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**The Future of Sufism in Saudi Arabia Under Salafi–Sufi Polemics and Vision 2030’s
Adoption of *Wasatiyya***

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**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of PhD Theology and Religious Studies**

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that, unless specific reference is made to the contributions of others, this thesis is the result of my own efforts and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Khalid S. Al-Nassar

TRANSLITERATIONS

The Arabic words in this thesis are transliterated using the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) transliteration system.

Note that the Arabic “Al-; al-” stands for the English article “the”

Note that the spelling of the two words, Ibn and Bin (e.g., Ibn Taymiyya or Bin Taymiyya, meaning son of Taymiyya) are used interchangeably in the Arabic language depending on the grammatical positioning of the word in the sentence.

All Arabic words are italicized except those in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the names of persons and places.

NOTE ON ENGLISH QUOTATIONS FROM THE QUR’AN

The King Saud University Electronic Moshaf is used throughout the thesis unless otherwise indicated.

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ABSTRACT

In the aftermath of the poor reputation acquired by the government-supported Salafi establishment as the principal source of political Islam's fundamentalist ideology behind Islamic terrorism, the Saudi government was compelled to rethink its internal socioreligious policies and imposition of the austere Salafism on the heterogeneous Saudi society. Societal pluralism was promoted when different groups within society, Sufis, Shī'a and liberal modernists, were all invited to participate in national dialogue forums. These forums were precursors to major socioreligious reform, as expressed in the country's Vision 2030.

Pluralism is sought in the controversial Qur'anic concept of *wasatīyya* (middle way), hoping to provide a solid Islamic foundation for the unprecedented socioreligious change of attitude. *Wasatīyya* would achieve two premises, as advanced in this thesis. First, it would instil an intra-Islamic and societal pluralism within the heterogeneous composition of Saudi society. Second, it would promote public acceptance of harmonious coexistence across cultural and religious worlds. The prevailing Salafi establishment's definition of *wasatīyya* is not conducive to fulfilling the two premises mentioned above. Instead, this thesis proposes that an alternative Sufi-defined *wasatīyya*, grounded in *taṣawwuf*'s two principles of *sulūk* (behaviour; conduct) and *akhlāq* (ethics), would better fulfil the two premises. Yet, in a country known for its deep-rooted Salafi abhorrence of *taṣawwuf* (Sufism), Sufism's approach to *wasatīyya* cannot be addressed outside the context of the Salafi–Sufi polemical relationship.

Through a review of the literature and multimedia sources, a comparative analysis was conducted, and Salafi–Sufi refutations and counter-refutations were identified. The research revealed that the Sufi interpretation of *wasatīyya* was inclusive, promoting pluralistic intra-Islamic and a disposition towards modernist schools of thought. *Taṣawwuf*'s *wasatīyya* underlines a new comprehensive approach to an Islamic philosophy for life that naturally fulfils the two premises of the socioreligious-cum-political aspect of Vision 2030. Although the state of *taṣawwuf* in Saudi Arabia is far from widely accepted, government-supported intellectual efforts and official public media programmes about *taṣawwuf* target the country's intelligentsia. This highlights the intellectual acknowledgement of true Sufism, in contrast to pseudo-Sufism, as essential to Islamic ethics. Consequently, this thesis advocates including Sufism's two principles, *sulūk* and *akhlāq*, in the country's religious education system.

INTRODUCTION

The Significance of the Thesis and its Hypothesis

This thesis examines the state of *taṣawwuf* (Sufism) in Saudi Arabia in light of its relationship with its traditional archenemy, Salafism. This controversial relationship is quite often ambiguous and, in many instances, outright misunderstood. The significance of this research at this point in Saudi Arabia's history stems from its probing into the core of Islamic creedal polemical differences between Sufism and Salafism. It does so in relation to a recent historic transformation that saw the traditionally conservative, Salafi-influenced Saudi society thrust into a modern twenty-first-century nation-state longing to assume a productive civilisational global role. The Saudi government launched a massive economic and social reform vision to achieve this transformation.¹ Vision 2030 aims to transform a country saturated by deep-rooted cultural and religious traditions into a modern state. At the same time, this vision wants the country to retain its Islamic values and leading role in the Islamic world through the promotion of what it calls “modern Islam”, as explained in Chapter One. In religious or ideological terms, this massive transformation was achieved through the Islamic concept of *wasatīyya* (middle way), connoting *i'tidāl* (moderation) as articulated by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salmān, the architect of Vision 2030.² *Wasatīyya* is described in the Qur'anic verse (2:143) as “It is thus that we appointed you to be the community of the middle way so that you might be witnesses to all mankind and the Messenger might be a witness to you”. But in a heterogeneous country with different legal and theological schools of thought, the definition of *wasatīyya* varies.³ It is important to note that in Western media and English-published Saudi media, *wasatīyya* is translated as *al-Islam al-mu'tadil* (moderate Islam).⁴ So-called fundamentalist and liberal

¹ See Kingdom of Saudi Arabia “Saudi Vision 2030”, <https://vision2030.gov.sa/en> (Accessed 15 March 2019)

² Muqtedar Khan, *Memo to Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman: Moderate Islam needs Democracy*: (homepage: <https://www.patheos.com>, 2018) <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rationalsufi/2018/03/memo-to-crown-prince-muhammad-bin-salman-moderate-islam-needs-democracy/> (Accessed 15 March 2019); Graeme Wood, “*The Absolute Power*” *The Atlantic Magazine*, 3 March 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/04/mohammed-bin-salman-saudi-arabia-palace-interview/622822/> (Accessed 18 May 2022).

³ In Saudi Arabia, there are four Sunni schools, three Shi'a schools of jurisprudence, and a Sufi school of thought.

⁴ Eman Alhussein, Saudi Arabia Champions “Moderate Islam,” Underpinning Reform Efforts December 15, 2020 https://agsiw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Alhussein_Saudi-Moderate-Islam_ONLINE.pdf (Accessed 9 December 2024)

Muslims could interpret it in strikingly different ways. Definitions differ drastically, whether oriented towards an ethics-based Sufi-style definition or a Salafi creed-focused one. But it is presumably understood that all of the definitions from various schools of thought embody the words *i'tidāl* (moderation), *tasāmuḥ* (tolerance), and *ta'āyush* (coexistence). Still, these terms have to be unpacked from within an Islamic context.

This thesis postulates that Sufism's spiritual capacity and its definition of *wasatīyya* could contribute toward the adoption of an approach to Islam congruent with Vision 2030 not only in terms of its socioreligious reform elements but also in its religious-political relations to the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds and especially in light of the poor reputation Saudi Arabia acquired in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorists attack and the accusations that fundamentalist Salafism nurtured the Salafi ideology to which the attackers adhered. However, this thesis' hypothesis relies on a *wasatīyya* derived from a Saudi brand of Sufism based on the ideas of Sayyid 'Abd Allah Fad'aq of *madrasat al-iḥsān* (school of *iḥsān*) of the Two Holy Mosques. This thesis hypothesises that a Sufi-based *wasatīyya* can fulfil the two premises of the socioreligious aspects of Vision 2030. First, it can instil intra-Islamic and societal pluralism within the heterogeneous composition of Saudi society. Second, it can promote public acceptance of harmonious coexistence between cultural and religious traditions. But in a country known for its deep-rooted Salafi ideology, Sufism's approach to *wasatīyya* cannot be addressed outside the context of the polemical relationship between Salafism and Sufism. In a majority Sunni society, these two antagonistic schools represent the two primary Sunni schools of thought that encompass all four Sunni *madhāhib* (jurisprudential schools).

Now that we have established the thesis hypothesis, the research questions may be formulated in the light of the new ambitious vision for the country and its adoption of *wasatīyya*, given the Salafi–Sufi polemic. This research agenda is significant and original in that it addresses the Salafi–Sufi polemic and calls for adopting a Sufi-based *wasatīyya* concept as a possible contributor to solving socioreligious problems in Saudi Arabia. Such theological and social, as well as at times political, research has never been undertaken in Saudi Arabia. Certainly, the government has never invited a Sufi-based *wasatīyya* to contribute to the reinstatement of a new socioreligious outlook for the country.

Aim, Objectives and Research Questions

This research has two aims. First, it examines the present and possible future state of *taṣawwuf* in Saudi Arabia. Second, it assesses the ability of *taṣawwuf*'s *wasāṭiyya* to fulfil the socioreligious goals of Vision 2030.

These two aims contribute to the study's objectives. This study aims to explore the attitudes towards *taṣawwuf* of the three key stakeholders in the research: the Salafī establishment, the government, and, consequently, Saudi society. The second objective is to justify the claim of this thesis that a Sufi-based *wasāṭiyya*, promoted by Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq of the Two Holy Mosques school of *iḥsān*, contributes to fulfilling the two socioreligious premises of Vision 2030. Fad‘aq brands it as a Saudi version of Sufism. These two objectives are formulated as my primary and secondary research questions below:

Primary research question: In light of the Salafī–Sufi polemics and the aversion of Saudi society to Sufism, this asks whether the objective of *wasāṭiyya* can be supported by a Saudi version of Sufism, which is grounded in the principles of the *madrasat al-iḥsān* and the work of Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq.

- i. First sub-research question: To what extent has Sufism been perceived and understood within the Saudi context?
- ii. Second sub-research question: Are the suggestions for a Saudi brand of Sufism made by Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq realistic?

Bridging a Gap in Sufi Research.

Traditionally, Salafī academic scholars in Salafī-dominated Saudi universities have presented a one-sided view focused on demoting *taṣawwuf* by defining it as a deviant sect of Islam that revolves around *shirk* (polytheism; associationism), cults of saints and grave worship. In contrast, this thesis seeks to address the Salafī–Sufi polemics by highlighting for the first time the Salafī refutation of *taṣawwuf* and the Sufi counterargument. Also, for the first time, this thesis proposes a Sufi-defined *wasāṭiyya*, though from within the context of the Saudi brand of Sufism, as a possible contribution to the socioreligious transformation in Saudi Arabia (i.e., in terms of the two premises of the socioreligious aspects of the country’s Vision 2030).

Literature Review

In Saudi Arabia, a Salafi-dominated society, there is an abundance of Salafi literature that criticises Sufism, while Sufi counterarguments are relatively scarce. Academic research on the Sufi–Salafi polemical relationship in Saudi Arabia is nonexistent. Nevertheless, I sought out relevant works. This study examines the Salafi–Sufi polemics alongside Saudi Vision 2030’s *wasatiyya* (middle way; moderate Islam) and the future of Sufism in Saudi Arabia. The literature is classified into primary and secondary scholarly and semi-scholarly sources. The review primarily relies on Arabic materials owing to the limited availability of Western literature on contemporary Sufism in Saudi Arabia. However, some pertinent Western works are referenced to bolster specific arguments.

The literature review analyses various sources, including books, journal articles, newspapers, and multimedia such as websites, television interviews, and YouTube videos concerning prominent Sufis and Salafis. It also considers government documents related to Vision 2030 and its focus on *wasatiyya*, providing insight into the government's stance on Sufism and its potential influence on Saudi society. The review examines the shift in Salafi attitudes towards Sufism, influenced by Vision 2030, from a period of refutation to one of acceptance, albeit a perfunctory acceptance.

I. Primary Sources

Chapter Two examines the foundational sources of Sunni Islam for both Salafis and Sufis, with a focus on their interpretations of *wasatiyya*. Despite both aligning with *ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* (of the Prophet’s Sunna and community), their differing views on *‘aqīda* (creed) and Islamic jurisprudence lead to distinct definitions of *wasatiyya*. Salafi scholars ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Fozān and Sa‘ad al-Khathlān represent the Salafi perspective. In contrast, Sayyid ‘Alī al-Jifrī and Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq represent the Sufi views, discussed further in Chapter Five.

Primary sources on the polemical literature of Sufism present arguments both for and against it, with intense Salafi criticism leading to Shaykh Bin Minī’s *Ḥiwār Ma‘ al-Mālkī* (A Dialogue

with al-Mālkī).⁵ This work is framed as a debate with Sayyid Muḥammad ‘Alawī al-Mālkī, who defended Sufism against accusations of *shirk* and *takfīr* from the Salafī establishment. In response, al-Mālkī wrote *Maḥāhīm Yajib an Tuṣāḥah* (Misconceptions that Must be Corrected), arguing that Salafis misinterpret Islamic teachings by conflating jurisprudence with creed, which fueled further discussions documented in Chapter Three.⁶

Salafī scholar Āl-Ashaykh harshly criticised Sufism in *Hādhihi Maḥāhīmūna* (These are Our Understandings), labelling it as based on polytheism.⁷ The Wahhabi Salafī authorities in Saudi Arabia take an anti-Sufi stance based on Ibn Taymiyya, as seen in Shiekh Muḥammad al-‘Arīfī’s PhD research, *Mawqif ibn Taymiyya min al-Ṣūfiyya* (Ibn Taymiyya’s Stance on Sufism).⁸

In the face of rising anti-government sentiments during the *Ṣaḥwa* (Islamic awakening) era in the 1980s, the Saudi government established the King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Center for National Dialogue, inviting prominent Sufis, including al-Mālkī. During this time, Salafis escalated their critiques of Sufism, linking it to Western political agendas, a concern highlighted in al-Baddāh’s *Ḥarakāt al-Taṣawwuf fī al-Khalīj al-‘Arabī* (The Sufi Movement in the Arabian Gulf).⁹

Furthermore, Salafis criticised philosophical Sufism for promoting unity of religions, as presented in Ma‘lawī’s *Waḥdat al-Adyān fī ‘Aqā’id al-Ṣūfiyya* (The Unity of Religions in the Sufi Creed).¹⁰ To counter all the Salafī claims against Sufism, Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq, in three interviews, defended Sufism in Chapter Five, emphasising its basis on the principles of *sulūk* (behaviour, conduct) and *akhlāq* (ethics) of the school of the Two Holy Mosques.

⁵ ‘Abd Allah Bin Minī’, *Ḥiwār Ma‘ al-Mālkī Fī Radd Ḍalālātih wa Munkarātih* (A Dialogue with al-Mālkī in Refuting his Aberrances and Deviancies), <https://shamela.ws/rep.php/book/1768> (Accessed 23 June 2022)

⁶ Muḥammad Bin ‘Alawī Al-Mālkī, *Maḥāhīm Yajib an Tuṣāḥah* (Misconceptions that Must be Corrected) Mecca, Saudi Arabia: The Library of Sayyid Muḥammad bin ‘Alawī Al-Mālkī 1426H, 2005.

⁷ Ṣāliḥ Āl-Ashaykh, *Hadhihi Maḥāhīmūna* (These are Our Understandings) <https://www.kutub-pdf.net/downloading/7rguqs.html> (Accessed 10 February 2021)

⁸ Muḥammad Bin ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Al-‘Arīfī, *Mawqif Ibn Taymiyya min al-Ṣūfiyya* (Ibn Taymiyya’s Stance on Sufism) Riyadh: Imam Mohammad bin Saud Islamic University, 2001

⁹ ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Aḥmad Al-Baddāh, *Ḥarakāt al-Taṣawwuf fī al-Khalīj al-‘Arabī: Dirāsa Taḥlīliyyah wa Naqdiyya* (The Sufi Movement in the Arabian Gulf: A Critical and Analytical Study), A PhD Thesis at the Islamic University in Medina. Published 1463 H (2015) <https://albdah.net/?p=1267> (Accessed 15 March 2019)

¹⁰ Sa‘īd M. H. Ma‘lawī, *Waḥdat al-Adyān fī ‘Aqā’id al-Ṣūfiyya* (Unity of Religions in the Sufi Creed) A PhD Thesis at Imam Muḥammad Ibn Sa‘ud University, (Riyadh: Maktabat Al-Rushd, 2010), pp. 113-131

However, with the launch of Saudi Vision 2030 in 2016, a more tolerant Salafi attitude emerged, as evidenced in literature such as al-Bakrī's *Ibn Taymiyya wa Mawqifihi min al-Turāth al-Ṣūfī* (Ibn Taymiyya and His Attitude on the Sufi Tradition).¹¹ I critique Ibn Taymiyyah's classifications of Sufism in his *Kitāb al-taṣawwuf* (The Book of Sufism) and argue for a redefinition of Sunni Sufism in Chapter Four. Raḍwān al-Sayyid's writings emerged in support of Sufism, presenting it as a manifestation of Islamic ethics that underlies a fresh narrative for a comprehensive philosophy of Islam. His views gained public attention through an interview with television host al-Mudayfir, as detailed in Chapter Seven. Al-Sayyid's perspectives indicate a shift towards an inclusive Islamic philosophy that aligns with the socioreligious objectives of Vision 2030. In his *Politics of Contemporary Islam*, this new philosophical narrative suggests a resolution to the dialectical entanglement between political Islam and the development of the modern Arab nation-state.¹² He expresses this resolution in *The Nation, the Community and the Authority*.¹³ An article titled *In the Aftermath of the Religious Disturbance: The Safety of Religion and the Peace of the World* articulates Sufism's relevance to his proposal.¹⁴

II. Secondary Sources

Secondary sources include scholarly works that provide a historical background of Sufism from the mid-eighteenth century, highlighting the debates between Salafī and Sufī perspectives. These sources reflect the evolving attitudes towards Sufism among the Salafi establishment, the government, and Saudi society, incorporating both Arabic and Western literature.

¹¹ Ṭāriq S. M. Al-Bakrī, *Ibn Taymiyya wa Mawqifihi min al-Turāth al-Ṣūfī* (Ibn Taymiyya and his Attitude on the Sufi Tradition) Dammam, Saudi Arabia: Dar Ibn al-Jawzi, 2020.

¹² Raḍwān al-Sayyid, *Siyaṣāt al-Islām al-Mu'āṣir: Murāja'āt wa Mutāba'āt* (Politics of Contemporary Islam: Reviews and Follow-ups), (Beirut: Jadawel for Printing, Translation and Publishing, 2015)

¹³ Raḍwān al-Sayyid, *Al-Umma wa al-Jamā'a wa al-Ṣulṭa* (The Nation, the Community and the Authority), (Beirut: Jadawel Publishing & Distribution, 2011)

¹⁴ Raḍwān al-Sayyid, *Mā ba'd al-Iḍṭirāb al-Dīnī: Salamat al-Dīn wa Salām al-'Ālam* (In the Aftermath of the Religious Disturbance: The Safety of Religion and the Peace of the World), (Al Tafahom Magazine, Vol 54 / 2016 Topic 4) [Book tafahom 54.in db \(mara.gov.om\)](http://book.tafahom54.in.db(mara.gov.om)) (Accessed on 3 November 2023)

2.1 Arabic Secondary sources

In Chapter One, Trukī al-Dakhīl's edited anthology, *Sufism in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf*, provides a critical context for understanding the evolution and position of Sufism across various countries of the Arabian Peninsula, with particular emphasis on Saudi Arabian society.¹⁵ 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Shuqayr's *The Ḥanbali Madhab in Najd: A Historical Study* and Khālid al-Dakhīl's *Wahhabism Between Polytheism and the Rupture of the Tribe* provide a historical backdrop for early Salafi attitudes towards Sufism in Najd, the central region of Arabia and the stronghold of Wahhabism.¹⁶ 'Abullah al-Saud (written in English) offers insights into the twentieth-century *Ṣaḥwa* (Islamic awakening) movement and its key figures.¹⁷ Chapter One provides an overview of a government website on Saudi Vision 2030, advocating for a *wasāṭiyya* approach to moderate Islam. In Chapter Three, Al-Iqbālī's *Qirā'a Tarbawīyya* (Educational Reading on the Early Sufi Traditions) demonstrates a Salafi shift towards a more positive perception of Sufism, supported by research from the Salafi University of Um al-Qura. Moreover, al-Shu'aybī's *Ibn Taymiyya Ṣufiyyan* (Ibn Taymiyya was Ṣufi) asserts this shift in Salafi attitudes.

Before reviewing Western literature as secondary sources, some significant classic Sufi works translated into English as general introductory books or as manuals of Sufi practices must be referenced.

Al-Qushayrī's *The Risalah Principles of Sufism* is a vital Sufi manual by 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī, an 11th-century scholar.¹⁸ *The Risalah* is crucial in Sufi studies and has significantly shaped Islamic thought literature. The Treatise of Al-Qushayrī is a significant work that marked

¹⁵ Turkī al-Dakhīl ed, *Al-Taṣawwuf fī al-Su'ūdiyya wa al-Khalīj* (Sufism in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf), (Dubai: Al-Mesbar Studies and Research Centre, 2013)

¹⁶ 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Shuqayr, *Al-Madhab al-Ḥanbalī fī Najd: Dirasa Tarīkhīyya* (The Ḥanbali Madhab in Najd: A Historical Study), (Riyadh: Al-Darah Periodical Journal, 1423H [2002]) p. 84 and p.94; Khālid al-Dakhīl, *Al-Wahhabiyya bayn al-Shirk wa Taṣaddu' al-Qabīla* (Wahhabism Between Polytheism and the Rupture of the Tribe), (Beirut: Arab Network for Research and Publishing, 2014)

¹⁷ Abdullah al-Saud, *The Sahwa in Saudi Arabia: History and Evolution*, in Joana Cook and Shiraz Maher (eds), *The Rule is for Non but Allah: Islamist Approaches to Governance*, C. (London: Hurst and Co. Ltd., 2023)

¹⁸ Laleh Bakhtiar, ed. *The Risalah Principles of Sufism of 'Abd al-Karīm bin Hawāzin al-Qushayrī*, (Translated by Rabia Harris) (Great Books in the Islamic World: Kazi Publications, Inc, Chicago, 2002)

the transition from philosophical Sufism to a form of Sufism grounded in the Qur'an and Sunna, as noted in Chapter Six.

