that affiliate with one or another mode. One work that did focus on ideological differences that distinguish communities was a

45. See Barzegar, "Discourse, Identity, and Community". Barzegar discussed this mode of analysis and proposes labels for several such discursive trends including "Abrahamic Americanism", "Rehabilitative Social Activism", "Salafi-Sunni", "Neo-Traditionalism", "Progressive Reformism", and "Homeland Homesick".

dissertation by GhaneaBassiri, which highlighted some of these differences, paying particular attention to the prevalence of different views among Salafi and non-Salafi mosque communities in the Los Angeles area.⁴⁶

One such mode is the deliberate preservation and reaffirmation of traditionalism in the face of modern challenges. This position has been described in scholarship as neotraditionalism.⁴⁷ In this dissertation, I will focus on a few communities that represent a Neotraditional mode of Islam, such as the online educational organization SeekersHub, Zaytuna College in Northern California, Ta'leef Collective which began in Northern California and expanded to include a branch in Chicago, and various other online and local communities. All of the communities I will study have a presence in the United States and other Western countries and also have close ties to individuals or institutions in Muslim-majority countries, but my focus will be American Muslim Neotraditionalism as a religious mode.⁴⁸ The community attached to Northern California's Zaytuna College exemplifies Islamic Neotraditionalism, and is well-suited for study because it is characterized by relatively sophisticated networks, proliferate production of discursive materials, and a self-conscious preoccupation with the nature of its own

46. GhaneaBassiri, *Competing Visions of Islam in the United States*.

47. An exemplary parallel sense of this term was developed to describe one of several modes of Orthodox Judaism in Liebman, "Religion and the Chaos of Modernity: The Case of Contemporary Judaism."

48. The conceptual terms "Western" and "Muslim-majority" are problematic and imply representations of society and history that are partisan in nature and cannot be supported objectively. However, at the risk of reifying these imagined categories, I have opted to use the terms where they provide significant convenience as a shorthand reference that I believe readers will generally understand in the intended sense.

role in modeling Neotraditional Muslim identity. In its early development, the founders and coordinators of the Zaytuna community published a series of reflective community-defining articles in Zaytuna's *Seasons* Journal, printed from 2003 until 2007.⁴⁹ *Seasons* included articles on topics ranging from what it means to be a Muslim in America, visions for how Islamic tradition can address modern challenges, and demonstrating differences of opinion that have been given an honored place within Islamic tradition. It also included poetry written by medieval scholars as well as contemporary members of the Zaytuna community, art, historical biographies, and essays relating to social justice, nature and the environment, homeopathic medicine, and interfaith dialogue. Since that time, Zaytuna's readership and following has grown into a large yet coherent Neotraditionalist network with distinctive values, aesthetics, and goals.

This dissertation will provide a detailed study of Neotraditionalism among American Muslims, and will highlight the discursive practices through which Neotraditional Muslims in America generate distinctive religious identities and communities. At the same time, it will describe, through contradistinction, some of the contours of alternative modes of Islamic religiosity in America such as Salafism, the Progressive-Muslims movement, and Secular-Reformism.

In this dissertation, I will build upon the research relating to Muslim identity categories which I presented in my M.A. Thesis. In that work, I described how Hui

49. Zaytuna Institute, "About Zaytuna," *Seasons : Bi-Annual Journal of Zaytuna Institute*. 1, no. 2 (2004).

identity shifted from being conceived as a geographical identity, then a religious identity, then a national identity, and currently exists as an ethnoreligious identity among Chinese Muslims.⁵⁰ Here, I will expand on that research by developing what Jonathan Z. Smith called a polythetic method of classification. Smith discussed the use of polythetic classification as an alternative to monothetic or essentializing models of religious group membership. In a polythetic model, attention is given to a number of characteristics that are frequently shared by group members, but which are not necessarily shared by all members, and none of which is considered an absolute determinant of group membership.⁵¹ My polythetic approach to describing Muslim Neotraditionalism attempts to present a portrait of an American religious culture that approaches community relationships in terms of community networks linked through shared discursive practices. For example, I will show that American Muslims affiliating with one or another mode of Islamic religiosity (Neotraditionalism, Salafism, etc.) tend to differ in how they engage topics such as environmental sustainability, religious legal interpretation, interfaith cooperation, civic and political activism, and even sartorial preferences.

These differences are not limited to the message, but also the medium of expression; different modes not only advocate different conclusions, but also express those conclusions in different rhetorical styles, using varying word choice, different spelling conventions for transliterated foreign terminology, and appeal to different

50. Brendan Peter Newlon, *Hui Muslims and the Minzu Paradigm* (Santa Barbara: University of California, Santa Barbara, 2013), <http://goo.gl/MdmKBs>.

51. Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 1–18.

forms of authority to support their arguments. By expressing views in a way that conforms largely to one or another rhetorical style, individuals signal their engagement with the Islamic religious mode with which the style is affiliated. This is similar to the way that engagement with different academic disciplines is signaled by following one or another citation style guide; a psychologist will follow APA guidelines, a historian follows the Chicago manual, and a scholar of literature will cite as prescribed by the MLA. In a research article addressing a topic potentially relevant to all three disciplines, the author's choice to follow one or another style guide may be the primary means to bring the research to the attention of scholars working in one or another discipline. Each of these citation styles accomplishes the same task of citation, but there is a meaningful aesthetic difference between them by which discursive communities can recognize their members. In the same way, Muslims engaging religious content through different modes signal their community affiliations through discursive and aesthetic choices, and these community signaling techniques will be discussed further below.

The existing literature on contemporary Muslim communities in America have largely overlooked these distinctions and describe American Muslims as though that label describes a group with commonalities beyond citizenship, nationality, or country of residence. Where internal variety is addressed in research on American Muslims, it is often presented in terms of the ambiguous diversity popularly ascribed to American society at large without attempting a systematic explanation for the

origins and continually evolving expressions of this diversity. The situation is similar to what would happen if a comprehensive study were done on the opinions of all authors who wrote about Carl Jung, without taking into account that some are writing from the perspective of psychology, others comparing literary themes, and still others researching the history of religions or folklore – the results of such a study would show some trends within tremendous variety. Statistics and trends summarizing research on American Muslims are meaningful and significant, but the patterns will become much more sensible if differences in religious modes are taken into account. To make this possible, it will first be necessary to produce a model that can be used to identify and describe Muslim communities that develop to engage with their religion through distinct religious modes.⁵²

This study of American Muslim Neotraditionalism and the theory developed to accomplish it will provide a model for future research investigating how religious, national, cultural or other identity groups can form voluntary communities and affiliate through networks and discursive practices that relate at a level that is more nuanced than the classical categories of 'religion' or 'nation'. In fact, these community identities are often experienced simultaneously with religious, national, cultural, sectarian, and other personal or group identities without producing any conflict. Scholars may adapt the research model used in this dissertation for future

52. A comparison could also be made to researching “American protestants” without regard for denominational differences. It would be interesting to see a parallel study describing discursive and aesthetic differences by which American protestants signal connection with one or another denomination. I do not mean to imply that the religious “modes” I will describe in this dissertation are a classification parallel to “denominations” in protestant Christianity. I will discuss this issue further below.

studies of how any religious or cultural identities become established and develop into local or global communities.

III. Overview of Theory

In the broadest sense, my dissertation proposes the existence of several distinct social categories of Muslims and describes one such category in detail. The majority of my theoretical work will be involved with circumscribing the imprecise and permeable contours of that category, describing its defining features, and explaining the sense in which the category has a social nature. I will argue that a Neotraditional identity is shaped through shared themes in discourse; it allows members to organize together into networks among individuals who may be geographically distant from each other; and it enables members to signal common group identity through common aesthetic expressions. The theories I will need to use are therefore related to three fields: *discourse analysis*, *network theory* and other models relating to social grouping, and theories dealing with identity aesthetics, including *branding* and *performance studies*.

My three-part model of discourse, networks, and aesthetics draws on a number of theoretical models, including Smith's idea of *polythetic taxonomy*, Giddens' *structuration*, Collins' *intellectual networks* and *encomia*, Latour's *actor-network theory*, Goffman's *interaction rituals*, Bourdieu's *cultural capital*,

Alexander's *social performance*, Berger and Heath's *group signaling*, and uses Benite's research on Muslim networks in China as a *comparative historical example*.⁵³ The application of each of these theories in my model will be discussed in detail in the relevant sections below.

These theories, taken together, provide a firm basis for the identification and description of a Neotraditional Muslim community identity. I will use them to describe the features of Neotraditionalism as a mode of Islamic religiosity, but I intend to also make my dissertation relevant to scholars in other fields by demonstrating how this three-part model of discourse, networks, and aesthetics provides a robust methodology for studying any voluntary community.

IV. Discourse

While Neotraditionalism is a mode of religiosity that exists as a response to modernity, antimodernist nostalgia is a salient theme within its discourse.

53. Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 1–18; Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998); Pierre Bourdieu et al., *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Pierre Bourdieu, Jean Claude Passeron, and Richard Nice, *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture* (London; Thousand Oaks; New Delhi: Sage, 2000); Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, 1st edition (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992); Jeffrey C Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, and Jason L Mast, *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Berger J and Heath C, "Who Drives Divergence? Identity Signaling, Outgroup Dissimilarity, and the Abandonment of Cultural Tastes.," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 95, no. 3 (2008): 593–607; Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2010).

Specifically, antimodernist nostalgia serves to critique features of modernity, and to promote alternative ways of living. The lens of nostalgia allows tradition to be something remembered and deliberately preferred, even while simultaneously acknowledging and understanding the realities of modernity. This is essentially what differentiates Neotraditionalism from traditionalism. While traditionalism is an unselfconscious participation in traditional social ways, Neotraditionalism recognizes that modernity has introduced numerous choices of lifestyle and ways of thinking, yet rejects those alternatives in favor of tradition. Proponents of Islamic Neotraditionalism express their preference for tradition in the face of modern alternatives with lucidity. I will refer to several scholarly works on the phenomenon of antimodernism in American religious and cultural discourse to argue that there is a relationship between American Muslim Neotraditionalism and other modern American religious and cultural movements.

Lears describes the development of antimodernism as a response to ideological and socioeconomic shifts in American culture.⁵⁴ Nostalgia for the purity and tradition of a precolonial past has been discussed by Gill in the context of representations of Native Americans⁵⁵ and by Ouyang in relation to nostalgia for tradition in Arabic literature.⁵⁶ American Muslims inherit both of these forms of

54. T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

55. Sam D Gill, *Mother Earth: An American Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). It is significant that instructors at Zaytuna College have encouraged Muslim students to read and reflect on nostalgic literature such as *Black Elk Speaks*; *Black Elk* and John Gneisenau Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, 2014.

56. Wen-chin Ouyang, *Politics of Nostalgia in the Arabic Novel Nation-State, Modernity and*

nostalgia through discursive channels connecting them with the cultural histories and imaginations of America and the Arab world.

Neotraditional nostalgia is not only a response to colonialism, but against the hegemonic claim of secularism, namely, the claim that secular and religious constitute mutually delimiting categories, and that of the two, secularism is the only rational and just foundation for a modern multicultural society. While An-Na`im argues that a degree of secularism in society is necessary for religious commitment to have value,⁵⁷ Asad calls these categories into question.⁵⁸ Wilson probes the prevalent view within Western societies that they themselves are secular societies while Muslim societies are religious, as well as the parallel phenomenon that Muslim societies often imagine both themselves and Western societies as religious, representing Islamic and Christian religious values, respectively.⁵⁹ Relevant to these opposing views are the theses of Gregory, Gaston, and Herberg, each of which insist that secularism must be understood as a product of the Protestant Reformation, and that the line between secular and religious, if there is one, remains unclear.⁶⁰ Notably,

Tradition. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013),
<http://universitypublishingonline.org/edinburgh/ebook.jsf?bid=CBO9780748655700>.

57. Abd Allah Ahmad Na`im, *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari`a* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 268.

58. Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003).

59. Erin K Wilson, *After Secularism: Rethinking Religion in Global Politics* (Basingstoke, Hampshire [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

60. Brad S Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012); K. Healan Gaston, "Demarcating Democracy: Liberal Catholics, Protestants, and the Discourse of Secularism," in *American Religious Liberalism*, ed. Leigh Eric Schmidt and Sally M Promey (Bloomington: Indiana

the separability of secular and religious is frequently denied in Neotraditional discourse (as well as in the discourse of several other modern Islamic modes), by appeal to the different conceptual boundaries implied by the word “religion” and the roughly parallel Arabic word *dīn* (sometimes written “deen”). Invariably, the argument is that the Islamic concept of *dīn* expresses a comprehensiveness that would preclude imagining life as divided into separate spheres.

Antimodernism can also be observed within Neotraditional discourse in references to traditional medicine or ways of life, wholesome or natural foods, and ecology. These themes appear frequently in lectures by Zaytuna College founders Hamza Yusuf and Zaid Shakir, as well as in the discourse of their students.⁶¹ Abdul-Matin, himself a former Zaytuna student, wrote a book arguing that ecology is a fundamental expression of Islamic ethics.⁶²

Neotraditional discourse about the valid sources and potential uses of knowledge reveals an additional nuance in its concept of antimodernism. The nostalgia felt by Neotraditionalists for Islamic traditions is expressed in conjunction with a revivalist imperative. The sacred knowledge of Islamic tradition has become

University Press, 2012); Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew; an Essay in American Religious Sociology*. (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1960).

61. Hamza Yusuf, *Fast Food Will Destroy You! Sheikh Hamza Yusuf*, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSl7FbcHLgQ&feature=youtube_gdata_player; *Planting Seeds for a Greener Tomorrow- Zaytuna College*, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAKLMmFhoWw&feature=youtube_gdata_player; *Imam Zaid Back in The Garden*, 2014, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NeYzGijm2bQ&feature=youtube_gdata_player; *Bang San Thai, San Francisco, CA (Guest: Imam Zaid Shakir) - Sameer's Eats*, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_GuyqCw_2k&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

62. Ibrahim Abdul-Matin and Keith Ellison, *Green Deen: What Islam Teaches about Protecting the Planet* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010).

diffuse, but is not lost. Grewal writes about the Neotraditionalist imperative to seek this knowledge overseas from the religious teachers deemed to be its caretakers and transmitters.⁶³ Kashani notes that the topic of sacred knowledge is a rallying discursive theme among the Zaytuna College community, and this is apparent even to the extent that the mere use of the phrase “sacred knowledge” in Islamic discourse can mark the speaker as having a Neotraditional leaning.⁶⁴

Finally, nostalgia for the perceived depth and authority of traditional knowledge and the imperative to revive it is brought to particular focus in reaction to the perceived shortcomings in Western (particularly, “Orientalist”) scholarship on Islam. As the formalization of Neotraditional educational institutions such as Zaytuna College continues, the instructors in those institutions are increasingly charging their students with the duty to set the record straight in Western academic discourse about Islam by introducing the interpretive structures of Islamic traditionalism; those structures are presented as exemplifying academic principles such as lucid argumentation, fair presentation of all relevant information, and stringent citation of sources. On the other hand, Western academic scholarship about Islam is perceived as heavily influenced by Orientalism, tainted by Eurocentrism and secular bias, and as advancing arguments based upon incomplete information or the

63. Grewal, *Islam Is a Foreign Country*.

64. Kashani, *Seekers of Sacred Knowledge: Zaytuna College and the Education of American Muslims*; Maryam Kashani, “Zaytuna Project | Maryam Kashani,” accessed September 10, 2014, <http://www.maryamkashani.com/2012/zaytuna-project>; Maryam Kashani, “IQRA’ Is READ | Maryam Kashani,” accessed September 10, 2014, <http://www.maryamkashani.com/2012/iqra-is-read-trailer>; Maryam Kashani, “When They Give Their Word, Their Word Is Bond | Maryam Kashani,” accessed March 9, 2015, <http://www.maryamkashani.com/2013/when-they-give-their-word-their-word-is-bond>.

unsystematic interpretation of data. The discourse representing traditional Islamic religious scholarship as adhering more closely to academic ideals than the current reality of Western academia is an important element in the recent discourse in terms of which Neotraditionalism expresses its own identity. I will present several primary sources expressing this theme in Neotraditional discourse, such as recorded speeches given by Zaytuna College founder Hamza Yusuf, and demonstrate the function of such discourse in the development of Neotraditional identity.⁶⁵

V. Networks

As obvious as this may seem, it is important to note that Neotraditional networks take as their central concern the propagation of religious education reflecting the Neotraditional mode of Islamic religiosity. Because of this, participants who are active in a Neotraditional network are often active in Neotraditional religious education initiatives. The most well-known and influential of those educational initiatives are Zaytuna College and SeekersHub. Korb was the first to write a book that focused exclusively on Zaytuna College,⁶⁶ but Kashani's

65. Hamza Yusuf, *Hamza Yusuf - The School System*, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7AqHxj2rF7I&feature=youtube_gdata_player; Hamza Yusuf, *Hamza Yusuf Talks about School Life in the USA*, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUjV0wuUoxU&feature=youtube_gdata_player; Hamza Yusuf, *Shaykh Hamza Yusuf - Who Are The Rightly Guided Scholars?*, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1yarE6Kwz4&feature=youtube_gdata_player; Hamza Yusuf, *Shaykh Hamza Yusuf - Islamophobia, The Crisis Of Muslims In The West*, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jL-IRMmmGCY&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

66. See Scott Korb, *Light without Fire: The Making of America's First Muslim College* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013). Korb aimed to reveal the experiences of Zaytuna College founders and students

dissertation “Seekers of Sacred Knowledge” provides the most in-depth ethnographic research available on Zaytuna College as an example of Neotraditionalism.⁶⁷ The ethnographic nature of Kashani's research limits the scope of her study to the Zaytuna campus and its surrounding community, but many of the trends she observes among Zaytuna community members can be shown to be equally descriptive of other Neotraditional communities.

I will use Giddens' theory of structuration to highlight the connections among Zaytuna scholars and associates that are simultaneously produced by and productive of a Neotraditionalist network.⁶⁸ In the setting of Neotraditional education activities, for example, the identity roles of teacher and student are mutually produced through regular participation in classes. Other leading-and-following relationships or relationships of guidance-and-trust are similarly co-produced through social rituals. Even non-participants will recognize others as embodying these roles through the ritual interactions that produced them.

Although I will refer to Zaytuna as a touchstone and exemplar, the subject of my dissertation is the phenomenon of American Muslim Neotraditionalism itself, which, as a religious mode, transcends the limits of any single group or distinct

in the first years after founding the College. He situates their experience within the context of American perceptions of Muslims after 9/11 and fearful representations of Muslims in popular American media.

67. Maryam Kashani, *Seekers of Sacred Knowledge: Zaytuna College and the Education of American Muslims* (University of Texas at Austin, 2014). Kashani avoids the term “neo-traditional” in her writing, and instead refers to “the Zaytuna school” (as opposed to “Zaytuna College”) to mean the comprehensive intellectual, cultural, and aesthetic mode of Islamic religiosity modeled by the Zaytuna community—in short, what I term “neo-traditionalism.”

68. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*.

community composed of identifiable members. I will employ Latour's model of actor-network theory (ANT) as a basis for considering Neotraditionalism in terms of networks instead of groups,⁶⁹ with emphasis on what Collins considers key features of intellectual networks,⁷⁰ including the production of *encomia* and what Goffman calls interaction rituals.⁷¹

As Latour argues, while groups have members, networks are better described as having participants, and these participants can be linked according to complex interrelationships. Networks can have branches, individual participants can be located more centrally or peripherally with respect to their connections with other individuals in the network, and each relationship can develop new connections or change the character of its connections independently without necessarily causing any fundamental change to the network as a whole. In the case of the Neotraditional network, participant roles can be observed to shift over time or in different circumstances, and these shifts are often commemorated or signaled by the use of different titles or through the performance of interaction rituals in encounters with other members.

Goffman's concept of interaction ritual can be employed as a key to interpret networked identities meaningfully. Consider the following scene: we observe one

69. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

70. Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*.

71. Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face to Face Behavior* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967).

individual enter a room where a large group is already sitting. He is older than the median age of those present, and unlike the others he wears a turban and a sash over one shoulder. He is accompanied by an entourage of associates who closely follow him into the room. Those already present in the room stand when he enters, whereupon many greet him by shaking his hand and then touching their chest at the place of their hearts or by bowing quickly to kiss his hand. Nobody sits down again until after this individual has taken a seat at the front of the room, facing everyone else. Without knowing anything else about the circumstances of this encounter, we can conclude from the interaction rituals observed that the person who arrived is someone greatly respected by those present, and that the group was specifically sitting together in anticipation of his arrival. The interaction rituals of collective waiting, conspicuous entrance, sartorial performativity, lack of parity in greetings, and relative spatial positioning indicate the beginning of a lecture or other event for which the arriving individual will be the leader. As we will see, different interaction rituals are used to performatively identify individuals differently within the Neotraditional network structure. A scene like the one above can be readily observed at the commencement of a lecture by Shaykh Farraz Rabbani or Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, but probably not at a lecture given by Sidi Ali Ataie or Ustadh Amjed Tarsin, who would be greeted with respect expressed through distinctly different forms of interaction ritual.⁷²

72. I have identified the individuals mentioned here together with the titles most frequently used to refer to them within their communities. As I will discuss below, the use of honorific titles such as *shaykha* or *shaykh*, *imam*, *sidi*, *ustadh* or *ustadha*, etc., are an important form of interaction ritual that change in certain circumstances to demonstrate dynamic relationships among individuals or between

The expression of *encomia* is vital to the production of intellectual networks of all kinds.⁷³ At one extreme, *encomia* can take the form of letters of reference or public endorsements, but are more frequently observed as informal public expressions of approval or praise. The colloquial expression “shout-out” is a fitting name for apparently unscripted praise for a person which occurs in the middle of a speech, and Neotraditional network leaders frequently recognize each other during their speeches through shout-outs. Furthermore, their shout-outs conform to recognizable patterns that express the nature of the relationship between the person speaking and the person mentioned. Speakers recognize their teachers with shout-outs that differ structurally from the way they recognize their peers or their students. This phenomenon can be interpreted as a strategy of what Giddens calls structuration because it is productive of a sense of structure that includes differential relationships among individual network participants.⁷⁴ Shout-outs can also be used to generate cultural capital through “name-dropping,” a strategy enabling a speaker to make implicit claims about the nature of their relationships with other influential figures.⁷⁵

Neotraditionalists find community through networks of affiliation that transcend geographic bounds, and I will compare Neotraditional networking with the structures and functions of other Muslim networks. Cooke and Lawrence have published an edited volume dealing with premodern and contemporary networks,

different sets of individuals within the network.

73. Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*.

74. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*.

75. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*.

including networks of intellectual exchange as well as networks organized around cultural or aesthetic preferences.⁷⁶ Cornell's contribution, "Ibn Battuta's Opportunism: The Networks and Loyalties of a Medieval Muslim Scholar," provides examples of how the 14th century Muslim traveler and scholar Ibn Battuta would be recognized as an Islamic scholar wherever he traveled by virtue of certain distinctive features of his speech and comportment.⁷⁷ I will argue that the same modes of recognition are common among participants and scholars of the Neotraditional network, and in many cases involve the same discursive and aesthetic signals by which Ibn Battuta's contemporaries recognized his status as an authoritative scholar. The continuity of these signals and interaction rituals themselves contributes to Neotraditional discourse about the nature of their interpretation of tradition, its history, legacy, and the Neotraditional claim to being the legitimate inheritor of the mantle of Islamic orthodoxy.

In the same volume, Bunt⁷⁸ and Anderson⁷⁹ contributed chapters about the function of websites and other online media in generating and sustaining virtual Islamic networks. It is significant that the Zaytuna community is based in the San

76. miriam cooke and Bruce B. Lawrence, eds., *Muslim Networks from Hajj to Hip Hop* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

77. Vincent J. Cornell, "Ibn Battuta's Opportunism: The Networks and Loyalties of a Medieval Muslim Scholar," in *Muslim Networks from Hajj to Hip Hop*, ed. miriam cooke and Bruce B. Lawrence, 1st edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

78. Gary Bunt, "Defining Islamic Interconnectivity," in *Muslim Networks from Hajj to Hip Hop*, ed. Miriam Cooke and Bruce B. Lawrence, *Islamic Civilization & Muslim Networks* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

79. Jon W. Anderson, "Wiring Up: The Internet Difference for Muslim Networks," in *Muslim Networks from Hajj to Hip Hop*, ed. miriam cooke and Bruce B. Lawrence, 1st edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

Francisco Bay Area not far from the Silicon Valley, and many members active in the community are professionals working in the internet and technology industries. Accordingly, Zaytuna's tech-savvy organizers have coined the term “digital da'wa” to describe their own use of online media to invite others to faith in Islam.⁸⁰

Benite's study of Muslim intellectual networks in early modern China provides an exemplary model describing the formation and multi-generational development of a Muslim intellectual network.⁸¹ The scholarly network he studied thrived during the 1600s-1800s, and a retrospective view of that network's origins and growth will provide this dissertation with a comparative model to show the significance of certain parallel developments occurring within contemporary American Muslim networks. Among these key developments is the recognition of one or more central teachers and lineages of local students who connect back indirectly to that teacher through links of formal teacher-student relationships. The central importance of such “living links” are a key element of Neotraditional discourse and a point of contention with other modes such as Salafism and the Progressive-Muslims movement, both of which reject the necessity of such lineages in establishing religious interpretive authority. Voices within both modes often argue against Neotraditionalism that the opinions inherited through scholarly lineages can be changed or discarded at the discretion of any individual who has access to

80. See Kashani, *Seekers of Sacred Knowledge: Zaytuna College and the Education of American Muslims*, 124–126. Several prominent members of the neo-traditionalist network are related to the concept of “digital da'wa”. Hamza Yusuf is described as a “visionary who recognized the significance of media, in both its form and content” and the phrase “digital da'wa” is attributed to digital filmmaker Mustafa Davis and to the director of Ta'leef Collective, Usama Canon.

81. Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad*.

primary religious sources such as scripture and the capacity of sound reasoning.⁸²

As Benite notes, a key feature in establishing the religious authority of the Chinese Muslim scholars he studied was their connection to foreign scholars and travel to places regarded by the network's followers as the heartlands of authentic Islam. Grewal notes that the religious authority of American Muslim scholars and community leaders is also often related to their travels abroad and connections with foreign Muslim teachers.⁸³ She notes that such travel and connection to teachers has been critical in establishing a sense of the religious authority of American Muslim scholars in the eyes of other American Muslims, and the opinions of American Muslim Neotraditional leaders such as Zaytuna College founder Hamza Yusuf are significant in determining which Muslim heartlands and what kind of foreign teachers network participants will regard as the most authentic sources of religious knowledge and spirituality. While traveling for sacred knowledge is a key theme of Neotraditionalism, there are other significant sources of authority and cultural capital within the Neotraditional network, and I will discuss these in more detail below.⁸⁴

I will refer to Alexander's works on social performance to highlight the most

82. The phrase “living links” has recently been coined by Zaytuna College as the title of a series of free, publicly accessible streamed online lectures given by authorities within their community on subjects relating to Islamic theology and law. The debate between Neotraditionalism, Salafism, and proponents of the Progressive-Muslims movement about the religious authority of past scholars will be addressed with specific examples below as a central element of Neotraditional identity discourse.

83. Zareena Grewal, *Islam Is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority* (New York: NYU Press, 2013).

84. See Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*; Bourdieu and Wacquant, *The State Nobility*. Bourdieu articulated the concept of cultural capital as the value and influential power gained with higher social status. In chapters 2 and 4, I'll discuss a variety of modes by which cultural capital is negotiated within neo-traditional networks, particularly through religious technical training and certain kinds of aesthetic expressions.

salient discursive practices modeled by leaders of the Neotraditionalist network and emulated by its constituents and audiences.⁸⁵ Berger and Heath studied the motivations for groups to retain or diverge from signaling practices to express in-group similarity and out-group difference.⁸⁶ It is by expressing and embodying these discursive practices that Neotraditionalist Muslims can recognize each other as Neotraditionalists, whether at a first meeting or within the first minutes of a recorded lecture. It is also in terms of these discursive practices that Neotraditional Muslims situate themselves socially and establish their priorities to live according to a Neotraditional mode of modern American Muslim religiosity.

VI. Aesthetics

In the context of the cultural diversity characteristic of many American Muslim communities, individuals signal their participation in distinct modes of Islamic religiosity through affiliation with discursive networks and the adoption of the aesthetics and identifying symbols of those networks. Of the literature that directly addresses aesthetics among American Muslim communities, a number of authors describe aesthetic choices as a strategy of brand marketing. Kashani has discussed the conscious aesthetic choices made by Zaytuna College leaders to

85. Alexander, Giesen, and Mast, *Social Performance*; Jeffrey C Alexander, "Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance Between Ritual and Strategy," *Sociological Theory* 22, no. 4 (2004): 527–73.

86. Berger J and Heath C, "Who Drives Divergence?"

represent the school as maintaining a recognizable “brand” image across their events, online materials, and published works.⁸⁷ The parallel she observes between religious community branding and business marketing techniques is not unprecedented; Moore has written about the general phenomenon of packaging religion as a product in America.⁸⁸ Knight has commented approvingly on the phenomenon of “celebrity shaykhs” – among whom he specifically identifies Hamza Yusuf – as marketing their own brands and selling religion as a product to consumers.⁸⁹ Finke and Stark describe religious institutions in America as existing more or less as rival products within an arena of free market competition.⁹⁰ Kosmin and Keysar make a similar claim, emphasizing instead the competition among religious ideas.⁹¹ This scholarship invites more attention to the mechanisms of brand marketing as they are understood beyond the context of religions. I will refer to works of business and marketing theory to provide relevant vocabulary even when their authors did not intend them for use as a framework for analyzing religious community aesthetics.⁹²

87. Kashani, *Seekers of Sacred Knowledge: Zaytuna College and the Education of American Muslims*; Kashani, “Zaytuna Project | Maryam Kashani.”

88. R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

89. Michael Muhammad Knight, “Michael Muhammad Knight vs. Hamza Yusuf,” *VICE*, accessed February 21, 2015, <http://www.vice.com/read/michael-muhammad-knight-vs-hamza-yusuf>.

90. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005 Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005), <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10150135>.

91. Barry A Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, *Religion in a Free Market: Religious and Non-Religious Americans : Who, What, Why, Where* (Ithaca, NY: Paramount Market Pub., 2006).

92. For example, David E Carter, *Branding: The Power of Market Identity* (New York, N.Y.: Hearst Books International, 1999); Rita Clifton, John Simmons, and Sameena Ahmad, *Brands and*

Although I am not aware of any published works on the broad topic of American Muslim aesthetics generally, there are already a number of works on the aesthetics of identity among Muslim women, with particular attention given to the concept of *hijab* (wearing a headscarf or modest dress generally). Elver discusses the hijab as a topic of political and legal discourse.⁹³ Furseth identifies hijab as a point of struggle for immigrant Muslim women seeking jobs in Los Angeles.⁹⁴ Mir identifies expectations about Muslim women's dress as central to identity discourse among female Muslim undergraduates.⁹⁵ Droogsma's work reveals a variety of views about hijab among American Muslim women.⁹⁶ Tarlo presents the place of hijab in the Islamic fashion industry.⁹⁷ Kamel identifies the incorporation of hijab into popular fashion as a means by which young American and British Muslim women express a harmonious simultaneity of their religious and national identities.⁹⁸

I will refer to publicly shared recorded videos of Neotraditional events as a

Branding (London: Profile Books, 2003), <http://www.books24x7.com/marc.asp?bookid=15671>; Torsten H Nilson, *Competitive Branding: Winning in the Market Place with Value-Added Brands* (New York: John Wiley, 1998); Mark Tungate, *Fashion Brands Branding Style from Armani to Zara* (London; Philadelphia: Kogan Page, 2008), <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10250421>; Andrew Bevan and D Wengrow, *Cultures of Commodity Branding* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2010), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=677790>.

93. Hilal Elver, *The Headscarf Controversy: Secularism and Freedom of Religion*, Reprint edition (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

94. Inger Furseth, "The Hijab: Boundary Work and Identity Negotiations among Immigrant Muslim Women in the Los Angeles Area," *Review of Religious Research* 52, no. 4 (2011).

95. Mir, *Muslim American Women on Campus*.

96. Rachel Anderson Droogsma, "Redefining Hijab: American Muslim Women's Standpoints on Veiling," *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 35, no. 3 (2007): 294–319.

97. Emma Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics, Faith* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2010).

98. Noora Kamel, "Hijabi Fashionistas and the Production of 'Seamless' Identity," accessed March 7, 2015, https://www.academia.edu/9321291/Hijabi_Fashionistas_and_the_Production_of_Seamless_Identity.

primary source for visuals capturing Neotraditional aesthetics as they are expressed by network leaders and other participants. I will discuss aesthetic choices including spatial arrangement, décor, scene framing for visual media, visual art and music, clothing and accessories, demonstrative gestures and verbal expressions that signal Neotraditional identity and contrast these examples with counterexamples of aesthetics that signal affiliation with other modes. These aesthetic choices are an important means by which Muslims recognize other Muslims who identify with the same mode or with different modes. Attention to aesthetic signals can be a practical strategy for literally judging a book by its cover or determine the mode with which a previously unknown speaker affiliates by observing aesthetic signals expressed through clothing choices, spoken phrases, or mannerisms. It is this signaling strategy that enables Neotraditionalism to enjoy a networked communal identity without the structural formality of group membership.

VII. The Next Generation

I will conclude this dissertation with a discussion of the trends and early indications of how American Muslim communities may change as the next generation matures to become participants in evolving social environments such as the Neotraditional community and communities based upon other Islamic modes.

To project the course the Neotraditional network will likely take, I will refer to historical examples of how similar Muslim networks evolved over the course of

several generations, especially the *Jingtang Jiaoyu* (“Scripture Hall Education”) network that developed in China from the 16th-20th centuries. That network was, in its own way, propagating a Neotraditional mode of Islamic religiosity and shared several discursive elements with the contemporary American Muslim Neotraditionalism. I will compare these two networks and highlight parallels in structure and discourse by referring to Benite’s detailed history of the Scripture Hall network and related scholarship by Liu and Murata focusing on the discursive themes with which it engaged.⁹⁹

Like the Scripture Hall network, American Neotraditionalism is growing as a minority religious community founded by the native students of foreign religious authorities who have returned to introduce a traditional mode of Islamic education among the people of their own culture. The discourse of both networks expressed self-consciousness about the struggles of a minority group trying to generate a shared community identity in a society dominated by the hegemony of social and religious ideas different from their own. Despite having been published in 1960, Herberg’s work on American religious minorities struggling with Protestant and secular hegemony remains relevant to this dissertation, and I will refer to it in parallel to the struggles of the Scripture Hall community to establish a Neotraditional

99. Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad*; Liu Yihong, *Hui-Confucian Dialogue: Arabian Scriptures and the Tao of Confucius and Mencius (Hui-Ru Duihua: Tianfang zhi Jing yu Kong Meng zhi Dao)* (Beijing: Religion Culture Publishing House (Zongjiao Wenhua Chuban She), 2006); Sachiko Murata et al., *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light: Wang Tai-Yu’s Great Learning of the Pure and Real and Liu Chih’s Displaying the Concealment of the Real Realm ; with a New Translation of Jami’s Lawa’ih from the Persian by William C. Chittick* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000).

Islamic community identity within their overwhelmingly Neo-Confucian rationalist Chinese society.¹⁰⁰ It is significant that leading figures within both networks wrote extensively about these struggles and often described their own religious values through comparison to or reinterpretation of the values of the surrounding dominant society. As I have discussed elsewhere, this minority-majority identity discourse must be highlighted as the most crucial element in the development of such community networks.¹⁰¹

Another important parallel between these two networks is that each began to express Islam as a foreign religion translated into local vernacular, and within a generation began instead to identify Islam as not only compatible with the core values of the dominant local culture, but to provide the best mode of living in harmony with those values. Thus, according to leaders of the Scripture Hall network, Islam provided the most comprehensive system to live up to Neo-Confucian ideals for a just society.¹⁰² Similarly, according to American Neotraditionalist Muslims, Islamic tradition embodies the same core values expressed by America's founding fathers and by later social heroes.¹⁰³ According to this discourse, Islam is already

100. Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew; an Essay in American Religious Sociology*.

101. Newlon, *Hui Muslims and the Minzu Paradigm*; Brendan Peter Newlon, "Exploring the Political Construction of Identity through the Case of Islam in China," in *Constructing and Contesting Islam: Muslim Minorities in Asia* (Fifth Annual UCSB Islamic Studies Graduate Student Conference, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2015), <http://goo.gl/kUywnu>.

102. Liu Yihong, *Hui-Ru Duihua*.

103. Hamza Yusuf et al., *Misreading History What Islam and the West Can Learn from the Other: An Evening of Conversation with Hamza Yusuf & Richard Bulliet*, Columbia University, 2008 ([Berkeley, Calif.]: Zaytuna Institute, 2008); Hamza Yusuf and Islamic Information Service, *Hamza Yusuf on Social Values* (Altadena, CA: Islamic Information Service); Hamza Yusuf et al., *Islam in America Panel Discussion* (Fremont, Calif.: Alhambra Productions, 1997).

quintessentially Chinese, or quintessentially American. Through this discourse, the validity of hyphenating identities such as “Muslim-American” is challenged by Muslims who consider it misleading to imply that their faith functions as an adjective modifying the noun of their national identity – or that their nationality adjectivally distinguishes them as a specific type of Muslim.¹⁰⁴ While Chinese Muslims in the Scripture Hall tradition represented the prophet Muhammad as completing and perfecting the existing Confucian philosophy and therefore working within the same Confucian tradition, contemporary American Muslims are expressing their identities more often in terms of the simultaneity of plural identities. The popularity of describing personal identity in these terms is an entirely modern phenomenon, and the argument could be made that it derived as an adaptation of the Christian theological position asserting the hypostatic union of Christ as simultaneously fully-human and fully-divine.¹⁰⁵

A final observation about this community is that it is becoming impossible to consider it as a purely local community or phenomenon. Although I have attempted to make Neotraditionalism in America the focus of this dissertation, it is not possible

104. Selcuk R Sirin and Michelle Fine, *Muslim American Youth: Understanding Hyphenated Identities through Multiple Methods* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Kamel, “Hijabi Fashionistas and the Production of ‘Seamless’ Identity”; “Voices of Islam in California: Rethinking Shari’a,” *KCET*, accessed January 6, 2016, <http://www.kcet.org/socal/departures/california-spring/voices-of-islam-in-california-rethinking-sharia.html>; Nahid Afrose Kabir, *Young American Muslims: Dynamics of Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim*; Sherman A. Jackson, *RIS Talks: Dr. Abdal Hakim Jackson - “From Identity to Community,”* RIS Talks, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpGyLA_8QAc&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

105. Consider, for example, that in the late 19th Century prominent converts to Islam such as Alexander Russell Webb were popularly regarded as having renounced their former identity to “turn Turk” by means of the religious conversion alone. Webb was appointed Honorary Turkish Consul by Sultan Abdul Hamid II and was the only speaker to represent Islam at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions.

to strictly observe this geographic constraint; network participants travel internationally, broadcast video publicly via the internet, and constantly engage with global issues in their discourse. The community identity developed within the Neotraditional network in America has persisted even as it has evolved into a global network, and the connections between individuals in this network are less and less constrained to local contacts. Neotraditionalism has already become a trans-local community, and this will become more pronounced as the globally dispersed next generation matures to become leaders of the network.

Chapter 2: Discursive Worlds

There is a close relationship between Traditionalism and Neotraditionalism, but there are also important differences. Neotraditional discourse, being a reaffirmation of Traditionalism, necessarily includes a degree of anti-modernism and nostalgia among its themes. These attitudes, while primarily directed towards core elements of religious epistemology, can also be observed in Neotraditional discourse about eating wholesome foods, natural living, responsible care for ecology, Prophetic remedies and natural medicine, and romanticized accounts of premodern Muslim lifestyles. Interestingly, such accounts often blend portrayals of Islam in the past with current conditions in various Muslim communities overseas that are imagined as representatives and repositories of premodern Islamic tradition and authenticity.¹⁰⁶

Neotraditional nostalgia should not be conceived as simply longing for a lost golden age. Instead, Neotraditional nostalgia is located in the sentiment that the intellectual and social strategies developed by Muslim scholars in the past are also the most effective means of addressing modern challenges. While those strategies are not lost or inaccessible, they have become unfamiliar to many of the lay Muslims in recent generations whose feelings of connectedness to tradition have been uprooted by the effects of Colonialism, migration, and the distractions of modernity.

In his article on modern Muslim communities, Bayram writes that

106. For a thorough presentation of this theme, see Zareena Grewal, *Islam Is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority* (New York: NYU Press, 2013).

Neotraditionalists “give less priority to modernity and [...] have strong loyalty to religious faith and practices inherited from the past. For them, there is no need to change social institutions and existing methodology in jurisprudence,” because the traditional methodologies remain effective means of living an Islamic lifestyle in modern times.¹⁰⁷ In the face of the contemporary divisions between Muslim modes, the nostalgia for the golden age of Islamic civilizations is not simply a glamorization of the past, it is a longing for the social and intellectual circumstances that were characteristics of a lost era of Muslim unity and orthodoxy.

I. Traditional Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy

Orthodoxy and orthopraxy are contentious topics, or rather, they are *the* contentious topics. The claim to orthodoxy is the claim to being *correct* – a truth claim that belongs to the domain of confessional discourse. The claim of orthopraxy is a claim that one's own way of doing things is *the right way* or at least *better* than any other. The two realms of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, read loosely as representing a formulation of propriety regarding internal thoughts or feelings and external actions and behaviors, encompass the entire range of human potential for making choices, developing preferences, and performance of actions to manifest individuality and agency. Establishing such a sense of propriety is the essence of

107. Aydin Bayram, “Modernity and the Fragmentation of the Muslim Community in Response: Mapping Modernist, Reformist and Traditionalist Responses,” *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 55, no. 1 (2014): 72.

being human, and also provides a principled definition of “religion.”¹⁰⁸ Naturally, even without outright condemning alternate paths, each community defines itself through vying for orthodoxy and orthopraxy, believing their own path to be the best and most correct way of life. In the ensuing ideological melee, at stake is whether individuals will believe a community to possess the keys to truth and eternal salvation or, if not, to be a deviant sect of misguided losers. Individual believers take sides in the debate by voting with their feet, inwardly or publicly converting to whichever path the heart finds most compelling.

In the discourse of Sunni Islam, the title-cum-definition of orthodoxy is represented by the phrase *ahl al-sunnah wa'l-jama`ah*, roughly meaning “the group of people who adhere to the example established by the Prophet Muhammad (*sunnah*) and what was agreed upon by the historical majority of Muslim scholars (*jama`ah*).” Any group claiming to be the legitimate holder of this title must address two questions: *how can we come to know the sunnah?* and *what was agreed upon by the historical majority of Muslim scholars?* The first of these questions is epistemological and relates to the development of a body of knowledge called *usul al-fiqh* (derivation of proper conduct from primary sources), and this will be addressed in detail below. The second question is historical in nature, and primarily

108. In fact, this expansive understanding of “propriety” is my preferred definition of religion. It follows that all deliberate human action, whether internal or external, is essentially religious. The same idea has been discussed, with various nuances, by a long succession of philosophers and theorists who argued that humans would best be described as “homo religiosus,” or Religious Man. For example, see Todd DuBose, “Homo Religiosus,” in *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*, ed. David A. Leeming (Boston, MA: Springer US, 2014), 827–30, http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-6086-2_308.

concerns recorded scholarly agreements about what a person must necessarily believe in order to be called a Muslim.

