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**A NEW SYNTHESIS: SAUDI SALAFISM AND THE CONTESTED
IDEOLOGIES OF MUḤAMMAD SURŪR**

by

Ahmad Kindawi

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of History
College of Humanities and Social Sciences
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
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at
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Thesis Chair: Corinne L. Blake, Ph.D.

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Dedication

To my parents, Ghassan and Bushra Hilli, and wife Dima

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Abstract

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A NEW SYNTHESIS: SAUDI SALAFISM AND THE CONTESTED IDEOLOGIES OF
MUḤAMMAD SURŪR
2019-2020
Corinne L. Blake, Ph.D.
Master of Arts in History

The thesis examines the life and thought of MuḤammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, the Syrian ideologue and founder of an influential Islamist trend within the Ṣaḥwa (Awakening) movement in Saudi Arabia. In the highly politicalized Saudi Islamist scene of the early 1970s, Surūr came up with a unique synthesis: an amalgam of the political awareness of the Muslim Brotherhood in seeking political reform and the implementation of an Islamic order and the religious thought of Wahhābīs. Under the influence of Surūr’s ideas, a new group appeared, *al-Surūriyya*, which had a significant impact on Saudi Islamic activism, becoming the main group within it. Surūr positioned himself and his followers as centrist Salafis. While rejecting the violent approach of the “*ḥizb al-Ghulāt*” (radicals), Surūr condemned “*ḥizb al-Wulāt*” (loyalists), who called for total obedience to the rulers; he also wrote influential anti-Shi‘i treatises. Analyzing the debates between Surūr, who advocated non-violent political activism, and “*ḥizb al-Wulāt*,” who adopted a quietist posture, sheds light on the ongoing discussion about political engagement among Salafis. This thesis is mainly drawn from primary sources: Surūr’s own corpus of political and religious writings, journalistic work, and memoirs and a series of seven recorded television interviews with Surūr as well as writings of other Salafis, especially his opponents.

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Chapter 1

The Surūrī Synthesis: Between Quietism and Political Engagement

Muḥammad Surūr bin Nāyef Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, hereafter Muḥammad Surūr, founded the Islamist trend that later came to be known *al-Surūrīyya* (Surūrism). Surūr’s influential ideology, which is also known as *al-Salafīyya al-Ḥarakiyya* (dynamic or activist Salafism), dominated the intellectual and religious spectrum of Saudi Arabia between the 1980s and 1990s and is still popular in the Muslim world. The popularity of Muḥammad Surūr’s ideas is rooted in his particularly creative approach to combing elements of two of the most influential forces in 20th century Islamic life: the Salafi creed—theological views stressing a return to the *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (the pious ancestors) and a rejection of the schools of Sunni Islamic jurisprudence (*madhāhib*)—and the political views of the Muslim Brotherhood. Often referred to as a *ḥarakī* (politically activist) trend, the Surūrīs—upholders of this ideology—diverged from many of their fellow Saudi Wahhābīs by expressing an interest in public affairs and engaged in political and social matters that had previously been solely the prerogative of the royal family. More interestingly, they began to express oppositional opinions about the political actions of the Saudi government just as the traditional Wahhābī religious establishment unquestionably sanctioned all of the regime’s policies. Thus, as we shall see, Surūr infused the political activism of the Muslim Brotherhood into Wahhābī traditions, staking out a popular, yet perilous, Salafi synthesis that placed his movement at odds with quietists and the Saudi state alike.

In the early twentieth century, as part of his effort to re-establish the Saudi Kingdom, King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Ibn Sa‘ūd reinstated the Wahhābī religious establishment, which had played a significant role in the formation of the first and second Saudi kingdoms. However, he realized that in order to survive in the international arena, he needed to restrain the zealotry of the *Ikhwān* (brothers), the tribal fighting force that he used to conquer various regions, as these fighters were very critical of the King’s pragmatic relationship with Western countries. Thus, in the late 1920s, he crushed his erstwhile military protectors when they challenged his authority and created a division of powers formula which stipulated that the Āl Sa‘ūd (House of Sa‘ūd) would rule and determine the country’s foreign and economic policy independent of Islamic jurisprudence, leaving the Wahhābī ‘*ulamā*’ to control the vast religious, cultural, and social spheres. In return, Wahhābī religious leaders would provide religious legitimacy for Āl Sa‘ūd’s rule through an interpretation of the Qur’ān and other Islamic texts, which justified the authority of Āl Sa‘ūd and made obeying the rulers part of the mandate to obey God.¹ Since then, political quietism has dominated the Wahhābī religious leaders’ behavior and discourse; the Wahhābī ‘*ulamā*’ limited their political involvement to only providing *naṣīḥa* (advice) to the rulers, usually behind the scene.²

In the 1950s, increasing oil production in the Kingdom and the influx of enormous profits, especially after the oil crisis in 1973, begin to undermine this quietest consensus. Between the 1950s and 1970s, members of the Muslim Brotherhood, who fled

¹ David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 71-72; Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 10-11.

² Roel Meijer, “Introduction,” in *Global Salafism: Islam’s new religious movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 17.

from the repression of Arab and Ba‘thist socialist regimes in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq often played a leading role in the rapid development of the Kingdom’s institutions.³ Members of the Muslim Brotherhood held high-level positions in the education system in Saudi Arabia and taught in high schools and universities, out of which emerged *al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya* (the Islamic Awakening), an Islamic movement that developed in Saudi Arabia between the 1960s and 1990s.⁴ One of the Muslim Brotherhood members who influenced the *Ṣaḥwa* was the Syrian Shaykh Muḥammad Surūr, who taught in Saudi Arabia between the 1960s and 1970s; in the early 1970s, he founded the dominant *jama‘a* (group) generally referred to as “*al-Surūriyya*.”

While followers of Muḥammad Surūr might share with some of these other Salafi groups a willingness to engage in political opposition, they nonetheless diverged from Salafi *jihādī* counterparts on matters of violence and positioned themselves as centrists among other Salafīs. On the one hand, Surūr rejected rebellion with the sword against the rulers because it leads to *fitna* (internal strife). On the other, he refused the practice of Salafī and Wahhābī loyalists of unconditional obedience to the rulers, asserting that political activism is consistent with Salafī *manhaj* (methodology).⁵ While Surūr adopted the political vision of the Muslim Brotherhood in seeking to effect political reform, despite his previous connections with the Muslim Brotherhood, like other Salafīs, he

³ Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West*, trans. Pascale Ghazaleh (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 171-177.

⁴ Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: Religious Dissent In Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, trans. George Holoch. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011), 38; Al-Rasheed, *Contesting*, 67.

⁵ Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (28) Al-Ḥiwār Bayna Ahl al-Sunnah: Al-Salafiyya bayna al-Wulāt wa al-Ghulāt” [Toward new Entity (28) Dialogue between the People of Sunnah: The Salafism between the Loyalist and the Extremists (the Extremists.)] *Al-Sunnah* 65, 1997 [1417]. Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (29) al-Ḥiwār Bayna Ahl al-Sunnah: Al-Salafiyya bayna al-Wulāt wa al-Ghulāt,” [Toward new Entity (29) Dialogue between the People of Sunnah: the Salafism between the Loyalist and the Extremists.] *Al-Sunnah* 67 (1997).

attacked the organization for focusing more on politics than on purification of faith. To avoid criticism from the Wahhābīs and Salafīs in Saudi Arabia for being overtly political, Muḥammad Surūr used the slogans of the Salafī and Wahhābī ‘*ulamā*’ in his teachings and rhetoric. He emphasized the Wahhābī slogan “creed first,” for example, which suggested the superiority of creed not only over politics, but also over other religious subjects like jurisprudence.⁶ However, he also reformulated concepts borrowed from the Muslim Brotherhood to be consistent with the Salafī creed and elaborated principles to enable engagement in politics.

Surūrī thought thus provided the tools to go beyond the existing Salafī binaries of revolution and political quietism found in the practices of both Salafī and Wahhābī schools, laying the groundwork for opposition to the Saudi regime through the expression of explicitly *non-violent* political activism. However, as shall be shown in chapter four, this novel hybrid ideology elicited strident opposition from other Salafī schools, such as the Jāmī movement (Salafī group who adopted a quietist posture).

Significance of the Thesis

Since 9/11, Salafī groups have commanded widespread academic and policy-studies attention, but most of this research emphasis has focused on Salafī-jihadīs, who adopted violent acts against the existing political regimes and called for establishment of the Islamic Caliphate. Non-violent Salafī groups, by contrast, have attracted scant interest from researchers. Despite its popularity and wide prevalence over three decades across

⁶ ‘Adullah Nāb, “Mushaḥnat bayna al-Jāmiyya wa al-Surūriyya fi al-Sa‘ūdiyya” (Hassles between Surūrīs and Jāmīs in Saudi Arabia). *Ilaḥ*, May 20, 2005. <http://elaph.com/Web/Politics/2005/5/63497.htm?sectionarchive=Politics>.

Saudi Arabia, the Surūrī group (*jamā'a*) has received almost no attention from researchers.

As detailed below, the few accounts that exist portray the ideology of Surūr and his followers as a hybrid ideology of Wahhābīsm and the Muslim Brotherhood, without providing any analysis of his thought based on his writings. Most of the Arabic accounts hold this *jamā'a* (group) responsible for the radicalization of the Saudi population and breeding violence without providing evidence from Surūr or other Surūrīs' writings or practices. This thesis is an intellectual biography of Shaykh Muḥammad Surūr offering insights into his life, his intellectual works, and political activism. The thesis draws mainly upon primary sources such as Surūr's books, articles, lectures, and interviews to analyze the *Surūrī* ideology, political vision, and his position within the Salafiyya movement and gain a more in-depth picture of his ideas, thoughts, and synthesis. Although Salafīs belong to the same theological system, the Salafiyya movement is not homogeneous, and boundaries between its groups are fluid. Through analyzing the views and actions of different Salafī groups on politics and violence and analyzing intra-Salafī debates, this study reveals doctrinal differences and political distinctions between the groups and provides a new understanding of the Salafiyya movement's diversity. In addition to contributing to our understanding of Salafism, the thesis provides insight into significant events and transitional periods in the history of Saudi Arabia and Islamist movements.

The thesis comprises five chapters. After examining the historical background and context, the first chapter discusses the historiography of this topic. Chapter 2 focuses on the formation of Surūr's ideas and the creation of his synthesis. The third chapter

explores Surūr’s very popular anti-Shia and anti-Iran views that were not only doctrinal accusations but also ethnic and political attacks. The fourth chapter examines Salafī engagement in politics, analyzing intra-Salafī debates between Surūr, who adopted non-violent political activism, and the Jāmīs, or as Surūr called them “*ḥizb al-wulāt* (party of loyalists),” who took a quietist posture. Finally, chapter five explores Surūr’s rejection of rising extremist currents within Salafī circles in the second half of the twentieth century.

Historical Background: The Origins of Wahhābī Quietism and Salafī Challenge

Between 1902 and 1932, after defeating several rivals, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was able to unify most of Arabia under his leadership. After he recaptured Riyadh in 1902 from the Rashīds, the Wahhābī followers of the Muslim reform movement, founded by Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb in the 18th century in Najd, central Arabia, were keen to restore a relationship with Āl Sa‘ūd.⁷ The Wahhābīs, who purported to be returning to the “true” principles of Islam, declared ‘Abd al-‘Azīz their *imam*, a religious title that gave him legitimacy for political and military leadership.⁸ The restoration of the alliance set the boundaries of the political-religious relationship between ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and the Wahhābīs.

It is crucial to understand the political position of the Wahhābī ‘*ulamā*’ during the period of unification of the Kingdom because of the defining political role they have continued play until the present day. According to the scholar Madawi Al-Rasheed, King

⁷ It is important to note the followers of Shaykh ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb have rejected this label. Historically, they called themselves *al-mūwahidūn* (the people of monotheism) and they prefer to be called Salafīs. In current academic discourse, the followers of the teachings of Shaykh ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb are referred to as Wahhābīs, not as Salafīs.

⁸ Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 50.

‘Abd al-‘Azīz and the kings after him derived their legitimacy from their “recognition and enforcement of the *Sharī‘a*, a divine law above him and independent of his will.”⁹ In return, the Wahhābīs advocated in their sermons and teachings for the obedience of and submission to King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz as *walī al-amr*, leader of the Muslim community. They also played a significant role in the creation of the *Ikhwān* (the tribal fighting force). The Wahhābī ‘*ulamā*’ launched an educational program targeting nomadic tribesmen whose practices were seen as un-Islamic. They sought to teach these tribal groups what they perceived as authentic Islamic tradition and recruit them as soldiers for the Saudi expansion.¹⁰

After helping ‘Abd al-‘Azīz -conquer Mecca and the Hejaz, however, the *Ikhwān* became very critical of the monarch’s relationship with Western countries. They believed that all-non-Wahhābīs, including Muslims who didn’t accept their version of “true Islam,” were infidels. Additionally, after defeating ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s rivals in Arabia, the *Ikhwān* began raiding the areas where their rulers had treaties with the British. King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz banned raiding in the border areas, and when the *Ikhwān* launched raids on southern Iraq, Transjordan, and the Emirate of Kuwait against his wishes, the tension between the *Ikhwān* and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz escalated. Soon these tensions culminated in a battle that ended with ‘Abd al-‘Azīz crushing his erstwhile *Ikhwān* supporters at the Battle of Sabilla in 1929.¹¹

⁹ Al-Rasheed, *A History*, 51-52. More on the Wahhābī ideology: Natana J. Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

¹⁰ Commins, *The Wahhabi*, 80; Al-Rasheed, *A History*, 59-60. On the Wahhābī relation with Saudi State: Guido Steinberg, “The Wahhabi Ulama and the Saudi State: 1745 to the Present”, in Paul Aarts and Gerd Nonneman (eds.), *Saudi Arabia in the Balance*, London: Hurst & Co., 2005, pp. 11–34.

¹¹ Commins, *The Wahhabi*, 76-78, 88; Kepel, *The War*, 161-163.

In 1932, King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz declared the formation of the current Saudi Kingdom with the support of the Wahhābī ‘*ulamā*’, who were given control over religious institutions and social spheres. At the same time, the Saudi royal family continually had to curtail the zeal of the ‘*ulamā*’ when they interfered with efforts to build modern institutions, sign oil agreements with American companies, and protect the country’s international borders. Furthermore, in the period after the unification of the Kingdom and building of national institutions, the Āl Sa‘ūd royal family took control of political, economic, foreign, and defense matters.¹² In return, the Wahhābī doctrine became the dominant discourse of political power, and the Wahhābī ‘*ulamā*’ enforced the Islamic appearance of the public domain, serving a critical role in ensuring that the new laws and institutions were in agreement with the strict Wahhābī teachings. These Wahhābī clerics enforced segregation of the sexes, for example, and ensured the predominance of religious education by supervising curriculum and emphasizing theological instruction.¹³ Meanwhile, the religious establishment, which became an institution under the control of the political royal authority, reciprocated by calling for obedience and submission to the *walī al-amr* (the ruler) and issuing *fatwas* (religious rulings) justifying his actions. Furthermore, they equated obedience to the ruler with obedience to God and the Prophet; political opposition or expressing a critical opinion were identified as *khuruj ala walī al-amr* (rebellion against the ruler).¹⁴

When King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz died in 1953, the Saudi monarchy consolidated its rule over most of Arabia, and the Wahhābī creed became the dominant theological school

¹² Commins, *The Wahhabi*, 80-103.

¹³ *Ibid*, 104-107.

¹⁴ Al-Rasheed, *Contesting*, 49-50.

across the country. However, regional developments from across the Middle East, and the ascendance of Gamal Abdel Nasser's Arab socialist regime in Egypt in 1952, posed an acute challenge to this royal-Wahhābī pact. The growing prestige of Nasser and Arab socialist nationalist ideologies in the Arab world posed a threat to the conservative Kingdom and concerned the Saudi regime, who worried that these ideas would gain popularity in Saudi society. However, the Wahhābī *'ulamā'* were too traditional and did not have the qualifications to counter Arab social nationalist and secular influences. As a result, Saudi Arabia sought to forge alliances with conservative monarchies and political actors in the region and elsewhere to combat the supremacy of what it saw as a progressive movement, led by Nasser. The Saudi rulers began to emphasize the importance of politics in Islam against the secular nationalism of Nasser in Egypt and the Ba'ath party in Syria and Iraq. During this time, the Saudis found in the Muslim Brotherhood a natural ally in this conflict.¹⁵

The Muslim Brotherhood was established by Ḥasan al-Bannā in Egypt in 1928. The main goals of the movement initially consisted of fighting the British occupation and establishing an Islamic order in Egypt.¹⁶ After the assassination of its founder in 1949, the Muslim Brotherhood evolved in the 1950s under the leadership of Ḥasan al-Huḍaybī into a pan-Islamic movement, and it spread to many countries around the Muslim world. This departure from the primacy of Islam in countries that adopted nationalist-socialism contributed to the emergence of a new belief within the Muslim Brotherhood organization that the Egyptian regime was un-Islamic and beyond reform. The only way

¹⁵ Kepel, *The War*, 159, 171-172.

¹⁶ Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2013), 22.

to reform such an un-Islamic regime, in turn, was through armed struggle.¹⁷ The group who promoted those ideas is often referred to as Qut̄bīs, a reference to the adherents of Sayyid Qut̄b, an Egyptian author, educator, and Islamic theorist who emerged as a prominent leader within the Muslim Brotherhood. Ultimately, Egyptian authorities imprisoned and executed Qut̄b for plotting to assassinate the Egyptian President, Gamal Abdel Nasser, in 1964.¹⁸

While in prison, Qut̄b wrote his famous work, *Ma‘alim fi al-Tariq (Milestones)*. In this book, he introduced the concepts of *Jahiliyya* and *hakimiyya* which he borrowed from the Pakistani thinkers Abū al-A‘lā Mawdūdī and Abū Ḥasan al-Nadawī.¹⁹ The concept of *Jahiliyya*, usually translated as “the Age of Ignorance” in English, refers to pre-Islamic Arabia. According to Qut̄b, *jahiliyya* is the rejection of “divine authority for human authority.”²⁰ He asserted that “the whole world is steeped in *Jahiliyyahha* (ignorance)”²¹ In the face of the *jahili* regimes, Islamic law derived from Islamic scripts (*al-hakimiyya Li-llah* - the sovereignty / governance of God) is the response. This response should not only assume the form of “preaching and persuasion,” but also “physical power and *jihad*.”²²

¹⁷ Barbara Zoller, “Prison Talk: The Muslim Brotherhood’s Internal Struggle during Gamal Abdel Nasser’s Persecution, 1954 to 1971,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39, no. 3 (2007): 419.

¹⁸ More about Qutb, John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Sayed Khatab, *The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb: the Theory of Jahiliyyah* (London: Routledge, 2006); Sayed Khatab, “Hakimiyyah and Jahiliyyah in the Thought of Sayyid Qutb,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 38 (3): 147, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/714004475>.

¹⁹ Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2013), 43.

²⁰ William E. Shepard, “Sayyid Qutb’s Doctrine of Jahiliyya,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, no. 4 (11, 2003): 524, <http://ezproxy.rowan.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/195593321?accountid=1360>.

²¹ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, ed. A.B. al-Mehri (Birmingham: Maktabah Booksellers and Publishers, 2006), 26.

²² *Ibid*, 65.

After Muslim Brotherhood members attempted to assassinate Nasser in 1954, he cracked down on the organization, spurring many members of the group to immigrate to Saudi Arabia. Another wave of the Muslim Brotherhood exiles fled to Saudi Arabia from Syria after the socialist Ba‘th party came to power in Syria in 1963. Nonetheless, Islamist tendencies gained more support in the Muslim world, especially after the Arab countries’ devastating loss in the 1967 War, which led to a growing frustration with the secular regimes. Ultimately, the nationalist-socialist regimes across the region harshly repressed members and supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and other countries. Under these circumstances, the Saudi leadership promoted the “anti-socialist credentials” of the exiled members of the Muslim Brotherhood to counter-balance the Arab socialism of Egypt’s Nasser. This tactic, in turn, gave the Muslim Brotherhood a foothold in Saudi Arabia.²³

At first, the Saudi regime welcomed this influx of Muslim Brotherhood dissidents, not just to signal its opposition to the advent of secular Arab socialism across the region, but also as a source of knowledge and skills to help with the modernization of the Kingdom. Between the 1950s and 1970s, Saudi Arabia experienced massive social, economic, infrastructural transformations, and, the Kingdom witnessed a vast modernization of the state apparatus including the creation of universal education, efforts to foster economic development, and the advancement of communication technology. The impetus for these transformations stemmed mostly from growing petroleum revenues.²⁴ However, Saudi Arabia did not have enough nationals or citizens with the

²³ Kepel, *The War*, 159, 171-172; Commins, *The Wahhabi*, 151-154.

²⁴ Commins, 104-108.

skills and expertise needed to support this process of modernization. As a result, the expatriate Muslim Brotherhood community, many of whom were educated professionals in medicine, engineering, and the sciences, provided a pool of skilled workers, though according to the prominent scholar Gilles Kepel, they played the role “on condition that they refrain from any political or religious proselytizing.”²⁵

Indeed, exiled members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Saudi Arabia played a significant role in the reformation of the educational system and held high-level positions, with Egyptian and Syrian Muslim Brotherhood members like Muḥammad Surūr, Muḥammad al- Mubārak, and Muḥammad Quṭb teaching in Saudi universities, colleges, and educational institutions. Others played important roles in creating academic curricula through which they brought their views on modern societal, political, and economic matters.²⁶

Accordingly, in the late 1960s, Saudi Arabia witnessed the emergence of what is often referred to as *al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya*, the Islamic Awakening or the *Ṣaḥwa* which has been characterized as “a vast social movement practicing a modern form of Islamic activism.”²⁷ The *Ṣaḥwa* movement represents a hybrid ideology based on a mix of Wahhābī ideas in religion and the Muslim Brotherhood’s ideas in politics.²⁸ The Saudi Arabian government supported this ideology due to two incidents that suggested it could serve as a source of support for maintaining Āl Sa‘ūd’s authority internally and externally. The first incident was when a group of Wahhābī dissidents led by Juhaymān

²⁵ Kepel, *The War*, 171-172.

²⁶ Lacroix, *Awakening*, 42-46.

²⁷ Lacroix, *Awakening*, 38.

²⁸ Jarret Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2009), 53; Kepel, *The War*, 156-57.

al-‘Uṭaybī occupied the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979, aiming to topple the rule of Āl Sa‘ūd. After two weeks of a siege, Saudi Special Forces stormed the Mosque with the help of Pakistan’s Special Services Group and French Special Forces on 9 January 1980. Al-‘Uṭaybī was executed by the Saudi authorities in 1980.²⁹ In the same year, the success of the Iranian Revolution that established a Shī‘ite Islamic state in Iran jolted the Āl Sa‘ūd rulers, who felt threatened by Ayatollah Khomeini’s revolutionary discourse fueling the desire for political change across the region. Consequently, the *Ṣaḥwa* gained momentum and enjoyed relative freedom to increase its influence in the 1980s across a variety of educational settings.³⁰

The *Ṣaḥwa* movement was represented by two main groups or *jamā‘at*: the *Ikhwān* (the Saudi Muslim Brotherhood) and *al-Surūrīyyun* (Surūrīs) who were the dominant Islamist political group in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Saudi Arabia.³¹ It is often noted that followers of the *Surūrī* trend in the Kingdom represented a majority among *Ṣaḥwis*. Other *Ṣaḥwis* besides those aligned with these two movements followed a variety of global political movements, including for example, al- Qa‘ida and Hizb al-Tahrir.³²

Two members of the exiled Muslim Brotherhood, Muḥammad Quṭb and Muḥammad Surūr Zayn bin Nāyef al-‘Ābidīn played a central role in infusing younger Saudis with a mixture of Muslim Brotherhood political ideology and the more traditional Wahhābī beliefs that had long dominated the Kingdom. Muḥammad Quṭb, Sayyid Quṭb’s

²⁹ Commins, *The Wahhabi*, 168; Lacroix, *Awakening*, 99.

³⁰ Commins, *The Wahhabi*, 163-176; Kepel, *The War*, 178-180.

³¹ Lacroix, *Awakening*, 63.

³² Al-Rasheed, *Contesting*, 70.

brother, was known as *shaykh al-Ṣaḥwa* (the Shaykh of the *Ṣaḥwa*). After being released from Egyptian jails during Anwar Sādāt’s presidency, he moved to Saudi Arabia and taught at Umm al-Qura University in Mecca. He published and promoted his brother’s books and ideas, while mentoring the scholarship of leading Islamic theologians and thinkers, including people like Safar al-Ḥawālī, one of the prominent figures of the *Ṣaḥwa* movement. Muḥammad Quṭb attempted to reconcile the doctrines of the Muslim Brotherhood with Wahhābīsm that dominated in Saudi Arabia.³³

The Syrian Sheikh Muḥammad Surūr Zayn bin Nāyef al-‘Ābidīn—the primary subject of this thesis—also played a central role in introducing a political orientation to Wahhābī Salafīst traditional circles in Saudi Arabia. Born in a village called Tasil in Dar‘a province in southern Syria in 1938, Surūr’s family traces its lineage to Zayn al-‘Ābidīn ibn Al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. He received his primary education in local schools, then moved to study his middle and secondary levels in Dar‘ā where he studied under reputable educators in Syria at that time, before finally moving in 1958 to the capital Damascus to complete his secondary education at the National Scientific College. After obtaining his degree, he joined Damascus University where he graduated from the Faculty of Law. Surūr benefited and was greatly influenced by senior ‘*ulamā*’ in Damascus such as Sheikh Alī Ṭaṇṭawī, Muḥammad al-Mubārak, and ‘Isām al-‘Aṭṭār. His primary influence, however, was Sheikh Muṣṭafā al-Sibā‘ī, who founded the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and who taught him a Personal Status Law course at the university.³⁴

³³ Kepel, *The War*, 174-175; Lacroix, *Awakening*, 53-56; Al-Rasheed, *Contesting*, 66.