Manāzil al-Sā'irīn, by Imam Abu Ismā'eel al-Harawī, is a key Sufi text that details a seeker's journey to God through 100 stations of spiritual growth.¹⁹ It illustrates his *Ḥanbalī* jurisprudence and *Atharī* creed through scripture and mysticism. This inspires commentaries like Ibn al-Qayyim's *Madārij al-Sālikīn*, a key reference for Salafī Muslims. As a disciple of Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim is widely read among Sunnis in Saudi Arabia, as noted in Chapter Four.

Al-Ghazali's *The Revival of the Religious Learnings* is a key text in Islamic thought.²⁰ This 11th-century work guides moral and spiritual growth, linking orthodoxy with mysticism while providing insights into daily rituals and theology. Al-Ghazali's focus on self-reflection aligns with modern personal development. Yet, Arab modernists and secularists criticize his Sufi writings for contributing to the decline of the Islamic Golden Age, which was renowned for its scientific discoveries, cultural exchange, and philosophical explorations, as discussed in Chapter Four and Chapter Six.

The Foundations of Sufism: An Annotated Translation of Qawā'id al-Taṣawwuf presents an important English translation of Shaykh Aḥmad Zarrūq al-Fāsī's (d. 1493) seminal Sufism text.²¹ Ghulam Shams-ur-Rehman offers a new translation that integrates theology, Islamic law, and spirituality, establishing a model for contemporary Sufism. Zarrūq's definition of Sufism is

¹⁹ The most well-known English translation of *Manāzil al-Sā'irīn* (Stations of the Travelers) by Imam Abu Ismā'eel al-Harawī appears to be the abridged translation by Abu Amina Elias 58. This translation has been made available online and in PDF format, making it accessible to English-speaking audiences interested in studying this classical Sufi text. <https://toaz.info/doc-view-3> (Accessed January 21, 2025)

²⁰ The Fons Vitae series of translations is a highly regarded and continuing project that seeks to provide scholarly English translations of select books from Al-Ghazzali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (The Revival of the Religious Learnings) translated by Fazl-ul-karim Vol. 1, (Pakistan: Darul-Ishaat, 1993) <https://www.ghazali.org/books/ihya-v1.pdf> (Accessed January 22, 2025). This series is known for its academic rigor, accessibility, and quality, offering detailed introductions and annotations for each translated book.

²¹ Shaykh Aḥmad Zarrūq, *The Foundations of Sufism: An Annotated Translation of Qawā'id al-Taṣawwuf* ed. & trans. By Ghulam Sams-ur-Rehman, (Brill, 2024) <https://brill.com/edcollbook/title/64407> (Accessed 28 January 2025)

central to my thesis, leading to a Sufi *wasāṭiyya* based on Qur'anic philosophy, as detailed in Chapters Four and Six.

2.2 Western Secondary Sources

Towards the end of my research endeavour, I obtained an unpublished PhD dissertation by Besnic Sinani, titled *Šufī Scholars, Practices, and Communities in Saudi Arabia Since 1979*, which critically analyses Sufism's relationship with orthodoxy and tradition. Sinani's work provides nuanced insights into the dynamics of Salafi Islam within the framework of Sunni orthodoxy, directly relating to my thesis, which seeks to ground Sufism within the Sunni theological context of the Two Holy Mosques. While my editorial approach diverges from Sinani's, his examination of Salafi–Sufi polemics substantively supports several of my arguments.²²

Lloyd Ridgeon's edited anthology, *Sufis and Salafis in the Contemporary Age*, examines the relationship between these Islamic schools of thought through comprehensive case studies. This exploration is particularly relevant to my thesis, which critiques Sufism's alternative perspectives in contrast to Salafism, as presented in chapters by Sedgwick and Weissman.

In discussing the historical background of Sufism in Saudi Arabia, prominent scholars, such as Stéphane Lacroix, in his work *Awakening Islam*, examine the political agency of religious movements. Similarly, Mark Sedgwick, in *Saudi Šufis: Compromise in the Hijaz* analyses Sufi orders in al-Hijaz during the early modern period of Saudi Arabia, as discussed in Chapter One. Graeme Wood's article, "*The Absolute Power*," is instrumental in understanding the implications of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 reforms, particularly concerning the government's trajectory towards moderating its interpretation of Islam amid the pressures exerted by political Islam and extremist elements. Wood articulates the sociopolitical transformations and their intricate connections with religious reforms, which relate to my thesis concerning Sufism's prospective role in promoting *wasāṭiyya*.

²² Besnic Sinani, *Šufī Scholars Practices, and Communities in Saudi Arabia Since 1979: Orthodoxy and Tradition in a Contemporary Muslim Society* (A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of History and Cultural Studies at Freie Universität Berlin, 2020)

In *Ibn Taymiyya*, Jon Hoover discusses Ibn Taymiyya's perspective on Sufism. He distinguishes between accepted practices and innovations while highlighting his contributions to "neo-Sufi spirituality." This is relevant to Chapter Four's discussions of Ibn Taymiyya.

In *Western Sufism: From the Abbasids to the New Age*, Sedgwick juxtaposes Western interpretations of Sufism against established academic discourse. This contrast is particularly significant in light of Sayyid 'Abd Allah Fad'aq's critical views of Western Sufism in Chapter Five.

As far as "political Sufism", referenced in Chapter Five, is concerned, Sedgwick discusses Sufi political affiliations in Egypt in *Good Muslims': Sufism in the Battle against Jihadi Salafism*. Alexander Knysh, in *Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism*, explores tensions between Sufism and Salafism in the Caucasus, highlighting Gulf support for anti-Sufi factions. His work on Yemen reveals struggles among the Soviet-supported government, Sufis, and Salafis, linking to my thesis through the connection between Ḥaḍramī Bā 'Alawī Sufis and al-Ḥijāz Sufis as discussed in Chapter Five.

The anthology *Sufism, Pluralism, and Democracy*, edited by Clinton Bennett and Sarwar Alam, assesses Sufism's political dimensions, which resonates profoundly with the discussion I explore in Chapter Five.

In *The Self-Disclosure of God*, Chittick further correlates Sufism with the philosophical doctrines attributed to Ibn 'Arabī, delving into complex concepts that contribute to understanding Sufi philosophical thought as referenced in Chapter Six.

Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick's collaborative work, *The Vision of Islam*, examines the various aspects of the Islamic faith. Its relevance to Sufism lies in its explanation of the concept of *iḥsān*, the third tier of Islam, which intricately links Sufism to the divine revelation.

Frank Griffel's *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* posits al-Ghazālī as a pivotal thinker who harmonises faith with reason. He argues that al-Ghazālī's legacy is frequently misrepresented with respect to philosophy and science, a point I discuss in Chapter Six.

Sedgwick's *Muhammad Abdu* offers valuable insights for understanding this influential figure of Arab enlightenment, particularly regarding his connection to Sufism, a topic mentioned in Chapter Seven.

This literature review examines the gaps in exploring Salafi–Sufi polemics owing to Saudi Arabia's association with the Salafi establishment. These factors have influenced my thesis hypothesis and shaped the subsequent research questions I developed.

Methodology

Data collection occurred in two different ways. To begin, the literature review sought to identify all available sources, no matter how few. This search encompassed publications (such as books, journals and newspaper articles) and multimedia sources (such as interviews with prominent Sufis on popular, public or semi-public television programmes, official websites of Sufi Shaykhs and YouTube videos of relevant interviews). Next, I planned to conduct semi-structured ethnographic interviews with a selected number of Saudi Sufis in the two regions where Sufism thrives: al-Ḥijāz and al-Aḥsā'. The collected data would be subjected to qualitative analysis to answer the two research questions.

Unfortunately, the methodology had to be altered due to time restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic that commenced in December 2019 and increased in intensity for several years afterwards. Pandemic restrictions rendered it impossible to conduct the semi-structured interviews. Other interview methods, such as by email or over the telephone, were not possible given the nature of this research for a society where *taṣawwuf* has an antagonistic relationship with the predominant Salafi school of thought in Saudi Arabia. This necessitates extra effort to build trust between the interviewer and interviewees. To reduce any unease or apprehension the Sufis might have, I prepared for my official interviews (which were to be conducted after I obtained mandatory approval from the required university's ethics committee) by contacting the Sufis of al-Ḥijāz in Mecca. They received me very well and provided some critical Sufi literature that would have been difficult to access then.

This forced me to revert to my first method of gathering data: reviewing all the available literature. The Salafi refutation of *taṣawwuf* and Sufi responses to their arguments were extracted from books, journal articles, newspaper articles, and multimedia sources. The arguments supporting my hypothesis were derived through a comparative analysis of Salafi–Sufi arguments and counterarguments, as presented in the available literature and multimedia.

Thesis Structure

The thesis is organised in a manner that addresses its hypothesis and answers the research questions outlined in this introduction. Chapter One illustrates the current state of Sufism in light of its historical antagonism with Salafism. It takes the reader through three hundred years of the formation of a Salafi-influenced Saudi society, reflected by an Arab culture defined by Salafi-imposed Islamic values reinforced by the authority of Saudi rule. This situation imposed by the Salaf lasted for two hundred and fifty years, during which Sufism faced significant suppression. Over the last fifty years, beginning in the early 1980s, a Sufi revival has emerged in the social scene, mainly due to the rise of political Islam, despite Sufism remaining a non-political sect within Islam. This resurgence provided the impetus for a change in attitude towards Sufism. The *Ṣaḥwa* (Islamic awakening) era, which produced political Islam and the resulting violence and terrorism associated with it, alongside a strong desire to open the country for economic and social reasons, led to what is now known as Saudi Vision 2030, which comprises three pillars: a vibrant Islamic society that values its Arab cultural heritage while embodying moderate Islam, economic prosperity, and an ambitious nation focused on efficiency and accountability at all levels, through a high-performing government. To address the first pillar, the government, recognising the need to distance itself from the austere attitudes of the Salafi establishment and its association with domestic and international terrorism, has adopted the Qur’anic concept of *wasatīyya* (the middle way that signifies moderate Islam). This thesis focuses on the first pillar, examining its socioreligious and political impacts as society shifts towards a new mode of *wasatīyya*, which contrasts with the strict stance of the Salafi school, particularly regarding intra-Islamic pluralism. My thesis posits that the socioreligious aim of Vision 2030 is, firstly, to promote intra-Islamic pluralism and, secondly, to achieve interreligious and cultural coexistence globally. The hypothesis I present in this thesis is that the Sufi variant of *wasatīyya* from the Two Holy Mosques’ *madrasah al-iḥan*, as described by Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq, aligns more closely with the aims of the first pillar of Vision 2030.

Based on differing interpretations of the Islamic religion, Chapter Two presents how the Salafis and Sufis perceive Sufism through their definitions of its types. This chapter examines the understanding of Islam by both Salafis and Sufis, thereby laying the foundation for the Salafī–Sufi polemics. These differences underpin the arguments for each definition of *wasatīyya*, thus providing the basis for Salafī–Sufi counterarguments throughout the thesis. Chapters Three and Four highlight the Salafī arguments against *taṣawwuf*. Chapter Three details the struggles of the epitome of al-Ḥijāz Sufism, Sayyid Muḥammad ‘Alawī al-Mālkī, within the Salafī establishment. Chapter Four presents the views of the foremost scholar of Saudi Salafism, Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyya, regarding Sufism, merely to facilitate a reclassification of Sufism into types that I term approaches to Sunni Sufism. Chapters Five and Six discuss the Sufi responses to Salafī claims. However, it is primarily in Chapter Five that the prominent Sufi of al-Ḥijāz, Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq, offers counter-refutations to Salafism. Chapter Six touches upon the arguments of the *ḥadathīyyūn* (Arab liberal modernists), who contend that Sufism obstructs the teaching of philosophy and consequently associates it with Salafism, which historically rejects philosophy as anti-Islam. Nevertheless, the Salafis accuse Sufism of being a by-product of a fusion of Islamic *‘aqīda* and foreign philosophies, such as Greco-Roman, Persian, and Indian thought. In this chapter, I argue that Qur’anic-inspired philosophy can be employed to approach a Sufi-based *wasatīyya*, thereby supporting the thesis’s hypothesis. Chapter Seven reinforces my argument for a Qur’anic-inspired two-principled (*sulūk* and *akhlāq*) *iḥsān* of the *Ḥaramayn* school Sufi-based *wasatīyya*, placing this in the context of a broader Islamic philosophy aligned with the socioreligious perspective of Vision 2030. It reviews the Saudi government-backed school of thought of the Lebanese-Saudi scholar Raḍwān al-Saidī, who advocates for a narrative of a new comprehensive approach to Islamic philosophy. Chapter Seven examines the scholarly ideas of Raḍwān al-Sayyid, which I interpret as aligned with the socioreligious and political aims of Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030. Thus, I contend that my hypothesis of a Sufi *wasatīyya* may contribute to al-Sayyid’s narrative advocating a comprehensive framework for a new philosophy for Islam that could undergird Vision 2030’s intended *wasatīyya*.

CHAPTER ONE

Sufism in Saudi Arabia's Socioreligious Context: From Wahhabi Austerity to the Openness of Vision 2030's *Wasatīyya*

This chapter addresses the first sub-research question: how Sufism is understood in Saudi Arabia's past, present, and potential future outlook, particularly in light of the advent of Vision 2030. In a heterogeneous, Salafi-influenced society, the state of *taṣawwuf* must be revealed and analysed while keeping Saudi Arabia's history in mind. From its inception in 1727 as a Najdi city-state to its present status as a fully-fledged nation-state, the kingdom is categorically divided into three states. This thesis designates the first two states as belonging to the premodern era of Saudi history, while the third state constitutes modern Saudi Arabia.

I. Sufism in the Pre-Modern First and Second Saudi States

In the premodern era, the Saudi dynasty spanned two consecutive Saudi states from 1727 to 1818 and 1818 to 1989, respectively. The Salafi-Wahhabi school of thought provided the ideological impetus with which the Saudi dynasty expanded to conquer all of the Arabian Peninsula, establishing what we now know as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It was in 1744, under the ideological banner of *tawḥīd*, that the two Imams known as the Muḥammadayn (the two Muḥammads: M. Bin Sa'ūd and M. Bin 'Ab al-Wahhāb) met to launch their newly formed political and religious alliance. This is why Saudi history books traditionally consider the year 1744 as the actual date of the founding of Saudi Arabia as a kingdom that exercised sovereignty over the entire Arabian Peninsula. The 1744 two Imam alliance aimed to spread Saudi rule under the Salafi-Wahhabi version of reforming Islam, purifying it from the seepage of *shirkī* (polytheistic) beliefs into the purity of *tawḥīd* (oneness of Allah) in the Arabian Peninsula.

It was only recently, on 22 February 2022, that the government reinstated the year 1727 as the date of the founding of Saudi Arabia – which I argue was an imperative and timely outcome that could fulfil the socioreligious goals of the country's Vision 2030 as explained in Chapter Five. The 1744 alliance between the two Imams spread Saudi rule under the Salafi-Wahhabi version of Islamic reform, which was instigated by the integration of *shirkī* (polytheistic) belief

with the belief of the *tawḥīd* (oneness of Allah) among the Najdi city-states. The reform was to root out shirk in the Arabian Peninsula. Since *taṣawwuf* is lumped amongst *shirkī* beliefs, the first Saudi state began an anti-Sufi course of action as the Saudi dynastic rule continued to spread to more territories on the Arabian Peninsula, expanding its dominance into the second and the third Saudi states.

1.1 Wahhabism, State Formation and *Taṣawwuf*

The literature on Wahhabism and the formation of the Saudi state allows us to deduce that the Najdi city-states jurisdictionally adhered to the *Ḥanbalī madhhab* (a Sunni jurisprudence school of thought). Still, other Sunni *madhāhib* (pl. of *madhhab*) existed in Najd, although to a much lesser extent.²³ The *Ḥanbalī madhhab* of Ibn Taymiyya's school of thought was the eminent feature of the cultural and educational lifestyle that prevailed in all Najdi city-states.²⁴ The salient *Ḥanbalī madhhab* was concentrated on *fiqh* (*sharī'a* law) to serve jurisprudential matters for pressing legal issues. At the time of the establishment of the early Najdi city-states, these issues included land ownership, inheritance and transactional issues in trade. During the Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb era, the *Ḥanbalī madhhab*'s theological scholastic efforts shifted their emphasis to the sciences of *ḥadīth* (the Prophet's sayings) and *tafsīr* (Qur'anic interpretation).²⁵

The explicit pivotal theme of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's movement was *tawḥīd* in a religious sense. Yet the alliance between the two Imams implicitly aimed at achieving *tawḥīd* in a political sense, i.e., uniting the Najdi city-states.²⁶ As conveyed in the first of the five pillars of Islam, *tawḥīd* was the emblem of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's reform movement in the eighteenth century and still holds today. This is expressed in the *shahāda* (witness statement) of "there is no God, but Allah, Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah". Later, combined with a sword, this forms the insignia adorning the flag of modern Saudi Arabia.

²³ Al-Shuqayr, *The Ḥanbali Madhab* ... p. 84 and p.94; Al-Dakhīl, *Wahhabism Between Polytheism...*

²⁴ Awayda al-Juhani, *Najd Qabl al-Wahhabiyya: Al-Zurūf al-Ijtīmā'iyya wa al-Siyāsiyya wa al-Dīniyya Ibbān al-Qurūn al-Thalatha allatī Sabaqat al-Ḥaraka al-Wahhābiyya* (Najd Prior to Wahhabism: The Social, Political and Religious Conditions During the Three Centuries Preceding the Wahhabi Reform Movement) (Beirut: Losour Publishing, Translated to English by Iḥsān Zakī, 2016) p. 236.

²⁵ Al-Dakhīl, *Wahhabism Between Polytheism* ..., p. 533.

²⁶ Ibid

Even though the religious higher authorities of the Najdi city-states were of the same *Ḥanbalī madhhab*, political rivalries between the rulers of these city-states prevented the formation of a unified Najdi religious accord or *marjaʿiyya* (religious referential authority). Taking the ruler's political side against his enemies was a priority over religious matters. It delivered through various *fatāwa* (pl. of *fatwa*), as with the Wahhabi *fatāwa* against other city-states and letters accusing deviation from the true path of Islam sent to the rival Najdi religious Shaykhs, who in turn negated Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's fatwas.²⁷ However, supported by the formidable military power of Ibn Saʿūd, the sword's voice was louder than that of the letter.

A question must be answered before we can clearly understand the state of religion in Najd. For example, who were the *mushrikīn* (polytheists)? There were three types of *mushrikīn*: two in Najd and the third outside Najd.²⁸ In Najd, one of the groups of *mushrikīn* were the practitioners of folk religion, which includes superstition and *tawassūl* (intercession with Allah) seekers at trees and gravesites. The other group was that of *taṣawwuf*, which was practised on a small scale. Outside Najd proper, the Sufis were present in Mecca and Medina as well as in ʿAsīr and al-Aḥsāʾ (see map of Saudi Arabia). It is also important to note that the state of religion, as was the case for any Islamic city then, was not free from superstition.²⁹ Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's mission to reinstate the unity of Allah through strong political power necessitated gathering all of the city-states under the solitary leadership of Muḥammad Ibn Saʿūd. Thus, the political vacuum-cum-power struggle in Najd was filled under the banner of a single religious ideology.