Within Islamic Traditionalism, orthodoxy is something that is defined only in terms of the most unambiguous points of faith upon which the broad consensus of scholars has been recorded. These points are described in Islamic discourse under the rubrics of creed (*`aqidah*) and things “known, of necessity, to be from the religion” (*al-ma`lum min al-din bil-darura*). They function as the *sine qua non* of Islam which define its inviolable limits; despite Islam’s tremendous flexibility and accommodation of difference in other matters, any deviation from the orthodox position on these points takes one outside the pale of Islam. These points not only include statements about the nature of divinity and creation, but also beliefs about the obligatory or forbidden nature of certain actions per Islamic law. For example, whether or not a Muslim actually performs the ritual prayer or abstains from drinking wine, it is nevertheless necessary to *believe* that drinking alcohol is forbidden and performing prayer is an obligation in Islam. Early Muslim scholars like Abu Hanifa (d. 767) wrote concise treatises to define the creed of *ahl al-sunnah wa’l jama`ah* in terms of those points of belief that were agreed upon among orthodox Muslims and to reject contradictory beliefs that minority religious movements were beginning to advance during his time.¹⁰⁹ This genre became known as *`aqidah*, or systematic theology. By clearly delineating the bounds of orthodoxy,

109. See Abdurrahman ibn Yusuf Mangera et al., *Imam Abu Hanifa’s Al-Fiqh Al-Akbar Explained*, 2007.

texts in this genre simultaneously served to identify dissenting groups as heterodox sects.

Not all religious differences are considered sectarian, however. In the preface to his translation of a famous 10th century theological text, Shaykh Hamza comments that “for unity to be restored, we need to first understand that unity is not uniformity, and that diversity of opinion and understanding is an essential part of human nature and fully incorporated within the framework of traditional Islam.”¹¹⁰ Given that diversity is anticipated and accepted in traditionalist discourse, the nature of Muslim commonality is all the more critical to define. Shaykh Hamza identifies that commonality with the acceptance of certain key tenets of Islamic faith, but not necessarily every point of belief: “We must also understand the difference between the essential beliefs and the incidental ones; this is achieved by adhering to the consensual core tenets articulated by our authoritative scholars.”¹¹¹ The authority of these scholars is defined in terms of their temporal closeness to the time of revelation and the extent to which their views were accepted by their contemporaries. If a doctrine was affirmed unanimously or was accepted generally by the majority of scholars, it attained the rank of scholarly consensus (*ijma`a*). In Sunni tradition, scholarly consensus is taken to be incontrovertible evidence that the Muslim community was divinely guided to the correct understanding of a matter.¹¹² This is a

110. Hamza Yusuf and Ahmad ibn Muhammad Tahawi, *The creed of Imam al-Ṭahawi* (Berkeley: Zaytuna Institute, 2008), 8.

111. *Ibid.*

112. A number of Prophetic narrations relate meanings to the effect that “Allah will never allow my community [viz. Muslims] to reach a consensus upon an error.” This hadith and others with

core principle developed in the traditional category of sciences known as *usul*, systematic derivation of knowledge and guiding principles from revealed primary sources. Dissenting views on a topic after it had achieved scholarly consensus would seldom (if ever) be accepted as orthodox.¹¹³

Since the 10th century, the general consensus of Sunni scholars has been that theological orthodoxy entailed adhering to the Ash`ari or Maturidi schools of systematic theology (*aqidah*).¹¹⁴ The consensus that Sunni orthodoxy is solely represented by the Ash`ari and Maturidi schools was also regularly mentioned in the written works of Muslim religious scholars, who sometimes also included the Maturidi school under the general umbrella of Ash`ari orthodoxy.

The Ash`ari school, led by its eponymous founder Abu al-Hasan al-Ash`ari (d. 935), “took up the traditionalist cause,” in “defense of Sunni doctrine,” especially against the Mu`tazili school. The Mu`tazilis advocated the superiority of Aristotelian

similar wording or meanings were related by a number of famous hadith experts including Ibn Abi Shayba (d. 849), Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855), Ibn Majah (d. 887), Tirmidhi (d. 892), Ibn Abi `Asim (d. 900), Tabarani (d. 923), Tabari (d. 923), Hakim (d. 1014), Lalika`i (d. 1025), Bayhaqi (d. 1066), Haythami (d. 1414), and even the modern Salafi preacher, Albani (d. 1999). For example, see Muhammad ibn `Isa Tirmidhi, *Jami` al-Tirmidhi (collected hadiths)*, ca. 9th c. CE, Vol. 4, Book 31 (Kitab al-Fitan), Hadith 2167.

113. Ahmet Temel provides a history of the doctrine of consensus's evolution and acceptance among Muslim scholars in his doctoral dissertation. See Ahmet Temel, “The Missing Link in the History of Islamic Legal Theory: The Development of Usul Al-Fiqh between Al-Shafi`i and Al-Jassas during the 3rd/9th and Early 4th/10th Centuries” (Dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2014).

114. The fact that these schools have represented Islamic orthodoxy for the majority of Islamic history is widely known. For example, Newby’s encyclopedia article mentions that the Maturidi school, led by its eponymous founder Abu Mansur Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Mahmud as-Samarqandi al-Maturidi (d. 934), is “one of the two orthodox Sunni schools of theology, the other being the school founded by Al-Ash`ari.” Gordon Darnell Newby, “Al-Maturidi, Abu Mansur Muhammad Bin Muhammad Bin Mahmud as-Samarqandi,” in *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002), 145.

rationalism over faith in revealed Islamic texts or tradition and argued that Allah's omnipotence was confined by human conceptions of justice. Abu al-Hasan al-Ash`ari, who had previously been an adherent of Mu`tazilism, eventually rejected that school and mobilized their own rationalist style of rhetoric against them to rebut their arguments and elaborate the positions of traditionalist theology. After this, the Ash`ari school quickly “became the leading Sunni tradition of theology, providing faith with a rational basis for defense against philosophers, innovators, heretics, and the theological claims of other Abrahamic religions.”¹¹⁵ The school continued to be developed by later scholars, until “by the fourteenth century, Ash`arism was the theology of the Sunni mainstream.”¹¹⁶ To a lesser extent, the conservative early theological approach advanced within the Hanbali school has also been respected and tolerated. The primary reason for this allowance is that Hanbali scholars avoided entering into theological debates by refusing to elaborate upon contentious topics beyond reiterating, verbatim, the words of revelation.¹¹⁷

All three of these theological schools (Ash`ari, Maturidi, and Hanbali) rejected interpreting texts referring to Allah's attributes in a way that would imply anthropomorphism or any degree of similarity to created things.¹¹⁸ The approaches of

115. Juan Eduardo Campo, “Theology,” *Encyclopedia of Islam* (New York: Facts On File, 2009), 668–69.

116. Gordon Darnell Newby, “Al-Ash`ari, Abu-L-Hasan `Ali,” in *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002), 34.

117. The Hanbali school was later termed Athari, meaning the school of “limiting oneself to the traces,” i.e. the uninterpreted verbatim repetition of what was stated in revealed texts. “Sunni Islam - New World Encyclopedia,” accessed August 6, 2016, http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Sunni_Islam.

118. Juan Eduardo Campo, “Anthropomorphism,” *Encyclopedia of Islam* (New York: Facts On

these three schools was only subtly different: the Ash`ari's and Maturidis allowed limited figurative interpretations, while the Hanbalis would reiterate the exact textual wording and then refuse to comment further on the basis that any interpretation at all, whether seemingly literal or figurative, would necessarily require uninformed guesswork by the exegete.

In contemporary discourse, the issue of Islamic orthodoxy is addressed according to this same model of adherence to (or departure from) the creed that has been agreed upon by the majority of Muslims. Neotraditionalists reaffirm that Islamic orthodoxy is defined as adherence to the Ash`ari and Maturidi theological positions in essential matters of faith. What makes this a critical point of focus within Neotraditional discourse is the fact that the modern Salafi movement rejects both of these theological schools as heretical deviations from the pure creed of *ahl al-sunnah wa'l jama`a*. What is particularly interesting about this claim is that, as explained above, the term *ahl al-sunnah wa'l jama`a* is a general label for orthodox Sunni Muslims, historically defined in terms of adherence to the Ash`ari and Maturidi schools; it is not the name of a school of Islamic theology. Nevertheless, in Salafi discourse, the phrase is appropriated and used as if it were the name of a discrete theological school. This sets up a discursive model in which the Ash`ari and Maturidi schools can be discussed as though they were distinct from an imagined orthodox theological school called *ahl al-sunnah wa'l jama`a*.¹¹⁹ This semantic

File, 2009), 46.

119. See Gottlob Frege, *Über Sinn und Bedeutung* (Leipzig, 1892); Gottlob Frege, "Sense and Reference," *The Philosophical Review* 57, no. 3 (1948): 209–30, doi:10.2307/2181485.

sleight-of-hand is possible because the theological school has been identified by multiple names. The potential for confusion in this case has been termed Frege's Puzzle. The analytical philosopher Gottlob Frege noted that a single thing, the referent, can be identified by distinct names to convey difference in nuance, or sense. As an example, he explained that it is possible to speak about "the morning star," or "the evening star," even though both names actually refer to Venus. In Salafi discourse, the fact that different names exist for the general theological school deemed orthodox by the historical majority of Muslim scholars is exploited to advance the argument that the names refer to divergent theological schools.

Salafis tend not to elaborate the specific theological positions upon which this supposed school differs from the Ash`ari/Maturidi positions, because within the Salafi rubric of authenticity, alternate religious modes may be summarily discredited by merely alleging that they differ from the beliefs of the earliest generations of Muslims, *al-salaf al-salih*. In this way, Salafis identify Neotraditionalists and other Muslims as heretics for teaching Ash`ari/Maturidi theology and identify their own theology as paradigmatic of timeless Islamic orthodoxy. To buttress this claim, Salafis refer to the 14th century Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiyya as a religious exemplar and champion of Islamic orthodoxy who did indeed oppose the figurative interpretations Ash`ari theologians assigned to various scriptural references about Allah's attributes.

Significantly, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) departed from the orthodox Hanbali

theological position by suggesting that scriptural texts alluding to Allah's attributes should be interpreted according to the literal or apparent sense they would have if the same thing were said about a human being. It was his advocacy of this radical theological opinion that led to Ibn Taymiyya being imprisoned for the heresy of anthropomorphism with the overwhelming support of the scholars who were his contemporaries. Nevertheless, Ibn Taymiyya's aberrant theological ideas were resurrected in the late 18th century by the Wahhabi movement, and it remains a central theological pillar of Salafism, a modern offshoot from Wahhabism. Thus, in contemporary Salafi discourse, Qur'anic statements like "Indeed, [all] bounty is in the hand of Allah - He grants it to whom He wills," are interpreted to indicate that Allah literally has a hand.¹²⁰ Salafis adamantly reject the traditional Ash'ari/Maturidi position that phrases like the above are figurative expressions inherent in the Arabic language, meaning, for example, that Allah has the power to do something. A famous leader of the Salafi movement, Muhammad ibn Uthaymeen (d. 2001) vehemently rejected the possibility of such figurative interpretations:

Let them bring one word from the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), or from Abu Bakr, or 'Umar, or 'Uthmaan, or 'Ali, to say that they interpreted Allaah's hand as meaning His power, or that they interpreted His being above the Throne (istiwaa') as referring to His Sovereignty, or that they interpreted His Face as meaning reward, or that they interpreted His love as meaning reward, etc. [...] My advice to these people is to fear Allaah and to abandon what So and so said, and to come back to the Book of Allaah and the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him),

120. Sahih International, trans., "Verse (3:73), Word 25 - Quranic Grammar," *The Quranic Arabic Corpus - Word by Word Grammar, Syntax and Morphology of the Holy Quran*, accessed August 23, 2016, [http://corpus.quran.com/wordmorphology.jsp?location=\(3:73:25\)](http://corpus.quran.com/wordmorphology.jsp?location=(3:73:25)).

and the way of the Rightly-Guided Khaleefahs who came after him.¹²¹

In the above passage, Ibn Uthaymeen mentions “what so-and-so said” as an expression of disdain for the Neotraditional model of reliance upon classical Muslim scholars. Salafism promotes personal interpretation of the primary texts as the ideal form of personal religious observance, while this is precisely what Neotraditionalism opposes. Instead, the Neotraditional model requires lay Muslims to forgo personal interpretation and defer to the way earlier authorities understood complex religious issues. While this is particularly true for matters of belief, the same reliance upon earlier authorities also extends to determining the details of ritual practice and how to model one's life and behavior upon the Prophet's example, the *sunnah*.

The Neotraditional answer to the epistemological question implicit in the orthodox designation *ahl as-sunnah wa 'l-jama`a* is that one learns how to follow the sunnah correctly by accepting and adhering to the conclusions reached by *mujtahids* (master religious scholars) during Islam's classical era, roughly meaning the first three hundred years that followed the passing of the Prophet. Neotraditional discourse often elaborates this point to explain that in Islamic tradition, *mujtahids* were elite scholars who acquired expert knowledge that enabled them to research and systematically reconcile data gathered in voluminous collections of received oral

121. This text attributed to Ibn Uthaymeen is quoted widely in Salafi discourse. Muhammad Saed Abdul-Rahman, *Islam: Questions and Answers - Knowledge* (MSA Publication Limited, 2003), 55; Salafi Internet forums and forum posts by anonymous authors often reproduce texts such as this, often quoting from other internet forums and even reproducing the citation exactly as it was seen on another internet forum. For example, see the following, which cites a forum post on IslamQA.info (citation follows) as its source: Dk, “Answering Abraham: Allah Enters His Creation Without Ceasing To Be Divine,” accessed August 23, 2016, <http://www.answeringabraham.com/2014/06/allah-enters-his-creation-without.html>; “Learning from Ash’ari Shaykhs - Islamqa.info,” accessed August 23, 2016, <https://islamqa.info/en/10693>.

and written texts. In particular, their expertise consisted in differentiating the authentic from the fabricated, the reliable from the dubious, the conclusively evidential from the inconclusive, the abrogated from what abrogated it, the literal from the figurative, the clear from the ambiguous, the definitive from the probable or improbable, the general from the specific, etc. Then, they would condense their conclusions into summary guides for laymen. Those master scholars only attained such comprehensive expertise by devoting decades of their lives to constant study under the experts who preceded them – and by Allah endowing them with unprecedented success (*tawfiq*) out of divine generosity. Those great early scholars attained knowledge and piety beyond what contemporary Muslims could hope to achieve on their own; the complexity of modern life is too distracting, and even if it were not, access to the guidance of divine revelation has diminished with the passage of centuries. Significantly, all of these points about the superiority of the early mujtahids over anything later scholars could hope to achieve were mentioned by earlier traditionalist Muslim scholars such as Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali (d. 1394).¹²² Now, without the benefit of ongoing revelation, or the companionship of those who witnessed it, or even of those who met others who witnessed it, the last remaining source of information about one's duty to God is the Islamic scholarly tradition.

Among Neotraditional Muslims, the concept of following tradition is not a static vision of perfect imitative repetition of the practices of the earliest generation,

122. Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali dedicated an entire published essay to elaborating this topic. See Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali, *Ibn Rajab's Refutation of Those Who Do Not Follow The Four Schools*, trans. Musa Furber (Islamosaic, 2016).

but rather a recognition of an organic historical community process that considers traits of constancy as well as change as a healthy and necessary part of its lived expression. According to this vision, societal changes related to different times and different places are anticipated and accepted as both natural and beneficial. When new questions and challenges arise for which a religiously informed response is not immediately apparent, the current generation of religious scholars is expected to draw upon the legacy of the scholarship of prior generations to discover appropriate ways of meeting those new challenges that are ultimately rooted in the exemplary guidance of the Prophet. Of course, the Prophetic example is paramount, but the many meaningful ways it can be understood to provide guidance for different circumstances are best understood by respecting the interpretations of scholars.

As times and societies change, the production and articulation of Islamic principles and guidelines for laypeople must necessarily change with them. This is the nature of tradition as described by Shils, who commented that “every novel characteristic is determined in part by what existed previously; its previous character is one determinant of what it became when it became something new. The mechanisms of persistence are not utterly distinct from the mechanisms of change.”¹²³ Islamic Traditionalism is the position that such changes are intrinsic to following the guidance conveyed through revelation and exemplified by the prophetic practice, rather than a departure from it.

123. Edward Shils, “Tradition,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13, no. 2 (1971): 122.

It is therefore not surprising that traditionalist Muslims have historically embraced heterogeneity in many details of religious practice as the manifest miracle of God's revelation of a religion for all people and all times. There are a number of famous sayings attributed to early Muslim scholars to the effect that differences of opinion among qualified Islamic scholars is a divinely ordained mercy for Muslims that facilitates religious observance in diverse circumstances. These sayings are often cited in Neotraditional discourse to argue that some heterogeneity in religious practice is not only inevitable, but is also legitimate and desirable.¹²⁴ They also allow Muslims living in dramatically different circumstances to retain a core religious unity even while exhibiting difference in the particularities of its expression. Although the historical process of constructing orthopraxy has been the continual work of Muslim scholars for more than a millennium, their objective has never been to generate a static, ever narrowing range of acceptable thoughts and behaviors. There are mechanisms within the discourse of Traditionalism to introduce changes and revisions. One of these is *tajdid*, a periodic religious renewal initiated by a visionary scholar.

In a famous saying attributed to the Prophet, "Allah shall raise for this community at the start of each century one who will renovate for it its religion."¹²⁵

Shaykh Hamza refers to this concept in his discussion of change within Islamic

124. A similar saying has also been attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, but the attribution is widely contested. For example, see Gibril Fouad Haddad, "Ikhtilaf Is a Rahma in the Ummah," accessed May 11, 2016, <http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/misc/ikhtilaf.htm>.

125. Sulayman ibn al-Ash`ath Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abu Dāwūd*, ed. Muhammad `Abd al-`Aziz al-Halidi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-`Ilmiya, 2001), Book 39, Hadith 1. The above translation is mine.

tradition:

My own teacher, Shaykh Abdullah Bin Bayyah, when we spoke about this and I asked him, and he speaks French and he knows the history of the reformation and the use of the term. And he said that he preferred the word 'renovation,' and used that as French, because it's closer to the idea of '*tajdeed*' [renewal]. The idea of reformation – because reformation can be a complete restructuring of something, whereas in the Islamic tradition the idea is that the house is of fundamentally of sound foundation, but it often needs renovating: sometimes the faucets aren't working anymore, the water's not flowing, people aren't getting fresh air because the windows can't be opened; so you need people to come in and renovate the house, and this is the idea.

Now, this process has been going on for centuries! There's this idea like "what's wrong with the Muslims? Why won't they change?" If you look at the Muslims today... the Muslims of the 19th century would not recognize the Muslims of today. The radical changes that have occurred in the Muslim world in the last thirty years, let alone the last hundred years, are beyond belief.¹²⁶

In Shaykh Hamza's vision, Islamic tradition consists of a continuous process of making renovations, in the sense of restoring things to the condition they were in when new, and this has always been the work of religious experts. They are constantly making changes, but these are not regarded as true modifications that alter essential Islamic teachings or the frameworks within which they have been understood.

Central to the discourse of Islamic Neotraditionalism are the four *madhhabs*, or schools of Islamic jurisprudence, which function as the institutional vehicles of tradition by providing frameworks for interpreting religious primary sources.

Neotraditionalists universally identify tradition as being embodied by the four

126. Hamza Yusuf, "Rethinking Islamic Reform: Hamza Yusuf & Tariq Ramadan," *Vimeo*, May 26, 2010, <https://vimeo.com/13738819>.

madhhabs, namely the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi`i, and Hanbali schools. The eponymous founders of these schools lived during the 8th and 9th centuries, when each developed a unique system to reconcile and integrate the vast amounts of raw data about Islam narrated from the Prophet into a coherent vision for proper religious practice. While the general systematic theories of each school are attributed to their respective founders and immediate students, the specific positions taken by each school on various issues are the product of the continual collaborative work of the leading scholars within each school since that time. Over the course of generations, some positions within each school have been maintained, others have been reversed or amended, and in some cases, multiple conflicting positions are accepted within the same school, with some being generally regarded as more reliable than others.¹²⁷

Although we may acknowledge the uncommon phenomenon of independent thinkers and self-identified interpretive experts, in the eyes of the vast majority of Sunni Muslims in every continent, interpretive authority has always been the domain of the scholars of these four madhhabs.¹²⁸ This was precisely the assessment Ibn Khaldun pronounced in 1377 in his history, *Al-Muqaddimah*. According to Ibn Khaldun, the four madhhabs had attained universal acceptance as the only authoritative voices of Sunni jurisprudence:

127. Brown describes the phenomenon of rating legal opinions in Islamic legal history and its relationship to politics and legal institutions. Jonathan A. C. Brown, "Reaching into the Obscure Past: The Islamic Legal Heritage and Reform in the Modern Period," in *Reclaiming Islamic Tradition*, ed. Elisabeth An Kendall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ Press, 2016), 103, https://www.academia.edu/27572458/Reaching_into_the_Obscure_Past_The_Islamic_Legal_Heritage_and_Reform_in_the_Modern_Period.

128. In the case of Shi`a Muslims, the principle is the same, but it is madhhabs other than these four Sunni schools that are regarded as the authoritative bearers of Islamic interpretive tradition.

These four authorities are the ones recognized by tradition in the (Muslim) cities. Tradition-bound people obliterated all other (authorities), and scholars no longer admit any differences of opinion. The technical terminology of the sciences has become very diversified, and there are obstacles preventing people from attaining the level of independent judgment. It is also feared that (the existence of differences of opinion) might affect unqualified people whose opinion (reasoning) and religion could not be trusted. Thus, (scholars) came to profess their inability (to apply independent judgment), and had the people adopt the tradition of the (authorities) mentioned and of the respective group of adherents of each. They forbade one to modify his traditional (allegiance), because that would imply frivolity. All that remained after basic textbooks had been produced in the correct manner, and the continuity of their transmission had been established, was to hand down the respective school traditions and, for each individual adherent, to act in accordance with the traditions of his school. Today, jurisprudence means this, and nothing else. The person who would claim independent judgment nowadays would be frustrated and have no adherents.¹²⁹

The relationship between these schools has historically been one of collegial disagreement. The adherents of each school consider their own school's position to be the most correct, but still respect the opinions of the other three schools as valid and possibly correct. This collegial pluralism was also the historical standard, and was asserted in the writing of a famous student of Ibn Taymiyya, the early 14th century scholar Al-Dhahabi:

Al-Dhahabi counsels his readers as follows: ‘Do not think that your madhhab is the best, and the one most beloved by Allah, for you have no proof of this. The Imams, may Allah be pleased with them, all follow great goodness; when they are right, they receive two rewards, and when they are wrong, they still receive one reward.’¹³⁰

129. Ibn Khaldūn, Franz Rosenthal, and N. J Dawood, *The Muqaddimah, an Introduction to History*, vol. 3 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), 8–9.

130. The author adds the following citations and notes: “(al-Dhahabi, *Zaghal al-‘Ilm wa’l-Talab*, 15, quoted in Sa`id Ramadan al-Buti, *Al-Lamadhhabiya Akhtar Bid`a tuhaddid al-Shari`a al-Islamiya*, 3rd edition, Beirut, 1404, 81.) The final words here (‘right ... reward’) are taken from a well-known hadith to this effect (Bukhari, *ʿtisam*, 21.)” Abdal Hakim Murad, “Understanding the Four Madhhabs (with Footnotes),” accessed May 18, 2016, <http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/ahm/newmadhh.htm>;

In keeping with this spirit of collegial disagreement among scholars in matters not explicitly and unambiguously elaborated in revealed texts, Shaykh Hamza concludes the abstract to one of his articles by saying, “we should understand that a lack of uniformity in our opinions around this issue should not affect our overall unity. At the end of this paper, I present a series of policy prescriptions that should help us to move forward constructively.”¹³¹ This approach of cooperation in a context of broad but not unrestricted pluralism in religious interpretation is the hallmark of Sunni Traditionalism, and remains a major point of contention between Neotraditionalists and followers of other contemporary modes.

II. The Mystery of the Missing Fourth Madhhab

Remarkably, while Neotraditional educational institutions construct authority in part through frequent reference to the four madhhabs as the bearers of Sunni tradition, they consistently teach only three of them, maintaining a “loud silence” regarding the fourth. For example, when Neotraditional scholars receive questions about legal topics, they sometimes publish their answers online to serve as a reference. A number of frequently published questions relate to whether one should or must follow a madhhab, which one they should follow, and how to go about learning the basics according to the one they adopt.

See: Mohamed Said Ramadan Bouti, *Al-Lamadhabiyya: akhtar bida`tin tohaddidu al-shari`ah al-islamiyya* (United Arab Emirates: Dar al-Farabi, 1999).

131. Hamza Yusuf, “Cesarean Moon Births | ARC,” accessed August 6, 2016, <http://www.arclondon.org/cesarean-moon-births/>.

In response to such a question, Mostafa Azzam began by saying: “It is permissible for you to follow any one of the four Sunni schools of fiqh, Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi`i, or Hanbali, provided that you can learn it properly.”¹³² He responds to the asker with additional considerations:

You mentioned the Hanafi, Shafi`i, and Hanbali schools. The following are some practical considerations for you.

Hanafi vs. Shafi`i: Practical Considerations

In Syria (where I have studied), both the Hanafi and Shafi`i schools are widespread. Realize that the majority school in most places that madhhabs exist is the Hanafi school. Most places you go, you can find a Hanafi teacher to teach you your basics. The Shafi`i school has the most texts available in understandable English. The Hanafi school is generally more flexible (particularly in transactions). The Shafi`i school is generally simpler to learn.

Hanbali

The Hanbali school has fewer resources than any other school for people wishing to study in the West—whether teachers or texts in English—and has few available to Arabic-speakers.¹³³

What is most fascinating about this response is the fact that the asker never in fact mentioned the Hanafi madhhab at all, and had only asked about choosing between the Shafi`i and Hanbali schools. The text of his original question is as follows:

I was not born with a madhhab, and my parents and community do not follow a madhhab. I am in the process of choosing, and I’m probably going to go with Shafii because it is the majority in Syria from what I understand, and I am Syrian. I am also considering Hanbali.¹³⁴

132. Mostafa Azzam, “Some Factors to Consider When Choosing a Madhhab,” *IslamQA* (Originally Published on *Qibla.com*), September 14, 2012, <http://islamqa.org/shafii/qibla-shafii/34209>.

133. Ibid.

Whether intentionally or not, the respondent has shifted the discussion from a choice between the Shafi`i and Hanbali schools to a choice between the Hanafi and Shafi`i schools, while implying that the Hanbali school would be difficult or impossible to learn “properly.”

In response to a similar question about how one should go about choosing a madhhab to follow, Mufti Abdurrahman ibn Yusuf Mangera writes that the principle concern should be whether or not one can find a reliable teacher with whom to study that madhhab, and adds:

...inquire around your area to see what is the madhhab that most people follow and have access to. If there are proficient scholars of the Hanafi school found in your area, then take up that school by learning the basics rules of everyday worship from them or by reading a text under their guidance then consult them on any deeper issues that arise.

Likewise, if you find scholars from the Shafi`i or Maliki school, and have access to them or the relevant materials then adopt that school.¹³⁵

Notably, he has specifically excluded the Hanbali school from his recommendation in a way that could be read as denying the possibility of studying the school at all.

One reason for Neotraditional avoidance of the fourth school is that the Hanbali madhhab was historically not developed to the level of methodological formality of the other three. In addition, the eponymous founder, Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, was a leading expert in the transmission of prophetic reports (*hadith*), and

134. Ibid.

135. Abdurrahman ibn Yusuf Mangera, “How Does One Choose A School Of Fiqh To Study?,” *IslamQA (Originally Published on Qibla.com)*, September 14, 2012, <http://islamqa.org/hanafi/qibla-hanafi/35204>.

his legal opinions often made direct reference to hadiths without a great deal of additional commentary. To an untrained observer, it is difficult to draw a clear line between the traditional Hanbali methodology and modern Salafī approaches to Islamic law, because most Salafī legal discourse appears to imitate the style of Imam Ahmad in the way he would prominently include references to hadith or passages from the Qur’an in his legal responses.

Further complicating matters is the fact that a number of prominent figures whose works contribute to Salafī (or Wahhabi) discourse themselves profess to be followers of the Hanbali madhhab. This is particularly true in Saudi Arabia, which calls into question something mentioned in the response given above by Sidi Mostafa Azzam. What can he have meant when he wrote that “the Hanbali school has fewer resources than any other school for people wishing to study in the West—whether teachers or texts in English—and has few available to Arabic-speakers,” when there are so many well-supported voices in Saudi Arabia speaking and publishing original religious works in Arabic as well as translations in a number of languages, including English?¹³⁶ The critical word in his response that solves this riddle is the word “properly.” While one may study from any number of teachers or books on the subject of Hanbali legal opinions, Neotraditionalists cast doubt on whether these works truly represent the traditional Hanbali madhhab at all – perhaps they are mere forgeries using the name and reputation of the Hanbali school as a tool to promote Salafī revisionism. For example, Neotraditionalists accuse Salafīs of

136. Ibid.

selectively citing from Hanbali texts to promote anthropomorphic beliefs about Allah, dissimulating the historical fact that the majority of Muslim theologians (including Hanbalis) categorically rejected anthropomorphism, and even held such rejection to be a central contention in the theology of traditional Sunni orthodoxy.¹³⁷ In addition, they accuse the Salafis of supporting their iconoclastic opposition to traditional institutions of Sunni religious authority by echoing the Wahhabi movement and misrepresenting aberrant Hanbali theological or juristic opinions as orthodox.¹³⁸

The explanation for the missing fourth madhhab in Neotraditional discourse is that it is difficult to clearly delineate the methodology of the Hanbali madhhab from that of the Wahhabis and Salafis, particularly in a way that would make their differences understandable to lay Muslims who have never formally studied Islamic legal methodologies. The topic of the Hanbali madhhab is therefore almost always assiduously avoided in Neotraditional discourse. Too much attention to it could obscure the distinction between Neotraditional and Salafi modes of knowledge production, posing a fundamental challenge to the identity discourse by which Neotraditionalists and Salafis identify themselves in contradistinction to each other.

137. On Sunni orthodox opposition to anthropomorphism, see Campo, "Anthropomorphism," 46.

138. Newby writes that the Wahhabi movement is "based on the writings of Ibn Taymiyyah and extreme Hanbali thought" but "took the doctrines of Ibn Taymiyyah to new lengths." Gordon Darnell Newby, "Ibn `Abd Al-Wahhab, Muhammad," in *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002), 87.

III. Neotraditionalism and Antitraditionalism

The Neotraditionalist standard of authority as being received from earlier scholars through the process of tradition stands in opposition to modern modes that locate religious authority in personal, unmediated interpretation of scripture without regard for the interpretations contributed by the scholars of earlier generations. Shaykh Hamza critiques such movements as indulging in temporal parochialism by failing to acknowledging that their own views are just the latest within a long historical process of individuals interpreting the same texts from different vantage points.

By claiming that the Islamic intellectual heritage is superfluous and that the Qur'an is sufficient, such people have surrendered to the spirit of the times. Those who ignore the interpretations of the past are forced to interpret their text in the light of the prevailing worldview of the present. This is a far different enterprise than that pursued by the great authorities who interpreted their present in the light of grand tradition, and who never fell prey to "up-to-date" – the most obsolescent of all abstractions. So one of the beauties of the ancient tradition... a writer writing in the 12th century is writing from the same worldview as a writer in the third century or the fourth century. Really. And that is where there is a continuity of interpretation. They did not succumb to the temptations of the time. One of the things that the moderns do is that they interpret everything in light of their time. And then people, later, will look back and realize how ridiculous much of what they came up with sounds.¹³⁹

Whether in the arena of textual exegesis or religious interpretation more generally, antitraditionalism can be summarized as a denial or rejection of history, often regarding it as irrelevant, as marred by erroneous deviations, or as an undesirable interference between the present and a sacred past. Below, I will discuss two modern

139. Hamza Yusuf, *Sheikh Hamza Yusuf - Vision of Islam CD1 2/6*, accessed June 8, 2016, <https://youtu.be/SIKHMxhoh2E?t=407>.

religious modes founded upon antitraditionalism: the Progressive-Muslims movement and Salafism. Followers of both of these modes, but Salafism in particular, “believe that equipped with the Arabic language and an average intellect, one can explore the books of the Islamic sciences independently of specialized scholars,” and some go beyond this position to deny that following the opinions of religious experts instead of one’s own scriptural interpretations would even be acceptable for a Muslim.¹⁴⁰

Antitraditionalism is the shared foundation of the Progressive-Muslims movement and Salafism, and is the primary discursive position that distinguishes both movements from Neotraditionalism. Each of these two antitraditional modes, in its own way, reflects the attitude that history and tradition must be negated to recover the original, unadulterated values of Islam and to practice the religion in the way that God commanded.¹⁴¹ Interestingly, there is a sense in which both of these movements

140. Besa (“Umm Sahl”) Krasniqi, “In Defense of Abd Al-Ghani Al-Nablusi | Masud.co.uk,” accessed August 3, 2016, <http://masud.co.uk/about-abd-al-ghani-al-nablusi/> The Salafi tenet that following the opinions of religious scholars is a reprehensible practice will be addressed further below.

141. Some scholars have used “fundamentalism” as a phenomenological term to describe movements that seek to negate the changes inherent in tradition and history and return to certain original, essential values or tenets. Other traits such as scriptural literalism, absolutism and exclusivism, and apocalypticism are sometimes also considered as marking a movement as fundamentalist. This is an adaptation of how the term was originally applied in the context of the 19th and 20th century Christian fundamentalist movement. Scholars who oppose the generalized use of the term phenomenologically in scholarship have argued that the term should not be used except to describe that Christian movement that identified itself by the term. Additionally, use of the term in scholarship and public media discourse has been critiqued as politically motivated, bigoted, or for serving to communicate a negative emotional valence more than any technical or practical meaning. The phenomenological sense of the term is not as widely known as its pejorative sense, and alludes to features that are not relevant to the present topic, so I have opted not to use the term. Cf. Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1981); William E Shepard, *The Significance of Islamic Fundamentalism*, 1983; William E Shepard, “Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology,” *Int. J. Middle East Stud. International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 3 (1987): 307–36; Bruce B.

could even be described as distinct modes under the broader rubric of Salafism. In his *Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, Newby writes that “the term [*salafiyyah*, or Salafism] is now used in two opposite senses. It is used in the sense of 'renewal' or 'reform,' usually involving a reassessment of the foundational sources of Islam,” which is essentially the objective of the Progressive-Muslims.¹⁴² Newby continues to say that “in the opposite sense, it is used as an attempt to translate the Western term 'fundamentalism' into a meaningful Islamic term. In this sense, it is used as a synonym of *usuliyyah*,” which is meant as a summary of the Salafi project.¹⁴³

Both Salafism and the Progressive-Muslims movement make frequent reference to the sayings and actions of the Prophet and members of the early Muslim community, and each movement represents itself as an effort to restore Islam to a particular vision of its original form rather than initiating something new. However, both are modern reform movements without a historical precedent. Eisenstadt, a sociologist whose work focused on processes of change that civilizations and societies undergo in modernity, writes that antitraditional sentiment is common in

Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age* (Harper & Row, 1989); Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Fundamentalisms Observed*, The Fundamentalism Project (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991); Niels Christian Nielsen, *Fundamentalism, Mythos, and World Religions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, The Fundamentalism Project (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); David Zeidan, *The Resurgence of Religion: A Comparative Study of Selected Themes in Christian and Islamic Fundamentalist Discourses* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003); Malise Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: The Search For Meaning* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Rebecca Joyce Frey, *Fundamentalism* (New York: Facts On File, 2007); Simon A. Wood and David Harrington Watt, eds., *Fundamentalism: Perspectives on a Contested History* (Univ of South Carolina Press, 2014).

142. Gordon Darnell Newby, “Salafiyyah,” in *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002), 189.

143. Ibid.

many reformist movements:

Although seemingly traditional, in fact these movements are in some paradoxical way antitraditional. They are antitraditional in the sense that they negate the living tradition, with its complexity and heterogeneity, and instead they uphold a highly ideological conception of tradition as an overarching principle of cognitive and social organization.¹⁴⁴

He also underscores the importance of differentiating between a movement's exclusivist discursive claims and its historical reality; "although each such movement claims to be the only representative of the original pristine vision of its religion, in fact they all are new constructions, and they may differ with respect to which aspect or symbol of their religion they portray as the essence of the original pristine vision."¹⁴⁵ Certainly, Salafism and the Progressive-Muslims movement have fundamentally different views on what exactly what qualities or characteristics the early Muslim community had that ought to be restored today.

Progressive-Muslims, as their adopted label indicates, seek to bring the essence of Islam into harmony with the realities of modernity by breaking from tradition and introducing new interpretive models to understand sacred texts in light of the ethical values prevalent in a contemporary social context. The stance of the Progressive-Muslims movement has been summarized as follows:

In the past, Islamic theology was a methodological framework to deal with intellectual challenges. However, this old theology could not respond to challenges which modernity posed. It should be replaced by a

144. Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, "Fundamentalism, Phenomenology, and Comparative Dimensions," in *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, ed. Martin E Marty and R. Scott Appleby, vol. 5, The Fundamentalism Project (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 266.

145. *Ibid.*, 267.

new theology that can respond to the needs of modern times.¹⁴⁶

Barzegar summarized the movement by saying that “progressive reformism calls into question not only the conventional interpretation of primary texts but the epistemological context in which those interpretations took place as well.”¹⁴⁷ The Progressive-Muslims mode advocates a rubric of engagement with religious primary sources that diverges from the traditionalist stance, namely:

radical reformulation of Islamic practice and belief based upon a rigorous reengagement with the primary sources themselves. Secular-humanist, environmentalist, feminist, post-colonial and post-modernist intellectual traditions are braided within the discourse of progressive reformism.¹⁴⁸

Clearly, it is a staunchly modernist antitraditional movement; while it seeks to preserve anything from Islamic tradition perceived to be in harmony with a given set of contemporary social-ethical ideals, anything deemed incompatible with those ideals can be reinterpreted through a hermeneutic of presumed original intent, or annulled and abandoned completely as outmoded and impractical in modern circumstances.¹⁴⁹

The modern Salafi movement is an example of a different kind of

146. Bayram, “Modernity and the Fragmentation of the Muslim Community in Response: Mapping Modernist, Reformist and Traditionalist Responses,” 72.

147. Abbas Barzegar, “Discourse, Identity, and Community: Problems and Prospects in the Study of Islam in America.,” *Muslim World* 101, no. 3 (2011): 534.

148. Ibid.

149. For example, this is precisely the approach taken by Duderija, who considers himself a participant in the Progressive-Muslims movement. See Adis Duderija, “A Case Study of Patriarchy and Slavery: The Hermeneutical Importance of Qur’ānic Assumptions in the Development of a Values-Based and Purposeful Oriented Qur’ān-Sunna Hermeneutic,” *Hawwa* 11, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 58–87, doi:10.1163/15692086-12341239.

antitraditional reformism. Rather than prioritizing modern values, proponents of Salafism seek to discard what they perceive as deviations that became accepted as a part of Islamic tradition by returning directly to the pristine original beliefs and practices of the earliest generations of Muslims. Inevitably, the exact nature of those beliefs and practices are interpreted and elaborated by the movement's contemporary leaders. Eisenstadt described movements of this type as being "oriented in principle against any innovation or lenience within the existing traditions – even if such innovation has been a continuous component in such tradition."¹⁵⁰ He provides the following parallel example and evaluation:

The Hatam Sofer's – a major figure in the modern Eastern European fundamentalist Jewish Orthodoxy in the first half of the nineteenth century – famous injunction that 'anything new is forbidden from Torah' went against the great and continuous tradition of interpretation and innovation that characterized the classical (medieval and early modern) Jewish tradition. Such injunctions and attitudes were in fact themselves innovations – but innovations presented as representations of simple, pristine, "old" tradition.¹⁵¹

Similarly, the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm wrote that "traditions' which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented" and referred to such movements as "invented traditions."¹⁵² Reference to an early historical period is at the center of Salafi discourse, but Salafism is unabashedly a radically antitraditional modern reform movement. Jonathan Brown notes that some of the reformist themes of Salafi discourse were in fact discussed by premodern

150. Eisenstadt, "Fundamentalism, Phenomenology, and Comparative Dimensions," 266.

151. Ibid.

152. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

Muslim scholars, but clarifies that “an actual coherent, self-identifying Salafi movement did not emerge until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.” He suggests that the term “proto-Salafi” could be used to describe earlier debates which would later be revived as elements of modern Salafi discourse.¹⁵³

The Arabic word *salaf*, from which the Salafi movement takes its name, is a reference to the first three generations of Muslims living during and after the era of revelation, collectively called *al-salaf al-salih* (the pious ancestors). The Prophet reportedly praised those three generations as the best of all people.¹⁵⁴ According to Juan Campo, “although some scholars mistakenly trace Salafism back through the centuries to these first generations, it is actually a modern phenomenon,” founded in opposition to the traditional institutions they regard as corruptions of the religion as well as the modern threats of “Western colonialism and secularism.”¹⁵⁵ Special esteem for those earliest generations is common among Sunni Muslims, so the movement’s reference to them elicits a sense of nostalgia and longing for a golden age in which Muslims were not only pious and knowledgeable, but also enjoyed dignity and high status as members of an empire that was gaining territory even

153. As examples of iconoclastic “proto-Salafi” themes, Brown mentions “rejection of rigid adherence to a *madhhab*, rejection of popular and/or theosophical Sufism, and rejection of speculative theology.” Jonathan A. C. Brown, “Is Islam Easy to Understand or Not?: Salafis, the Democratization of Interpretation and the Need for the Ulema,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 26, no. 2 (May 1, 2015): 118n3, doi:10.1093/jis/etu081.

154. Statements to this effect may be found in various collections of statements attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, most notably as the third hadith (recorded statement) in Sahih Bukhari, book 57. See Muhammad ibn Isma’il al-Bukhari and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *Sahih Al-Bukhari: The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari: Arabic-English* (Ankara, Turkey: Hilal Yayinlari, 1971).

155. Juan Eduardo Campo, “Salafism,” *Encyclopedia of Islam* (New York: Facts On File, 2009), 601.

more rapidly than the religion was gaining followers. In contemporary Salafi discourse, the early community's political and economic success is directly attributable to their piety and pure beliefs, and “since then every time a Muslim society has been confronted with a political, economic, or social crisis, Islamic revivalists have argued for a return to the way of the early *salaf*.”¹⁵⁶ At that time, Islam was ascendant, so the attraction contemporarily of this kind of nostalgic rhetoric is especially strong among Muslims living in countries that are still struggling to come to terms with the disruptive social, cultural, and psychological effects of colonialism and post-colonial modernity.