³⁴ Surūr’s bio under the title “Al-Shaykh Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn ... Sīrah wa Masirah,” Surour.net, <https://surour.net/%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9%D9%88%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B>

In the 1960s, Muḥammad Surūr became what the scholar Stephane Lacroix referred to as a “second-rank figure” in the movement at precisely the same time when the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood suffered from divisive splits between two factions.³⁵ Initially, Muḥammad Surūr was close to the Damascus wing of the Muslim Brotherhood under the secretary general ‘Isām al-‘Aṭṭār. However, he later moved more towards a more hardline faction of the Muslim Brotherhood led by Marwān Hadid, a student of Sayyid Quṭb who advocated armed struggle against the Syrian regime.³⁶ Muḥammad Surūr soon started to criticize the more moderate Damascus leadership of the group for tolerating “Ṣūfīs” within its ranks, which was one of the reasons he was forced to leave Syria in 1965.³⁷

In his first broadcasting interview, Surūr said that he had to leave Syria because political activism became difficult under the repression of the Ba‘th party, which seized power in March 1963. Surūr migrated to Saudi Arabia and worked as a teacher in the Scientific Institutes in Buraydah, Ḥā’il and the Eastern Province. In Saudi Arabia, Surūr enjoyed the opportunity to meet Muslim Brotherhood members from other countries and continued to deepen his commitment to political activism. At the time, exiled Muslim Brotherhood and leaders from the Arab and Muslim world either moved to the Kingdom

1%D8%A9/ Television interview with Muḥammad Surūr was broadcast by Al-Hiwar channel in March 2008 as part of the program called Murāja‘āt [Revisions]. The series consists of seven recorded interviews.

³⁵ Stephane Lacroix, “Understanding Stability and Dissent in the Kingdom: the Double-Edge Role of the jama‘at in Saudi politics,” in *Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights on Social, Political, Economic and Religious Change*, ed. Bernard Haykel, Thomas Hegghammer, and Stephane Lacroix (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 171.

³⁶ ‘Alī al-‘Umaym, “Mashāyikhunā wa mashāyikh al- Ṣaḥwa Nadharat fi al-Islām al-Saudi al-ḥaraki.” (Our Sheikhs and Sheikhs of Ṣaḥwa: insights on the Saudi ḥarakī Islam) *Elaph*, June 12, 2003, <http://aljsad.org/showthread.php?t=19943>.

³⁷ Lacroix, “Understanding Stability,” 171.

or made frequent visits. Sheikh Surūr, who was a teacher at the Scientific Institutes, found fertile ground for his ideological views and activities.

The religious environment of his new home in Saudi Arabia soon inspired Muḥammad Surūr to adopt the creed of Salafism, even though he never relinquished his commitment to political action. His method and “new convictions,” however, brought about long-term conflicts with Muslim Brotherhood.³⁸ By 1969, Muḥammad Surūr broke away from the organization after challenging the leadership’s orders to Muslim Brotherhood exiles to refrain from participating in Saudi political activism. During the early 1970s, Muḥammad Surūr continued his political engagement and eventually emerged as a leading focal point of a *ḥaraki* (politicized activist) group among the Saudi youth.³⁹

Surūr sought to adopt and spread a new form of Islamic activism that was closer to the Wahhābī ideological vision, emphasizing the priority of the creed over other matters. Despite the instrumental role he played in establishing a new group in the Kingdom, Surūr continued to assert that he was not a leader of the movement because he is not “an *‘alim* in the *sharī‘a* sciences,” pointing out that he does not want to “burden the reformist renewal project with the responsibility for [his] previous mistakes.”⁴⁰ As a result, Falāḥ al-‘Iṭrī, a Saudi secondary school teacher in the capital Riyadh, took on the

³⁸ Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, “Al-Waḥda Al-Islāmyyia 8: Surūryyia” [Islamic Unity 8: Sururism] *al-Sunna* 27, (1992) [1413 Hijri], 47.

³⁹ Ibid; Al-Faqīh, “Al-Sheikh Muḥammad Surūr,”; ‘Umar Al-‘izī, “Al-Ikhwān Al-Sa‘ūdiyyūn ... al-tayār al-l-dhī lam yaqul kalimath ba‘d” [The Muslim Brotherhood: the trend that does not say its word yet.] *Al-‘Asar*, July 25, 2004, <http://web.archive.org/web/20120419120500/http://alasar.ws:80/articles/view/5547>.

⁴⁰ Muḥammad Surūr, “Al-Waḥda Al-Islāmyyia 8,” 57.

leadership role of the group.⁴¹ Sa‘d al-Faqīh, a Saudi dissident in London, confirmed that Surūr was not the leader of this *jamā‘a* but that he contributed to it by way of his previous activist experience.⁴²

At the early stages of its formation in the early 1970s, the group was called *jamā‘at Falāh*, referring to the name of the cofounder Falāh al-‘Iṭrī. Surūr and most members of this group refused to give a name to their *jamā‘a*; to distinguish themselves from the *Ikhwān* (the Saudi Muslim Brotherhood), they used “*zumala’a alakharun*” (colleagues from the other side).⁴³ The group initially did not use the term Surūrīsm; it was used for the first time during the Gulf War in the early 1990s, not by the followers of the Surūrī trend, but by their opponents. Ibrāhīm al-Sikrān, who was active in the *jamā‘a*, states that the term “came from opponents of the Surūrī approach and those who were affected by it, especially the Saudi Muslim Brotherhood who saw in this trend Islamic activism’s energy wasted.”⁴⁴ Surūr himself confirmed that this name came after his disagreement with the Muslim Brotherhood.⁴⁵ However, the Jāmīs, followers of the Salafi Sheikh Muḥammad Amān al-Jāmī, who emerged during the Gulf War and advocated total obedience to the rulers in their conflict with the opposition, were responsible for

⁴¹ Mishari al-Dhayidi, “Muḥammad Surūr ghādara Sūrīyah Ba‘d Nakbah alIkhwān... Istaqra wa ‘allma fi Buraydah... Khalṭa Ḥarakiyya alIkhwān bi Thawriyya Quṭb bi Salafiyya Ibn Taymiyah,” [Muḥammad Surūr Left Syria after Brotherhood’s Catastrophe, Settled, Taught in Baridah, Mixed Brotherhood Movement with Quṭb’s Revolutionariness, Ibn-Taymiyah’s Salafism] *Al-Sharq Al-Awast*. October 28, 2004, P. 4.

<http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=9466&article=262726#.W14Rb66nHDc>.

⁴² Sa‘d al-Faqīh, “Al-Sheikh Muḥammad Surūr wa al-Surūrīyya wa ‘alāqatina biha” [Sheikh Muḥammad Surūr, Sururism, and our relationship with it,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABoQggHxIXs>.

⁴³ Ibid.; Islam Muḥammad, “Maḥātāt Al-surūrīyya (1): Kāifa Shakal al-Ikhwān Bidayyat al-tayyar al-Sa‘ūdi,” [Stages of Suruism (1): How did the Ikhwān form the beginning of the Saudi Trend,] *Ida2at*, November 27, 2016, <https://www.ida2at.com/alsrorih-plants-1-how-muslim-brotherhood-forms-the-begining-of-the-saudi-group/>

⁴⁴ al-Dhayidi. “Muḥammad Surūr,” 4.

⁴⁵ Murāja‘āt with Surūr.

disseminating this epithet during their relentless dispute with the Surūrīs during the Gulf War.⁴⁶ Probably, naming the group after a person who was not a Saudi was an attempt to link the *jamā'a* with external actors in order to delegitimize its practice and discourse.

Surūr's adherence to Salafi ideology and his political activism in the Kingdom put him in conflict with his erstwhile Muslim Brotherhood expatriates, ultimately leading to a rupture with previous mentors and colleagues. In 1973, the Muslim Brotherhood representative in Saudi Arabia informed the Saudi authorities about Surūr's political activism in the Kingdom, which ended his contract and expelled him.⁴⁷ At that point, Surūr went to Kuwait where he worked as a contributing essayist to *Al-Mujtama'*, a magazine. The magazine was published in Kuwait and was established in 1969 by the Association of Social Reform (Jam'iyat al-islāḥ al-ijtima'i), the Kuwaiti branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. In 1976, Surūr became its editor and he established the Dar al-Arqam Publishing house. Around this time, Surūr began to study Shī'ism and published his well-known book, *Then Came the Turn of Majūs* (Zoroastrians), which criticized the Iranian Revolution and warned against the threat of Shī'ite domination of the Middle East.⁴⁸ In Kuwait, he gradually began to lose his connection with the *jamā'a* in Saudi Arabia that he had originally inspired and instead "tried to establish a new movement, based in the Salimiyya neighborhood of Kuwait City, but the plan failed."⁴⁹ In 1984, Surūr moved to the United Kingdom where he established a center of Sunnah Studies and

⁴⁶ al-Dhayidi, "Muḥammad Surūr,"4.

⁴⁷ More about Surūr's expulsion from Saudi Arabia in chapter two.

⁴⁸ Muḥammad Surūr's Bio on his website,

<https://surour.net/%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9%D9%88%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9/>; Al-Faqīh, "Sheikh Muḥammad."

⁴⁹ Kepel, *The War*, 177; Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 70.

published *Sunnah* magazine and several books. In 2004, he moved to Jordan before moving finally to Qatar, where he died in 2016.⁵⁰

Towards a Typology of Salafī and Wāhhābī Diversity

By the mid-20th century, Saudi Arabia witnessed the increasing influence of “modern Salafism,” a school of thought that focuses on purifying Islam from putative “*bid*” (plural of *bid’a* “innovations”) and returning to the model of the Prophet and the *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (the righteous ancestors).⁵¹ Salafis reject *taqlīd* (“blind” following/imitation) of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence (*madhāhib*) because they believe that the later generation of the Islamic scholars introduced unlawful innovations. Instead, the Salafīs promoted *ijtihād* (independent judgement) in legal matters, relying on proof (*dalīl*) from revelation (the Qur’ān) and early tradition (Sunna) to form Islamic opinions or legal judgments.⁵²

It is essential to show the main differences between the Wāhhābīs and Salafīs because people often use the two terms interchangeably. Undoubtedly, they share a lot in common. Both emphasize the same theological orientation of purifying Islam from unlawful innovations and emphasizing the oneness of God. While the Salafis condemn *taqlīd* and promote *ijtihād*, however, the Wāhhābīs tend to accept the wisdom of past Islamic legal precedents and adopt the Hanbalī school of jurisprudence. In the 1960s, for

⁵⁰ Muḥammad Surūr’s Bio on his website.

⁵¹ Meijer, “Introduction,” 9; Stéphane Lacroix, “Between Revolution and Apoliticism: Nasir al-Din al-Albani and his Impact on the Shaping of Contemporary Salafism,” in *Global Salafism: Islam’s new religious movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 58–80; Bernard Haykel, “On the Nature of Salafī Thought and action Appendix al-Qaeda’s Creed and Path,” in *Global Salafism: Islam’s new religious movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 42-43.

⁵² Haykel, “On the Nature,” 42-45.

example, Shaykh Muḥammad Nāsīr al-Dīn al-Albānī (1914-1999), a Syrian scholar of Albanian origin, taught at the University of Medina, but he had to leave after he criticized views against Wahhabism for upholding Hanbali *madhab* and thus engaging in *taqlīd*.⁵³ His followers, who constitute the mainstream of Salafis, reject any form of engagement in political life and eschew participation in political parties. They view the political parties and movements as innovative, corruptive, and divisive of the belief of *umma*. Indeed, Shaykh al-Albānī and his followers condemn Islamist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood as sources of division and political deviations, accusing it of paying attention to politics over *‘ilm* (religious knowledge).⁵⁴

In the wake of the first Gulf War (1990), a new Salafī offshoot emerged in the form of a current known as the “Jamīs,” whose followers increasingly emphasized unyielding support for the Saudi royal family. Drawing their ideological and doctrinal thoughts from the teachings of Shaykh al-Albānī, the Jamīs or Madkhalīs (in reference to Shaykh Muḥammad Amān al-Jāmī and Shaykh Rabī‘ b. Hādī al-Madkhalī, two leading figures) arose as a response to the *Ṣaḥwa*, a politicized Salafī movement that had opposed the Saudi government’s decision to host American troops during the Gulf War. This emerging Salafī group are referred to as loyalist Salafīs, and at least in political matters, are aligned more with the Wahhābīs than other Salafīs. The Jāmīs share with other Salafīs a theological emphasis on eliminating what they regard as illegitimate religious

⁵³ Lacroix, “Between Revolution,” 65-67; Haykel, “On the Nature,” 42-45.

⁵⁴ Meijer, “Introduction,” 9; Haykel, “On the Nature,” 47; Lacroix, “Between Revolution,” 69.

“innovations,” rejecting *taqlīd*, and promoting *ijtihād*, but they disagreed with others on matters of political quietism.⁵⁵

At the same time, other fissures opened up between mainstream Salafīs and dissident *jihādī* Salafī groups who advocated violence against what they saw as corrupt political regimes in the Muslim world and called for the re-establishment of the Islamic caliphate. Unlike mainstream Salafis, *takfīr* (excommunication) and *shirk* (associating partners with Allāh) constitute the core principles of the creed of *jihādī*-Salafi groups such as al-Qa‘ida. Like other Islamist movements, *jihādī*-Salafist groups have been profoundly inspired by the ideas of Sayyid Quṭb, especially the principles of *jahiliyya* (age of ignorance; the pre-Islamic society) and *ḥakimiyya* (sovereignty/governance of God). Academic researchers trace the emergence of the *jihādī* trend within Salafism to the 1980s war in Afghanistan when thousands of Muslims engaged in the Afghan war against the Soviet Union.⁵⁶

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, where most of the attackers were from Saudi Arabia, Saudi officials have sought to eliminate perceptions that the attacks are connected with their adherence to Wahhābīsm by defecting blame to the imported ideologies of political Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood. More recently, in his ambitious effort to improve the country’s image, the powerful Crown Prince, Muhammad bin Salman, said in an interview with *Time* magazine that Surūrīs, who took their inspiration from Muhammad Surūr, are “ahead a little bit within the

⁵⁵ Haykel, “On the Nature,” 49; Lacroix, “Between Revolution”, 76.

⁵⁶ Haykel, “On the Nature,” 48; Meijer, “introduction,” 24-25; Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement”, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 01 May 2006, 225.

Muslim Brotherhood, viewing things more extremely in the Middle East.” Despite their emphasis on non-violent political engagement, the Crown Prince added, “but in our law they are criminals and whenever we have enough evidence against any one of them, they will face a court.”⁵⁷ With this statement, Ibn Salman is trying to re-direct blame for terrorism, violence, and extremism away from Wahhābīsm—the usual culprit identified in international discourses—and toward *Surūrī* ideology instead.

Historiography

In the aftermath of the 1900 Gulf War, a body of literature emerged to discuss Islamist criticism of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for inviting foreign forces on its soil. Islamist dissent has been examined by several works that explore its origins, offer detailed biographies of prominent Saudi figures, record their discourses, and note their political activities in opposition to the Saudi government, as we shall discuss below. However, the scholarship about the ideology of the *Ṣaḥwa* movement and the figures who influenced it is sparse. Muḥammad Surūr’s influence on the *Ṣaḥwa* and his role in founding the *Surūrī* group which dominated the social and political scene in Saudi Arabia for almost 20 years has received little attention from researchers.⁵⁸

In *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent*, for example, Mamoun Fandy surveys the ideas and political ideologies of the six most important Islamist Saudi dissident

⁵⁷ Muhammad Ibn Salman, “Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Talks to TIME About the Middle East, Saudi Arabia’s Plans and President Trump,” *Time*, April 6, 2018, <http://time.com/5228006/mohammed-bin-salman-interview-transcript-full/>.

⁵⁸ There are some exceptions who do briefly examine Surur: Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 69-70; Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a new Generation*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 73-77; Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West*, trans. Pascale Ghazaleh (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 176-177.

leaders in the 1990s, who mostly participated in non-violent political opposition. He provides a rich empirical base, documenting the vast literature produced by the prominent figures (lectures and writings) and their use of the latest technologies: videos, cassettes, and the Internet. Fandy discusses two key figures in the *Ṣaḥwa* movement usually described as Surūris, Salmān al-‘Awda and Safar al-Ḥawālī, who expressed their opposition to the Saudi regime’s alliance with the West in many sermons during the Gulf War.⁵⁹ His account also includes the dissidents in exile, Sa‘d al al-Faqīh and Muḥammad al-Mas‘ari, who added a “cyberspace” aspect to classic exile politics in London, and the Shī‘ite leader Sheikh Ḥasan al-Saffar.⁶⁰ He also discusses the role of Osama bin Laden, who adopted a more violent approach in sponsoring terrorist acts against Americans in Saudi Arabia, Uganda, and Tanzania.⁶¹ In his book, Fandy adopts a biographical approach that focuses on analyzing their ideas of each Islamist figure rather than indicating the historical factors or influences that led to the rise of those Islamist ideas and leaders in the first place.

Other scholars have explained the rise of Islamist political opposition against the Saudi monarchy in the 1990s in terms of an amalgam of domestic and foreign factors. On the domestic level, one factor that most scholars emphasize is the slide of oil prices, which affected living standards and led to cuts in all welfare programs for Saudi Arabian citizens, providing an opening to Islamist opponents of the state. Another factor included the social incongruities of the Kingdom and, according to the political scientist Hrair Dekmejian, “the impact of modernization and the spread of Western cultural

⁵⁹ Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent* (Basing-stoke: Macmillan, 1999), 61-113.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 115-176, 195-228.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 177-194.

influences.”⁶² The final reasons on the domestic level were the growth in the graduates from Islamic universities who became the backbone of the religious resurgence and the role of charismatic religious figures like Safar al-Ḥawālī and Salmān al-‘Awda, key figures in the *Sahwa* movement.⁶³ On the international front, in the 1980s, the Saudi kingdom became vulnerable to the threat of Iran’s ambitions to become the leader of the Islamic world, Saddam Hussein’s expansionist ventures, and the presence of the U.S troops in Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf region, thereby contributing to the eruption of political dissent.⁶⁴

Most Arabic sources funded by the Saudi government or members of royal family portray the *Surūrī jamā‘a* and other *Sahwi jamā‘at* as tools of foreign religious influence, describing them as inflexible groups that used Islam to achieve their political and ideological aspirations or an Islamist seizure of power in the Kingdom.⁶⁵ They accuse Surūr of laying the groundwork for violent *jihādī* groups like al-Qa‘ida, arguing that he was one of the people who introduced the concept of *ḥakimiyya*, which leads to *takfīr* (excommunication) of all the regimes in the Arab world.⁶⁶

Recently, several scholars have begun to study the origins of Islamic opposition to the Saudi Kingdom going back to the early days in the 1950s and 1960s, looking for the roots of Islamic activism and identifying sources of the *Ṣahwa* movement’s political

⁶² Hrair R. Dekmejian, “The Rise of Political Islamism in Saudi Arabia,” *Middle East Journal* 48, no. 4 (1994), 629.

⁶³ Dekmejian, “The Rise,” 629; Joshua Teitelbaum, *Holier than Thou: Saudi Arabia’s Islamic Opposition*, Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near Eastern Policy, 2000), 5-9; Fandy, *Saudi Arabia*, 61-113

⁶⁴ Dekmejian, “The Rise,” 629; Teitelbaum, *Holier*, 5-9

⁶⁵ ‘Ali Sa‘d al-Musa, “Ikhwān al-Dakhl: Ghiṭa’ al-Taḥwila” [Ikhwān the Interior: cover of the shunt,] *al-Watan Online*, 2017-06-17, <http://alwatan.com.sa/Articles/Detail.aspx?ArticleID=34477>.

⁶⁶ ‘Abd Allah bin Bjad, “Al- Surūryia... Al-Ḥakimiyya Al-Qutbiyya Asas!,” (Surūrism... Qutbist Ḥakimiyya Basis!.) *Middle East Online*, August 27, 2013, <https://www.middle-east-online.com>.

orientation. In his book, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West*, Gilles Kepel reflects on Saudi official discourse, arguing that *jihādi* groups emerged from the *Ṣaḥwa* movement, which in turn was influenced by the ideology of Muslim Brotherhood expatriates in Saudi Arabia. He writes that “the phenomenon of Osama bin Laden and his associates cannot be understood outside this hybrid tradition. It is the offspring—monstrous, natural, legitimate, depending on one’s point of view—of the marriage between local Wahhabism and international Islamist activism, facilitated at the highest echelons by the complicit meditation of the United States and Saudi Arabia.”⁶⁷ While he indicates that “the [Egyptian and Syrian] Muslim Brotherhood obeyed the prohibition on proselytizing to Saudi subjects,” later, he seems to suggest the opposite, attributing the emergence of the Islamist political tendency and terrorism to the influence of Muslim Brotherhood members from Egypt and Syria.⁶⁸ He argues that this would not have happened without the freedom to operate granted by the Saudi government.⁶⁹ To support his argument, Kepel notes that Muḥammad Qutb supervised the dissertation of Safar al-Ḥawālī, a prominent figure in the *Ṣaḥwa* movement, that focused on the ills of secularism. Muḥammad Surūr also taught Salmān al-‘Awda as a teenager at the Scientific Institution in Buraydah.⁷⁰ However, these two examples highlighted by Kepel alone do not provide strong evidence for the radicalization of the Saudi Arabian population by the Muslim Brotherhood; arguably, Wahhābī theology has played a much larger role with its focus on *jihād* and *takfīr*.

⁶⁷ Kepel, *The War*, 156-157.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 152- 196.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 176-77.

Meanwhile, in her landmark work, *Contesting the Saudi State*, Madawi al-Rasheed also emphasizes the influence of external ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood on the Ṣaḥwīs. She argues that the Sahwis “rediscovered the revolutionary potential of Wahhabi religio-political discourse and articulated it in a modern language accessible to all.”⁷¹ In his book, *Awakening Islam*, Stéphane Lacroix provides a similar argument with an important qualification, contending that “although the Sahwa was at first partly the product of foreign influences, it thus acquired an endogenous character by producing its own identity and its own organizations.”⁷² In his analysis, Lacroix discusses the influence of the exiled members of the Muslim Brotherhood from Egypt and Syria, as well as the former member of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Shaykh Muḥammad, Surūr, on the cohort of Saudi activists.

Stéphane Lacroix’s book is one of the few accounts that examine the rise of Surūrism and its main figures. He discusses the *jamā’a* in the context of what is called *al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islamiyya*, the primary Islamist social trend that emerged in the 1960s as a combination of the Wahhābī creed and imported political ideas from the Muslim Brotherhood. He indicates that the *Ṣaḥwa* movement was represented by two main *jamā’at*: the *Ikhwān* (the Muslim Brotherhood) and *al-Surūriyyun* (Surūrīs) who was the dominant Islamist.⁷³ In the 1990s, the *Ṣaḥwa* trend was the only political group that opposed the Saudi Arabian regime.

⁷¹ Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, 67.

⁷² Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 73.

⁷³ Ibid, 63

The political thought of the Wahhābīs after the establishment of the Saudi Arabian Kingdom has been studied by several researchers recently. There is an agreement in this body of literature that political quietism permeated the discourse of the Wahhābī *'ulamā'*: the *'ulamā'* endorsed interpretations that promoted consent and obedience to the rulers. Peaceful or violent rebellion is forbidden, and the only political activity that the Wahhābī *'ulamā'* may practice is providing advice to the ruler in secrecy.⁷⁴ The Wahhābī political discourse and behavior continued unchallenged until the emergence of *Ṣaḥwā* movement in the 1970s. The rise of a new generation of *'ulamā'*, the shaykhs of the *Ṣaḥwā*, not only undermined the political authority of the Saudi Arabian Kingdom, but also challenged the discourse of the traditional Wahhābī *'ulamā'*.⁷⁵ Madawi al-Rasheed states that they “were uncomfortable with the religio-political aspect” of traditional Wahhābī tradition.⁷⁶

By the 1980s, the *Ṣaḥwī 'ulamā'* in Saudi Arabia specifically began to criticize the political discourse of the traditional Wahhābī *'ulamā'* for focusing on the ritual aspects of religion and ignoring politics. The Surūrīs criticized the *'ulamā'* for a lack of understanding of reality (*fiqh al-wāqī'*). The critique was identified by Stéphane Lacroix, who clarifies the meaning of the principle of *fiqh al-wāqī'* and how the Surūrīs used it to attack the *'ulamā'*. He explains the criticism as resulting from the competition between the traditional Wahhābī circle and the *Ṣaḥwī 'ulamā'*: the young *'ulamā'* did not have the access to the high positions in the religious apparatus such as the Senior *'ulamā'* Council

⁷⁴ Al-Rasheed, *Contesting*, 48; Meijer, “Introduction,” 17.

⁷⁵ Commins, *The Wahhabi*, 155-204; Al-Rasheed, *Contesting*, 65.