The flimsy religious commitments across the city-states and lethargy against *shirk*, according to Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, tolerated the mixing of superstitious traditions with Islamic rituals. This included worshipping the graves of some Islamic Saints, e.g., the tomb of Zayd Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb

²⁷ Muḥammad Bin ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *Fatāwa wa Masāʾil* (Fatwas and Issues), (Riyadh: Imam Mohammad Bin Saud Islamic University) https://www.cia.gov/library/abbottabad-compound/07/0761E6F45803730B556D88AF9E3962E4_04-2_50044.pdf (Accessed January 28, 2020)

²⁸ Al-Dakhīl, *Wahhabism Between Polytheism ...*

²⁹ Ibid, p. 327.

and certain trees in al-Kharj that were believed to be sacred.³⁰ *Taṣawwuf* was lumped among these practices as *shirk*.³¹

Sufism, this thesis argues, was the only practice among the “deviant practices” that could be justified by the alliance between the two Imams as being politically oriented. This was due to its popularity in neighbouring al-Ḥijāz, the would-be political rival of the nascent Saudi state. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb foresaw that well-established Sufi orders in Najd would inevitably attract the attention of Ottoman-supported Ḥijāzi Sufis. Fear of a tolerant attitude toward Sufism in Najd was based on the early Najdi *Ḥanbalī*’s adherence to the Damascene *Ḥanbalī* school of Ibn Taymiyya.³²

In Ibn Taymiyya’s time, Sufism thrived in Damascus. According to al-Shuqayr Sufism came to Najd with the Najdi ulama who studied in Damascus.³³ Attitudes towards Sufism among the *Ḥanbalī* Shaykhs were thus similar to their masters in Damascus— that is, selective rather than a total rejection. Some scholars note that Sufism thrived only in urban settings, which explains why Najdi *taṣawwuf* was practised in the old town of Mi‘kāl, where Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb directed his criticism.³⁴

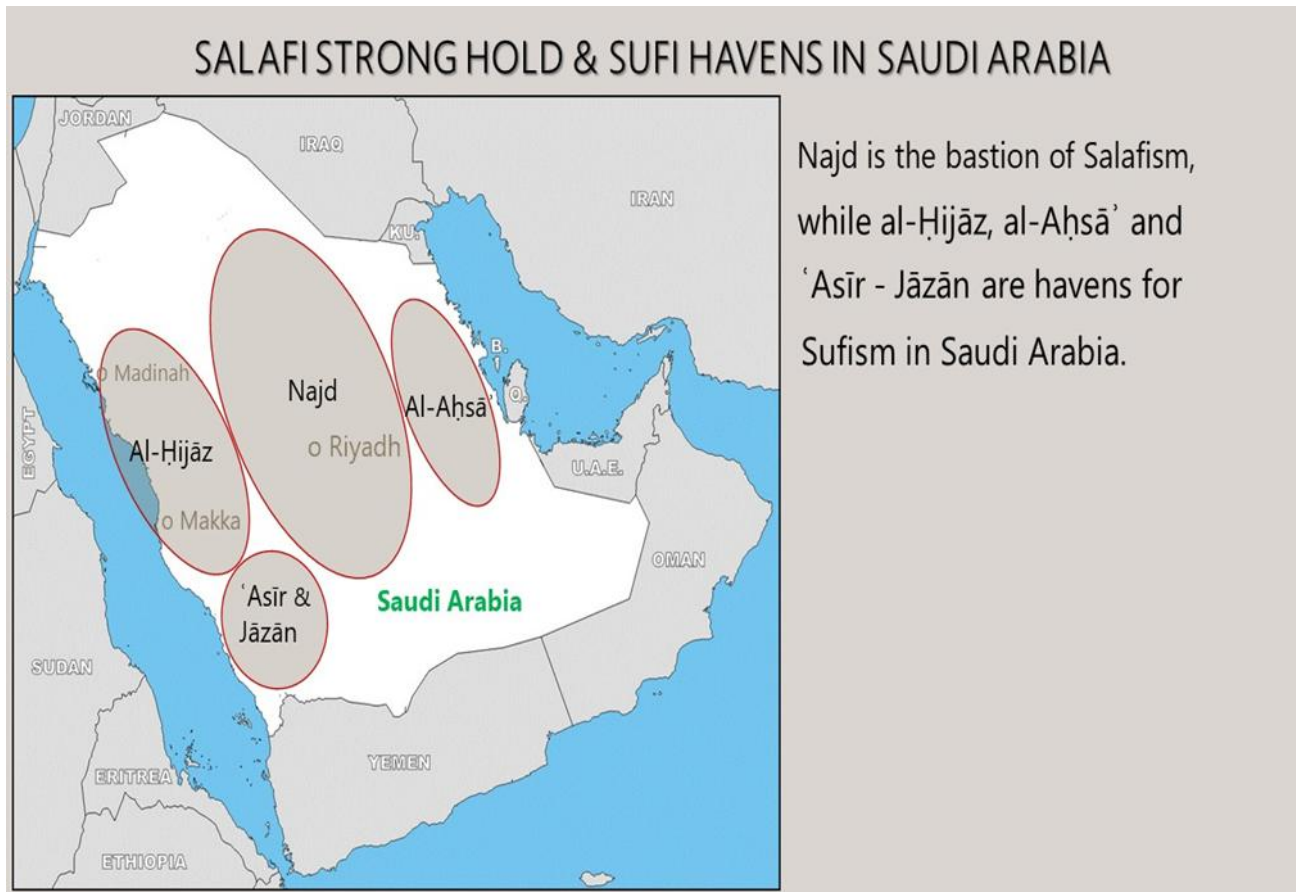
³⁰ Al-Juhani, *Najd Prior to Wahhabism*..., p. 270.

³¹ Al-Dakhīl, *Wahhabism Between Polytheism* ..., p. 275; pp. 279-285.

³² Al-Shuqayr, *Ḥanbali Madhab in Najddhab* ..., pp. 79-80; p. 82; p. 86; p. 89.

³³ Ibid., p. 95.

³⁴ Ibrāhīm T. Al-Alma‘ī, *Al-Taṣawwuf fī ‘Asīr wa al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymanī* (Sufism in ‘Asīr wa al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymanī), in *Al-Taṣawwuf fī al-Su‘ūdiyya wa al-Khalīj*, (Sufism in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf) ed. Turkī Al-Dakhīl (Dubai: Al-Mesbar Studies and Research Center, 2013), p.113; Al-Shuqayr, *Ḥanbali Madhab in Najddhab* ..., p.95.



Map of Saudi Arabia

Majālis al-dhikr (Ṣufi supplication sessions) were held in Mi‘kāḷ. At these sessions, the books of Ibn ‘Arabī (1165–1240) were read, and the poetry of Ibn al-Fāriḍ (1161–1234) was recited. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s teachings and attitude toward Sufism were influenced by the socioreligious milieu in Najd and the religio-political agenda of the two Imams, as evidenced in his numerous letters to the rulers and judges of the city-states.³⁵ Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb set the course for his disciples after him to establish a Najdi school of Ḥanbalism.

Even though Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb founded his *Ḥanbalī* school of thought based on the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya, he practically founded a new *Ḥanbalī* school of Wahhabi Najdi orientation. This became the Wahhābī *Ḥanbalī madhab*’s school as an offshoot of the Damascene Ibn Taymiyya *Ḥanbalī* school.³⁶ But in the light of the Wahhābī *Ḥanbalīs* antagonism towards

³⁵ Ibid, pp 305-307.

³⁶ Three *Ḥanbalī* Schools and their attitude towards Sufism, see Al-Shuqayr, *Ḥanbali Madhab in Najddhab ...*

taṣawwuf, Ibn Taymiyya's attitude towards *taṣawwuf* is essential and will be addressed in Chapter Four.³⁷

According to Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's followers, the Sufis were among the *mushrikīn* who sought Allah's blessing at the graves of saints.³⁸ But lumping Sufism wholesale with superstitious folk practices was unfair. Some Najdi religious scholars attended the Sufi *majālis al-dhikr*.³⁹ In some of these *majālis*, Sufi practices, such as *dhikr* and seeking the *baraka* (grace and intercession) of *awliyā'* Allah (the allies of Allah; Sufi saints) were practised. Sufism was known to be practised in a variety of *ṭurūq* (pl. of *ṭarīqa*, or Sufi order), some of which were not rejected by the *Ḥanbalī* scholars who at that time belonged to the Ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn Taimiyya tradition, e.g., Sulaymān Bin Suḥaym.⁴⁰

My thesis argues that the religious-cum-political agenda of the two Imams necessitated lumping Sufism in its entirety under the rubric of the broader term *shirk* for two main reasons. On the one hand, it was partly for reasons of creed, given differences between the *Ash'arī* creed to which Sufism generally belongs and the *Atharī* creed to which the Najdi *Ḥanbalī* school adheres (see Chapter Two).⁴¹ On the other, there was a political reason behind the encouragement and support of Sufism from the Ottoman superpower that dominated the region at the time, especially through its control of al-Ḥijāz and influence in al-Aḥsā', where *taṣawwuf* thrives to this day.⁴² Historically, al-Ḥijāz and al-Aḥsā' were dominant forces that controlled the dispersed Najdi city-states through intermittent attacks and alliances.⁴³

³⁷ 'Ādil al-Shu'aybī, *Ibn Taymiyya Ṣufiyyan* (Ibn Taimiyya was Ṣufī), (Beirut: Dar al-Rayaheen, 2018); for Ibn Taymiyya's attitude towards Sufism, see Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyy: Maker of the Muslim World*, (London: Oneworld Academic, 2019), p. 70-71.

³⁸ Ondrej Beranek, and Pavel Tupek, *The Temptation of Graves in Salafi Islam: Iconoclasm, Destruction and Idolatry*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018); Al-Dakhīl, *Wahhabism Between Polytheism ...*, p. 275.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 285; Al-Shuqayr, *Ḥanbali Madhab in Najd hab ...*, p. 95.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 95.

⁴¹ To illustrate the complication of creed as far as the historically changing hue of the four Sunni madhāhib, see Ibid, p. 94; p. 97.

⁴² Muḥammad Ḥilmī. 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Al-Taṣawwūf wa Taḥawulātih fī Mashhadih al-Mu'āṣir* (Sufism and its Transformation in its Contemporary Scene), in Al-Dakhīl ed. Sufism in Saudi Arabia ..., p.149; Al-Dakhīl, *Wahhabism Between Polytheism ...*, p. 295

⁴³ Ibid, p.276.

The 1818 Ottoman Empire-instigated Egyptian campaign, led by Ibrāhīm Pasha, aimed to eradicate Wahhabism and the budding Saudi state, marking a turning point in Saudi state-making and the religious attitudes of the Najdis toward the invaders.⁴⁴ This Egyptian campaign ended the first Saudi state in Najd, only to see it revived in a hard-won political struggle as the second Saudi state. Given the Ottoman-Egyptian campaign, Sufism was associated with the Ottomans and the Egyptians and received its final disfavour in Najdi's hearts.

Suppose *taṣawwuf* in Najd was lumped into the camp of the detested shirk by the newly emerging political-cum-religious alliance of Ibn Saud and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb in the middle of the eighteenth century. What was the state of Sufism on the Arabian Peninsula, mainly in al-Ḥijāz and 'Asīr to the west and al-Aḥsā' to the east of Najd at the time?

1.2 The Historical State of *Taṣawwuf* in al-Ḥijāz

Al-Ḥijāz, or the Western Province of Saudi Arabia, had been the bastion of Sufism in the Arabian Peninsula for centuries.⁴⁵ Many known *ṭurūq* (Sufi orders) have flourished in the scholarly religious environments of Mecca and Medina, the cradle of Islam. The Sharifian ancestry of al-Ashrāf (pl. of Sharīf), the descendants of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, the grandsons of Prophet Muḥammad, predisposed them to play leading roles in the emirates of Mecca and Medina from the eighth and ninth centuries onwards. They played a prominent role not only as rulers but also as religious specialists. For example, they were judges and preachers and acted as heads of Sufi orders. Sufi circles flourished in Mecca and Medina for a long time.⁴⁶

The Sufi mystic Abu Ṭālib al-Makkī (d.1071), who inspired generations of Sufis, including the prominent Abu Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (1058–1111), lived and studied in Mecca during his early years. Al-Makkī's book *Qūt al-qulūb* (*The Nourishment of Hearts*) is still widely read among

⁴⁴ Stephane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia* (London: Harvard University Press, 2011) p 12. Translated from French by George Holoch,

⁴⁵ Muḥammad A. M. Nuwaylātī, *Jeddah wa 'Abqariyyat al-Makān: Ṣafahāt min Farādatuha al-Rūḥāniyya wa al-Thaqāfiyya* (Jeddah and the Genius of the Place: Notes on the Uniqueness of its Spirituality and Culture), (Jadawel for Publishing, Translation and Distribution: Beirut, Lebanon, 2023) Pp. 303-391

⁴⁶ Madawi al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) pp. 29-30.

Sufis and seekers of mysticism.⁴⁷ The famed and controversial Sufi mystic Muhyī al-dīn Ibn ‘Arabī (1165–1240) was inspired to write his magnum opus *Al-Futuḥāt al-Makkiyya* (*The Openings in Mecca*) after living in Mecca for some years.⁴⁸

Prominent Sufi scholars were also known to have lived and taught in the Grand Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina since the seventeenth century, more than one hundred years before Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb launched his reform movement.⁴⁹ In the seventeenth century, for instance, renowned Ḥijāzi Sufis, the likes of Aḥmad Bin Muḥammad al-Qashāsh (d.1660) and Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī (d.1690) played a significant role in mixing Indian (*Naqshabandī* and *Shaṭirī ṭurūq*) with Egyptian *ṭurūq*, such as that of Zakariyya al-Anṣārī and ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī.⁵⁰ However, the unpretentiously prevailing Meccan *ṭurūq* from the eighteenth century consists of a combination of ‘*Alawiyya* and *Khalwatiyya*, as established by Aḥmad Zaynī Daḥlān.⁵¹ The famed *zawāyā* (pl. of *zāwiya*; a Sufi religious lodge and school) of the Sufi *ṭarīqa* of Shaykh ‘Umar Abu Sarīr (d. in Jeddah in 1629) and Shaykh Ḥasan ‘Ujaymī (1639–1701) attest to that.⁵²

But in the nineteenth century, during the Ottoman era, Sufism flourished through its Sufi *zawāyā*. These *zawāyā* served as schools and charity providers. They held *majālis al-dhikr* and religious celebrations, such as *al-mawlid al-nabawī* (The Birth of the Prophet) and *al-isrā’ wa al-mi’rāj* (The Prophet’s night journey). The *zawāyā* identified with people’s lives. After attacks on al-Ḥijāz from hegemonic Wahhabis in 1924, however, they began to disappear. Over time, they outgrew their usefulness as regular public schools took over their teaching roles, and their charitable functions were transferred to social charitable organisations. The Ḥijāzi Sufi *ṭurūq*

⁴⁷Saeko Yazaki, *Islamic Mysticism and Abu Talib al-Makki: The Role of the Heart*, (London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis, 2013)

⁴⁸ For work by a specialist on Ibn ‘Arabī see William Chittick, *From the Meccan Openings: The Myth of the Origin of Religion and Law* (Kindle books: The World and 1 Online, 2014)

⁴⁹ Mahmūd ‘Abd al-Ghanī Ṣabbāgh, *Al-Ṣufiyya wa al-Majālis al-‘Ilmiyya fī al-Ḥijāz al-Ḥadīth* (Sufism and the Salons of Learning in Modern Hijaz), in Turkī Al-Dakhīl ed, 2013, p151.

⁵⁰ Naser Dumairieh, *Intellectual Life in the Ḥijāz before Wahhabism: Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī’s* (d. 1101/1690) *Theology of Sufism* (Leiden: Brill, 2022)

⁵¹ Ṣabbāgh, *Sufism and the Salons...*, pp. 187-8.

⁵² Ibid, p. 151.

and *majālis al-dhikr* were supported by many prominent scholars and merchant families in al-Ḥijāz and from around the Muslim world.⁵³

During the eighteenth century, at a time when Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb declared Sufism as a form of *shirk* in Najd, the Sufi *ṭurūq* in al-Ḥijāz were growing. For example, the *ṭarīqa Sammāniyya* was established in the mid-eighteenth century by Shaykh Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Sammān (d. 1775), the caretaker of the Prophet Muḥammad's tomb in Medina.⁵⁴ Moroccan-born Meccan scholar Sufi Imam Aḥmad Bin Idrīs, initially associated with the *Shadhiliyya-Khalwatiyya ṭarīqa*, launched the *Idrisiyya ṭarīqa*.⁵⁵ He lived and taught in Mecca until his expulsion to ‘Asīr in 1827.

The most well-known of the Meccan *zawāyā* was the Sanūsī *zāwiya*, which was established in 1828.⁵⁶ The Meccan *ṭurūq* were varied and included, among others, the *Naqshabandiyya*, *Qādiriyya (Jilāniyya)*, *Shadhiliyya*, *Idrissiyya*, *Badawiyya (Aḥmadiyya)*, *Marghaniyya*, *‘Alawiyya*, *Rifā‘iyya*, and *Baktāshiyya*. The Ottoman Sultan empowered the governor of Mecca to oversee and supervise these *zawāyā* to certain prominent Meccan families. For instance, the services for the *Ādilī* shrine were assigned to the house of al-Qudsī al-Makkī.⁵⁷

The Meccan Sufi Shaykhs held high positions in al-Ḥaram al-Makkī institution as teachers of *fiqh*; they also authorised their disciples to lead the *ṭurūq* as fully pledged Shaykhs.⁵⁸ A golden age of Sufism shone in Mecca until a few years before King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz seized al-Ḥijāz in the 1920s. One of the last prominent Sufi scholars was Shaykh ‘Abd Allah Bin Moḥammad Bin Sālih Zawāwī (1850–1924), the chairman of the Ḥijāzi *Majlis al-Shurā* (Council of

⁵³ Ibid, p. 150.

⁵⁴ Beranek, and Tupek, *The Temptation of Graves...*, pp. 23-25.

⁵⁵ Bin Idrīs’ co-supporter in the *ṭarīqa* was the *Shāfi‘ī* mufti of Mecca Mohammad Šālih al-Rayyis. The Rayyis family remains prominent in Mecca and are related by marriage to the controversial Meccan Šufī Sayyid Muḥammad ‘Alawī al-Mālkī.

⁵⁶ Šabbāgh, *Sufism and the Salons...*, p 152.

⁵⁷ Shaykh Muḥammad Sa‘īd Qudsī, the mufti of Mecca (d. 1846). He was followed by his son Shaykh ‘Alī (d. 1878) see Ibid, p 153.

⁵⁸ ‘Abbās Š. Tāshkandī, *Tārīkh Ḥalaqāt al-‘Ilm fī al-Ḥaramayn al-Sharīfayn* (History of the Study Circles in the Two Holy Mosques) (London: al-Forqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 2020).

Representatives) during the Sharīf Ḥusayn rule of al-Ḥijāz. One of his students was the Najdi Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Turkī.⁵⁹

Regarding the *ziyārat al-qubūr*, visiting graves for *tabbaruk*, or a blessing, was a common folk religion practice. Some *Sharīfian* government officials were influenced by the strict Wahhabi attitudes against such practices as a form of *shirk*. The tenure of the governor of Mecca between 1882 and 1905, ‘Awn al-Rafīq, was characterised by anti-Ottoman tendencies. Aspiring for authority and independence, he ordered the destruction of all the tombs that received visitors to protect true religion from *khurāfāt* (myths) and *kufṛ* (blasphemy) of the common people.⁶⁰ Nearly two decades before King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz entered al-Ḥijāz, Governor al-Rafīq destroyed seven significant shrine tombs in Jeddah: al-Shaykh al-‘Alawī, al-Shaykh Abu Sarīr, al-Shaykh Abu ‘Inaba, al-Shaykh al-Mazlūm, al-Shaykh al-Arba‘īn, al-Shaykh al-‘Uqaylī, and al-Shaykh Abu al-‘Uyūn.⁶¹

A very important source of Meccan history can be found in the writings of the Dutch traveller Cnouck Hurgronje, who lived in Mecca between 1884 and 1885 under the pseudonym al-Ḥajj ‘Abd al-Ghaffār.⁶²

1.3 The Historical State of *Taṣawwuf* in ‘Asīr and Jāzān

Taṣawwuf in ‘Asīr and the adjacent Jāzān, the southwestern coastal regions of the Arabian Peninsula located between al-Ḥijāz and Yemen, have been associated with Imam Aḥmad Bin Idrīs. Establishing his rule marked a prime example of mixing politics with a Sufī order, which he did by exploiting his Prophetic bloodline for political clout and his religious scholarship for

⁵⁹ Ibid, p 154.

⁶⁰ Ulrike Freitag, *Tārīkh Jeddah: Bawābat Makkah fī al-Qarnayn al-Tāsi ‘ashar wa al-‘Ishrīn* (A History of Jeddah: The Gate to Mecca in the Nineteenth and the Twentieth Centuries) translated by ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Qaṣṣāb, (Beirut: Dar Ban Alani, 2024), pp, 273-274.

⁶¹ Muḥammad A. M. Nuwaylātī, *Jeddah wa Ummuna Hawwa: ‘Abaq al-Makān wa ‘Imq al-Zamān* (Jeddah and Our Mother Eve: Scent of the Place and Depth of Time), (Jadawel for Publishing, Translation and Distribution: Beirut, Lebanon, 2021) P. 53.