Salafism is rooted in a paradigm Eliade called “the myth of the eternal return” in which a return to a sacred original time is achieved through perfect ritual emulation of that time’s sacred ancestors.¹⁵⁷ Sayyid Qutb, a contributor to the development of an early form of Salafism argued that “the religion revealed to the Prophet Muhammad embodies a unique ideal beyond history, time, and place.”¹⁵⁸ In accordance with this paradigm, the ideal of the Salafi movement is to emulate exactly the Prophet and *al-salaf al-salih* in every detail of one’s life. In this mythical conceptualization of time, all of the evils that manifested through the intervention of

156. Sadek Hamid, “The Attraction of ‘Authentic’ Islam: Salafism and British Muslim Youth,” in *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 387–88; See also: Samir Amghar, Amel Boubekeur, and Michael Emerson, eds., “Salafism and Radicalization of Young European Muslims,” in *European Islam: Challenges for Public Policy and Society* (Brussels: Centre for European Policy, 2007).

157. See Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper, 1959).

158. Nielsen, *Fundamentalism, Mythos, and World Religions*, 88.

historical time are nullified, the world is restored to the way it should be, and the identity of the ritual participant is transformed into that of the sacred ancestors – tellingly, an adherent of Salafism is called a *Salafi*, an attributive title which literally means “belonging to the pious ancestors.”¹⁵⁹ In “the earliest manifesto in the English language of what Salafi *da`wa* [preaching] stood for,” the British Salafi organization JIMAS described Salafism as “the call to return to a pristine Islam – the sublime Quran and to the Prophet's authentic Sunnah – [...] in accordance with the understanding and practice of as-Salaf.”¹⁶⁰ In the mythic imagination of Salafism, ritual emulation provides the key to wiping away the centuries of innovated accretions (*bida`a*) that corrupted Islam's original purity, which in turn led to the degeneration of Muslim societies, and culminated in the ultimate shame of modernity: subjugation of the believers beneath the political and cultural hegemony of infidels.

As a process of development through history, tradition itself is regarded as the manifestation of religious corruption within Salafi discourse, so radical antitraditionalism and rejection of history functions as a method enabling the meaningful recovery of an idealized past. Hobsbawm suggests that the relationship invented traditions claim to have with the past should be regarded as a feature of

159. Wallace identified this basic model as typical of what he called “revitalization movements.” Phenomenologically, the narratives, ritual prescriptions, and promises of salafism might be compared to late 19th century “ghost dance” movements among Native American tribes menaced by white expansionism. See Anthony F. C. Wallace, “Revitalization Movements,” *American Anthropologist* 58, no. 2 (1956): 264–81; Cf. Rani-Henrik Andersson, *The Lakota Ghost Dance of 1890* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

160. Hamid, “Global Salafism,” 388–89; The quoted Salafi publication is *A Brief Introduction to the Salafi Da`wah* (Ipswich, Suffolk: Jamiyyah Ihya' Minhaj as Sunnah (JIMAS), 1993).

their discourse rather than historical fact:

...insofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of 'invented' traditions is that the continuity with it is largely factitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition. It is the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some part of social life within it as unchanging and invariant, that makes the 'invention of tradition' so interesting to historians of the past two centuries.¹⁶¹

In keeping with Hobsbawm's description, the Salafi movement developed primarily during the past two centuries, and its emphasis on detailed ritual emulation can often take the form of "quasi-obligatory repetition." For example, Brown describes Salafis as frequently concerned with "praying properly, how are you greeting people, how are you taking your shoes on and off.. stepping into the bathroom in the right way and stepping out of the bathroom in the right way – very focused on ritual."¹⁶²

Salafism began as an offshoot from Wahhabism, and has been consistently "opposed by traditionalist Sunni ulama" since the formation of the movement.¹⁶³ Wahhabism began as an 18th century reform movement which was selectively antitraditional without totally rejecting the validity of adhering to a *madhhab* (school of Islamic jurisprudence). The movement's eponymous founder, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, was himself a follower of the Hanbali school, except that he

161. Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 2.

162. Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Dr. Jonathan AC Brown - What Is Salafism?*, accessed May 12, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcxVXqHz-v0>.

163. Campo, "Salafism," 602.

differed from the views of the school on some issues.¹⁶⁴ Henri Lauziere wrote that *salafiyya* (Salafism) is a term “usually understood to refer to a rigorist creed and religious methodology that share a ‘family resemblance’ (to use Wittgenstein’s expression) to Wahhabism or are intimately linked to the religious establishment of Saudi Arabia.”¹⁶⁵

Much later, Salafism developed its present radically antitraditional stance through the influence of Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani (d. 1999). Stéphane Lecroix has referred to Albani as a “religious entrepreneur,” a term recognizing an individual’s foundational role in establishing a new religious movement or organization.¹⁶⁶ Joerg Stolz explains the concept of a religious entrepreneur as follows:

As we have shown, the religious entrepreneur takes on a dual function in contemporary religious change. On the one hand, he drives it forward by his organizational actions, not the least of which are the marketing activities outlined in this article – but on the other hand he is also an innovator in terms of its content, because he embodies the maxims of the “self-empowerment of the spiritual subject” (Gebhardt *et al.*, 2005) *in persona*.¹⁶⁷

Albani’s most innovative contribution to the Salafi movement was extending its

164. Stéphane Lecroix, “Al-Albani’s Revolutionary Approach to Hadith,” *International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM)* 21 (2008): 6.

165. Henri Lauzière, “The Construction Of Salafiyya: Reconsidering Salafism From The Perspective Of Conceptual History,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42, no. 3 (August 2010): 370, doi:10.1017/S0020743810000401.

166. Lecroix, “Al-Albani’s Revolutionary Approach to Hadith,” 7.

167. Joerg Stolz, *Religions as Brands: New Perspectives on the Marketization of Religion and Spirituality* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2014), 87; The included quotation is from Winfried Gebhardt, Martin Engelbrecht, and Christoph Bochsinger, “Die Selbstermächtigung Des Religiösen Subjekts. Der »spirituelle Wanderer« Als Idealtypus Spätmoderner Religiosität,” *Zeitschrift Für Religionswissenschaft* 13, no. 2 (2005).

antitraditional stance beyond what was advocated by its Wahhabi forerunners to include the wholesale rejection of traditional religious institutions. Albani accomplished this by criticizing Wahhabi reliance upon the Hanbali madhhab as antithetical to the Salafi ideal of “exclusive reliance on the Quran, the Sunna, and the consensus of *al-salaf al-salih* (the pious ancestors).”¹⁶⁸ Adopting Albani’s tenet of opposition to traditional Islamic religious institutions has allowed Salafis to differentiate their movement from the structures of religious authority that Muslims almost unanimously agreed upon for more than a millennium. Commonly this tenet is expressed as rejection of Sufism in general and Sufi orders (*tariqas*) in particular, and in the denunciation of Muslims who blindly follow expert scholars instead of deriving religious knowledge through their own direct, unmediated interpretations of the Qur’an and hadith.

Typically, Salafis structure the argument that “blind following,” and especially adherence to a madhhab, is impermissible by citing verses of the Qur’an or excerpted hadith texts while expressing incredulity that traditionalist Muslims could fail to understand those texts in precisely the same way that the modern Salafi author has interpreted them:

How can it be said that [the Prophet’s] speech which is the explanation to the people cannot be understood except by a single person among them [i.e. a master scholar]?! Rather, in this time, it is not understood by anyone, based upon their [i.e. the Neotraditionalists] claim that there has not been a mujtahid [master scholar] in the world for hundreds of years!! [...] So they reach their goal by declaring that understanding the Book and the Sunnah (upon which deriving judgements depends) is only

168. Lecroix, “Al-Albani’s Revolutionary Approach to Hadith,” 6–7.

possible for a mujtahid, then they deny that there are any mujtahids in the world and then this saying is spread amongst the people. [...] While the Qur'aan commands every Muslim to act upon that which is established from the Hadeeth of the Prophet (sal-Allaahu 'alayhe wa sallam) and warns those who disobey him (sal-Allaahu 'alayhe wa sallam) [...] Every Muslim must accept the Hadeeth and must not be prevented by being upon the madhhab of so and so.¹⁶⁹

Salafi discourse, like the sample above, often take the form of arguments punctuated by frequent and unsystematic citation of primary sources – a rhetorical style that Dr. Khaled Abou El Fadl has termed “impressionistic hadith-hurling.”¹⁷⁰

Passages that are nearly identical to the one quoted above are ubiquitous in Salafi discourse. Their purpose is to advance an iconoclastic rejection of traditional Sunni standards of religious authority, especially as embodied by the figure of the *mujtahid*, or master scholar. Salafis hope that by belittling the role of mujtahid scholars and challenging their status as religious experts, they can dismantle the authority of the four Sunni madhhabs. Their ultimate aim is to reassign absolute religious authority to any Muslim who meets the minimal requirements of being able to read the scriptural texts and produce some interpretation from those sources to derive theological and legal conclusions.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, Salafis generally maintain that lay Muslims should be vested with this same degree of religious interpretive

169. Muhammad Sultan al-Ma'soomee al-Khajnadee, “The Blind Following of Madhhabs,” 41, accessed August 3, 2016, <http://www.greenlanemasjid.org/uploads/resources/publications/blind-following-of-madhabs.pdf>.

170. Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Reasoning with God: Reclaiming Shari'ah in the Modern Age* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 264. Abou El Fadl further elaborates “hadith-hurling” as engaging in argument and “hurling traditions at their opponents to score cheap points.” *Ibid.*, 263.

171. Umm Sahl Besa Krasniqi argues against the Salafi position that merely being able to read texts is not sufficient qualification for the derivation of conclusions from primary sources. See Krasniqi, “In Defense of Abd Al-Ghani Al-Nablusi | Masud.co.uk.”

authority whether they read the source texts in the original Arabic or in translation.¹⁷²

Another example of this position in Salafi thought is related in the form of a dialog between Shaykh Muhammad Sa'id al-Buti and an unnamed “leading Salafi teacher,” in which Buti challenges the Salafi's claim to be “follower of evidence” on the basis that he had not been aware of the relevant evidence – let alone examined its strength – before pronouncing an opinion on the matter, to which his Salafi interlocutor replies, “What else could I do? I [was] asked and I only had a limited amount of scholarly resources.”¹⁷³ Throughout the discussion, the unnamed Salafi teacher maintains that every Muslim, regardless of his knowledge or ignorance of the primary evidence or scholarly opinions relating to a matter, “is morally responsible for following his personal conviction” even when “he knows [the scholars of the madhhabs] have evidences for [an opposing position] that he is unaware of.”¹⁷⁴

Rejection of the four madhhabs has even been identified as a central contention of the Salafi movement, and one traditionalist scholar, Shaykh Mohamed Said Ramadan al-Bouti (d. 2013), famously critiqued Salafism by labeling it “anti-madhabism,” and cautioning that it is “the most dangerous heretical innovation to threaten the Islamic way of life.”¹⁷⁵ By implication, Bouti's critique equates

172. This point was made by al-Buti's anonymous Salafi interlocutor in the course of their discussion about the basis of religious authority. See Nuh Ha Mim Keller, trans., “Discussion between Sa'id Al-Buti and a Salafi Teacher,” *Masud.co.uk*, 1995, <http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/nuh/buti.htm>.

173. Ibid.

174. Ibid.

175. Translation mine. Bouti, *Al-Lamadhabiyya*; A French translation is also available. See M. S.Ramadan Al- Bouti and Mahmoud al-Dabbagh, *La non conformité aux quatre doctrines: la plus*

adherence to the four madhhabs with preserving “the Islamic way of life,” and this is precisely the Neotraditionalist position. In his translator's introduction to Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali's 14th century essay *Refutation of Those Who Follow Other than the Four Madhhabs*, Musa Furber implicitly links Ibn Rajab's views with the contemporary Neotraditional critique of Salafism, remarking that “although written seven centuries ago, [this text] might as well have [been] written with today's 21st century CE reformers in mind.”¹⁷⁶

Of the various modes described above, only Neotraditionalism affirms the interpretive authority of traditional institutions such as the four madhhabs. On that basis, Neotraditionalists reject the methodologies of modern reformist modes such as the Progressive-Muslims movement and Salafism as lacking legitimate interpretive authority, asserting that “the gate of ijtihad [independent interpretive authority] is closed as Islamic Law has reached its peak with four schools of jurisprudence (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi`i, and Hanbali).”¹⁷⁷ These schools were instrumental in developing the fields of Islamic scholarship that came to be known collectively as the Islamic Sciences (*‘ulum al-din*). The central aim of Neotraditionalism is to preserve and revive those traditional modes of knowledge production, so the phrase “traditional Islamic Sciences” appears frequently in Neotraditional discourse.

dangereuse hérésie qui menace la loi divine (Damas: Dar Al Farabi, 1999).

176. I have provided the correct translation of the Arabic work's title above; the title given to Furber's English translation significantly distorts the author's intended meaning. al-Hanbali, *Ibn Rajab's Refutation of Those Who Do Not Follow The Four Schools*, ix.

177. Bayram, “Modernity and the Fragmentation of the Muslim Community in Response: Mapping Modernist, Reformist and Traditionalist Responses,” 72.

IV. Sacred Knowledge: Reviving Traditional Islamic Sciences

The phrase “reviving the Islamic sciences” is intended to be reminiscent of Imam Ghazali’s (d. 1111) magnum opus, *Revival of the Religious Sciences* (ihya’ `ulum al-din). This work is widely credited with reconciling the two most influential religious trends of his time: the intellectualism of the madhhab jurists and the spirituality of the *Sufis*, an imprecise category including Muslim mystics, ascetics, and metaphysicians. Ghazali was one of the most influential and respected Muslim scholars in history, but his affirmation of concepts and practices which later came to be associated with Sufism have recently made him a contentious figure; a contemporary Muslim's attitude towards Ghazali may signal affiliation with one or another Islamic mode. Neotraditionalists embrace Ghazali as the “Proof of Islam” (*hujjah al-Islam*), the title by which he is widely known in Islamic scholarly circles. On the other hand, Salafis view him with skepticism.

The polarization of Muslims based on their position vis-à-vis Ghazali is one example of the many ways Neotraditionalists articulate their own identity in opposition to Salafism. With few exceptions, premodern Muslim scholars, particularly those living after Ghazali's time, approved generally of Sufism as providing an indispensable system for cultivating inner virtue and seeking to draw spiritually nearer to Allah through intensive focus on the Prophet's prescriptions for attaining both of these ends. The scholars' only condition was that one not depart

from the orthodox theological positions of *ahl al-sunna wa'l-jama`ah* (i.e. the Ash`ari or Maturidi theological schools) nor diverge from the orthoprax legal positions of the four madhhabs (viz. the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi`i, and Hanbali madhhabs). Doing so would constitute heresy or an illegitimate abandonment of normative practice. This position has been preserved in Neotraditionalism.

On the other hand, Salafis denounce Sufism as an egregious innovation (*bid`a*) that departs from the pure *sunnah* (custom or habitus) of the Prophet and his earliest companions. They readily reject most of the classical scholars who are celebrated in Neotraditional discourse for promoting Ash`ari theology, *taqlid* (adherence to) madhhabs, or affiliating with sufi *tariqas* (spiritual orders).¹⁷⁸

Recently, some Salafis have suggested that Ghazali publicly repented on his deathbed from Sufism as well as the Ash`ari school of *aqidah* (systematic theology), hence whatever books he previously authored that support either of those religious positions should be disregarded as heretical mistakes. Shaykh Gibril Haddad summarizes this phenomenon:

Today's "Salafis" have revived a particularly bad trait of some naysayers of the past, which consists in attacking Imam Ghazali and belittling those who read his works and cite them to illustrate their opinions. This concerns especially his major book *Ihya' `Ulum al-Din*, because it is a landmark of tasawwuf [Sufism] whose immense success and readership the enemies of tasawwuf find particularly galling. Some go so far as to claim that Ghazali was mad when he wrote it, others misconstrue Ghazali's deathbed reading of Imam Bukhari as a renunciation of

178. The Salafis follow the Wahhabis in opposing "any form of Sufism and any kind of reliance on taqlid, the adherence of a person to a doctrine because of the authority of others." Newby, "Ibn `Abd Al-Wahhab, Muhammad," 88.

tasawwuf...¹⁷⁹

This revisionist account makes it possible for Salafis to reject whatever they disagree with in the content of Ghazali's works without needing to disavow the most famous and respected of the later scholars of Islam. Instead, the story of his supposed deathbed repentance provides a mechanism for replacing what Ghazali actually recorded as his opinions on religious matters with whatever opinion they claim he affirmed in his final moments.

This claim is intended to neutralize the threat Salafism sees in Ghazali's celebrity endorsement of Sufism and Traditionalism. Shaykh Abdullah bin Hamid Ali offers a lengthy rebuttal of the Salafi narrative of deathbed repentance in his translator's introduction to Ghazali's final work, *A Return to Purity in Creed*, noting, for example, that the book was written sometime within the last two years of Ghazali's life, and its content is entirely comprised of Ghazali's reaffirmation of his previously published support for Ash`ari theology.¹⁸⁰

It is worth noting, however, that the recent Salafi discourse asserting that Ghazali repented from earlier views on his deathbed may be the result of a careless Salafi researcher failing to differentiate between the famous Imam Ghazali (d. 1111) and the modern Egyptian scholar Muhammad al-Ghazali al-Saqqa (d. 1996). Dr. Khaled Abou el Fadl, a prolific author of academic works on Islamic Law, relates a

179. Gibril Fouad Haddad, "Those Who Attack Imam Ghazali," *Living Islam : Islamic Tradition*, September 7, 1996, http://www.livingislam.org/n/atgz_e.html.

180. Abdullah bin Hamid Ali, "Translator's Introduction," in *A Return to Purity in Creed (Iljam Al-`awamm `an `ilm Al-Kalam)* (Philadelphia, PA: Lamppost Productions, 2008), 3–14.

story about the modern al-Ghazali al-Saqqā:

When al-Ghazali died the Saudi government magnanimously announced that it would accommodate his dying wish to be buried in the Hijaz. When al-Ghazali's family accepted this generous offer, Saudi Arabia, typical of its mode of operation, effectively circulated a rumor that on his deathbed al-Ghazali realized the error of his ways, repented, and disavowed his works.¹⁸¹

The striking similarity between these two narratives suggests that the story about Imam Ghazali could be explained as a misguided reading of the more recent account about al-Ghazali al-Saqqā. It is also possible that the uncanny similarity between these two accounts has another explanation; according to Abou El Fadl, “Wahhabi authors have made the same claim about every Muslim jurist who challenged the legitimacy of their ideas.”¹⁸² This practice in Wahhabi/Salafi discourse of casually rewriting history as a way to deny or obscure the opinions of scholars who held opinions conflicting with their own represents a particularly lackadaisical approach to the devaluation of tradition, but, more importantly, it is also a case of academic dishonesty.

V. Neo-Academia: A True Education

In the preceding sections, I introduced Neotraditional discourse calling for revival of Islamic sciences, seeking sacred knowledge, and maintaining the methodological structures of the four madhhabs. Taken together, these constitute a

181. Abou El Fadl, *Reasoning with God*, 264–65.

182. *Ibid.*, 265.

vision of how responsible Islamic scholarship should be conducted, which source texts should or should not be considered exemplary of Islamic tradition, and the structured education a student should receive to make sense of that scholarship.

Neotraditional Muslims champion the Islamic scholarly tradition as the true bearer of academic integrity in opposition to Salafism and Orientalist scholarship. This vision is an argument against other modern approaches to the study of Islam that are marred either by moral ambivalence, anti-Muslim bias, flawed epistemologies, or shallow scholarship. Salafism, the Progressive-Muslims movement, and Western academic programs influenced by Orientalists are often targeted within Neotraditionalist critiques as reflecting these flaws. The main Neotraditionalist critique is that the proponents of each of those movements advance their own interpretations of primary source texts without studying or understanding the text's interpretive traditions as conveyed through scholarly lineages. As a result, they lack any legitimate grounds for interpretive authority because they have divorced themselves from the channels of authoritative knowledge, namely, the tradition of inheriting knowledge from living scholars who transmitted it in an uninterrupted chain from God's messenger. In this extended and comprehensive model of education, students study texts but also learn the teacher's style of thinking, including their assumptions about the world, about themselves, and about the proper purposes of seeking knowledge. More than the contents of the texts, it is these underlying values and assumptions that constitute the epistemological bases of the

Islamic scholarly tradition.

In a lecture entitled “The Crisis of Knowledge,” Shaykh Hamza Yusuf lamented that most contemporary educational institutions do more harm than good, and spread more ignorance than knowledge. The reasons, as he sees them, are that modern educational institutions are founded upon the epistemological assumptions of secular materialism instead of philosophical assumptions about the nature of truth, meaning, or the sacred. This in turn leads to methodological differences between Islamic traditions of scholarship and modern academia. As a result, the academic world has embraced a number of critical misunderstandings. He explains:

In our tradition, our epistemology is very different from the epistemological assumptions of the current dominant model around the globe. But if we don't understand the epistemological assumptions, if we simply go to these universities and we imbibe what's being taught without having the critical skills to understand and analyze these things, then we become dictums of worldviews that were engendered by others, that do not share the same first principles that we share. If we don't know our first principles, if we don't know what our methodologies are, if we don't know what the epistemology of Islam is... that ignorance is easily replaced by another type of ignorance, which is a compounded ignorance. It's learning things that are simply wrong.¹⁸³

He goes on to indict the state of contemporary of academic institutions for misleading students by giving them the dangerous illusion of having learned something, when, in reality, they have only been taught to believe themselves knowledgeable.

183. Hamza Yusuf, *The Crisis of Knowledge - Shaykh Hamza Yusuf* (Dewan Sri Budiman, UiTM, Shah Alam, Malaysia, 2014), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NIc-4CdIF9U&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

Our scholars differentiated between simple ignorance and between compounded ignorance – *al-jahal al-murraqab, wa al-jahal al-basiit*.¹⁸⁴ *Jahal al-basiit* is the ignorance that someone who knows they're ignorant has. And this—Dr. Naqib Attas calls it innocent ignorance—It's something that can be remedied. But compounded ignorance is an ignorance where someone is ignorant and they're also ignorant of their ignorance. And this is a much deeper problem...

We have a cult film in the United States called *The Wizard of Oz*, which every American child has to see year after year until they're fully indoctrinated into the worldview of *The Wizard of Oz*. But one of the things about *The Wizard of Oz* is there's a scarecrow who's looking for a brain. And he says, “if I only had a brain / with the thoughts I'd be thinkin' / I could be another Lincoln / if I only had a brain.” So he's looking for a brain. Well, he never finds the brain, but at the end the wizard gives him a piece of paper and he says, “in my country, back home in Kansas, when someone doesn't have a brain, we confer upon him a diploma.” And this is very often what happens in our universities: brainless people are given pieces of paper to convince them that they have a brain. But the reality of it is, they're actually more ignorant coming out of the university than they were going in, because when they went into the university they had innocent ignorance, but by the time they come out of the university, they have this compounded ignorance. And this, to me, is one of the great crimes of the modern educational institutions: that people are deprived of a true education. That they're given what they think is an education.¹⁸⁵

In Shaykh Hamza's view, these institutions disguise their failure to provide “a true education” by shifting attention from the content of the curriculum to the degree awarded upon its completion. In this analysis, academic degrees have become like a fiat currency: the cornerstone of a system based upon widespread faith in pieces of paper that are not supported by anything of real value. In another lecture, Shaykh Hamza recounts a hadith in which the Prophet tells his companions (*sahaba*) about a

184. It is interesting to note that Shaykh Hamza has redundantly added the word “between” a second time in this phrase, because his patterns of speech in English have been affected by his habitual use of Arabic. In Arabic grammar, the word for “between” needs to be repeated in this way.

185. Yusuf, *The Crisis of Knowledge - Shaykh Hamza Yusuf*.

future phenomenon that Muslims should fear even more than the emergence of the Antichrist (*dajjal*) toward the end of time:

...that [Muslims] work for other than the sake of Allah... And we have a whole nation of people studying for pieces of paper. *Wallahi* [I swear to God]! They're studying for pieces of paper. It's not knowledge. You can't tell me it's knowledge, because I have the piece of paper – [laughs]. So nobody can tell me it's knowledge, 'cause I went to the school and I sat in the classes and did that thing – and regret every minute of it. It's not knowledge!¹⁸⁶

Even worse, receiving an academic degree fortifies ignorance within a shell of arrogance, insulating graduates from those opportunities for future learning that humility invites. It is clear from Shaykh Hamza's other comments that he does not view this as the reality of every academic program or graduate, but merely a possibility enabled by a secular academic model.

If academia is not providing “a true education,” what is it that is missing or has been done wrong? Keep in mind that Shaykh Hamza is a co-founder of Zaytuna College, which is also a degree-conferring academic institution. What is it that makes Zaytuna different, allowing it to avoid these shortcomings? There are three facets to Neotraditional critique of Western academia that must be understood to answer this question.

The first critique is that a philosophy grounded in materialistic consumerism has led to the impoverishment of ethics in educational curricula. The second critique is that the Orientalist scholarship on Islam that has been accepted within many

186. Hamza Yusuf, *Shaykh Hamza Yusuf - Veracity & Sincerity In Islam*, (11:36), accessed August 7, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1_9CCznFu0.

academic institutions fails to uphold academic principles, and that because of this, it is often polemical in effect. The third critique is that non-religious academics, unconsciously influenced by secular-materialist epistemological assumptions, will naturally misinterpret the texts of religious communities, sometimes even in direct opposition to the meanings the community would recognize in the text.

A Neotraditionalist critique of Western academic institutions is that they have contributed to the moral impoverishment of society by adopting secular materialism as a fundamental philosophical assumption instead of grounding education in a sense of the sacred. Shaykh Hamza describes this development as inhibiting the ability of students to recognize meaning:

We believe that education is rooted in the sacred. If you cut it off from the sacred, you've destroyed education; it has no meaning. This is what our students all over this country know in their heart of hearts – they can not articulate it but they know it: I am studying something that does not have meaning because you have not told me why I am studying this. It can't simply be to make money.¹⁸⁷

He continues to warn his audience that because students are not guided to apply what they learn in pursuit of a sense of meaning and higher purpose, they may instead utilize their knowledge as a tool for worldly gain without any regard for ethics.

I don't know how many of you know about the Tuskegee syphilis study, which was where physicians in this country injected syphilis into African Americans to see the effects over time. It's a well-known study. But only recently we found out that not only were they doing it in Mississippi, they were also doing it in Guatemala. In 1947 they were injecting people down in Central America with syphilis, gonorrhea, and other diseases to

187. *Hamza Yusuf - The School System*, (16:29), accessed June 9, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7AqHxj2rF7I>.

see the effects of these diseases on people. These were scientists that were produced by the best colleges in the United States of America. The same colleges that produced the people that robbed all of you that own homes in this country. Robbed you of your equity. The same people. These are the products of American universities. And until we deal with the fact that without teaching people meaning – without teaching people purpose, you create monsters... This is what happens when you divorce education from the sacred... People talk about sacrificing and they don't even know the root meaning of that – *sacrus facere*: to make sacred... And that's what's lacking.

And until we reestablish the true roots of learning and knowledge and why we're learning and what is the purpose of knowledge, we will see it get worse and worse and worse. Muslims have an incredible opportunity right now, because we are a people that still, in spite of ourselves, because of our Prophet *salla allahu alayhi wa sallam* [God's salutations and peace be upon him], because when he said one of the signs of the end of time is that people will study for other than the sake of God. They will go to school for other than the sake of God. Because every civilization – Hindu, Buddhist, Confucianist [sic], Christian, Jewish, and Muslim – all of them understood that learning was to make a better human being. Learning was not to make more money. It was to make a better human being. Not for learning's sake, for the sake of Allah *subhanahu wa ta'ala* [glorious is He and Most High].¹⁸⁸

According to Shaykh Hamza, education can only have a positive value if it is rooted in a sense of spiritual purpose. On the other hand, an education predicated upon secular-materialism and divorced from the sacred will instill in students a nihilist outlook on life that provides fertile soil for monstrous acts of evil.

In the last decade, there has been a dramatic proliferation of local as well as online Neotraditional Muslim educational organizations. Most of them are engaged in a simple competition for confessional authority against the internet “milk-sheikhs,” an epithet for self-proclaimed Muslim scholars who aggressively promote

188. Ibid., (18:30).

their own unprecedented opinions and scriptural interpretations as Islamically normative. These organizations hope to intercept young Muslims who, not knowing where else to turn for religious answers, place their absolute trust in “Sheikh Google,” and type their questions into any online search engine.¹⁸⁹ However, other recently founded organizations like Zaytuna College have turned their attention towards a more mature audience, seeking to create an academic space in which to directly confront what they see as flawed modes of Islamic Studies scholarship produced or disseminated in Western universities. This intention was made explicitly in the language used to invite papers for Zaytuna's 2015 conference, “Forging Islamic Authority” which identified the modern development of a tension pitting “academic vs. traditional authority” as a central theme.¹⁹⁰

Neotraditional critique of the Western academic model of education is a complex topic. For each critique of a perceived shortcoming, there must be a corresponding discourse describing what would have been a better approach. Central to Neotraditional discourse is the claim to epitomize the principles of “reliable scholarship” which function not only as the only legitimate foundation for religious authority, but also represent the most rigorously academic model for social scientific

189. The phrases “milk-sheikh” and “Sheikh Google” are used jokingly within Neotraditional discourse to deride untrustworthy sources of religious knowledge, especially self-proclaimed scholars lacking educational lineage and the many anonymous authors who publishing their opinions the internet, often without providing any supporting citations. See, for example Amena, *SHEIKH GOOGLE! | Amena*, accessed August 2, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cmvCkZxpb8.

190. Hatem Bazian, “Call for Papers,” in *Forging Islamic Authority: Navigating Text and Context in the Modern World* (2nd Annual Zaytuna College Conference on Higher Education, Berkeley, Calif.: Zaytuna College, 2015), https://www.zaytuna.edu/static/2nd_annual_zaytuna_college_conference_on_higher_education.

scholarship on Islamic tradition.

This genre of critique accuses Western academia of producing (although by no means without exception) shoddy scholarship on topics related to Islam. Essentially, this is an extension of Neotraditionalist polemics against Salafism, the Progressive-Muslims movement, and other religious modes. The Neotraditional ideal is that scholarship requires critical authentication and evaluation of sources, transparency in the citation of earlier authorities, and a clearly articulated system for the analysis of data. In Neotraditional discourse, any other religious (or purportedly non-religious) mode, inasmuch as its system of knowledge production differs from the Neotraditional ideal, is diagnosed as suffering from the same terminal malady: its conclusions are spurious and the arguments offered to support them are merely arbitrary citations drawn from a woefully deficient informational basis. Based upon that prognosis, the proponents of such arguments must either be guilty of willful dissimulation or genuine ignorance. In sum, they are movements produced and sustained exclusively through the production of critically flawed scholarship.

In Shaykh Hamza's other public comments and publications, it is clear that he considers this problem to extend beyond the internal disputes among different cohorts of Muslims to specialists in the academic study of Islam, because their scholarly contributions are similarly weak in the application of academic principles:

...there are people like Patricia Crone and other "scholars" who have attempted to say the Quran was put together by a committee of people after the Prophet's *–sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam–* death and they added

what they wanted and took out what they wanted. This was in *Atlantic Monthly*; it has come up a few times. Those are rejected even by the Orientalists. People that work within the Orientalist tradition do not accept those theories, and Patricia Crone has backtracked quite a bit; she is not saying things like she was three or four years ago. She is teaching in the East Coast now, she was originally at SOAS. She is no longer saying the same things because she was given so much flak by the Orientalist community. When you read those things, you have to understand that those things are not even accepted by non-Muslim scholars of Islam. Nicholson who taught Arberry in his book on the history of Arabic literature says that we have to admit that the Qur'an is definitely the word of the Prophet –*sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam*.¹⁹¹

In this passage, he mentions a thesis proposed by Crone and comments that it was rejected “even by the Orientalists,” using language which indicates a low opinion of the scholarship of Orientalists generally. At the same time, he engages the topic according to a model that can only be called academic: he identifies the author who proposed the idea and her academic posts, describes the idea’s reception by other scholars (albeit summarily), names a magazine which published the idea, and the view of other scholars whose research led them to a contradictory conclusion. In the passages that follow, he discusses several factors informing Nicholson’s thesis which he suggests Crone failed to take into account. Notably, many of these factors relate to the nature of Islamic tradition and the methods that were historically used to transmit and authenticate it by Muslim religious scholars.

The implied message is that although Crone was widely respected in academic circles as a luminary of Islamic Studies, her scholarship was irredeemably flawed because she did not understand the epistemological foundations of the

191. Hamza Yusuf, *Sheikh Hamza Yusuf - Vision of Islam CD1 3/6*, (06:40), accessed June 8, 2016, <https://youtu.be/k8ybCaQFHIQ>.

Islamic scholarly tradition, such as the strategies early Muslim communities developed to reliably preserve, transmit, and determine the authenticity of knowledge conveyed through oral tradition. Shaykh Hamza's audience is left wondering how Crone was able to produce such poor scholarship and yet still be praised within Western academia as an exemplary scholar. This example functions as a cautionary tale that calls into question the ability of Western academics to recognize poor scholarship on Islam – much less produce strong scholarship – in Islamic Studies.

It is worth noting that many of the active producers of Progressive-Muslims discourse are themselves academics who were educated primarily within the Western academic tradition. Many of them are professors of Islamic Studies. As academics who describe themselves as religiously committed Muslims, these figures sometimes have a dual affiliation, such that their publications contribute to Western academic discourse about Islam and to the fledgeling Progressive-Muslims confessional discourse simultaneously. If the quality of scholarship in these publications avails itself to criticism on the grounds of their academic quality, rebutting them offers Neotraditionalists an opportunity to bolster the claim that their own scholarly tradition is more rigorous and principled than what passes for scholarship in other circles.

In a detailed rebuttal of Scott Kugle's publications on the topic of homosexuality in Islamic legal discourse, Mobeen Vaid, who is described by

MuslimMatters as a “student of traditional Islamic sciences,” critiques Kugle for publishing poorly researched studies.¹⁹² A significant weakness of the works, according to Vaid, is that Kugle bases significant portions of his argument upon an obscure work from the literary genre called *qasas al-anbiya*, or tales of the prophets. Narratives in this genre were produced by synthesizing details from miscellaneous sources to introduce a general audience to basic Islamic religious themes through informal storytelling about prophets and the incidents occurring in the course of their spiritual missions. Vaid challenges Kugle’s reliance upon a work in the *qasas* genre, and staunchly objects to his characterization of the genre as being “just as old and just as authentic as making explicit commentaries on the Qur’an.”¹⁹³ Addressing this point, Vaid’s response was that Kugle’s “statement can only charitably be described as dubious. In reality, the tradition of storytelling held very little authority in general, and has never held any at all in the fields of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) or theology (*‘aqida*).”¹⁹⁴ In addition, Vaid points out that Kugle has incorrectly attributed the work to a famous early Muslim scholar and narrator of the Qur’an, when it was actually written by someone else whose name was merely similar.

Kugle cites lengthy passages from the *qasas* work of Muhammad b. ‘Abd Allah al-Kisa’i (active 5th/11th c.), which he states “quotes from earlier

192. “Mobeen Vaid,” *MuslimMatters.org*, accessed July 21, 2016, <http://muslimmatters.org/author/mobeen/>.

193. Scott Kugle, “Sexuality, Diversity, and Ethics in the Agenda of Progressive Muslims,” in *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 209.

194. Mobeen Vaid, “Can Islam Accommodate Homosexual Acts?: Qur’ānic Revisionism and the Case of Scott Kugle,” *MuslimMatters*, July 11, 2016, 29, <http://cdn.muslimmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/Can-Islam-Accommodate-Homosexual-Acts.pdf> | <https://web.archive.org/web/20160712193621/http://cdn.muslimmatters.org/wp-content/uploads/Can-Islam-Accommodate-Homosexual-Acts.pdf>.

books that no longer exist.” It is important to note that Kugle erroneously cites the al-Kisa’i who wrote the *qasas* work in question as ‘Ali b. Hamza al-Kisa’i (d. 189/804), the famous transmitter of one of the seven canonical Qur’anic readings, or *qira’at*, and founder of an early school of grammar based in Kufa. Muhammad b. ‘Abd Allah al-Kisa’i, however, the author of the later *qasas* work in which Kugle anchors the bulk of his Qur’anic revisionism, is by all counts an obscure figure. Little has been recorded about his life, his date of death is a matter of great uncertainty, and no other work has been attributed to him aside from his aforementioned *qasas* collection, itself a marginal and relatively unknown work in the larger *qasas* genre.¹⁹⁵

This type of error is considered inexcusable in traditionalist scholarship, for which the science of *‘ilm al-rijal* (the analytical study of biographies) was developed to ensure the accuracy and reliability of citations. Because of this slip, Kugle is not only critiqued for negligence regarding this traditional epistemological standard and its associated literature, but is also accused of applying a double standard to textual evidence; he attacks the body of traditional scholarship dealing with the evaluation of narrative authenticity as unreliable, but simultaneously relies upon sources for which no meaningful assertion of reliability had ever been made by anyone.

It is worth taking note of a glaring incongruence in Kugle's epistemology. [...] Kugle makes much ado about the purported “unreliability” of *hadith* and how they merely reflect a neo-traditionalist “vision of orthodoxy,” further charging that the few still trained to scrutinize *hadith* credibility today have “abandoned their duty.” [...] Kugle brings up reason after reason for rejecting *hadith* reports otherwise designated *ṣaḥih* ('sound')—a label he deems “optimistic” and that merely serves to make otherwise tenuous reports appear more reliable than they really are. It is curious indeed that Kugle reserves such great suspicion vis-à-vis the rigorously authenticated reports adjudged *ṣaḥih* by centuries of *hadith* scholarship only to lay enormous evidentiary weight upon *qasas* materials from an obscure late author lacking any

195. Ibid., 30–31.

chain of transmission (*isnad*) or other evidentiary basis whatsoever.¹⁹⁶

In reference to Kugle’s citation of another source, Vaid protests that he “applies absolutely no scrutiny whatsoever to the narrations he cites from al-Rāwandī. Are they sound? How have they been graded by scholars? What is known about their transmitters? Kugle reveals none of this information.”¹⁹⁷ Vaid further accuses Kugle of “selective citation,” adding that he is “selective even when quoting from these dubious sources, citing only passages that support his goals and ignoring those that run counter to them.”¹⁹⁸ He censures Kugle for making unannounced modifications to texts he claims to quote and knowingly omitting evidence that undermines his argument.

Ultimately, Vaid’s critique is clear: Kugle’s thesis was built upon an unreliable source, but by falsely attributing the citation to a famous author, he demonstrates either naive carelessness or a form of academic fraud; in either case, Kugle’s research has failed to meet academic standards. Vaid concludes that Kugle’s purpose is “promoting anything that advances his revisionist account, no matter how tendentious the source or incoherent the methodology.”¹⁹⁹ In order to “force his own agenda onto the text,” he sacrifices academic integrity, misrepresents key facts, and “manipulates his interpretive approach when and as needed to arrive at already

196. *Ibid.*, 31–32.

197. *Ibid.*, 34.

198. *Ibid.*, 33.

199. *Ibid.*, 34, 33.

predetermined views.”²⁰⁰

Vaid is a neotraditional Muslim writing in defense of a neotraditional approach to Islam, but despite his occasionally confessional authorial tone, there is no doubt that his negative assessment of Kugle’s research is intended as a critique on purely academic grounds. He ends with an appeal to the core principles of scholarship: “For an argument to have intellectual integrity, it must at the very least be honest with the sources and tradition it seeks to interrogate. At some point, one must admit when one is wrong.”²⁰¹

In a revealing passage, Vaid dismisses Kugle’s academic slips as failures according to the standards of traditional Islamic scholarship:

Plying *qasas* materials as reliable and authoritative, if not quasi-apodictic, while casually dismissing the majority of an entire genre of diligently scrutinized revelational statements—namely, *hadith*—as merely speculative, is both epistemologically incoherent and radically at odds with the Islamic scholarly tradition under the rubric of which Kugle claims to be advancing his cause.²⁰²

By comparing Kugle’s work against “the Islamic scholarly tradition” here, Vaid identifies the Islamic scholarly tradition and not Western academia as the benchmark of academic integrity against which any effort at scholarship must be measured. The mere fact that Vaid published this rebuttal stands as a subtle accusation: the Western academic system was impotent or unwilling to subject Kugle’s thesis to adequate

200. Vaid, “Can Islam Accommodate Homosexual Acts?: Qur’ānic Revisionism and the Case of Scott Kugle,” 39.

201. *Ibid.*, 47.

202. *Ibid.*, 34, 33.

review, so it was left to Vaid, a humble “student of traditional Islamic Sciences” to point out its academic shortcomings.

For neotraditional Muslims like Shaykh Hamza, and Vaid, Islamic religious scholarship has always been an eminently academic enterprise – being an insider to the religious tradition was never an impediment to fair and principled academic research, but rather the cardinal means by which academic integrity in Islamic scholarship could be assured.

Neotraditional scholars and authors such as those mentioned above opine that theories like those advanced by Crone (particularly in her earlier works) and Kugle have not been met with a degree of critical scholarly review proportional to their contentiousness nature. Neotraditional discourse that highlights academic shortcomings of published works in Islamic Studies that universities nevertheless continue to teach gives the impression that academic circles enthusiastically and uncritically embrace dubious theories and laud their authors. This in turn contributes to an erosion of confidence, especially among educated Muslims, in the quality of Islamic Studies scholarship in Western academia.

The first of the two critiques above alleged that academia has become morally impoverished generally by purging the dimension of the sacred from the curriculum of higher education. The second critique suggests that the quality of scholarship about Islam and Muslims in Western academia fails to reach a respectable academic standard because most of it continues to be built upon the

flawed foundations of Orientalism. This discourse addresses academic failure, defined as the inability to produce sound research that is based upon thorough knowledge of the sources and a reasonable, coherent methodology for understanding what those sources can be said to indicate about Islam generally. According to Neotraditionalists, the proponents of Orientalism, Salafism, and the Progressive-Muslims movement are essentially similar, because they are all guilty of this same basic shortcoming. The core message is that none of these discursive modes can be relied upon as a source of information about Islam. Supplementing this conclusion is a discussion of what specific qualities would be requisite for someone to possess before they can be considered a scholar or a reliable source of information about Islam.

Shaykh Hamza and other Neotraditionalists often express incredulity that even people they would regard as completely uneducated about religion apparently deem themselves experts, particularly when it comes to Islam. At a speech to the Oxford Union, Shaykh Hamza criticized the popular trend among contemporary people who have not even studied the basic texts taught in traditional Islamic educational curricula, yet still consider themselves to have acquired sufficient expertise to speak authoritatively about Islam.