⁷⁶ Al-Rasheed, *Contesting*, 65.

and General Office for the Management of the Scientific Research, Fatwas, Preaching, and Guidance.⁷⁷

In the 1990s, *fiqh al-wāqi‘* became one of the debatable points between the Surūr and other Ṣaḥwīs on one side and the Jāmīs, a new group of Salafīs, on the other side. Jāmīs launched a blistering critique against Surūrīs and Ṣaḥwīs for misusing the principle. In turn, Surūr and others responded to their attacks, which led to a heated debate between them. However, there is little follow up in existing literature about the impact of such debates and their recriminations.

⁷⁷ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 144-147.

Chapter 2

Toward a New Synthesis in Saudi Arabia

Muhammad Surūr's thought went through many stages before reaching its distinctive synthesis: blending the political awareness of the Muslim Brotherhood with the religious thought of the Wahhabis and creating an influential Islamic trend in Saudi Arabia and the Muslim world. This chapter examines the development of Surūr's thought and its ideological framework. His outlook on Islam was shaped primarily by teachers who belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood, and early experiences in the ranks of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood shaped his political awareness and commitment to organization and planning. The rise of national secular parties and the political polarization of the 1950s also comprised decisive factors in forming his ideological convictions. Examining the early period of Surūr's life is crucial to understanding his subsequent career, as it shaped his Islamic path, political awareness and political and organizational experience.

Furthermore, the chapter details the fine-grained distinctions between the Muslim Brotherhood, which is the most popular trend in political Islam, and political Salafists. Although both groups are categorized as Islamists, pursue the same goals, and have considerable interactions, they nevertheless diverge in terms of theology and praxis. This chapter, therefore, explains some of the most important theological and ideological distinctions between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists. Particularly, Surūr criticized the Muslim Brotherhood's focus on politics at the expense of religious

knowledge (*ilm*), thus spurning centralization and a hierarchic organizational structure for his group.

To shed light on his early life and ideological shifts, we will examine Surūr’s writings in his magazine *al-Sunnah*, where he penned a series of articles talking about his experiences in the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood ranks, his embrace of Salafi ideology, and his activism in Saudi Arabia. “Murāja‘āt,” (Revisions), a series of seven recorded interviews with Surūr on Al-Hiwar channel, also offers further details of various aspects of his journey.

Surūr’s Ikhwani Background

As a youth, Surūr did not receive an intensive religious legal education. According to his own recollections, few educated people and experts in *ilm al-shar‘i* (religious legal knowledge) worked in his home region of the Ḥawrān area.⁷⁸ Thus his Islamic education came mainly from lay teachers, many of whom were members of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. Most of his teachers did not originate from the Ḥawrān area, but from urban centers like Damascus or other nations like Palestine and Jordan. Shaykh Muḥammad Luṭfī al- Ṣabbāgh, a linguist, *faqīh* (an Islamic jurist), educator and an activist in the Muslim Brotherhood from Damascus, was one of Surūr’s teachers in middle school and an important early influence. In middle school, Surūr accompanied his teacher on trips to the towns and villages of Ḥawrān to deliver lectures and sermons.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Murāja‘āt with Surūr; Muḥammad Surūr, “Al-Waḥda Al- al-Islāmiyya (8),” 46.

⁷⁹ Murāja‘āt; For Al-Sabbagh life) Ayyman Dhu Al-Ghina, “Fī Raḥīl al-‘alāmah al-Shaykh Muḥammad b. Luṭfī al- Ṣabbāgh,” *alukah.net*. <https://www.alukah.net/culture/0/124370/>.

In his youth, Surūr witnessed the growth of Arab and Syrian nationalist feelings among the Arab population, especially in a rural area like Ḥawrān; political events and disputes played a significant role in forming his ideological awareness. From independence through the late 1960s, Syrian politics were marked by upheaval and repeated military coups. Political disputes and ideological conflicts between different players, including the Ba‘th Party, Nasserites, Muslim Brotherhood, and Syrian Social Nationalist Party, dominated post-independence Syria. According to Surūr, student demonstrations proved instrumental in bringing down the military rulers in the 1950s, and these events often echoed across outlying areas of the country including Ḥawrān. Surūr stated that school students actively participated in the country’s political life and had a unique political consciousness. The conflicts of the time left a lasting imprint on Surūr, as he recounted that the heated partisan conflicts among students belonging to the Ba‘th Party, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Social Syrian Nationalist Party sometimes precipitated the suspension of study in schools in Ḥawrān for days at that time.⁸⁰

In 1953, at the age of fifteen, Surūr joined the Muslim Brotherhood, later explaining that the Muslim Brotherhood was “the only group that practices the *da‘wa* for God” in his area: “not associating with this group means the correlation with apostate *jāhiliyya* parties because the young people at that period were very interested in the politics, and they felt that partisan affiliation is necessary.”⁸¹ Young Surūr found a sanctuary in the Muslim Brotherhood from what he viewed as deviant thoughts of the nationalist parties and the corrupted environment of students.

⁸⁰ Murāja‘āt with Surūr.

⁸¹ Muḥammad Surūr, “Al-Waḥda Al- al-Islāmiyya (8),” 47.

When Surūr moved to Damascus in 1958 to pursue advanced studies, he had the opportunity to work under the mentorship of some of the Muslim Brotherhood's most prominent leaders in Syria. He was heavily influenced by his professor Muṣṭafā al-Sibā'ī. Al-Sibā'ī (1915-1964), the founder and general guide (*al-Murāqb al-`ām*) of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, was also the founder and dean of the college of Sharī'a in Damascus who taught Surūr a personal status law course at the university. Surūr was keen to attend his lectures, sermons, and political campaigns, in the process becoming a strong advocate of Shaykh al-Sibā'ī's ideas, especially the views he expressed in *The Socialism of Islam* that shocked even some Muslim Brotherhood members as too progressive.⁸² In his work, Al-Sibā'ī argued that with its social aspects, Islam teaches a unique type of socialism: it shares with socialism the same goals and emphasizes basic human rights: life, freedom, knowledge, dignity, and ownership.⁸³ During this period, Surūr also learned about Salafi ideas. He was very close to the Damascus camp of the Muslim Brotherhood, among which included rising figures such as Zuhyr al-Shawīsh, Muḥammad Surūr, and Muḥammad al-`Abdeh who were influenced by the emergence of a more doctrinal and literalist version of Islam.⁸⁴

Surūr's Adoption of Salafism and Break from the Muslim Brotherhood

Surūr left Syria in 1965 as political activism became difficult under the repression of the Ba'ṯh party, which seized power in March 1963; he decamped to Saudi Arabia and

⁸² Muḥammad Surūr, "al-Waḥda al-Islāmiyya (10): rudūd," *al-Sunnah* No. 30 (Shawal, 1413 Hijri), 75.

⁸³ Raphael Lefevre, *Ashes of Hama: Muslim Brotherhood in Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 33-34; Alison Pargeter, *The Muslim Brotherhood: From Opposition to Power* (London: Saqi Books, 2013), 78.

⁸⁴ Lefevre, *Ashes of Hama*, 86.

commenced work as a teacher in the Scientific Institutes in Buraydah and Ḥā'il and the Eastern Province.⁸⁵ Upon his arrival in Saudi Arabia in 1965, Surūr continued his political engagement within the Muslim Brotherhood's ranks. We do not know exactly the nature of Surūr's religious identity during this early period. He was very far from being Ṣūfī (a Muslim mystic and ascetic) and never adopted a Ṣūfī order. He denied accusations that he was an Ash'arī, (Asharite), or a follower of Ash'ariyyah, an Islamic theological school that uses reason in theological dispute on divine attributes and nature of the Qur'ān, instead professing his ignorance of such creeds.⁸⁶

We do know that Surūr's religious outlook gradually shifted toward Salafism in Saudi Arabia. This adoption proved a turning point in the life of Muḥammad Surūr, as it propelled him toward his unique theological and political synthesis. Unlike many expatriates, the young teacher was impressed by the Saudi lifestyle at the time, especially by its simplicity. He also praised the religious establishment's control of the country social life and enforcement of strict observance of Islamic traditions on a daily basis, such as closing businesses during working hours to facilitate prayers at mosques.⁸⁷ Unlike many other Muslim Brotherhood refugees, Sheikh Surūr also exuded an openness to influence and being influenced by the society around him. At the time of his arrival, he began teaching at the Scientific Institutions, a six-year religious school that prepares Saudi students for college founded in 1950 by the muftī Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Ibrahim ibn Abd al-Latif Al-Shaykh (1890– 1969). According to its official websites, the Scientific Institution set up “its curriculum based on the correct creed and *manhaj* of al-

⁸⁵ Murāja'āt with Surūr.

⁸⁶ Murāja'āt with Surūr.

⁸⁷ Murāja'āt.

salaf al-ṣāliḥ (methodology of the righteous ancestors) and *i'tidāl* (moderation) without *ghulw* (exaggeration) and *jafā'* (harshness).”⁸⁸ Surūr thus joined the mainstream of the Saudi Salafī-cum-Wahhābī ideological religious system.

Surūr found inspiration from the religious scientific tendency of the Salafī school and broader religious and scientific trends among the students of these Islamic educational institutions. Regretfully, he noted the absence of such a tendency among the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria “because of their preoccupation with politics.”⁸⁹ The Salafī ideology appealed to him because of its emphasis on the superiority of *‘ilm* (religious knowledge); students in these schools showed an extraordinary interest in studying the religious sciences such as Ḥadīth, Qur’ānic exegesis, theology, and *fiqh*. Additionally, Surūr was attracted by the creed of Salafiyya that emphasized the purity of belief from *bid’* (religious innovations) and from practices that deviate from the teachings of the Prophet and his companions, such as veneration of saints. Unlike many other Muslims, the Salafīs reject *taqlīd* (the following of the four canonical law schools) and emphasize *ijtihād* (individual interpretation.) Instead, they rely on *dalīl* (proof from the Qur’ān, Sunna of the Prophet and the consensus of the companions) as the basis of their opinion.⁹⁰ Surūr believed that this ideology, which claims a return to the *‘aqīda* (creed) and *manhaj* (Islamic method) of the *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (pious ancestors), provided him with a more authentic model of belief and social action.⁹¹

⁸⁸ <https://units.imamu.edu.sa/shis/Kamees-inst/profile/Pages/default.aspx>.

⁸⁹ Murāja‘āt.

⁹⁰ Haykel, “On the Nature,” 36-40.

⁹¹ Ibid.,

After working with the Muslim Brotherhood for more than ten years, Surūr decided to break away and began to criticize the movement, even as he still bore the traces and influence of his previous association. After spending a few years in Saudi Arabia and under the influence of the Saudi religious circle, Surūr appreciated that “the *da‘wa* must be through the creed and methodology of *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (pious ancestors).” However, many of his older Muslim Brotherhood compatriots did not share such an interest. He affirmed that “I tried to reconcile between my new convictions and my status within this group. But this is hard to achieve.”⁹² Surūr asserted that he could not compromise on doctrinal errors of the Muslim Brotherhood and tirelessly tried to correct false beliefs among its members.

On the doctrinal level, Surūr criticized issues of theological and jurisprudence of the Muslim Brotherhood, condemning them for not adopting the Salafī creed (*‘aqīda*) and methodology (*manhaj*).⁹³ He disdained the organization for being deviant and shallow regarding religious knowledge and for its focus on politics at the expense of religious knowledge (*‘ilm*) and purifying the creed (*‘aqīda*). Surūr considered the purification and correction of the creed of greater importance than a focus on politics.

Surūr’s critiques of the Muslim Brotherhood not only emanated from doctrinal, methodological, or even political concerns, but also from disagreements on strategic actions. He criticized the recruitment strategy of the Muslim Brotherhood for accepting members regardless of their doctrinal background. Surūr also said he was fed up with the “policy of gathering,” by which he meant that the movement combined many contrasting

⁹² Muḥammad Surūr, “al-Waḥda al- Islāmiyya (8),” 47.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 47.

elements such as Šūfīs, Ash‘arīs, and Salafīs in one group. The policy had been developed by al-Bannā who believed that Muslims should abandon their divisions and wrote “we cooperate upon what we agree, and we excuse one another in what is disagreed upon.”⁹⁴ For Surūr, gathering Muslims around a noble political aim— establishment of an Islamic state—without considering the correctness of the creed amounted to a colossal mistake.

Surūr also condemned the multi-faceted nature of the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Bannā perceived Islam as a “comprehensive system” that can apply in any political context. He transformed his vision of Islam to his movement and defined it as “a Salafi call, a Sunni way, a Sufi truth, a political organization, an athletic group, an intellectual and scientific association, an economic company, and a social idea.”⁹⁵ Surūr declared that “such a mixture cannot be a basis for the unity of Islamic action. On the contrary, it leads only to rivalry and division because Šūfiism is an anomaly and deviation from the approach of the truth (*manhaj al-Haq.*)”⁹⁶

Additionally, he criticized the centralization and a hierarchic organizational structure of the group. Surūr criticized rights that the Muslim Brotherhood conferred upon the leader of the movement that in practice made him an absolute ruler. According to the Muslim Brotherhood, obedience to the people who are in charge is part of obedience to God and the Prophet. The leader of the association thus enjoyed the same rights as the Khalifa of the Muslims, including listening and obedience and taking *bay‘ah*

⁹⁴ Ibid., 48.

⁹⁵ Khalil al-Anani, “The Power of the Jama‘a: The Role of Hasan Al-Banna in Constructing the Muslim Brotherhood’s Collective Identity,” *Sociology of Islam* 1 (2013), 61-62.

⁹⁶ Muḥammad Surūr, “al-Waḥda al- Islāmiyya (8),” P. 56.

(allegiance). Surūr lamented that these rights make the Brotherhood leader “a tyrannical dictator.”⁹⁷

Surūr mocked the Muslim Brotherhood leaders, saying they practiced absolute rule within the group while being fascinated by democracy. Surūr felt frustrated by the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood for gathering people around the political goal of establishing an Islamic state, then rejecting offers to take high positions in the government on the pretext of illegitimate way. After ten years in the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood, he found out that “the goals and objectives they talked about were a mirage because they missed a historic opportunity to reach power because the leaders were fascinated by democracy until others from the enemies of God came and took advantage of the opportunity.”⁹⁸

Furthermore, Surūr condemned the stance of the Muslim Brotherhood for its support of the Iranian revolution in 1979 and for siding with the Iranians in the Iraq-Iran War. He described its attitude as “emotional, devoid of reading the events and its result.” He added that none of the Islamists who welcomed the Iranian revolution ever read about the beliefs of Shī‘ites “Rāfiḍah” (rejectors), the term Surūr and many others applied to Shī‘ites because they do not recognize the first three Khalifs as the legitimate successors of Prophet Muhammad and hold Ali as to be the first successor.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Ibid., 50.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 52.

⁹⁹ ‘Abd Allāh al-Gharīb [pseudonym of Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn], Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, *Wa-jā‘a dawr al-Majūs: al-ab‘ād al-tārīkhīyya wa al-‘Aqā‘idīyya wa-al-siyāsīyya lil-thawrah al-Irānīyya* [Then Came the Turn of Majūs: the historical, doctrinal, and political dimensions of Iranian Revolution], tenth edition, 9-10. available on his Website, www.surour.net. first published in Cairo by Dar al-Ajyal Li-ltiba‘a (1402 H.) [1981].

Finally, Surūr bitterly condemned the Syrian Muslim brotherhood after the Ḥamāh massacre in February 1982 for entering into the National Alliance for Liberation of Syria along with the dissident Ba‘th faction led by notable archrivals of the Hafiz al-Assad regime, Amīn al- Ḥafiz and Michel ‘Aflaq, as well as the Arab Socialist Party of Akram al-Ḥawrānī and other secular groups in exile. The brotherhood’s move put them in opposition to the Fighting Vanguard, a splinter Islamist armed group which fought against the regime.¹⁰⁰ Surūr deemed the coalition of the Muslim Brotherhood with “the infidel apostate parties” that did not share the same goals of implementing the *Sharī‘a* illegitimate. He argued that although the leaders of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood who held the agreement sought to find interpretations from *sīrah* (biography of Prophet Muḥammad) and *fiqh* to support their efforts, there is no proof justifying such a coalition. He added that in the past, there had been many efforts to work and cooperate with secularists; however, the previous attempts had been shown to fail.¹⁰¹ He expressed surprise over the seeming contradiction that the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood would “fight against a wing of the Ba‘th Party and ally with another wing of Ba‘th Party.” The Syrian exile also expressed astonishment that the Brotherhood could achieve a coalition and work with figures such as Michel ‘Aflaq who, according to Surūr, is one of many “Abū Jahl of this era.”¹⁰² With this statement, Surūr is comparing Michel ‘Aflaq, the founder of the Ba‘th Party that seized power in 1963 in Syria and subjected the Muslim Brotherhood

¹⁰⁰Raphael Lefevre, *Ashes of Hama*, 138-139, 177.

¹⁰¹ Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, “Munāqishat Shubuhāt al-Mutahaālifiyyin ma‘ al-‘Almāniyyin wa al-Murtadiyyin” [Discussion the Misconceptions of those who allied with the Secularist and Apostates] *al-Sunnah* 5 (1411 H.) (August 1990): 94.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 94-95.

to ruthless repression, with Abū Jahl, one of the greatest persecutors of the early Muslims in Mecca.

This marked rupture with the Muslim Brotherhood over doctrinal and political differences also likely stemmed, at least in part, from Surūr’s exposure to and interaction with various Saudi subjects. Despite their role in the modernization process in Saudi Arabia, the Saudi government prohibited expatriate Muslim Brotherhood members from political and religious proselytization to Saudis. This restriction was clearly aimed at preventing any attempt to challenge the religious domination of the Wahhabi establishment and forestalling friction or confrontation between the Muslim Brotherhood and local religious leaders. Generally, Muslim Brotherhood members in the Kingdom obeyed the orders that required them to refrain from any political activities with Saudi subjects. However, the ambitious Surūr challenged these strictures and met with Saudis, who were influenced by his political ideas and became the backbone of the *Ṣahwa*. Surūr’s activities caused, in his own words, “a heated war” with the *Ikhwān* (the Muslim Brotherhood), which became the main reason for leaving the group, as we shall see below.¹⁰³

Surūr’s criticism of the Muslim Brotherhood and adaptation of *Salafiyya* led to animosity with other Muslim Brotherhood expatriates, a break which had an enduring and painful personal consequences. According to Surūr, after leaving the Muslim Brotherhood, he was subjected to “harassment and hostility” by the former group, stating “I do not think that anyone in the Muslim world was wronged by his brothers and former

¹⁰³ Murāja‘āt.

companions as much as I was.”¹⁰⁴ According to Surūr, the representative of the Muslim Brotherhood in Saudi Arabia and the principle mediator between that group and the Saudi government, Mannā‘ al-Qattān, played the decisive role in his ultimate expulsion from the nation. Al-Qattān informed the Saudi authorities about Surūr’s activities, asking them to end his contract and then to deport him from the kingdom. Surūr recounted that al-Qattān told him that “your presence in this country harms us.”¹⁰⁵

Establishing His Own Path and Movement

After separating from the Muslim Brotherhood, Surūr decided to start his own distinct group and theological orientation. Surūr created a new synthesis which combined a vigorous commitment to the Salafī creed with the Muslim Brotherhood’s political ambition of seizing power and enforcing *Sharī‘a* through state control. His activism took place within Salafī circles and was directed toward gaining a foothold within it. Furthermore, he adopted a new set of epistemological assumptions that defined his future activism. Henceforth, Surūr still obviously reflected his early career in the Muslim Brotherhood in some respects, but he also became decisively Salafī in others. During this period, Surūr established his hybrid ideology as an influential trend in Saudi Arabia during the 1980s and 1990s.

Since his thought played a crucial role in the development of the eponymous *Surūrī* group and the broader Ṣaḥwa movement in general, it is important to discuss his philosophy. The cornerstone of Surūr’s new guiding assumptions for Islamic activism is

¹⁰⁴ Muḥammad Surūr, “al-Waḥda al- Islāmiyya (8)”, 55.

¹⁰⁵ Murāja‘āt.

adherence to the *‘aqīda* and *manhaj* of the *al-salaf al-ṣalīh*, by which he meant understanding and practicing Islam in the same way of the first three generations of pious Muslims.¹⁰⁶ A central feature of his religious thought is his affirmation that Islam comprises a total system, with politics component a part of this system, and cannot be ignored. He wrote that “calling for the implementation of the Islamic *Sharī‘a* is one of the most important issues and problems of this time. The conditions of Muslims will not settle unless they submit to God’s orders in every aspect in their life. The acceptance of the *jāhili* laws is one of the nullifications of Islam.”¹⁰⁷ He asserted that the call for implementation of *Sharī‘a* should be consistent with the creed of the *al-salaf al-ṣalīh*.¹⁰⁸

Despite the influence of his ideas, Surūr exhibited a reticence to play the role of the leader of the new group because he did not see himself as “*‘ālim mujtahid*” (independent jurist: one who can formulate an independent decision on legal and theological matters), and because he did not want to “burden the reformist renewal project with the responsibility for [his] previous mistakes.” Additionally, he believed that the competition for leadership is one of the most serious problems facing the Islamic *umma*: the preacher should only provide his experiences and talents and keep away from the reins.”¹⁰⁹ He also refused to give the new entity a name, because such a moniker would inevitably lead toward partisan fanaticism (*ta‘aṣṣub*), which becomes the main obstacle to Islamic unity.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Muḥammad Surūr, “al-Waḥda al- Islāmiyya (8),” 57.

¹⁰⁷ Muḥammad Surūr, “al-Waḥda al- Islāmiyya (9), rudūd,” *al-Sunnah* 29 (1413) 96.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁰⁹ Muḥammad Surūr, “al-Waḥda al- Islāmiyya (8),” 57.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

Surūr is known for his influence in the broader *Ṣaḥwa* movement that was colored by his synthetic ideology in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Through his communications and meeting with local people, Surūr observed that the Islamic current among the Saudis lacked “the comprehensive sense that makes the Muslim have an Islamic impression over everything.”¹¹¹ In other words, he recognized the lack of political activism among religious circles in Saudi Arabia, which were dominated by the Salafis and Wahhabis. Infusing politics within the Wahhābī and Salafī lines was not an easy task, given the purist and non-political stance of most of Wahhabis and Salafī strains, which emphasize that politics is the main source of division within the Islamic community. It is important to note that these two groups are in agreement on various matters, including eschewing politics and criticizing Islamists movement for not adopting the creed and *manhaj* of the *Salaf*. Surūr was aware that the domination of the Wahhābī tradition was unassailable in his host country. By adopting a Salafī path, he was able to penetrate the conservative community and promote his emphasis on political orientation.

As a teacher in the Scientific Institutions, Surūr inspired his students, some of whom became the leaders of the *Ṣaḥwa* movement. Shaykh Salmān al-‘Awda, a key figure of the *Ṣaḥwa*, for example, was one of his students in the Scientific Institution in Burayda.¹¹² Certainly, Dr. al-‘Awda was influenced directly or indirectly by Surūr’s synthesis. Surūr’s meeting with the Saudi subjects was also an important factor in spreading the *Ṣaḥwa* movement. In these gatherings, Saudis would be introduced to the concept of *al-ḥakimiyya* (rule of God, sovereignty), the fundamental demand of the

¹¹¹ Murāja‘āt.

¹¹² Salmān al-‘Awda recorded a video mourning Shaykh Surūr.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MaqP3JoYVME>.

Muslim Brotherhood. Furthermore, Surūr would talk about engagement in the partisan wars and opposing “the secular invasion” in Syria.¹¹³ Surūr’s political thoughts circulated among young Saudis, who found his political discourse more inspirational than the traditional Wahhābī ‘*ulamā*’, whose teaching was limited to extirpating deviant religious practice and whose political preaching was confined only to calls for total obedience to the *walī al-amr*.

Within a short time, Surūr was able to build extensive public relation networks, not only on the areas where he worked but also in the whole kingdom.¹¹⁴ Eager to learn more about the modern world, the young generation undoubtedly also gathered around Shaykh Surūr for the experience and organizational capabilities that he had acquired through his membership in the Muslim Brotherhood. Under his influence, *al-Surūriyya* (Surūrism) gained an important foothold by the late 1960s and early 1970s, soon dominating the intellectual and religious spectrum of Saudi Arabia between the 1980s and 1990s.

¹¹³ Murāja‘āt.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

Chapter 3

Surūr: The Champion of Modern Anti-Shī'ism

After his expulsion from Saudi Arabia and relocation to Kuwait in 1973, Surūr took a new interest in studying Shī'ism. Shī'ites constitute a significant minority in Kuwait, and Surūr visited the *ḥusayniyyat* (congregation halls for Twelver Shī'a Muslims commemoration ceremonies, especially the mourning of Muḥarram and Battle of Karbala), engaged in debates with Shī'ite imams, and met with exiled figures from the *Ḥizb al-Da'wa al-Islāmiyya*, an Iraqi Shī'ī political party. Through his examination of the situation in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran, as well as his reading of Khomeini's writings and activities years before the Iranian Revolution, Surūr developed firm anti-Shī'a convictions that would provide the basis for a book, *Wa jā'a dawr al-Majūs* [*Then Came the Turn of Majūs (Zoroastrians)*], that was published under pseudonym in 1981. He was one of the early polemicists who criticized the Iranian Revolution and warned against the threat of Shī'ite domination of the Middle East. While anti-Shī'ī rhetoric was certainly not unique to Surūr, his writings played his significant role in modernizing and popularizing it by adding ethnic and political aspects. His writings were distinguished by the addition of an ethnic dimension to his theological broadside, noting Persians' betrayal of the Islamic state from the early period of Islam to the modern day, stating that they were the impetus for many uprisings and heretical groups.