⁶² C Snouck Hurgronje’s 1880 dissertation at Leiden University was titled “The Festivities of Mecca.” His historical account of Mecca titled “Mekka”. C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Mekka in the Latter Part of the 19th Century*, translated by J.H. Monahan. (Leiden: Brill, 2007)

authority. It is interesting to note that his *ṭarīqa* branched into several others in countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Eritrea, and Somalia, known as (al-Ṣālihiyya), and in the Sudan, as (*al-Rāshidiyya*). Sufism survives in ‘Asīr’s cities today, and particularly in al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī of Jāzān.⁶³

1.4 The Historical State of *Taṣawwuf* in al-Aḥsā’

Unfortunately, reliable information on the state of Sufism in al-Aḥsā’ was not available during the relevant stage of research. However, correspondence between the Sufi Shaykhs of al-Ḥijāz and al-Aḥsā’, as well as the appearance of YouTube videos by Salafi Shaykhs refuting the Sufi Shaykhs of al-Aḥsā’, has circulated in recent years, along with some videos by al-Aḥsā’ Sufis. Their scale is limited, but social media circles attest to their prominence. One notable characteristic of al-Aḥsā’’s inhabitants is their historically tolerant religious lifestyle, spanning both the pre-modern and modern periods.⁶⁴

II. *Taṣawwuf* in the Modern Third Saudi State (1902–present)

The current third Saudi state commenced with the recapture of Riyadh by King ‘Abd al-Azīz in 1902. He claimed the capital city of his ancestors from the possession of a rival clan, al-Rashīd (allies of the Ottoman Turks).⁶⁵ Saudi Arabia began its journey toward the modern age with its Salafi–Wahhabi school of thought as the ideological backbone of the state. Launching a conservative society run under a strict religious ideology into modernity required a series of transformative reforms. For this reason, I dub the third Saudi state “the state of transformative reforms”.

According to this thesis, these reforms describe Saudi Arabia’s shift from a pre-modern nineteenth-century state into a modern nation over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries

⁶³ Ṣabbāgh, *Sufism and the Salons...*

⁶⁴ Khalid al-Nassar, *The Sunni-Shia Interfaith Issue in The Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia*, unpublished MA dissertation (Lampeter, UK: University of Wales, 2017).

⁶⁵ Mahmūd ‘Abd al-Ghani Ṣabbāgh, in *Al-Tasawwuf fī al-Sa‘ūdiyya wa al-Khalīj* ed. Turkī Al-Dakhīl, ..., 2013, pp.149-150.

through three stages of transformation. The first two reform stages aimed at achieving several significant objectives. On the one hand, the state wanted to preserve and propagate mainly Wahhabi Salafi religious values, especially in the fields of jurisprudence and religious education (albeit in a culturally and religiously “heterogenous” society). On the other, the state also wanted the Kingdom to be recognised as a modern twentieth-century nation-state, whether politically, economically or culturally.

The first objective of transforming a newly unified “heterogenous” society into one that adhered to a uniform Wahhabi Salafi school of thought necessitated correcting the creed of so-called “deviant sects”, that is, Sufism and Shi‘ism so that they might return to the “right path” of Islam. The “right path” consists of understanding and practising Islam per the Wahhabi Salafi *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā‘a*’s (adherents to the Prophet’s Sunna and the community) understanding of Islam.

The second objective would be achieved by adopting modern methods and techniques for administrating its new governmental agencies and ministries. The state also launched a massive educational programme to meet the future needs of technocrats critical to the modernisation process. Modernisation was initiated to establish efficient management and technological systems to run its newly founded departments. Saudi writer al-Khodhayr described Saudi society as “government-fabricated”.⁶⁶

Still, it should be noted that reform for the sake of modernity was not always generated by the government alone. In many cases, it was a natural development of public exposure to the modern world and a desire to modernise, expressed by the intelligentsia who promoted the *ḥadātha* (modernity) movement. The modernisation path was trodden vigilantly in the face of fears of the influence of foreign social values that often frequently accompanied imported technologies and the influx of expatriate workers recruited to participate in the country’s economic development.

⁶⁶ ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Khodhayr, *Al-Su‘ūdiyya Sirat Dawla wa Mujtama‘: Qirā’a fī Tajrubat Thulth Qarn min al-Taḥawwulāt al-Fikriyya wa al-Siyasiyya wa al-Tanmawiyya* (Saudi Arabia: A Biography of State and Society: A Third of a Century’s Reading of Intellectual, Political and Developmental Transformations), (Beirut: Arab Network for Research and Publishing, 2011) p. 47.

The primary objective of promoting Salafi values was to shield society from the influence of undesirable foreign cultural, ideological, and moral values. This meant that the officially recognised Wahhabi Salafi school of thought imposed its values on any attempt to modernise. In addition to suppressing “deviant” Islamic sects, the Salafis were in charge of safeguarding society against going astray morally, intellectually or ideologically. This often created tension between the Salafis, other Islamic schools of thought, *ḥadātha* movement promoters, and the government.

Interdependence between the government and Wahhabi Salafi ideology painted Saudi Arabia as a semi-theocratic monarchy.⁶⁷ Although the Saudi monarch was in charge of running the secular affairs of the state, the theocratic arm of the state bestowed divine legitimacy on the King. It drew the boundaries of *sharīʿa* within which state affairs are run, in what Sinani calls the legitimacy of “authoritative orthodoxy”.⁶⁸ Subjection to religious influence thus compelled the Saudi government to indulge in “political Islam,” whether intentionally or by default, in all three transformative reform stages.

In turn, political Islam resulted in interactions between the Wahhabi Salafi school and other political Islam movements. For instance, the Muslim Brotherhood, which nurtured the *Ṣaḥwa* (Islamic awakening) movement and its derivatives from splintered Salafi groups, such as *al-Sūrūriyya*, *al-Jāmiyya*, *al-Qāʿida* and at a later stage, the Islamic “*tanwīriyyūn*” (enlightened modernists Muslims). For decades, the *Ṣaḥwa* movement played a formidable role in shaping socio-political and socioreligious life in Saudi Arabia. This thesis argues that the official Salafi establishment and the active proponents of *al-Ṣaḥwa* effectively ignored the religious and cultural heterogeneity of society by taking an antagonistic stand against Sufism and Shiʿism in the religious sphere and against *al-ḥadātha* (modernity) in the secular sphere. For this reason, anti-pluralism socioreligious discord has become an attribute of Saudi society.

In terms of the religious sphere, the Saudi state, through the Salafi establishment, targeted two regions to achieve its first objective of transformative reform: the region of al-Ḥijāz to bring

⁶⁷ The adherence to the Holy Qurʿan and the Prophet’s Sunna is a very important pillar of the Saudi Arabian constitution <http://www.the-saudi.net/saudi-arabia/saudi-constitution.htm>

⁶⁸ Sinani, *Sufi Scholars Practices...*, p. 71

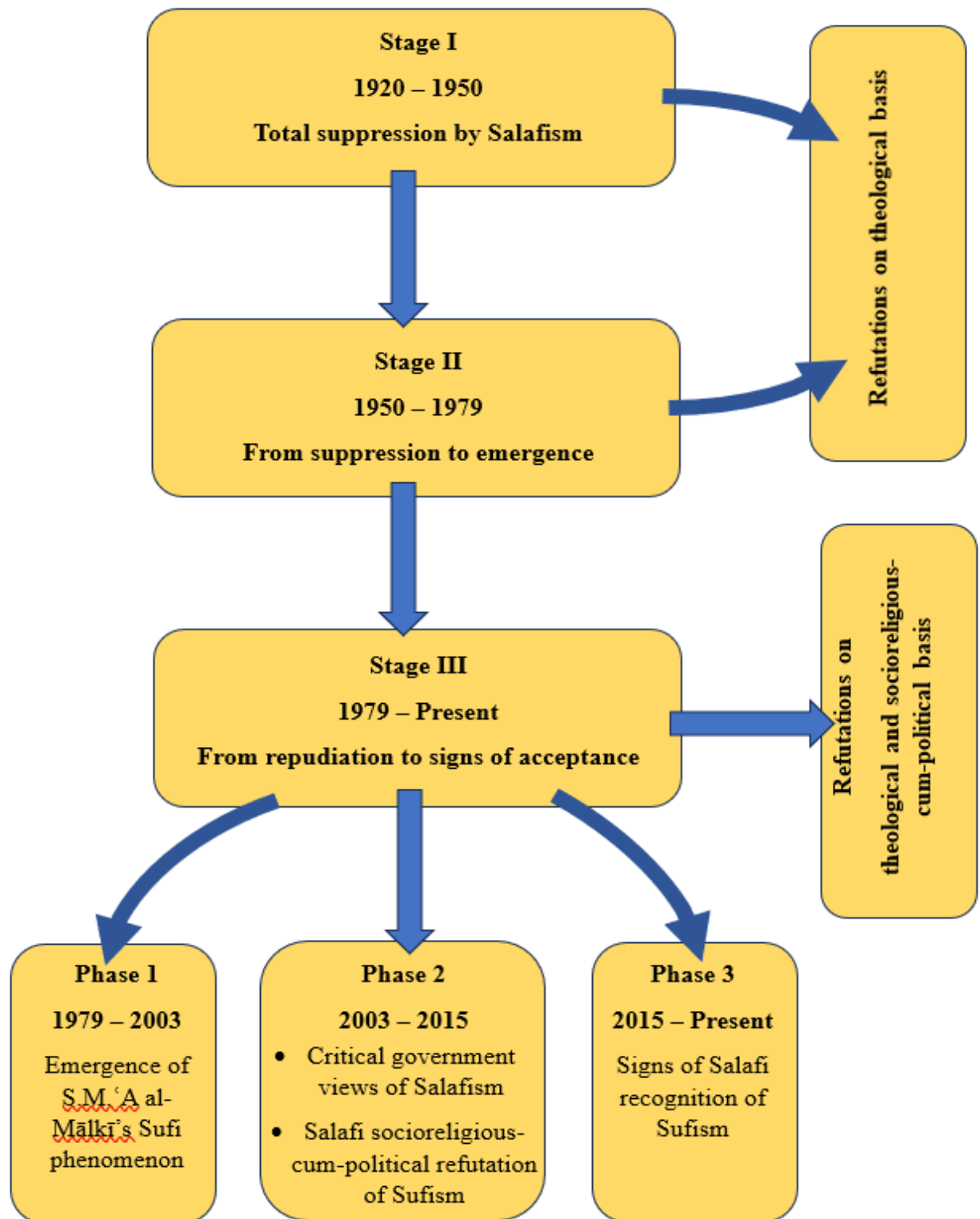
“astray” Sufis back to the fold of “pure” Islam and the region of al-Aḥsā’ and Qatīf (a Shī‘a-populated area in the eastern part of the country) to repress and “straighten up” deviant Shī‘a.⁶⁹

These chronological developments will shed light on the state of Sufism during the three stages of transformative reform allowing us to analyse the socioreligious aspects of Saudi society. (see Diagram 1 below).

⁶⁹ Simon Mabon, *Saudi Arabia and Iran: Power, and Rivalry in the Middle East* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2016) p. 120

DIAGRAM 1

**State of Sufism in Contemporary Saudi Arabia
(1920 – Present)**



The thesis designates the three stages of transformational reforms to demonstrate the interplay between the government, the Salafī establishment and *taṣawwuf* in terms of their attitudes towards each other (i.e., accord, discord and neutral relationships), and society in general.

2.1 The First Stage of Transformative Reform (1920–1950): Total Submission of *Taṣawwuf*

As mentioned, the literature on *taṣawwuf* in al-Aḥsā' is virtually non-existent. Only recently, due to Vision 2030 openness, have a few voices of the Sufīs of al-Aḥsā' surfaced on social media and YouTube. It must be noted, however, that al-'Ubaydī described the well-established pedagogical relationship between the Ḥijāzī school and the Sufī students from al-Aḥsā'.⁷⁰ Hence, as a result, this stage of transformative reform only focuses on *taṣawwuf* in al-Ḥijāz and 'Asīr-Jāzān regions.

2.1.1 *Taṣawwuf* in al-Ḥijāz

In the spirit of a reform effort to propagate and preserve Salafī–Wahhabi values as the unifying ideological religious-cum-cultural umbrella reaching over a whole newly unified Saudi domain, the state launched an effort to exert hegemonic control of the arch-enemies of Wahhabism, Sufism and Shi'ism. As far as *taṣawwuf* in al-Ḥijāz was concerned, the wrath of the Wahhabis against Sufism ranged from extreme opprobrium to systematic iconoclasm.⁷¹

In 1924, the first stand-off of the Second Hashemite–Saudi War took place in the mountain city of Ṭayif, seventy kilometres southeast of Mecca.⁷² The battle-ready *Ikhwān* (brethren) forces of Ibn Saud took out their rage in a bloodbath that resulted in the massacre of between 300 and 400 Ṭayif residents.⁷³ The puritanical *ikhwān* swept across al-Ḥijāz, imposing their austere

⁷⁰ Asrār Thāmir H. al-'Ubaydī, *Muḥaddith al-Ḥijāz al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bin 'Alawī al-Mālkī wa Juhūdih al-Kalamiyya* (The Ḥijāz Religious Scholar al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bin 'Alawī al-Mālkī and his Theological Efforts), (Amman, Jordan: Dar al-Faṭḥ, 2019), p. 74 & p. 101

⁷¹ Beranek, and Tupek, *The Temptation of Graves...*, p.1.

⁷² In the first war, the Saudi army retreated from attacking the Sharīf's forces in compliance with a British warning not to do so. See Ḥāfiẓ Wahba, *Jazīrat al-'Arab fī al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn* (The Arabian Peninsula in the Twentieth Century), (Cairo: Maktabat Lajnat al-Ta'līf wa-l-Tarjama wa al-Nashr, 2010) p. 341.

⁷³ David Holden, *The House of Saud: The Rise and Rule of the Most Powerful Dynasty in the Arab World*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1982); Wahba, *The Arabian Peninsula...*, pp. 345-346.

ways and displacing the religious practices and icons associated with Sufi *ṭurūq* with the practices and values of Wahhabi Salafism.⁷⁴ A significant issue the Wahhabis endeavoured to prevent was the Ḥijāzi practice of celebrating *al-mawlid al-nabawī* (the Prophet's birthday). In 1924, a debate took place between the Najdi and the Meccan ulama, after which the Meccan ulama, on their home ground, were to denounce the practice of *al-mawlid al-nabawī* as heresy.⁷⁵

Wahhabi Shaykhs started to replace Ḥijāzi Shaykhs in key religious posts in a systematic effort to cleanse al-Ḥijāz of important Sufi figures. This included the 1925 expulsion of Shaykh Abu al-ʿAbbās al-Dandarāwī and the *Dandarāwwiyya ṭarīqa* that belonged to the Ḥijāzi Idrīsi tradition.⁷⁶

In 1926, Alfa Hāshim, Shaykh of the *Tijāniyya ṭarīqa*, was summoned by Shaykh ʿAbd Allah Bin Ḥasan Āl-Ashaykh, the Ibn Saud's Salafī appointee to oversee the religious affairs of Medina. He was to publicly denounce his *ṭarīqa*, a request he refused, and the matter escalated to the point that it had to be resolved at the Medina governor's office. In 1926, a non-Najdi Salafī, Shaykh ʿAbd al-Zāhir Abu al-Samḥ was appointed Imam of al-Ḥaram and required to adhere to the religious discourse of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb in his sermons.

In 1928, the president of the Judiciary Supervision Commission, Shaykh ʿAbd Allah Āl-Ashaykh, ordered a survey to determine the population of all the *zawāyā* in Mecca. He did so to replace their Sufi Shaykhs with Salafī Shaykhs in a clear move to control them and spread Salafī ideals. Some of the Sufi Shaykhs claimed ownership of several of these *zawāyā*, which were annexed to their houses; they demanded to remain but to no avail.⁷⁷

In Medina, the Wahhabis demanded that the famed Libyan *mujāhid* Aḥmad al-Sharīf al-Sanūsī denounce his Sanūsī *awrād*. He refused, and the Wahhabi Shaykhs complained to King ʿAbd

⁷⁴ Al-Ikhwān should not be confused with al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn (The Muslim Brotherhood), which was established in Egypt in 1928. They are the Bedouins led by the ʿUtayba tribe, who settled in Najd around an area called Ghut, which came to be known by the Ḥijāzis, probably derogatorily, as *al-Ghutghut*.

⁷⁵ Ṣabbāgh, *Sufism and the Salons...*, p. 75.

⁷⁶ Mark Sedgwick, "Saudi Ṣufis: Compromise in the Hijaz, 1925- 40" *Die welt des Islams*, New Series, Vol. 37, Issue 3, (Saudi Arabia: Shites and Ṣufie, November 1997, p.349, p.368); <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1570657> (Accessed November 25, 2019)

⁷⁷ Ṣabbāgh, *Sufism and the Salons...*, p. 182.

al-‘Azīz, requesting that he be expelled from the country. The king delayed his decision, but soon al-Sanūsī died in 1933.⁷⁸

Despite their tough reputation, which had instilled fear in his enemies, the shrewd Ibn Saud saw in the *Ikhwān* a menace more than a blessing. In addition to his Salafi leanings, Ibn Saud was a pragmatic king and a shrewd statesman. The infamous Ṭāyif massacre produced two outcomes. First, it demonstrated the weakness of the Sharīf rule and proved that al-Ḥijāz would succumb easily to Ibn Saud’s authority. Second, the fear and terror instilled in Ḥijāzi *hearts by al-Ikhwān* painted Ibn Saud negatively as a ruthless ruler. These two issues had to be dealt with tactfully if he were to secure the allegiance of the Ḥijāzi people.

To improve his image a month before he entered al-Ḥijāz in person, Ibn Saud delivered a speech in Riyadh that was published in major newspapers of the Islamic world. The speech essentially expressed his intention to treat the Ḥijāz as a sacred Islamic domain belonging to all Muslims, dedicated to the worship of Allah and revival of the Prophet’s Sunna. He would call for a pan-Islamic conference to collectively determine what was best for the Holy cities and how to run al-Ḥijāz. But out of concern for the security of al-Ḥijāz, given that Ḥajj season was approaching, an urgent need to safeguard the Ḥajj pilgrimage passages to al-Ḥijāz pushed Ibn Saud to declare himself the King of Ḥijāz and the Sultan of Najd and its Dependencies.

Nevertheless, he called for a convention to be held in Mecca. The convention was lacklustre, to say the least. In it, the King emphasized re-instating his rule and his determination to instil the “correct path of Islam” (*Hanbalī* Salafism, according to the Wahhabi school) in al-Ḥijāz. He reiterated in the convention that raising the flag of *tawḥīd* and denouncing *shirk* was his message to the Islamic world.⁷⁹

As far as *al-Ikhwān* were concerned, Ibn Saud had rid his new rule of their terrorizing reputation in a pre-emptive move, before announcing the foundation of his twentieth-century nation-state. Ibn Saud eradicated *al-Ikhwān* in the battle of *al-Sabala* in 1928.⁸⁰ This battle marked the

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 184

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics ...*

launch of a transformative reform to introduce Western technology and management styles in preparation for a Saudi Arabian bid to become a sovereign state in 1932

Medina contained many tombs belonging to the *ṣaḥāba* (the Prophet's companions) and *ahl al-bayt* (the Prophet's immediate family). These tombs, marked by structures and domes, were demolished by the Wahhabis upon their conquest of al-Ḥijāz as a legitimate religious duty to purify the faith. This action angered some Muslims, particularly Sufis and Shī'a in the wider Islamic world and especially in India, where some groups vowed to re-erect the revered tombs. According to Wahba, an advisor to King 'Abd al-'Azīz, the government "in the cause of satisfying Allah, refused all suggestions about this action".⁸¹ The structure and dome over the tomb of *ūmmuna Ḥawwā* (Our Mother Eve) in Jeddah were also destroyed.⁸² However, this icon was not specifically associated with Sufis. As there is no historical or archaeological evidence to support this claim, at least one writer, 'Abd al-Wahhāb, categorises it as part of folk religion, meaning it is not specific to *taṣawwuf*.⁸³

2.1.2 *Taṣawwuf* in 'Asīr and Jāzān

On the Red Sea, between Mecca and Yemen, lies the mountainous regions of 'Asīr and Jāzān. The regions were ruled as independent governorates by the Sufi Ashrāf Idrīsī clan. *Taṣawwuf* in 'Asīr played a political function during the Idrīsī rule. Allegiance to pious Sufi religious rulers who traced their lineage to the Prophet afforded the Idrīsīs a special spiritual reverence to govern the region.⁸⁴ In advancing his strategy to draw the final borders around his domain, Ibn Saud signed the Treaty of Mecca with Ḥasan ibn 'Alī al-Idrīsī in October 1926. The treaty acknowledged al-Idrīsī's status as a governor of a semi-autonomous 'Asīr under the suzerainty of the King of Ḥijāz, Sultan of Najd and its Dependencies (as his title was at the time).

After signing the Treaty of Mecca, and one month before Ibn Saud entered 'Asīr, men followed the advice of the well-known religious family, the Ḥifzī, and demolished the domes on their

⁸¹ Wahba, *The Arabian Peninsula...*, p. 32

⁸² Nuwaylātī, *Jeddah and the Genius...*

⁸³ 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Sufism and its Transformation ...*, pp. 149-254.