We can also ask ourselves if we are informed by natural and social science—“Is our attitude towards Islam a scientific attitude? Are we looking at it with objectivity? Have we really studied this religion in order for us to articulate informed opinions about it, whether positive or negative?” One of the things about our current situation in the West, if you look at it is, when Islam is mentioned, people are willing to

articulate the most prejudiced views without any hesitation and feel they are quite informed by doing so. They might have been informed by journalists, or what they saw on television, but if you ask them “Have you ever read the Qur’an? Have you ever read any of [sayings of] the collections of the Prophet Muhammad? Have you ever read a *seerah*, or a life of the Prophet Muhammad?” And more often than not, you will hear “No.” So, it’s very interesting that we are often very opinionated, vis-à-vis Islam, and it’s associated with some of the most backward aspects of the current situation.²⁰³

He not only laments the low threshold at which people will regard themselves as authoritative about Islam, but also the failure to adhere to academic standards when it comes to studying Islam:

Now, the first thing I think is interesting is that there is a verse in the Qur’an, “*La ikhraha fi deen*—There is no compulsion in this religion.” [Holy Qur’an, 2:256] And one of the things we tend to not think about is inward compulsion. In other words, we are often outwardly coerced, or we recognise outward coercion, but the idea of being inwardly coerced by our own biases and prejudices. The ability to actually suspend our frames of reference—that are often quite negative—because many of us in the West have inherited an enormous amount of baggage vis-à-vis the Muslim world and so it becomes very difficult to actually look with objectivity at the Muslim world. Much of what is being articulated today is the rehashing of hackneyed canards about Islam that went on for centuries—really, it’s actually quite extraordinary. And many people who consider themselves to be educated will actually say these things that they have heard, grown up with or read in a journal or in a magazine. So, it’s very important if we are to move beyond the realm of prejudice that we actually begin to examine internally what’s going on, and what’s informing our opinions and our views.²⁰⁴

What Shaykh Hamza is lamenting here is the abandonment of the principle developed by phenomenologists of religion called *epoché*, or suspension of judgment

203. Hamza Yusuf, “Conveying Islam at Oxford (Transcript),” February 15, 2006, 2, <http://ihsanic-intelligence.com/v3/wp-content/uploads/2006/02/2006-Conveying-Islam-at-Oxford-Sh.-Hamza-Yusuf.pdf>.

204. *Ibid.*, 2–3.

in the interest of reducing biases in representation. Without striving for epoché, an author's representation of a group will reflect his personal views about the group rather than recording how members of the group understand themselves. When the author's bias is negative, the result might, in effect, be polemical rather than academic. This suggests that prejudices about Muslims have led to the popular repetition of old, false tropes that are academically unsupportable and uncharitable towards Islam or Muslims, even among highly educated people.

According to Shaykh Hamza, religiosity is a prerequisite to scholarship. In his view, unless one is accustomed to interpreting experience in light of their own inner faith, it is impossible to achieve the degree of epoché required for true scholarship of religion:

By “scholar” I mean a devotional scholar because, again, in the West they differentiate between devotional scholars and between scholars, what Dr. Cleary sometimes calls “scholars for dollars.” Those are people who earn their living in institutions. And so they will study something as a way of making their living whether they believe in it or not. And so, many people will teach religion that don't believe in religion. And that perspective of religion will taint the way they teach the religion. And I went through a Religious Studies program at a California university. There was an incredible difference for me between the classes that I took from someone who was actually working within a tradition and was a believer in a tradition... and the classes that were done by people that did not believe in religion. The type of approach that's taken by somebody that does not believe in religion – even if they're attempting to be objective – it will still taint their view of religion, and that's the nature of human beings.²⁰⁵

What is clear from this comment is that even if a scholar does not believe in the

205. Hamza Yusuf, *Sheikh Hamza Yusuf - Vision of Islam CD1 1/6*, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-2vMLdjYuo&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

particular religion they study, they must at least believe “in religion.” Hence, Shaykh Hamza praises Cleary and identifies him as a Catholic, yet Cleary’s scholarship has focused mainly on Buddhism, Taoism, and Islam.

The basis of the argument that religiosity is a prerequisite to understanding religion is the postulation that a person who does not believe in the supernatural will unconsciously interpret religious texts through a secular-materialist lens that distorts the true meaning of the text. Shaykh Hamza’s criterion of religiosity echoes but also exceeds the recommendations of early phenomenologists of religion. For example, it is reminiscent of Gerardus van der Leeuw’s prescription that the phenomenologist must be capable of “the interpolation of the phenomenon into our own lives,” in order to approach unfamiliar religious phenomena empathetically.²⁰⁶ By way of example, van der Leeuw quotes G. K. Chesterton as remarking:

When the professor is told by the barbarian that once there was nothing except a great feathered serpent, unless the learned man feels a thrill and a half temptation to wish it were true, he is no judge of such things at all.²⁰⁷

In other words, the cost of approaching such accounts with skepticism is that something relevant and valuable about the story will be excluded from the resulting scholarship. This is a sentiment that Shaykh Hamza appears to share. In an article published on his website, he relates the story of a saintly man’s miraculous access to hidden knowledge and insight, then comments in a footnote:

206. Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 674.

207. *Ibid.*, 2:675; quoting from Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (London: E. Benn Ltd., 1925), 62.

Wahab knew the man's name without previously knowing him or being told his name, which frightened the man leaving him unable to speak. This is known as *kashf* ["unveiling"] and can occur among the deeply righteous whereby they know something that is not possible for them to know by ordinary means. Usually the righteous hide this gift, but sometimes it is necessary for them to reveal it, as it can help their words to penetrate the heart of the one they are trying to guide. I have witnessed this many times with my own teachers, so it does not strike me as contrived, which is generally how orientalists, unfamiliar with this phenomenon, view such narrations.²⁰⁸

What Shaykh Hamza is suggesting is that Orientalists have been intellectually hobbled by a secular educational framework that censors information about miraculous phenomena by assuming them to be the product of imagination and superstition. As a result, they would automatically discount stories like the one above as either the product of an unscrupulous storyteller's imagination or the honest account of a charlatan who claimed to be clairvoyant. On the other hand, an open-minded scholar who had received a religious upbringing and education would be intellectually capable of receiving an account like the one above on its own terms, producing from it scholarship that honestly reflects the positive spiritual meaning it holds for its own religious community.

What Shaykh Hamza and other Neotraditional scholars allege is that Orientalists, by nature of the aloofness of their approach to Islam as an object of scholarship, could not possibly produce unbiased accounts. Without a doubt, cynical readings of Islamic texts and narratives colored the scholarship of some of the most prominent Orientalist scholars like Goldziher, Schacht, and Crone. As a result, their

208. Hamza Yusuf, "Striking Necks: It Must Be the Kharijites!," *Sandala*, March 20, 2015, <https://sandala.org/striking-necks-it-must-be-the-kharijites/>.

works explicitly or subtextually depicted Muslims as superstitious, gullible, dishonest people who had no qualms about fabricating or appropriating religious narratives to advance their own agendas.²⁰⁹ In some cases, Orientalist scholarship reflected such an extreme degree of negative bias that they would be branded dehumanizing hate speech by contemporary standards:

For example, consider Goldziher's basic description of Islam as a "warlike religion" comprising an unoriginal though "eclectic composite of religious ideas and regulations...derived from foreign sources" by a well-intentioned but still "pathological" prophet motivated by "vigorous worldly aspirations which became dominant during the course of his successes" and who "brought the sword into the world" because he felt "no preference for peace" as "real blood clung to the sword he wielded to establish his realm."²¹⁰

In Shaykh Hamza's view, the negative bias reflected in Orientalist scholarship is symptomatic of an inability to maintain epoché, much less to empathize with the believer's faith-based conception of their religion, even though that should have been their primary source of information. Having neglected the only truly indispensable source of research data, what the Orientalist produces is not really scholarship at all; it is chauvinistic fiction loosely inspired by an innovative misreading of religious texts. In contrast, true scholarship requires the ability to approach religious narratives

209. Contemporary readers should have no trouble recognizing these themes and the general negative bias implicit in early Orientalist works. Examples include: Ignác Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981); Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950); Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

210. Brendan Peter Newlon, "Introducing Islamic Law: A Guide for Teachers," *Article Written for Doctoral Field Examination (Not yet Published)*, University of California, Santa Barbara, May 2015, 5; Warlike: Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, 168; Unoriginal derivation, pathological: *Ibid.*, 5; Worldly aspirations: *Ibid.*, 26; Swords and blood: *Ibid.*, 23.

with a degree of empathy only achievable by a religious scholar – even one who subscribes to a different religion.

Other Neotraditionalists argue that one’s understanding of Islam is never complete until one acquires direct, lived experience of the religion as a believer. I once heard a shaykh relate the story of how he had invited a man to convert to Islam by saying, “I could tell you all about our religion, but you would not understand its beauty. I may as well tell you that I have the most delicious ice cream in the other room – but you would never be able to truly understand until you step inside and taste it!”²¹¹ Similarly, Ustadh Ibrahim Osi-Efa maintains that developing an inner appreciation for the Prophet Muhammad as a gift from Allah is “part of the process [...] of seeking knowledge,” and supports his claim by commenting on an account attributed to the Prophet’s nephew Ali:

Ali ibn Abi Talib (*karam Allahu wajhu*) tells us [...] that whoever intermingled with the *rasul* [i.e. the Prophet], *salla Allahu `alayhi wa salama* [God’s salutations and peace be upon him], *ma`rifah*– It’s not just out of knowledge. Because *ma`rifah* presupposes an *increase* in knowledge. A movement from ignorance into knowledge. *Ma`arifah* is not just academic or abstract; *ma`arifah* also presupposes *experience* likewise. So whoever intermingled with the *rasul* (*salla Allahu `alayhi wa salama*) increasing in knowledge *of him* and experiencing *him... ahabahu* [“they would love him”]! That they will *love* the *rasul* (*salla Allahu `alayhi wa `ala alihi wa sahabihi wa salam*)!²¹²

211. Anonymous, “Story of a Man’s Conversion to Islam” (Firm Foundations Retreat, San Bernadino, 2012).

212. Ibrahim Osi-Efa, *Peterborough | Virtues 1437 – Ustadh Ibrahim Osi-Efa (Full Lecture)*, (23:00), accessed July 26, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1425&v=EW_5EiAvoEY | <http://seekershub.org/blog/2016/01/the-prophets-reminder-to-allah/>; An uninterrupted translation of the quote might roughly be given as “...and whoever kept close company with him, having deep understanding, would love him.” Osi-Efa cites his source as Muhammad ibn ‘Isa Tirmidhi, *Al-Shama’il Muhammadiyya*, ca. 9th c. CE, Book 1 “On the noble features of the Messenger of Allah (May peace and blessings be upon him),” hadith number 6/7.

Just as in the ice cream allegory above, the message of this story is that *ma`rifah*, a word connoting deep and thorough knowledge, can only be attained when direct experience enriches the learning process. In other words, a process of study that is “just academic or abstract” is incomplete or deficient until it positively affects the heart. This sentiment resembles another of van der Leeuw’s prescriptions: “Understanding [...] presupposes intellectual restraint. But this is never the attitude of the cold-blooded spectator; it is, on the contrary, the loving gaze of the lover on the beloved object.”²¹³ In these examples, Neotraditional scholars echo phenomenologists like van der Leeuw in calling for principles they considered foundational for the scientific study of religion. Highlighting those principles is a means to advance the argument that any study of religion predicated upon a secular-materialist epistemology is flawed from the outset, and does not truly merit being termed scholarship. The overarching message is that real scholarship not only requires thorough knowledge of the topic; it must also be guided by an attitude that inspires the scholar to a higher degree of insight in interpretation and fairness in presentation.

VI. Conclusion: Reliable Islamic Scholarship

Each section of this chapter has addressed a different theme in Neotraditional discourse, but in reality, each of these themes fit together as multiple facets of the

213. Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 684.

core message of Neotraditional discourse: the only reliable sources of knowledge about Islam are the Muslim scholars who were educated within the frameworks of Islamic Traditionalism. Those frameworks constitute a unique style or praxis of learning and necessarily include understanding the guidelines of systematic theology and law according to the orthodox schools and principled fidelity to the epistemological protocols those schools developed for accepting, rejecting, or reconciling apparent conflicts in primary texts.

Furthermore, honest scholarship requires humility regarding the inherent limits of human knowledge as well as of one's personal knowledge. Lastly, while personal faith enables a religious scholar to understand and appreciate accounts of the miraculous, it is the feeling of *taqwa*, or pious wariness against transgressing the limits set by Allah, that prevents religious scholars from advancing any claim unless it is based upon a preponderance of sound evidence. At its core, the defining characteristic of Islamic Neotraditionalism is the demand for scholarship about Islam that reflects these rigorous criteria. Scholars educated within the Neotraditional style of learning will not merely convey knowledge of the texts and commentaries received from their teachers; they will also express what they internalized of the teacher's habits, mannerisms, etiquette, rhetorical style, and *taqwa*.

This chapter described the discourse which seeks to define the essential nature and purpose of Neotraditionalism as a multifaceted style learning. In this discourse, the Neotraditional style is showcased and clarified by contradistinction to

rival modes such as Salafism and the Progressive-Muslims movement. The constant theme in such comparisons is that the Neotraditional praxis of learning provides a reliable basis for knowledge about Islam that is free from the epistemological and methodological shortcomings of other modes. The next chapter will introduce some of the actors whose interrelationships and demonstrations of the Neotraditional style of learning provide for the formation and development of Neotraditional community networks.

Chapter 3: Community Networks

In the late 16th century, a Chinese Muslim named Hu Dengzhou returned to China after spending several years studying Islam in Mecca. In the years that followed, Hu initiated a new style of Islamic education that developed over time to include a coordinated network of scholars and teachers, organized teaching curricula, and the proliferation of translated and original texts written in the local language. Later generations of Chinese Muslim scholars regarded Hu as the founder of their shared educational lineage, and usually referred to him by the title Grand-shaykh Hu (Hu Taishi).²¹⁴

In the mid 1990s, American convert to Islam Shaykh Hamza Yusuf initiated something remarkably similar after he returned from studying Islam in the United Arab Emirates and Mauritania. Yusuf was born in 1958 with the name Mark Hanson. He was raised in a family that practiced Greek Orthodox Christianity, but converted to Islam when he was 17 years old after nearly dying in a head-on collision and reading an English translation of the Qur'an. Over the following 10 years, he traveled in pursuit of an Islamic education, spending three years in England with the community of Abdalqadir as-Sufi, four in the UAE enrolled at the Islamic Institute of al-Ain, and three in Mauritania learning from Shaykh Murabit al-Hajj. When he returned to the United States, he studied homeopathy and earned Associates degrees

214. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Asia Center, 2010).

in English and Nursing. After working for some time in a hospital cardiac care unit, he completed a Bachelor's degree in Religious Studies at San Jose State University. For several years, he served as the imam for the Muslim Community Association (MCA) at a mosque in Santa Clara and delivered public lectures at events such as the annual national conference organized by the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). From 1996 to 1998, Shaykh Hamza worked together with Dr. Hesham Alalusi to establish a center for traditional Islamic learning in the San Francisco Bay Area called the Zaytuna Institute.

The Zaytuna Institute began as a meeting place for Muslims to learn more about Islam from scholars who taught according to traditional educational styles. Notably, the teachers at Zaytuna introduced some of the differences of opinion between scholars of the four madhhabs in relation to matters of religious rituals, and emphasized the long tradition of friendly collegial disagreement between the different madhhabs. This created an environment in which Muslims who came from different backgrounds could feel comfortable practicing their religion together as one community even though they practiced it in different ways. When a group would gather to pray in congregation at Zaytuna, one could often see some people praying with their hands folded over their chests while others let their hands hang down at their sides. Some would complete their prayer by reciting the finishing *salam* once and others would recite it twice. When differences like these are observed in a Salafi community, it sometimes provokes a confrontation about the validity of such differences because “Salafis believe that there is only one accurate religious truth as

revealed by the Prophet Muhammad,” and “as a result, in disagreements, only one scholar (if any) can be judged to have the 'correct' understanding.”²¹⁵ However, at Zaytuna, nobody argued that one way was more correct than another or accused anyone else of having fallen into deviant heterodoxy. The Neotraditional style taught at Zaytuna operated on the traditional principle that difference of opinion among religious scholars is a divinely guided blessing which serves to accommodate the needs of diverse communities.²¹⁶

Since that time, and largely as a result of Shaykh Hamza's activities, energetic partnerships and cooperative efforts have created links among a broad spectrum of Muslim scholars and community leaders in America. Through their cooperative efforts, this network has developed a Neotraditional style of learning that unites a number of discursive themes around a common core of Islamic traditionalism and expresses them in ways that are distinctly American.

I. A Model Network: Chinese Islamic Traditionalism

Since the Neotraditional network in America is still developing, it can be elucidating to study it in comparison with the traditional Muslim education network that began to form in China during the 16th century. There are striking parallels between the developmental processes of the two networks, and retrospective analysis

215. Quintan Wiktorowicz, “The Salafi Movement: Violence and the Fragmentation of Community,” in *Muslim Networks from Hajj to Hip Hop*, ed. miriam cooke and Bruce B. Lawrence (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 214.

216. The reader will recall that this principle in Neotraditional discourse was discussed in the previous chapter as a “divinely ordained mercy.” C.f. Gibril Fouad Haddad, “Ikhtilaf Is a Rahma in the Ummah,” accessed May 11, 2016, <http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/misc/ikhtilaf.htm>.

of the historical Chinese Muslim network can clarify the significance of some of the developments we are observing in American Muslim networks today. In particular, the way that the American Neotraditional network has developed in the past two decades shares a great deal in common with the historical development of Hu Dengzhou's Chinese Muslim educational network. In the case of the Chinese network, we have the luxury of knowing how the network grew out of Hu's earliest teaching activities to eventually become the most influential mode of Muslim religious learning in China.

Following Grand-Shaykh Hu's return to China, he began by teaching several students as direct disciples who would master his style of learning. Once their mastery had been recognized by their teacher, they were given *ijaza*, a formal certification and authorization to teach that serves as the primary quality control mechanism within traditional Islamic educational lineages. That first generation of students traveled outwardly, dispersing to various cities to serve as imams of Muslim communities and developing study circles in their mosques to teach the systematic curriculum they had been taught by Grand-Shaykh Hu. In 16th century China, religious scholarly lineages were *de rigueur*; as was the case in other intellectual lineages, disciples in Hu's Muslim lineage were commonly referred to as *dizi*, which combines the words for younger brother and son, and the relationship between a student and the founder of the school was described in terms of belonging to a numbered generational cohort. In each generation, the number of disciples to graduate with an *ijaza* (*chuanyi guazhang*) under each teacher was recorded in terms

of *xuechuan*, or transmission of the teaching. In Islamic traditional educational models, this lineage model is called *sanad*, or a chain of transmission. It includes the complete history of the provenance of any piece of religious information, functioning as a certificate of the teaching's authenticity. Taken together, the elements of discipleship, authorization, and lineage formed the basic structure of the religious educational network, and remain the core elements that provide structure to Neotraditional Muslim networks today.

II. Networks in Time: Intellectual Ancestry and Filiation

The central question distinguishing contemporary Muslim modes is the issue of how Muslims today should understand their relationship with the historical figures of Islamic tradition and their ideas. As related in the previous chapter, antitraditionalist modes such as Salafism and the Progressive-Muslims movement denounce tradition as an obstacle to Islamic authenticity. This modern phenomenon of antitraditionalism represents a type of selective religious memory that “suffers from serious lacuna. It overlooks the long period, eventually the greater part of Islamic history, that passed between the contemporary modern world and the era of the scriptural foundations of Islam.”²¹⁷ In contrast, Neotraditionalism affirms and embraces tradition, and can be summarized in essence as the reaffirmation of traditionalism in the face of modern choices and challenges.²¹⁸ The Neotraditional

217. Itzhak Weismann, “Modernity from Within: Islamic Fundamentalism and Sufism,” in *Sufis and Salafis in the Contemporary Age*, by Lloyd V. J. Ridgeon, 2015, 12.

218. The reader will recall that I have discussed this definition in detail above in the chapter on

mode embraces traditionalism as the process by which successive generations continuously inherit and apply Islamic religious principles to their diverse and ever-changing social contexts.

In describing the nature of tradition, Edward Shils explains that “it is not the intertemporal identity of beliefs or actions which constitutes a tradition; it is the intertemporal *filiation* of beliefs which is constitutive. Filiation entails transmission, 'handing down'. Filiation entails not only handing down but receiving as well.”²¹⁹ The model of filiation is appropriate to describe traditions that are handed down within a community, especially where traditions are literally passed intergenerationally from parents to children. The filial relationship between a child and parent implies a degree of novelty without complete difference. Children resemble their parents because of what they have inherited from them genetically, culturally, linguistically, habitually, and so on; however, they are also unique in terms of which potentially inherited traits they express and which they do not. The same can be said of the cultural heritage passed from one generation within a community to the next, or the intellectual heritage passed from a teacher to a student. It is presumed that the student's knowledge is not *exactly* the same as the teacher's. Similarly, cultural values and behaviors are not replicated *exactly* from one

“The Paths of Neotraditionalism.” This usage accords closely with the way it was used by Shepard and Leibman; see William E Shepard, “Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology,” *Int. J. Middle East Stud. International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 03 (1987): 307–36; Charles Liebman, “Religion and the Chaos of Modernity: The Case of Contemporary Judaism,” in *Take Judaism, for Example: Studies toward the Comparison of Religions*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

219. Edward Shils, “Tradition,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13, no. 2 (1971): 127.

generation to the next. Tradition necessarily involves difference.

Also implied in filiation is a structure of hierarchical authority. Parents are authorities to their children, teachers are authorities to their students, and the present generation must look to the earlier generations as authoritative as well. In Islamic discourse, teachers are analogous to parents, and the knowledge they convey is referred to as analogous to inheritance. In a famous *hadith* (a transmitted narration), the Prophet was reported to have said that “scholars are the inheritors of the prophets. The prophets have not bequeathed dinar nor dirham [currencies], but have only left Sacred Knowledge, and whoever takes it has taken an enormous share.”²²⁰ The same analogy is used to characterize the relationship between God and humans. Shaykh Faraz Rabbani, the founder of SeekersHub, cites a traditional authority who says this narration echos a verse of the Qur'an that provides additional context for its meaning:

Imam al-Ayni (Allah have mercy on him) explained in his commentary on Sahih al-Bakhari, *Umdat al-Qari* (2.39) that this hadith is inspired from the words of Allah Most High, “Then We gave the Scripture as inheritance unto those whom We elected of Our servants.” [Qur'an, 35.32]²²¹

Metaphorically linking scripture and religious teaching with inheritance is a

220. Ahmad ibn Lu'lu' Ibn al-Naqib and Nuh Ha Mim Keller, *Reliance of the Traveller: The Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law 'Umdat Al-Salik* (Beltsville, MD, U.S.A.: Amana Publications, 1999), 4. The importance of “Sacred Knowledge” as a technical term in Neotraditional discourse will be addressed in detail below.

221. Faraz Rabbani, “Is the hadith: ‘The Scholars Are the Inheritors of the Prophets’ authentic? If So, What Does It Mean? - Faraz Rabbani,” *SeekersHub Blog*, March 15, 2011, <http://seekershub.org/blog/2011/03/is-the-hadith-the-scholars-are-the-inheritors-of-the-prophets-authentic-if-so-what-does-it-mean-faraz-rabbani/>.

rhetorical device to indicate the tremendous value of what is being bequeathed.

Furthermore:

The knowledge possessed by these scholars is the knowledge deemed beneficial (al-`ilm al-nafi`) by Allah and His Messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace). This knowledge was defined by Imam Ghazali as being, “Knowledge of the way to Allah Most High and the next life.”²²²

In other words, scholars transmit sacred knowledge of how to attain God's favor by performing righteous actions, which, in turn, is a means to avoid eternal punishment and gain salvation and eternal felicity in paradise. Humans are utterly dependent upon that knowledge; without it they would be as helpless regarding the next life as children abandoned by their parents without any inheritance to give them provision might be helpless in this life.

In the relationships between parent and child as well as between God and humans, there is a dynamic in which dependency is met with corresponding provision. The dependency of the child and the willingness of the parent to provide voluntarily makes it a matter of common decency that the child repay the debt; this is the concept of filial piety, which can be understood primarily as the duty to be grateful, obedient, and reverential. Religious teachers occupy a paternal position analogous to a student's real parents, and if obedience to parents is a duty in part because worldly livelihood is provided, then a similar duty is due to teachers when what is provided is the means to eternal life in paradise.

The structure of this authority is repeated in every generation of the lineage,

222. Ibid.

with each generation of students directly indebted to the scholars who taught them, but also by extension to all of the preceding generations of teachers in the lineage reaching back to the Prophet, the angel Gabriel, and, ultimately, to God. More to the point, the individual's debt to God can only be honored –yet never repaid– by directing reverential obedience to the scholars who stand as the inheritors and trustees of God's authority. To underscore the extreme debt due to one's teachers, the Prophet's nephew and fourth caliph Ali was famously recorded to have said, “I am the slave of whoever teaches me one letter.”²²³ Tradition is therefore a dialectical relationship. Its structure is described in terms of filiation proceeding through time from the authority who stood as its exemplary forerunner. In terms of its process, tradition is a transactional exchange involving a priceless inheritance and the reciprocal gratitude and duty that such a gift demands from its heirs.

Accordingly, Neotraditional Muslims consider it imperative to connect themselves to this intellectual heritage by receiving it through a chain of living scholars. Since the continuity of the chain continues to the present generation of scholars, the intellectual and spiritual connection to the time of revelation is regarded as alive, even generations after the earlier scholars have passed away. By means of these human lineages, Muslim scholars from the distant past are not regarded as inaccessible to contemporary students. On the contrary, their ideas remain relevant and still contribute dynamically to contemporary discourse through the medium of

223. For example, this quote is used to introduce the webpage of an online Neotraditional learning community, immediately before listing the teachers affiliated with the project. “Halaqa: Teachers,” accessed July 31, 2016, <http://haqaonline.com/halaqa/teachers/index.html>.

the contemporary scholars who are their intellectual descendants.

Since tradition is always a process connected with history, and change is an intrinsic part of that process, a religious history of Islam would essentially be an account of continuity and changes over time. In particular, such a history would describe how and why religious scholars in different times and places interpreted the same revealed texts in diverse ways that could meet the challenges of their differing social contexts, especially within the frameworks of institutions like the four madhhabs.

Neotraditionalism is the reaffirmation that this process of continuity and change through history, including its diverse expressions, has value and provides the only viable links by which Muslims can remain connected to the sacred past. Moreover, the continuity embodied in those human lineages provides an interpretive structure that allows changes inasmuch as they remain faithful to inherited interpretive principles. Without formal training in those received structures under the tutelage of reliable scholars, Muslims could deviate from orthodoxy by inventing unsubstantiated interpretations that flout traditional standards.

Ustadha Umm Sahl, a contemporary Muslim scholar married to Shaykh Nuh Keller, summarizes why it is vital to study with traditional scholars in the introduction to her rebuttal against an opinion published by Akram Safadi:

My husband, Nuh Keller, and I know Akram as a sincere and honest Muslim and although we share differences with him regarding our understanding of Islam, these have not been an obstacle preventing us

from co-operating together to further the cause of the Din [i.e. Islam]. One of the principle causes for our disagreement with Akram is our differing understanding as to how the Islamic sciences should be attained. Akram belongs to a modern generation of educated Arabs who are religious and believe that equipped with the Arabic language and an average intellect, one can explore the books of the Islamic sciences independently of specialized scholars in that field. Nuh and I, on the other hand, take a more traditional stand, believing that any Islamic science should first be read with a specialist in that field in order to correctly understand the terminology and issues related to that subject, and that without this process one is likely to make mistakes in ones understanding.²²⁴

The different “understanding of Islam” that she alludes to and ascribes to Safadi is Salafism, and her generalization that being conversant in Arabic language and possessing at least an average intellect are considered sufficient qualifications by many Salafis is accurate.²²⁵ In contrast, Ustadha Umm Sahl teaching qualifications are expressed in terms of her educational lineage, which comprises fully half of the biographical information provided to introduce her as a teacher on SeekersHub:

She studied Hanafi Fiqh and hadith terminology with Sheikh Shuayb Arnaut; Hanafi Fiqh and ‘Aqida with Sheikh Ahmad al-Jammal; Tajwid with Sheikh Ibrahim Rumana; and for the last 10 years, she has been studying Tafsir, Arabic grammar, Balagha, and Islamic Inheritance with Sheikh ‘Ali Hani. In 1992, she joined the Shadhili tariqa of Sheikh Abdur-Rahman ash-Shaghouri, and was his student until his death in 2004. At present, she studies and teaches, helps her husband in his translation projects, and the running of the Zawiya of Abul Hasan ash-Shadhili in Amman.²²⁶

224. Besa (“Umm Sahl”) Krasniqi, “In Defense of Abd Al-Ghani Al-Nablusi | Masud.co.uk,” accessed August 3, 2016, <http://masud.co.uk/about-abd-al-ghani-al-nablusi/>.

225. This point, and some of its complications, is discussed in Jonathan A. C. Brown, “Is Islam Easy to Understand or Not?: Salafis, the Democratization of Interpretation and the Need for the Ulema,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 26, no. 2 (May 1, 2015): 117–44, doi:10.1093/jis/etu081.

226. “The Sila Initiative - 2015 Webinar Mini-Series with Shaykha Umm Sahl,” *SeekersHub Blog*, September 5, 2015, <http://seekershush.org/blog/2015/09/the-sila-initiative-2015-webinar-mini-series-with-shaykha-umm-sahl/>.

In the biography of any contemporary Neotraditional scholar, identifying their teachers is almost invariably the principal discursive element provided to establish the authoritativeness of their religious knowledge.

Neotraditionalists characteristically emphasize respectful deference to the lineage of earlier scholars as the touchstone of religious authority and orthodoxy. In their lectures and written works, they often assert that it is imperative to call Muslims to return to the type of orthodox Islamic lifestyle that earlier scholars defined, a goal which can only be achieved by reconnecting the present generation of Muslims with those earlier scholars through educational lineages. The continuity of Islam as a living religious tradition depends upon it. Appropriately, then, the series of weekly public religious lectures given at Zaytuna college and broadcast live over the internet as streaming video is entitled “Living Links,” and Zaytuna provides the following description of the series on their website under the heading “Linking Our Community to a Living Tradition”:

Living Links is a Zaytuna College educational initiative that seeks to revive two traditions: the time-tested Islamic tradition of conveying religious knowledge from teachers to students through sound chains of transmission, and Zaytuna’s own tradition as an American Muslim institution committed to community-based learning.²²⁷

In the model of Islamic Neotraditionalism, scholarly lineage is the only reliable source of religious authority. Because of this, Neotraditionalists develop and promote educational curricula that focus on influential Muslim religious scholars

227. “Living Links,” *Zaytuna College*, accessed May 27, 2016, <https://www.zaytuna.edu/livinglinks>.

from the past and the classical religious sciences they helped to develop. The website of Zaytuna College demonstrates this view in a surprising way. It lists famous scholars from various eras of Islamic history as Zaytuna College's "Perennial Faculty," calling them "the giants who have laid the intellectual and spiritual foundation upon which we aspire to build."²²⁸ In these terms, the unbroken continuity of tradition is expressed as so vivacious that the traditional master scholars continue to teach vicariously through their later generations of student-scholars, including the contemporary teaching faculty of Zaytuna College. Taken as a rhetorical device, listing these famous scholars from the past on the Zaytuna website and identifying them as faculty is a form of prosopopoeia. The purpose of using prosopopoeia in this way is to elevate the perception of Zaytuna as a seat of authority by implying that if the great scholars were alive today, they would teach at Zaytuna. Another function of such references in Neotraditional discourse is to reaffirm the temporal structure of the religious intellectual network of Islam traditionalism by highlighting an uninterrupted continuity of scholarly heritage from the time of the Prophet and his companions until the teachers of the present day. Accordingly, the most valuable type of connection between individuals in a

228. ZaytunaCollege.org, "Perennial Faculty," Zaytuna College, accessed December 13, 2013, http://www.zaytunacollege.org/about/perennial_faculty/. Those mentioned are: Imam Abu Dawud, Qadi Abu Bakr b. al-'Arabi, Imam Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Imam al-Bukhari, Imam Shams al-Din al-Dhahabi, Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali, Imam "Abd Allah b. Alawi al-Haddad, Imam Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali, Imam Raghib al-Isfahani, Imam Ibn 'Ata' Allah al-Iskandari, Imam Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah, Imam 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, Imam al-Juwayni, Imam al-Muzni, Imam al-Nawawi, Imam al-Qurtubi, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, Imam al-Sakhawi, Imam al-Shafi'i, Imam Taj al-Din al-Subki, Imam Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, Imam Abu Ja'far al-Tabari, Imam Abu Jaf'ar al-Tahawi, Qadi Ayyad, Imam Ahmad Ibn Ashir, Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal, Qadi Ibn Khaldun, Imam Malik b. Anas, Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyah, Imam Ahmad Zarruq.

Neotraditional network are the relationships between students and their teachers.

Salafi websites may also proffer lists of the scholars regarded as authoritative within the discourse of Salafism's heritage. One such list provided on the website SalafiPublications is offered as an answer to the question “who are the Salaf and who are the Salafis?” The author writes:

The Pious Forefathers (i.e. As-Salaf as-Saalih) of the Islamic Community of Believers are the Companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, their Followers (the Taabi'een and the Taabi Taabi'een (i.e. the first three generations of Muslims) and the Scholars of the Ahl-us-Sunnah wal-Jamaa'ah after them who followed their way in belief and deed. Among them are:

Imam Abu Hanifah (150 AH), Al-Awzai (157 AH), Ath-Thawri (161AH), Al Laith ibn Saad (175 AH), Imam Malik (179 AH), Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak (181 AH), Sufyan ibn Uyainah (198 AH), Imam Ash-Shafi'i (204 AH), Ishaq (238 AH), Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal (241 AH), Al-Bukhari (256 AH), Muslim (261 AH), Abu Dawood (275 AH) and others.

Ibn Taymiyyah (728 AH), and his students: Adh-Dhahabi (748 AH), Ibn al-Qayyim (751 AH), Ibn Katheer (774 AH) and others.

Muhammed bin 'Abd al-Wahhab (1206 AH) and many of his students.

And in our time: Abdul Aziz bin Baz, Muhammed bin Saalih Uthaimeen, Muhammed Naasir-ud-Deen al-Albaani.²²⁹

This summary answer has been structured in the form of a genealogy, naming the authoritative figures in chronological order. However, there is something unusual about this genealogy: it is temporally disjointed, and the author signals its disconnectedness by dividing the cohorts of the genealogy into separate paragraphs.

The first cohort includes several famous Muslim scholars from the first three hundred years of Islamic scholarly tradition known as the *salaf* (an abbreviation of *al-salaf al-salih*, the pious ancestors). The second cohort, living nearly half a millennium later, is comprised of Ibn Taymiyya and his closest students. Although

229. “Salafi Publications | A Brief Introduction to the Salafi Dawah,” accessed February 5, 2017, <http://www.spubs.com/sps/sp.cfm?subsecID=SLF02&articleID=SLF020001&pfriend>.

Ibn Taymiyya is still widely renowned for his scholarship in the field of Hanbali jurisprudence, he was also imprisoned on several occasions for advocating anomalous legal opinions and anthropomorphic theological views that the majority of scholars contemporaneous with him denounced as heretical deviations from the transmitted theological position of the *salaf*, as evidenced by explicit statements from scholars among the *salaf* like Imam Abu Hanifa and Imam Tahawi, which were recorded in texts that are still extant. Ibn Taymiyya ultimately died while imprisoned in Damascus together with his student Ibn al-Qayyim.

The next figure to be named is Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, the eponymous 18th century founder of the Wahhabi movement. This movement borrowed a legal opinion Ibn Taymiyya formulated in relation to the religious status of Mongol invaders, and repurposed it to develop the radical modern ideology of *takfirism*. *Takfirism* is a paradigm in which a Muslim is deemed to have apostatized from the religion through some perceived theological deviation, with the consequence that they are regarded as liable for capital punishment or military aggression to seize their assets. The Wahhabis revived some of Ibn Taymiyya's aberrant theological positions and claimed that those positions represented Islamic orthodoxy. As a result, they were able to leverage the theory of *takfirism* to justify their conquest of territory in Arabia held by any Muslims who did not agree with Ibn Abdul Wahhab's religious interpretations. The final cohort of significant leaders in Salafi thought, Bin Baz, Ibn al-Uthaymeen, and Albani, came more than 100 years

later and based their religious thought squarely on Wahhabi doctrine, while also initiating new religious trends, notably including a more pronounced rejection of traditional institutions of authority such as the four madhhabs.

The temporal ellipses between cohorts in this genealogy amount to more than 1,000 years that have been elided from Islam's 1,439 years of intellectual history. Since Salafism and Neotraditionalism are in agreement about the authority of those scholars of the *salaf* who lived in the first three hundred years of Muslim history, that early era is not pertinent to the development of the unique ideas that distinguish Salafism from other movements. Thus, the periods during which significant developments in Salafi thought were made amount to less than one tenth of Muslim history, and can be traced back almost exclusively to just one scholar, Ibn Taymiyya, who was broadly denounced for departing from mainstream Sunni views by Muslim scholars in his own time.

Interestingly, in contrast to the Neotraditional premise that orthodoxy is known through the continuity of tradition, the core message of Salafism is a call to return from widespread religious corruption to a primordial religious purity. According to this paradigm, Salafis identify themselves as the true representatives of *ahl al-sunna w'al-jama`ah*, or the orthodox Muslim majority, even though the narrative supporting this view imagines Muslim history as the recurrent struggle of a few rightly-guided scholars to defend Islamic orthodoxy from what they deem the perpetually deviant views of the Muslim majority.

Within its own discursive paradigm, Salafism is not imagined in terms of a continuous tradition or the unbroken lineage of teaching, so connections between teachers and students are not necessarily the most significant links in the construction of a Salafi discursive network. Instead, the most important links in a Salafi network are those of agreement and endorsement between individuals regarding contentious questions “that produces a certain degree of ‘cognitive closure,’ whereby core beliefs are no longer subject to questioning.”²³⁰ The inter-referential agreements between popular proponents of Salafism is an important bond that is constitutive of community, however, the phenomenon of such bonds breaking due to disputes between leading Salafis is just as important to note, since it can lead to ruptures in the community. In the event of disagreements, different factions take sides against each other in support of their preferred leader.

Such schisms between Salafi factions, commonly termed *fitnah* in Salafi discourse, immediately and dramatically affect the structure of relationships within a broader Salafi network. For example, one Salafi author relates that,

Shaykh Rabee' bin Haadee established that al-Hajooree is a Haddaadi but continued to show lenience and gentleness with al-Hajooree, hoping that he would return and recant – unfortunately that has not happened and the Shaykh has recently warned about the fitnah of al-Hajuri[sic].²³¹

230. Wiktorowicz, “The Salafi Movement: Violence and the Fragmentation of Community,” 214; See also Luther P Gerlach and Virginia H Hine, *People, Power, Change; Movements of Social Transformation* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), 161.

231. The shift from the vowel-doubling style of transliterating Arabic preferred by many Salafis to the more common transliteration style at the end of this quotation is curious. It may indicate the interference of an inconsistent editor, or an absentminded spelling slip on the part of an author who participates in Salafi discourse but is also familiar with academic and traditional written styles. “Shaykh Rabee’ Bin Haadee Warns Against the Ghuluww and Haddaadiyyah of Yahya Al-Hajuri and Followers,” accessed February 6, 2017, <http://www.manhaj.com/manhaj/articles/dedtt-shaykh-rabee->

In response to a question about another schism, the answer provided was the following:

Usaamah al-Qoosee, as you all know, used to be a true salafee, in shaa' Allaah. Then, when the fitnah of Abul-Hasan came, he was drawn into it. He continued to be affected by this fitnah, until he reached a point that we ask Allaah to save the Muslims from it, and to save him from it as well. So I do not advise you to attend his lessons or lectures, until he has repented to Allaah, the Blessed and Exalted, from what he fallen into. Verily, he is from those who have been affected by the fitnah of Abul-Hasan, may Allaah bless you, and he has supported this fitnah, and done things to strengthen it. An example of this is his visit to this organization, and their invitation to him. These things, as I see it, are his delving deeper into the fitnah, and Allaah knows best, and they are diversionary tactics (leading the people) away not only from Rabee' and his brothers (from the scholars), but from the Salafee manhaj itself. Abul-Hasan has invented many principles, all of them falsehood, and Aboo Haatim (Usaamah al-Qoosee) has not criticized any of them, while he praises, lauds, and speaks highly of people of innovation, sadly enough. He has gone so far into the fitnah, that it has almost become like his usual dressing habit (meaning: he appears to outwardly agree with all of the fitnah), and we ask Allaah for success. And we ask that He accepts all of our repentance. So, you should refrain from going to him or his lectures until he repents to Allaah and returns back to the Salafee manhaj.²³²

In keeping with the core values of Salafism, it does not matter whether these disputing individuals shared an intellectual ancestor; what matters is that they are in disagreement regarding something that at least one of them deemed to be a critical matter of religious doctrine. These dramatic debates are framed in terms of the need for constant vigilance regarding who is right and who has deviated from what Salafis consider the correct path, or “the Salafee manjaj.”

The understanding of consensus in Neotraditionalism differs from the concept of consensus in Salafism. As noted above, a *fitnah*, or schism between Salafi factions arising from a disagreement about correct belief or practice, is moderated

bin-haadee-warns-against-the-ghuluww-and-haddaadiyyah-of-yahyaa-al-hajuri-and-followers.cfm.

232. “Salafi Publications | The Current Situation of Usaamah Al-Qoosee,” accessed February 6, 2017, <http://www.salafipublications.com/sps/sp.cfm?subsecID=MNJ02&articleID=MNJ020004&articlePages=1>.

discursively through competition, with each faction “seeking to gain a broader audience and a stronger reputation [...] that frequently manifests itself in polemics and personal attacks intended to undermine the legitimacy of others.”²³³ The type of consensus active in negotiating Salafi schismatic differences is a popular consensus among followers of the Salafi movement that is temporally local; what matters is the share of followers won over to each side within the short period of time immediately following the occurrence of the *fitnah*.

In contrast, the authority of consensus in Neotraditionalism is governed by the same function of continuity as the authority of individual scholars. First of all, the consensus that matters is the consensus of those scholars who inherited their individual authority through a scholarly lineage; a consensus reached among laymen is of no consequence.²³⁴ Secondly, the content of the consensus must not depart from what earlier scholars considered to have been agreed upon by consensus in their times. In other words, even if a consensus opinion is sought on some new question related to the changing circumstances of Muslims in modernity, such as whether a Muslim may be an organ donor or whether it is permissible to eat the meat of machine-slaughtered animals, it must still demonstrate continuity with consensus opinions received through scholarly lineages. Ideally, a novel answer to a question

233. Wiktorowicz, “The Salafi Movement: Violence and the Fragmentation of Community,” 214.

234. Neotraditional discourse relating to a matter of consensus is always a reference to consensus among scholars. For example, see “The Best of Creation - The Consensus on This Prophetic Title - Shaykh Gibril Haddad,” *SeekersHub Blog*, June 30, 2010, <http://seekershub.org/blog/2010/06/the-best-of-creation-the-consensus-on-this-prophetic-title-shaykh-gibril-haddad/>.

from the standpoint of Islamic law should resonate with the recorded consensus of past scholars in different times and in different regions so that the new consensus reflects principles that are both temporally and geographically non-local. The Neotraditional vision of a continuous (yet living and evolving) scholarly consensus can be thought of as a self-conscious duty to understand and preserve a shared intellectual history that is not characterized by parochialism. As Randall Collins noted:

The significant ideas which are the topics of intellectual history are those which are carried trans-locally. Examining the local site of knowledge production misses what another branch of the sociology of science has been good at investigating: the groups of thinkers, the chains of network contacts, the rivalries between one segment of an argumentative community and another.²³⁵

It is by reference to such “contacts” and “rivalries” that Islamic Neotraditional networks are formed, negotiate communal identity, and through with members demonstrate their affiliation.