Along with his anti-Shī'a thoughts from the Wahhābīs and Salafis, who see Shī'ism as a deviant sect, Surūr expressed a more political version of anti-Shī'ism, including doubt about the aspirations of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its alliance with

the “‘Alawī Syrian regime.” The political context of his homeland of Syria, and especially the repression experienced by the Muslim Brotherhood under the Nusayri (‘Alawī) Syrian regime, clearly informed this anti-Shī‘ī treatise and contributed to special criticism of Syria’s Nusayris (‘Alawis). Geopolitics and great power competition continually appear in the text as Surūr argued that the Iranians, like their Persian ancestors, had national ambitions in the neighboring Arab countries and sought to control the region with the help of the Arab Shī‘ite, who were seen by Surūr as a “fifth column.” Soon after the revolution, Khomeini and his followers began talking about exporting the Islamic revolution to other Islamic countries that are under secular corrupted regimes. Surūr understood the aim of these announcements as Persian *rafidas*’ aspirations to dominate the other side of the Gulf and Iraq by overthrowing the current regimes and creating Shī‘ī-dominated states.

Surūr stated that he began writing the book in 1976 and completed a few chapters before the Iranian revolution. After following Khomeini’s writings and activities for a long time, he said that it was clear that the cleric would play a leading role in Iran’s future. He mentioned that the idea for the book did not stem only from the danger posed by the Iranian revolution, but also from Arab Shī‘ites, who started to build close links with the Iranian regime from the time of the Shah and who took power in Syria.¹¹⁵ Surūr published *Wa-jā’a dawr al-Majūs* in 1981 under the pseudonym of ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Gharīb when he was in Kuwait. The term *majūs* means Zoroastrians, and in the early Islamic period, it translated to fire-worshippers. Surūr used the term in a derogatory way and deployed it against Iranian Shī‘ites to cast them as ersatz Muslims.

¹¹⁵ Muraja‘at with Surūr.

As discussed in detail below, the book, which became very influential between the 1980s and 1990s, warned of an Iranian Shī‘ite plan to control the Middle East. He attacked the Iranian Revolution and Khomeini, in process warning of the “Persian *Majūsī rāfiḍī*” expansion into the Gulf, Iraq and the Levant, adding ethnic and political aspects to modern anti-Shī‘ism.

Surūr faced challenges in printing and distributing his anti-Shī‘ite book. The book was universally rejected by all the publishing houses in Kuwait and other Gulf states because of its content. The book was only published in Egypt by a publishing house owned by a Coptic Christian, but after the printing of the book, the Egyptian authorities refused to release it until receiving permission from the rectors at al-Azhar University, and even then, rejected distributing the book in Egypt. According to Surūr, he was able to get the permission of al-Azhar through connections, perhaps without anyone actually reviewing the book.¹¹⁶ In the beginning, the book was banned across the entire Arab world. At the time, however, the Wahhābī ‘*ulamā*’ in Saudi Arabia gathered to take a stand on the Iranian Revolution. After one ‘*alim* suggested the book included all the information they need to make their stance, however, the book gained the acceptance of the Wahhābī establishment. Then, Shaykh Abdul Aziz bin Bāz, Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, decided to buy three thousand copies and distributed the book to his surrounding circle before lifting the ban on the book in the Kingdom.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, *Wa-jā‘a dawr al-Majūs: al-ab‘ād al-tārīkhīyya wa al-‘Aqā’idīyya wa al-siyāsīyya lil-thawrah al-Irānīyya* [Then Came the Turn of Majūs: the historical, doctrinal, and political dimensions of Iranian Revolution], 11, 10th edition, available on <https://surour.net/>. The first edition was published under a pseudonym, Al-Gharīb, ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad in Cairo by Dar al-Ajyal Li-Itiba‘a in 1981.

¹¹⁷ Surur, *wa ja dawr al-majus*, 11-12; Muraja‘at with Surūr.

After the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war, the book gained even greater notoriety and influenced other anti-Shī‘a polemicists who saw the Shī‘a as a political threat; subsequently, the ban on the text was lifted in most countries. Kuwait was one of the few countries that did not lift the ban because of fear of provoking its significant Shī‘a minority. Although penned under a pseudonym, the book was a source of danger for Surūr because the authorities sought to punish those who held the book, and it was a principal reason for his departure from Kuwait in 1984.¹¹⁸

Throughout *Wa-jā‘a dawr al-Majūs*, Surūr vehemently embraces anti-Shī‘i rhetoric and promotes the idea that Khomeini’s pan-Islamic rhetoric constituted a harbinger of imminent Shī‘ī invasion and the “Shī‘ite Persian menace” of Sunni lands. One of the earliest opponents to warn against Khomeini and his rule before the Iran-Iraq war, Surūr wrote that “Khomeini is more malicious than the Shah.”¹¹⁹ In the book, he expresses views about the Iranian Revolution that diverged from mainstream Islamists. He criticizes the statement of the International Organization of the Muslim Brotherhood welcoming the Iranian revolution and the position of the International Organization supporting the Iranian side in the Iran–Iraq War. Surūr particularly lambastes the Brotherhood for what he described as an emotional, theoretical position devoid of an actual reading of events on the ground.¹²⁰ He also condemns the attitude of other Islamists who admired the revolution in Iran, including Abū’l-A‘lā Mawdūdī, a Pakistani Muslim theologian and founder of the Islamist political organization called Jamaat-e-Islami. Surūr argues that no one who supported the Iranian revolution read about the

¹¹⁸ Muraja‘at with Surūr.

¹¹⁹ Surūr, *wa ja dawr al-majus*, 7,

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

“aberration and deviations” beliefs of Shī‘ites *rāfiḍa*.¹²¹ In sum, Surūr deplores the ignorance of those Islamists who welcomed the Iranian Revolution and called for cooperation with Khomeini.¹²² Throughout the book, Surūr refers to Khomeini and his fellow Iranians as Persians to demonstrate the nationalist ambitions of Khomeini’s ideas, in opposition to the Islamic solidarity that the revolutionaries alleged to advocate. Surūr sometimes does not differentiate between the Twelver Shī‘a and other Shī‘a sects such as Alawis and Isma‘ilis.

While anti- Shī‘ī rhetoric was certainly not unique to Surūr, as noted above, his writings were distinguished by the addition of an ethnic dimension to his theological broadside. Surūr chronicles the Persians’ betrayal of the Islamic state from the early period of Islam to the modern day, stating that they were the impetus for many uprisings and heretical groups. Surūr claims that after the Muslim conquest of Persia in 633–654, the *majūs* Persians converted to Islam only to undermine it from within: to orchestrate conspiracies against Muslims that would eventually destroy their religion. According to Surūr, the first attempt of *majūs* to achieve revenge against Muslims was the assassination of the second Khalifa ‘Umar, who they hated because he was behind the demise of their rule in the Sassanian kingdom and the destruction of their glory.¹²³ Killing ‘Umar was a *majūsi* Christian plot perpetrated by a Christian Persian captive brought to Medina, Abū Lu’lu’ah al-Majūsi. Their campaign against the Khalifa ‘Umar continued after his murder by cursing him, in accordance with the practices of Shī‘ism.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Ibid., 9-10, 125.

¹²² Ibid., 170.

¹²³ Ibid., 73.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 75.

Surūr claimed that Persians converted to Shī‘ī Islam because of the compatibility of their old Zoroastrian beliefs with Shī‘ism in terms of the veneration and unyielding submission to a holy family.¹²⁵ He adds that the Zoroastrians converted to Shī‘ī Islam because they thought that Shī‘ī Islam was derived from the Sassanian royal family: Ḥusayn, the grandson of Prophet Muḥammad and the third Shī‘a Imām, had married a Sassanian princess whose son became the fourth Imām.¹²⁶

Surūr continued to see such suspect Persian machinations at work in the ‘Abbāsids overthrow of the Umayyads in 750 and efforts to control the new Khalifate. According to Surūr, Abū Muslim al- Khurasānī, a Persian general and the leader of the ‘Abbāsīd Revolution, began to look on the Caliph with disdain and exercised absolute power, even aspiring to appropriate the Caliph’s position for himself.¹²⁷ Like Abū Muslim al- Khurasānī, the Persian al-Barāmīkah family enjoyed considerable influence under the early ‘Abbāsids, and according to the Syrian political activist, other Persian figures sought to control Caliphs through intermarriage.

Surūr also contends that the endeavors of the Persians were not limited to efforts to influence and control the caliphs; their impact penetrated several other areas. During the ‘Abbāsīd era, the Persians orchestrated many heretical movements that advocated the “Manichaeen doctrines.” Surūr gives an example of the rebellion of Al-Muqanna‘, a religious leader who carried out a revolt against the ‘Abbāsīd caliph al-Mahdī and called for the “*al-ḥulūl*” (incarnation).¹²⁸ He adds that Persians attempted to distort Islamic

¹²⁵ Ibid., 53, 77.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 76-77.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 78-80.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 83-85.

history and fabricate aḥādīth of the Prophet Muḥammad. They also sought to disparage and criticize the al-Ṣaḥāba (Companion of Prophet Muhammad) such as Abū Bakr al-Siddīq and ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. During this time, Surūr laments the Persians returned to their old perceptions and customs, such as wearing turbans and celebrating *majūsi* holidays like Nowruz.¹²⁹

Surūr notes that ‘Abbāsīd authority began to deteriorate in the third century when Persian Shī‘a established independent “small states” across the broader Middle East in Iraq, Iran, the Levant, and Egypt. These states were “aiming to keep Muslims away from their religion..., to destroy the Islamic Caliphate, and to provoke ethnic tensions.”¹³⁰ He asks by what coincidence were the ethnic ancestors of the Qarāmiṭa (Qarmatians), the ‘Ubydiyyūn (Fatimids), the Būyahīyyūn (Buyids) all of Persian origins.¹³¹ He also points out that the states of Qarāmiṭa 278 H (891 G), Fāṭimīyūn 296 H (909 G), Būyahīyīyūn (Buyids) 334 H (945 G) were established in a relatively short time span, and their doctrines were similar to the doctrines of Mani, Mazdak, and Zoroaster.¹³² For instance, the Buyid dynasty, a Shī‘a Persian dynasty, “conquered Iraq in 334H (946 G), deposed the ‘Abbāsīd caliph” of Baghdad, attempted to enforce their particular religious view upon their subjects, and “instigated sectarian strife between the Sunnis and Shī‘a.”¹³³ In Surūr’s view, the Persian *majūs* continued their plots and fighting against the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate, spreading “*al-kufr*” (unbelief) and “*al-Zandaqa*” (heresy) until “Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn

¹²⁹ Ibid., 84.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 86.

¹³¹ Ibid., 94.

¹³² Ibid., 94-95.

¹³³ Ibid., 91-92.

al-Ayyūbi came and cleansed the Levant and Egypt from majūsism, and returned the Prophet's sunnah to the Muslims.”¹³⁴

Surūr argues that although these early states disappeared, their doctrines and conceptions persisted in the beliefs of some Shi'ī *bāṭinī* groups that focus on an inner, esoteric (*bāṭin*) meaning in the interpretation of religious texts. Surūr uses the term here pejoratively, and argues that, after the demise of these states, *bāṭinī* groups continued to be involved in clandestine activities:

The *bāṭinīs* were preparing themselves to come out of their burrows with their old beliefs, which they changed only the names: the Ṣafawīs (Safavids), the Bahā'īs, the Qadyānīs (Ahmadis), the Durūz (Druze), the Nuṣayrīs ('Alawīs), the Ḥashashūn Ismā'īlīs (Assassins). The *bāṭinīs* have returned to their normal role ... to support the enemies of Allāh and to cooperate with them against Muslims. They cooperated with Britain, Portugal, France, and Tsarist Russia. They returned to tear the Islamic unity again.¹³⁵

Surūr claims that all these groups belonged to Shi'ī origins and that the founders of these sects including the Durūz and the Nuṣayrīs ('Alawīs), centered primarily in the geographic land of Levant, were *majūs* Persians.¹³⁶

The political context of his homeland of Syria, and especially the repression experienced by the Muslim Brotherhood under the Nuṣayrī ('Alawī) Syrian regime, clearly informed this anti-Shi'ī treatise and contributed to special criticism of Syria's Nuṣayrīs ('Alawīs). An early example of the Shi'ī *bāṭinī* sects, the Nuṣayrīs ('Alawīs) were founded by Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr, who emerged first as an Imāmī Shi'ī. Surūr claims that Ibn Nuṣayr was the first to conceive “the idea of the occulted Imām,” adding

¹³⁴ Ibid., 96

¹³⁵ Ibid., 96

¹³⁶ Ibid., 97, 179.

that Ibn Nuṣayr claimed that he is “the *bāb*” (door) of the occulted Imām, the intimate disciple of the Imām.¹³⁷ The Nuṣayrīs, likewise, believe in “transmigration of souls, the eternity of the world, deny the resurrection and propagation, deny paradise and hell.” He writes that they also believe that “Alī is the *rabb* (Lord), Muḥammad is the *ḥijāb* (veil) and Salmān is the *bāb* (door). *Iblīs al-Abālisa* [the king of the devils] ... is ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb and below him in the rank of the devils is Abū Bakr and then ‘Uthmān, may God be pleased with them all.”¹³⁸

Continuing from this theological critique to more specifically political accusations, Surūr levels charges of treason against the ‘Alawīs for aiding the Christians, the Tatars, and the French against the Muslims to occupy the Levant. Additionally, he criticizes the actions and behavior of the Nuṣayrīs in the present. He writes that “they control an important part of the Levant- Syria- and plan to eradicate Islam and Muslims if the atmosphere is clear for them, and cooperate with Israel, Iran, and the United States of America, and the Islamic scholars in the present and the past have agreed upon *kufṛ* (heresy) of this sect.”¹³⁹ Clearly, Surūr wants to stress the treacherous and heretical nature of the sect in the history and provides a timely warning against what he perceived as the expansionist aspiration of the ‘Alawīs in his own time.

In the second part of the book, Surūr reviews doctrines of the Shī‘ites in the past and present. The Salafī and Wahhābī influence of Surūr’s anti-Shī‘a thoughts is clearly present in this part of the book. It is important to note that Salafis and Wahhabis provide

¹³⁷ Ibid., 103; <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bab-door-gate-entrance>.

¹³⁸ Surur, *wa ja dawr al-majus*, 103.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 103-104.

the intellectual and religious groundworks of religious anti-Shī‘ism. This part discusses the doctrinal and religious error of the Shī‘a, arguing that Shī‘a believe in the idea of altering the Qur’ān’s text. He criticizes Shī‘ites on numerous points, including for their contradiction of the Sunna, for believing in *‘iṣmah* (immunity from sin, infallibility) of the Twelve Imāms, for *sabb al-Ṣaḥāba* (cursing the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad), for the endorsement in *ja‘fari* law of *mut‘a* (temporary marriage), and for the Shī‘ī theory and practice of *taqiyya* (dissimulation of the real religious belief and practice in the face of persecution.)¹⁴⁰

Surūr goes on to argue that the Shī‘ites of modern times are more dangerous to Islam than the Shī‘ites of the past.¹⁴¹ In the first half of the twentieth century, there were efforts by Shī‘a and Sunni figures to reach a kind of rapprochement between their two communities. For this purpose, newspapers, magazines, and associations were established by both sides. However, all these attempts largely failed.¹⁴² Surūr blames the Shī‘a for the failure of these efforts because their *‘ulamā’* continued publishing books cursing the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad.¹⁴³ Pointing to the concept of *taqiyya*, he condemns the Shī‘a as untrustworthy and questioned their intentions in calling for rapprochement and unity between Sunnis and Shī‘a. To Surūr, the Shī‘a adopted such a conciliatory posture only as mask to implement their plans of disseminating Shī‘ism among Sunnis.¹⁴⁴ He mentions the experience of Shaykh Muṣṭafā al-Sibā‘ī and others,

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 127-136.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 142.

¹⁴² Ibid., 145.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 147.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 146.

who participated in such efforts, citing their unpleasant comments.¹⁴⁵ Surūr concludes that the only way to achieve unity between the Sunnis and Shī'a is “to get rid of their polytheism and idolatry.”¹⁴⁶

Surūr claims that through studying the history and doctrines of the Shī'a, as well as observing their news, he recognized that Iranian clerks organize the affairs of their co-religionists around in the world, who are first and foremost loyal to the political and religious leadership in Iran, whether the ruler is the Shah or Khomeini. He also contends that the dispute between the Shah and Khomeini did not have a significant impact on members of the sect outside Iran.¹⁴⁷ He notes that “the Nuṣayrī regime in Syria had close connections with the deposed Iranian Shah and his regime, and these connections have become closer and stronger with the new revolution led by Khomeini.”¹⁴⁸ Surūr claims that Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr is of Persian origin and that the Nuṣayrī doctrines are similar to the *majūs* ones. Therefore, he assumes that “the correlation of the Nuṣayrīs to Iran is ethnic on one hand and doctrinal on the other.”¹⁴⁹ There are no differences between the Shah and Khomeini’s “foreign affairs and Persian aspirations on the neighboring countries.” Like the Shah, “the leaders of the Khomeini revolution” claimed that the three UAE islands are Iranian, the Gulf is Persian, and “demanded to annex Bahrain, Iraq, Mecca, Medina, and Southern Lebanon. They sought to create a great Shī'ite empire that extends to all Islamic countries under leadership of an Iranian *murshid*.”¹⁵⁰ Clearly, Surūr

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 153-168.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 142.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 177-178.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 178.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 179.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 179.

is asserting that the political loyalty and religious authority of Arab Shī'ites is to Iran and not their countries of residence, thus insisting upon the expansionist nature of the Persians of Iran whether ruled by the Shah or Khomeini.

Geopolitics and great power competition continually appear in the text, as Surūr argues that the Iranians, like their Persian ancestors, had national ambitions in neighboring Arab countries and sought to control the region with the help of the Arab Shī'ites. Soon after the revolution, Khomeini and his followers began talking about exporting the Islamic revolution to other Islamic countries under corrupted secular regimes.¹⁵¹ Surūr understands the aim of these announcements as Persian *rāfiḍas'* aspirations to dominate the other side of the Gulf and Iraq by overthrowing the current regimes and creating *Shi'ī*-dominated states. Ayatollah Ṣādiq Ruhānī, an Iranian *marja* (religious authority), called for the annexation of Bahrain to Iran, renewing the historical Persian demand for sovereignty over these areas. Surūr adds that the ambition of the Persians in Bahrain and Iraq is traced back not only to the time of the Shah but also to their pre-Islamic "*majūs* Persian ancestors."¹⁵² After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, these calls increased under the pretext of exporting the Islamic revolution and supporting Arab Shī'ites, who are the majority in Bahrain and Iraq and a significant minority in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, against persecution.¹⁵³

Surūr sought to provide an especially urgent warning to those of his fellow Sunni Islamists who might gravitate towards the revolutionary ideas of Khomeini as to what he

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 288.

¹⁵² Ibid., 242, 244, 250, 309.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 285, 288.

perceived as the true intentions of the Shī‘ites’ plans.¹⁵⁴ He also seeks to degrade Khomeini’s prestige and his revolution among Sunnis, portraying the Ayatollah’s pan-Islamic promises as publicity stunts belied by the cooperation of the Islamic revolution’s leaders with the Americans, Israelis, and the Syrian regime. He describes Khomeini as “a Shī‘ite leader bigoted for his sect” who “calls [only] for a Shī‘ite Islamic state and does not mention the question of cooperation with the Sunnis or merger with them.”¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, he argues that Khomeini believes that Islamic unity can be achieved only through conversion of Sunnis to Shī‘ism and their acceptance of the *‘iṣmah* of Imāms. He adds that in his book *Islamic Government*, Khomeini excludes the first three Rightly Guided Caliphs as a model of the Islamic government, and this means not recognizing them.¹⁵⁶ In his writings, Khomeini also detracts from the standing of the companion Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān.¹⁵⁷

In addition, the book goes even further to undermine the appeal of the Revolution, describing Khomeini as an agent of the United States and Europe and depicting the Iranian Revolution as an American product. Surūr argues that although Khomeini continuously criticized the United States for Iran’s economic problems and supporting the authoritarian regime of the Shah, he did not shut down the US embassy as he did the Israeli Embassy after the revolution. He adds that Iranian oil exports continued to the United States and the West as usual, and the revolution’s leaders did not even mind exporting oil to Israel.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, Surūr argues that Khomeini set the theological

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 28.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 148.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 149.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 150.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 185.

basis that gave permission for collusion with the enemies. He notes that Khomeini issued a *fatwa* that allowed providing aid for enemies, citing the actions of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, one of great Twelver Shī‘ī scholar, who “put himself in the service of the Tatars invaders” and aided the Mongol forces under Hulegu when he attacked Baghdad in 1258.¹⁵⁹ As proof of Khomeini’s treason with the United States, Surūr details several contacts and meetings between Khomeini himself and officials from the American administration when he was in France.¹⁶⁰ Surūr assumes that the US administration of President Jimmy Carter orchestrated the Iranian Revolution, supporting his claim by citing the memoirs of the Shah, Khomeini’s partners in the revolution and media reports.¹⁶¹

Surūr was also one of the earliest Sunni writers who noticed the contention between Khomeini and anti-Khomeini groups within Iran in the post-Revolutionary period. He uncovers the clash between Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Muhammad Kazem Shariatmadari, who was at odds with Khomeini regarding several matters such as interpretation of the concept of the “Guardianship of the Jurists” (*wilāyat al-faqīh*), the constitution, the system of government, and the occupation of the US embassy in Tehran.¹⁶² However, followers of the Shariatmadari were suppressed, and Shariatmadari himself was put under house arrest.¹⁶³ Surūr repeats his warning for Sunni Islamists who

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 187.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 188.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 185-207.

¹⁶² Ibid., 220-221.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 224.

sympathized with Khomeini, noting that he crushed his partners in the revolution and even his fellow Shī'ites.¹⁶⁴

Furthermore, Surūr tries to attack the pan-Islamic nature of Khomeini's vision by questioning his solidarity with the Palestinian cause. He compares Khomeini's speeches and slogans with those of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, who had captured the imagination of the Palestinians and Arabs in the 1950s and 1960s. According to Surūr, Khomeini would let them down, as Abdel Nasser did.¹⁶⁵ He also criticizes Yasser Arafat's welcoming position of Khomeini, reminding the Palestine Liberation Organization how the "Syrian Nuṣayrī regime" had intervened in favor of the Maronites against the Palestinians and Lebanese Muslims, siding mainly with Lebanese Shī'a represented by Shaykh Musa al-Sadr and Amal movement to the Syrian army.¹⁶⁶ Surūr also cites several statements by Iranian officials apologizing for their inability to provide aid to the Palestinian liberation movement, with the excuse that Iran was now in critical conditions.¹⁶⁷ He insists that Khomeini will not fight Israel and that all his promises and professed solidarity with the Palestinian cause only amounted to a ploy to gain popularity among Sunnis. Another reason for Surūr's criticism was the continuous purchase of Israeli weapons by Tehran.¹⁶⁸ Surūr argues that "the rulers of Tehran are more dangerous to Islam than Jews... They will cooperate with the Jews in fighting the Muslims."¹⁶⁹ He

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 225.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 233.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 234.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 235.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 16.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 307.

adds that “those who are plotting against Iraq, the Gulf, Lebanon, and Syria will not fight Israel.”¹⁷⁰

All of these charges thus led Surūr to conclusion that Arab Shī‘ites comprise a “fifth column” for Iran and act as its tool to destabilize the region.¹⁷¹ During the Iranian Revolution and after the return of Khomeini to Tehran in 1979, Shī‘ites started demonstrations in Iraq, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia.¹⁷² Surūr talks about a plan to sweep through the Gulf organized by Iranians and led by local Shī‘ites who were originally Persian.¹⁷³ These movements were accompanied by smuggling and the distribution of weapons among Shī‘ites to cause disturbance in the Gulf.¹⁷⁴ Surūr contends that many Gulf Shī‘ites today are originally Persian, and they only managed to buy their citizenship in the 1950s when the Gulf states were still poor. Although they became citizens of these states, their language, culture, and behavior remained irreducibly Persian. Surūr writes that the Gulf Shī‘ites “live with their bodies in the Gulf, but their hearts and minds live in Tehran.”¹⁷⁵

Surūr also articulates skepticism about the alliance between the secular Ba‘athist Syrian regime and the Iranian regime which claimed to speak on behalf of Islam. After taking power in 1970, Hafiz al-Assad, an ‘Alawīte, relied on his family and sect in ruling Syria, which led to revived discussion about the heretical character of the ‘Alawīs among regime’s opponents. Hafiz al-Assad sought to obtain recognition from Musa al-Sadr, the

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 307.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 18, 22.

¹⁷² Ibid., 286, 290.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 285.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 276.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 258.