⁸⁴ Al-Alma'ī, *Sufism in 'Asīr wa ...*, p.115.

ancestors' tombs out of fear for *the Ikhwān's* cruelty.⁸⁵ In 1930, 'Asīr was transformed, falling wholly under Saudi rule as part of the southern province of what would become Saudi Arabia.⁸⁶ *Taṣawwuf* still exists in 'Asīr today but is limited to the districts of Rijāl Alma' and al-Mikhlāf al-Sulaymānī of Jāzān.⁸⁷ After the annexation of al-Ḥijāz, 'Asīr and Jāzān King 'Abd al-'Azīz drew the final borders of his kingdom. Saudi Arabia then presented itself to the Islamic world as the flag-bearer of "pure" Islam.

2.2 The Second Stage of Transformative Reform (1950–1979): From Submission to Signs of Re-emergence

At the end of the first stage and the beginning of the second stage of transformative reform, Wahhabi-aborred religious groups such as the Shi'a and the Sufis were subdued. In al-Ḥijāz, the Sufi *majālis al-dhikr* were held quietly in the privacy of Ḥijāzi homes and private gatherings.⁸⁸ *Taṣawwuf* was dormant compared to the dynamically emerging political movements of the time, despite the generally passive nature of *taṣawwuf*. Instead, *taṣawwuf* was taught unobtrusively in the Ḥijāzi *majālis al-'ilm* (salons of learning).⁸⁹ Publicly, Sufism was still denounced during the Salafī Shaykhs' Friday sermons.⁹⁰

The domination of the feared Salafī authority's Commission to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice (CPVPV) was publicly imposed after an incident in which the CPVPV censored a shipment of a Sufi text *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* (Waymarks of Benefits) that contained Sufi *awrād* and praise for the Prophet.⁹¹ In 1956, the famous Meccan bookseller 'Abd al-Ṣamad Fida imported four hundred copies of this Sufi *wird* (devotional liturgy) from Egypt to satisfy his

⁸⁵ Ibid, p.115.

⁸⁶ Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi...*

⁸⁷ Ibid, pp.111-148.

⁸⁸ Ṣabbāgh, *Sufism and the Salons...*, p. 219.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 180.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 219.

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 181; *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt wa Shawāriq u'l Anwār fī Dhikr al-Ṣalāt 'Ala al-Nabiyy al-Mukhtār* is a well-known collection of prayers for Prophet Muhammad, which was written by Moroccan *Shadhili* Ṣufi and Islamic scholar Mūḥammad S. al-Jazūlī (d.1465).

usual customer demands. After being confiscated by the CPVPV Salafi authority, an exaggerated article published in the Ḥijāzi newspaper *Al-Bilād* warned readers about the severe harm the book could inflict on the “true” creed.

Despite the denunciation of Sufism in al-Ḥijāz, this phase of transformational reform channelled Wahhabism more towards inclusivity than exclusion. This shift was due to the pragmatic policies of King ‘Abd al-Azīz, who sought to maintain good relations with the Islamic world. Advocates for inclusion managed to navigate the constraints of *realpolitik*, a policy endorsed by the Grand Mufti Shaykh Muḥammad Bin Ibrāhīm, known for his strict adherence to tradition. In 1954, he chaired a high-level meeting with key religious leaders from various *madhāhib* in Mecca. During this gathering, the Islamic roots of other religious traditions were implicitly acknowledged for the first time by the austere Wahhabis. The message from the meeting was intended to be disseminated throughout the Islamic world.⁹² However, at the national level, the Shī‘a and the Sufis remained suppressed.

Despite the suppression of the Shī‘a and Sufis, a new threat was emerging that required immediate attention from the government. The discovery of oil in commercial quantities in 1938 proved to be both a boon and a nemesis for the Saudi government. In the 1950s, an economic boom brought wealth and openness to Saudi society. However, a simultaneous rise in Arab revolutions in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq affected the youth of Saudi Arabia, who consequently posed a threat to the government. The danger stemmed from the emergence of newly developing local civil and political movements in the cities and towns surrounding the oil facilities in the Eastern Province.⁹³ The movements demanded *al-ḥadātha* (modernity), shifting a political request to the openness of Arab intellectual schools, provoking a swift government reaction.

Arab nationalism and leftist ideologies faced pushback by directing youth towards Salafi Islamic values. This shift was bolstered by Egyptian and Syrian Salafi Muslim Brotherhood (MB) scholars, expelled by Arab nationalist regimes, notably President Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nasser of Egypt. ‘Abd al-Nasser, a key figure in Arab nationalism aiming to unify the Arab world under

⁹² Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics ...*, pp. 13-14.

⁹³ ‘Alī al-Awwāmī, *Al-Haraka al-Waṭaniyyah al-Su‘ūdiyya – al-Juz’ al-Awwal* (The Saudi National Movement Part I) (Beirut: Riad al-Rayyes for Books and Publishing, 2012) p. 16.

socialism, opposed King Faysal, who reinforced his monarchy with Salafi principles Islam.⁹⁴ These educated religious newcomers taught in the newly established Saudi Islamic institutions. Mannā' al-Qaṭṭān, a Muslim Brotherhood member, came to Saudi Arabia in 1953, one year after Egypt's 'Abd al-Nasser revolution. Al-Qaṭṭān held high positions in Saudi Islamic institutions.⁹⁵ He was considered one of the early initiators of what became known in the 1980s as the *al-Ṣaḥwa* (the awakening) Islamic movement, which ushered in the third transformative reform stage.

It is important to note that the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's traditional stance on Sufism had to change in its new Saudi environment. The traditionally Sufi-tolerant Muslim Brotherhood adopted an anti-Sufi stance congruent with the Wahhabi Salafism. It is also essential to note that a splinter group from *al-Ṣaḥwa*, known as the "modernist Muslims," developed its own political ideology, which accepts Sufism's self-expression as part of the democratic process that the group purports to adopt. This also occurred during the third stage of transformation.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the conflict between the religious establishment and the Sufis of al-Ḥijāz had been pacified. Al-Ḥijāz flourished economically and socially during the era of King Faysal (1964–1974), primarily due to his affinity for the region, as it was his long-time residence while serving as Foreign Minister. All embassies were located in Jeddah before the shift to Riyadh in the 1980s. The Ḥijāzis felt the King was pro-Ḥijāz, as exemplified in his wife Effat al-Thunayyān's social, philanthropic and women's education efforts in Jeddah.⁹⁶ However, according to Lacroix, the Ḥijāzi identity was reawakened and expressed at a Sufi revival in response to the marginalisation of Ḥijāzi elites in political and economic spheres during the *tafra* (economic boom) that followed a surge in oil prices. Lacroix states:

Sufi circles at the time included several thousand active members, gathered under the authority of the man who was distinguished as the leader of the

⁹⁴ Out of this counteroffensive, two institutions emerged, the Islamic University of Medina in 1961 to counter al-Azhar University, and the Muslim World League in 1962. The top echelon of the League included Pakistani Abu al-A'la Mawdūdī, the founder of Jamā'at Islāmī. Faysal adopted the mantra of "Islamic modernization". The MB became for Faysal what the Muslim reformists became to his father, see Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics* ..., p. 43.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 44.

⁹⁶ Queen 'Īffat, as she was known in al-Ḥijāz, was born in Constantinople, under the Ottoman Empire.

revival, Sheikh Muhammad ‘Alawi al-Maliki, a descendant of the Malekite muftis of Mecca before the Saudi conquest.⁹⁷

The second stage of transformative reform was characterised by severe criticism of Salafism. During this stage, the *taṣawwuf* started to emerge from a state of repression by the Salafis. At the end of the second stage and the beginning of the third stage, there is an ironic contrast in the attitude of the government-supported Salafī anti-Sufi establishment. The government facilitated refuge in al-Ḥijāz for the Āl Bā ‘Alawī Sufis who had been expelled from their homeland for political reasons. This situation became known as the Ḥaḍramī diaspora, a point revisited in Chapter Five.

2.3 The Third Stage of Transformative Reform (1979–Present): From Salafī Repudiation to Signs of Acknowledging Sufism

The characteristic feature of the third stage was a changing attitude towards *taṣawwuf*. Liberals and other religious groups came to the fore while fundamental Salafī groups were either eradicated or at least quieted, as explained later in the chapter. For the first time in Saudi history, the official Salafī establishment was compelled to ride in the backseat while the government, to borrow al-Khodayr’s terminology,⁹⁸ “refabricate[ed]” Saudi society through its new ambitious futuristic Vision 2030 towards, as Maṣṣūr calls it, an “authoritative *ḥadātha*”; a *ḥadātha* (modernity) designed and propelled by the government.⁹⁹

In light of the government’s significant involvement in acknowledging the diversity and dynamism of a heterogeneous Saudi society, this phase presented a golden opportunity to explore the essence of Saudi Sufism. Given the socio-religious characteristics of the society and its subjugation to the conservative Salafī dominance for decades, the government realized that the transformation of religious concepts and values into a new mode of thinking would be a formidable and challenging task. The Islamic concept of *wasatīyya* (middle way; moderation

⁹⁷ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics ...*, pp. 221-224.

⁹⁸ Al-Khodhayr, *Saudi Arabia: A Biography...*, p. 47.

⁹⁹ Ashraf Maṣṣūr, *Al-Ramz wa al-Wa‘ī al-Jām‘ī: Dirāsāt fī Sosiolojia al-Adiyān* (Collective Symbol and Awareness: Studies in the Sociology of Religions), (Cairo: Ru’yah for Publishing and Distribution, 2010)

in Islam) thus provided a catalyst to facilitate the desired transformation. However, the definition of *wasatīyya* itself varies across all the major Islamic sects and religious schools of thought. This thesis argues that the Sufi definition of *wasatīyya* is more accommodating to achieving the government's goals.

Chapters Two, Five, and Six will discuss the definition of *wasatīyya* in the Salafi and Sufi schools of thought. However, this chapter will note its effects on the dynamics of social change.

The third stage of transformation is the most dynamic. Dramatic events have occurred, prompting a series of reforms in response to the impact of political Islam on the religiopolitical (and consequently, the socioreligious) life of Saudi Arabia's religiously heterogeneous society. In this third stage, the attitude of the government and the Salafis towards each other and *taṣawwuf* unfolded in three phases:

2.3.1 The Salafi-Influenced Reform Phase (1979–2003)

Known as the Salafi-influenced reform phase, this period is characterised by dragging *taṣawwuf* and its prominent Hījāzi Sufi, Sayyid Muḥammad ʿAlawī al-Mālkī, into the quagmire of *al-Ṣaḥwa*'s political Islam. The Salafis did so even though their repudiation of him primarily involved theological conflicts.

The onset of the third stage of transformational reform in the early 1980s witnessed the maturity of *al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islamiyya* (Islamic awakening) movement, referred to here as *al-Ṣaḥwa*.¹⁰⁰ *Al-Ṣaḥwa* (or the *Ṣaḥwa*) was a progeny of the Muslim Brotherhood and Wahhabi Salafism. It had already endured an adolescent state and matured to fully assume an active and critical role in a newly (and rapidly) developing socioreligious order and challenging geopolitical situations. As a result of and concurrent to *al-Ṣaḥwa*, the Saudi government faced three challenges that demanded immediate action.

The first challenge involved the emergence of a new form of militant Islamism with a *ḥarakī* (action-oriented) ideology to violently oust the “deviant” Saudi government, which a

¹⁰⁰ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics ...*

fundamental Salafi government would replace. This was implemented at an ill-fated event where Juhaymān al-‘Utaybī occupied the Grand Mosque in Mecca in November 1979.¹⁰¹ The Juhaymān clique was the militant offshoot of an *al-Ṣaḥwa* group named *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*.¹⁰²

This event opened the government’s eyes to the enemy within the cultural process of Islamization in Saudi Arabia, which the government itself has nurtured. Some obstinate Islamic groups that adhered to puritanical Wahhabism felt threatened by the hybrid Islam, or *al-Ṣaḥwa*, that emerged from the Muslim Brotherhood and the official Wahhabi Salafis. The Brotherhood had its hidden political agenda, while the Salafis were loyal to the ruling family, a combination proven politically untenable as it produced an anti-government offshoot, i.e., the *Surūriyyūn*.¹⁰³ The *Ṣaḥwa* model emanated as a social norm that manifested zealously in superior knowledge of Islam's intricacies among its followers, who showed even greater intransigence than the official ulama.¹⁰⁴

Owing to the Muslim Brotherhood's hidden agenda, which it carried in its folds shrouded in non-political Wahhabi puritanism, the *Ṣaḥwa* identity suffered from a fundamental ambiguity: it revolted against an abstract reality imagined to be the *kuffār* (infidels) and the *munāfiqūn* (hypocrites). The *Ṣaḥwa* emerged as “rebels without a cause.”¹⁰⁵

Within the *Ṣaḥwa*’s domain, ideological differences brewed and generated new offshoots, i.e., the *Surūriyya* (MB school of thought)¹⁰⁶ and *Jāmiyya* (Wahhabi school of thought)¹⁰⁷ who abhorred each other.

¹⁰¹ Oliver Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (translated by Carol Volk) (USA: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 114

¹⁰² Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics ...*, p. 81.

¹⁰³ The MB is a religious, political party with an agenda to establish an Islamic government.

¹⁰⁴ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics ...*, p.62.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Muḥammad Surūr Zayn al-‘Ābidīn politicized the Saudi religious field. Important to review “Politicizing everyday life” in Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics ...*, p. 60.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 224.

An attack by the *Surūrīs* targeted the dual *Ṣaḥwa* and Muslim Brother Syrian Saʿīd Ḥawwa, who aligned with Sayyid Qutb’s political thinking, but had a strong connection to *taṣawwuf*.¹⁰⁸ His book *Our Spiritual Education* was at the root of the polemic within the ideologues of the *Ṣaḥwa*, given that the *Ṣaḥwa* generation of Saudi MBs is against Sufism. His books were sold in their bookstores and widely read. Within a few months, however, his books disappeared from their curriculum.¹⁰⁹ *Taṣawwuf*’s revival in al-Ḥijāz by the epitome of Ḥijāzi *taṣawwuf* Sayyid Muḥammad ʿAlawī al-Mālkī was seen as a threat to the Ḥijāzi branch of *al-Ṣaḥwa* because it attracted Ḥijāzi youth away from *Ṣaḥwa* camps.¹¹⁰

Despite the government’s awareness of the split in political groups within the *Ṣaḥwa*, a pragmatic political decision by the government strengthened the *Ṣaḥwa* movement for a religion-political consideration. Al-Saud characterises the relationship between the two as “an uneasy relationship between confrontation and uncomfortable cooperation.”¹¹¹ This was done to combat a second challenge the government faced, i.e., the rise of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. Iran acted as a spokesperson for the Middle Eastern Shīʿa, and it denounced the Sunni royal family’s rule of Saudi Arabia as a pro-Western corrupt government unqualified to oversee holy shrines in Mecca and Medina.¹¹² Inspired by the Iranian revolution, the Shīʿa of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia expressed themselves in a 1979 *intifāḍa* (uprising) followed by a series of socio-political head-on collisions with the government.¹¹³ The 1979 Iranian revolution thus marked the onset of a new cold war between the two great powers in the Middle East.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Unlike the Saudi Salafis who were antagonistic towards Sufism, Sufism was an acceptably pious Islamic tradition to the Egyptian MBs.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, pp. 124-125.

¹¹⁰ Ṣabbāgh, *Sufism and the Salons*..., pp.249-252

¹¹¹ This thesis argues that despite the government’s awareness of the nascent *Ṣaḥwa*’s political Islam trouble, it was pragmatically compelled to nurture, through it, a strong Salafī backing against the imminent threat posed by the anti-Saudi government Islamic revolution in Iran Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics* ..., see Al-Saud, *The Sahwa in Saudi Arabia*..., p. 404

¹¹² Mabon, *Saudi Arabia and Iran*...

¹¹³ Badr al-Ibrāhīm, and Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq, *Al-Ḥirāk al-Shīʿī fī al-Suʿūdiyya: Tasyīs al-Madhab wa Madhabat al-Siyāsa* (The Shīʿā Movement in Saudi Arabia: Politicizing the Sect and Sanctifying Politics). 2nd ed. (Beirut: Arab Network for Research and Publishing, 2014)

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p.124.

The third challenge facing the government was how to maintain its commitment to modernising the country in light of the *hadāthiyyūn* (liberal modernists) locking horns with the official Salafi establishment and *Ṣaḥwa* offshoot groups. The government was keen to go through its rapid modernisation programme launched in the 1960s to feed its bureaucratic machines with technocrats and its media with pro-government intellectuals.¹¹⁵

This mixed bag of various Islamic movements and their antithesis *al-ḥadātha*, all acted in a country that prides itself as being the worldwide flag-bearer of Sunni Islam, created a paradox for the Saudi government. But among these groups, the Sufis in Saudi Arabia did not join the country's Islamic entanglement as a movement. Owing to its spiritual or *tazkiyat al-nafs* (self-purifying) nature, Sufism was not prone to involvement in civil or political movements.

Nevertheless, on suspicion that Sayyid M. 'A. al-Mālkī was associated with a Shī'a-sympathetic Sufi *ṭarīqa* in Egypt, *taṣawwuf* was dragged into the dynamics of political Islam, rekindling the historic Salafī enmity towards Sufism as a polytheistic sect. Sufism was denounced on credal and ritualistic grounds as the antithesis of the prevailing Salafī school of thought.¹¹⁶ The Salafis of the *Ṣaḥwa* movement and its offshoots shared basic credal and ritualistic practices with the official Salafī establishment. This meant they all shared the same antagonism against Sufism.

Still, one paradoxical exception should be pointed out: the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) ideology, which was nurtured in Egypt, does not traditionally oppose Sufism. This is for pragmatic reasons as, to appease the Wahhabi side of the *Ṣaḥwa* hybrid, the Muslim Brotherhood had to reject the Saudi version of Sufism.¹¹⁷ This change of heart towards Sufism emerged decades later in the political ideology of “muted modernists”, a very important movement alluded to in the second phase of this third transformation stage.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 5.

¹¹⁶ Bin Minī', *Dialogue with al-Mālkī* ...

¹¹⁷ 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Sufism and its Transformation* ..., pp.310-330.

¹¹⁸ Al-Rasheed, *History of Saudi Arabia*...

The *Ṣaḥwa*, represented the ultimate interference of political Islam in its extremity into almost all aspects of Saudi life. It started with the blessings of the government until its adverse effects on society, and ultimately, its threat to the foundations of the government itself exceeded toleration.¹¹⁹

Al-Ṣaḥwa's religious influence crossed from the political sphere into the social one, as "Islam in Saudi Arabia is the primary language in which social rivalries are expressed".¹²⁰ A mainstream culture distinguished itself from mainstream Saudi society by dress, lexicon, and behaviour congruent with that of the official religious establishment.¹²¹

2.3.2 The Salafi Ideological Critique Reform Phase (2003 – 2015)

The second phase is designated as the Salafi ideological critique. It is marked by the emergence of al-Mālkī through the national dialogue held under the auspices of the country's Crown Prince.

The second phase of the third transformation began in 2003 and lasted for over a decade. It was a by-product of internal struggle within Islamist groups with the official Salafi establishment and the government. The struggle was over differences between the Muslim Brotherhood-offshoot factions, i.e., the politically oriented anti-government *Surūriyya*, the "Islamic modernists," and the pro-government *Jāmiyya* over issues such as the American invasion of Iraq, obedience to the ruling family as a religious duty, and attitudes towards democracy, the Sufis and the Shī'a of Saudi Arabia.¹²²

Ironically, the second phase of the third transformation came about from the rising threat of radical Islam that started a campaign of explosive terror – first outside the country, then later within Saudi Arabia. The 9 September 2001 attacks on the Twin Towers by nineteen terrorists,

¹¹⁹ Al-Saud, *The Sahwa in Saudi Arabia...*

¹²⁰ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics ...*, p.2.

¹²¹ Ibid

¹²² A small group of Islamists who came from the 1990s Islamic Awakening era reasserted themselves as reformers seeking political change after 9/11" see Madawi al-Rasheed, *Muted Modernists: The Struggle over Divine Politics in Saudi Arabia*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) p.32; Al-Rasheed, *History of Saudi Arabia...*

fifteen of whom were Saudi nationals, had stunned the general public into a mix of a state of denial and deep self-reflection. This was followed by a series of terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia on civilian and military facilities that commenced in mid-May 2003.¹²³ The harsh, stark reality demanded an urgent and realistic reevaluation of the entire country's religious-political and socio-religious situation.

Many issues long ignored were surfacing as an expression of the wrath of a society no longer convinced by the purported cure-all panacea of Wahhabi Salafism. During the internal struggle among *Ṣaḥwa* offshoots, the “Islamic modernists” emerged with a different political agenda that saw a by-product group of political *Ṣaḥwa* recognize for the first time the heterogeneity of Islam to include Sufism as a fully-fledged school of thought.¹²⁴ A royal decree was issued in July 2003 announcing the founding of King ‘Abd al-Azīz Center for National Dialogue (KACND).¹²⁵ The aim was to strengthen the Saudi national unity within a comprehensive (all sects) Islamic faith through productive dialogue.¹²⁶

The royal decree was a much-needed breath of fresh air. It was received as a sign that the near-total social suffocation of the Wahhabi and *Ṣaḥwa* era would recede to some extent and grant its two traditional adversaries, Shi‘ism and Sufism (as well as liberals and women’s rights activists), room to express themselves openly in forums for the National Dialogue.