The distinction between how Salafi and Neotraditional communities understand the importance of lineage and intellectual heritage highlights an essential difference in how the structures of Salafi networks and Neotraditional networks should be analyzed and interpreted. Explicit statements about intellectual heritage and teacher-student relationships are not the only ways that actors frame significant relationships; there are also other types of connections which need to be considered, and special attention should be given to the distinctive ways these connections are

235. Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 21.

signaled within community discourse.

III. Living Links: The Form of a Network

Within the Neotraditional paradigm of orthodoxy, religious authority is thought of as a spiritual and intellectual heritage that must be received through an unbroken teacher-student lineage extending back to the Prophet. As Shaykh Abdullah bin Hamid Ali puts it, “the fundamental rule of Islamic learning is that one requires a teacher who possesses knowledge of what the Messenger was given by his Lord.”²³⁶ Of course, there is no assumption that every student in such a lineage will be equally successful in attaining the sacred knowledge their teachers meant to convey or in emulating the analytical methods of their teachers. Scholarly consensus acts as the mechanism that enables laymen to distinguish scholars of their generation who reliably transmit knowledge from their teachers from less reliable sources.

An observable consensus, such as the mutual recognition of authority among a community of scholars, is as pertinent to the establishment of contemporary Neotraditional communities in America as it was in establishing the Neotraditional Muslim network in China. For example, the mid-seventeenth century Chinese Muslim scholar Ma Zhu still sought broad support from his contemporaries when he published his book, *The Guiding Compass to Understanding Islam (Qingzhen*

236. Zaytuna Staff, “The Place of Isnad in Islamic Education: Demystifying ‘Tradition’-Shaykh Abdullah Ali and Shaykh Muhammad Al-Ninowy,” accessed March 12, 2017, <http://blog.zaytuna.edu/the-place-of-isnad-in-islamic-education-demystifying-tradition-shaykh-abdullah-ali-and-shaykh-muhammad-al-ninowy>.

Zhinan), even though he had completed his religious education within the schools of Grand-Shaykh Hu's Neotraditional network, and would therefore have been considered an authoritative scholar in his own right:

After finishing his magnum opus, [...] Ma Zhu visited several Muslim educational centers [...] teaching, and perhaps promoting, his book and meeting with other Muslim scholars. While visiting these centers, Ma Zhu collected “greetings” (*zengyan*) for his book from the scholars he met. These greetings, twenty-four in number, were gathered or sent to him from several locations throughout China and consist of short poems praising the book and its author. Among the authors of these greetings were Yuan Ruqi and Liu Sanjie (father of Liu Zhi, perhaps the key scholar of this tradition), as well as Li Yanling, the cofounder of the Chinese Muslim educational center in Jining and also Yuan Shengzhi’s teacher. Other authors were also known teachers or scholars [...]. Here again we see the same elements of overlap between the master-pupil relationship and kinship and specialization across a broad geographical area in a shared body of literature.²³⁷

Ma Zhu collected statements of support from contemporaries to demonstrate that Muslim scholars all over China regarded him as an authoritative author and his book to be an authoritative argument that Islam epitomizes and perfects Chinese social and philosophical values. For any potential reader who was not already familiar with Ma Zhu, these statements served the function of locating him as a trusted authority within the network of scholars they did know. Moreover, it is exactly this practice of seeking and extending words of approval and support that maintains the coherence and vitality of any intellectual network:

The Chinese Muslim intellectual climate surrounding the completion and publication of this major Chinese Islamic work was characterized by a widespread and interconnected group of scholars, scholarly institutions, and writings. It is clear that Ma understood himself as part of a network,

237. Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad*, 28.

or community, of learning and scholarship. The fact that he was so readily able to collect encomia from numerous scholars familiar with and interested in his work is one indication that he defined himself as a participant in a well-established intellectual community, one that was unified by shared intellectual interests, educational pedigree, and, in many instances, kinship as well. It was a community that also reflected the general cultural emphasis on a communal tradition of scholarly production.²³⁸

Ma Zhu's decision to reach out for support to a network of well-known scholars is significant because it demonstrates that he thought of this community of scholars as a network, and understood how to make use of that network to gain social capital, which Pierre Bourdieu defined as “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.”²³⁹ Ma Zhu leveraged the authoritative status of his scholarly peers and teachers to establish his own credentials and gain social capital through the public commendation of network leaders and other participants.

Appealing to the authority of a network to establish credibility and gain social capital remains a familiar practice today. We pursue degrees and certificates, request letters of reference, count our followers on social media platforms, employ strategic name-dropping, and display photographs of ourselves shaking hands with important people. All of these practices are ways to position oneself in relationship with other actors in a social network.²⁴⁰ What is exchanged through these

238. Ibid.

239. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), 119.

240. Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face to Face Behavior* (Garden City, N.Y.:

relationships is “social capital, made up of social links (a continuous series of interpersonal transactions involving shared interests, obligations, expectations and rules) and symbolic links (a continuous series of transactions, both face to face and indirect, to which the participants contribute and in which they find shared meanings, memories, future expectations and symbols).²⁴¹ The ways in which individuals seek support, the actors from whom they seek it, and who responds constitute the details of such transactions, and attention to those details can reveal a great deal about the nature, priorities, and internal structures of a network.

In 2015, Asad Tarsin published his book *Being Muslim* through Sandala Inc. This carries symbolic meaning because Sandala is Shaykh Hamza Yusuf's publishing company that also serves as his personal website.²⁴² The front cover of the book announces that it includes a forward by Shaykh Hamza Yusuf. In the same way that Ma Zhu collected supporting statements from leaders of his Chinese Neotraditional network, Tarsin invited Shaykh Hamza to author a forward to his book, and also published a promotional website that features testimonials from other leading figures in the American Neotraditional network. For example, the first testimonial reads:

“Dr. Asad Tarsin has provided an immeasurable service to both Muslims and members of other faith communities with this extremely insightful and important work. *Being Muslim* not only lays out, in balanced

Doubleday, 1967).

241. Stefano Allievi, “Islam in the Public Space: Social Networks, Media and Neo-Communities,” in *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities in and across Europe*, ed. Jørgen S Nielsen and Stefano Allievi (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003), 8.

242. Asad Tarsin, *Being Muslim: A Practical Guide*, 1st edition (Sandala, 2015); “Sandala - Hamza Yusuf Official Website,” *Sandala*, accessed February 26, 2017, <https://sandala.org/>.

measure, the basic teachings of Islam, teachings related to both faith and practice, it also explains issues that are frequently neglected in introductory works. Those issues would include the relationship between faith and reason, the foundations of a meaningful spiritual life, the major themes of the Qur'an, and much more. Especially significant is his chapter on a healthy Muslim lifestyle. I would highly recommend this volume to anyone interested in knowing about Islam as the vast majority of Muslims have historically understood and lived it.”

Imam Zaid Shakir
Co-Founder, Zaytuna College²⁴³

The website also shares testimonials from several other figures who are well known scholars and leaders in the American Neotraditional network, Muslim community leaders, and converts to Islam who describe how they benefited personally from reading the book.

Many of the testimonials make reference to core discursive themes of Neotraditionalism, such as the importance of conveying knowledge through a scholarly tradition, adherence to the tenets of faith held by the majority of Sunni Muslims, and the central importance of formal religious education. For example, in Dr. Ingrid Mattson's testimonial, she says, “while no description of Islam is completely inclusive, the manual describes the practices and beliefs held by the majority of Muslims. I encourage the leadership of mosques and Islamic centers to use this book as a foundation for teaching Islam at the introductory level.”²⁴⁴ Usama Canon's testimonial adds, “Dr. Tarsin brilliantly reconciles tradition with context [...] If there's a book that should be standard curriculum in our Mosques and

243. “Being Muslim: A Practical Guide,” *Being Muslim: A Practical Guide*, accessed March 6, 2016, <http://www.beingmuslim.org>.

244. Ibid.

communities, this is it.” Anse Tamara Gray expresses her confidence that *Being Muslim* will “become a classic textbook of learning across mosques, homes and schools.”²⁴⁵

This attention to developing a reliable system of education and attention to the quality of materials used for teaching about Islam is another noteworthy parallel between the Neotraditional networks in America and China. “Chinese Muslim scholars were interested in instructing their constituency on the proper focus for their studies even as they aimed to demonstrate to those outside their constituency that their activities were those of the literati class.”²⁴⁶ Academic conferences like Zaytuna College has organized demonstrate the same concern to represent Neotraditional Islam as a rational, intellectual, and eminently academic style of learning by questioning such issues as “academic vs. traditional authority,” and the cornerstones of “educational philosophy.”²⁴⁷ It is especially significant that Zaytuna College asked these questions in the context of hosting a graduate student conference, which might be called the quintessential forum of academic networking. By participating in this conference, graduate student presenters transact their demonstration of confidence in the academic authority of Zaytuna College as a venue for such a conference and, by listing their participation on a C.V., anticipate gaining social capital in the form of

245. Ibid.

246. Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad*, 182.

247. Hatem Bazian, “Call for Papers,” in *Forging Islamic Authority: Navigating Text and Context in the Modern World* (2nd Annual Zaytuna College Conference on Higher Education, Berkeley, Calif.: Zaytuna College, 2015), https://www.zaytuna.edu/static/2nd_annual_zaytuna_college_conference_on_higher_education.

academic prestige through their transaction.

The theoretical approach to networks developed by Bruno Latour suggests that network actors can be of any kind, whether individuals, institutions, material objects, or even abstract concepts such as texts. At the same time, these actors can also be considered as real things or function as elements of discourse.

Three resources have been developed over the ages to deal with agencies. The first one is to attribute to them naturalness and to link them with nature. The second one is to grant them sociality and to tie them with the social fabric. The third one is to consider them as a semiotic construction and to relate agency with the building of meaning. The originality of science studies comes from the impossibility of clearly differentiating those three resources. Microbes, neutrinos or DNA are at the same time natural, social and discourse. They are real, human and semiotic entities in the same breath.²⁴⁸

In the case of the Zaytuna College conference, the relevant actors who are transacting social capital are not limited to the individual student-presenters, Zaytuna College, and the faculty and conference organizers at Zaytuna; they also include the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (W.A.S.C.) as an academic accrediting authority as well as the reputation Zaytuna has cultivated within the Neotraditional Muslim community as an institution that upholds principles of the traditional style of Islamic learning, which is a parallel mode of accreditation. Inviting participation in a conference and responding to that invitation is a significant transaction of social capital, and if such a transaction were repeated frequently, that would indicate a very strong connection between actors.

248. Bruno Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory. A Few Clarifications plus More than a Few Complications," *Soziale Welt* 47 (1996): 1.

However, as discussed above, the most instrumental type of connection between participants in the Neotraditional network are the bonds between teachers and their students, because these bonds establish the primary credentials of an individual's religious authority. An ancillary means of representing social capital in the form of religious authority is by being broadly recognized and identified as an authority by other known leaders in the network. When Ma Zhu and Asad Tarsin published their respective books, each made an effort to demonstrate their own scholarly authority in both of these ways. Ma Zhu introduced himself as a student in the lineage of Grand-Shaykh Hu's educational network and also as a direct biological descendant of the great western sage, meaning the Prophet Muhammad. Under the heading “about the author” on the promotional website for *Being Muslim*, Tarsin is described as having completed “his bachelor's degree in Islamic studies at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor,” but the biography adds that he “continued his study of Islamic theology, sacred law, philosophy and spirituality with some of the country's most prominent Muslim scholars including Shaykh Hamza Yusuf and Dr. Sherman Jackson, among others.”²⁴⁹ While the testimonials discussed above demonstrated the approval of network leaders, Tarsin's biography establishes his authority through reference to teacher-student lineages.

The website also notes that Tarsin “served as the curriculum director for the Deen Intensive Foundation for the last ten years.”²⁵⁰ Deen Intensive (DI) is “a North

249. “Being Muslim.”

250. Ibid.

American initiative dedicated to the preservation and dissemination of the core sacred sciences of Islam from traditional sources” by organizing short-term retreats “to provide quality educational programs for dynamic men and women to come together to study with qualified scholars and teachers.”²⁵¹ In fact, DI has been so successful at doing this that for any scholar in the Neotraditional network, chances are high that they have been involved in a DI program at some time, either as a teacher or as a participant. For example, Abdul Latif al-Amin, who is now a teacher at SeekersHub, says that he spent several years as an “ignorant worshiper” before attending a DI program that “changed the course of his life.”²⁵² Another SeekersHub teacher, Abdul-Karim Yahya, moved his family to Damascus “in active pursuit of a traditional understanding” of Islam after being “inspired by a Deen Intensive” program.²⁵³ Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, Zaid Shakir, Afroz Ali, Abdal Karim Murad (Dr. Timothy Winter), Faraz Khan, Yahya Rhodus, and a host of other leading Neotraditional scholars have all served as teachers at events organized by Deen Intensive Foundation. DI reported its early programs “inspired the longer intensive courses such as the Rihla and Ibn Ajurrum Arabic program,” and also influenced the development of other “long-term organizations and institutions that are dedicated to

251. “DeenIntensive.com | Home,” *Deen Intensive Foundation*, accessed February 26, 2017, <http://www.deenintensive.com/>.

252. “Home Teachers Abdul Latif Al Amin,” accessed February 26, 2017, <http://seekershub.org/home/teachers/abdul-latif-al-amin>.

253. “Abdul-Karim Yahya,” August 14, 2016, <http://web.archive.org/web/20160814090104/http://www.lamppostproductions.com/abdul-karim-yahya/#prettyPhoto/0/>.

traditional Islamic education.”²⁵⁴ For example, every person who was listed as a member of the Deen Intensive Foundation Committee in 2006 is also also connected in multiple ways with Zaytuna College, SeekersHub, or both, as well as other Neotraditional scholars and institutions.²⁵⁵ One currently sits on the board of trustees for Zaytuna College.²⁵⁶

In his description of how Neo-Confucianism became established as an independent Chinese philosophical school, Randall Collins demonstrated a method to study the differentiation of intellectual communities in terms of networks. His model noted contacts between individuals such as links between teachers and their students as well as between individuals and prominent social or institutional figures such as poets or politicians. In the network graph he produced as an illustration, different types of connections were recorded, such as ties of acquaintance, master-pupil ties, probable ties, and even conflictual ties representing debates between rival philosophers.²⁵⁷ The purpose of his network graph was to demonstrate the existence of a distinct discursive community, namely Neo-Confucianism, and its boundaries. It also revealed the community's relationships with competing communities and with the broader Chinese society through institutional affiliations. The same method can

254. “Deen-Intensive Programs,” December 9, 2002, <http://web.archive.org/web/20021209003634/http://www.deen-intensive.com/program.htm>.

255. “Deen Intensive Foundation : About Us,” April 20, 2006, <http://web.archive.org/web/20060420160225/http://www.deenintensive.com/aboutus.html>.

256. “ZAYTUNA COLLEGE | About > Board of Trustees,” accessed February 26, 2017, https://www.zaytuna.edu/about/board_of_trustees/.

257. See “Figure 6.4. Neo-Confucian Movement and the Winnowing of Zen, 935-1265.” Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*, 300.

be used to explore the boundaries of the Islamic Neotraditional community in America. Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, the co-founder of Zaytuna College, is frequently a common link between participants in the American Neotraditional Network. Taking Shaykh Hamza as a starting point, we can graph how a Neotraditional network can be described as extending through his first, second, and third-degree contacts.

There are five types of relationships recorded in the following graphs. The first is a teacher-student relationship, as indicated by an explicit biographical statement that one individual is or was the student of another. The second type of relationship is that of an individual with an organization they established, such as Hamza Yusuf co-founding Zaytuna College and Faraz Rabbani co-founding SeekersHub. The third type of relationship is formal membership in an organization. Examples would include Abdullah bin Hamid Ali serving as a faculty member at Zaytuna College and Faraz Khan teaching at a Deen Intensive retreat. The remaining two types of relationships are endorsements and inspiration.

Shaykh Hamza's first-degree network (Figure 1) includes his direct teachers, including Murabit al-Hajj, Abdullah Bin Bayyah, and Muhammad al-Yaqoubi. It also includes his direct students, like Shaykh Yahya Rhodus and Shaykh Rami Nsour. In my research, I recorded direct teacher-student relationships as the strongest type of connection in the network. Links of various strengths can be used to analyze and describe features of the network and its participants.²⁵⁸ Institutions that have a direct

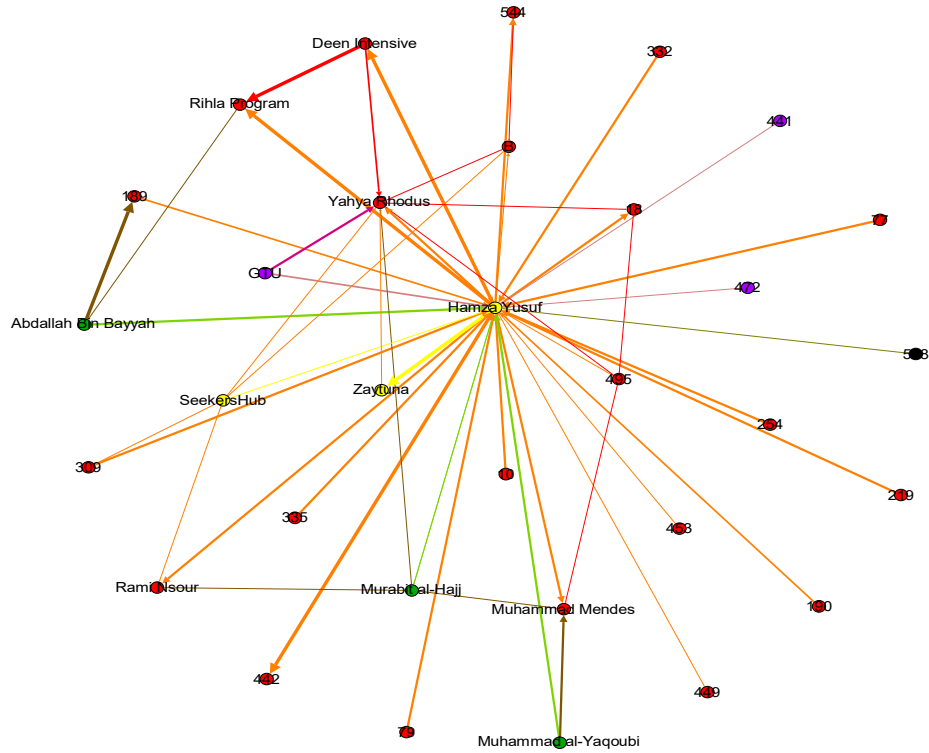
258. To gather this data, I began with publicly available information relating to several individuals and institutions who are central to the Neotraditional network. I recorded every individual and institution those biographies or informational notes mentioned in terms of relationships such as

link to Shaykh Hamza are also included in his first-degree network. For example, Shaykh Hamza's brief biography published on Zaytuna College's website mentions that he is currently completing a PhD in Islamic Studies through UC Berkeley and the Berkeley Graduate Theological Union (GTU), and is also an advisor to Stanford University's Program in Islamic Studies and the Center for Islamic Studies at the GTU, so these institutions are directly connected in various ways to Shaykh Hamza. He is also connected directly to Zaytuna College as its co-founder, and to organizations like Deen Intensive and the Rihla Program as one of the core teachers in each organization. SeekersHub also endorses Shaykh Hamza by promoting a number of articles he has written on the SeekersHub blog.²⁵⁹

teachers, students, employers, founders, and inspirations as well as public displays of endorsement in support of any person or organization. I then followed the same method to incorporate the same type of data about any person or organization that had been mentioned, and so on. I recorded 952 distinct statements of relationships existing between 654 entities. Some of these entities are universities, but I have only included those university connections pertinent to the topic; where someone's degree from a university was in an unrelated field, like engineering or medicine, I did not record the connection. In graphs produced from this data, the highly relevant public entities are named and other entities are only identified by a unique number. The data recorded here should not be considered complete; further study of this network would be beneficial. Brendan Newlon, "Unpublished Research Notes: American Muslim Networks," 2017.

259. I recorded demonstrations of endorsement such as this as a direct connection of a type that is not as strong as formal organizational membership or a teacher-student relationship. The type of relationship I recorded as the weakest is a person's statement of having been "inspired" by someone else. Ibid.

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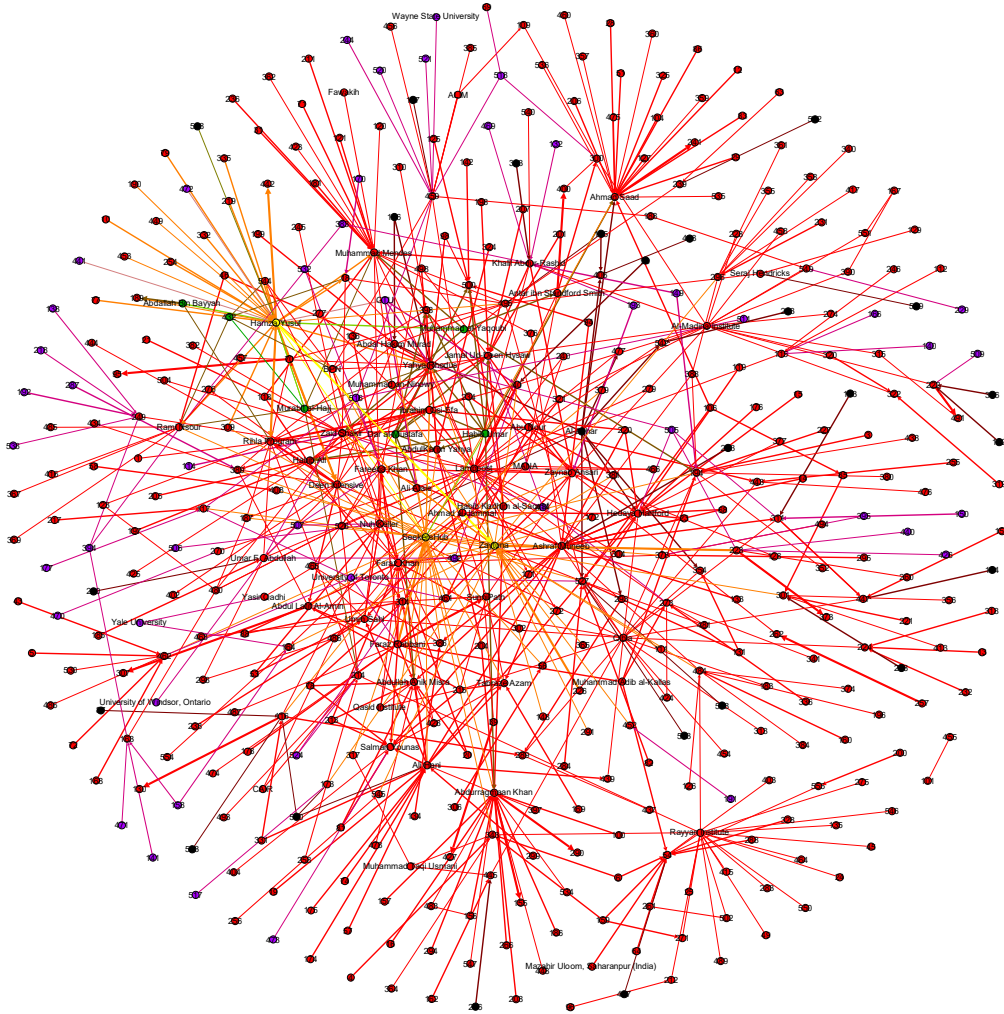


Shaykh Hamza's second-degree network would include any entity connected to him indirectly by virtue of being a direct contact of one of his first-degree contacts. This would include all of the teachers and students of his teachers and students, anyone teaching or taking classes through SeekersHub or programs offered by Deen Intensive, and, while I did not extend my research to include them, could also include anyone formally involved in the Islamic Studies programs at Stanford or GTU. Since several of Shaykh Hamza's first-degree contacts are also prominent and

central figures in the broader Neotraditional network, a large proportion of other significant network participants are included in Shaykh Hamza's second-degree network (Figure 2), and his third-degree network (Figure 3) includes the majority of well-known participants in the Neotraditional network.²⁶⁰ In total, 559 entities determined to be affiliated with the Neotraditional network (Figure 4) were included in my research data.

260. In fact, many of these “second-degree” contacts could actually be shown to be among Shaykh Hamza’s first-degree contacts, but I have only included connections mentioned in summary biographical notes, such as the kind that would be offered when introducing a keynote speaker before an audience. Further research that draws upon more sources would reveal many more connections not mentioned here. *Ibid.*

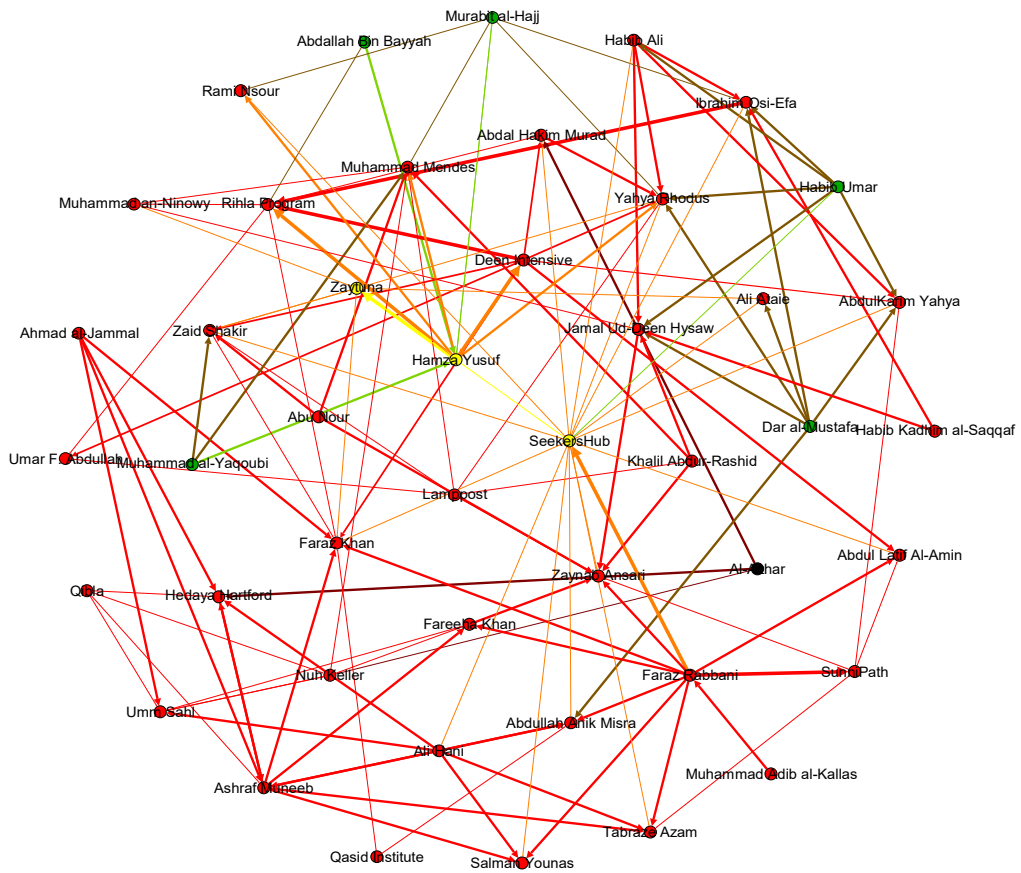
Figure 4. The Neotraditional Network



If the more peripheral nodes and nodes with fewer interconnections are removed, we can show what Collins described as the “inner core” of the network (Figure 5).²⁶¹

Many of the individuals and institutions in this network are not American, or are not based in America, but the connections between them are constitutive of a network for which America is the primary sphere of activity.

261. Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*, 43.



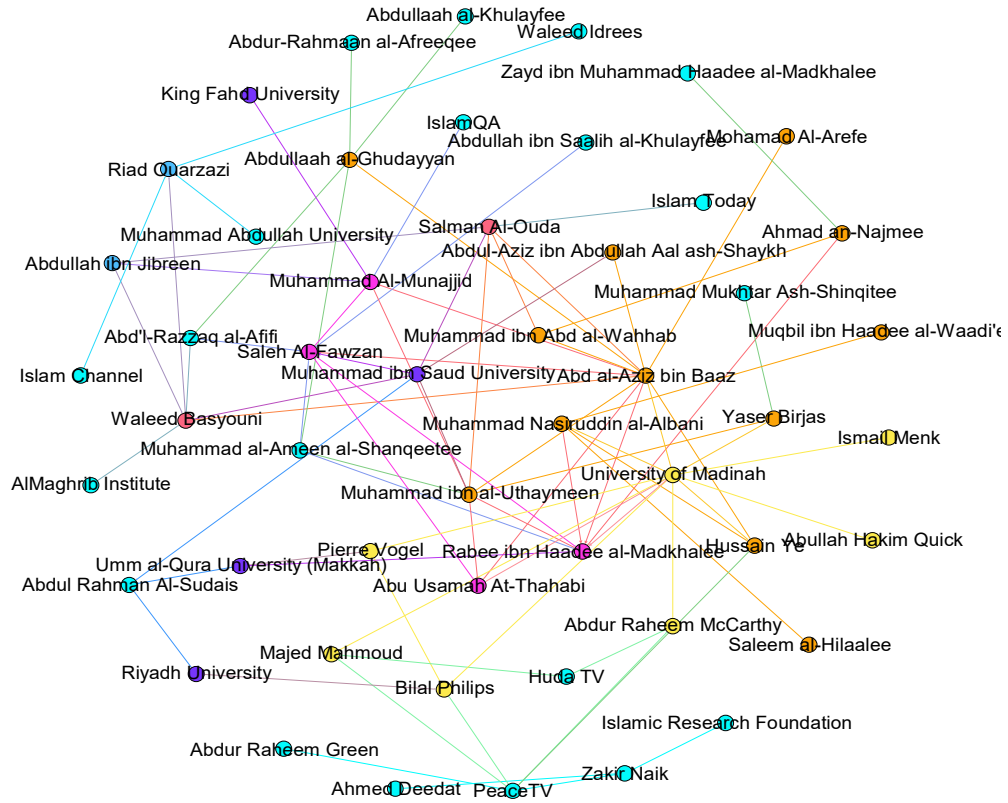
One of the reasons there are so many interconnections among contacts in

Shaykh Hamza's network is that some of his students actively sought to study with the scholars Shaykh Hamza lauded as his own teachers or as other advanced scholars. Studying with those senior scholars bolstered the scholarly credentials of Shaykh Hamza's students until they were elevated to teachings positions of their own through online organizations like SeekersHub and in-person knowledge retreat programs like Deen Intensive and the Rihla Program. High-quality teachers are scarce, so those who have distinguished themselves by studying with advanced scholars are in high demand among Neotraditional institutions and organizations all over the country and even internationally.

For comparison, the following graph (Figure 6) represents some of the relationships between a number of prominent participants in the Salafi network and the graph below shows the core of the Salafi network (Figure 7).²⁶² Like the Neotraditional network above, it is clear from the graph that this Salafi network is also a tight-knit community with multiple parallel interconnections between individuals, institutions, and universities within the network.

262. It should be noted that this graph, like the graphs above, is far from comprehensive. A more thorough study using this approach to Salafism as a network should be conducted by an expert in Salafism and Salafi communities. Newlon, "Research Notes: American Muslim Networks."

Figure 7: Core of the Salafi Network



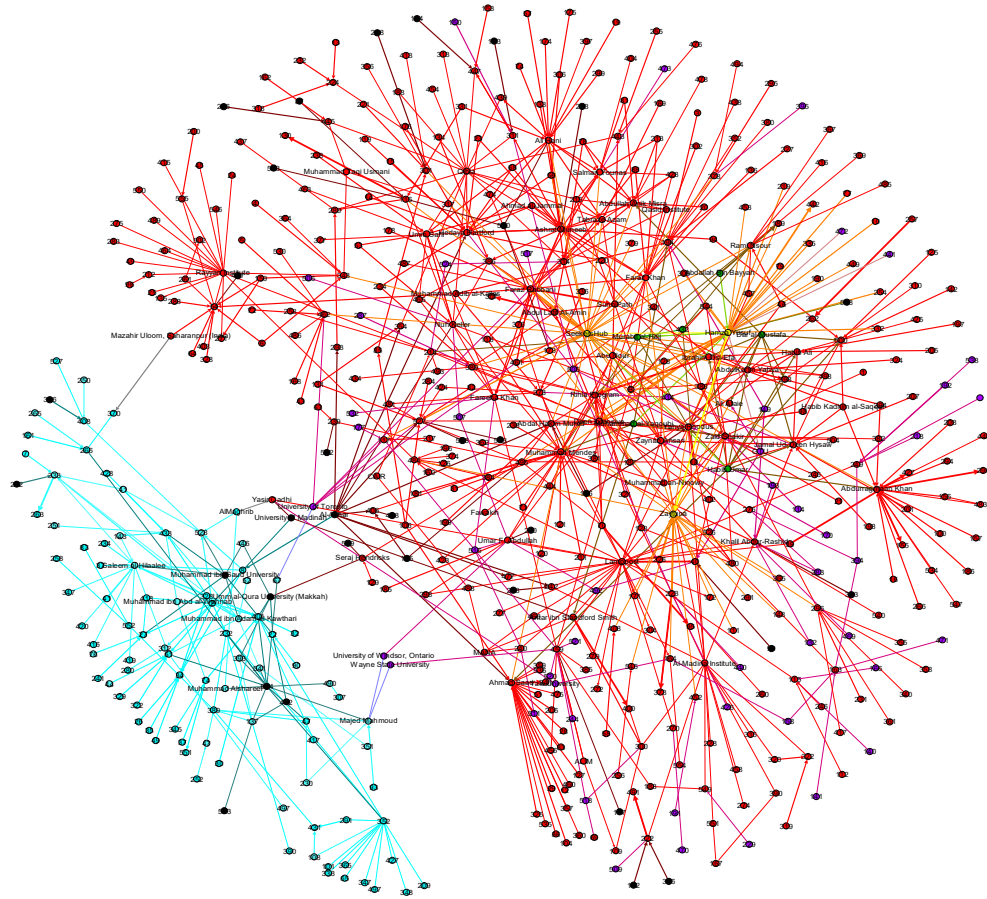
Even though it entailed casting a fairly wide net for research, there are three reasons that university affiliations have been included in this study. The first reason, which was elaborated in the previous chapter, is that an important discursive theme in American Islamic Neotraditionalism is to present the epistemological standards of traditional Islamic scholarship as a challenge to contemporary academia. This challenge argues that religious scholars operating within the Neotraditional style of learning have been more rigorous in upholding academic principles than Orientalist-inspired academics, whose works about Islam are often still regarded as classics and taught at Western universities. The sociologist Marshall Murphree noted that communities do not “exist in a political or economic vacuum; they are linked in various ways with the larger society that surrounds them,” and the efforts of the Neotraditional Muslim community to engage in this dialogue with academics tied to universities about how the academic study of religions should be conducted reveals a great deal about Islamic Neotraditionalism.²⁶³ It is also significant that many participants in the Neotraditional network are graduates of Islamic Studies programs in American or foreign universities, and many others are university faculty members who teach in such departments.

The second reason is that studying Islam at a university can strongly influence one's understanding of Islam and its history. Importantly, my research showed that having studied at certain universities in Saudi Arabia correlates strongly

263. Marshall W. Murphree, “The Role of Institutions in Community-Based Conservation,” in *Natural Connections: Perspectives in Community-Based Conservation*, ed. David Western, R. Michael Wright, and Shirley C. Strum (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1994), 403.

with an individual's participation in the discursive networks of the modern Salafi movement while studying at any university outside of Saudi Arabia correlated strongly with participation in the Neotraditional network.

The third reason is that my research found five universities which were attended by at least one member of each of these two networks, and attention to these shared connections contributes a significant point to our understanding of contemporary Muslim networks. The fact that these shared connections exist allows us to include both the Neotraditional and Salafi networks in the same graph (Figure 8). Below, the Neotraditional network is shown primarily on the right in red while the Salafi network is shown on the left in blue. It is immediately apparent from this graph that these networks represent two separate communities, even if they do share a small number of connections in common.



While there are a few individuals and institutions shared between the two

networks, closer attention to these exceptions also demonstrates how difficult it is to find any connections at all. One entity that is connected to both networks is Al-Azhar University. Ten participants in the Neotraditional network were educated at Al-Azhar, and one participant in the Salafi network was also educated there. One member of each network spent time as a student in Mazahir Uloom, a religious academy in Saharanpur, India. The same is true of the University of Windsor, Ontario and Wayne State University. One member of each network also attended Yale, but this is a more interesting case. The Yale alumnus related to the Salafi network is Yasir Qadhi, who's humorous story about his "conversion" from a Windows PC user to being a Mac user was especially interesting because the indirect phrasing of his story led readers to believe at first that he was describing a conversion from Salafism to Neotraditionalism.²⁶⁴ Later, he did in fact distance himself from some aspects of the Salafi movement.²⁶⁵ The last two nodes which have a connection to both networks are individuals: Antar ibn Stanford Smith and Seraj Hendricks. Each of these two men spent some time attending universities in Saudi Arabia that have also been attended by many members of the Salafi network. I could find no other connections between these two networks in the data I surveyed, despite the large number of people and organizations that were included in my research. This strongly indicates that these networks can be said to represent two distinct

264. Yasir Qadhi, "Yasir Qadhi: My Conversion - Admitting One's Mistake and Moving On - MuslimMatters.org," accessed June 7, 2015, <http://muslimmatters.org/2009/05/18/yasir-qadhi-my-conversion-admitting-ones-mistake-and-moving-on/>.

265. "Have You Left the Way of the Salaf? ~ Dr. Yasir Qadhi - YouTube," accessed March 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/>.

communities. Each community is characterized by complex internal connections among participants, however, each community remains almost entirely disconnected from the other.

Knowing this, it would be reasonable to expect that information, opinions, and imperatives expressed by central figures within either network would be likely to influence the views of other members within the same network. However, there are very few links between the two networks, and all of those I found related to the biographical history of an entity, such as educational background, and not to an entity's enduring relationships such as continued affiliation with other individuals or institutions. Therefore, there is no basis to assume that information or views expressed by members of one network would correlate with or influence the views held by members of the other network. Instead, since the values of each network are often expressed in terms of diametrical opposition to the values of the other network, it should be anticipated that prevailing views within one network will differ markedly from prevailing views within the other network.

The significance of this conclusion to the study of Islam in America is tremendous. It means that any surveys or other research endeavors that fail to distinguish between these two communities (and other relevant communities) for the purpose of analysis will produce data that mixes apples with oranges; the views of diametrically opposed communities will be jumbled together in a way that may obscure patterns and trends that would have been obvious if each community had

been surveyed independently. Any study that groups American Muslims into differentiated demographic categories according to ethnic or national backgrounds, immigration history, age, class, or gender would be just as problematic if the study does not also account for the fact that divergent communities like Neotraditionalism and Salafism cut across all of these demographics. Jonathan Z. Smith noted that scholarship requires the imagination of categories “created for the scholar's analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization,” and that “the student of religion must be able to articulate clearly why 'this' rather than 'that' was chosen as an exemplum.”²⁶⁶ The method of network analysis demonstrated here provides a principled model for distinguishing the boundaries of discursive communities so that categories of scholarship can be imagined more fruitfully.

IV. Collaborative Structure: Roles and Relationships in Contemporary Muslim Networks

Considering communities in terms of networks suggests models for interpreting the internal diversity and structures of those communities as well. The relationships of consensus and agreement among network leaders reflect what Durkheim called “mechanical solidarity, or solidarity by similarities.”²⁶⁷ In effect, they generate a sense of shared social consciousness that seems to give Islamic

266. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, Reprint edition (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1988), xi.

267. Émile Durkheim and W. D Halls, *The Division of Labor in Society* (New York: Free Press, 1997), v, 58, <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/37575382.html>.

Neotraditionalism a coherent voice of its own so that “the sentiments brought into play draw their entire strength from the fact that they are common to everybody: they are strongly felt because they are not contested.”²⁶⁸ On the other hand, discourse of competition or even antagonism between Neotraditionalism and alternative modes such as Salafism and the Progressive Muslims movement strengthens the internal bonds of each community. As Durkheim noted:

Never does the believer feel himself so strongly drawn towards his coreligionists as in time of persecution. Undoubtedly, the company of those who think and feel as we do is agreeable at any time. But we seek it out, not only with pleasure but passionately, after arguments have taken place in which the beliefs we share have been hotly disputed.²⁶⁹

Since these communities exist in perpetual discursive opposition to one another, followers of one or another religious mode may feel even more passionately committed to their own community's interpretation when that interpretation is challenged by conflicting modes.

Although the graphs above focus primarily on the intellectual leaders within the Neotraditional network, Islamic Neotraditionalism is not merely a community of scholarly solidarity; it is an overarching mode of religious interpretation and practice through which scholars and laity of all stripes engage with Islam as a religion. Those who participate in or affiliate with the Neotraditional mode of Islam have diverse religious needs because they come from diverse backgrounds and face diverse life circumstances. To meet those needs, the leadership of the Neotraditional network

268. Ibid., 58.

269. Ibid.

must also diversify their approaches to teaching and engaging with the laity and with others outside of the network.

Network leaders are effectively cooperating to preserve and promote the religious mode of their network, so they must leverage their different rhetorical approaches, skills, or specialties to appeal to as many people as possible. Durkheim notes that “to co-operate, in fact, is to share with on another a common task. If this task is subdivided into tasks qualitatively similar, although indispensable to one another, there is a simple or first-level division of labour. If they are different in kind, there is composite division of labour, or specialization proper.”²⁷⁰ He called this type of cooperation among specialists in different areas an “organic solidarity” because participants will contribute their own specialized skills as needed in the pursuit of a common goal.²⁷¹ In light of this, it is understandable that not every prominent or important figure in the Neotraditional network is a religious scholar. The same was true of Grand-Shaykh Hu's network; the scholars “remained close – literally and intellectually – to one another and worked in concert. They were, however, also supported by and in contact with many other individuals – publishers, financial backers, philanthropists, editors, students, and countless others.”²⁷²

To better understand the internal structure and relationships of the Neotraditional network, it is necessary to develop a model to describe some of the

270. Ibid., 79.

271. Ibid., v.

272. Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad*, 29.

important roles that exist in the network other than the role of religious scholar. The phenomenologist Joachim Wach proposed a concept of “classical” examples, in which “the phenomena which we designate as classical represent something typical; they convey with regard to religious life and experience more than would be conveyed by an individual instance.”²⁷³ Collins made use of this concept to describe “typical” examples of various roles within Chinese philosophical networks. He coined a number of terms to describe the roles he considered integral, including “major philosopher,” “minor philosopher,” and “lineage chief.”²⁷⁴ Ninian Smart addressed a wider selection of typical roles that he called “key individuals” including “the priest, the prophet, the contemplative, the healer, the shaman, the guru, the incarnation, the sage, the preacher, the rabbi, the jurist, the imam, the king, the monk, the nun, the hermit, the theologian, the philosopher, the saint, the martyr and the icon maker,” saying that “these experts, functionaries, charismatic figures and holy persons exhibit in their differing ways many of the modes of religious expression.”²⁷⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre described these roles as “characters” and called them “the moral representatives of their culture” which “merge what usually is thought to belong to the individual man or woman and what is usually thought to belong to social roles.”²⁷⁶ This phenomenological approach is not really new;

273. Joachim Wach, *Types of Religious Experience, Christian and Non-Christian*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 51.

274. Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*, 61–62.

275. Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 215.

276. Alasdair C MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 28.

Vincent Cornell points out that the 13th century Muslim scholar Nasir al-Din al-Tusi used this kind of schema to describe typical roles among members in Muslims societies of his time.²⁷⁷

The same method of describing classical examples for various roles can elucidate the roles and cooperative structures of the American Neotraditional network's organic solidarity. I propose descriptions of several roles within the Neotraditional network by coining several terms, including Founder, Grand-Shaykh, Inviter, Hero, Helper, and Patron. Further research would be helpful to clarify these roles and improve upon or revise this schema. Additionally, the specialized use of the word “scholar” within Neotraditional discourse and the role of “Seeker” will be addressed further in the next chapter. It is important to note that these roles may change as the community develops; some roles may become less central or may be abandoned, and new roles may eventually emerge or become institutionalized within the network.

Since the central value of the Neotraditional network is the transmission of sacred knowledge, the most elementary unit of a Neotraditional network is the establishment of a lineage in terms of the relationships between teachers and their students. The first teacher from whom all of these lineages descended is the Prophet Muhammad, and any later scholar's authority depends upon having received the knowledge taught by the Prophet through an unbroken lineage of teachers.

277. Vincent J. Cornell, “Ibn Battuta's Opportunism: The Networks and Loyalties of a Medieval Muslim Scholar,” in *Muslim Networks from Hajj to Hip Hop*, ed. miriam cooke and Bruce B. Lawrence, 1st edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 42.

However, localized networks like the American Neotraditional network often merely trace their lineage back to a founding teacher who is regarded as having connected the local community with the long line of scholars that came before him.²⁷⁸ This figure can be called a Founder. In the sense suggested by Wach, we can say that a classical example of a network Founder is Bodhidharma, who is considered the first patriarch of Chinese Chan Buddhism. Early generations of his followers regarded him as possessing such a high level of authority that very little effort was made to reconstruct the spiritual lineage preceding him and connecting him to the Buddha until at least a century later, indicating that his community considered his authority to be sufficiently established without that lineage needing to be known. Later, the epitaph of a student of the fifth patriarch emphasized the student's lineage back to Bodhidharma, and Chan Buddhist monks since that time have always conceived of themselves as belonging to the same lineage descending from Bodhidharma.²⁷⁹ The best known description of a lineage from Bodhidharma back to the Buddha was written in the 14th century by Keizan, a founder of the Japanese Soto school of Zen, which is descended from Bodhidharma through the

278. In each of the networks I have discussed in this dissertation, the person who would best be described as the founder has been male, so I have used gendered language here. It should be noted, however, that many Muslim networks have female founders. In many cases, the research method taken to study the network would change how the network is perceived from an analytical standpoint. For example, Anse Tamara Gray is a prominent participant in the Neotraditional network as I have described it here, but she is also the founder of the parallel Rabata educational network. According to the model I have used, the entire Rabata network can be included in the Neotraditional network by virtue of the many strong connections participants in both networks have with Anse Tamara Gray. Bellah made a similar point about gender in his description of the role he called "The Town Father." See Robert N Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 170.

279. Heinrich Dumoulin, "Early Chinese Zen Reexamined," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 21, no. 1 (1993): 37.

Chinese Chan lineage.²⁸⁰

The practical reality is that a Founder like Bodhidharma, while preserving a connection to the great figures who came before, nevertheless functions as an independent authority who enjoys a high degree of creative autonomy in shaping the form and direction of the new community. The same phenomenon can be observed in the Chinese Islamic network: “a genealogy establishing the starting point of this school and marking its prominent figures” was written “in the last decade of the seventeenth century,” or a century after Grand-Shaykh Hu's death.²⁸¹ After another century had passed, the network had further developed a standard curriculum of books and its own unique style of teaching. “For Yuan Guozuo,” a prominent 18th century publisher of Chinese Muslim texts, “his list of books provided consummate testimony to the existence of the specific school of scholarship to which he himself subscribed [...] – the time had come to establish this school's canon and to list its creators.”²⁸² A high degree of uniqueness in the discourse of a community was also the heuristic gauge Collins referenced as a sign that Chinese Neo-Confucian philosophers had developed into an intellectual community that could be identified as distinct from other philosophical movements of the same period.²⁸³

Regarding the authority of a Founder, it is noteworthy that the particular

280. Francis Harold Cook, *The Record of Transmitting the Light: Zen Master Keizan's Denkoroku* (Los Angeles: Center Pub., 1991).

281. Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad*, 159.

282. *Ibid.*

283. Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*, 299–321.

teachers that the Founder studied with may not be known, or may not be known to his community. In fact, in the eyes of the local community, it is actually the praise of the Founder for his teachers that makes foreign teachers known to them and which identifies those teachers as great authorities. On the basis of the traditional Islamic analogy that a teacher is like one's parent, the Founder's teachers may be termed Grand-Shaykhs. Although the Grand-Shaykhs may be widely regarded as authorities among their own networks, that status is reaffirmed discursively within the Founder's new network through his description of them as senior scholars. The ascription of this role only occurs retroactively after a network and lineage has been established. Even in the case of Grand-Shaykh Hu, the title was given to him by later generations of his students to identify him as the ancestral originator of their scholarly lineage. Thus, within the discourse of the local network, the authority of Grand-Shaykhs paradoxically rests, at least in effect, upon the authority of the Founder. Intellectual filiation and the continuity of tradition are also expressed in the way the Founder's attitude and comportment toward Grand-Shaykhs is taken as an exemplary model for the propriety with which all students should address their teachers, including the Founder. For Shaykh Hamza, modeling propriety is not merely an implicit activity; an explicit and even central theme in his lectures over the years has been the importance of maintaining proper *adab*, or propriety, in every domain of a Muslim's life.²⁸⁴

284. For example, see Islam Rewards, *Root to Purifying the Heart Is Adab - Shaykh Hamza Yusuf*, accessed March 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYbGiWkrXZM>; ShadhiliMaster, *Shaykh Hamza Yusuf on Respect and Adab*, accessed March 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgBuPPNp75w>.

Ultimately, a Founder is a luminary scholar who possesses authoritative knowledge and conveys it to at least one student. When the relationship extends to the student's student, a lineage has been established. For Neotraditional Muslims, the primary function of such a lineage is the maintenance of tradition – the passing down of knowledge, blessings, and spiritual authority in a continuous chain from the earliest scholar to the latest student. For the 16th century Chinese Neotraditional network, Grand-shaykh Hu was such a founder. He was “the father of Chinese Muslim learning [...] the great teacher, the founder of the educational system, and, most important, the originator of the Chinese Muslim lineage of learning.”²⁸⁵ In his explanation of Hu's role as a Founder, Benite makes an important distinction:

His key importance rests on the fact that he was a “translator” in all senses of the term. He was the translator, of course, of specific Islamic classical works; he was also the translator of Islam itself (as an entire cultural category) into Chinese culture. Translation was the bridge by which Islam was tied to China, the very means by which Chinese Muslim scholars could claim Islam as their own and as Chinese[...] Hu Taishi is thus seen as the founder not of Islam in China but of Chinese Islamic knowledge and its tradition[...] His crucial role [...] was as a translator and adaptor of the Islamic classics so that they could be used and studied in China.²⁸⁶

Shaykh Hamza holds an analogous position in the American Neotraditional network. He has translated a number of classical texts into eloquent English, including Tahawi's 10th century classic of Islamic systematic theology, which has historically been the most widely accepted text of Sunni Muslim creed, despite differences

285. Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad*, 79.

286. Ibid.

regarding its interpretation appearing in modern Salafi discourse.²⁸⁷

Like Grand-shaykh Hu, Shaykh Hamza has also acted as a “translator of Islam” into his own context of contemporary American society. Through his public lectures, written and translated works, and efforts to develop Zaytuna's Islamic Studies curriculum, Shaykh Hamza “has introduced Islamic intellectual canons and pedagogy to American Muslims at a scale unparalleled by any other Muslim American leader.”²⁸⁸ For example, in a series of lectures sold as a set of 14 CDs, Shaykh Hamza addresses the challenges Muslims in America often face when seeking a spouse and striving to maintain matrimonial harmony. Each lecture offers advice about those contemporary issues based upon principles drawn from discourses on the topic by earlier generations of Muslim scholars and the ideal example of matrimonial relations set by the Prophet.²⁸⁹

Also like Hu, Shaykh Hamza established a model for Neotraditional education in a style that meets the accessibility needs of his society. For Hu in the

287. In particular, Tahawi's vehement, repeated rejection of any attribution of similarity between Allah and creation is restricted through the use of extratextual qualifications and exceptions in Salafi interpretations. One such commentary published piecemeal by the polemical Salafi blog *asharis.com* applied the writing style Khaled Abou El Fadl termed “impressionistic hadith-hurling” (2014, 263) to produce an original and unprecedented anti-Ashari interpretation of Tahawi's text that the blog's authors say grew to “over 1000 pages [...] in less than three months.” Tahawi's original text contains only 111 sentences in Arabic. Hamza Yusuf and Ahmad ibn Muhammad Tahawi, *The creed of Imam al-Ṭahawī* (Berkeley: Zaytuna Institute, 2008); “Asharis.Com Publication: The Creed of the Early Kullabi Asharis - Comparative Analysis of the Early and Later Asharis,” accessed March 7, 2017, <http://www.asharis.com/creed/articles/gisbc-ashariscom-publication-the-creed-of-the-early-kullabi-asharis---comparative-anal.cfm>.

288. Zareena Grewal, *Islam Is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 171.

289. Hamza Yusuf, *The Rights and Responsibilities of Marriage* (Hayward, Calif.: Alhambra Productions, 2002).

16th century, that meant a formal curriculum to be taught in regular study circles conducted in mosques throughout China between prayer times. For Shaykh Hamza, it has meant employing a range of new approaches and technologies. For example, the pluralistic, traditionalist learning community model Shaykh Hamza established when he co-founded the Zaytuna Institute in Hayward, California has been adopted or adapted by many of his early students in other cities. One example of such an adaptation is Ta'leef Collective, a Neotraditional community organization in Fremont, California led by Usama Canon, who was one of Shaykh Hamza's early students. Ta'leef was founded upon the idea of a “third space,” which is neither one's home nor the mosque.²⁹⁰ Originally the outreach program of Zaytuna Institute, it is now an independent gathering place where teachers conduct religious classes, provide guidance and a safe space for new converts to Islam who might not feel comfortable at a mosque, and host gatherings for experiencing spiritual meditation, poetry, and song.²⁹¹ This model is similar to the model Hu pioneered in China in that both focused on introducing lay Muslims (or those interested in pursuing a religious education) to the Islamic scholarly tradition through a curated curriculum of canonical subjects and texts. Zaytuna later transformed, and began to model a new way of teaching Islam through American institutions when it developed into

290. The concept of “third places” has been described in: Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (New York; [Berkeley, Calif.: Marlowe ; Distributed by Publishers Group West, 1999); Ray Oldenburg, *Celebrating the Third Place: Inspiring Stories about The “great Good Places” at the Heart of Our Communities* (Chicago: Da Capo Press, 2009), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=904212>; Robert D Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

291. “Ta’leef Collective,” *Ta’leef Collective*, accessed March 8, 2017, <http://bamcgroup9.weebly.com/>.

America's first Muslim Liberal Arts College.

Shaykh Hamza and his network have also pioneered the use of new media technologies to promote their teachings, such as sharing recorded and live streaming video lectures over the internet. The streaming video of Zaytuna's Saturday public lecture series, "Living Links," is one example of this while the free online courses offered by SeekersHub are another. Some individuals close to Shaykh Hamza have called the use of multimedia content to share Islamic teachings "digital da`wa," using the Arabic term for "calling" or "inviting" people to Islam through teaching.²⁹² In particular, the term was initially coined to refer to Mustafa Davis's production of short films and photography promoting Ta'leef Collective. Irrespective of their knowledge or scholarly credentials, the work done by Usama Canon at Ta'leef and by Mustafa Davis through his digital filmography is not the same as the work of religious scholars, yet their work is also important in maintaining the vitality of the Neotraditional network. From the framing of their work as da`wa, and the choice of the word Ta'leef, which comes from an Arabic word that means "gathering together," we might call figures like Usama Canon "Inviters", or those whose activities relate to welcoming people from all backgrounds and then directing them towards a Neotraditional path of learning about Islam in greater depth from religious scholars within the network.

292. Maryam Kashani, *Seekers of Sacred Knowledge: Zaytuna College and the Education of American Muslims* (University of Texas at Austin, 2014), 125, <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/32815/kashani-dissertation-2014.pdf?sequence=1>.

Scholars and Inviters are dedicated to producing a message, but the delivery of that message relies upon specialists of a different type. The medium of delivery is also a significant part of expressing how the values being taught translate into one's work and everyday life.²⁹³ For example, in her dissertation focusing on the history of the Zaytuna community, Maryam Kashani relates the story of Shaykh Hamza encouraging Haroon, an audiovisual media engineer, to move to California and become “a Helper” involved with Zaytuna’s digital media production.²⁹⁴ Shaykh Hamza similarly encouraged many other people to come together as Helpers, including several Muslim converts “who had studied overseas and could teach and those who had other skills like craftsmanship, decorative arts, and design.”²⁹⁵ Haroon recalls thinking, “I want to do that. I think this person is going to make a major contribution to Islam in America and abroad, and I think I can help.”²⁹⁶ Both Mustafa Davis and Haroon are classic examples Helpers in the Neotraditional network.

What is particularly fascinating about this role is that the term “Helpers” that Shaykh Hamza used, in its context, was an unambiguous reference to a term coined by the Prophet Muhammad to describe the specialized role of a subset of people in his own community. When the Prophet emigrated to Medina, he was charged with arbitrating a longstanding feud between the resident Aws and Khazraj tribes. He did

293. C.f. Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium Is the Message*. (Toronto, ON: Bantam, 1967).

294. Kashani, *Seekers of Sacred Knowledge: Zaytuna College and the Education of American Muslims*, 113.

295. *Ibid.*, 113–14.

296. *Ibid.*, 113.

so, in part, by reconfiguring the social categories and labels which had become the markers of difference between the two factions: they were no longer to be known as the Aws and Khazraj, but rather by the collective honorific title *Ansar*, meaning “Helpers,” because they would be responsible for helping the *Muhajjirun*, those Muslim emigrants who arrived from Mecca, to establish themselves in the new community. In this reconfiguration of society, the tribal affiliations of Medinan locals and Meccan emigrants were all superseded by new roles that were defined in terms of organic solidarity and the division of labor. In Medina, the term Helpers was coined to describe the role of those who provided the logistical and institutional support that the emigrant Muslims needed such as housing, food, clothing, and work. In the California Bay Area, the Helpers also provide logistical and institutional support as they help to promote the teachings of religious scholars by producing and editing digital media, designing websites, and organizing events.

A role that parallels that of the Inviters is the role of the network Hero. Like the Inviters, regardless of their individual scholarly credentials, Heroes have beneficial functions to perform that differ from those of the religious scholars. A classical example of a Neotraditional Hero is Ali Ataie. He not only “studied at the prestigious Dar al-Mustafa under some of the most eminent scholars in the world,” but also “holds a Masters’ Degree in Biblical Studies from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, (the first Muslim seminarian in the 143 year history of the school to do so), and is working on a PhD in Islamic Biblical Hermeneutics.”²⁹⁷ He is also

297. Zaytuna College, “Zaytuna College Blog | Ustadh Ali Ataie,” accessed March 8, 2017,

one of Shaykh Hamza’s early students. This mixed educational background has given him a rare ability to engage in an erudite discussion of comparative Christian and Islamic theology, and he has used that ability to engage in interfaith discussions; in which he has also “dialogued and debated with Christian scholars about such critical topics as the resurrection of Jesus and the Prophethood of Muhammad.”²⁹⁸ In his debates, he fluently quotes Islamic textual sources in Arabic, Talmudic and Biblical passages in Hebrew or Greek, and early Christian sources in these and other languages, and uses those sources to rebut polemics against Islam. For example, in 2007, Ataie participated in a debate against David Wood that was co-sponsored by the Muslim Students Association (MSA), College Crusade for Christ, and College Life Christian Fellowship at the University of California, Davis. In that event, he calls polemics focusing on Islamic texts a mere “smoke-screen” relying upon selective citation and dissimulation of the fact that similar passages exist in the texts of Christianity. After presenting his evidence exonerating the character of the Prophet Muhammad from Wood's accusations and demonstrating how similar polemical attacks might be made on Christianity through reference to textual sources, his general advice to the audience is, “don’t believe the hype.”²⁹⁹ This debate exemplifies the Hero’s role in championing and defending the community’s position. The Hero's role is especially valued as beneficial to lay Muslims such as the

<http://blog.zaytuna.edu/author/ustadh-ali-ataie>.

298. “Home Teachers Ali Ataie,” accessed March 8, 2017, <http://seekershut.org/home/teachers/ali-ataie>.

299. Islam Explained, *David Wood Vs Ali Ataie : Who Was Muhammad?* ﷺ, accessed March 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYyXGcZrMQc>.

undergraduate MSA members in the audience whose faith may be challenged if such polemics were left unanswered. The Neotraditional Hero strives to revive and strengthen the self-confidence and pride of the network's lay affiliates by demonstrating the strength of the Neotraditional position on a contended issue and the breadth of scholarship supporting it.

The diverse activities of a large and complex community like the American Neotraditional network requires a division of labor among participants who have diverse skills and specialties, and providing the necessary financial and social capital to support the work of all these specialists is the duty of a Patron. Shaykh Salek bin Siddina, one of the original teachers at Zaytuna Institute, described the Patron's duty to support scholars as a religious obligation and moral imperative:

One of the things that is an obligation for [...] people in possession of wealth [...] is they must spend on the people of knowledge. This is a *fard kifaya*, a communal obligation. And in this, they must support the people of da`wa, the people of knowledge so that those people do not get busy in other worldly affairs and other jobs that may take them away from their focus of da`wa, their focus of knowledge.³⁰⁰

If the community members who have the means do not spend their wealth to provide financial support for the activities of religious scholars, they will be committing a sin by failing to fulfill a communal obligation. Patrons belong to what Thorstein Veblen called the leisure class, whose use of wealth is subject to judgment by their society as to whether or not it accords with social expectations. Those with wealth are

300. Shaykh Salek bin Siddina and Blessed Tree Foundation, *Knowledge Every Muslim Must Know - Fard A`yn Part 1 of 3*, (13:30), accessed March 9, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NyGIR2lGgXA>.

expected to spend it on good things; “since the consumption of these more excellent goods is an evidence of wealth, it becomes honorific; and conversely, the failure to consume in due quantity and quality becomes a mark of inferiority and demerit.”³⁰¹

In the discourse of Neotraditionalism, there is nothing more noble or excellent than learning and teaching religious knowledge. Shaykh Salek makes this point by citing a famous 13th century exegete of the Qur’an: “Imam al-Qurtubi said, 'had there been anything which was more noble to seek an increase in, Allah would have given that to the Prophet, but the thing He commanded the Prophet to ask for increase in is knowledge.’”³⁰² Veblen, however, distinguished between “exoteric” worldly knowledge and systematic religious learning, saying that the latter “is primarily of no economic or industrial effect,” and yet “the higher learning [...] is a leisure-class occupation – more specifically an occupation of the vicarious leisure class employed in the service of the supernatural leisure class.”³⁰³ In Veblen’s apathetic economic analysis, religious scholars are analogous to a luxury commodity, and spending on them can be a means for wealthy members of society to earn social capital. This is not to say that gaining social capital is necessarily what motivates them; that may be accidental, while the Patron's real intention is to earn “spiritual capital,” meaning the pleasure of God and eternal felicity in the hereafter.³⁰⁴ While some Patrons lend their

301. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class an Economic Study of Institutions*, (New York: Macmillan Co., 1912), 36, <http://www.aspresolver.com/aspresolver.asp?SOTH;S10020684>.

302. Blessed Tree, *Knowledge Every Muslim Must Know - Fard A'yn Part 1 of 3*, (4:18).

303. Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class an Economic Study of Institutions*, 169.

304. C.f. Dean R. Lillard and Masao Ogaki, “The Effects of Spiritual Capital on Altruistic Economic Behavior” (Cornell University and the Ohio State University, September 2005), <http://paa2006.princeton.edu/papers/61119>.

support by simply donating wealth, others incorporate their support into their ongoing business activities.

For example, the late 17th / early 18th century Chinese Muslim scholar Liu Zhi was a prodigious author and sixth-generation disciple in Grand-Shaykh Hu's educational lineage. His works were profoundly influential and widely read by Muslims all over China during and after his lifetime. However, the success of his books, and by extension, the popularity of his ideas, can be attributed in part to the ardently supportive networking and promotional efforts of his publisher.

Yuan Guozuo [...] was the publisher and editor of Liu Zhi's books” and also “compiled the first bibliography of Muslim Chinese books, one that included all Muslim Chinese books written up to his time. Significantly, this bibliography not only lists the works but provides biographical information on their authors and details the relationships between each author and his teachers or intellectual associates.³⁰⁵

Yuan's family was also known for their scholarly lineage – his grandfather had been Liu Zhi's teacher – and their family school “was a center where other Chinese Islamic scholars met and visited, and it was a place where new texts were introduced and manuscripts preserved. Some of its teachers and members authored books or wrote prefaces or greetings to other scholars' works.”³⁰⁶ Yuan did not merely preserve and share these texts; he was active in their production and how they would be presented to their audience. In fact, it appears that Yuan himself was behind commissioning some of the scholarly prefaces that demonstrated the intellectual

305. Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad*, 27.

306. *Ibid.*, 27, 159.

relationships between Chinese Muslim scholars through the medium of their published works.³⁰⁷

Yuan has a counterpart in the American Neotraditional network. Ustadh (“teacher”) Feraidoon is a core Patron and also a scholar within the network, specializing in the teachings of the 13th century Muslim Hanafi jurist and poet Jalal al-Din Rumi.³⁰⁸ Ustadh Feraidoon is also the owner of Rumi Bookstore, which specializes in Islamic books, art, clothing, gifts, and products like prayer rugs and incense burners. The store's website highlights several key figures in the neotraditional network by promoting their works on dedicated pages, including a book category for “Zaytuna Publications,” and individual categories in CDs or DVDs dedicated to the lectures of Shaykh Hamza, Imam Zaid, Habib `Ali al-Jifri, and Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi. There is also a page called “Rumi Production,” which highlights the bookstore's own in-house publications of these scholars' lectures.³⁰⁹ Like Yuan, Ustadh Feraidoon's support is not limited to gathering and promoting the books of scholars; he is also involved in producing their works. Moreover, he is a leading organizer for most of the Neotraditional network's major annual events, including the Sacred Caravan spiritual travel programs, the Grand Mawlid celebration in the San Francisco Bay Area, Deen Intensive and Rihla events

307. Ibid., 218–19.

308. SeekersHub Sydney, “#Rumi with Ustadh Feraidoon & Imam @alfroz at #ACU & @SeekersHubSyd Must Register [Http://Seekershubsyd.org/Sydney/Events/](http://Seekershubsyd.org/Sydney/Events/) [Pic.twitter.com/pFRjOngdbI](https://twitter.com/pFRjOngdbI),” microblog, @seekershubsyd, (November 4, 2015), <https://twitter.com/seekershubsyd/status/661894082088710144>.

309. “Rumiproductions,” accessed March 11, 2017, <https://www.rumibookstore.com/index.php/rumiproductions>.

and the international Reviving the Islamic Spirit (RIS) Conventions. These events and programs bring together central scholars from the Neotraditional network as speakers and presenters, and are attended by large Muslim audiences. For example, the 2011 RIS Convention in Toronto had over 20,000 attendees, and tickets for the Grand Mawlid conference have historically sold out every year within days (or sometimes within hours) of becoming available for purchase.³¹⁰ The events and publications organized or facilitated by Ustadh Feraidoon have been profoundly influential in promoting the teachings of Neotraditional scholars like Shaykh Hamza and consequently making the Neotraditional message available to a broader audience.

Normally, networks are conceived as having members but not audiences. In the case of the American Neotraditional network, I argue that the network's active participants organize events and cooperate in large part for the sake of presenting a unified message to a number of distinct audiences, including Muslims who are strongly or only loosely affiliated to the network, American Muslims generally, Muslims globally, American non-Muslims (who might either become Muslim or support social justice causes that are of interest to their Muslim neighbors), and a global public. The following chapter addresses some characteristic messages that the Neotraditional network offers as a product to its “audience and would-be recruits,” as well as the various forms of media and interaction through which Neotraditional

310. “Canadian Islamic Convention Attracts Record Breaking Attendance,” *Iqra.ca*, December 27, 2011, <http://iqra.ca/2011/canadian-islamic-convention-attracts-record-breaking-attendance/>; “Grand Mawlid – Tickets,” March 12, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170312012720/http://www.grandmawlid.com/ticket-mobile/>.

messages are delivered and shared.³¹¹

311. Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*, 43; Richard Giulianotti, “Supporters, Followers, Fans, and Flaneurs A Taxonomy of Spectator Identities in Football,” *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 26, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 25–46, doi:10.1177/0193723502261003.

Chapter 3: Aesthetics of Culture

I. Introduction: Aesthetic Sociology

This chapter proposes what might be termed an “aesthetic sociology” as opposed to a “sociology of aesthetics.”³¹² To explain this distinction by way of example, consider Durkheim's proposal of the concept of “religious sociology,” in which he demonstrated that everyday social structures can be interpreted through a religious lens as expressions of tension between the sacred and the profane.³¹³ Similarly, while a sociology of aesthetics would rely upon the theoretical and methodological assumptions of sociology to question social practices relating to aesthetics, my approach will instead be to take the phenomena of aesthetic preferences and expressions as the foundation of a sociological project to identify and describe a community. This approach to understanding the nature of communities through aesthetic expressions of identity bridges and challenges social categories often imagined as distinct, such as religion, culture, nation, and even categories related to

312. C.f. Eduardo de la Fuente, “Sociology and Aesthetics,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 3, no. 2 (May 1, 2000): 235–47, doi:10.1177/136843100003002007.

313. Jeffrey C Alexander, *Durkheimian Sociology: Cultural Studies* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 2–3; Émile Durkheim and Karen E Fields, *The elementary forms of religious life* (New York: Free Press, 1995); C.f. Richard Hecht, “Private Devotions and the Sacred Heart of Elvis: The Durkheimians and the [Re]turn of the Sacred,” in *Matters of Culture: Cultural Sociology in Practice*, ed. Roger Friedland and John Mohr (Cambridge [England]; New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2004); C.f. Michelle Marie Nixon, “Approaching a Sociology of Aesthetics: Searching for Method in Georg Simmel’s Rembrandt” (Master of Science, Department of Sociology, Brigham Young University, 2012), <http://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4167&context=etd>.

imagined temporal designations like modern and ancient.³¹⁴

In this chapter, the idea of aesthetics is conceptualized as a window through which various aspects and expressions of a community's shared culture can be glimpsed. "Aesthetics" and "culture" are versatile terms without clear definitions, and both have been approached in a number of different ways in scholarship. The concept of "culture" in the sense of cultivation, or as the process by which one attains good character by overcoming inner defects and developing virtues is attributed to Cicero, who introduced *cultura* within an agricultural analogy:

Just as a field, however fertile, will not bear fruit without being cultivated (*cultura*), the same is true of a soul that is not taught (*doctrina*). In each case, the one is unable [to attain its potential] without the other. Now, what cultivates the soul is philosophy: it uproots one's defects, prepares the soul to be receptive, and conveys [good into] it. Thereafter, with maturity [a soul thus cultivated] bears abundant fruits.³¹⁵

If we were to exercise poetic license by translating *philosophia* more generically as *loving* –, *desiring* –, or even "seeking sacred knowledge" or wisdom, then Cicero's statement would nicely summarize the premise of Neotraditional Islam: seeking sacred knowledge from those who possess it is the key to perfecting one's character and attaining salvation.

314. Jeffrey Alexander outlines a brief history of how the idea of "modernity" has been conceived at different times as a term expressing various sets of values and intellectual preferences. I would suggest that these shifts can be thought of as distinct aesthetics of historiographical imagination. Jeffrey C Alexander, *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 196, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=316370>.

315. The above is my translation; the original Latin is as follows: "Atque, ut in eodem simili verser, ut ager, quamvis fertilis, sine cultura fructuosus esse non potest: sic sine doctrina animus. Ita est ultraque res sine altera debilis. Cultura autem animi, philosophia est: hœc extrahit vitia radicitus, et præparat animos ad satus accipiendos, eaque mandat his, et, ut ita dicam, serit, quæ adulta fructus uberrimos ferant." Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Tusculanes* (Chez J. Gaude, 1812), 186, 273.

Cicero's description also suggests the concept of a teaching tradition. His use of the verb *mandare* (to give or send from hand to hand; also, to command), translated above as “conveys” has roughly the same meaning as “tradition,” which derives from *tradere* (to give and pass along). In this view, culture is a tradition of teaching sacred knowledge that leads one to abandon moral defects and cultivate socially-defined virtues. In the Qur'an, Muslims are characterized in roughly the same terms, namely as “a nation inviting to what is good, commanding to propriety and forbidding what is morally reprehensible.”³¹⁶ The Qur'an similarly describes the Prophet as teaching a tradition of sacred knowledge to uplift the moral character of his community by “purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom – although they were before in clear error.”³¹⁷ In *The Guiding Compass to Understanding Islam*, Ma Zhu wrote that the Prophet's mandate was to guide and teach people “so that they can return to truth and re-enter their destined straight path, investigate the essence of things and attain knowledge, to make their hearts upright and establish truth in their consciousness.”³¹⁸ If we were to rely upon Cicero's description of culture and the descriptions of Islam given in the Qur'an and by

316. I have added some nuance that was missing from alternate translations. “The Quranic Arabic Corpus - Translation,” (3:104), accessed March 21, 2017, <http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=3&verse=104>; C.f. Smart’s description of “propriety” as a comprehensive paradigm for social morality. Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World’s Beliefs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 76.

317. “The Quranic Arabic Corpus - Translation,” (62:2), accessed March 21, 2017, <http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=62&verse=2>.

318. This is my translation. “Guīzhēn fùmìng zhī zhèngdào, géwù zhìzhī, zhèng xīn chéngyì.” Yihong Liu, *Hui-Confucian Dialogue: Arabian Scriptures and the Tao of Confucius and Mencius (Hui-Ru Duihua: Tianfang zhi Jing yu Kong Meng zhi Dao)* (Beijing: Religion Culture Publishing House (Zongjiao Wenhua Chuban She), 2006), 114.

Chinese Muslims like Ma Zhu, then the conceptual domains of Islam, religion, and culture would overlap to an extent that they might become indistinguishable.

At the very least, the domains of aesthetics and culture are intertwined. Aesthetic expressions such as art, music, and décor are not merely cultural products. It is in cultural products that aesthetics become observable, but a sense of aesthetics shared by a group is, in reality, the subtly guiding force which produces the range of phenomena we call culture. Aesthetic judgments about what is beautiful and good are the “moral textures and delicate emotional pathways by which individuals and groups come to be influenced by [collective meanings]” rather than merely the epiphenomena of collective meaning.³¹⁹ Culture is a particularly elusive concept, as will be discussed below, but I will use it here to mean a social framework within which a sense of aesthetics, or expressions of taste and preference, are shared broadly among members of a community.³²⁰ Identifying a set of shared aesthetics that differ from the aesthetics shared by other groups can be used as a systematic method for demonstrating the existence of a distinct community and revealing its differential qualities.³²¹

319. Jeffrey Alexander offered this point of distinction as reflecting the difference between what he termed “sociology of culture” and “cultural sociology.” Alexander, *The Meanings of Social Life*, 5.

320. Zangwill describes Kant’s formulation of aesthetics as a “judgment of taste.” See Nick Zangwill, “Aesthetic Judgment,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2014 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2014), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/aesthetic-judgment/>; Immanuel Kant and James Creed Meredith, *Kant’s Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911).

321. Jonathan Z. Smith quotes Francis Ponge to make the point that “naming the differential quality” of something like early Judaism is the central aim of scholarship. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, Reprint edition (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1988), 1; Francis Ponge, *Le Grand Recueil*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 41–42.

Aesthetics also functions as a substructure for symbolic language and codes that enable individuals to signal their belonging in a community and recognize others as also belonging to the same community. This process is instrumental in creating and maintaining any shared social reality and social identity, whether a corporate culture, national character, or a religious mode like Neotraditionalism.³²² Once created, preserving the distinctiveness of a community's signature elements is a dynamic process; “people select cultural tastes (e.g., attitudes, possessions, and behaviors) that distinguish them from members of other groups, and they abandon cultural tastes when members of other social groups adopt them. Divergence is pervasive in social life.”³²³ If we approach all of the diverse modes of cultural expression as forms of text, then aesthetics is the language – the “towering edifice of symbols” – in which differentiated cultural texts are written.³²⁴

The relationship between aesthetics and style is intimate and nuanced, and the difference between the two terms, as I will use them, is located in an individual's depth of understanding. Anyone can learn how to convincingly imitate the style of a person or a community through observation and by trial and error – they can wear the right clothes, say the right things, and read the right books – and yet remain

322. Harris and Nelson propose that “symbolic behavior creates and maintains organizational cultures.” Thomas E Harris and Mark D Nelson, *Applied Organizational Communication: Theory and Practice in a Global Environment* (New York: L. Erlbaum Associates, 2008), 225.

323. Berger J and Heath C, “Who Drives Divergence? Identity Signaling, Outgroup Dissimilarity, and the Abandonment of Cultural Tastes.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 95, no. 3 (2008): 593.

324. Peter L Berger, *The Sacred Canopy; Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), 6.

oblivious to the philosophical value judgments and tastes that produced the style.

Pierre Bourdieu commented on this gap:

Taste is an acquired disposition to 'differentiate' and 'appreciate', as Kant says – in other words, to establish and mark differences by a process of distinction which [...] ensures recognition (in the ordinary sense) of the object without implying knowledge of the distinctive features which define it [...] Orienting practices practically, they embed what some would mistakenly call *values* in the most automatic of gestures or the apparently most insignificant techniques of the body – ways of walking or blowing one's nose, ways of eating or talking – and engage the most fundamental principles of construction and evaluation of the social world...³²⁵

In other words, adopting a style is a practical behavior, and can be accomplished even without knowledge of the deeper aesthetic valuations that informed the style. In the Neotraditional community, the laity only needs to learn how to practice the community's style in order to signal belonging and recognize their fellows. The religious scholars are the ones who are expected to understand those aesthetic valuations because they derive from the body of inherited sacred knowledge. As a result, scholars in a Neotraditional community are also trendsetters. They are the producers and exemplary models of the Neotraditional style, and their aesthetic practices must serve a practical purpose.

The outward manifestations of aesthetics, or style, can be approached as social performance. Peter Berger described the nature of social interaction as a type

325. Pierre Bourdieu, Richard Nice, and Tony Bennett, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgment of taste*, 2015, 466; Citing Immanuel Kant and Hans H Rudnick, *Anthropology: From a Pragmatic Point of View* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), 141; Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "Meditationes de Cognitione, Veritate et Ideis," in *Opuscula Philosophical Selecta* (Paris: Boivin, 1939), 1–2.

of script shared in common among people within a social group:

The socially constructed world is, above all, an ordering of experience. A meaningful order, or nomos, is imposed upon the discrete experiences and meanings of individuals [...] Every social action implies that individual meaning is directed toward others and ongoing social interaction implies that the several meanings of the actors are integrated into an order of common meaning. [...] Man's sociality presupposes the collective character of this ordering activity.³²⁶

Berger's description of a nomos or shared "order of common meaning" is abstract enough to serve as a neutral model that is equally relevant in describing a society, religion or religious mode, or a culture or subculture. While these categories are not commonly imagined to be coterminous, religions have cultural and artistic dimensions, cultures have religious elements, and both categories are ultimately "created for the scholar's analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization."³²⁷ Outside of scholarship, these categories are deployed as a political strategy to impose structures of power favoring or disempowering groups based upon categorization.³²⁸ In the broadest sense, religions and cultures share the

326. Berger's concept of the nomos follows Aristotle's description of humans as social animals, prioritizing the imposition of social structure on the individual over the power of individual agency to shape culture. This point will be addressed further below. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy; Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, 19.

327. Smith, *Imagining Religion*, xi; For religious aspects of the "American Way of Life," see Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew; an Essay in American Religious Sociology*. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1955); For "American civil religion," see Robert N Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); For artistic and other "dimensions of the sacred," see Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*.

328. In China, for example, legal benefits are extended to groups that identify as an "ethnic minority" but withheld if the group identifies as a "religious minority." See Brendan Newlon, *Hui Muslims and the Minzu Paradigm* (Santa Barbara: University of California, Santa Barbara, 2013), <http://goo.gl/MdmKBs>; In the U.S., "anti-sharia bills" attempted to define Islam as a political movement bent on undermining the U.S. Constitution, and thereby strip Muslims of equal protection under the law. See Brendan Peter Newlon, "Exploring the Political Construction of Identity through the Case of Islam in China," in *Constructing and Contesting Islam: Muslim Minorities in Asia* (Fifth Annual UCSB Islamic Studies Graduate Student Conference, University of California, Santa Barbara,

common domain of informing and expressing deliberate internal and external choices, preferences, and actions; each is a way of “fulfillment of an appropriate pattern of conduct,” or in other words, propriety.³²⁹

Jeffrey Alexander suggested social interaction can be analyzed as a type of performance in which individuals are actors and “cultural scripts achieve verisimilitude through effective *mise-en-scène*.”³³⁰ In other words, the possibilities of meaningful interaction are predetermined by context and custom and are known in advance by the actors, who communicate meaning through the choice of one symbolic action or another. On the topic of interpreting behavior through cultural semiotics, Marcel Danesi and Paul Perron noted that the word “person,” derives etymologically from *persona*, meaning a mask designed to project an actors voice from the stage. They suggest that the history of the word invites consideration of an individual's social actions through theatrical metaphors “such as *to play a role in life*, *to interact*, *to act out feelings*, *to put on a proper face* [mask], and so on.”³³¹

According to this model of actions as performances, behaviors might be polite or

2015), <http://goo.gl/kUywnu>; In European politics, clothing or other symbols deemed “religious” such as the hijab may be subject to legal restrictions in public places even while a crucifix is given legal protection as a “cultural symbol.” See Hilal Elver, *The Headscarf Controversy: Secularism and Freedom of Religion*, Reprint edition (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Deutsche Welle (www.dw.com), “EU Court Allows Ban on Headscarf in Workplace | News | DW.COM | 14.03.2017,” *DW.COM*, accessed March 25, 2017, <http://m.dw.com/en/eu-court-allows-ban-on-headscarf-in-workplace/a-37923881>.

329. Smart Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 76.

330. Jeffrey C Alexander, “Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance Between Ritual and Strategy,” *Sociological Theory* 22, no. 4 (2004): 527.

331. Marcel Danesi and Paul Perron, *Analyzing Cultures: An Introduction and Handbook* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 48–49.

impolite, friendly or threatening, but they are all performed according to familiar scripts.

Propriety is the body of shared scripts determining what should or should not be done, and aesthetics refers to refinement, nuance, and creative or philosophical variations in how such scripts are or should be performed to express slightly different meanings. For example, *propriety* may prescribe that a handshake is in order when greeting someone, yet still allow for numerous ways the handshake could be performed. *Aesthetics* is choosing how to shake, when such a choice is available and the choice has the potential to affect the meaning communicated by one's performance: who should be first to extend their hand? Should the grasp be firm or gentle, long-lasting or brief? Should the hands come together in an energetic clap or meet with sober formality? Who should be first to release the other's hand, and how should the moment to release be chosen? Should the hand be grasped with one hand or enclosed warmly between two? In what ways should the rest of the body be involved – by bowing, kneeling, kissing the other's hand, making or avoiding eye contact? Is the handshake one of many among many actors with equal status in a gathering, or does it carry special significance to one or both actors? Is the handshake a private performance between the actors only, or will its performance be observed by an attentive audience, and is the audience's interpretation of the handshake's meaning important to the actors who shake hands or not? Clifford Geertz used the term “thick description” to mean scholarship that explains the

nuances of a social performance like this and how such nuance affects meaning.³³²

As it is used here, the conceptual domain of aesthetics is maximally extended to nearly correlate with this broad concept of propriety. This is necessary because aesthetic practices might be employed in similar (or identical) ways by communities in any social category, whether imagined as being religions, cultures, nations, movements, etc. In his observations of social interactions taking place in an American synagogue, Samuel Heilman explained:

This is not a book about the religion of Orthodox Jews, for it explains neither their religion nor the essence of their Orthodoxy. Such matters of the spirit do not fully reveal themselves in the context of interaction. One will not find the faithful Jew here – not because he does not exist, but because the analytic perspective used here transforms him into a person like all others, subject primarily to the imperatives of commingling. Thus observed, the interdictions and demands of Orthodox Judaism are qualitatively indistinct from the social constraints and claims made upon all people.³³³

An aesthetic sociology must make its starting point the observation of aesthetic practices and their social functions, and allow communities or types of communities to come to light and distinguish themselves through those practices rather than setting out with the presumed existence of categories already in mind. At this point, it is an open question whether an aesthetic sociology would even be capable of deriving and distinguishing between those familiar social categories, or whether it might provide a basis for suggesting new and unfamiliar analytical categories

332. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, 1973, 6–7.

333. Samuel C Heilman, *Synagogue Life: A Study in Symbolic Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), ix–x.

instead.

Observation of aesthetic practices contributes to a sociological method for describing and defining a distinct community by providing “thick description” of how actors express and perform their affiliation with a community, its signature characteristics, and their role or position within it.³³⁴ The methodology for the following model of aesthetic sociology is grounded in the premise that aesthetic practices are used to express social congruence and divergence relative to the various identity roles and categories possible within a cultural web of meaning. Accordingly, an analysis guided by aesthetic sociology is a means to systematically investigate how individuals attain and express personal identity within a shared cultural imagination. Since cultures and their individual members are co-productive, that shared imagination – the ineffable concept of culture itself – is revealed simultaneously, at least to the extent that an indefinite and persistent-yet-volatile imaginary category can be discerned.³³⁵ Aesthetic expressions of communal identity can be classified into three different types, which I call signaling, declaration, and performance. These three types are similar, but relate to different stages in the sequence of a social interaction, namely, signaling in the time before an interaction

334. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 6–7.