Iranian-born Shī‘ite cleric and founder of the Amal movement in Lebanon, who issued a *fatwa* recognizing the ‘Alawīs as Shī‘ī Muslims.¹⁷⁶ The Islamic Revolution gave Islamists in Syria an example of how an Islamist movement was able to overthrow one of the most authoritarian regimes in the region. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood intensified their opposition, and elements of it engaged in an armed conflict against the Syrian regime. So the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, who welcomed the Islamic revolution in Iran, might seem to offer a natural ally for the new Islamic regime that promoted Muslim solidarity as a cornerstone of its foreign policy. Instead of supporting the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, however, the revolutionary regime developed special relations with the secular Syrian state and denounced the Islamic opposition. Surūr asks how Khomeini’s followers criticized all regimes in the region except the Syrian government. He attributes this betrayal to the confessional closeness between the Shī‘ites of Iran and the Nuṣayrī (‘Alawī) regime of Syria.¹⁷⁷ Another reason for their alliance was that the Syrian regime provided support for the Shī‘ites of Lebanon and sought to help them achieve their aspirations, contrary to any professed sense.¹⁷⁸ Surūr affirms that like the new Iranian regime, the Syrian regime is “*majūsi*” and “*rāfiḍi*.”¹⁷⁹ We can see here a political reason for Surūr’s criticism of Khomeini and the Shī‘ites.

Moreover, Surūr objects to the idea that only an Iranian can be the Supreme Leader of the Shī‘ites in the world. He declares that such a principle is not Islamic but a *majūsi* practice, because Islam does not recognize national boundaries and

¹⁷⁶ Lefèvre, *Ashes of Hama*, 71-72.

¹⁷⁷ Surūr, *wa ja dawr al-majus*, 275.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 312.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 312.

nationalities.¹⁸⁰ Surūr criticizes some fundamental principles in the 1979 Constitution such as the stipulation that the President should be Iranian.¹⁸¹ Surūr also accuses Khomeini of “setting up slaughterhouses” in every town and village in Iran and punishing the opposition severely.¹⁸² Furthermore, as a result of the purge against the Shah’s supporters and the opposition, Iran suffered from “brain drain.” The scientists, doctors, dentists, and professors left Iran fearing torture and other abuses.¹⁸³ He also discusses the situation of Sunnis in Iran after the revolution, who suffered from persecution, discrimination, and poverty as a result of marginalization and did not have access to higher political positions.¹⁸⁴ He condemns celebration of Nowruz (the Iranian New Year) after the Islamic revolution in Iran, characterizing it as “a *jahili majūsi* holiday.” Before the revolution, the followers of Khomeini “used to attack the Shah because he sought to revive Persian *majūsi* habits and traditions which Islam annulled,” yet, the celebration of Nowruz continued after the Islamic Revolution. Surūr asked how Khomeini forgot the teachings of Islam and gave a speech on this occasion.¹⁸⁵

Surūr attacked the Iranian revolution in the early 1980s, trying to assess the effects and impacts of it on political and religious groups across the Arab Muslim world. He tried to explore the imminent danger of the Iranian revolution as a harbinger Shī‘ite expansion in Iraq and the Gulf. The Salafī and Wahnābī influence of Surūr’s anti-Shī‘a thoughts is present in the book in its criticisms of Shī‘ī doctrines and practice. However,

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 346.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 347.

¹⁸² Ibid., 293.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 329-330.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 343-355.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 344.

he developed his own type of anti-Shī‘ism grounded in ethnic and political antagonism, illustrated for the most part by many historical examples of alleged betrayal of the *rāfiḍh* against Islam and Islamic *umma*. Surūr counted a long list of what he called the conspiracies of Shī‘ī sects against Islam and aiding the enemies of the *umma*. In addition to this book, Surūr penned other works like *Amal and the Palestinian Camps* and *The Condition of the Sunnis in Iran* in his effort to unveil the danger of Khomeini’s ideology.

Surūr stated that his book and its anti-Khomeini views struck a dissenting note at the very apex of Khomeini’s widespread appeal among Islamists. However, the book surged in influence from the 1980s, continuing to 2000s. With the increasing Sunni-Shī‘ī tensions in recent decades, Surūr’s anti-Shī‘a thoughts have since commanded an even wider audience. Some argue that Surūr’s views on Shī‘ism and Iran became a reservoir for several Salafi-jihadi ideologues and thinkers, laying the groundwork for intensified the sectarian extremism in many parts of the Middle East like Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.¹⁸⁶ Nibras Kazimi for example, demonstrated the tremendous impact of Surūr’s book on the treatise and speeches of the jihādīs. Kazimi argues that the book was the main influence on Abū Muṣ‘ab al-Zarqāwī, the leader of al-Qā‘ida in Iraq, who declared *jihād* against the Shī‘ites majority in Iraq.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Bernard Haykel, “Al-Qa’ida and Shiism in Fault Lines” in *Global Jihad: Organizational, Strategic, and Ideological Fissures*, edited by Assaf Moghadam, and Brian Fishman, (New York: Routledge, 2011) 187-188, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rowan/detail.action?docID=801852>; Hassan Hassan, “Muhammad Surur and the normalisation of extremism,” *The National*, November 13, 2016, <https://www.thenational.ae/opinion/muhammad-surur-and-the-normalisation-of-extremism-1.214695>.

¹⁸⁷ Nibras Kazimi, “Zarqawi's Anti-Shi'a Legacy: Original or Borrowed?,” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 4 (January 1, 2006): 53–72,99, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1437357624/>.

For others, years after the Iranian Revolution, Surūr’s prophecy of Iranian Shī‘ī aspirations in the Arab world has become evident. Consequently, Surūr received admiration and recognition as a writer who faced and forecasted Iranian plans to expand in the region. Additionally, almost all the obituaries and eulogies for him on his website from high profile Islamic individuals and Islamic organizations lauded his role in unmasking the danger of Iranian “*majūs*” “*rāfiḍa*” and warning the “*umma*.” Finally, the ultimate goal of the book is to persuade his fellow Islamists to not be deceived by Khomeini’s thoughts. Thus, Surūr’s writings played a significant role in modernizing and popularizing anti-Shiism by reawakening dormant confessional debates and adding ethnic and political perspectives.

Chapter 4

Debates with Saudi Salafis

In the late 1970s, as Surūr established himself in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia faced two severe challenges to its Islamic legitimacy and its security: the Iranian Revolution and the occupation of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. The previous chapter explored Surūr's reaction to the Iranian Revolution and his anti-Shi'i writings. The Saudi royal family, too, reacted to these challenges by leaning more heavily on their Islamic credentials, adopting stricter religious norms and supporting various Islamic causes. With Surūr out of the country, his followers in Saudi Arabia maintained a relatively non-oppositional relationship with the Saudi state for at least a decade and generated relatively scant controversy. As mentioned before, they even distributed Surūr's anti-Shi'i treatise once he was safely exiled from the country.

However, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 transformed these dynamics, contributing to a notable deterioration in the relationship between the Saudi authorities and the Ṣaḥwīs (the awakened; the people of Ṣaḥwa) over the intervention of foreign troops in the Gulf War in the 1990s. The growing stridency and opposition of the Ṣaḥwīs to the hosting of US military personnel on Saudi soil, however, did not merely lead to government repression. As we shall see in this chapter, a backlash against Ṣaḥwī stridency also led to the emergence a new Salafī group—the pro-regime and quietist Jāmīs—as a reaction against the Ṣaḥwa, particularly its political tendencies, and its oppositional activities to the Saudi government. Specifically, the Gulf crisis and the first protests against the Saudi government in the 1990s reignited longstanding debates about

the theological validity of Salafīs participating in politics. The debate between Surūr and *Ṣaḥwīs* on the one hand, who advocated non-violent political activism, and the *Jāmīs*—or as Surūr called them “*ḥizb al-wulāt*”—who adopted a quietist posture, sheds light on the evolving discussion among Salafīs about the legitimacy of political engagement.

The chapter offers an understanding of Salafism that moves beyond the stereotypes of radicalism, terror, and violence that permeates much of the academic discussion about political Islam and religiosity in Saudi Arabia.¹⁸⁸ Analyzing debates among the non-violent Salafi strands in Saudi Arabia on different issues reveals the diversity of views on matters ranging from religious reformism and politics to relations between Muslim believers and their rulers. Although both *Ṣaḥwīs* and *Jāmīs* adhere to the same overarching current of modern Salafism, with shared belief in returning to the model of the Prophet and *al-salaf al-saliḥ*, fighting *bidʿ* (a plural of *bidʿa*; innovations) and rejecting *taqlīd*, they nevertheless engaged in heated debates regarding the stances of the *Ṣaḥwīs* on religious reform, the restoration of the importance of *Sharīʿa* in the Kingdom, and a possible confrontation with potential secular influences in the Kingdom.

The most significant areas of conflict between the *Ṣaḥwīs* and their counterparts were *fiqh al-waqiʿ* (jurisprudence of reality) and *tawḥīd al-ḥākimiyya* (the Oneness of God’s governance/sovereignty). In the late 1980s and beginnings of the 1990s, the *Ṣaḥwīs* appeared as the only practitioners of the *fiqh al-waqiʿ*, which is an old concept that was revived by Sururis and used as a tool for religious reform and enhancing their momentum over other groups. It requires Muslim scholars to acquire secular knowledge

¹⁸⁸ Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism*, New York: W.W.Norman, 2003.

in addition to religious knowledge in order to reformulate an accurate ruling or fatwa and gain a good view of the world. However, Jāmīs saw the concept as a threat aimed at destabilizing the authority of *Sharī‘a* and the prestige of traditional Wahhabi ‘*ulamā*’. During the same period, the Ṣaḥwīs began to propagate the concept of *ṭawḥīd al-ḥākimiyya*, which provided them the theological justification for their claim that the Saudi government was insufficiently Islamic, a claim which elicited the opposition of Jāmīs who saw the concept as a theologically unacceptable *bid‘a* (innovation).

To elucidate this sharp polarization between the Ṣaḥwīs and Jāmīs, this chapter will explore writings from both sides of this Salafī divide. On the Jāmī side, the opinion of Dr. Rabī‘ b. Hādī al-Madkhalī, author of dozens of books and lectures, will provide insight into the fierce denunciations and methodological refutations aimed against the Ṣaḥwīs during the 1990s. On the opposite side, we will examine the Ṣaḥwīs’ responses to Jāmī’s criticism by reviewing the writing of their chief protagonist, the exiled religious leader, Shaykh Muḥammad Surūr, who after 1984 found refuge in the United Kingdom. Even in absentia, Surūr wrote a series of widely read articles in his magazine *al-Sunnah* defending the Ṣaḥwīs what he referred to as the “free centrist Salafīs.” He also criticized those Salafīs who provided unconditional support to the government in its conflict against the Ṣaḥwi, labelling this with them with the epithet “*ḥizb al-wulāt* (loyalist party.)

The magazine *al-Sunnah* provided Surūr with soft power, allowing him to gain more followers and attack opponents. It was concerned with political affairs in the Islamic world more than religious studies and formulated political events from Surūr’s Islamic point of view. *Al-Sunnah* is known for criticizing Arab governments, and thus it was banned in most Arab countries. Despite the ban, the magazine was smuggled,

reprinted, and distributed by the Ṣaḥwīs, some of whom wrote in *Al-Sunnah* under pseudonyms.¹⁸⁹ During the Gulf crisis, *Al-Sunnah* gained wide popularity among the Ṣaḥwīs when the magazine increased its opposition to the Saudi regime. *Al-Sunna Magazine*'s denunciations of the Saudi regime culminated in an article by Shaykh Muḥammad Surūr entitled “Al-Irāhb Al-Sa‘ūdī” (Saudi Terrorism) in 1994, condemning the campaign of arrests against key figures in the Saḥwa, like Shaykh Salmān al-‘Awda, and Shaykh Safar al-Ḥawālī.¹⁹⁰ Shaykh Ṣaliḥ al-Fawzān, member of the Committee of Senior Ulama and sworn enemy of the Ṣaḥwa, declared *Al-Sunnah* more dangerous to the *umma* than drugs because its content undermines the unity of the Muslim *umma* and instigates *fitna*. He warned the Muslims not to be deceived by the name of the magazine.¹⁹¹

Challenges to the Saudi State in the 1980s

To understand the polarizing debates between Ṣaḥwīs and Jāmīs in the 1990s, one first needs to understand the broader historical backdrop of challenges confronting the Saudi state. First, the Islamic Revolution in Iran of 1979 constituted a serious challenge to Saudi Arabia's effort to gain primacy in the Muslim world. As discussed in chapter 3, the new Iranian leaders claimed to represent Islam and wanted to export the Islamic revolution to other Muslim countries including Saudi Arabia. Such revolutionary stances proved profoundly threatening to the Saudi regime, which had long claimed a position as the only genuinely Islamic state and true representative of the global Islamic

¹⁸⁹ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 154-155; Brachman, *Global Jihadism*, 38.

¹⁹⁰ Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, “Al-Irāhb Al-Sa‘ūdī” (Saudi Terrorism) *Al-Sunna* 43, (1994) [1415].

¹⁹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jG0tMIi2ok4>.

community.¹⁹² Yet, at the same time, the Saudis also confronted a challenge not only from the Shī‘ite revolution in Iran, but also from militant Salafis like al-Jama‘a al-Salafiyya al-Muḥtasiba, a violent group led by Juhaymān Al-‘Utaybī that seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca in November 1979. Al-‘Utaybī specifically condemned the Saudi royal family for its corruption and alliance with the Christian states of the West. In addition, he attacked the Wahhābī ‘ulamā’ for bolstering the rulers and failing to condemn its policies that went against Islam. Through seizing the Meccan Grand Mosque, Al-‘Utaybī was asserting that the royal family was unfit to serve as custodians of the holy cities of Islam.¹⁹³

Under the pressure of these events from multiple directions, Saudi Arabia’s leaders felt compelled to yield to the increased demands of the Wahhābī ‘ulamā’ in exchange for their continued political quiescence. Specifically, the regime abandoned its effort to cultivate an image of Islamic modernizers and instead did the bidding of Wahhābī establishment by helping to enforce an austere public interpretation of public dress and comportment. The government conferred more power upon the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, for example, by allowing them to enforce a strict observance of Wahhābī principles in public places, such as enforcing the closure of businesses during prayer time.¹⁹⁴ In its effort to enhance the religious credibility of his regime, King Fahd also contributed to the jihād in Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion in 1979 and adopted the title of Custodian of the Two Holy Cities (*Khādim al-Ḥaramayn al-Sharīfayn*) in 1986. Through such actions, the Saudi monarchy

¹⁹² al-Rasheed, *Contesting*, 105; Commins, *The Wahhabi*, 163-176; Kepel, *The War*, 178-180.

¹⁹³ Commins, *The Wahhabi*, 165-166, 168; Teitelbaum, *Holier*, 19-20; Lacroix, *Awakening*, 99.

¹⁹⁴ Commins, *The Wahhabi*, 169.

hoped to outmaneuver challengers by responding to Iranian revolutionary rhetoric abroad and bolstering its image as the defender of Islam at home.¹⁹⁵

In this precarious political moment, however, the Saudi state did not seek to undermine all politicized Salafi; to the contrary, they sought to isolate the groups responsible for occupying the Grand Mosque in Mecca by increasing their support for other religious groups with sway. Indeed, outside the Wahhabi establishment, much of the Saudi government aid went to groups associated with the *Ṣaḥwā* movement, including the Surūrīs. The Saudi authorities initially sought to enhance the influence of the *Ṣaḥwā* by providing more support to their activities such as summer camps and Islamic scouts.¹⁹⁶ Indeed, why try to undermine a group and its spiritual leader, Surūr, who were so vociferously opposed to one of the Saudi state's main antagonists, the Islamic Republic of Iran. Furthermore, they allowed the Islamist groups to operate freely with little oversight. The Surūrīs and other *Ṣaḥwīs* took advantage of the relative freedom to develop their networks. By the 1990s, they had gained momentum and dominated the political and social life in the kingdom as an estimable rival to the Wahhabi elite.¹⁹⁷

However, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 brought the relationship between the Saudi government and the *Ṣaḥwīs* to a crashing halt. The Saudi royal family, concerned about Saddam Hussein's ambition to continue his invasion all the way into the Kingdom, invited Western troops onto its territory as a necessary measure to protect the country from aggression. To justify this move, the Saudi rulers sought a *fatwa* from the

¹⁹⁵ Dekmejian, "The Rise," 629; Al-Rasheed, *Contesting*, 107-111.

¹⁹⁶ Lacroix, "Understanding," 173.

¹⁹⁷ Dekmejian, "The Rise," 628-629; Lacroix, *Awakening*, 103.

Wahhābī establishment of officially employed *'ulamā'* to authorize permission for non-Muslim troops in Saudi Arabia to fight against other Muslims. The Council of Senior *'ulamā'*, headed by Mufti ibn Bāz, who commanded great prestige among all Saudi religious circle, issued a *fatwa* permitting the rulers' efforts.¹⁹⁸ This fateful decision incited considerable backlash against the Kingdom for many years, especially among radical groups like al-Qā'ida, who used the presence of US troops as justification for the 9/11 attacks. However, a much wider and non-violent strata of politically-engaged Salafis also fiercely opposed this invitation to American troops, particularly the Ṣaḥwīs and various other upstart popular preachers. All these groups criticized the *fatwa* for allowing the intrusion of non-Muslim forces into the Kingdom to protect the holiest places, believing that the Western military intervention would increase foreign, non-Muslim domination. Although the Ṣaḥwīs had condemned the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and potential march into Saudi Arabia, at the same time, they also condemned the Saudi decision to call American troops for help against Saddam Hussein.

Criticism of the introduction of US troops into Saudi Arabia catalyzed a wide-ranging Islamist oppositional movement against the authority of the Saudi royal family and Wahhābī establishment. This movement soon brought two young influential religious figures, who are often referred to as Surūrīs, Shaykhs Safar al-Ḥawālī and Salmān al-'Awda, to the fore as new leaders. Soon known as Shuyukh al-Ṣaḥwa (Shaykhs of the awakening), these two figures helped spearhead the movement by expressing their objections through Friday sermons, pronouncements, letters, and petitions. Two young

¹⁹⁸ Dekmejian, "The Rise," 632; Teitelbaum, *Holier*, 26-28.

influential Shaykhs emerged as the leaders of the Islamist opposition movement within Saudi Arabia.¹⁹⁹

These two young leaders, in turn, spearheaded the Letter of Demands and the Memorandum of Advice, which crystallized mounting protests and attracted the signatures of hundreds of Ṣaḥwa figures before their final submission to the king and mufti Shaykh ibn Bāz in 1991 and 1992. These petitions demanded the implementation of comprehensive reforms to Saudi state apparatuses, including modification of the political system within the boundaries of *sharī'a*.²⁰⁰

While this movement briefly flourished after the arrival of US troops in 1990, mobilizing a large number of young people, as we shall see, it quickly lost its momentum. The Saudi government responded by taking a firmer stand against the Ṣaḥwīs and suppressing the shaykhs of Ṣaḥwa. In 1994, the government started to arrest the most important figures, including shaykhs Salman al-ʿAwda and Safar al-Ḥawālī. Even more damaging, however, this brief resurgence of an independent, politically-minded, but also non-violent Salafism in the form of an energized Ṣaḥwa movement also soon engendered a deep backlash not just with state officials, but also across the spectrum of devout Muslims. In particular, a new movement known as the Jāmīs, a separate group from the Wahhābī establishment that preached devotion to the Saudi state, rather than protest, would arise.

¹⁹⁹ Comminis, *The Wahhabi*, 176-181; Teitelbaum, *Holier*, 25-29.

²⁰⁰ Teitelbaum, *Holier*, 32-42; Dekmejian, "The Rise," 630-635.

The Counter Ideology (Jāmī Movement)

On the eve of the Gulf War, the *Jāmī* movement emerged as a potent countervailing force, loosely subscribing to the overarching framework of Salafī Islamic beliefs yet reacting against other Salafis like the *Ṣaḥwa* movement who engaged in opposition to the Saudi government and the traditional Wahhābī ‘*ulamā*’. In particular, the *Jāmī* developed a reputation for their severe criticism of the *Ṣaḥwa* and any other Islamist movements that dared mount political opposition against the religious legitimacy of the Saudi regime while providing support of the Saudi regime’s policies and acts. This position emanates from the principle of listening and obedience to *walī al-amr* (the ruler). Ultimately, this new movement leveled criticism not just against their immediate antagonists among the *Saḥwa* movement, including Safar al-Ḥawālī and Salmān al-‘Awda, but also a broader pantheon of famous intellectual luminaries of political Islamism, including renowned figures such as Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb.

The “Jāmī” specifically derives from the name of an important cleric, Shaykh Muḥammad Amān al-Jāmī who was born in Ethiopia in 1930 and later emigrated to Saudi Arabia. He chaired the Faculty of Ḥadīth at the Islamic University of Medina until his death in 1995.²⁰¹ As with the Surūrīs, the members of this backlash movement did not explicitly choose or embrace the term “Jāmīs,” but instead had it foisted upon them by their antagonists.²⁰² For many Ṣaḥwīs, labelling their antagonists as “Jāmī” had the effect

²⁰¹ <http://dusunnah.com/article/1045/>.

²⁰² Khālīd Mushawḥ, *al-tayarāt al-dīniyya fī al-sa‘udiyya* (the Religious Trends in Saudi Arabia) (Beirut: Dar al-Intishar al-Arabi, second edition 2012), 111.

of undermining their legitimacy by associating them with a “foreign” Ethiopian Shaykh. The group is also referred to as “Scholastic Salafis” (*al-Salafiyyah al-‘Ilmiyyah.*)²⁰³

However, despite such efforts to tarnish the group as foreign, the most well-known Jāmī figure is Rabī‘ b. Hādī al-Madkhalī, born in 1931 in the Jizan Province of southern Saudi Arabia. He began to study at his village schools when he was eight years and later continued his education at the Al-Ma‘had al-‘Ilmī (Scientific Institution) in Saamitah. In 1960, he joined the Faculty of *Sharī‘a* in Riyadh before moving in 1961 to the Islamic University of Medina, where he studied under ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Bāz (1909–1999), Muḥammad Nāsīr al-Dīn al-Albānī (1914–1999), and Muḥammad Amīn al-Shanqītī.²⁰⁴ Al-Madkhalī specialized in the field of *ḥadīth*, particularly *al-jarḥ wa-l-ta‘dīl* (disparagement and praise), which is a method to evaluate narrators of *ḥadīth*. However, during the internal polarization of the 1990s, al-Madkhalī deployed this religious knowledge as a tool to criticize his political adversaries.²⁰⁵

Al-Madkhalī held a particular literalist interpretation of Islamic sources that distinguished him even among Salafis. He was especially attracted to the teachings of shaykh Muḥammad Nāsīr al-Dīn al-Albānī, whom the International Crisis Group noted in a 2004 report “had founded a school of Islamic thought that views the Ḥadīth as the sole basis for religious decisions” and “rejected all schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*),

²⁰³ Haykel, “On the Nature,” 49.

²⁰⁴ His bio under the title “Tarjamah Mūjazah li-l Shaykh al-‘lāmah Rabī‘ b. Hādī ‘Omayir al-Madkhalī,” rabee.net <http://www.rabee.net/ar/sharticles.php?cat=10&id=55>.

²⁰⁵ Roel Meijer, “Politicising al-jarḥ wa-l-ta‘dīl: Rabī‘ b. Hādī al-Madkhalī and the transnational battle for religious authority” in *The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam*, ed. Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Kees Versteegh and Joas Wagemakers (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2011), 375-376 doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004206786_019.

including Wahhābīsm, insofar as they involved a degree of human judgment.”²⁰⁶ This school of devotion to a literalist interpretation is often referred to as “Ahl al-Ḥadīth” in reference to the medieval school that emerged in the 8th and 9th century. Devotees of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth focus on purifying the faith from *bid‘* (pl. of *bida‘a* innovations) and teaching Muslims about their religion, but also issuing condemnations of those who pursue political participation.²⁰⁷ In order to spread their views, the Jāmīs used the same methods utilized by Ṣaḥwīs, such as cassette tapes, websites, pamphlets, books, and conferences.²⁰⁸ Asserting that all Arab political regimes are legitimate, the Jāmīs thus argue that it is a religious obligation for Muslims to offer unconditional obedience to the *walī al-amr* (the ruler). The only political action they deem acceptable is the provision of secret and private advice for the rulers behind palace walls.

Linked to this notion of the listening and obedience, the Jāmīs also advocated for quietism in part because they regard politics and political machinations as the main sources of *fitna* (internal strife) that afflicted the Muslim community across history. Thus, this group labelled anyone who opposed the Saudi regime as a *Khāriḡī* (Kharijite, one that departs), a Muslim secessionist sect that appeared after the battle of Ṣiffīn between ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the fourth caliph, and Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, governor of Syria, in 657, and a term in the contemporary lexicon that denigrates those who oppose a legitimate Islamic rule.²⁰⁹ Not surprisingly, experts like Meijer, have argued that the

²⁰⁶ “Saudi Arabia Backgrounder: Who are the Islamists?” International Crisis Group, Middle East Report 31 (September 2004), 3.

²⁰⁷ Omayam Abdel-Latif, “Trends in Salafism,” *Islamist Radicalisation: The Challenge for Euro-Mediterranean Relations*, ed. Michael Emerson, Kristina Kausch and Richard Youngs (Brussels: Centre For European Policy Studies, 2009), 72; Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 215.

²⁰⁸ “Saudi Arabia Backgrounder,” 6.

²⁰⁹ Meijer, “Politicalized,” 376; Brachman, *Global Jihadism*, 30.