The cultural and religious heterogeneity of society thus inched its way to public recognition. The Sufi–Salafī enmity began to be addressed differently, both internally and externally. Internally, the leader of Saudi Sufism, Sayyid Muḥammad ‘Alawī al-Mālkī, was invited to address the Islamic Conference in Medina. Externally, the US government started to enquire about Sufism in Saudi Arabia as an alternative to Salafism, which was associated with political

¹²³ R. Lacey, *Al-Mamlakah min al-Dākhil: Tārīkh al-Su‘ūdiyya al-Ḥadīth* (Inside the Kingdom: Modern History of Saudi Arabia) 11th ed. Translated by Khalid bin Abdulrahman al-Awadh, (UAE: Al-Mesbar Studies & Research Centre, 2015), These were connected to militant attacks launched by al-Qā‘ida in Jazīrat al-‘Arab Organization (Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula Organization), which targeted vital civil and military targets and assets leaving numerous casualties.

¹²⁴ Al-Rasheed, *History of Saudi Arabia...*, p 9.

¹²⁵ For reference see “About the King Abdulaziz Center for Cultural Communication [KACCC], www.kacnd.org

¹²⁶ Yāsir bin M. Bā‘āmīr, *Al-Ṣuḥfiyya al-Su‘ūdiyya wa Ḍ-ādat Tashkīlātīha fī al-Dākhil* (The Internal Reshaping of Saudi Sufism), in ed. (Turkī Al-Dakhīl, 2013), p. 255.

Islam, through some think tanks.¹²⁷ An association directed the Salafī criticism of Sufism not only on a theological basis but also on socioreligious-cum political basis.

2.3.2.1 The Impact of National Dialogue on Sufism

The second National Dialogue meeting was held in Mecca in December 2003. Known Sufi personalities who participated included Sayyid Muḥammad ‘Alawī al-Mālkī, Dr Muḥammad ‘Abdu Yamānī and Dr Sāmī ‘Anqāwī.¹²⁸ The symposium’s title was *al-Ghulūw wa al-I’tidāl* (Excess and Moderation, an Encompassing Methodological Vision).¹²⁹ Intended to propagate a culture of tolerance and understanding between all the major components of Saudi society, the symposium included Salafis, Sufis, Shī‘a, politically oriented liberals, and women’s rights activists. For Sufism, the symposium ended with recognition at the highest level by the state.

The concluding symposium meeting was held in the Crown Prince’s palace. Of all the conferees, the Crown Prince asked Sayyid Muḥammad ‘Alawī al-Mālkī to deliver the closing speech. The speech marked a new spirit of tolerance, respect and acceptance of the different-other. The essential question thus became: would this spirit of Islamic comradery travel beyond the confines of the Crown Prince’s court? Would the symposium recommendations be enacted or concealed in the files of the symposium?

During the symposium, voices urged the state to recognize all groups (*madhāhib*) and religious orientations with a clear and bold statement. This demand was unpalatable to the Salafī establishment, especially with the historical interdependence of the Saudi state and Wahhabi Salafis.¹³⁰ Still, several reasonable Salafī Shaykhs voiced some justification for the Salafī take on Sufism. The views of a retired judge and *mustashār* (expert consultant) to the government, Muḥammad Bin Ṣāliḥ al-Dūḥaym, were widely entertained. Shaykh al-Dūḥaym justified the

¹²⁷ Reference to a study of Sufism by the Rand Corporation published in 2007. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2007/RAND_MG574.pdf

¹²⁸ Yamānī, was a Ṣufī who served as the Minister of Information during King Khālīd’s reign in the 1970s. Anqāwī, was an architect who specialized in traditional Hījāzī architecture and culture.

¹²⁹ See the symposium website at King Abdulaziz Center for Cultural Understanding “We Talk to Communicate” KACCC, <https://www.kacnd.org>

¹³⁰ Bin M. Bā‘āmīr, *The Internal Reshaping...*, pp. 259.

adoption of the state-supported Salafi school of thought in the past in fields such as fatwa issuance, jurisprudence, and the delivery of Friday sermons, citing the same one-sided spirit that expressed Salafi theology and ideology, and nullified all other schools of thought.

According to al-Dūḥaym, the Salafi approach was helpful at the time of founding the state to display the state's religious and political robustness. However, the country's development and emergence in a new, changing world meant that the state should avoid hibernating in stagnant theological dogma while ignorant of its own societal dynamism. The state's failure to address these religious *madhāhib*'s issues could detonate a social time bomb. Unfortunately, rejection of the different other, i.e., the Sufis, is still being propagated by the official religious establishment.

2.3.2.2 The Salafi Political and Social Vision of Sufism

The various offshoots of *al-Ṣaḥwa*, whether in their *taqlīdī* (traditional) or *ḥarakī* (political or *Jihādī*) forms, differ in their attitudes toward Sufism. For example, the *Jāmiyya* Salafi group, the only group that allied itself with the official Salafi establishment, described the Sufis as *qubūrriyyūn* (seekers of intercession from the graves of Sufi saints) and sanctifiers of a cult of the saints. The *Jāmiyya* went so far as to accuse the Sufis of engaging in dangerous ethno-sectarian political projects in collaboration with the Shī'a and with support from the Iranian Ayatūllahs' projects that would establish two new states in the Arabian Peninsula in lieu of Saudi Arabia.¹³¹

These projects would involve a Sufi state in the west named al-Ḥijāz Islamic State and a Shī'a state in the oil-rich Eastern Province of the country. These two states were envisioned forming an alliance that would rid the Arabian Peninsula of Wahhabism. The Sufi state would endeavour to rebuild the destroyed tombs. The Shī'a and Sufi rituals would be revived without any limits. The source of this information was Bā' Āmir's conducted interviews in al-Ḥijāz.¹³² His interviewees claimed that the *Jāmiyya* spread these rumours against the Sufis and Shī'a. These Salafi/*Jāmiyya* rumours coincided with the March 2007 RAND Corporation report titled *Islam's*

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 273.

¹³² Ibid, pp. 272-83.

Tolerant Networks, which recommended supporting Sufism as a civil Islam that could suppress Wahhabism.¹³³

The *Jihādī Sururiyyūn* interpreted the RAND report as a promoter of Sufism for two reasons.¹³⁴ First Sufism is less resistant to American and Western policies in the Middle East. Second, Sufism is more prone to adopt a flexible strategy of change to modernize the Islamic world, thus engaging *taṣawwuf* in a major sociopolitical transformation.

The Ahl al-Bayt website, which belongs to a pro-Ḥijāz organization, published a lengthy study in August 2007 in response to the RAND report, criticized embroiling Sufism in the hidden political agendas of the Shīʿa and liberals.¹³⁵ The Sufi–Liberal accord was a manifestation of a visit by Muḥammad Saʿīd Ṭayyib, a well-known liberal Ḥijāzi nationalist figure, to Sayyid Muḥammad ʿAlawī al-Mālkī. The visit was detailed in the newspaper *al-Nadwa* under “*Sharīʿa Scholar Meets Enlightened Nationalist Thinker*”.¹³⁶ The honour Sayyid Muḥammad ʿAlawī al-Mālkī bestowed on Muḥammad Saʿīd Ṭayyib in 2004 was seen as an indication of Sufi–Liberal alliance.

As with any youth in the country, young Sufi liberals were affected by the prevailing political thoughts, especially Ḥijāzi liberalism, which often held ideas common to Sufis and in the face of Wahhabi Salafism.¹³⁷

2.3.2.3 Sufism and the Official Establishment

The aforementioned accord between the reformer Crown Prince ʿAbd Allah and the epitome of al-Ḥijāz Sufism Sayyid Muḥammad ʿAlawī al-Mālkī did not reverberate outside the walls of

¹³³ Reference to a study of Sufism by the Rand Corporation published in 2007. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2007/RAND_MG574.pdf

¹³⁴ Bin M. Bāʿāmīr, *The Internal Reshaping...*, pp. 274-5.

¹³⁵ Ibid, pp. 273-77.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 276.

¹³⁷ Mai Yamani, *Cradle of Islam: The Hijaz and the Quest for an Arabian Identity*, (London: I.B Tauris & Co., 2004); M. Saʿīd Ṭayyib, *Al-Sajīn 32: Aḥlām Muḥammad Saʿīd Ṭayyib wa Hazaʾimih* (Prisoner 32: Dreams of Muḥammad Saʿīd Tayyib) (Beirut: Al-Markaz al-Arabi al-Thaqafi, 2011) p. 342.

the royal reception hall of the Palace especially not with the religious establishment. The usual Friday sermons criticising the Sufi *ṭurūq* continued as a part of the normal routine of rhetorical imprecations against all aberrant groups, which included Sufism. In 2010, the mufti delivered a Friday sermon during which he attacked Sufis and accused them of ruining the reputation of Islam. He further drew an association between Sufism and Shi‘ism, an accusation denied by the Shaykhs of Saudi Sufism (see Chapter Five). *Al-Waṭan* newspaper reported the closure of two historical mosques in Medina as Sufis revered them.¹³⁸

2.3.3 Signs of Salafi Recognition of *Taṣawwuf* Phase (2015 – Present): The Advent of Vision 2030’s *Wasafīyya*

The third phase is characterized by signs of Salafi recognition of *taṣawwuf*. Due to the influence of Vision 2030, one can catch glimpses of a budding partial recognition of Sufism in the public domain among the Salafi establishment. It has emerged in the public through both government-controlled media and social media.

At the beginning of King Salmān’s rule in 2015, three key factors brought about the momentum needed to introduce a significant reform. The first factor was the reaction to the *Ṣaḥwa*’s Muslim Brotherhood-influenced severe religious discourse. On the one hand, it nurtured in-country intra-Islamic anti-government militant splinter groups. On the other, it propagated an anti-Western ideology that disseminated a negative image of Saudi Arabia on the international scene. This called for harmony within the diverse composition of Saudi society, which includes various Sunni *madhāhib*, Sufis, Shī‘a, liberal modernists, and women's rights activists. The second factor was the economic setbacks the country experienced when oil prices fell, which augmented youth unemployment and prompted a serious call to diversify the national economy. The third factor was the government-supported national desire to elevate the country's standard of living to that of the twenty-first century. These key factors led to the introduction of an unprecedented, comprehensive, and ambitious reform project called Vision 2030.

Vision 2030 has three main themes: a vibrant society, a thriving economy, and an ambitious nation. According to the official website of Vision 2030, these themes are:¹³⁹

¹²⁴ Bin M. Bā‘āmīr, *The Internal Reshaping...*, p.260.

¹³⁹ Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030’s themes; An Overview <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/overview> (Accessed 9 December 2024).

A Vibrant Society

Vision 2030 aims to create a thriving society where all citizens can pursue their passions and aspirations. It prioritises a strong social infrastructure that values cultural traditions, national pride, and modern amenities while embodying the spirit of “modern Islam” and delivering effective social services.

A Thriving Economy

Vision 2030 aims to create a vibrant economy that provides everyone with the opportunity to succeed. By fostering a supportive business environment for companies of all sizes and investing in education to equip people for future jobs, Saudi Arabia is shaping an exciting and prosperous future for all.

An Ambitious Nation

Vision 2030 aims to develop a committed nation focused on efficiency and accountability at all levels, including the establishment of a practical, transparent, accountable, empowering, and high-performing government.

This thesis explores the theme of a dynamic society that embodies "modern Islam." In Vision 2030, modern Islam is defined as *wasatiyya*. This approach is seen in Western think tank publications as representing moderate Islam. Alhussien of The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington argues that this "moderate Islam" is essential for transforming the social landscape to support the goals of Vision 2030.¹⁴⁰ Moderate Islam serves as a strategy to address the kingdom's regional and domestic issues while reshaping the religious and social landscape to align with the leadership's sociopolitical goals.

As the government saw it, the socioreligious aspect of this reform vision aimed to turn the wheel back to a pre-*Ṣaḥwa* situation, thus adjusting society's religious discourse to become antithetical to the abhorred *al-Ṣaḥwa*. It seeks to transform Saudi society into one characterized by moderation, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence among all its diverse components. Such a

¹⁴⁰ Alhoussein, *Saudi Arabia Champions...*; Wood, “*The Absolute Power*”...

society would also project an image of Saudi Arabia as culturally sophisticated to the rest of the world. Justification for this reversal of the adverse effects of *al-Ṣaḥwa* was sourced in the Islamic concept of *wasṭiyya*.

In a kingdom founded on Wahhabi Salafi ideology, socio-religious reform is intended to eradicate the *Ṣaḥwa*'s aftereffects and open the door wide to embrace *al-ḥadātha* (modernization). The government still wanted to retain the original Salafi tradition of the state but in a format congruent with the aims of Vision 2030. This thesis thus takes up the socioreligious aspect of the reform. An analysis of the causes and effects of *al-Ṣaḥwa* is necessary to generate arguments in support of my hypothesis. I argue that *wasṭiyya*, especially within the Sufi context rooted in *sulūk* (behaviour or conduct) and *akhlāq* (ethics), can significantly enhance the socioreligious aspects of Vision 2030 reform. This contribution is crucial given Sufism's historical undervaluation by the official religious establishment. Chapters Five, Six, and Seven detail key socio-religious reforms that support my argument, particularly in light of the Salafi establishment's traditional opposition to these developments. The next section provides an overview of these reform events.

2.3.4 Recent Socioreligious Events Reflecting the Reforms of Vision 2030

Chapter Two will explore the theological aspects of *wasṭiyya* from Salafi and Sufi perspectives. This section outlines current social and religious events that reflect modern or Moderate Islam, as represented by *wasṭiyya* in Vision 2030. The alignment of these events with either Salafi or Sufi interpretations will be examined throughout the thesis and revisited in the conclusion chapter.

These events, presented in chronological order, demonstrate a shift in attitudes toward religious and social issues affecting Saudi society. Al-Saud discusses Vision 2030's socioreligious reforms, emphasizing the evolving relationship between political and religious authorities. This reform limits the powers of the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV). As of 2016, a Council of Ministers order has restricted the CPVPV's ability to investigate or arrest individuals on moral grounds. Instead, they report violations to the police or the General Directorate of Narcotics Control.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Al-Saud, *The Sahwa in Saudi Arabia...*

In 2016, the General Entertainment Authority was established to transform Saudi Arabian society, which faced fatwas against music and singing. As a result, the country is now emerging as a vibrant hub for major entertainment and music festivals, featuring both Arab and international artists.¹⁴² As Sinani explains, the new Saudi government's perspective on entertainment reflects the diminishing influence of Wahhabism in enforcing public morality, a critical indicator of its status as mainstream orthodoxy.¹⁴³

The Salafi establishment's opposition to women's rights in public spaces was beginning to be challenged in line with Vision 2030. In June 2017, a key royal decree removed the requirement for women to obtain the consent of a male guardian to access state services.¹⁴⁴ In September of that year, King Salmān made a transformative decision by issuing a decree that allowed women to drive, marking a significant step towards gender equality and empowerment in the country (see Chapter Five). In 2019, Saudi Arabia allowed foreign educational institutions and universities to establish campuses within its borders for the first time. In 2021, a ban was lifted, allowing stores and public service outlets to remain open during prayer times.¹⁴⁵ In 2021, a significant change occurred in a country where education had been influenced by a religious establishment that opposed teaching philosophy. The first philosophy conference was held in Riyadh, marking the beginning of philosophy's inclusion in the educational curriculum (see Chapter Six). In February 2022, Saudi Arabia hosted the International Interfaith Forum in Riyadh, uniting around 100 religious leaders to discuss shared values (See Chapter Six). In 2023, the country marked a milestone for women's rights by launching its first female astronaut into space.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² The General Entertainment Authority of Saudi Arabia: <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/explore/explore-more/general-entertainment-authority> (Accessed 9 December 2025)

¹⁴³ Sinani, *Sufi Scholars Practices...*, p. 257

¹⁴⁴ Saudi Gazette, Breaking fetters of male guardianship June 10, 2017.

¹⁴⁵ Saudi shops can stay open during prayer times -business group circular
By Reuters July 16, 2021
<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/saudi-shops-can-stay-open-during-prayer-times-business-group-circular-2021-07-16/> (Accessed 9 December 2024)

¹⁴⁶ Talat Zaki Hafiz, First Saudi Female astronaut heads into space, Arab News, 27 May 2023,
<https://www.arabnews.com/node/2311451/first-saudi-female-astronaut-heads-space>

2.3.5 The Silencing of *Ṣaḥwa* Voices and the Fear of Their Resurgence

The government's vision to shift from a *Ṣaḥwa*-influenced austere fundamentalist Islam to a moderate "modern Islam" was augmented by silencing hardline *Ṣaḥwa* advocates. For example, Muḥammad al-ʿArifī is notably absent from Saudi media, possibly due to personal choice (see Chapters Three and Four). However, his extreme views banned him from the UK, Switzerland, and Denmark.¹⁴⁷ Other figures, like Salmān al-ʿAwda and ʿAwad al-Qarnī, face incarceration. At the same time, ʿĀyid al-Qarnī has publicly apologised for the *Ṣaḥwa*'s intolerant stance during a live interview in 2019, now advocating for a moderate and open Islam.¹⁴⁸

Despite Vision 2030 efforts, signs of *Ṣaḥwa* ideology persist in the Salafi community, raising concerns from liberal commentators like al-ʿAql, who, in a newspaper article, notes the presence of "unbearded *ṣaḥawīs*."¹⁴⁹ Sinani critiques the vision for aiming to return to a pre-1979 state without addressing sectarian animosity in Saudi society and questions the oversight of Wahhabism's ties to extremism.¹⁵⁰

I argue that the Wahhabi foundation of the Salafi establishment remains significant within the prominent *Ḥanbalī* jurisprudence. The government tends to avoid intensifying religious sensitivities associated with the term "Wahhabi." The challenge is whether the definition of *wasatīyya* promoted by Vision 2030 can align with Salafi's interpretations. Periodic independent polling is essential to assess societal attitudes toward these objectives, as the first theme of Vision 2030 presents a modern interpretation of *wasatīyya*. This thesis will analyse the Sufi *wasatīyya* principles in relation to the Two Holy Mosques' school of *iḥsān* and their relevance in the contemporary discourse of Vision 2030.

¹⁴⁷ Switzerland denies Saudi sheikh entry for 5 years
<https://www.itv.com/news/2014-06-23/banned-preacher-under-scrutiny-over-links-to-young-cardiff-men-fighting-with-isis-in-iraq-and-syria> (Accessed 9 January 2025)

Teis Jensen, Denmark bans six 'hate preachers' from entering the country
<https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN17Y1N8/> (Accessed 9 January 2025)

¹⁴⁸ Al-Saud, *The Sahwa in Saudi Arabia...*, p 426

¹⁴⁹ Al-ʿAql, ʿAql. *Al-Ṣaḥawīyyūn al-Judud Laysū Multaḥīn Bilḍarūra* (The Neo-Ṣaḥawīs [revivalists of Ṣaḥwa] are not Necessarily Bearded). Published 15 April 2022 <https://www.okaz.com.sa/articles/authors/2102805>

¹⁵⁰ Sinani, *Ṣufī Scholars Practices...*, p. 252 and p. 256

Conclusion

Chapter One sets out the historical background of the Sufi state in the government-supported Salafi-dominated Saudi society since the founding of the country by the Saudi dynasty 300 years ago. This thesis divided the background into three stages. The first two stages cover the historical periods of the two states of premodern Saudi Arabia (1744 – 1891). The third stage of the state of *taṣawwuf* covers the period when Saudi Arabia was unifying the Arabian Peninsula that started in 1902. This culminated in 1932 when the country was recognised internationally as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The new country set off to become a nation-state, experiencing a rite of passage into modern life in the twentieth century.

Throughout, the austere Salafi establishment held an attitude of repression towards Sufism and other sects, such as the Shīʿa. Beginning in 1979, the three stakeholders who traditionally held antagonistic attitudes towards *taṣawwuf* (i.e., the Salafi establishment, the government and subsequently the Salafi-influenced Saudi society) also began to experience a change in attitude towards *taṣawwuf* that unfolded in three phases. The first phase, which lasted from 1979–2003, saw a movement from rejection to acceptance of *taṣawwuf* by the government. In response, a stepped-up criticism dragged *taṣawwuf* to the social and political realm, characterized by the second phase, which lasted from 2003–2015. In the third phase, from 2015 to the present, signs of Salafi's recognition of *taṣawwuf* due to the socioreligious aspects of Vision 2030 began to emerge.

These Salafi attitudes are the basis for Salafi refutations of *taṣawwuf*. The Sufi counterarguments to Salafism will be addressed on this basis. In light of the government's efforts to reform society on a socioreligious basis while also maintaining its leadership of the Sunni Islamic world, the concept of *wasatīyya* was used to instill needed tranquility in a religion that has begun to acquire a reputation for rejecting the different other (non-Salafi Muslims and non-Muslims), painting Islam as tending militancy.