335. Margaret Archer identifies the “problem of structure and agency,” or the tension in sociological theory between voluntarism and determinism, as a central contention among sociologists. My view, briefly, is that the individual and society are co-productive. In premodern (i.e. traditional) societies, social structures exert greater influence on the individual, however, the diversity of choices available to individuals in modernity are magnified by technological advancements in communications that allow new ideas to spark widespread social changes quickly and sometimes lastingly. In that way, individual agency is more able to disrupt long-established social structures. See Margaret Scotford Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 65.

commences, declaration at the threshold within which the basis for interaction is established between actors, and performance during the remaining period of interaction.³³⁶

II. Signaling, Declaration, and Performance of a Neotraditional Style

Imagine entering a mosque in America in time to observe the end of a congregational prayer. Immediately afterward, one man approaches another to offer several points of critique, saying, for example, that the man had prayed with his hands at his side although the sunnah is to fold the arms in front of the chest, and that he concluded the prayer by saying only “as-salamu alaykum,” instead of saying “as-salamu ‘alaykum wa rahmatullah,” twice. When the second man answers that his prayer was performed according to the guidelines of the Maliki school, the critic objects that one shouldn’t follow any teacher or school that departs from the sunnah of the Prophet, as recorded in authentic hadith collections such as Bukhari and Muslim. Doing so, he cautions, would be *bida`a*, and following them instead of the Qur'an and sunnah would amount to *shirk*, or idolizing someone as a partner with God.

The above interaction is almost stereotypical of encounters between Neotraditional and Salafi congregants in an American mosque. Similar scenes have played out so many times and have been related in so many stories that the continued

336. My use of the word “stages” here refers to an interpretive structure based on the model of theatrical performance. C.f. Alexander, “Cultural Pragmatics,” 527.

recurrence of such interactions can only be explained as a performative ritual of community divergence. In the fictional encounter above, practices such as prayer postures may be selected according to personal religious convictions, but they can also have the auxiliary effect of signaling community affiliation; it is primarily Sunni followers of the Maliki school or Shia Muslims who pray with arms hanging at the sides. The remaining three Sunni madhhabs and Salafis all advocate folding the arms in front, only differing on whether they should be folded low near the navel or up near the chest. This minor point of difference has existed since the 9th century, and has always been deemed insignificant by all four Sunni madhhabs. Nevertheless, it takes the form of a brand new issue of immediate and critical importance to the Salafi critic in such interactions. This is because the Salafi approach to deriving legal points is grounded in direct and unmediated scriptural interpretation rather than giving consideration to how a matter has historically been understood and conveyed in scholarly traditions.

In the case of a Salafi who reads an authentic hadith reporting that the Prophet folded his arms during prayer, the Salafi methodology requires that this practice be immediately adopted and performatively defended against *bida`a*, or reprehensible innovations that deviate from the Salafi perception of a clear, authentic sunnah. Therefore, if a Salafi layperson surmises that Imam Malik, the eponymous founder of the Maliki school, has departed from the authentic sunnah as they have understood it from reading textual sources like the hadith collection of Bukhari, then

they reason that Imam Malik must have been mistaken. It is taken for granted in Salafi discourse that Bukhari's collection is a reliable textual source for prophetic hadiths, especially what the leading figure of the contemporary Salafi movement, Nasiruddin Albani, confirmed of the reports it contains. However, Salafis do not generally afford the same distinction to Imam Malik or the hadith collection he compiled, despite the fact that Bukhari was the student of the students of the students of Imam Malik. In fact, it was Imam Malik who pioneered the scholarly methodology for recording and authenticating a book of prophetic hadiths.

The significance of this performative encounter for the Salafi actor can only be understood in terms of what Eliade called “the myth of the eternal return.”³³⁷ It is a ritual performance in which time is nullified, the religious purity inherent in the moment of the divine law's revelation is directly witnessed through reading the hadith text, and the intervening millennium of perceived legal deviation is erased by admonishing the other man to correct his prayer. Thus, the performance perfectly expresses the core Salafi aesthetic value: to return to the original religious purity of the era of the righteous ancestors (the *Salaf al-Salih*), and purify the religion of later innovations (*bida`a*) not immediately apparent in the textual Qur'an and sunnah.

There is a Neotraditional counterpart to this ritual, but it will occur sometime later in the form of a published scholarly summary of evidence for the Maliki practice and rebuttal against the Salafi's zeal in condemning it. One such piece is

337. Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper, 1959).

published by Shaykh Abdullah bin Hamid Ali, a teacher at Zaytuna College. It

begins:

Questions have been asked about what appears to be a novel practice amongst Western Muslims of people praying with their hands at their sides instead of folding them over their chests as has been reported in sound traditions about the Prophet – may Allah bless him and grant him peace. It is common knowledge to Muslims everywhere that this was a practice of the virtuous Imam and erudite, Malik b. Anas – may Allah have mercy on him.³³⁸

After introducing the topic but before entering the main discussion of pertinent textual evidence and historical scholarly opinion, Shaykh Abdullah explains:

The reason for writing this paper is so that the author or others will no longer have to go into great detail repeatedly in explaining and justifying this issue. The aim of this explanation is not to appease or convince those opposed to this practice. Rather, it is to console and put at ease those who do it. This way, if one desires to know the facts, it would be as simple as taking recourse to the current paper, and those like it wherever they exist.³³⁹

What follows is a two-part article containing 18 pages of citations to hadith and the comments of early scholars about the reliability and legal impact of those reports, which include biographical data of narrators, explanations of the scholarly methods for evaluating hadith authenticity. He also includes a thorough discussion with references to scholarly critiques of reports that would seem to contradict the Maliki position. Shaykh Abdullah concludes “In the end, I'd like to say that it would be much more beneficial for those seeking to sow discord through this matter to address

338. “The Maliki Argument for Not Claspings the Hands in Salat (Part 1),” 1, accessed April 20, 2017, <http://www.lamppostproductions.com/the-maliki-argument-for-not-claspings-the-hands-in-salat-part-1/>.

339. Ibid.

some of our more pressing issues like the divorce rate in the Muslim community [...] instead of policing people's prayer when they're not doing anything wrong.”³⁴⁰

Shaykh Hamza Yusuf has also responded to this issue. Like Shaykh Abdullah, he comments on the relative strengths and weaknesses of pertinent hadith reports and their import for Islamic ritual law, and also laments that contemporary Muslims have begun to consider the matter contentious: “[praying with the hands at the sides] has been attacked by a lot of ignorant people in this time”³⁴¹ Shaykh Hamza theorizes that the issue originally had a political purpose. He says, “you have to understand the sociological aspects of a lot of this material [...] there are realities to where people were and what was going on and why they take the positions they do.”³⁴² In the case of where the hands should be held during prayer, Shaykh Hamza points out that only two early factions in Islamic history, the Khawarij and the Shi`a, were adamant about praying with their hands at their sides, and both were opposed to the ruling Ummayyad dynasty. He suggests that people were ordered to fold their arms in prayer during that time as a signal of divergence, so that “the thing that immediately distinguishes your political allegiance is in the prayer.”³⁴³ This would have provided an administrative convenience, since it would make political dissidents easy to recognize during the congregational prayer. Today, it can have the same signaling effect, except that among Neotraditional Muslims, diversity

340. Ibid., 7.

341. Maliki Fiqh, *Praying With Unfolded Arms (Sabl) Shaykh Hamza Yusuf (Maliki Fiqh)*, (00:10), accessed April 20, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X6vobY94XkE>.

342. Ibid., (6:23).

343. Ibid., (7:50).

regarding such practices is the norm, and the position that only one way is acceptable is uniquely a feature of Salafism. Furthermore, the practice of returning the conversation to the transmitted analysis provided by classical Muslim scholars – and doing so in a written work with detailed citations – is a perfect expression of the Neotraditional aesthetic to “preserve and transmit traditional sacred knowledge.”

Signaling refers to broadcasting or advertising aesthetic symbols openly to make one's community affiliation discoverable by others. A great deal of scholarship has been done on signaling in the field of social psychology. Jonah Berger and Chip Heath summarize that literature and discuss relationships between practices that signal a group's unique character, which they term “divergence,” and some of the reasons such practices are adopted, modified, or abandoned. They propose that “people diverge to ensure that others understand who they are.”³⁴⁴ To give a few familiar examples of signaling, imagine you are in a department store and want to ask a question about a product; if you see that several people in the store are wearing the same red shirt with the name of the store emblazoned across the chest and back, you might interpret that shirt as a text signaling that they are employees. To give another example, any sensible person realizes that wearing *their* team's colors and sitting in *our* team's bleachers is asking for trouble. Similarly, a diehard reggae fan who doesn't know anyone else at a cocktail party might consider talking to that one person with dreadlocks. On the topic of “how to find friends that share interests,” wikiHow offers the following practical advice:

344. Berger J and Heath C, “Who Drives Divergence?,” 595.

Watch for people who advertise their interests. Sometimes people show their interests and hobbies in visual ways. They may wear a t-shirt of their favorite band, or they may have stickers of their favorite superhero on their bag. Perhaps you see them knitting on the bus, or they're reading a book you enjoy. In these situations, don't be afraid to compliment them on their tastes.³⁴⁵

Like any shared-interest community, Neotraditional Muslims rely upon this same mechanism to signal their community affiliation and recognize each other.

Signaling occurs before social interaction with any particular individual commences, and is used to advertise information about the possibilities of such an interaction. Due to the potential for highly visible expression through the medium of what one chooses to wear, sartorial practices are a common strategy for signaling religious identity and status.³⁴⁶ Clothes and other dressing and adornment practices (such as cosmetics, coiffure, jewelry, perfumes, piercings, tattoos, etc.) have broad communicative potential. For example, Neotraditional Muslims including followers of many schools of Sufism often wear jewelry, hats, pins and brooches, or even use sticker decals in the shape of the Prophet's sandals (*na`layn sharif*). This image is so distinctive as a symbol of the community that it is sometimes referred to as a “na`layn badge.”³⁴⁷ Clothes provide a highly flexible medium for expression:

[clothes] are status markers as they communicate the station of their wearer in the stratified social structure. They also convey various cultural meanings and are loaded with symbolic values that tell something

345. “How to Find Friends That Share Interests,” *wikiHow*, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://www.wikihow.com/Find-Friends-That-Share-Interests>.

346. Jacqueline Grigo, “Visibly Unlike: Religious Dress between Affiliation and Difference,” *Journal of Empirical Theology* 24, no. 2 (November 2011): 209–24, doi:10.1163/157092511X603992.

347. “Nalain Shareef,” accessed April 16, 2017, <http://www.sufiport.co.uk/?cat=14>.

important about their possessor. Moreover, as media of symbolic communication, clothes can be conceived as sartorial devices through which the wearer tries to speak something important about himself/herself through the clothes he/she wears.³⁴⁸

Sartorial practices can simultaneously communicate multiple layers of information to different audiences. For example, subtly different turban styles can signal a variety of meanings, but to an observer who is entirely unfamiliar with turbans, a person wearing one may only succeed in communicating a sense of difference; any deeper nuances relating to a particular religious or cultural affiliation would fall on deaf ears.

Communicating difference can be a significant religious expression. In a response published on SeekersHub, Tariq Abdul-Rasheed notes that the Prophet was reported to have instructed his companions, “wear turbans and differentiate yourselves from the nations that preceded you!” and “wear turbans for indeed the turban is a symbol of Islam and it is a barrier between the Muslims and the Polytheist!”³⁴⁹ Among Muslims, different types of turbans can also signal things like lineage, class, seniority, or affiliations with particular teachers or schools of thought. In the 14th century, the Mamluk sultan Al-Ashraf Sha`ban commanded familial descendants of the Prophet to wear green turbans “so that it might distinguish them

348. Alin Croitoru, Horațiu Rusu, and Mihai Stelian Rusu, “Tailoring a Fashionable Self: Sartorial Practices in an Emerging Market Context,” *Social Change Review* 13, no. 2 (n.d.): 145; Citing Georg Simmel, *Fashion* (Place of publication not identified: publisher not identified, 1957); Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1998), <http://www.aspresolver.com/aspresolver.asp?SOTH;S10020035>; Bourdieu, Nice, and Bennett, *Distinction*.

349. “Is It a Sunna to Wear a Turban?,” *SeekersHub Answers*, February 21, 2014, <http://seekershub.org/ans-blog/2014/02/21/is-it-a-sunna-to-wear-a-turban/>.

from others out of respect.”³⁵⁰

Recently, however, wearing or denouncing the practice of wearing a green turban has become a means to signal divergence between communities.

Neotraditional Muslims maintain that it is permissible to wear green turbans, and that it can be documented that they have been worn by Muslims since the time of the Prophet, even if he himself may not ever have worn one. However, a few groups, such as Barelvis and Naqshbandis, have come to be recognized by their signature green turbans, so a number of Salafis have responded by declaring that there is no textual evidence that the Prophet ever wore a green turban, therefore wearing a green turban is a *bida`a* (reprehensible innovation) or a symbol of Sufism and therefore an impermissible practice.³⁵¹

Similarly, Neotraditional Muslims avoid clothing practices that represent a recognizably Salafi style. For example, proponents of the modern Wahhabi and Salafi movements often signal community affiliation by wearing a white or checkered red and white cloth called a *ghutra* or *shemagh* draped loosely over their heads. Shaykh Gibril Haddad, a Neotraditional scholar and follower of the Naqshbandi school of Sufism who often wears a green turban, responded to a question about the Prophet's clothing practices by dismissively concluding, “*ghutra*

350. “SeekersGuidance - The Green Turban and the Prophet’s (Peace Be Upon Him) Favorite Color – Answers,” accessed February 28, 2014, <http://seekersguidance.org/ans-blog/2011/11/11/the-green-turban-and-the-prophet%E2%80%99s-peace-be-upon-him-favorite-color/>.

351. Ibid.; C.f. “Green Turbans Are an Innovation – Mufti Ghulam Sarwar Qadri Al-Barelwi,” *Barelwis: A Critical Review*, October 7, 2012, <https://barelwism.wordpress.com/2012/10/07/green-turbans-are-an-innovation-mufti-ghulam-sarwar-qadri-al-barelwi/>; “Is It Sunnah to Wear Green Clothes? - Islamqa.info,” accessed April 16, 2017, <https://islamqa.info/en/171834>.

has no place nor mention in the Prophetic *sunna* that I know of and I don't know the *shamagh*.”³⁵² In context, his statement can be read as a tongue-in-cheek rebuttal of the Salafi *argumentum ex silentio* that green turbans are a *bida`a* on the grounds that no extant text mentions that the Prophet wore one.

Interestingly, although Haddad nearly echoes the Salafi argument by mentioning that there is no textual record of the Prophet wearing a *ghutra*, he makes a subtle pedagogical point related to traditional Islamic legal principles by stopping short of extrapolating any legal judgment from that fact. The Salafi conclusion that wearing a green turban is impermissible is premised upon an undisclosed departure from the established technical definition of *bida`a* within Islamic legal discourse; redefining *bida`a* to mean "something that was never done by the Prophet" is unique to modern Salafi polemical discourse. Thus, Haddad's response plays upon a double irony: not only would the signature Salafi style of wearing a *ghutra* be condemnable as a *bida`a* according to the Salafi technical definition of the term, but that definition itself would also be condemnable as a *bida`a*, because it departs from the lexical and legal senses in which the term has been used since the Prophet's time. The photographs below show Haddad's teacher, Shaykh Nazim al-Haqqani, wearing a green turban adorned with the symbol of the Prophet's sandal (Figure 9) and Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz, a leader of the Salafi movement, wearing a red and white checkered *ghutra* (Figure 10).³⁵³

352. Gibril Fouad Haddad, "Sunnah of The Rida' | Eshaykh.com," *Eshaykh.com*, accessed March 28, 2017, <http://eshaykh.com/sunnah/sunnah-of-the-rida/>.

353. Shaykhana, *English: Shaykh Nazim Al-Haqqani*, January 1, 2008, Own work,

Figure 9. Shaykh Nazim al-Haqqani



Figure 10. Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz



It is not only the peculiar technical meaning of *bida`a* that is a distinctive feature of Salafi discourse, but also the frequency with which the term appears within Salafi discourse. In fact, the central aesthetic value of Salafism can be summarized as “purifying Islam from *bida`a*.” Accordingly, the question of how *bida`a* may be understood in the context of Islamic law is a critical point of contention between Neotraditionalism and Salafism. In characteristically Neotraditional style, Shaykh Yahya Rhodus counters the Salafi concept of *bida`a* by

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nazim_Haqqani.jpg Cropped to show detail; Lakhdar, *Français : Grand Savant Saoudien*, April 1, 2013, Own work, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ibn_Baz.jpg Cropped to show detail.

citing a traditional aphorism of Islamic jurisprudence:

From the bounty of our *din* [religion] is that we have a vastness in our *din*. Just because the Prophet didn't do something in his time, *salla Allahu `alayhi wa salam*, this is not a... a... –“*Dalil al-tark laysa dalil `ala al-hurma*”– the fact that the Prophet didn't do something is not a proof that it is not a legally permissible or valid thing to do.³⁵⁴

The sociolinguistic practice of interjecting a scholarly citation in Arabic between sentences in an English speech is a type of performative diglossia, or code-switching, in which “the use of several separate codes within a single society [...] [is] dependent on each code's serving functions distinct from those considered appropriate for the other.”³⁵⁵ Shaykh Yahya is expressing an aesthetic judgment that Arabic is the appropriate code in which to express principles of Islamic scholarship, while English is the primary language of his presentation.

This particular practice of code-switching triggered through reference to classical scholarship is the signature style of Shaykh Yahya's teacher, Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, but many of his other students also adopted it. Over time, it has become almost iconic of American Neotraditional oratory style. This code-switching model indicates that English is the profane, low language of everyday life and Arabic is the sacred, high language to be “utilized in conjunction with religion, education, and other aspects of high culture.”³⁵⁶ Since the core premise of Neotraditionalism is that

354. Yahya Rhodus, *London | Virtues 1437 – Ustadh Yahya Rhodus*, (3:10), accessed April 16, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=206&v=9ZTqbQ2v3ZE.

355. Joshua A. Fishman, “Bilingualism With and Without Diglossia; Diglossia With and Without Bilingualism,” *Journal of Social Issues* 23, no. 2 (April 1, 1967): 29, doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.1967.tb00573.x.

356. *Ibid.*, 30.

religious education itself is the highest form of cultivation, this code-switching style can be interpreted as an aesthetic performance to honor sacred knowledge by giving linguistic distinction to the words and statements the speaker has inherited through Islamic scholarly tradition above those words he produces from within himself. This aesthetic practice is not only an expression of American Neotraditional values, but emulating Shaykh Hamza's signature speaking style also functions as an implicit declaration of the speaker's connection to him, either as a fellow scholar or as a seeker of sacred knowledge within the same Neotraditional mode.

As highlighted above, the core value of Islamic Neotraditionalism is the veneration of transmitted sacred knowledge. An article published on the SeekersHub blog reiterates this point:

In *Knowledge Triumphant*, Franz Rosenthal observes that the Islamic civilisation is one that is essentially characterised by knowledge (*`ilm*), “for *`ilm* is one of those concepts that have dominated Islam and given Muslim civilization its distinctive shape and complexion.”³⁵⁷

This central aesthetic of reverence for sacred knowledge is the value that informs the characteristic symbols of the Neotraditional community, and it can be observed in every distinctively Neotraditional aesthetic practice. Over time, those individual aesthetic practices that have proven most effective have coalesced into a recognizable Neotraditional style.

357. Adi Setia, “Kalam Jadid, Islamization & The Worldview of Islam: Operationalizing the Neo-Ghazalian, Attasian Vision,” 1, accessed March 28, 2017, <http://seekershub.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/kalamjadidislamization2.pdf>; Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Boston; Leiden: Brill, 2007).

III. Signaling Religious Authority

The most critical function of aesthetic signaling practices is to support the core social structures of the community, such as providing a means to recognize and interact with valid authorities and community leaders. As evinced by Neotraditional critiques of alternative religious modes as well as secular academic approaches to the study of Islam, the imperative to follow the guidance of qualified scholars and acquire sacred knowledge is the linchpin of Neotraditional discourse.

Aesthetic declaration practices are those that occur on the threshold of a social interaction. Like a secret handshake or a self-introduction that includes one's honorific title (Dr., Shaykh, Mufti, etc.), aesthetic declarations are used to clarify and reaffirm one's community identity and establish one's particular role among the familiar cast of characters of a social category. For example, I was once introduced to a man while I was unaware that he was a relatively famous religious scholar. I intended to call him by his first name, so I repeated it to ask if I had heard it correctly. In response, he gently repeated his full name, this time adding the title "al-Azhari," to the end to identify himself as a scholar who had graduated from Al-Azhar. Declaring his title was practical in the context of our interaction; I had just approached the person who introduced us to ask a religious question. By declaring his role as a scholar, he was subtly indicating his availability as someone who might be able to answer such a question, if asked. At the same time, he demonstrated a type of humility characteristic of the Neotraditional style by only mentioning the

educational designation “al-Azhari,” without ascribing to himself the honorific title “Shaykh” before his name. In that way, he was able to symbolically honor the sacred knowledge represented by his religious education without exalting himself as its possessor.

Word choice and topic choice can also function as practices that signal community affiliation. Recent studies have demonstrated this point by revealing that choice of language in a Twitter user's non-political tweets may be a fair indicator of their alignment with either the Republican or Democratic political party.³⁵⁸ Distinctive terminology and certain topic preferences are frequently used as aesthetic declarations of Neotraditional identity. For example, the phrases “sacred knowledge” and “tradition” refer to this Muslim intellectual heritage, and both possess an aura of authority and mystique. Similarly, the phrase “Islamic sciences” conveys the sense that connecting to that legacy will empower contemporary Muslims to solve future problems by using the intellectual tools and interpretive methodologies transmitted from the Islamic past. The word “scholar” also connotes a specific meaning. Most often, it takes the place of the Arabic word *`alim*, which is more familiar in English in its plural form, *ulema*, meaning religious scholars. The lexical meaning of *`alim* is “a person possessing *`ilm*,” where *`ilm* refers to the type of knowledge that can only be acquired through systematic instruction.

358. Karolina Sylwester and Matthew Purver, “Twitter Language Use Reflects Psychological Differences between Democrats and Republicans,” *PLOS ONE* 10, no. 9 (September 16, 2015): e0137422, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0137422; Raviv Cohen and Derek Ruths, “Classifying Political Orientation on Twitter: It’s Not Easy!,” in *Proceedings of the Seventh International AAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media* (Cambridge, Mass., 2013), <http://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM13/paper/viewFile/6128/6347>.

In one sense, identifying someone as a scholar functions as an honorific applied selectively to individuals regarded as masters of authoritative religious knowledge necessarily inherited through recognized lineages of Islamic tradition.³⁵⁹ By applying the term as an honorific, the speaker communicates confidence in the named person as a qualified religious authority, so the term is used only with caution to guard the category against individuals feared not to have achieved such an authoritative rank. Also implicit in identifying someone as a scholar is the construction of a clear distinction between the scholar and the layman: the scholar has attained authoritative mastery of sacred knowledge and the layman should avoid the pretension of claiming to have knowledge or to possess the authority that such knowledge conveys.

As a term of art within Neotraditional discourse, *sacred knowledge* refers to the information Allah revealed to guide people on the path to paradise.³⁶⁰ Since this refers specifically to the immutable revelation brought by God's final messenger, Muslims do not consider it to be subject to invalidation by the passage of time. However, as temporal distance increases between the earliest and most authoritative generations of Muslims and the community of Muslims living today, the danger that sacred knowledge could be lost, forgotten, or misunderstood similarly increases.

359. As a technical term of central importance to the topic, I will use the word “scholar” in this sense throughout this dissertation.

360. Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi, and others narrated the hadith: “Whoever travels a path seeking knowledge Allah makes easy for him a path to paradise.” This is from the same hadith as mentioned above (ie. “scholars are the inheritors of the prophets...”). Aḥmad ibn Lu’lu’ Ibn al-Naqīb and Nuh Ha Mim Keller, *Reliance of the Traveller: The Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law ‘Umdat Al-Salik* (Beltsville, MD, U.S.A.: Amana Publications, 1999), 4.

In light of this, it is clear that the central imperative of Neotraditional discourse about “reliable scholars” and the essential features of responsible scholarship is to define Neotraditional identity itself. This entails both extensional and intensional approaches to definition; specific scholars are identified as exemplary and the qualities that make them exemplary are discussed in detail.³⁶¹ Articulating Neotraditional ideals of scholarship incidentally describes a network of scholars who are deemed authoritative and simultaneously indicates the features that mark their discourse. Through observation of those well-known authoritative scholars and their close followers, community members learn to intuitively recognize their distinctive style. For lay Neotraditional Muslims, familiarity with signaling practices that express a Neotraditional style acts as a key point of reference for evaluating previously unknown scholars or the quality of their scholarship.

Another, more explicit mechanism for differentiating between reliable scholars and untaught preachers is the *ijaza*, a certificate of license to transmit and teach a given body of information – a traditional Islamic parallel to the diploma. At the conclusion of his keynote address for the 2016 Zaytuna College conference on Ghazali, Shaykh Hamza read the text of an *ijaza* document written for him by his teacher, Shaykh Abdullah bin Bayyah. In the document, bin Bayyah authorizes Shaykh Hamza on the authority entrusted to him by his teacher, and his teacher before that... listing the full names of every teacher in the lineage between himself

361. Strictly speaking, intensional definitions provide a complete, essential description of necessary criteria for inclusion in a category, but I am using the term loosely to mean an essentialist approach to definition of the type Smith calls a “polythetic taxonomy.” See Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 1–18.

and Ghazali.³⁶² A similar *ijaza* written by Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqubi is presented in Shaykh Hamza's annotated translation of the classical of orthodox Sunni belief, *The Creed of Imam Al-Tahawi*.³⁶³ An *ijaza* is only as authoritative as the scholar who confers it, and the scholar is only as authoritative as the *ijazas* they received from their own teachers. For Neotraditional Muslims, the *ijaza* is the only recognized assurance of authoritative knowledge, and alternate forms are regarded with deep suspicion.

I can recall an exemplary anecdote: I was once asked by a Mauritanian religious scholar about the focus of my doctoral research. I answered that I study “Islam in America,” but his translator implied that I was in the university “to learn Islam.” Hearing this, he shook his head slowly in dismay and responded, “may Allah save us from your teachers.” Later, I heard him relate the story of a time his *shaykh* (teacher) was invited to visit the Islamic Studies faculty of a university. In one of their offices, a group of the faculty asked him to explain the meaning of *shahadat al-zur* (false testimony) in Islamic legal discourse. The shaykh immediately responded, “it is those papers you give out here,” meaning the academic degrees conferred upon graduates from the university. His comment was intended to distinguish between true, methodical, and deep scholarship, as represented by the traditional curriculum studied by the shaykh, and false, weak, or empty scholarship, of which the degrees

362. Hamza Yusuf, “Keynote - President Hamza Yusuf,” in *Revisiting Al-Ghazali: Reason and Revelation* (The Third Annual Conference on Higher Education, Berkeley, Calif, 2016).

363. Hamza Yusuf and Ahmad ibn Muhammad Tahawi, *The creed of Imam al-Ṭahawi* (Berkeley: Zaytuna Institute, 2008), 41–45.

granted by the university were emblematic in his view. The graduates receive no more than a few years of part-time instruction in Islamic Studies, yet the university certifies that they are experts in a field so vast that traditional scholars would not dare claim to have mastered even half of its subjects after decades of continuous study – what could be more fraudulent?

The discursive purpose of relating anecdotes such as the above is to convey a serious critique of modern academia in a humorous and memorable way, so the audience can be warned not to trust diplomas awarded by academic institutions, and look instead to traditional religious educational models and their scholars as the only reliable and authoritative sources of knowledge about Islam. Declarative practices such as the presentation of an *ijaza* are also a perfect outward expression of the Neotraditional aesthetic of preserving and transmitting sacred knowledge through an unbroken chain of teachers.

The Neotraditional critique of alternative avenues for obtaining sacred knowledge echoes the Neotraditional discourse that specifically entreats young Muslims not to seek religious knowledge on the internet, because such sources are often either anonymous or unaccredited (i.e. lacking any affiliation with traditional scholarly lineages). Furthermore, some of the websites that seem to provide Islamic religious information are actually authored by anti-Muslim organizations; these often deliberately promote misinformation in an effort to tarnish public opinion of Islam or to challenge the faith of lay Muslims who assume the information is authentic.³⁶⁴ In a

364. For examples of anti-Muslim websites designed to imitate the appearances of websites

short skit by British Muslim fashion designer Amena, the internet's unreliability as a source of authoritative knowledge is neatly parodied by the image of "Sheikh Google" awarding a diploma to a young Muslim woman through her computer screen and applauding her accomplishment of receiving it.³⁶⁵

Specialized vocabulary and authoritative documents like those described above are a means of declaring one's Neotraditional community belonging and authoritative status within the community.³⁶⁶ However, another linguistic marker that Neotraditional and Salafi communities use to mutually distinguish themselves is the choice of spelling conventions for the Romanization of Arabic words and names, most noticeably with regard to Arabic long vowels. Generally, Neotraditional writing will prefer diacritical marks following the ALA-LC (American Library Association – Library of Congress) standard, for example to represent Arabic long vowels by adding a macron above a single Latin vowel. On the other hand, Salafi writing will more often double the vowel instead, which is closer to BATR (Bikdash Arabic Transliteration Rules) in style. For example, the word “hadith” would appear more often appear as “hadith” in Neotraditional writing, and as “hadeeth” in Salafi writing. The same principle applies to writing “Rasul” (messenger) or “Rasool.” The

promoting Islam, see “TheQuran.com - Home,” accessed August 2, 2016, <http://www.thequran.com/>; “Answering Islam, A Christian-Muslim Dialog and Apologetic,” accessed August 2, 2016, <http://www.answering-islam.org/>; “Source Materials on Islam,” accessed August 2, 2016, <http://www.muslimhope.com/SourceMaterials.htm>.

365. Amena, *SHEIKH GOOGLE! | Amena*, accessed August 2, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cmvCkZxpb8.

366. C.f. Pierre Bourdieu and John B Thompson, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

use of divergent spelling conventions is a strategy to signal a written work's community affiliation without any explicit mention. The practical result is that each community's "audience and would-be recruits," or "supporters, followers, fans, and flaneurs" can often deduce whether or not a text represents a perspective their community would endorse without even reading it.³⁶⁷

However, there are a few words that are often exceptions to this stylistic difference which are often written in the same way by members of any Muslim community, such as "zabihah," "deen," and "seerah." My theory is that the agreement on the spelling of "zabihah" has a purely pragmatic explanation. Zabihah is a word that has evolved in the context of Muslims living as minorities in religiously heterogeneous countries to designate meat that has been slaughtered in a way prescribed by Islamic ritual law. Before this word was coined, such meat would have been called *halal*, (permissible), but this word became contentious because different Muslim groups disagreed upon the requisite conditions for valid application of *halal* as a label and no Islamic regulatory authority existed in America or Europe to settle the dispute. Instead, the word zabihah came to be used to work around the issue: even if Muslims may disagree about whether meat obtained in a certain way is permissible to eat, they can agree on the objective fact of whether or not it was slaughtered in a way prescribed by Islamic ritual law.³⁶⁸ In this context, the only

367. Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 43; Richard Giulianotti, "Supporters, Followers, Fans, and Flaneurs A Taxonomy of Spectator Identities in Football," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 26, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 25–46, doi:10.1177/0193723502261003.

368. C.f. "Zabiha-Meat Madness in America Explained - Halal Advocates of America," accessed

conceivable purpose for transliterating the word at all is to establish it as a label to be used in a way resembling a religious certification, and a certification can only be effective if it is recognizable. If different butchers were not consistent in how they labeled meat, and used alternate transliterations like “zibh,” “zabiihaah,” and “dhabhiha,” the label would be ineffective; “zabihah” stuck because that spelling was the variant that achieved the widest recognition. Therefore, despite the otherwise highly consistent use of divergent transliteration practices to signal affiliation with Neotraditionalism or Salafism in English language media, writing this word in this way neither signals one's community affiliation nor divergence.

IV. The Neotraditional Brand and Celebrity Shaykhs

To borrow a few terms and concepts used in business, the aesthetic practices of Neotraditional scholars can be interpreted as serving the function of establishing a clear brand image representing Neotraditional Islam so that it will be recognizably distinct from other Islamic religious modes. In her dissertation, Maryam Kashani wrote about the choices of aesthetics and space layout for Zaytuna events and productions, and notes that the Zaytuna community is supported by a number of media and technology professionals, who consciously consider the development of clear Zaytuna branding as an aesthetic project.³⁶⁹ She points out that, over time, the

April 17, 2017, <http://halaladvocates.net/site/2010/12/maecenas-nec-neque-vitae-ligula-dictum-vulputate-in-sit-amet-nulla/>; Informatics Inc, “Halal or Zabihah? There Is a Difference.,” accessed April 17, 2017, <http://www.isahalal.org/Content/Halal-Information/Halal-Education/-Halal-or-Zabihah.aspx>.

369. Maryam Kashani, *Seekers of Sacred Knowledge: Zaytuna College and the Education of American Muslims* (University of Texas at Austin, 2014).

Zaytuna community's "attention to aesthetics in its publications, websites, and spaces was tangible as a kind of 'branding.'"³⁷⁰ For example, clothing style is given attention as a matter of considerable importance.

The Student Code of Conduct for Zaytuna College likewise mentions the importance of students maintaining a clean and dignified appearance, and Yusuf has on numerous occasions lamented and disdained students' wearing of sweatshirts, jeans, and corporate labels (jeans are no longer allowed). He asks for them to be cut out or zoomed out of video material of Zaytuna student interviews (a Nike sweatshirt, for example), and typically uses such opportunities to share this view with the staff. Shakir has also given students clothing advice on occasion, recommending that they spend a little more on fewer items of clothing that will last longer than cheaper (and often sweatshop-produced) apparel.³⁷¹

Sheykh Hamza has often critiqued shifts in contemporary American culture such as changing fashion trends as a departure from the sense of dignity that characterized premodern societies.

When people came and sent their emissaries to the Prophet, he had clothes to greet them. He had clothes that were specifically for the *minbar* [i.e. for sermons]. This is mentioned in his *seerah* [biographical literature], *salla Allahu `alayhi wa ahlihi wa salam*. We're living in a time when the most degraded people design clothes to make people look degraded. Really! If you look at what's happened to women's clothes, just in our lifetime, those of us who are old enough to remember, in this country, what's happened to women's clothes? And now convincing people that threadbare clothes are fashionable, so that people will pay large amounts of money for wearing jeans with holes in them – purchasing them! People will wear t-shirts now which used to be an undergarment! When I was growing up a t-shirt was worn under the shirt. And my father wouldn't let us wear jeans. Literally, would not let

370. Maryam Kashani, *Seekers of Sacred Knowledge: Zaytuna College and the Education of American Muslims* (University of Texas at Austin, 2014), 127, <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/32815/kashani-dissertation-2014.pdf?sequence=1>.

371. *Ibid.*, 129.

me wear jeans... I wanted to wear jeans, 'cuz... James Dean wore jeans.³⁷²

Each of the teachers at Zaytuna are also known for having their own distinctive styles of dress, reflecting their own backgrounds and roles in the community.³⁷³

Usama Canon, the co-founder of the Ta'leef Collective, and longtime student of the Zaytuna School, carries on the tradition of his well-adorned teachers, from Yusuf to Shakir to Habib 'Umar bin Hafiz. Canon's attention to fashion, from his hair to facial hair to clothes, and shoes -is empowered and empowering, effective in multiple ways. He once commented on his first time seeing Habib 'Umar, and "how fly" he looked in his Yemeni attire. For him, this was an example of Muslim manhood, a significantly different genealogy for what is often considered a "metrosexual" or "dandified" attention to one's personal appearance. This is in contrast to his more casual co-founder Mustafa Davis, who dons more of a photographer/filmmaker attire of cargo pants, t-shirts, and dress shirts. Their attires reflect their respective roles at Ta'leef as the image and image-maker of the ever-expanding and influential organization.³⁷⁴

The attention to aesthetics at Zaytuna goes beyond symbolic clothing choices. For example, Zaytuna publications express a coherent style through color schemes, fonts, and layouts, and "space-making and interior design" are elevated to expressions of the community's spiritual dignity.³⁷⁵ The attention to aesthetics in religious expression among the Zaytuna community can be attributed in part to Shaykh Hamza, and his "visionary aspects in his appreciation of beauty and the role it played in opening the space for spiritual discovery and renewal," but even this is an echo of

372. fajetas, *Hamza Yusuf - Legacy of Malcolm X, The Malcolm Nobody Talks About*, (14:00), accessed April 22, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXHBb6W7yOE>.

373. Kashani, *Seekers of Sacred Knowledge: Zaytuna College and the Education of American Muslims*, 129–31.

374. *Ibid.*, 130 (footnote 128).

375. *Ibid.*, 127.

hadith “traditions that speak to the Prophet Muhammad's love of things beautiful. The beauty of Islamic architecture and calligraphy has been well-documented, such that attention to the work that one's aesthetic environment does is not a new concept in Islam.”³⁷⁶

The focus on aesthetics has been an effective marker of community difference for the Zaytuna community. For example, Michael Muhammad Knight refers approvingly to Shaykh Hamza's “brand” of Islam, adding about his follower's conduct that “they make for powerful testimonials to the value of his product. If his consumers live out the brand like that, sometimes I'll buy what Hamza Yusuf's selling.”³⁷⁷ The Neotraditional community focus on scholars and the religious mode – or brand – they represent has led to a new social phenomenon:

Today, a new set of Muslim scholars have emerged—on the red carpet. They are decorated in traditional pious garb: long flowing gowns and trendsetting scarves. They stride elegantly down the crimson walkway where they are met by follower-fans who eagerly praise and lionize them. In this Hollywood reality, celebrity scholars are exalted for their religious knowledge.³⁷⁸

In his manuscript on the early years of Zaytuna College, Scott Korb similarly concluded that “celebrity follows knowledge in American Islam.”³⁷⁹

While this is true to some extent, it overlooks an important point: not all

376. Ibid., 128.

377. Michael Muhammad Knight, “Michael Muhammad Knight vs. Hamza Yusuf,” VICE, accessed February 21, 2015, <http://www.vice.com/read/michael-muhammad-knight-vs-hamza-yusuf>.

378. Safia Latif, “Celebrity Scholars,” *The Islamic Monthly*, accessed March 8, 2015, <http://theislamicmonthly.com/celebrity-scholars/>.

379. Scott Korb, *Light without Fire: The Making of America's First Muslim College* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), 26.

scholars become celebrities, and some may even be overlooked by the community despite the depth of their knowledge. In those cases, the missing element is charisma. Marshall McLuhan commented on the importance of appearances, saying that “charisma means looking like a lot of other people [...] acceptable people, interesting people.”³⁸⁰ For example, “in a classy black suit and round horn-rimmed glasses,” Shaykh Hamza (Figure 11) bears an unmistakable resemblance to Malcolm X (Figure 12), an undeniably interesting person whose legacy Shaykh Hamza often praises in public lectures.³⁸¹

380. Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium Is the Message*, (34:11), accessed April 16, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ko6J9v1C9zE>.

381. Guest Contributor, “Rock Star Imams and Scholars - Avoiding the Pitfalls,” *Altmuslim*, August 8, 2014, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/altmuslim/2014/08/rock-star-imams-and-scholars-avoiding-the-pitfalls/>; umar nasir, *Hamza Yusuf*, photo, July 4, 2010, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/umarnasir/4768192281/> Cropped to show detail; Herman Hiller photographer World Telegram staff, *Malcolm X at Queens Court*, 1964, Library of Congress. New York World-Telegram & Sun Collection. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3c11166>, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Malcolm_X_NYWTS_4.jpg.

Figure 11. Shaykh Hamza at ISNA



Figure 12. Malcolm X at Queens Court



Just as celebrity follows knowledge, the production of style follows celebrity. Scholars in the American Neotraditional community are regarded as role models, not only of fashion, but also of how to live as spiritually committed Muslims in America today. Essentially, American Neotraditional scholars are translators. They not only translate texts, but also translate Islamic values into their local cultural context.

V. Translating Islam in Style

In the early 17th century, Wang Daiyu, a fifth-generation disciple of Grand-Shaykh Hu, initiated a new method for teaching Islam in China. He called his method “interpreting Islamic scripture in Confucian terms” (*yiru quanjing*), and it

not only entailed translating the teachings of Islam into Chinese language, but also into the paradigmatic format and technical vocabulary of the Confucian discursive style. Since the terminology and rhetorical strategies of Confucianism were the common foundation of all Chinese intellectual discourse at the time, presenting Islam in a Confucian style meant presenting it in the *Chinese* style. Adapting Confucian discursive structures to present Islamic concepts allowed Chinese Muslim scholars to engage in public intellectual debates about ethics and philosophy from their own religious perspectives. It also paved the way for Muslims to make their religion intelligible to their educated contemporaries.

On a more pedestrian level, translating Islamic thought into Chinese language was also an effective strategy to make Islam more accessible to the larger population of literate Chinese Muslims who could not read Arabic or Persian. For them, Wang's books were the first sophisticated explanations of Islamic philosophy and spirituality to demonstrate that Islam could also answer the complex religious and social questions raised and debated in Chinese intellectual discourse. Wang's writing demonstrated erudition and mastery of Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist literary traditions, and took aim at all three traditions with insightful challenges to their positions on a number of topics. In one book, he records a series of real or hypothetical encounter dialogues between scholars of these three traditions and himself which generally conform to an established format: the challenger arrives to pose a question, the Shaykh responds either with incisive directness or cryptic allusiveness, and the challenger is so profoundly moved that he either converts to

Islam on the spot or flees in defeat with tears in his eyes.³⁸² Through these encounter stories, Wang invited Chinese Muslims to consider themselves the intellectual equals of the highest classes of society, and even as adhering to a superior tradition, rather than merely the descendants of immigrants who follow an obscure and foreign religion. And by presenting all of this with such erudition in Chinese language and according to the common Chinese intellectual paradigm, Wang did more than naturalize Islam as a Chinese religion; he expressed Islam in a way that demonstrated *it was always a Chinese religion* in essence. As a result, his community of readers had a clear basis for conceiving of their identity as a matter of simultaneity, that is, as Chinese Muslims, rather than merely as Muslims in China.³⁸³

Scholars of Islam in America have long grappled with the same theme: “is [Islam] simply a foreign religion somehow transplanted into Western soil, or is it emerging as a genuinely American phenomenon?”³⁸⁴ Questions such as this imply that there exist certain cultural criteria to be met before a phenomenon – or a religion for that matter – may be deemed “genuinely American.” The impossible first task in addressing a question like the above would be to identify the exact nature of those

382. Sachiko Murata et al., *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light: Wang Tai-Yu's Great Learning of the Pure and Real and Liu Chih's Displaying the Concealment of the Real Realm ; with a New Translation of Jami's Lawa'ih from the Persian by William C. Chittick* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 44–48; For more on the typical characteristics of stories in the “encounter dialogue” genre, see John R. McRae, *Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism* (University of California Press, 2004), 77–80.