Jāmīs gained most of their religious authority from the *tazkiyat* (recommendations) of those leading Wahhabi and Salafī scholars at the apex of the religious pyramid, such as Shaykhs Ibn Bāz and al-Albānī.²¹⁰ Therefore, the Jāmīs insisted that they did not comprise a political party or group, but instead encouraged their followers to remain strictly apolitical in their daily affairs.

The Jāmīs developed theological refutations aimed at famous international Islamist figures such as al-Banna and Qutb as well as their followers among wider Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Tablīgh. These theological refutations often devolved into slander and vilification of those groups that did not share the Jāmī’s approaches to Salafism. This vociferous criticism started with an attack against the Muslim Brotherhood, who they saw as the main source of mixing Islam with politics and which of course had been an early inspiration for figures like Surūr. Al-Madkhalī claimed that “The Muslim Brotherhood is more harmful to Islam than the real *kuffar* (unbelievers) because the Muslims are not deceived by *kuffar*, but they are deceived by those misleading innovators who lead people going astray.”²¹¹ Shaykh Rabī‘ b. Hādī al-Madkhalī also warned in his writings about the danger of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups infiltrating Saudi Arabia. Al-Madkhalī blamed the Muslim Brotherhood for seeking to “distort the Salafī methodology,” effect the “extinction [of]

²¹⁰ Meijer, “Politicalized,” 379-380.

²¹¹ al-Madkhalī launched his attack against the Muslim Brotherhood in a lecture quoted in Surūr, “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (21),” 95.

the light of *tawhīd*,” and obtain the “replacement with their rotten methodologies (such as) methodology of the Ikhwān and Qutbīs.”²¹²

The Jāmī critique extended to include the most prominent thinkers behind the Muslim Brotherhood such as Sayyid Qutb. Al-Madkhalī declared that “the heads of contemporary *ahl al-bid*” (the people who commit blameworthy innovations) and “the heads of *ahl al-fitan*” (the people who cause and instigate strife) are Sayyid Qutb, (Ḥasan) al-Bannā, Mawdudī, and Ḥasan Turābī.²¹³ Al-Madkhalī wrote four books against Qutb and his ideas, refuting the core precepts of his thoughts such as the idea of *jahiliyyah*. Furthermore, he accused Qutb of practicing *takfīr* (excommunication) of the Islamic communities, calling for socialism, rejecting the attributes of Allāh, and believing in the creation of the Qur’ān, which is a doctrine coined by the Mu‘tazila (Mutazilites) who believed that the Qur’ān is created by God and was not eternal, uncreated, and the words of God as most mainstream Muslims of the day believed. He also accused Qutb of propagating the blasphemous principle of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (Unity of Being), which is one of the major ideas of Ṣūfism.²¹⁴ While al-Madkhalī did not pronounce *takfīr* against Qutb explicitly, the observer can see in these condemnations of Qutb an implicit *takfīr*. According to the Salafī view, whoever believes in the creation of Qur’ān or *waḥdat al-wujūd* commits *kufr* (apostasy) and will be out of Islam.

²¹² Rabī‘ b. Hādī al-Madkhalī, *Jamā‘a wāḥida lā Jamā‘āt: wa-ṣīrat wāḥid lā ‘asharāt*, Cairo: Dar al-Manahij, 2005),93-94. First published in 1995.

²¹³ Ibid., 188.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 155-156.

Surūr's Counterattack and Defending the Muslim Brotherhood and Qutb

At the time of the fierce Jāmī backlash against the Sahwa, Surūr had not disappeared from the intellectual or theological scene, despite his physical absence from Saudi Arabia. In 1984, Surūr moved to the United Kingdom as an investor in publishing and distribution coming from Kuwait. In Birmingham, he established the publishing house “Dar al-Araqam” and the “Center for Islamic Studies.” In 1989, he also founded the *al-Sunnah* magazine, which became a platform to express his views and attitudes towards political issues and events.²¹⁵ From his new exile, Surūr was one of the earliest figures to comment upon the origins and rise of this new Jāmī movement, as well as to advance a full-fledged rebuttal of its theological approach. By the mid-1990s, Surūr churned out several extensive criticisms and observed that Jāmī rhetoric consisted of two main pillars: first, unconditional support for the royal family, and second, a campaign of vilification against political Islamists such as al-Bannā, Qutb, the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Tablīgh. Surūr responded to this criticism with inflammatory accusations of his own, criticizing the Jāmīs for manipulating and betraying the true Salafī creed, as well as performing espionage for the Saudi regime.

In his writings, Surūr called the Jāmīs *ḥizb al-wūlāt* or “party of the loyalists,” mocking their exhortation to full obedience and complete submission to *wūlāt al-amer* (the ruler). Surūr admitted that the loyalists agree with other Salafīs about foundational theological creeds, but they disagree with them about their advocacy for unconditional

²¹⁵ His bio under the title “Al-Shaykh Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn ... Sīrah wa Masirah,” Surour.net. <https://www.surour.net/%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%b1%d8%a9-%d9%88%d9%85%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%b1%d8%a9/>; Murāja‘āt with Surūr.

loyalty toward the rulers, claiming that in so doing, the Jāmīs even violate Islamic law.²¹⁶ Surūr observed that the loyalists tried to tar all criticism with the brush of unlawful “innovation” and also accused all those who disagreed with them of being “Qutbists,” “Surūris,” and “Ikhwān.”²¹⁷

Beyond their devotion to the Saudi state and what he perceived as their flawed interpretation of Islamic doctrine, Surūr embraced a more specifically geostrategic argument, contending that the Jāmī provided a useful tool for American aims in the region. For instance, he noted that the Jāmī movement only emerged after the Gulf War and the rise of the United States as the ruler over a “New World Order” directed at subjecting the Middle East to its control. According to Surūr, the United States understood that the only groups that could really thwart their aims of hegemony in the Middle East were politically engaged Islamists and Salafists. Therefore, it made sense that the US would seek to defuse such threats and mobilize public opinion by impugning Salafīs as fundamentalist terrorists. However, Surūr also believes that the United States sought to weaken Islamist politics by sowing internal dissension and weakening any Salafī organization that maintained autonomy from their ally, the Saudi State. The Jāmī, in particular, contrary to their outward appearances of scriptural literalism, in fact, served American agendas by undermining the forces of political Salafism and thus helping “to lay the roots of secularism and remain loyal to the enemies of Islam.”²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (21) al-Ḥiwār Bayna Ahl al-Sunnah: Al-Salafiyya bayna al-Wulāt wa al-Ghulāt,” [Toward new Entity (21) Dialogue between the People of Sunnah: the Salafism between the Loyalist and the Extremists.] *Al-Sunnah* 56, (1996) [1416], 85.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 93

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 87

Surūr also drew attention to what he perceived as the contradiction between Jāmī rhetoric and their actual practices. Specifically, he argued that the Jāmī stance of rejecting politics concealed the reality that they themselves embraced the tools of a modern political party. For example, even though the Jāmī loyalists denounced politics and the political parties as the source of blameworthy “innovation” (*bid‘a*), they nonetheless embraced the structure of a political party “with popular base, leadership, methodology, and goals.”²¹⁹ More recently, academic researchers have also drawn attention to this gap between a professed opposition to politics and the reality of political mobilization. Khālīd Mushawāḥ, an expert in Islamist movements, argued that the Jāmī group began to assume a *ḥarakī* character, with a large number of its followers organized around and receiving orders from a centralized leadership—the very attributes to which they supposedly expressed unyielding opposition.²²⁰ Meijer also recognizes this paradox. He argues that “[f]or although it pretends to be apolitical or even anti-political and is against internal strife (*fitna*) within the *umma*, which supposedly results from politics and machinations, the movement itself uses instruments of power to obtain hegemony in the transnational Islamic movement and ultimately becomes itself a political movement, provoking resistance and ultimately fostering internal strife.”²²¹ Intentionally or unintentionally, the Jamis engaged in precisely the same activities for which they criticized other Salafis. They committed the same actions that they warned against, practicing politics and promoting division within the Muslim communities.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 86.

²²⁰ Mushawāḥ, *al-tayarāt al-dīniyya*, 115.

²²¹ Meijer, “Politicising Al-Jarḥ,” 376.

Surūr thus made the argument that the main feature of the loyalists is not their detachment from politics, but rather, their hostility to specific political Islamist movements, especially the Muslim Brotherhood. Although Surūr acknowledged that there are flaws and shortcomings in the Muslim Brotherhood’s methodology, as discussed in chapter two, he does not find justification for Jāmī loyalists to engage in such ad hominem attacks against them, noting the organization still belongs to the *Ahl al-Sunah wa al-Jama‘a* (the Sunnis; lit. people of the tradition of the Prophet and community).²²²

Surūr thus devoted a portion of his condemnation of the Jāmīs to specifically refuting their attacks against Sayyid Qutb. Surūr admitted that he admired Qutb for his steadiness/inalterableness on the truth, boldness in facing the *ṭāghūt* (despot, idol), and knowledge. Surūr denied that Qutb was Ṣūfī, *mu‘taẓla*, *Ash‘ari*, an advocate of the concept of *wahdt al-wujud*, or an extremist. At the time, Surūr admitted that Qutb had made mistakes in some religious issues, which is normal and not necessarily meriting extreme condemnation according to Surūr, because Qutb is only human and does not have *‘iṣma* (infallibility) like prophets.²²³

Throughout his writings, Surūr evokes a sense of surprise at the Jāmī campaign against various political Islamists, particularly their equation of the culprit (the ruler) with the victim (the Islamists), and questioned how they support the ruler against the Islamists.

²²² Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (22) al-Ḥiwār Bayna Ahl al-Sunnah: Al-Salafiyya bayna al-Wulāt wa al-Ghulāt,” [Toward new Entity (22) Dialogue between the People of Sunnah: the Salafism between the Loyalist and the Extremists.] *Al-Sunnah* 57, (1996) [1417], 65.

²²³ Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, *Dirasāt fi al-Sira al-Nabawiyya* (Birmingham: Dar al-Araqam, 1988 second edition), 321-323.

Surūr further amplified his criticism by likening the position of the Jāmīs with that of secularists, particularly in terms of their complete alignment with the views of the Saudi government on which groups they support and which groups they oppose.²²⁴ Most damningly, Surūr charged that Jāmī loyalists invoke the Salafī call but strip it of all its spirit and betray its meaning.²²⁵

Surūr argued that the efforts of the Jāmī loyalists are directed mainly to monopolizing the Islamic arenas, believing that “they are responsible for the Salafī call” so they can include whoever they like and exclude whoever they dislike.²²⁶ They put themselves in charge to combat the deviations of the Islamists, using the principle of *al-jarḥ wa-l-ta’dīl* (disparagement and praise). Surūr argued that condemnation of innovations was done through exaggeration of mistakes of the *du’āt* (preachers) and Islamist groups. They began a campaign against the antagonists from the Islamists, looking for mistakes or religious errors in their writings and lectures. Once they see a mistake done by an Islamist, they call him *mubtad’* (a person of innovation). Then, they wage public smear campaigns against this antagonist.²²⁷ Furthermore, Surūr accused the loyalists of espionage for the Saudi royal family, claiming that their writings, audiotapes, and lectures became reports against their rivals such as Surūris and other Ṣaḥwīs to the intelligence services. Surūr mentioned that the Jāmī loyalists wrote a long report submitted to the Saudi Interior Minister under the title “the International Secret

²²⁴ Surūr, “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (22),” 67; Surūr, “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (21),” 96. More information on Secular trend in Saudi Arabia and position from the Saudi monarchy see Richard Dekmejian, “The Liberal Impulse in Saudi Arabia,” *Middle East Journal* 57, no. 3 (Summer, 2003): 400-401; Stéphane Lacroix, “Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia’s New “Islam-Liberal” Reformists,” *Middle East Journal*, 58, No. 3 (Summer, 2004): 345-347; Al-Rasheed, *Contesting*, 66.

²²⁵ Surūr, “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (21),” 87.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

Organization between Planning and Implementation in Saudi Arabia” in the middle of the 1990s. The report recommended state authorities take measures against their Ṣaḥwī opponents because they pose a danger to the Kingdom. Surūr stated that this report contained a lot of lies and fallacies against the Islamists in Saudi Arabia.²²⁸ Furthermore, Surūr described “the loyalists” with *ahl al-ahwā’* (the people of desire) because they are driven by their whims and passions.²²⁹

Surūr’s Anti-Jamī Campaign: Condemning the Wrong and Rejecting Total Obedience

In response to this vehement criticism, the Jāmīs excoriated Surūr himself for abandoning Saudi Arabia to live in the West, for his lack of *‘ilm* (knowledge), for not respecting *‘ulamā’* and for criticizing the rulers. The Jāmīs, who called for complete obedience for the rulers in everything, accused Surūr of “intellectual terrorism” because he described the *‘ulamā’* as slaves at the service of the ruler for their *fatwa* permitting the aid of non-Muslim troops in the Gulf War.²³⁰ The Jāmīs believed that the political authority in the Kingdom should make the decision on the behalf the nation. Opposing the Saudi monarchy and rebellion against it constitutes forbidden acts.²³¹ On the contrary, they believe that Surūr, as well as everyone in the world, owe love, appreciation, and respect for the *‘ulamā’* and rulers of the Kingdom.²³²

²²⁸ Ibid., 96-97.

²²⁹ Surūr, “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (22),” 75.

²³⁰ Zayd b. Muḥammad b. Hādī al-Madkhalī, *Al-irḥāb wa-athāruhu ‘alā l-afrād wa-l-umam* (Terrorism and its Effects on Individual and Nations) (United Arab Emirates, 1418 (1997), 76-77, <http://www.ajurry.com/vb/showthread.php?t=18641>.

²³¹ Abdel-Latif, “Trends in Salafism,” 74.

²³² al-Madkhalī, *Al-irḥāb wa-athāruhu*, 77.

Expectedly, Surūr did not stay quiet in the face of these reprisals. In response to Jāmī criticism of young generation of Ṣaḥwī preachers, he defended the Salafī status of these upstart ‘*ulamā*’, asserting that “they are Salafīs in fundamentals and branches and this is clear for everyone who reviews from their writings and explores their positions. They have had a significant role in the interpretation of the creed of *Ahl al-Sunah wa al-Jama‘a*, refuting the misconceptions of the enemies of Islam.”²³³ They also have contributed, according to Surūr, to the struggle against “the innovators,” “*khawarj*,” and “*al-ghulāt*.”²³⁴ Surūr defended the Ṣaḥwīs’ oppositional activities during the Gulf War by invoking a principle that he believed transcended loyalty to the ruler, specifically, the principle of “condemning the wrong.” He added that by writing and signing various petitions, which were also signed by a broad spectrum of other senior Muslim scholars, these young ‘*ulamā*’ did not infringe upon the approach of the pious ancestors in the past and present.²³⁵

Surūr followed up on this idea of “condemning the wrong” by demonstrating his jurisprudential view on a host of issues concerning the legitimacy of the ruler, potential rebellions against him and the position of the scholars. Recognizing that it is mandatory to uphold the principle of “listening and obedience of the ruler in case the ruler imposes the *sharī‘a* on his subjects,”²³⁶ Surūr nevertheless believed that the obedience to the *walī al-amr* is still conditional on his maintenance of “*al-amr bi-l-ma‘rūf wa-nahy ‘an al-*

²³³ Surūr, “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (22),” 62.

²³⁴ Ibid., 63.

²³⁵ Ibid., 63.

²³⁶ Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (29) al-Ḥiwār Bayna Ahl al-Sunnah: Al-Salafiyya bayna al-Wulāt wa al-Ghulāt,” [Toward new Entity (29) Dialogue between the People of Sunnah: the Salafism between the Loyalist and the Extremists.] *Al-Sunnah* 67 (1997), 86.

munkar” or commanding good and forbidding wrong. “Obedience,” according to Surūr, “does not mean acquiescence, tyranny, and oppression.”²³⁷ Surūr denied the principle of giving private, discreet advice behind the palace walls adopted by the Jāmīs and the traditional Wahhābī ‘*ulamā*’. For Surūr, it is unacceptable for the advice to be secret; as long as the violation of the *sharī‘a* was in public, then the advice should be in public too.²³⁸

Surūr elaborated upon his opinion of the ‘*ulamā*’ who support political rulers by distinguishing between two types. He argued that after the abolition of the Khalifate, the rulers of the Muslim countries replaced the provisions of Islamic law with ignorant European law. The rulers also practiced a “gagging policy against their people and distributed injustice, corruption and disintegration everywhere.”²³⁹ He also lamented that in modern times, the ‘*ulamā*’ no longer possess the freedom to write, preach and give a religious verdict.²⁴⁰ Surūr distinguished between two types of ‘*ulamā*’ who provide support to the rulers. The first category of the ‘*ulamā*’ support the *ṭāghūt* (despotic ruler) and issue *fatwas* that contradict the *sharī‘a*, including rulings that effectively legalize “usurious banking” and justify “bloodshed of the (*Ṣaḥwī*) ‘*ulamā*’.”²⁴¹ The other group of ‘*ulamā*’ might be fooled by the ruler who seeks to take advantage of their knowledge, honesty, and popularity among the people for their purposes. The ruler insists on these ‘*ulamā*’ accepting high positions in the religious field, promising them the cooperation of

²³⁷ Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (31) al-Ḥiwār Bayna Ahl al-Sunnah: Al-Salafiyya bayna al-Wulāt wa al-Ghulāt,” [Toward new Entity (31) Dialogue between the People of Sunnah: the Salafism between the Loyalist and the Extremists.] *Al-Sunnah* 69 (1997) Page 86

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

²³⁹ Surūr, “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (29),” 87-88.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 91-92.

the state to execute reforms in the Kingdom. After the fall of these *'ulamā'* into the trap of the ruler, they begin to change their attitudes and opinion regarding many issues, often remaining silent. These *'ulamā'* justify their new discourse and silence in terms of the fear that the Kingdom might otherwise fall into *fitna* (internal strife); they also contend the situation in Saudi Arabia is better than in neighboring countries.²⁴²

Surūr discussed the silence of some *'ulamā'* and their refusal to clearly state any legal opinion on the violation of rulers against the *sharī'a* for fear of abetting a descent into dangerous civil wars, or *fitna*. In particular, Surūr attributes the state of *fitna* not to *'ulamā'* who voice some criticism of the regime, but instead, to those *'ulamā'* who abandon correct legal jurisprudence and contradict past ruling in an effort to appease the rulers. For instance, some of those *'ulamā'* issued *fatwas* or legal opinions that contradicted their previous opinions or the *sharī'a* in fear of antagonizing the ruler. Surūr also believed that the true source of *al-fitna* is not the critical or autonomous *'ulamā'*, but rather, those who shamefully issued *fatwas* legalizing repression against other *'ulamā'*.²⁴³ It is required from the *'ulamā'*, according to Surūr, not to bear arms against the rulers or instigate the people against them, but to—at the bare minimum—issue clear legal opinions against those rulers who do not properly apply the *sharī'a*.²⁴⁴ He also denied the claim of some *'ulamā'* that the rulers in Saudi Arabia might deserve some special dispensation—despite some errors and deviations—for being comparatively upright in

²⁴² Ibid., 93-94.

²⁴³ Ibid., 94-95.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 96.

comparison to the situation in neighboring countries. Such a relativist view, according to Surūr, does not exempt scholars and preachers from the duty of denying wrong.²⁴⁵

Towards a New Reformism: *Fiqh al-Waqi'* and Ongoing Polemics

Building on resources found in the Islamic legal literature, the Ṣaḥwīs revived the *fiqh al-waqi'* (jurisprudence /understanding of reality) and sought to use it as a tool to enhance their domination in the Islamic sphere. According to some, advocating the *fiqh al-waqi'* endowed the Ṣaḥwīs with superiority over the traditional Wahhābī 'ulamā', who were seen as isolated from reality. On one hand, this expertise demonstrated that the Ṣaḥwīs could fuse an extensive religious background with good knowledge of modern sciences such as social sciences. However, the jurisprudence of reality also proved a controversial topic engendering heated debate between the Surūrīs and the Jāmīs at the beginning of the 1990s.

The *fiqh al-waqi'* is one of the key concepts in Islamic jurisprudence. The concept was first coined by Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, a famous Ḥanbalī scholar and a student of Ibn Taymiyya. In al-Jawziyya's view, the *mufti* and the judge are required to understand two points in order to issue a correct *fatwa* and verdicts. He wrote:

The first is having a grasp of reality. The *faqīh* should draw a conclusion of what is happening based on evidence, indications, and signs so that he comprehends it. The second is understanding of what is required with respect to reality, which means understanding the ruling (judgment) of God and his Prophet that it is established in His book or on the tongue of His Prophet in light of this reality. After that, he should apply the one (matter) to the other.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-'Ābidīn, "Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (30) al-Ḥiwār Bayna Ahl al-Sunnah: Al-Salafiyya bayna al-Wulāt wa al-Ghulāt," [Toward new Entity (30) Dialogue between the People of Sunnah: the Salafism between the Loyalist and the Extremists.] *Al-Sunnah* 68 (1997), 83-84.

²⁴⁶ Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *I'lām al-Muwaqqi'īn 'an Rabb al-'alamīm* (Information for Those Who Write on Behalf of the Lord of the Worlds), vol. 1 Page 87, <https://www.ajurry.com/vb/showthread.php?t=10827>.

Nāsir al-‘Umar, a key figure in the *Ṣaḥwa* movement who is often referred to as a leading Surūrī, earned a doctorate from the college of the fundamentals of religion at Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University in 1984, when he began teaching at the same university. In his 1980s-era lectures, he invoked the concept of *fiqh al-waqi‘* first expounded by early Islamic scholars.²⁴⁷ Specifically, he talked about the importance of this “*ilm*” and argued that “of the reasons of backwardness of the *umma* is its ignorance of reality.”²⁴⁸ He defined the *fiqh al-waqi‘* as “a science looking into understanding contemporary circumstances, such as factors influencing/acting on societies, forces/powers dominating states, ideas directed to undermine the faith, and the legitimate ways of protecting the *umma* and making it advance now and in the future.”²⁴⁹ This *ilm* requires that specialists learn not only the religious knowledge (‘*aqida* and *fiqh*), but also social sciences (history) and modern knowledge (politics and media).

Al-‘Umar also emphasized that the practitioners of this type of *fiqh* should continuously engage in the pursuit of learning by following new developments in the sciences and news.²⁵⁰ He clarified that those who analyze and evaluate contemporary events must avoid biased negativity, but instead try to understand the reality in an objective fashion.²⁵¹ Furthermore, he encouraged those who want to specialize in *fiqh al-waqi‘* to read historical studies and other scholarly works on politics, international relations, and political economy, not to mention Muhammad Surūr’s *Then Came the Turn*

²⁴⁷ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 145; al-‘Umar bio is available in his website, <http://almoslim.net/naser/cv>.

²⁴⁸ Nāsir al-‘Umar, “Fiqh al-waqi‘,” 11, <http://almoslim.net/documents/Feqeh%20Alwaqei.pdf>.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

of *Majūs* and Muhammad Qutb's *Our Contemporary Reality*.²⁵² He also highlighted many of the positive outcomes of the *fiqh al-waqi'*, particularly as a tool to counteract the enemies who might plot against the *umma* and the '*ulamā'*'. He explained that "the secularists are plotting against the '*ulamā'*' of *umma* and seeking to distort their image before the public by raising controversies in religious and scientific issues which might seem a contradiction in the *fatwa* and weakness in '*ilm*.'" To avoid that, "the *fatwa* has to be based on a conception of reality... which gives the *fatwa* respect and strength."²⁵³

Unsurprisingly, the *Jāmīs* sought to belittle the importance of this notion of grasping reality in the *fiqh al-waqi'* and accused its advocates of deviation from the right Salafī path. Shaykh Rabī' b. Hādī al-Madkhalī claimed that the *Ṣaḥwīs* who advocated the *fiqh al-waqi'* diverged from the teachings of great scholars such as Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya. He insisted that the *Ṣaḥwīs* revived the *fiqh al-waqi'* only for political purposes against the Wahhabi '*ulamā'*'. He also believed that the *Ṣaḥwīs*' focus on this type of *fiqh* over other types of religious sciences is dangerous because it would distance the young generation from religious studies and preoccupy them with politics. Furthermore, al-Madkhalī sought to further demean the importance of awareness of the *fiqh al-waqi'* by arguing that such knowledge it intended for a small group of people such as the rulers and the '*ulamā'*'; the laymen, by contrast, have no need to understand this field. Often, al-Madkhalī referred to those who advocate the *fiqh al-waqi'* pejoratively with the epithet of

²⁵² Ibid., 35-36.