This chapter has highlighted the three pillars of the arguments of this thesis: the Salafi refutation of *taṣawwuf* addressed in Chapters Three and Four, and the Sufi counterarguments addressed in Chapters Five and Six. The purpose of addressing the arguments and counter-arguments is to outline each school of thought, the Salafi and the Sufi, understanding of the Islamic creed and tenets, to come up with each school's definition of *wasatīyya*, or the third pillar of the thesis

– a *wasatīyya* congruent with the socioreligious aspect of Vision 2030, which will be addressed in Chapter Seven.

The following chapter, Chapter Two, will provide the basis of each school's understanding of Islam to explain their battle over Sunni Islam and the true meaning of *wasatīyya*. As far as this thesis is concerned, it is a particular Sunni school of *wasatīyya*, i.e., in line with the *Ḥaramayn* school of *iḥsān* as suggested by Sayyid 'Abd Allah Fad'q, that could indeed contribute to transforming the socioreligious lifestyle in Saudi Arabia as intended by Vision 2030's *wasatīyya*.

CHAPTER TWO

The Battle Over Sunni Islam and the Claim of *Wasatiyya*

This chapter examines the Salafi and Sufi interpretations of Islam, highlighting their differing understandings of the correct *'aqīda* (creed), which underpins *tawhīd*, the foundational principle of the Islamic faith. These distinctions influence how each group advocates for interpreting *wasatiyya* (middle way; moderate Islam). This chapter exposes the arguments each side employs to refute the other. At the same time, it establishes a framework for differentiating which school's *wasatiyya* is compatible with a new approach to “modern Islam” that aligns with the socioreligious objectives of Vision 2030. Ultimately, this chapter will lay out the theological and socioreligious foundations of the Salafi and Sufi counterarguments discussed throughout the thesis.

Chapter One outlined the three pillars of this thesis argument: the Salafi refutation of *taṣawwuf*, the Sufi counterarguments, and the *wasatiyya* that aligns socioreligiously with Vision 2030. This chapter details the basis for the Salafi–Sufi arguments and counterarguments. But to begin with, the reader's attention should be drawn to two observations. First, as far as *wasatiyya* is concerned and in light of the intended socioreligious goals of Vision 2030, there is a question to be answered: in which Islamic school of thought is the hoped-for *wasatiyya* grounded? Second, we can observe that the Salafi refutations, which traditionally derived from theology, began to engage with *taṣawwuf* based on socioreligious-cum-political arguments. Hence, the Salafi–Sufi arguments and counterarguments should be addressed on a theological basis as well as on a socioreligious and occasionally political one.

My thesis argues that a Sufi-defined *wasatiyya* is a viable contributor that could fulfil the two premises of the socioreligious aspect of Vision 2030: to instil an intra-Islamic *madhāhib* as well as intra-cultural pluralism in the Islamically and culturally heterogenous Saudi society and to promote the harmonious coexistence of the religious and cultural worlds.

But in a traditionally Salafi-dominated society such as Saudi Arabia, where *taṣawwuf* has been denigrated for a long time, the viability of a Sufi-defined *wasatiyya* compared to a Salafi-defined one disseminated by the dominant establishment is questionable. So, the research must identify

the basis for each school's definition of *wasatīyya*. One must bear in mind that each school's definition reflects their understanding of the religion of Islam. This is exemplified in their battle over Sunni Islam, with each school claiming the correct understanding of Islam, as this chapter explains. This consequently brings forth their differing definitions of the concept of *wasatīyya*, the backbone of the socioreligious aspect of Vision 2030.

This chapter has the following three aims: a) defining Salafism and Sufism in the Saudi Arabian context, b) projecting the non-pluralistic nature of the dominant Salafi school of thought's relationship with *taṣawwuf* and c) pointing out how these two schools of thought accuse each other of a distorted understanding of the Islamic 'aqīda (creed). In other words, both sides misunderstand the nature of Islam. This has led to a deadlock conflict that reflects their definitions of *wasatīyya*. Suppose this conflict is resolved through a new understanding of the nature of Islam. In that case, this thesis postulates that it could align the socioreligious aspects of life in Saudi Arabia with the aims of Vision 2030.

I. The Issue of Definitions

While both schools of thought belong to the Sunni *madhhab*, the polemical differences in their views of each other extend from their origins in a different 'aqadī (credal) school within the *madhhab*, as explained later in the chapter. However, the Salafis generally regard *taṣawwuf* as a negation of Islam's basic principle, *tawhīd* (oneness of Allah). For this reason, it is presented in Salafi literature as a *shirkī* (polytheistic) sect.¹⁵¹ Salafism defines itself as an extension of *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā'a* (of the Prophet's Sunna and community) and the sole bearer of the banner of Sunni Islam as the Prophet intended it to be transmitted to humanity.¹⁵² But to the resentment of the Sufis, Salafism denies that *taṣawwuf* belongs to the *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā'a*. The definition of Salafism and Sufism reflects each side's understanding of the nature

¹⁵¹ Uthmān al-Khamīs, *Al-Ṣufiyya – Aqsāmuha wa Turūquha wa Aqtābuha* (Sufism: Its Divisions, Orders and Aqtāb) Published 14 April 2020 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59dCC6PNABU>

¹⁵² Abd al-'Azīz Ibn Bāz, *Al-Salaf hum Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a* (The Salaf Are Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a), <https://binbaz.org.sa/fatwas/20048/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%81-%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A9> (Accessed 13 August 2020)

of the Islamic religion. This carries the seeds of their theological polemics and, therefore, the basis of their arguments against each other.

In a Salafi-dominated society, *taṣawwuf* needs to be defined and presented to the Saudi public as understood by its Sufi adherents. Yet determining the state of *taṣawwuf* in its Saudi Arabian context at this juncture of the research is premature due to the absence of available literature. In its larger Islamic context, the literature review identified three types of *taṣawwuf* from a Sufi source and three from a Salafi source. From the Sufi source, Shaykh Gum‘a, a prominent Azharite Sufi (a reference to al-Azhar Islamic University in Cairo) and a former mufti of Egypt stated that there is *taṣawwuf* Salafī, *taṣawwuf* Sunnī and *taṣawwuf falsafī* (Philosophical Sufism). The first two types call themselves *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā‘a*.¹⁵³ For further reading on *taṣawwuf*’s types al-Tiftazānī provides a detailed Sufi view on defining *taṣawwuf*.¹⁵⁴ From a Salafī point of view, for his part, Shaykh al-Khamīs, a disciple of the Saudi Salafī school, identified *taṣawwuf zuhdī* (ascetic Sufism), *taṣawwuf bid‘ī* (heretical), which includes *al-mawalid al-nabawī* (commemoration of the birth of Prophet Muḥammad), and “dancing” ceremonies of *dhikr and samā‘* (chanting devotional utterances and listening), and *taṣawwuf kufrī* (blasphemous).¹⁵⁵

In practice, Sufism is not always restricted to the boundaries of each distinctive type, as there can be overlap. In addition, there are cases where adherents of some types do not approve of practices of the other types. Regarding the types of *taṣawwuf*, in Chapter Four, I will readdress the definition of *taṣawwuf* from both Sunni and Sufi points of view in what I call approaches to Sunni *taṣawwuf*.

Since both the Salafis and the Sufis claim an authentic understanding of Sunni Islam, it is essential to comprehend how each group defines the concept of *wasāṭiyya*.

¹⁵³ ‘Alī Gum‘a, *Al-Madāris al-Thalātha li al-Taṣawwuf* (The Three Schools of Sufism)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFVuAK8cp38&list=PLv0tui8gplu0Na1me5K5xJFLvtEiPxkyF&index=268>
(Accessed 13 August 2020)

¹⁵⁴ Abu al-Wafa al-Ghinaymī al-Taftazānī, *Madkhal ila al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī* (An Entry to Islamic Sufism), (Cairo: Dār al-Thaqāfa wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī‘, 1979)

¹⁵⁵ In *dhikr* gathering circles some Sufi *ṭurūq* engage in specific rhythmic movements the Salafis call dancing. This does not apply to *dhikr* circles by Saudi Sufis, which are void of dancing.

1.1 Defining *Wasatīyya*

The differing interpretations of *wasatīyya* by Sufis and Salafis are significant. The Salafi view, represented by Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Fozān, sees *wasatīyya* as Islam's central position among the different Islamic sects. He emphasises a balanced approach that distinguishes the *ahl al-Sunna* from deviant sects. He warns against contemporary interpretations that dilute authentic faith in favour of a "moderate Islam," frequently influenced by secularist thought.¹⁵⁶ Shaykh al-Khathlān characterises *wasatīyya* as a form of justice—an equitable stance between extremes while upholding vital religious obligations. This concept encompasses the pursuit of the straight path (*ṣīrāt al-mustaqīm*) and is exemplified in balanced behaviours such as generosity versus stinginess, humility versus pride, and courage versus cowardice. He designates the *ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a* as representing the equilibrium devoid of extremism, negligence, or excess.¹⁵⁷ Finally, Shaykh Sāliḥ al-Fozān emphasises the Salafis' assertion of being the only rightly guided Muslims in comparison to other groups, including Jews, Christians, Sufis, and heretics, as discussed in Chapter Three.¹⁵⁸ In the context of Sufi *wasatīyya*, ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq, the distinguished Sufi from the *Iḥsān* school at the Two Holy Mosques, posits that *taṣawwuf* is grounded in two fundamental tenets: *sulūk* (behaviour/conduct) and *akhlāq* (ethics). He elucidates that *wasatīyya*, or moderate Islam, is a derivative of *tarbiyyat wa tazkiyyat al-nafs* (the discipline and purification of the self), as will be discussed in Chapter Five. However, the prominent Sufi al-Jifrī characterises *wasatīyya* as a remedy for spiritual maladies, achievable through *tazkiyyat al-nafs*. This definition will be revisited in Chapter Five.

¹⁵⁶ ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Fozān, *What Wasatīyya Means*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Etw-GdLoO3M> (Accessed 15 January 2025)

¹⁵⁷ Sa‘ad al-Khathlān, *Wasatīyya and Moderation: A Way of Life*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUNTq3A407E> (Accessed 15 January 2025)

¹⁵⁸ Shaykh al-Fozān's explanation contrasts with the verses of the Qur’an (2:62; 5:69;) and (22:17), where Allah states: “Indeed, those who have believed and those who were Jews and the Sabeans and the Christians and the Magians and those who associated with Allah - Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection. Indeed, Allah is, over all things, Witness”.

II. Claiming an Authentic Sunni Islam

The Salafī–Sufī polemic in Saudi Arabia reflects the current state of Salafī Islam’s non-pluralistic approach to dealing with minority Islamic sects, such as Sufism and Shi‘ism, which are looked upon as aberrant and heretical splinter groups from the “pure” body of Islam.¹⁵⁹ When addressing these “heretical” sects, the Salafis recall a *ḥadīth* attributed to Prophet Muḥammad in which he predicted that the *umma* (nation) of Islam would divide into seventy-three *firqā* (sects; groups), all would be doomed in hellfire except for one. It is, therefore, the rescued sect that will remain steadfast on the right path of Islam.¹⁶⁰ Needless to say, to the Salafis, the rescued sect is their Salafī sect.

Despite its debated authenticity and negation of intra-Islamic *maddhāhib* and hence *wasatīyya*, this *ḥadīth* is popular, especially amongst the Salafis. It is used to emphatically elevate the speaker’s position above that of all other Muslim sects. The rescued sect or *al-firqa al-nājiya* is elevated not only in their understanding and adherence to the ‘*aqīda*’ of the righteous predecessors, the source of pure Islam, but also as the patented possessors of the Islamic concept of *wasatīyya*—a controversial concept in its own right as explained in this chapter and revisited in Chapters Five and Six.¹⁶¹

It is important to note that in Salafī Islam, there are two divergent branches from the teachings of the righteous predecessors: a *maḥmūd* branch and a *madhmūm* one. The *maḥmūd* (the agreeable) one is when the ‘*aqīda*’ is not tampered with, and it remains “pure”. However, development in the *sharī‘a* law (the diligent preserver of ‘*aqīda*’ principles in *al-‘ulūm al-shar‘īyya* or the *sharī‘a* sciences) is beneficial or even imperative for fulfilling the various *fiqhī* (jurisprudential) needs of different Muslim communities, which reflects the particularities of their physical or social environments in a geographically expanding religion. Examples of the

¹⁵⁹ al-Baddāḥ, *Sufi Movement in the Arabian ...*, p. 393; Al-Nassar, *The Sunni-Shia Interfaith...*, pp.11-13.

¹⁶⁰ Imām al-Barbahārī, This Ummah will Divide into 73 Sects – From Shaykh Al-Fawzān Explanation of *Sharḥus-Sunnah*, <https://www.abukhadeejah.com/this-ummah-will-divide-into-73-sects-shaykh-al-fawzan-explains-what-it-means/> (Accessed 26 September 2021)

¹⁶¹ Muḥammad S. al-Munajjid, *Man Hiya al-Firqa al-Nājiya* (Who is the Rescued Sect) <https://islamqa.info/ar/answers/90112/%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%87%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%A9> (Accessed August 13, 2020)

maḥmūd branch are the four Sunni *madhāhib* (jurisprudence schools): *Mālikī*, *Shāfiʿī*, *Hanafī*, and *Hanbalī*.¹⁶²

On the other hand, the *al-madhūm* (objectionable) branch is when the *ʿaqīda* is not interpreted per its pure form as conveyed by *al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ* (the righteous predecessors) as is the case for the Muʿtazilites, the *Qadariyya*, the *Jabriyya*, the *Jahmiyya*, the Shiʿa, the Sufis (Ashʿarites) and others. Hence, the seventy-three *firqā* mentioned above differ from *al-firqā al-najdiyya*, principally in *ʿaqīda*.¹⁶³ This *ʿaqīda* issue is causing a schism between the adherents of Sunni Islam and non-Sunni Islam, such as the Shiʿa, the Aḥmadiyya, the Druze, and others.¹⁶⁴

But if the *ʿaqādī* (in reference to *ʿaqīda*) schism occurs within Sunni Islam itself, such as between the Salafis and the Sufis, a paradoxical chasm ensues. This necessitates a more detailed explanation of this intra-Sunni conflict. The non-pluralistic attitude of the Salafī establishment towards the *Shiʿa* is justified, despite their deep-rootedness in the country’s fabric, on account of an *ʿaqādī* (credal) or severe schism between the two *madhāhib*. A non-pluralistic approach towards *taṣawwuf*, a Sunni school of thought that adheres to Sunni *madhāhib* and claims to belong to *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamāʿa*, all in need of closer scrutiny to unpack each one of these two Sunni schools of thought—Sufis and Salafis— understanding of the Islamic religion. However, before examining the reasons behind the divergences in their knowledge, it is essential to address the issue of these two Sunni schools ascribing their *shariʿa* legitimacy to *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamāʿa*, a claim that the Salafis deny to the Sufis.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Muḥammad Bin Ibrāhīm al-Ḥamad, *Mukhtaṣar ʿAqidat Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa: Al-Mafhūm wa al-Khaṣaʾiṣ* (Summary of the Creed of Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamaʿa: The Concept and the Characteristics) <https://www.noor-book.com/%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%87%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%81%D9%87%D9%88%D9%85-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B5-pdf> (Accessed August 13, 2020)

¹⁶³ ʿAbd al-Qāhir Bin Ṭāhir al-Isfarayinī, *Al-Farq bayn al-Firaq wa al-Adyān* (The Difference between the Sects and Religions), A review by Muḥammad M. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: Muḥammad ʿAli Ṣabīḥ and sons, 2010)

¹⁶⁴ Safar al-Ḥawālī, *Uṣūl al-Firaq wa al-Adyān wa al-Madhāhib al-Muʿāṣira* (Origin of Contemporary Groups, Religions, and Sects), <https://books-library.online/free-418781781-download> (Accessed 16 August 2020)

¹⁶⁵ See Ḥasan al-Mālikī (no relation to the Sufi Sayyid Muḥamad ʿAlawī al-Mālki) a Saudi scholar known for his criticism of the Saudi Salafī establishment, who argues that the early Muslims of *al-ṣaḥāba* and *tabiʿīn* (the Prophet’s companions), called *ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa* by the Salafis falsely portrayed as living a harmonious life with no disagreements as far as their understanding of the Islamic religion is concerned. This description of the early Muslim lifestyle and relationships to each other suits the Salafī image. See Ḥasan al-Mālikī, *Qūlū al-*

2.1 *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*

The Salafi and Sufi assertion of belonging to *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā‘a* is controversial and paradoxical. It is controversial because, despite their mutual open abhorrence, both schools claim adherence to the “pure” Islam of *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā‘a*, as dictated, acted upon and transmitted by the Prophet to his disciples. It is paradoxical because each school accuses the other of misinterpreting and misunderstanding the Islamic ‘*aqīda*, therefore deviating from the true essence of the *Salaf*’s (early Muslims) teachings. This means a historical and polemic controversy intensified between the two due to three factors: exegetical differences in interpreting the holy texts, economic and socio-political developments in the ever-expanding new Islamic Empire, and the emergence of a thriving intellectual life at the growing urban centres of Baghdad, Basra, and Kufa. A historical review of these three factors, a task beyond the scope of this thesis, shows how newly acquired wealth combined with (internal and external) political and military struggles and a freshly acquired sophistication through intellectual exposure all led to several relevant outcomes.

To start with, a prominent political split between the Sunni majority and Shī‘a minority took place right after the death of the Prophet in 630 CE. Over time, the divide developed into a religious division (over creed and rituals).¹⁶⁶ The inclusion of new social environments and geographical locations under the cloak of Islam in the new Empire has resulted in the development of several *madhāhib* (jurisprudence schools) to offer jurisdictional *aḥkām* (*shari‘a* laws) specific to each society. The heightened intellectual life that came as part of the vibrant exchange of ideas and knowledge with other civilisations of the time (Greco-Latin, Persian, Indian) saw the introduction and combination of philosophy with theology.

This resulted in the rise of schools of thought such as the Mu‘tazilites, who influenced the development of the Islamic ‘*aqīda* by combining logic-based philosophy with Muslim theology, or ‘*ilm al-kalām*, wherein reason is seen as the final arbiter over a literal translation of

Ṣāliḥūn wa la Taqūlū al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥ (Say the Righteous, Do not Say the Righteous Predecessors), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnJN1OrHV8s> (Accessed 16 August 2020).

¹⁶⁶ Al-Nassar, *The Sunni-Shia Interfaith...*, pp.11-13.

scripture.¹⁶⁷ . The Mu‘tazilites school of thought contributed twofold to the intellectual and religious scene. First, it gave birth to the age-old dialectical struggle between the *al-naql* (literal) and *al-‘aql* (rational; logical) interpretation of sacred text. Second, it paved the way for the *Ash‘arī* version of the Islamic *‘aqīda*, which was presented as full-fledged *Ash‘arī ‘aqīda*, the current backbone of Sufism.