383. C.f. Jonathan Neaman Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997); Dru C. Gladney, *Ethnic Identity in China: The Making of a Muslim Minority Nationality* (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998); Newlon, *Hui Muslims and the Minzu Paradigm*.

384. Jane I Smith, *Islam in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), xi This topic is frequently imagined in terms of an agricultural metaphor, as it is here. Authors with a strong negative bias against Islam tend to prefer the metaphors of epidemiology, pathology, or parasitism.

criteria, and the outer limits of what might be considered American. A culture can never be clearly defined because the question of which of its elements are essential is constantly being contended and negotiated discursively by insiders and outsiders, and especially by individuals whose *insiderness* and *outsiderness* is exactly what is at stake in such contentions. Moreover, cultures are never static; “culture must be continuously produced and reproduced [...] its structures are, therefore, inherently precarious and predestined to change.”³⁸⁵ Since culture is always contested territory, it can never be objectively captured within definite bounds and described comprehensively.

There is an aesthetic judgment that must be made, for example, in how one chooses to write about Wang Daiyu's contribution to Islam in China. A great deal of cultural unpacking must be done in order to evaluate the proposition that “Islam is a Chinese religion,” or similar propositions, such as that there exists a “Chinese Islam” that “is part of China's multifaceted culture [...] and bears its localized and nationalized particularities.”³⁸⁶ It is not unusual to see Islam in China described as “Islam with Chinese characteristics,” or as a form of Islam that has “a distinctive flavour” that distinguishes it from Islam in other places.³⁸⁷ Descriptions like these

385. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy; Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, 6.

386. Yijiu Jin, Alex Ching-shing Chan, and Wai-Yip Ho, *Islam*, 2017, 4, <http://lib.myilibrary.com?id=988920>.

387. The phrase “...with Chinese characteristics” plays on the Chinese Communist Party’s formulation of its unique adaptation of political philosophies as “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.” “Islam with Chinese Characteristics Begins to Take Hold - World - [Www.smh.com.au](http://www.smh.com.au),” accessed March 21, 2017, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/World/Islam-with-Chinese-characteristics-begins-to-take-hold/2005/02/25/1109180112727.html>; C.f. Ian Johnson, “Shariah With Chinese Characteristics: A Scholar Looks at the Muslim Hui,” *The New York Times*, September 6, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/07/world/asia/china-islam-matthew-erie->

make it clear that the adjective “Chinese” is being used in a cultural sense, and not, for example, in the legal or political sense of Islam existing as a religion practiced by Chinese citizens.³⁸⁸ Justification of such characterizations are overwhelmingly presented through reference to aesthetic features associated with cultural “Chineseness.” Following the precedent of scholarship on Islam in China, it is certainly possible to speak of “American Neotraditional Islam” as long as it is understood that the adjective “American” does not describe a qualitative difference in creed or rituals, but is meant in the sense of identifying an aesthetically unique expression of the religion: it is “Islam, with American characteristics.”

The investment in America's future as a center of Muslim society is a key theme in American Neotraditional discourse, and is often articulated in terms of the need to abandon the “back home” mentality that often characterizes the religious and social aesthetics of first generation Muslim immigrants. Of course, the American Neotraditional network has emerged within the unique historical circumstances of modern America, in which differing visions of a religion must vie with each other to attract and maintain a community following. The types of institutional structures and outreach activities it employs are also characteristically American.

When Alexis de Tocqueville traveled to the United States to research what he considered to be the distinctive elements of American society for his work

[shariah.html](#); Massoud Hayoun, “Islam With Chinese Characteristics,” *The Atlantic*, January 18, 2012, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/01/islam-with-chinese-characteristics/251409/>.

388. Thus, Abdullahi an-Na`im’s argument that being an American Muslim merely requires faith and citizenship does not address this question. C.f. Abdullahi Ahmad Na`im, *What Is an American Muslim?: Embracing Faith and Citizenship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Democracy in America, he highlighted a trait as quintessentially American:

"In the United States, as soon as several inhabitants have taken an opinion or an idea they wish to promote in society, they seek each other out and unite together once they have made contact. From that moment, they are no longer isolated but have become a power seen from afar whose activities serve as an example and whose words are heeded."³⁸⁹

In de Tocqueville's opinion, this social consciousness that prompted Americans to join together and establish formal voluntary associations differentiated American society from the aristocratic hierarchies that were prevalent in the European societies of his time.

"Aristocratic societies always contain. . . a small number of very powerful and wealthy citizens each of whom has the ability to perform great enterprises single-handed. In aristocratic societies men feel no need to act in groups because they are strongly held together. . . A nation in which individuals lost the capacity to achieve great things single-handed without acquiring the means of doing them in a shared enterprise would quickly revert to barbarism."³⁹⁰

Americans would form these associations to exert a greater influence upon their society than any individual member of the association would have been able to wield on his or her own. These associations are therefore microcosms that exemplify American democratic ideals. They are also a way that working class Americans can involve themselves directly in the democratic process by working together towards the realization of a shared vision for an ideal society and self-consciously reflecting upon the association's role in bringing those ideals to fruition.

389. Alexis A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: The Complete and Unabridged Volumes I and II*, trans. Henry Reeve, Bantam mass market reissue / June 2004 (New York: Bantam Dell, 1840), 599.

390. *Ibid.*, 597.

Muslims in America have enthusiastically embraced this quintessentially American aesthetic of joining together in voluntary associations to strive cooperatively toward achieving shared visions for a better society. Unsurprisingly, the associations established by Neotraditional Muslims have almost always focused primarily on sharing sacred religious knowledge and transmitting it through the traditional model, namely, that of students studying directly under teachers to connect with an unbroken intellectual lineage reaching back to the earliest Muslim scholars.

The community that developed around the Zaytuna Institute is a classical example of an American Neotraditional network that initially formed as a voluntary association. The shared vision that united the Zaytuna community is expressed clearly through recurring themes in *Seasons*, a semiannual journal the group published between 2003 and 2007. Many of the articles in these journals were philosophical and self-reflective in nature, exploring questions such as what it means to be an American Muslim as opposed to merely being a Muslim in America. Several asked how the core elements of Islamic tradition would persist even as they come to be expressed in unprecedented and uniquely American ways. Of course, the fact that *Seasons* published essays on such topics which were written by highly esteemed religious scholars for a general audience was already a novel phenomenon. It provided a candid glimpse into topics which would previously only remained conversations held privately among Muslim scholars. Publishing these thought-

provoking essays invited the American Muslim laity to become involved in those conversations by supporting and participating in the activities of voluntary community associations like the Zaytuna Institute. As a direct consequence of the inherently democratic nature of such associations, the basic structure of the American Neotraditional network changed by shifting from a basically linear teacher-student lineage to include a variety of new roles and relationship dynamics that had not previously existed. The new conversations and relationships that developed through the activities of the Zaytuna community were instrumental in bringing about changes that have also exerted a profound influence on the development of other American Muslim communities.

In 2003, Zaytuna's journal *Seasons* ended with a summary of the community's recent activities and current projects, then outlined a primary goal:

If Zaytuna is to achieve its long-term vision of reviving the traditional Islamic ethos, which was profoundly humanizing, plural, tolerant, universal, and the foundation of a thriving civilization, then it must commit itself fully to the education and training of competent teachers. In an effort to achieve this, Zaytuna is currently working towards becoming an accredited Islamic university, hoping to provide effective channels for perpetuating the tradition of Islamic learning by offering qualified and accessible instructors, a formalized teaching methodology and curriculum, the availability of appropriate texts in the English language, and the ability to recruit and attract large numbers of capable students.

The vision is to create a central oasis of learning where leading scholars from across the world prepare students in the West, thirsty for sacred knowledge, to carry on the traditions of the Prophet [S], the Companions, and the rightly guided scholars. Initially, Zaytuna's plan is to focus on three main areas:

- Translation of curriculum

- Instruction
- Testing and Licensing

Each of the above areas contains components that are strategically necessary for future success.³⁹¹

In the decade since this issue of *Seasons* was published, the Zaytuna community has steadfastly adhered to its mission statement and made progress in each of the areas identified. Zaytuna received accreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges in March 2015, making it the first Muslim liberal arts college in America.³⁹² The educational curriculum they have developed for teaching Islamic theology and law has centered upon teaching texts both in Arabic and in English translation authored by the famous Muslim theologians and jurists alluded to above as “the rightly guided scholars.”

The central purpose of the Neotraditionalist network is to preserve the traditional Islamic educational heritage received from those scholars and produce a comprehensive representation of Neotraditional Islam as the best and most correct expression of Islam. Considered as a product, this discourse competes against alternative visions of Islamic religiosity produced by Salafis, Progressive-Muslims, and others to be the dominant mode of religiosity among Muslims. In America, Neotraditional Islam must also compete against non-Islamic religious and ideological discourse to be recognized by the wider American public as a legitimate

391. I have placed a bracketed capital S at the point where the text included the supplication “salla Allahu `alayhi wa sallam” (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in a form of Arabic calligraphy that I was not able to reproduce here. Zaytuna Institute, “About Zaytuna,” *Seasons : Bi-Annual Journal of Zaytuna Institute*. 1, no. 2 (2004): 99–100.

392. Mary Ellen Petrisko, “WASC Senior College and University Commission Letter to Zaytuna College President Hamza Yusuf,” March 4, 2015, <https://www.zaytuna.edu/images/uploads/WASC-Letter-03-04-15.pdf>.

and viable modern American way of life.

The religious competition between competing Muslim modes entails addressing the question of what constitutes a properly “Islamic” way of life, and this is primarily done, as discussed above, through discourse that debates the nature of Islamic authority and the legitimate sources of Islamic tradition. On the other hand, competing representations about the place of Neotraditional Islam in American society must address the equally contentious question of what constitutes a “modern” and “American” way of life. It is fitting to approach this question with the idea of free market competition in mind; after all, the United States Declaration of Independence began by affirming the absolute rights to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” where the latter two rights express an individual's freedom to choose between competing options and the first right is their prerequisite. Affirmation of these rights is not unique to America, but can be termed “American” in the sense that it is central to a way of thinking about an individual's purpose in life that is inseparable from any discussion of American values. In this sense, a way of life might be called essentially American if it regards as sacred the individual's choice among a market of competing possibilities.³⁹³ This is a core element of what Will Herberg identified as “the American Way of Life” adhered to by Americans of diverse backgrounds.³⁹⁴

393. In Julian Boyd's reconstruction of Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration of Independence, the second paragraph begins, “we hold these truths to be sacred & undeniable...” rather than “...to be self-evident.” Thomas Jefferson, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson.*, ed. Julian P. Boyd, vol. 1 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1950), 423.

394. Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew; an Essay in American Religious Sociology.*, 88.

Although Herberg elaborated this idea more than half a century ago, his sketch of the “American Way of Life,” particularly as a topic relating to religious pluralism, remains persuasive today.³⁹⁵ A contemporary reader will find many of Herberg's insights strikingly relevant to contemporary society, which attests to there being qualities that are quintessentially American and have persisted over time as well as to the continued relevance in 21st century America of ideas developed by earlier theorists like Herberg. For example, Herberg emphasized certain “crucial developments” that “transformed the face of American life in the past generation” related to “the social psychology of an immigrant-derived people.”³⁹⁶ He also refined Marcus Hansen's principle that the grandchildren of immigrants often seek to develop their personal identities through recommitment to ancestral heritage by arguing that in America, it is the religious aspect of that heritage that is most often emphasized. The explanation he offers for this trend is that the pressure immigrants experience to integrate with American culture does not necessitate accepting any particular religion:

But what he can 'remember' is obviously not his grandfather's foreign language, or even his grandfather's foreign culture; it is rather his grandfather's *religion* – America does not demand of him the abandonment of the ancestral religion as it does of the ancestral language and culture. This religion he now 'remembers' in a form suitably

395. A citation search performed on the Google Scholar database found over 3,000 instances of Herberg's work being cited since the year 2000, about 1,600 of which appear in works published between 2010 and 2017. “Google Scholar Citation Search Results,” *Scholar.google.com*, accessed April 26, 2017, https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=herberg+protestant+catholic+jew&btnG=&hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&as_ylo=2000.

396. Philip Gleason, “Looking Back at ‘Protestant, Catholic, Jew,’” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 23, no. 1 (2005): 52.

'Americanized,' and yet in a curious way also 'retraditionalized.'³⁹⁷

This is a profound observation about an aspect of what might be called the American aesthetic: religious diversity is the American norm. Moreover, the religious diversity attributable to this principle, which Herberg termed “Hansen's Law,” involves religious expressions taking on American cultural characteristics; “the process of acculturation had 'Americanized' Old World religious traditions, which brought them more closely into line with the third generation's outlook.”³⁹⁸ Herberg's final point about reclaimed religious heritages being “retraditionalized” even as they express American cultural aesthetics is particularly cogent to understanding American Islamic Neotraditionalism. The complex question of whether Neotraditional Islam can be called aesthetically American by virtue of exemplifying American values such as holding individual choice to be sacred is also central to the question of whether Neotraditional Islam is a modern religious mode.

Charles Liebman suggested that a modern way of life is one that stands in contrast to the “taken-for-grantedness that characterizes the world view of traditional societies,” saying that “modernity, or modern consciousness, is defined by the necessity to choose. Men and women, and in increasing measure even children, are confronted by alternatives in matters which previous generations accepted as given.”³⁹⁹ This distinction between the social realities of traditional and modern

397. Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew; an Essay in American Religious Sociology.*, 273.

398. Gleason, “Looking Back at ‘Protestant, Catholic, Jew,’” 52.

399. Charles Liebman, “Religion and the Chaos of Modernity: The Case of Contemporary Judaism,” in *Take Judaism, for Example: Studies toward the Comparison of Religions*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 147.

societies prompted Liebman to use the term Neotraditionalism to identify an orthodox religious mode that prefers the simplicity of traditionalism over the modern complexity of competition between different modes of religious identity.⁴⁰⁰ Although Liebman imagined Neotraditionalism as rejecting modernity, William Shepherd considered a Neotraditionalist to be one who “begins to come more deeply to grips with the Western challenge.”⁴⁰¹ In light of the themes discussed in the preceding chapters, neither of these two definitions is entirely correct. In fact, contemporary Islamic Neotraditionalism is more accurately characterized as simultaneously accepting modernity and reaffirming that the teachings handed down through tradition provide the best models for reconciling and harmonizing between Islamic religious values and the challenges of life in modern secular societies.⁴⁰² What each of these three definitions agrees upon is that the phenomenon of Neotraditionalism can only come into existence in the context of the modern reality of choices between social and religious alternatives in a free market. Neotraditionalism is thus unequivocally a modern way of life; it could not be otherwise because it is a product of modernity, not merely a response to it.

The modern character of Neotraditionalism does not negate the importance of antimodernism in Neotraditional discourse. To the contrary, antimodernism is also a

400. *Ibid.*, 149–50.

401. William E Shepard, “Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology,” *Int. J. Middle East Stud. International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 03 (1987): 319.

402. The reader will recall that this point was discussed when describing the Neotraditional discourse of renovation and change as beneficial and intrinsic to tradition.

product of modernity and an important theme in the history of American culture.⁴⁰³ Neotraditional discourse expresses a reverence for tradition and a nostalgic memory of earlier times in light of contemporary circumstances, but it does not shy away from the realities of modernity and of living and raising families in America. Marshall McLuhan observed that, “nostalgia is a type or rearview mirror, but it is also the shape of things to come.”⁴⁰⁴ Nostalgia is the means by which American Neotraditional Muslims reflect on a beloved image of the past to discover the aesthetic values they most dearly hope to carry forward and preserve in a rapidly changing world.

Beyond the examples presented here, there are many other stylistic elements that make the Neotraditional brand recognizable. Affiliates and audience members draw inspiration from those styles when constructing and expressing aspects of their own identities. These can include speech acts, comportment, sartorial practices, the use of religious objects and other practices. For example, many Neotraditional scholars hold prayer beads and may even move them between their fingers as a form of *dhikr* (mindfulness of God) even as they give lectures; their lips might be seen moving as they praise God under their breath during the pauses between their sentences. This practice is a performance of Neotraditional identity and a declaration of divergence from Salafi identity, since it is common for Salafis to condemn the use

403. See T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

404. Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium Is the Message*, (17:15).

of prayer beads as a *bida`a* (reprehensible innovation).⁴⁰⁵ Neotraditional Muslims are also far more likely to include the honorific title “*sayyidina*” (our master) when invoking blessings on the Prophet during prayer; Salafis tend to consider doing so to be a *bida`a*. The same pattern repeats so regularly as a means by which Salafis express divergence that the word “*bida'a*,” itself is sufficient as a trope to signal a character's Salafi identity in polemical anti-Salafi comics and cartoons.⁴⁰⁶

In each community, the laity use or avoid aesthetic practices like those mentioned above as identity signals that accord with the practices and statements of leading figures in their own community while diverging from the practices of the other community. Marshall McLuhan nicely summarized this general social phenomenon by noting that “the quest for identity goes along with this bumping into other people in order to find out 'who am I?'”⁴⁰⁷ The formulation of identity depends upon distinction from other identities, and this is why “people often diverge to avoid sending undesired identity signals to others.”⁴⁰⁸ For Neotraditional Muslims, as is the

405. For example, see Muhammad Salih Al-Munajjid, “Ruling on Using the Masbahah (Prayer Beads) - Islamqa.info,” *IslamQA.info*, accessed April 16, 2017, <https://islamqa.info/en/3009>; Salih Al-Fawzan, “The Ruling on Using Beads for Tasbeeh,” *Bidah.com*, accessed April 16, 2017, <http://www.bidah.com/articles/odvbl-the-ruling-on-using-beads-for-tasbeeh.cfm>; “A Scholarly Research by Shaykh Albaani That Prayer Beads Are a Bida’,” *AbdurRahman.Org*, October 6, 2014, <https://abdurrahman.org/2014/10/06/a-scholarly-research-by-shaykh-albaani-that-prayer-beads-are-a-bida/>.

406. For example, see Fahmi22286, “Tipu Daya Salafi Wahabi Yang Gagal Paham,” accessed April 26, 2017, <http://kampus.sarkub.com/2015/09/tipu-daya-salafi-wahabi-yang-gagal-paham.html>; Sufilive, *Sunni vs Salafi - A Believer Is His Brother's Mirror*, accessed April 26, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dMA7oAe5E>; “Muhibbun Naqsybandi: Menjadi Imam Dalam 10 Hari,” *Muhibbun Naqsybandi*, April 22, 2009, <http://muhibbunnaqsybandi.blogspot.com/2009/04/menjadi-imam-dalam-10-hari.html>.

407. Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium Is the Message*, (11:10).

408. Berger J and Heath C, “Who Drives Divergence?,” 595.

case for any community, aesthetic practices that signal belonging and divergence play a critical role in establishing a clear personal identity, communal style, or brand image.

Conclusion

I. Summary and Relevance to Scholarship

The preceding chapters have shown that the context of modernity has led to the development of an American Neotraditional Muslim community which exists in competition against other modes of Islamic religiosity to be popularly regarded as the legitimate inheritors and interpreters of Islamic tradition. Three different theoretical approaches have been used to describe the distinguishing characteristics and to identify the conceptual borders of the Neotraditional community, especially in contrast with other communities founded upon different approaches to understanding Islam, such as Salafism, the Progressive-Muslims Movement, and Orientalism.

The first approach, modeled in Chapter 2, *Discursive Worlds*, was an analysis of persistent community discourse, especially where it addresses the community's identity. That discourse can either express direct, positive statements about Neotraditional values and points of view on core matters, or it can indicate Neotraditional values through opposition to the views of alternate communities. Neotraditionalism is distinguished by its discursive position of reaffirming that Islam can only be correctly understood through the continuity of traditional Islamic religious scholarship through history; not only has that scholarly legacy served as a collective effort to understand sacred scriptures and other authoritative texts, but it also served to maintain a high quality of scholarship. The opinions and

interpretations of Muslim scholars were vetted and refined through peer-review, scholarly debates, and the formal elaboration of distinct interpretive methodologies, most notably those of the four traditional schools of Islamic jurisprudence. The contention of Neotraditional Islam is that alternate approaches to studying the religion, such as Orientalism, Salafism, and the Progressive-Muslims movement, share the common deficiency of ignoring or misinterpreting the processes and actors of that scholarly tradition, with the result that each of those modes arrives at a fundamentally flawed understanding of Islam. More than anything else, Neotraditionalism is the reaffirmation that tradition does have value. The content of tradition is the religious knowledge of correct belief and how to live a virtuous life, and this is the priceless key by which one attains personal salvation in the next life.

At the same time, the structure of tradition and its mechanisms are also treasured. In Chapter 3, *Community Networks*, the social structures of the Neotraditional community were described in terms of networks. The human connections that participate in the scholarly lineages that maintain traditional continuity are what connect the contemporary Neotraditional community with the community of early Muslims that received the revelation. For the Neotraditional community, that linear, temporal network is constitutive of religious legitimacy and authority. At the same time, the community can also be described through its contemporary networking practices, such as personal endorsements, public displays of affiliation through shared teaching lineages, and cooperative participation in

events and organizations. By constructing network graphs to visualize affiliations mentioned in the public biographical statements of prominent members of American Muslim communities, this approach demonstrated a clear separation between the Neotraditional and Salafi communities, while also revealing complex interconnections within each community. The pride of place afforded to scholars in Neotraditional networks establishes the basic message of Neotraditionalism: whoever has not attained a degree of knowledge exceeding those great early scholars is obliged to rely upon them for their superior understanding rather than second-guessing their conclusions after merely reading a few hundred *hadiths*. The subtext of extolling the knowledge of traditional scholars and the value of networks connecting them is a warning against the teachings of people who pose as experts yet lack the necessary qualifications to provide responsible religious guidance – this is exactly the critique Neotraditional Muslims level against the alternate modes mentioned above. The challenge facing lay Muslims, then, is learning how to recognize and avoid religious charlatans so that they can learn how to believe and live as a Muslim from a qualified teacher.

The means by which community affiliation can be expressed and recognized is the topic of Chapter 4, *Aesthetics of Culture*, which proposed an *aesthetic sociology* blurring the lines between social categories like religion and culture to focus on expressions of community belonging. This approach was used to highlight how members of Neotraditional and Salafi communities aesthetically signal

community affiliation and divergence from alternate communities. In particular, followers of each community develop their own personal and social identities through sartorial practices, speech acts, appropriation of meaningful symbols. These and other expressions of community identity become successful identity markers to the extent that they reflect the core aesthetic values of the community. When taken together, these aesthetic practices constitute the elements of recognizably distinct community styles. For example, signal phrases used in Neotraditional discourse like “reviving traditional Islamic sciences” express the community's emphasis on the importance of tradition. Using such key phrases is a speech act that frames the mission of Neotraditionalism as not only a project to convey religious knowledge, but to do so in accordance with the traditional means of conveying it, namely, by maintaining a chain of teacher-student relationships. Furthermore, the word “sciences,” is used here to translate an Arabic word that implies knowledge gained through systematic study. This implies that that the pedagogical process to be followed will conform to a traditionally ordered curriculum that relates the various branches of that knowledge in precisely the way that earlier teaching authorities within the scholarly lineage described them as being related. It is fidelity to the principle of assiduously citing each idea being presented as having been established through the work of an earlier authority that is expressed in referring to the Neotraditional style of learning as *science* exemplifying academic principles of fair scholarship.⁴⁰⁹ Any expression of style that reflects this core Neotraditional aesthetic

409. The reader will recall this as a central contention discussed in Chapter 2, relating to Neotraditional critiques of the Orientalist legacy of Western scholarship about Islam as being prone to

of the importance of traditional learning can function as a signaling practice for Muslims to advertise belonging to the Neotraditional mode of Islam.

Research guided by each of these three approaches – analysis of discourse, networks, and aesthetics – supported the same conclusion: Muslims in America are not by any means a single community. To the contrary, American Muslims develop personal and communal identities through affiliation with any of several modes of Islamic religiosity that exist in mutual opposition.

Communities of Muslims following different religious modes, such as Neotraditionalism and Salafism, paradoxically have a great deal in common, yet very little common ground. These communities are similar in terms of the internal diversity of their membership. Some of this diversity is a product of immigration policies; for example, both communities are ethnically diverse, which should be expected since Muslim migration to America has never been affected by which mode of Islam they follow. In the same way, both of these communities include immigrants or the children and (increasingly) grandchildren of immigrants, as well as Muslims whose ancestors immigrated so long ago that the details of their immigration have been lost to memory. Both communities also include those whose parents raised them as Muslims and those who chose to adopt the beliefs and practices of Islam later in life.

Nevertheless, despite all of these outward similarities, members of each

incautious or unsystematic citation of sources.

community understand their religion in markedly different ways. Their lives and values are guided by that understanding in ways that often lead to members of one community holding diametrically opposite opinions from those supported by members of the other community. Research on any topic relating to American Muslim communities needs to take these differences into account and make use of methodologies that enable the researcher to avoid mixing data about one community with that of its rivals. Consider the case of a hypothetical survey finding that 50% of American Muslims agree with the statement, “Islamic knowledge must be learned under the guidance of religious scholars, not by reading books independently.” This is a particularly contentious point of difference between Neotraditional Muslims and Salafis; what if polling each community separately found that 95% of American Neotraditional Muslims agreed with the statement, while only 5% of American Salafis agreed. That would be a far more elucidating discovery than reporting, however accurately, that 50% of all American Muslims agreed with the statement.

This dissertation has demonstrated the stark separation between communities of American Muslims that organize around differing modes of religiosity. Muslims belonging to these communities emphatically maintain their mutual opposition on fundamental principles of religious interpretation, but also express opposition in topics of discourse and by means of their aesthetic practices. Nevertheless, the distinctions between them have been largely overlooked in scholarship on Islam in America. For that reason, it is probable that critical observations like the one

suggested in the hypothetical case above really have gone unnoticed or unmeasured by researchers in this field. Therefore, the existing literature on American Muslims needs to be reevaluated, and attention to distinctions based on these different modes of Islamic religiosity needs to be considered a central concern in the research designs of future studies.

II. Future Research on Muslim Communities

Each of the three preceding chapters modeled a different approach to identifying and describing the distinctive features of a community like the American Neotraditional Muslim community. Each approach revealed elements unique to the identities of different communities of American Muslims and major points of divergence between communities. However, these approaches have only been modeled here to the extent necessary to demonstrate their effectiveness and potential for deepening our understanding of American Muslim communities (or any other communities) that exist in competition. The next step for scholarship in this field must be to conduct in-depth research using each of these approaches.

For example, deeper studies should be dedicated to analysis of core themes and divergence in discourse between American Muslim communities like Neotraditionalism, Salafism, and the Progressive-Muslims movement. How do the discursive worlds of these communities influence their members to differ on issues like homeschooling, out-group socialization, political activism, consumer behavior

or ecology?⁴¹⁰ If there are topics addressed frequently in the discourse of more than one community, are those topics framed or presented in different ways, or are divergent conclusions generally reached? Who are the primary producers and consumers of the internal discourse of each community? What would be considered the mainstream views within each community on any given topic, and what views would be considered fringe or aberrant? What do communities in competition agree upon, and what are the conditions or pressures that produce agreement? If community discourse is a collaborative effort to describe and shape the shared social world, what can these worldviews reveal about community visions for the “good life” and the social worlds each community is striving to create and inhabit?

A great deal could also be learned by more extensive studies of American Muslim communities from the perspective of network sociology. Such studies should incorporate much larger data sets, produce quantitative analysis of centrality and power among network actors, and identify the many sub-networks within each community or the meso- and macro-level structures of interaction and their societal effects. In what ways might the different activities and priorities of each community affect local, national, or international economies? In what ways do these communities utilize new communication technologies to forge connections and share their messages? What influence does affiliation with one or another community

410. For example, Neotraditional Muslims have elaborated a unique vision of the relationship between religion and the environment. See Brendan Peter Newlon, “The Prophet Loved Green: Environmentalism in American Muslim Identity Discourse,” in *Discourses By/On Muslims in Minority Contexts* (American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, San Diego, California, 2014), https://www.academia.edu/10716670/The_Prophet_Loved_Green_Environmentalism_in_American_Muslim_Identity_Discourse.

network have on industry? For example, features common among Indian Jains, such as seeking non-violent employment (which includes avoiding agricultural labor for fear of harming creatures in the soil), tight-knit extended family structures, and prohibition of intoxicants, facilitated the relatively small community's path to becoming leaders in the global diamond-cutting industry.⁴¹¹ Are there perhaps also industries or other networks with which one or another of these Muslim networks overlap significantly, such as Silicon Valley technology specialists, university educators in any field, or international NGOs?

While a few good studies in network sociology may be able to answer several of the questions above and others like them, this dissertation has suggested more potential approaches and foci for ethnographic and aesthetic studies than could be addressed by anything less than a new field of interdisciplinary collaboration. The question of how different American Muslim communities translate their distinctive aesthetic values into all manner of recognizable outward expressions and signals has been shown to be a remarkably complex topic. Efforts to answer this question will need to approach the matter from perspectives as diverse as communication studies and sociolinguistics, philosophy of aesthetics and semiotics, interaction ritual and performance studies, individual and social psychology, ethno- and historical musicology, political science, media studies, material culture and graphic design,

411. M. Backman, *Inside Knowledge: Streetwise in Asia* (Springer, 2005), 163–64; Saleem Hassan Ali, *Treasures of the Earth: Need, Greed, and a Sustainable Future* (Yale University Press, 2009), 51–53; Kathryn Lum, “The Rise and Rise of Belgium’s Indian Diamond Dynasties,” *The Conversation*, accessed April 29, 2017, <http://theconversation.com/the-rise-and-rise-of-belgiums-indian-diamond-dynasties-32332>.

architecture and interior design of community spaces, fashion and art history, analysis of rhetorical or literary styles and publishing practices, popular culture, and so on. Studies of this type might either focus on contributing ethnographic data through observation of these communities, or it may set out to answer practical questions: how do the community aesthetics of minorities in America drive shifts in fashion or advertising trends? How do these communities act as a market with demand for new products and services like Islamic banking, burkinis or other modest swimwear, organic-halal food labeling, ethically sourced fair trade chocolates, online religious classes, podcasts, music, or Muslim family counseling?

An important caveat for such studies will be to recall that although the communities identified here and other categories are indispensable for the scholar, it must never be presumed that they describe strictly bounded groups between which every individual must make a decisive choice. With respect to any individual's experience, these communities and the lines between them are all imagined; they can be crossed, changed, or straddled. Probably – as perhaps a future study will determine – many American Muslims do not even have a clear sense of what these communities represent or how their personal religious views intersect with one or more of them. There may be a practical reason not to delve into this topic too deeply. For Muslims living as minorities in America, there would be little incentive to dwell upon the internal divisions that separate the community into smaller and smaller subcategories; being “just Muslim” is strange enough.

However, from a macroscopic perspective, these different American Muslim communities are as real and distinctive as any imagined community. Their distinguishing characteristics are persistent and the boundaries between communities are clearly demarcated. It is as valid to talk about the differences between Neotraditionalism and Salafism as it would be to discuss differences between American and Chinese cultures or between the political views of Republicans and Democrats. As these comparisons should also highlight, no matter how many differences might be noted between communities, their individual members are never absolutely different or alien, and they may have more in common than they care to admit. It is also conceivable that a member of one community may prefer a position more commonly associated with another community, or for such preferences to change with time or context.

Scholarship requires a systematic approach to reconciling the paradox of microscopic chaos and macroscopic social order, and that has been presented in this dissertation. Data about each community, as gathered through the three approaches modeled here, can provide the basis for what Jonathan Z. Smith called a polythetic taxonomy.⁴¹² If an individual can be attributed a significant number of the distinguishing characteristics of a community, whether in terms of discourse, networks, or aesthetics, this can provide an objective basis for placing the individual into the corresponding category for the purpose of scholarly analysis. For example,

412. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, Reprint edition (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1988), 1–18.

imagine the case of an individual American Muslim who does not self-identify as being associated with any of the communities we have proposed here, or who may even object to such a schema of categorization. If the scholar observes that this individual adheres to one of the four Sunni *madhhabs* [interpretive schools] in matters of ritual and invariably prefers to hear a religious scholar's explanation of a difficult topic rather than attempting to seek an answer through independent reading in scripture and hadith literature, that would suggest affiliation with the Neotraditional community and a corresponding divergence from the Salafi and Progressive-Muslims communities. If the scholar also determines that the individual is directly connected by independent social links to at least three actors whose collective measures of centrality in the Neotraditional community network are greater than a certain significant threshold, that would further support the scholar's decision to consider the individual as belonging to the Neotraditional community. If the same individual is also observed attending a *mawlid* [gathering in celebration of the Prophet's birth] while wearing a green turban embellished with the *na`layn sharif* symbol and a *rida`* shawl draped over the right shoulder (as is uniquely the style of the Ba`alawi scholars of Yemen), that would be more than sufficient evidence to categorize the individual as a member of the Neotraditional community. In fact, if any three of the eight hypothetical observations above were observed, the case would still be compelling because each of these traits function as strong indicators of Neotraditional community affiliation. The necessary next stage of scholarship on Muslim communities in America (and globally) must be to

systematically determine which such traits are strong indicators of community affiliation, which traits are weak indicators, and which are insignificant. Once that is done, it will be possible to develop survey questions or criteria from which an individual's community affiliation can be inferred reliably. Only then could the aggregated survey or research data be subjected to a meaningful analysis.

III. Anticipating Future Trends in American Neotraditionalism

Throughout this dissertation, I have used historical vignettes to draw parallels between contemporary Islamic Neotraditionalism in America and a Neotraditional Muslim network that developed in China during the 16th-19th centuries. The explanatory power of those comparisons helped to highlight why certain contemporary developments must be regarded as significant and interconnected parts of a broader social transformation. The same method of historical comparison can be used to project the future course of Neotraditional Islam in America, where it must face social challenges that are surprisingly similar to those that were faced by the Chinese network.

The development of each network is closely related to the cultural effects of immigrant as well as non-immigrant Muslims growing up as second, third, or later generation descendants of Muslim immigrants within the networks and structures that were established by the social activities of preceding generations. In each network, the impact of first- and second-generation converts to Islam must also be

considered, as must descendants of Muslims who have been native to the place for as long as family memory can record. Community narratives about the past also continue to convey new social meanings in the present. For example, in China, many Muslims relate a narrative account of their ancestors having been invited to immigrate to China by the Emperor himself, who had seen in a dream that light-eyed western people would come to his aid and protect the empire. In America, many Muslims recall a darker origin story, in which their ancestors were brought in chains to be slaves of an exploitative economic system. Each story later acquired an ironic undertone when some of the descendants of those “imported” Muslims came to be shunned as an unwelcome minority group and told that they are living in a country where they do not belong.

In America, a generation gap can also be observed within Muslim communities. For example, while first-generation immigrant Muslims often feel strongly that religious spaces, expressions, and rituals must resemble those they remember from “back home” to be truly authentic, young second- and third-generation Muslims growing up in the heterogeneous Muslim communities of the United States often feel uncomfortable with such uniformity. Neotraditional youths in particular grow up in an environment in which differences of opinion between one *madhhab* and another are praised as reflecting intellectual genius and the miraculous ability of Allah's religion to adapt to a range of circumstances. Since such variety is considered indicative of (and necessary for) the success of Islam as a universal

religion, Neotraditional Muslims prefer spaces of worship in which variety is apparent. In a sense that could be considered classically “American,” for the new generation of American Muslims, religious and cultural diversity will be the norm.

Not only do young Neotraditional Muslims discuss and respect differences relating to ritual form, but relating to cultural expressions as well. It has become popular for Muslims in the U.S. to wear the traditional clothing styles of different Muslim societies, to enjoy restaurants serving halal traditional cuisines from around the world or the unexpected dishes at halal fusion restaurants, and to spend time with friends at halal hamburger-and-hookah joints.⁴¹³ Especially in California, young American Muslims and young non-Muslim Americans feel the same appreciation for the cultural variety of the American urban lifestyle – they do not feel at home unless they can sometimes eat Chinese food, and sometimes Tacos. The attachment to sampling cultural diversity is a hallmark of American culture, and one which is especially well reflected by young Muslim Americans. These trends fly in the face of research paradigms in which American Muslims are still analyzed in terms of their ethnic backgrounds no matter how long their families have called the U.S. their home. It is important to recall here that Neotraditional Islam reflects an appreciation for diversity and promotes the attitude that there may be a plurality of correct ways,

413. Although I will not have the opportunity to do the topic justice in this dissertation, a detailed ethnography centering on World Famous Grill, a halal Persian-Mexican-Hamburger restaurant in the city of Bell, CA would probably be fascinating and elucidating. The diversity among patrons of this restaurant is remarkable. Because the food is halal, prices are low, it stays open until very late at night and has a location just outside of Los Angeles, it has become a favorite social hub and meeting place for L.A. County Muslims. See www.worldfamousgrill.com or visit in person – for the sake of research, of course.

while Salafism thrives upon conformity and accord in belief, ritual practice, and attitude. For Salafis, religious diversity among Muslims is tantamount to discord and *fitna*, a tribulation which threatens social unity. If American cultural history teaches anything, it is that conformity does not remain in vogue for long in this country. Therefore, if “diversity sampling” remains a popular attitude within American youth culture for at least another generation, we might expect that the Neotraditional community will grow, while children of Salafi parents, if they continue to identify with Islam and Muslim communities after they grow up, will likely lean more towards belonging to Neotraditional communities.

Another lesson we can learn from the Chinese Neotraditional network's history is that the value attributed to teacher-student relationships in Neotraditional discourse will determine how the community grows and establishes new network hubs. This fact is the key to predicting which American cities will be home to larger and more active Neotraditional communities. It will not depend primarily upon the size of the current Muslim population, birthrates, ethnic backgrounds or immigration policies. Rather, it will depend largely upon where Shaykh Hamza's most prominent students decide to settle down, or where they frequently visit. Wherever they go, their scholarly lineage will be the means by which the Neotraditional style of learning is transmitted to the next generation. They will offer classes and hold events, establish spiritual communities and schools, and work together with their local community members in ways that generate networks of organic solidarity.

Committed Neotraditional Muslim families will also move to those cities to be closer to their teachers and benefit from their lessons and company. Shaykh Hamza's students will build Neotraditional communities, because the work of Neotraditional Islam is precisely to convey that tradition to the next generation as it was conveyed by the generation that came before. This is what we observed over the two centuries following Shaykh Hu's return to China from studying Islam in its western heartlands. His students – and their students after them – spread out and established local teaching circles which eventually grew to become the various great centers of Chinese Islamic learning. Since similar social and religious circumstances apply to both the Chinese and American Neotraditional networks, awareness of how the Chinese network developed over the course of more than two centuries provides information that can aid in anticipating how the American network might develop in the future.

Another key to anticipating future trends in Neotraditionalism is to recall that the Neotraditional community is really two networks; the linear-temporal network of scholars at the community's core and the network of affiliates that surround and complement their scholarly work. François Mauriac famously said, “‘tell me what you read and I will tell you who you are’ is true enough, but I’d know you better if you tell me what you reread.”⁴¹⁴ As we consider Neotraditionalism in America as an intellectual network in the sense Collins described, we might adapt this idea: what

414. R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Caught Reading Again: Scholars and Their Books* (Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd, 2009), xiii.

books are the leading figures in the network endorsing and urgently recommending to their followers?⁴¹⁵ When such recommendations are made, the community takes note. For example, a website maintained by one of Shaykh Hamza's fans has compiled an incomplete bibliography containing more than 400 books in 36 subject categories, all of which Shaykh Hamza has discussed in his public lectures, recorded courses, and writings.⁴¹⁶ These include religious and philosophical books like *The Gospel of Barnabas* and Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*; Western literary classics like *Animal Farm*, *Moby Dick*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*; poetry by Poe, Longfellow, Rumi; works on political and social history like *Roots* and *The Devil's Horsemen*; books on psychology, biographies, education, astronomy, health, and issues relating to contemporary American society like *Fast Food Nation* and *Pornified*. These recommendations exert profound influence; there has even been a resurgence in the popularity of English poetry among young American Neotraditional Muslims because Shaykh Hamza frequently quotes poems and talks about the importance of poetry among traditional societies. When Shaykh Hamza speaks to an audience of thousands of followers at large events like the annual Reviving the Islamic Spirit convention, which are also recorded and shared online, he clearly intends to drive social change:

Make sure your company is good company, and make sure your food is pure food. We should be encouraging organic farms, we should be

415. Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).

416. shaykhhamza.com, "Shaykh Hamza Yusuf | Book Recommendations," *ShaykhHamza.com*, accessed May 3, 2017, <http://shaykhhamza.com/recommendations/>.

encouraging organic gardens, we should be at the forefront of the urban homesteading movement – These are things that Muslims should be involved in! Don't think "I'm going to go to McDonalds and have a halal fish," seriously! Because everything about McDonalds is antithetical to our Prophet *salla Allahu `alayhi wa salam* and his sunnah. And I am speaking openly; I don't care what anybody says, I'm telling you that fast food is something that is destroying people and we have to oppose fast food consumption.⁴¹⁷

The recommendations made by network leaders today will play a part in influencing the future courses of several social movements in America and globally, therefore a future study to identify patterns in such recommendations would be well-advised.

Finally, we can anticipate that the Neotraditional community, like most other communities, will be profoundly affected by new developments in communication technologies. Earlier imaginings of globalization tended to assume that the ability to share information and access it globally would have a homogenizing effect on culture. This has been true to some extent; we have witnessed convergence of expression in clothing styles, pop music, and cinema, for example. However, not all communication conducted through new communications media is addressed to a global audience; the same platforms can be used to facilitate the spread of information within a community, such as among Neotraditional Muslims living anywhere in the world where they can access the internet. This allows for the formation of virtual communities, in which members interact and know each other primarily within an online environment. It also facilitates the formation of translocal communities, in which person-to-person connections are prioritized but also

417. Hamza Yusuf, *Fast Food Will Destroy You! Sheikh Hamza Yusuf*, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSl7FbcHLgQ&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

supplemented by online media like streaming video that allows individuals to participate in community events and gatherings even when they are not able to be present in the same place. Ethnographic studies on Neotraditional communities will need to be mindful of the fact that the community may not be bounded by a geographical limit, since members may experience meaningful interactions with others who are distant from them. For example, a Neotraditional Muslim may consider themselves a close student of a shaykh who lives in another country, and attend their lessons regularly via Facebook Live. An example of a translocal community network would be SeekersHub's Knowledge Without Barriers (KWB) program, which provides free online courses in Islamic subjects, including online live sessions during which students may interact directly with the teacher and ask questions related to the course material. In translocal communities such as KWB, information is shared worldwide, yet the discourse the community shares remains in-house. Rather than using technology to share information beyond the boundaries of the community, they have used technology to share the community itself beyond any boundaries at all. KWB may be taken as a model community to better understand how other translocal communities establish and maintain a sense of connection and shared experience.

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