²⁵³ Ibid., 23.

fuqahā' al-wāqī' (*fuqahā'* of reality) or *al-mutaḥamisūn li fiqh al-wāqī'* (the enthusiasts for the jurisprudence of reality).²⁵⁴

The core of the Jāmī argument against “the *fiqh al-wāqī'* stemmed from the view that such an emphasis represented a malicious plot against the religious sciences in general, and the *'ulamā'* of the *umma* in particular. The aim of the advocates of this *fiqh* is elimination of the *sharī'a* and an unacceptable alteration of the words of the Qur'ān and Sunna.”²⁵⁵ Al-Madkhalī accused “the enthusiasts for the *fiqh al-wāqī'*” of exaggerating the importance of the *fiqh al-wāqī'* and elevating other sciences over *sharī'a*. He proclaimed that in fact, *fiqh al-wāqī'* should not be called either *'ilm* or *fiqh*.²⁵⁶ Furthermore, al-Madkhalī alleged that the *fuqahā' al-wāqī'* dangerously accused the *'ulamā'* of ignoring reality and not having enough knowledge of it.²⁵⁷ Finally, Al-Madkhalī claimed that the *fiqh al-wāqī'* exhibited dangerous political goals. This approach, according to al-Madkhalī aims to cast aside the Salafī methodology and divide the minds of youth from the Wahhabi *'ulamā'*.²⁵⁸

Surūr, unsurprisingly, responded harshly in what would become an extended cycle of polemics and bitter argumentation, seeking to maintain the Ṣaḥwīs's gains by refuting the Jāmīs' attacks and defending the young Ṣaḥwīs scholars who revived the *fiqh al-wāqī'* and its stress on *'ilm*. He also argued that the campaign of the loyalists against

²⁵⁴ Rabī' b. Hādī al-Madkhalī, *Ahl al-Ḥadīth hum al-Ta'ifa al-Manṣuwrah wa al-Furqah al-Nājiyya: Ḥiwār ma' Salmān al-'Awda*, (second edition 1993), 78-80, First edition was published in 1992.

²⁵⁵ Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-'Ābidīn, “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (23) al-Ḥiwār Bayna Ahl al-Sunnah: Al-Salafiyya bayna al-Wulāt wa al-Ghulāt,” [Toward new Entity (23) Dialogue between the People of Sunnah: the Salafism between the Loyalist and the Extremists.] *Al-Sunnah* 58, (1996) [1417], 97.

²⁵⁶ Al-Madkhalī, *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* 78-80.

²⁵⁷ Al-Madkhalī, *Jamā'a wāḥida*, 58.

²⁵⁸ Al-Madkhalī, *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, 78.

this school of *fiqh* amounted to little more than a defense of the Saudi royal family and an attempt to justify its illegal activities and repression.

Surūr considered the *fiqh al-waqi'* a condition that must be met in the *fatwa* and the mufti. He cited the saying of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth scholar Muḥammad Nāsīr al-Dīn al-Albānī, who also commanded considerable respect among the Jāmīs,

Understanding reality to reach the *sharī'ī* ruling is an important duty that a specialized and smart group of seekers of knowledge have to do. This is just like any other branch of knowledge, whether it has to do with *sharī'a*, social sciences, economics, military matters or any other branch of knowledge that is of benefit the Islamic *umma* and will bring it back to its position of glory and leadership, especially when these branches of knowledge are developing from one time and place to another.²⁵⁹

Surūr asserted that all the '*ulamā*' and seekers of religious knowledge, who are engaged in the *fiqh al-waqi'*, "are known with authenticity in belief, the abundance of '*ilm*, and standing by the boundaries set by Allāh." He denied al-Madkhalī's accusation of exaggeration in the importance of this *fiqh*. He also contended that the young '*ulamā*' did not exceed the lines drew by Ibn al-Qayyim and al-Albānī, adding that "these people (the loyalists) know that who aims at overthrowing the *sharī'a* is an infidel, so how can those, who defend '*ulamā*', accuse other '*ulamā*' of committing infidelity and apostasy, even though the methodology is the same and the belief is the same?!"²⁶⁰ Surūr rejected the claim of the loyalists that *fiqh al-waqi'* is a conspiracy against the *sharī'a*.

Finally, the arguments on behalf of *fiqh al-waqi'* culminated with his claim that this methodology represented not only the correct *sharī'ī*, but that it amounts to a *farḍ*

²⁵⁹ Surūr, "Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (23)," 100.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 101-102.

kifāya (a communal obligation), rather than a *farḍ ‘ayn* (an Individual obligation). In another words, if some of the scholars undertake it, the obligation is waived for the other.²⁶¹ Surūr discussed al-Madkhalī’s castigation of the sources used in this type of *fiqh* as unreliable. Surūr argued that people who are specialized in *‘ilm* must acquire extensive religious knowledge, examine the news that they obtain, and explain and publish the sources upon which they rely.²⁶² Surūr gave an example in which he intended not only to explain his idea and refute al-Madkhalī’s critique, but also to criticize the Saudi regime. He stated that “if the news recurs from the *kuffār* about an official visit of American officials to Riyād, and then held a series of meetings with their Saudi counterparts that resulted in an agreement (that) what the media of *walī al-amr* has kept silent from publicity - as usual - and published in details by American media outlets and discussed and endorsed it by the Congress, would we deny this news because the infidels were only people circulated it.”²⁶³ Despite the effort of al-Madkhalī to undermine the bases of this knowledge, Surūr, with his example, wanted to refute al-Madkhalī’s claims and take the debate back to its core underlying issue: namely the Saudi Arabian relationship with the United States and the West in general.

Debate about *Tawḥīd al-Ḥākimiyya*

These debates over the proper place of loyalty to the Saudi state for Muslim scholars also spilled over into other arenas of intra-Salafī theological polemics, including

²⁶¹ Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (24) al-Ḥiwār Bayna Ahl al-Sunnah: al-Salafiyya bayna al-Wulāt wa al-Ghulāt” [Toward new Entity (24) Dialogue between the People of Sunnah: The Salafism between the Loyalist and Extremists.] *Al-Sunnah* 60, (1996) [1417], 72.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 73.

the concept of *tawḥīd al-ḥākimiyya*. In particular, the debates about the authenticity and legitimacy increased within Salafī circles at the start of the 1990s. Before we go further in examining this debate about the authenticity and legitimacy of the *tawḥīd al-ḥākimiyya*, it is essential to explain the meaning and connotations of this concept. *Al-ḥākimiyya* (the sovereignty of God) means that the sovereignty belongs only to God and He is the One in whom is vested the right of legislation, judging and executing the judgments. Abū l-A‘lā Mawdūdī (1903–79), the Indo-Pakistani scholar, introduced the concept of *al-ḥākimiyya* in the twentieth century to modern Islamist discourse. Influenced by Mawdūdī’s works, Sayyid Qutb also picked up the term and popularized it across the Middle East as discussed in chapter 1.

Joined to the concept of *al-ḥākimiyya*, in turn, was the idea of *tawḥīd*, the unitary oneness of God—a universally acknowledged—core component of Islam and the most critical aspect in Salafism and Wahhabism. In order to achieve an accurate understanding of the concept and to prevent their Muslim followers from stumbling into unsanctioned “innovation,” the Salafī Wahhābī ‘*ulamā*’ broke down the concept of *tawḥīd* into categories. Perhaps the earliest figure associated with Wahhabism, the Saudi Shaykh, Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (l. 1703-1792), divided it into three constituent components: *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* (Oneness of Lordship), *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* (Oneness of divinity), and *tawḥīd al-asmā’ wa al-ṣifāt* (Oneness of names, qualities, and attributes). These classifications are for the most part accepted among Wahhābīs. However, it is important to note that these categories are not present in the Quran and Sunnah but were

developed by Wahhābī scholars to facilitate the understanding of texts and rulings of *sharī'a*.²⁶⁴

Meanwhile, political events and other perceived social changes encouraged Ṣaḥwīs to combine the concept of *al-ḥākimiyya* with concept of *ṭawḥīd*. The much-discussed intervention of American troop in the Arabian Peninsula increased the fears of the Ṣaḥwīs about being dominated by the encroaching colonial powers. The Ṣaḥwīs also began to combat the secular influence that appeared at that time in the Kingdom and called for separation between religion and state.²⁶⁵ As a reaction to these calls, the Ṣaḥwīs pioneered the fusion of the concept of *al-ḥākimiyya* with the concept of *ṭawḥīd*, forming a new category of *ṭawḥīd*, known as *ṭawḥīd al-ḥākimiyya* to educate Muslims about the importance of the oneness of God's rule.

However, linking the idea of God's sovereignty with *ṭawḥīd* elicited the opposition of Jāmīs who believed that creating a new category of *ṭawḥīd* constituted an act of *bid'a* and an unnecessary addition. The main concerns of the Jāmīs were that the Ṣaḥwīs did not show full commitment to practicing *ṭawḥīd*, and their emphasis on *al-ḥākimiyya* and *ṭawḥīd al-ḥākimiyya* simply emanated from malign political purposes. In his writing, Al-Madkhalī referred to the Ṣaḥwīs who call and promote *ṭawḥīd al-ḥākimiyya* as “people of politicians” who have political agendas.

Al-Madkhalī criticized Islamist groups who preoccupied themselves with politics, the call for *al-ḥākimiyya* and the establishment of the Islamic state. Al-Madkhalī did not

²⁶⁴ Haykel, “On the Nature,” 39; Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 146.

²⁶⁵ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission*, 176-182; Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 132-141.

neglect *al-ḥākimiyya* and argued that “the call for *al-ḥākimiyya* and its implementation are the important thing... in case its conditions were observed.”²⁶⁶ However, as for the *ṭawḥīd al-ḥākimiyya*, al-Madkhalī rejected making a fourth category of *ṭawḥīd*. For him, it represented yet another act of unlawful innovation and a political plot by politically oriented Islamist rivals to achieve *al-ḥākimiyya* and establish their vision of an Islamic state. He also believed that the division of *ḥākimiyya* into a separate classification of *ṭawḥīd* represents a distortion of the true meaning of *ṭawḥīd*.²⁶⁷

Surūr vociferously responded to these Jāmīs’ arguments yet again by invoking a common refrain: the idea that loyalists “entered the battle in response to the order of *walī ul-amr*.”²⁶⁸ Surūr argued that the Jāmīs “appointed themselves as attorneys on behalf of their *wūlāt omūrihm* (rulers)” to justify their failures in full implementation of *sharī‘a*.²⁶⁹ The exiled religious scholar specifically argued that “the talk about the *ṭawḥīd al-ḥākimiyya* for the loyalists has become like a political act, can do nothing but harm, because it leads inevitably to clash with the regimes.”²⁷⁰ In his view, it is a religious duty upon Muslims to propagate the call for the *ṭawḥīd al-ḥākimiyya* and seek to achieve full implementation of Allah’s laws.

Surūr also defended *ṭawḥīd al-ḥākimiyya* as a valid classification of *ṭawḥīd* and opposed the accusation that it constituted an innovation. He stressed its importance by citing the works of a range of classical and contemporary Wahhābī ‘*ulamā*’ including

²⁶⁶ Rabī‘ b. Hādī al-Madkhalī, *Manhaj al-‘Anbiyā’ fi al-Da‘wa ila Allāh fihi al-Ḥikmah wa al-‘aql* (The Methodology of the Prophets in Calling to God) second edition 1993, 181.

²⁶⁷ Rabī‘ b. Hādī al-Madkhalī, “al-Tawḥīd ‘awaln” (Monotheism First) a lecture held in 2002. <https://ar.alnahj.net/audio/2117/1423>.

²⁶⁸ Surūr, “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (24),” 94.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 92, 84-85.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 79.

Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb himself. Surūr noted that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb considered “those who believe that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) did not complete his guidance or that the rule (judgment) of the others is better than his rule (judgment), as those who prefer the ruling of *tāghūt* (tyrant) on his rule are *kafirs* (infidels).”²⁷¹ He also asked whether the loyalists have read the work of Shaykh Muḥammad Amīn al-Shanqīṭī, who saw “the one who follows an order other than God’s law and legislation is like worshipping an idol and worshipping idolatry, and there is no difference between them in any way, they are one, both are idolaters.”²⁷² For Surūr, the Jāmī position on *ṭawḥīd al-ḥākimiyya* just represented one more example of their total subordination to the Saudi rulers despite their violation of Islamic decrees.

Surūr continued his refutation of the Jāmīs and accused them of espionage, not to mention writing false reports to slander the *Ṣaḥwa* and the *Ṣaḥwīs*. According to Surūr, al-Madkhalī erroneously linked *fiqh al-waqi‘* (jurisprudence of reality) and *ḥākimiyya* with rebellion against the rulers in his writings. In order to prove his claim, al-Madkhalī mentioned the names of the *Ṣaḥwa* preachers and misquoted their sayings. Then, he analyzed these quotations and heavily imputed meanings that distorted the actual words. Al-Madkhalī also called these chosen examples from sayings and writings of the *Ṣaḥwīs* “foretastes of rebellion.” Finally, he warned the ruler “to be aware of those *Khawārij* (Kharijites) and strike them with an iron fist.”²⁷³

²⁷¹ Ibid., 80-81.

²⁷² Ibid., 81

²⁷³ Ibid., 82.

Surūr concluded that the dispute between the Jāmīs or “the *ḥizb -wūlat*” (party of loyalists) and what he called the centrist preachers of the Free Salafīs, otherwise known as the Ṣaḥwīs, did not fundamentally hinge on religious matters such as the position regarding the innovators or the way of commanding good and forbidding wrong. Instead, he observed that the loyalists “entered this battle in response to the orders issued by the rulers, who handed over the reins of affairs in the Arabian Peninsula to American polytheistic and their allies.” He added that the loyalists “will not be pleased unless the rulers are pleased, and the rulers will not be pleased unless the Americans are pleased.”²⁷⁴ For Surūr, the Jāmīs amounted to little more than a tool in the service of political rulers.

By 1994, the Jāmīs appeared victorious after jailing the key figures of the Ṣaḥwa such as Safar al-Ḥawālī and Salmān al-‘Awda. With the backing of the Saudi government and adoption of the popular Ahl al-Ḥadīth trend, the Jāmīs became an essential player in the Islamic circle in Saudi Arabia and contributed to weakening the authority of the Ṣaḥwa by drawing some followers. The conflict impacted the Jāmīs themselves by changing the very nature of the group. A group that first appeared as a *da‘wa* group calling for refraining from politics transformed into an organization dedicated to criticizing other Islamist movements. In the highly polarized moment of the Gulf War, the group began to take more a *ḥarakī* character by embracing the tools of a political party, like attracting followers and having leadership and goals. In general, it is noted that this conflict resulted in the weakening of the Ṣaḥwa phenomenon, at the expense of the

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 94.

growth of other trends. The liberal orientation and other religious trends, like the people of jurisprudence, made their way to the scene again.²⁷⁵

Examining the debates among non-violent Salafis reveals the dynamics of the Salafi scene in Saudi Arabia in the late twentieth century. The Ṣaḥwīs invoked and reformulated concepts in their pursuit to find tools to help them in their religious reformist project, which emphasized maintaining the importance of *sharīʿa* and incorporating modern sciences with religious knowledge. However, the Jāmīs, who adopted a purist Salafī approach, sought to demean this discourse by linking it with the revolutionary discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood, highlighting the limits of these concepts, and questioning their consistency with Salafī methodology.

²⁷⁵ Nāb, “Mushaḥnat.”

Chapter 5

Surūr's Rejection of Violence and Extremism

Activist (*ḥarakī*) Salafīs from different schools belong to the same overarching ideological and creedal Islamic school of thought and pursue overlapping goals. Despite such broad similarities, these activists engaged in vigorous debates and intellectual conflicts over the emergence of elements that we might call “extremist,” who embraced divergent methods and tactics in their pursuit of broadly shared goals against the larger backdrop of turbulent politics in the Islamic world of the late twentieth century. Two prominent examples of such extremist discourses that proved especially divisive within the Salafī movement include the idea of “*takfīr*,” or declaring a Muslim to be a *kāfir* [an unbeliever] because of an aspect of their belief or actions, and the embrace of violence as a tactic. In this chapter, I will examine how such beliefs polarized Salafīs into non-violent and violent political factions, this time pitting the “centrist” Surūrīs not against the Saudi state or “Jamī Salafī loyalists,” but against more radical forces within Salafism.

From the outset of his career, Surūr adopted a non-violent approach to Islamist politics that would soon inform his denunciation of the wholesale declarations of *takfīr* employed by certain Salafi Muslims against co-religionists who do not share their doctrines or interpretation of the sources of Islam. Surūr expressed particularly harsh criticism of those Muslims who deployed violence as a tool for implementing *sharī'a*, denouncing in no uncertain terms any indiscriminate attacks made by Muslims against fellow Muslims. He described the extremists as ignorant of Islamic precepts and specifically condemned their advocacy of *takfīr* and violence as a form of unacceptable

bid' (innovations.) Surūr argued that their lack of religious knowledge impaired their ability and eligibility for giving legal rulings or opinion. Although they draw from the Qur'ān and other foundational sources of Islam, Surūr contended, they selectively choose verses and evidence in a way that agree with their *bid'* (innovations) of *takfīr* and spilling Muslim blood. Diving into history, Surūr blamed the phenomenon of *takfīr* that emerged in the late of the 1960s and the early 1970s on the repression of the Muslim Brotherhood by various Arab regimes and the mistreatment of members of other Islamist groups in Arab prisons.²⁷⁶ Thus, repressive regimes bore a large measure of the blame for providing fertile ground for the emergence of radicalism, according to Surūr. However, while this scholar mostly blamed unjust regimes, he also took to task the practitioners of such wayward *takfīrī* doctrines, attributing their errors to the lack of religious knowledge among their leaders and adaptation of extreme ideas in their religious interpretations of *takfīr* from *Khawārij* (Kharijites). This chapter sheds light on Surūr's position toward extremist groups and their ideology and demonstrates the main differences between non-violent and violent political Salafīs.

Surūr embraced a decisive position against what he called “*al-Ghulāt*” (the exaggerators/ extremists/ radicals), and he specifically provided a detailed refutation of the ideology of two such organizations, al-Takfīr wa al-Hijra (Excommunication and Exodus/Emigration) led by Shukri Muṣṭafā in Egypt and the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), an Islamist group which gained notoriety for using mass violence during the Algerian Civil War. He argued in his writings about the incompatibility of such extremist

²⁷⁶ Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, *al-Ḥukum Bighar Ma Anzal Allāh wa ahl al-ghulū: Jamā‘a al-Muslimīn* (Ruling by what God has not revealed and the People of Extremism) (London: Dar al-Jabiyya, 1406 Hijri (1985-1986), 385.

ideologies with the creed of the *ahl al-sunna wa al-jamā'a* (the Sunnis; lit. people of the tradition of the Prophet and community). Given Surūr's reputation as a leading exponent of Salafism, his condemnation and refutation of the doctrines of *al-Ghulāt* posed a profound threat to these groups, who also claimed to adhere to the same Salafī creedal school. Indeed, Surūr was one of the first political Islamists who warned of the phenomena of extremism and *takfīr* among the Muslim groups in Egypt and Algeria in several books and articles, perhaps prefiguring criticism of groups like ISIL in the 21st century. In 1986, even before the emergence of Al-Qa'ida or the War on Terror, Surūr penned the book *al-Ḥukum Bighīr Ma Anzal Allāh wa ahl al-Ghulw* (Ruling by what God has not revealed and the People of Extremism), in which he examined the origins of the Shukri Muṣṭafā group's extremist ideology and demonstrated its deviations from the *manhaj* of *ahl al-sunna wa al-jamā'a*. Surūr also argued that in modern times, *takfīr* doctrine and extremism did not exist before this group.²⁷⁷

In his 1986 book, Surūr noted that the doctrine of *takfīr* first appeared in the second half of the twentieth century inside the infamous Egyptian prisons when thousands Muslim Brotherhood member confronted ruthless repression by the Egyptian government. He demonstrated that a small group of the imprisoned activists led by the Azahri shaykh, Ali Abdo Ismail, who formulated its religious foundations, began to adopt extremist ideas such as *takfīr* in the 1960s.²⁷⁸ The most prominent manifestations of these ideas are declaring *takfīr* on the Egyptian regime under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser. Then, they extended such charges of apostasy to Egyptian society writ large,

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 12.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 20, 396.

noting that ordinary people supported the ruler and did not rebel against the regime.²⁷⁹

These radicalized prisoners, in turn, developed the belief that a person cannot be a genuine Muslim unless he joined their group “Jamā‘a al-Muslimīn” (the Society of Muslims); all outsiders, by contrast, were infidels.²⁸⁰

Surūr explained that these prisoners derived aspects of their new ideology from the texts and conceptions of the *Khawārij* (Kharijites).²⁸¹ Eventually, Shaykh Ali Abdo Ismail later renounced this idea of *takfīr* entirely, but his erstwhile followers reorganized around a young, charismatic agricultural engineer student, Shukri Muṣṭafā, who was imprisoned from 1965 to 1971 because of his activism in the Muslim Brotherhood. After his release from prison in the beginning of the 1970s, he found Jamā‘a al-Muslimīn.²⁸² The group was crushed by Egyptian security forces and Mustafa was executed in 1977 after the group assassinated Muhammad Hussein al-Dhahbi, an Islamic scholar who was the former Minister of Islamic Endowments and a vocal critic of the Jamā‘a al-Muslimīn group.

The group is often popularly referred to as al-Takfīr wa al-Hijra, or “Excommunication and Exodus/Emigration,” a derogatory term used by the Egyptian media after its confrontation with the government.²⁸³ In the 1970s, leaders of the group believed that *jihād* was not possible at that time. Thus, they urged their followers and true Muslims to denounce the *kāfir* (non-Muslim infidel) nature of Egyptian society, to isolate

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 9, 396.

²⁸⁰ al-‘Ābidīn, *al-Ḥukum*, 402; Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh*, trans. by Jon Rothschild, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 74-75; Johannes Jansen, *The Dual Nature of Islamic Fundamentalism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 91.

²⁸¹ Surūr, *al-Ḥukum Bighar*, 9; Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, 75.

²⁸² Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, 74.

²⁸³ Ibid., 9-10, 385, 391-392, 396; Jansen, *The Dual*, 91; Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, 100.

themselves from it and to perform *hijra* (emigration) to establish an authentic society through education (*tarbiyya*). Then, once they built their strength, they could come back to conquer and re-Islamize the Egyptian nation.²⁸⁴

It is notable that Surūr, himself an active promoter of the teachings and writings of Sayyid Qutb, would deny that Qutb's ideas were compatible with the *takfīr* doctrinal ideology of this group and its leaders.²⁸⁵ Yet, despite such denials, Shukri Muṣṭafā was influenced by Qutb's doctrines of *Hijra*, *al-Jāhiliyya* and *al-ḥākkimyya*, but embraced the most extreme interpretation possible by declaring all of society *takfīr*.²⁸⁶ Surūr also observed that the extremist ideology of the Shukri group derived much of its content from the ideology of the *Khawārij*, especially the issue of *takfīr*. For Surūr, the propagation of a doctrine of *takfīr* constituted the key source of *bid'a* and deviation, particularly in the way it justified bloodshed against other Muslims and the usurpation of their wealth.²⁸⁷

In his writings, Surūr reviewed doctrines of the group and discussed the religious errors of its theological structure. Surūr pointed out that Shukri Muṣṭafā's conceptions, forged within prison, violated the principles of Islam and the methodology of *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamaa* in several specific ways. First, he criticized the group's rejection of *taqlīd* (imitation of four Sunni canonical legal schools (*madhahib*)). As we mentioned before that most of the Salafis promote *ijtihād* and reject *taqlīd*. However, they are

²⁸⁴ Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, pp. 74–76, 84.

²⁸⁵ Surūr, *al-Ḥukum Bighar*, 386.

²⁸⁶ Gehad Auda, "The "Normalization" of the Islamic Movement in Egypt from the 1970s to the Early 1990s," in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, ed. Martin E Marty, R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 378; Kepel, *Muslim Extremism*, 74-76.; Jeffrey B. Cozzens, "Al-Takfir Wa'l Hijra: Unpacking an Enigma," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 6 (May 28, 2009): 493.

²⁸⁷ Surūr, *al-Ḥukum Bighar*, 25, 158, 314.

different on the degree of following or rejection of existing jurisprudence. For followers of Shukri Muṣṭafā, *taqlīd* functioned as the source of polytheism because it promotes blind subservience to Islamic scholars. According to Mustafa, the source of this error derived from the fact that the masses accepted the judgments of the *muqallid* (who performs *taqlīd*) without asking about the *dalīl* (proof). Instead, Shukri Muṣṭafā argued, it is obligatory for each Muslim to perform individual *ijtihād*. Consequently, his followers believed that each Muslim should be a *mujtahid*, and the one who performs *taqlīd* is *kafir*.²⁸⁸

The competing interpretations regarding *taqlīd* among different schools of Muslims are extensive and cut in many different political directions. In the 19th and 20th centuries, Muslim reformists such as Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Muḥammad ‘Abduh, and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, who sought to respond to the Western cultural and political threat but at the same use the West as a model for imitation, opposed the principle of *taqlīd*. These reformers regarded *taqlīd* as a source of cultural and intellectual stagnation for Muslims. Instead, they encouraged *ijtihād* that gives more room for independent reasoning and depends less on the traditional schools of law and the mystical orders.²⁸⁹ Most modern Salafīs are agreed, in broad principle, on the importance of *ijtihād* reasoning and the rejection of the *taqlīd* of the four Sunni schools. However, they diverged on the full extent to which they should reject or follow the opinions of these schools. Muḥammad Nāsīr al-Dīn al-Albānī, a major influencer on the modern Salafī

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 33-38.

²⁸⁹ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 127, 140-141, 150.

movement, rejected *taqlīd*, condemned it as a reprehensible innovation, and insisted that the Muslim can acquire the religious knowledge easily.²⁹⁰

In accordance with his radical Salafī centrism, Surūr admitted the reprehensible nature of *taqlīd* as practiced by the *bāṭinīs*, or those who focus on an inner, esoteric (*bāṭin*) meaning in the interpretation of religious texts, as well as other *ṣūfī* exaggerators and the *Khawārij*. In Surūr’s estimation, throughout the history of Muslim community, these groups had all left a lasting legacy of terrible consequences. Surūr blamed the “deviated groups” for improper use of *taqlīd*, which led Muslims to the unthinking acceptance of the views of the leaders of their school of thought, who were in turn treated with great veneration by their followers. He also noted that Muslims had turned away from the Qur’ān and Sunnah to dedicate themselves to the study of the books and letters of their shaykhs; ultimately, Surūr believed these books functioned as barriers between Muslim believers and the key scriptural texts that constituted the only true way to learn the Islamic sciences.

While Surūr stressed the importance of Muslims seeking religious knowledge, however, he also asserted the permissibility of *taqlīd* for ordinary people who had not immersed themselves in a life of religious scholarship. He believed that if ordinary people attempted to perform *ijtihād*, they would not have time to do anything other than acquiring religious knowledge, thereby hobbling trade, crafts, and agriculture in the Islamic community.²⁹¹ Surūr added that even some of *Ṣaḥāba* (companions) did not reach

²⁹⁰ Haykel, “On the Nature,” 42-45.

²⁹¹ Surūr, *al-Ḥukm Bighar*, 39-45.

the degree of *ijtihād* required to practice *taqlīd*.²⁹² At the same time, he stressed that permissibility of *taqlīd* should not be equated with the end of Muslims seeking their own path to religious knowledge or expressing blind loyalty to the opinions and *fatwas* of a scholar.²⁹³ In sum, he took a middle path that preserved *taqlīd* while conferring more responsibility to the individual believer—consistent with his radical Salafī centrism.

Furthermore, Surūr argued that followers of Shukri Muṣṭafā discarded *ijmāʿ*, or the concept of consensus of Islamic scholars, a practice regarded by Sunni Muslims to be the primary principle of Islamic law (*sharīʿa*). Surūr particularly lamented that such radicals did not stop at condemning those who see the *ijmāʿ* as a legitimate proof, but went so far as to declare *takfīr* (excommunication) against them.²⁹⁴ Surūr defined *ijmāʿ* as a consensus of the *mujtahidūn* (pl. *mujtahid*, the learned scholar) on a particular legal ruling and affirmed it is impossible for the *mujtahidūn* of the people of the Sunna to reach total agreement on an issue that does not have proof from the Sunna of the Prophet.²⁹⁵ Yet, Surūr argued that *ijmāʿ* does not comprise the abstract words or opinions of men, as Shukri claimed, but rather, the considered judgment of scholars based on legitimate evidentiary text.²⁹⁶ He listed a series of verses from the Qurʾān and *Ḥadīth* as a basis of this principle’s legitimacy.²⁹⁷ Surūr added “all that the Shukri’s group wrote in criticizing the *ijmāʿ* is not at all new.” They derived their thoughts from the people of *rāfiḍa* (the rejectionists) and *al-muʿtazilah* without citing the sources they used.²⁹⁸

²⁹² Ibid., 46-47.

²⁹³ Ibid., 50.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 75-76.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 85.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 76.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 76-81.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 88.

The quickness of Shukri and his group to declare *takfīr* on fellow Muslims who commit major sins is one of the main criticisms of Surūr against the ideology of Shukri’s group. For instance, according to Surūr, Shukri and his followers pronounced various Muslims who commit major sins, such as *shirk* (associating partners with Allāh) or committing murder and adultery even if they pray and fast on Ramadan, as *kufār*.²⁹⁹ From this point of view, they excommunicated some of the prophets and messengers such as Adam and Ibrahim, because they committed sins.³⁰⁰ Shukri’s group, according to Surūr, relied on generalities, logical fallacies, inaccuracies and distortion of the word to justify their positions.³⁰¹ Surūr argued that declaring *takfīr* against the sinners is a *bid’a* (innovation) and that the Sunni position does not consider Muslims disbelievers because of their sins.

Surūr also criticized Shukri and his followers for their claims that they alone represent true Islam and that their leader (Shukri) is the *al-mahdī* (messiah); indeed, members of this group went so far as to believe that the Egyptian authorities could not kill Shukri, and that he would never die.³⁰² He condemned the group’s “call for illiteracy” and their misinterpretation of the texts. Surūr accused Shukri’s followers of believing that learning writing, and reading are forbidden, thereby condemning the Islamic *umma* to illiteracy, and they believe that the Muslims should instead direct their effort and time to learn only religious sciences. For example, since Shukri invoked the *Ḥadīth* which says, “we are an illiterate nation; we neither write, nor know accounts,” his followers

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 211.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 407.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 212.

³⁰² Ibid., 289-291.

concluded that the Muslims should be *Ummiyūm* (illiterates).³⁰³ Surūr discussed this point, citing the interpretation that says the word *Ummiyūm* in this *Hadīth* refers to the Arabs before Islam who were generally illiterate by comparison to later “people of the books.”³⁰⁴

With the eruption of the Algerian Civil War and the rise of radical groups that fought *jihād* against the Algerian government in the 1990s, Surūr published in his *al-Sunnah* magazine a series of articles criticizing the extremists, particularly their methodology, violent approach, and lack of religious knowledge. It is important here to note that Surūr did not, therefore, offer a more “moderate” approach, at least in a political sense, simply because of his rejection of *takfīr* and violence—rather, his stance comprised something more akin to what I describe here as “radical Salafī centrism.” He still rejected electoral processes as a legitimate means to establish the Islamic state. He believed that the parliamentary elections were not only a waste of time, but because they originated from secular societies, stood in conflict with Islamic principles; he also believed that Islamists who participated in the elections did not achieve the electoral promises they made despite their many concessions. Instead, like other Salafīs, Surūr stressed the importance of military *jihād* in a general sense and saw its great virtue.

At the same time, Surūr rejected the violence that was used by some of the Algerian Islamists such as the Armed Islamic group (GIA) to achieve their goal in establishing an Islamic state.³⁰⁵ In addition to his polemics against Shukri’s group, Surūr

³⁰³ Ibid., 319-321.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 323-324.

³⁰⁵ Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (25) al-Ḥiwār Bayna Ahl al-Sunnah: Al-Salafiyya bayna al-Wulāt wa al-Ghulāt” [Toward new Entity (25) Dialogue between the People of Sunnah:

provided refutations of a number of issues raised by the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). The GIA was one of the insurgent groups that fought the Algerian regime between 1992 - 2002. It emerged when Algeria's military government decided to annul the 1992 election in which the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), the moderate Islamic political party, appeared to be winning the elections democratically. In its pursuit of establishing an explicitly Islamic state, the GIA waged a total war against the military government in Algeria. The group launched a campaign of violence, targeting not only the government and the military but also civilians, journalists, and foreign subjects. It also conducted a campaign against other Islamists who left the group or did not agree with the GIA.³⁰⁶

Surūr began by criticizing the group for practicing killing and other brutal actions under the guise of *jihād*. In particular, he stated that the Ḥizb al-Ghulāt raises the banner of *jihād*, but the content is different from the slogan.³⁰⁷ He added that they commit the most heinous crimes and the ugliest acts in the name of *jihād* and abuse this duty, giving people a distorted image of it.³⁰⁸ Surūr pointed out that the main characteristic of GIA is the legalization of the bloodshed of dissenters. He recognized the acceleration of the incidences of violence committed by that group, which increasingly assumed a destructive and indiscriminate character. Such incidences did not leave any segment of Algerian society unaffected. For instance, Surūr reported directly on conditions in Algeria, noting that “public roads have become unsafe because of shifting checkpoints

The Salafism between the Loyalist and the Extremists (the Extremists,)] *Al-Sunnah* 61, (1996) [1417], 64-65. Available at: <http://sunah.org>.

³⁰⁶ Mohammed M. Hafez, “Armed Islamist Movements and Political Violence in Algeria,” *Middle East Journal*, 54, no. 4 (Autumn, 2000), 572-591; Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Michael Willis, *The Islamist Challenge in Algeria: A Political History* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1996)

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

where they check passengers' IDs. At which point they kill those they identified as members of military and those who did not comply with orders issued by the leadership of this party.”³⁰⁹ They blow up markets, under the pretext of killing a patrol of security men and they do not care if they victimize women, children, and the elderly.³¹⁰ He added that the extremists in Algeria did not only justify killing members of the military and innocent civilians, but also issued a statement legalizing bloodshed of preachers and other Islamist groups leaders.³¹¹ In the end, he wondered what *al-Ghulāt* would do to their fellow Muslims if they actually imposed their rule over Algeria and how many giant factories they were going to open for the manufacture of knives, daggers, and swords.³¹²

Ultimately, Surūr continued, as a scholar, refuting and addressing mistakes of extremists, specifically rejecting their religious rulings and opinions that justify the spilling of Muslim blood. Surūr argued that they are not qualified to issue *fatwas* because they lack *‘ilm* and the necessary learning requirements to issue fatwas. They selectively choose from religious sources to meet their desire without looking at the entirety of the Qur’ānic text and *Ḥadīths* that related to such matters. Such deviators from correct practice, according to Surūr, often involved the citation of a Qur’ānic verse or a *Ḥadīth* or sayings from the *Salaf* to derive a legal opinion or a ruling without any understanding of their true meaning and full context.

³⁰⁹ Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn. “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (26) Al-Ḥiwār Bayna Ahl al-Sunah: Al-Salafiyya bayna al-Wulāt wa al-Ghulāt” [Toward new Entity (26) Dialogue between the People of Sunnah: The Salafism between the Loyalist and the Extremists (the Extremists.)] *Al-Sunnah* 62, (Dec, 1996) [1417], 87. Available at <http://sunah.org>.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 90.

To buttress his contention that members of the GIA did not comprise legitimate religious scholars, Surūr mentioned five qualifications for a *muftī* and applied them to the extremists who issued *fatwa* in the most serious and legal (*sharʿī*) issues. Surūr argued that the extremists are ineligible to practice *fatwa* for many reasons. First, they “have busied themselves with the issues of apostasy and *Khurūj* (rebellion) and they do not have time for the study of the sciences of the Qurʿān and delving deeper into the sciences of *Ḥadīth* and *fiqh*.” They refuse to study at the hands of the distinguished ‘*ulamā*’ because, according to the extremists, they are hypocrites and scholars of authority.³¹³

Surūr suggested some characteristics that should be present in the *muftī*, which are “patience, serenity and reverence.” However, he described the extremists as “careless, hastiness, fury, and irascibility and their positions are volatile.” They will not be able to achieve neutrality and impartiality in their judgment.³¹⁴ One of the most important conditions for a person who practices the *fatwa* is to have ‘*ilm* (knowledge). This attribute is not present for anyone of the extremists, and none of them deserves to be called an ‘*ālim* (scholar). On the contrary, Surūr called them ignorant.³¹⁵

Another reason for the extremists in Algeria being disqualified from giving religious rulings is that they are people of innovation and desire. Rebellion (*Khurūj*) against the rulers is the main focus of the Ḥizb al-Ghulāt’s activism and the basis upon which they determined their attitude towards others.³¹⁶ Thus, the *fatwa* of advocates of this *bidʿa* is not acceptable because they are going to give a religious verdict in

³¹³ Ibid., 82

³¹⁴ Ibid., 82.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 83

³¹⁶ Ibid., 82.

accordance with their purpose and desire. They are going to choose the evidence with which they agree.³¹⁷

One contradiction that they fall in is that they speak in the name of the *Salaf* and believe that they are the only ones who understand and quote their sayings. Surūr admitted that all their *fatwas* include evidence from the Qur'an, Sunnah and the sayings of the *Salaf*. However, the problem, according to Surūr, is that they incorrectly characterize this evidence to support conclusions that amount to *bid'a* directly contradicting what the evidence actually means.³¹⁸ Surūr argued that it is not enough to gather relevant scriptural passages and insert them in a *fatwa* or a legal opinion. The *mufī* should comprehend and consider everything about the evidence before the quotation, such as their contexts and meanings.

Surūr also noted that the issue of *jihād al-ṭawāghīt* (unjust tyrants) is the most important element in the methodology of these extremists. It is this concept, according to Surūr, that provided extremists with criteria to judge others and whoever disagrees with them as a misguided innovator.³¹⁹ The *al-Ghulāt* do not believe in seeking knowledge and education as a way to reform and establish the desired Islamic state. On the contrary, they think that all regimes in the Islamic world are infidel and apostate and that the best way to achieve these goals is to declare *jihād* and fight these governments. They believe that the fight against these regimes is an individual duty on every Muslim. The Armed Islamic Group (GIA) began killing 'ulamā' and preachers who do not support their

³¹⁷ Ibid., 83.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 84.

³¹⁹ Muḥammad Surūr, "Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (25)," 61.

opinion of fighting the regime and then issued a statement that declared that it is not permissible to have more than one group to fight *jihād* against the Algerian government. It also declared that the GIA is the only legitimate *jihādī* group in Algeria. After this statement, the GIA added new targets to its list and conducted a violent campaign against other Islamists, such as the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), who fought to reestablish an electoral process that had been annulled by a military coup in 1992.³²⁰ In the end, Surūr wondered if the extremists are aiming to establish an Islamic state with the strategy of gaining the enmity of the people. He stated that they declared wars on everyone at the same time and failed to distinguish between friend and foe.³²¹

Rebellion and fighting against the apostate regimes of the Muslim world are the core of the extremist ideology and the breakpoints between them and other groups. Any group that does not agree with these two principles automatically becomes an enemy for these extremists.³²² Surūr gave his opinion regarding the rebellion against the “sinful unjust rulers.” He tended to the traditional view that says that it is not permissible to rebel and remove the “unjust ruler” if rebellion would result in greater disorder and leads to corruption, oppression, and bloodshed.³²³ It is important to remember that Surūr’s position about Saudi rulers did not exceed these lines. On one hand, he did not call for violent rebellion against the Saudi rulers. On the other, he believed that it is an obligation

³²⁰ Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn. “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (27) Al-Ḥiwār Bayna Ahl al-Sunah: Al-Salafiyyia bayna al-Wulāt wa al-Ghulāt” [Toward new Entity (27) Dialogue between the People of Sunnah: The Salafism between the Loyalist and the Extremists (the Extremists.)] *Al-Sunnah* 64, (Dec, 1997) [1417], 90-94.

³²¹ Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn. “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (28) Al-Ḥiwār Bayna Ahl al-Sunah: Al-Salafiyyia bayna al-Wulāt wa al-Ghulāt” [Toward new Entity (28) Dialogue between the People of Sunnah: The Salafism between the Loyalist and the Extremists (the Extremists.)] *Al-Sunnah* 65, 1997) [1417], 82-83. Available at <http://sunah.org>.

³²² *Ibid.*, 84-86.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 85-89.

to denounce the Saudi rulers in public when they contradict the *sharīʿa*. Surūr believed that rebellion against the “apostate ruler” who he ordered something contrary to the *sharīʿa* may be permissible under certain conditions. First, Muslims should provide advice to the ruler to curb his orders. Then, they should have “the capability” to remove the ruler without causing harm that is worse than that caused by the ruler in the first place.³²⁴ Additionally, the insurgent group must have a form of leadership with the qualifications of the *ahl al-ḥall wa al-ʿaqd* (the people of loosening and binding) to reduce any possibility of lawlessness.³²⁵

In conclusion, with the rise of the extremist tendencies, that promoted violence and adopted radical positions toward other Muslims, in the second half of the twentieth century, it was imperative for Surūr to present his views about these groups and refute their ideology. He rejected the campaign of violence and declared that because extremists do not have religious knowledge and their understanding for the Islamic sources is shallow, their *fatwas* do not have value. He accused them of *bidʿ* and following their desires, addressing the mistakes and warning them that what they are doing is clearly wrong. Surūr sought to refute their theology of justifying violence against those guilty of deviations and mistakes or religious error. He also criticized their perception of *jihād* asserting that it is not *jihād* at all, but it is bloodshed and criminality.

³²⁴ Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn. “Naḥwa Kiyān Jadīd (33) Al-Ḥiwār Bayna Ahl al-Sunah: Al-Salafiyya bayna al-Wulāt wa al-Ghulāt” [Toward new Entity (33) Dialogue between the People of Sunnah: The Salafism between the Loyalist and the Extremists, *Al-Sunnah* 72 (1997), 111-112. Available at <http://sunah.org>.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 115.

Despite the substantial differences between Surūr's ideology and the extremists' ideology, a few articles that appeared after his death argued that Surūr was responsible in one way or another for the rise in extremist movements, such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in the contemporary Middle East. These articles argue that Surūr was the key figure who played the main role of transform of the traditional quietist Salafism to Salafi jihadism by introducing the revolutionary ideas of political Islam to it. These articles claim that Western and Arab scholars misconceived Surūr's legacy; instead, they argue that he was a man who shares blame for the normalization and the prevalence of religious extremism and even set the intellectual foundations for the current trend of the Salafist-jihadist violence in the Middle East.³²⁶ Hussein Ibish, a senior resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, argues that Abu Muḥammad Al-Maqdisī, a Jordanian-Palestinian leading Salafī jihādī ideologue, was influenced in his teenage years in Kuwait by Surūr. He adds that although al-Maqdisi criticized Surūr for his lenient position toward the Arab regimes, he still provides a good example of this point of view.³²⁷

In his remarkable book *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi*, Joas Wagemakers admits Surūr's influence on al-Maqdisī, who later rejected his teachings.³²⁸ He argues that al-Maqdisī in his journey found that the purist Wahhābī religious tradition is the only one conferred the most authentic Salafi

³²⁶ Hassan, "Muhammad Surur."; Hussein Ibish, "The Legacy of Muhammad Sorour, Key Figure in Rise of Sunni Extremism," The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, Nov 16, 2016, <https://agsiw.org/legacy-muhammad-sorour-key-figure-rise-sunni-extremism/>.

³²⁷ Ibish, "The Legacy."

³²⁸ Joas Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 32, 34.

nature and the tools by which he can excommunicate the political rulers. Wagemakers adds that Al-Maqdisī was strongly influenced by Juhayman’s supporters and their practice of radical concept *al-wala’ wa’ l-bara’* (loyalty and disavowal). Al-Maqdisī developed the concept and took to its extreme political end by declaring *takfīr* against the regimes in the Muslim world for adopting to non-Islamic laws and the Saudi state because of its relations with the United States and the West. Hence, *jihād* would be an adequate form of disavowal and wholly based on Wahhābī reasoning.³²⁹

³²⁹ Joes Wagemakers, “The Transformation of a Radical Concept,” in *Global Salafism: Islam’s new religious movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Colombia University Press, 2009), 91-102.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

After the death of the two most prestigious official Wahhabi scholars, Muftī Bin Bāz and Muḥammad Ibn ‘Uthaymīn, the Sahwī ‘*ulamā*’ who were released from prison in 1999 became major religious actors in the Kingdom. According to Sa‘d al-Faqīh, after their release, they decided to continue their *da‘wa* activism and refrain from political activities. They even played a role in countering the ideology of extremist groups, such as al-Qa‘ida. After the reconciliation between the Surūrīs and regime, Surūr decided to tone down his criticism against the Saudi regime. According to Sa‘d al-Faqīh, Surūr believed that the priority is to face the threats of Iran and the extremist groups. He visited the Kingdom many times to perform ‘*Umra* (visiting the holy sites in Mecca and Medina beyond the obligation of Hajj).³³⁰

With the eruption of the Syrian uprising in 2011, Surūr declared his support for the revolution against the Baath regime from his last station in Qatar. He contributed to the establishment of many organizations such as the Syrian Islamic Council.³³¹ Surūr’s primary effort was his role in unifying different non-jihadist Islamist rebel brigades in the Syrian Islamic Liberation Front, one of the strongest armed coalitions in Syria at that time opposing Assad regime.³³² The Syrian National Council, the most prominent

³³⁰ Al-Faqīh, "Sheikh Muḥammad."

³³¹ Thomas Pierret, "The Syrian Islamic Council," May 13, 2014, <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/55580>.

³³² Thomas Pierret, "Brothers in Alms: Salafi Financiers and the Syrian Insurgency," May 18, 2018, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/05/18/brothers-in-alms-salafi-financiers-and-syrian-insurgency-pub-76390>

opposition's political body, gave condolences upon Surūr's death in 2016, memorializing as "a great symbol of moderation."³³³

Before he died, Surūr, in a video statement, also declared his support to Operation Decisive Storm, a military intervention launched by Saudi Arabia in 2015 that attacked the Houthi militia, an Iranian proxy in Yemen. In the broadcasted video on Al Jazeera Mubasher, Surūr stated that the long-awaited operation would curb Iran's covetousness in the region. He also praised the rulers of Saudi Arabia and described them as heroes.³³⁴

Surūr's burial in November 2016 was attended by thousands of people both within and outside of Qatar. The previous Amir of Qatar, Shaykh Hamad b. Thani and the political leader of Hamas, Khālīd Mash'al, along with many scholars and Islamic preachers, were among the senior figures to attend his funeral. The current Amir of Qatar, Shaykh Tamim b. Hamad and even Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Qatar visited the house of the Sheikh in Qatar to offer their condolences to his family and children.³³⁵ The key figures in the Sahwa posted their obituaries on social media, memorializing his good deeds.³³⁶

This thesis sheds light on the thought of Shaykh Muḥammad Surūr, one of the early influencers of the Ṣaḥwa movement, and offers a close view of his synthesis, which is an amalgam of the political thought of the Muslim Brotherhood and religious ideas of

³³³ The Syrian National Coalition, Syrian Coalition Mourns Scholar and Thinker Mohammed Suroor Zine Abidine, November 12, 2016. <http://en.etilaf.org/press/syrian-coalition-mourns-scholar-and-thinker-mohammed-suroor-zine-abidine.html>.

³³⁴ Muḥammad Surūr, "A Statement issued by Shaykh Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-Ābidīn on the Decisive Storm," April 10, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHqydDw8QKY>

³³⁵ <https://www.albawaba.com/ar/903524-أخبار/أمير-قطر-في-منزل-الشيخ-محمد-سورور-للتعزية-صور>.

³³⁶ <https://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2016/11/13/muhammad-surour-oudah-oraifi>.

Wahhābīs. Furthermore, it shows the diversity of the Salafiyya movement by analyzing the relationship of the Salafī groups toward politics and violence. Through analyzing the intra-Salafī debates, the study contributes to the discussion on Salafism by examining the doctrinal differences between various groups.

As we have seen, the influx of members of the Muslim Brotherhood from various Arab countries to Saudi Arabia between the 1950s and 1970s played an essential role in the emergence of the Ṣaḥwa movement. One member of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Syrian ideologue Shaykh Muḥammad Surūr, influenced the Ṣaḥwa and infused a *ḥarakī* orientation into purist and non-political Wahhābī circles. The political awareness of Muḥammad Surūr was shaped early in the ranks of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, where he learned the significance of organization and planning. Fleeing from the repression of the Ba‘th regime, Surūr moved to Saudi Arabia in 1965 to work as a teacher in Scientific Institutes in the Kingdom. In Saudi Arabia, he began to be influenced by the doctrinal thought of the Salafī Wahhābī school.

Surūr’s adoption of *Salafiyya* had a profound impact on the rest of his life. On the one hand, it facilitated his entry to the Saudi religious circles and introduced his ideas that played a significant role in formulating the *Ṣaḥwa* movement. On the other hand, his new convictions caused tensions with his previous Muslim Brotherhood compatriots.

Although he decided to turn away from the Muslim Brotherhood and criticize it, he still bore the traces of Muslim Brotherhood influence to a significant extent. By the late 1960s, he created a new formula which combined aspects of the Muslim Brotherhood with the Salafī teachings. Under the influence of Surūr’s ideas, a new group known as the

al-Surūriyya the main group known as the within the *Ṣaḥwa* movement, appeared which had a significant impact on Saudi Islamic activism.

Surūr is also known for his anti-Shīʿa views that were very influential in the 1980s and the 1990s, continuing to the 2000s. He was one of the early polemicists who criticized the Iranian Revolution and warned against the threat of Shīʿite domination of the Middle East. He developed a set of anti-Shīʿa ideas that were ethnic, doctrinal, and political. On the doctrinal level, he was influenced heavily by the Salafī Wahhābī anti-Shīʿa thoughts, which see Shīʿism as a deviant sect. Interestingly, Surūr contributed to anti-Shīʿa thoughts by adding ethnic and political aspects to his polemics. He warned from “Persian Majūsī rāfīdī” enlargement into the Gulf, Iraq, and the Levant. The Syrian Shaykh was particularly skeptical about the alliance between the Iran revolutionaries and “*Alawī* Syrian regime,” thereby articulating a political version of anti-Shīʿism.

Surūr positioned himself and his followers as free centrist Salafis and distinguished himself from two types of Salafis who he called the “*ḥizb al-Ghulāt*” (radicals) and the “*ḥizb al-Wulāt*” (loyalists). On one hand, Surūr rejected the violent approach of the radicals in pursuing their goals, but he also condemned the loyalists who called for total obedience for the rulers. The Gulf crisis and the first protests against the Saudi government in the 1990s reignited the old discussion about the validity of Salafī participation in politics. The debates between Surūr and what he called “*ḥizb al-Wulāt*,” who adopted a quietist posture, sheds light on the ongoing discussion about the question of political engagement among Salafis.

Consistent with the traditional Sunni view that emphasizes stability and warns from rebellion and internal strife, Surūr rejected *khurūg* (rebellion) against the oppressive or unjust rulers to maintain unity and social order. At the same time, he believed it is permissible to call publicly on the government to pursue reform and challenge the political authority for not fulfilling the implementation or violation of the *sharī'a*.

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Appendix A

I followed the transliteration system used in *Journal of Islamic Studies* issued by the Oxford Center of Islamic Studies to spell the Arabic words.