In the twenty-first century, the epitome of the *Atharī* Salafis’ and the *Ash‘arī* Sufis’ denial of each other’s belonging to *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā‘a* was expressed at the 2016 Grozny Islamic Conference. There, the Sunni Muslims (Ash‘arite Sufis) dissociated themselves from the Salafis, whom they called *takfiriyyūn* (accusing other Muslims of apostasy, denoting excommunication), and therefore nurturing terrorism. The Saudi Salafī establishment was not invited to this pan-Sunni Islamic conference, which created havoc within Sunni circles and had to be quelled at the highest level by the Islamic authorities.¹⁶⁸ The conference thus ushered the historical Sufi-Salafi schism into the twenty-first century.¹⁶⁹

2.2 The *Ash‘arī ‘Aqīda*, *Naql* versus *‘Aql*, and *Taşawwuf*.

Naql (to copy) denotes a literal interpretation of the religious text, while *‘aql* (mind; rationality) denotes applying logic and metaphor to the interpretation of the religious text. This thesis dubs the *naql* versus *‘aql* issue a “syndrome” because it is a chronic controversial matter with the forces of logic and metaphor on one side and the literal interpretation of sacred text on the other. These two sides converge in a never-ending tug of war. *‘Ilm al-Kalām* (Islamic theology)

¹⁶⁷ Josef van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*, Translated by Jane Marie Todd. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006)

¹⁶⁸ Ghulam Rasool Dehlvi, *Islamic conference in Chechnya: Why Sunnis are disassociating themselves from Salafists* (Grozny Sufism Conference, 2016)
<https://www.firstpost.com/world/islamic-conference-in-chechnya-why-sunnis-are-disassociating-themselves-from-salafists-2998018.html> (Accessed 17 August 2020)

¹⁶⁹ In addition to the rejection from the Grozny Conference, the emergence of the conflicting Saudi-Salafi splinter groups in the 1980s and 1990s (that culminated in 9/11) prompted Saudi Arabia to diametrically oppose their traditional stance and image as a vehement promoter of puritanical and often militant, Salafism. Instead, the government adopted the tolerant version of Salafism promoted by Shaykh Muḥammad al-‘Īsa, a former Minister of Justice and the Secretary General of the Muslim World League since 2016.

addresses the relationship between reason and revelation (a point we will return to in Chapter Six). Still, it stops short of resolving arguments between *al-naql* and *al-‘aql*.¹⁷⁰

After forty years’ affiliation with the Mu‘tazilite school known for its logician thinkers, Abu al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (874–936), the founder of the *Ash‘arī ‘aqīda*, dissociated himself from this school of thought with its *‘aql* orientation. Working his way to a *manhaj wasaṭī* (middle methodology), he rejected some of the teachings of both the Mu‘tazilites and the Salafi *mujassima and mushabbiha* (proponents of the corporeality of Allah; anthropomorphism) who adhere to the *naql* school.¹⁷¹ The new Ash‘arites adopted an approach where Allah’s anthropomorphic-like attributes, which are mentioned in the Qur’an, should neither be accepted nor denied but left to *tafwīd* (relegation).¹⁷² It is Abu al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī’s adoption of the *naqlī* school of the *Ḥanbalī madhhab* into his new-found *Ash‘arī ‘aqīda* that reinforced the Ash‘arite-Sufis claim of belonging to *ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama‘a*.¹⁷³

However, the establishment of a combined *naql* and *‘aql* *Ash‘arī* school created a new battleground between the *Atharī* traditional *‘aqīda* of the *Ḥanbalī* Salafis and that of the *Ash‘arī ‘aqīda*, which was adopted primarily by the *Mālikī*, the *Shāfi‘ī* and the *Ḥanafī* Sunni *madhāhib*.¹⁷⁴

The *naql* versus *‘aql* syndrome arguments in Muslim and Arab intellectual thought were not limited to theology and religious matters. Instead, they were and still are significant when

¹⁷⁰ Naṣr Ḥ Abu Zāyid, *Al-Ittijāh al-‘Aqlī fī al-Tafsīr: Dirāsa fī Qaḍīyyat al-Majāz fī al-Qur‘an ‘ind al-Mu‘tazila* (Rationalism in Exegesis: A Study of the Problem of Qur’anic Metaphor in the Writing of the Mutazilites), (Beirut: 4th edition, 1998)

¹⁷¹ ‘Alī Bin Ismā‘īl al-Ash‘arī, *Al-Ibāna ‘an Usūl al-Dīyāna* (Clarification of the Origin of Religion) (Riyadh: Mada al-Muslim for Publishing, 2010); ‘Alī Bin Ismā‘īl al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islamiyyīn fī Ikhtilāf al-Muṣṣalīn* (Discourses of the Muslims and Discrepancies of the Worshippers) (Beirut: Abnā’ Sharīf al-Anṣārī Company for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, 1990)

¹⁷² *Tafwīd al-amr lillāh* [relegation of matters to Allah] is a doctrine according to which ambiguous Qur’anic verses should be consigned to Allah alone.

¹⁷³ It must be noted that the *Ash‘arī ‘aqīda* is adopted by the adherents of Sunni *madhāhib*, i.e., *al-Mālikī*, *al-Shāfi‘ī* and *al-Ḥanafī* whose adherents are mostly *Matūrīdī* in *‘aqīda*, with no significant differences from the Ash‘arites.

¹⁷⁴ The Sunni Muslims adhere to three creedal schools: *Atharī*, *Ash‘arī*, and *Matūrīdī*. The *Matūrīdī* is an offshoot of *Ash‘arī* and so close to it, they are considered one. see Binyamin Abrahamove, *Scripturalist and Traditionalist Theology*, The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology. ed. Sapine Schmodtke (London: Oxford University, 2016).

addressing and proposing solutions as a way out of the historic struggle between traditions and modernity (a subject discussed in Chapter Six). At this juncture of the thesis, our concern lies with differences in creed that have put the two Sunni schools at odds. Even though *taṣawwuf* traditionally thrived in both of these opposing Sunni creeds, it is currently grounded in the *Ash‘arī ‘aqīda*. To the annoyance of the Salafī establishment, the Ash‘arites constitute the majority of the Sunni Muslims.¹⁷⁵

It is also important to note that, as far as the Salafis are concerned, the Sufi Ash‘arites belong to a deviant form of the *Ash‘ari madhhab*. In other words, they belong to an old version that existed before Abu al-Ḥasan rejected his old ways and followed the *Atharī ‘aqīda* of Ibn Ḥanbal. This claim has led to more controversies between these two Sunni schools. The complication that these two Sunni schools are entangled with inevitably led to each accusing the other of misunderstanding the nature of Islam.

The *naql* versus *‘aql* “syndrome” plays a pivotal role in classifying how the nature of Islam is understood. When it comes to understanding the nature of Islam, there are two types of views: traditional and new. The conventional category covers the two Sunni schools: the Salafī Ḥanbalites and the Sufi Ash‘arites. These two Sunni schools have different stances about *naql* versus *‘aql* that sees the Ḥanbalites reject *‘aql* in interpreting the attributes of Allah. At the same time, the Ash‘arites consider where anthropomorphic attributes are recognized nonetheless, *bilā kayf* (without how), meaning how Allah enacts His attributes.^{176 177} The Ash‘arites employ logic and metaphor in situations where Allah’s actions defy logic, such as when Allah descends to Earth in the hours before every dawn to receive worship from His followers. The Ḥanbalites interpret such actions literally (albeit in a way fit for *jalālihi wa aẓamatihi*, or Allah’s glory and majesty).¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Mustāfa Bin ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-‘Aṭṭās, *Madhhab al-Sawād al-Aẓam min al-Muslimīn fī al-Uṣūl: ‘Aqīdat al-Imām al-Ash‘arī* (The Creed of the Great Majority of Muslims in Uṣūl: The Creed of Imam al-Ash‘arī), (Cairo: Dar al-Uṣūl, 2007)

¹⁷⁶ Avicenna (980–1037) explained that the anthropomorphic attributes of Allah in the Qur’an were given only to simplify the understanding of Allah’s qualities (such as omniscience and omnipotence) to early Muslim societies. See Dimitri Gutas, *Orientalism of Avicenna’s Philosophy: Essays on his Life, Method, Heritage*, Variorum Collected Studies) (Routledge: 2014)

¹⁷⁷ Livnat Holtzman, *Anthropomorphism in Islam: The Challenge of Traditionalism (700-1350)* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019)

¹⁷⁸ Imām Muḥammad al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, (Of offering *Ṣalāt* (Prayer) and Invoking Allah in the Last Hours of the Night, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/19/26> (Accessed 21 November 2022) For a Salafī point of view,

A new understanding of Islam acknowledges the metaphysical aspects of the Qur'an and the Prophetic miracles. In its interpretation of how Allah and the Prophet intend for the nature of Islam to be understood, it employs the faculty of *'aql*. This new understanding has been the research subject for numerous Islamic scholars and reformers across Islam, regardless of creed and sect.

III. Traditional vs New Understandings of Islam: Theological and Socioreligious-cum-Political Basis of the Salafi–Sufi Rebuttals

I argue that religion is a combination of philosophy and a creed. On the one hand, this creed positions individuals in a theological bond with Allah, the creator, who manifests existentially in human psychology. On the other hand, the creed connects humans to others in a social order built on ethics. Religion is a set of relations between God, individuals, other humans, and the environment as a whole (this is a Qur'anic philosophy, which is pivotal to a *wasāṭiyya*, elaborated on further in Chapter Six). These relationships align in an expression that describes Islam as being of *dunyā wa dīn* (Islam is for our earthly lives and pleasing God, i.e., the present and the hereafter).¹⁷⁹

Conflict arises when this description of the essence of Islam is ignored or when the definition of each one of its two components, i.e. the purely theological-cum-psychological and the individual's social conduct and behaviour towards others, differ amongst the different sects of Islam. I argue that *wasāṭiyya* (a word that means a middle way or a balanced situation based on justice) represents the ideal harmony between two components. On the first hand, it is a harmony between the individual human and Allah as well as the individual human and himself or herself in a psychological sense. On the other hand, it applies to harmony between individuals and other humans in their shared social order, as Chapter Six explains. But due to the tendency

see Shaykh Muḥammad Bin'Uthaymīn explain Allah's descent to Earth in a suitable way fit for His glory and majesty, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qe258S_If4Y (Accessed 11 September 2020); for a Sufi point of view see Shaykh 'Alī al-Jifrī https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQZoxy_qyeU (Accessed 11 September 2020).

¹⁷⁹ Ḥāzim Jalāl, *Duniya wa Dīn: Muṣṭalaḥ Yajma' bayn Ḥājāt al-Rūḥ wa Mutatallibāt al-Jasad* (The Concept of this Life and the Afterlife Connotes Combining between the Spiritual Needs and Bodily Requirements). In its larger meaning this concept connotes Islam's spiritual as well as sociopsychological fulfillment. <https://www.elbalad.news/5493103> (Accessed 12 December 2023)

of one component to override the other for one to be emphasised and the other ignored in each individual's understanding of *wasatīyya*, humans are constantly subjugated to a state of imbalance. I argue that the balance versus imbalance of these two components is the essence of Islam's *wasatīyya*, the foundation for a "philosophy of Islam" as a Qur'anic-instructed ethical relationship between humans and God (see Chapter Seven).

The essence of these differences, which have become polemical conflicts between various schools of Islamic thought, can be ascribed to their specific understandings of the nature of Islam, i.e., their "philosophy of Islam". We are concerned here with how the Salafis and Sufis establish the basis of their counterarguments, given that each claims an exclusively "correct" understanding of Islam and hence *wasatīyya*. This requires the researcher to examine the theological and socio-religious foundations underpinning the Salafi and Sufi rebuttals of each other, as each reflects their distinct interpretations of Islam and, consequently, their respective approaches to *wasatīyya*. The discussion regarding which interpretation of *wasatīyya* aligns with the socioreligious objectives of Vision 2030 will be addressed in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven.

3.1 Islam as the Basis for the Salafi Rebuttals of Sufi Theology

When addressing the Salafi and the Sufi approaches to understanding the nature of Islam, it is rather redundant to state that both schools of thought believe in Allah, the ultimate essence of Islam, manifested in Muḥammad, the messenger of Allah and seal of the Prophets, in the Qur'an, the revealed words of Allah, and in the Sunna (the Prophet's ways) as transmitted in *al-ḥadīth al-nabawī* (the Prophet's instructional sayings and actions). Ironically, however, these four components forming the foundation for Islam are precisely where Salafism and Sufism emphasise their differences. In doing so, they demonstrate that their refutation of the other is grounded in differences in understanding of the nature of Islam.

3.1.1 The Theology of Islam

Both groups believe that the Islamic religion aims to worship Allah as He describes Himself in the Qur'an and to conduct one's life, as exemplified by the Prophet and his companions and disciples. However, each group has a specific understanding of Allah's attributes, how to

worship Allah, how to achieve fulfilment of worship, and how to conduct a pious life in accordance with the *sharī'a*.

The differences in their approach to Allah and reverence for the Prophet Muḥammad were eventually so distinct that each school of thought accused the other of a distorted understanding of the nature of Islam. The Salafi and Sufi understanding of Islam reflects how they perceive Allah and the Prophet Muḥammad through the Qur'an and the *ḥadīth*. So, as part of their accusations and counter-accusations of misunderstanding, it is exigent to address their perspective on Allah and the Prophet in both the Qur'an and the *ḥadīth*.

Allah in the Qur'an

The best description of the nature and attributes of Allah is found in the Qur'an (42:11), where He describes Himself as “*Wa lays k'mithlihi shay'*” (There is nothing like unto Him). Throughout the Qur'an, the name Allah connotes an abstract entity no human mind could or would ever be capable of knowing. Allah is the absolute name of this abstract entity that produces reality as we know it, including ourselves and the metaphysical universe beyond our comprehension.¹⁸⁰ Allah possesses ninety-eight attributes. If added to His name “Allah”, they constitute “His” ninety-nine names, which are known as *asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā* (the beautiful names of God).¹⁸¹

The Sufis seek Allah by experiencing all the ninety-eight attributes in His name.¹⁸² They seek Allah through processes called *Maqāmāt* (stations; spiritual positions closer to Allah) and *aḥwāl* (spiritual condition bestowed by Allah upon one's heart) in the Sufi lexicon. The Sufis seek Allah through a spiritual journey that can yield certain manifestations, i.e., *karāmāt* (saint miracles or supernatural wonders). In contrast, the Salafis express their ultimate relationship with Allah Almighty by maintaining a pure belief in the oneness of Allah to free oneself from

¹⁸⁰ Gabriel S. Reynolds, *Allah: God in the Qur'an*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020)

¹⁸¹ Abdur Raheem Kidwai, *Blessed Names and Attributes of Allah*, (Leicestershire, UK: Kube Publishing, 2016)

¹⁸² Ahmad Hulusi, *Decoding the Qur'an* (A Unique Sufi Interpretation) (Kindle, 2013)

any form of both *shirk aṣghar* (lesser polytheism) or *shirk akbar* (greater polytheism) or *shirk khafī* (concealed polytheism), as detailed in Chapter Three.¹⁸³

The Salafis worship Allah by diligently following the Prophet's and early Muslims' ways. In addition to the obligatory five daily prayers, they perform *nawāfil* (supererogatory prayers) and live a pious life of *zuhd* (asceticism) somewhat dissimilar to that practised by the Sufis, as detailed in the next two chapters.¹⁸⁴ My thesis concerns how these two schools of thought relate to Allah and the Prophet. But as both Salafis and Sufis claim to belong to *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā'a*, it is important to introduce the three approaches to the oneness of Allāh found in Salafi literature.

The Three Salafi Approaches to *Tawḥīd*

The oneness of God is acknowledged in three ways: Allah the Creator is called *rabb* (lord; owner; creator); Allah the worshipped is called *ilāh* (deity); and Allah is recognized as possessing ninety-nine *asmā' wa ṣifāt* (names and attributes). *Tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* means to believe in the oneness of Allah the creator, while *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* means to believe in the oneness of Allah the deity (see Chapter Three).

However, Salafi scholars (beginning with Ibn Taymiyya) introduced a third kind of *tawḥīd*; the *tawḥīd al-asmā' wa al-ṣifāt*, which falls under the all-encompassing name of Allah. This distinction between *al-rubūbiyya*, *al-ulūhiyya*, and *al-asma' wa al-ṣifāt* (Allah's names and attributes) is significant in the context of *shirk*. A human can recognize the oneness of Allah the *rabb* (i.e., the one creator of the universe). However, Allah, the *ilāh* (i.e., the worshipped deity), can be reached through sub-deities or saints, who, in some religions, possess some of Allah's attributes. The three Salafi approaches to *tawḥīd*, in addition to the controversial Sufi concept

¹⁸³ For details of *shirk akbar* and *shirk aṣghar*, see D. Gimaret, "Shirk", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/*-SIM_6965 (Accessed 20 August 2020)

¹⁸⁴ Muḥammad J. Sharaf, *Kitāb al-Zuhd li al-Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal* (The Book of Zuhd by Imam Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal), (Beirut: Dar al-Nahḍa al-Arabiyya, 1981) <https://waqfeya.com/book.php?bid=3848> (Accessed August 13, 2020)

of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the unity of being, a concept not universally adhered to by all Sufis), form the basis for the Salafi–Sufi arguments discussed in the following four chapters.¹⁸⁵

Allah Between *‘Ilm al-Bāṭin* and *‘Ilm al-Zāhir*

To Sufi scholars, Allah, in His absolute and abstract entity, is known as *al-ḥaqīqa* (mystical and absolute truth), which can be reached through esoteric knowledge, whether learned or acquired as *‘ilm ladunnī* (a term derived from the Qur’an, meaning knowledge inspired directly by Allah). *‘ilm al-bāṭin* (hidden or esoteric knowledge) can be compared to *‘ilm al-zāhir* (apparent or exoteric knowledge) on which, traditionally, the Salafis rely to define Allah. In the sciences of *tafsīr* and *ta’wīl* (Qur’ānic interpretation and hermeneutics). Some Sufis rely not only on linguistic metaphors but also on *‘ilm al-bāṭin*, employing an *ishraqī* (Sufi spiritual and metaphorical exegesis) interpretation wherever literal translations fall short of conveying an *‘aqlī* or *naqlī* interpretation.¹⁸⁶ *‘Ilm al-bāṭin*, and *‘Ilm al-zāhir* create intense disagreements between Salafis and Sufis and are thus a major cause for their polemic.

To understand the nature of Islam as revealed by Allah, another source of Allah’s words besides the Qur’an is the *aḥādīth* (pl. of *ḥadīth*) *qudsiyya* (sacred *aḥādīth*).¹⁸⁷ The most relevant of these to Sufism is the celebrated *ḥadīth* revealed by the Angel Jibrīl (Gabriel), known as *Ḥadīth Jibrīl*. This is a *ḥadīth* in which the Angel Jibrīl had a dialogue with the Prophet in the presence of some of his disciples. The Prophet concluded the *ḥadīth* after Jibrīl had left by saying, “That was Gabriel who came to teach the people their religion”.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Muḥammad Bin ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, *Kitāb At-Tawḥīd* (The Book of Monotheism), (Riyadh: Darussalam Publishers and Distributors, 2014); Ibn ‘Uthaymīn, *fatāwa Arkān Al-Islam* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vx0H6NXSXG8> (Accessed 26 September 2021); Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-‘Uboodiyah: Being a True Slave to Allah*, (London: Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd., 2013) Translated by Nasiruddin Al-Khatib; The concept of the oneness of Allah in its Sufi context, i.e. the controversial *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being) is addressed in Chapter 4 where definitions of the four types of Sufism are explained.

¹⁸⁶ Sahl Bin ‘Abd Allāh al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr Al-Tustarī: Great Commentary on the Qur’an*, Translated by Annabel Keeler and Ali Keeler, Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought (Louisville KY: Fons Vitae publisher, 2011)

¹⁸⁷ “Introduction” *Forty Ḥadīth Qudsi*, <https://www.iium.edu.my/deed/hadith/other/hadithqudsi.html> (Accessed 13 August 2020)

¹⁸⁸ Refer to the *Ḥadīth* in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukharī* (1/21).

This is the most significant *ḥadīth* on which the Sufis base the association of Sufism with the highest of the three sequential tiers of the Islamic religion: Islam, *imān* (faith) and *iḥsān*. *Iḥsān* (beautification; beneficence, or, as the Sufis refer to it, spiritual beauty) is where the Sufis can attain *fanā* (annihilation in God) as a state of being on the path to Allah. in *The Vision of Islam*, Murata and Chittick explain this *ḥadīth*.¹⁸⁹

Discrepancies in the *Ḥadīth* and Exaggerated Reverence

The *ḥadīth* is susceptible to diverging interpretations for several reasons. The first concerns its classification into three overarching categories: *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic), *ḥasan* (acceptable) and *ḍaʿīf* (weak) about *isnād* and *matn*.¹⁹⁰ Some *Ḥadīth* could fluctuate between any two of the three categories depending on the genuineness of its *isnād* (support; backing), the integrity of the persons who conveyed it, and *matn* (backbone; leaning) in terms of the soundness of its textual content citation in the Sunni-recognized six books of *ḥadīth*.¹⁹¹

The second concerns what is known as *aḥādīth mawḍūʿa* (sayings falsely attributed to Prophet Muḥammad), a source of sectarian conflict. The problem lies in proving whether a *ḥadīth* is genuine or *mawḍūʿ*. Numerous Salafī–Sufi disagreements on issues such as reverence for the Prophet and when *istighātha* (appeals for help) and *tawassul* (intercession) should be sought from the Prophet and *al-awliyāʾ* (Sufi saints; friends of Allah). Salafis believe it should be sought only during *al-awliyāʾ*'s lifetime, while Sufis believe it should continue after death. These disagreements can thus be attributed to *aḥādīth mawḍūʿa*.

The above two reasons, combined with accusations that some *aḥādīth* negate Qurʾanic interpretations, are causes behind a broader scope of conflicts between the sectarian and secular groups in justifying rules for the dos and don'ts of a religiously-influenced society such as Saudi

¹⁸⁹ Sachiko Murata, and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, (London: I.B. Taurus, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2021).

¹⁹⁰ Mohammad H. Kamal, *Ḥadīth Studies: Authenticity, Compilation, and Criticism of Ḥadīth*, (The Islamic Foundation: Kindle, 2014)

¹⁹¹ *Isnād* refers to a *Ḥadīth* being backed up by a *silsila* (chain) of reporters traced back to the time of the Prophet, which legitimates the authenticity of the *Ḥadīth*. *Matn* refers to the textual content of the *Ḥadīth*. The six books of *Ḥadīth* are: *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bokhari*; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*; *Sunan al-Nasāʾi*; *Sunan Abi Dāwūd*; *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*; *Sunan Ibn Mājah*.

Arabia. These groups converge on Allah and the Prophet and diverge in their sects to the point of excommunicating one another. A multiheaded hydra of fierce enmity, often interwoven with the hidden agenda of political interest groups, is a prominent feature of Islam today.

The role of the *ḥadīth* as a unifier rather than a divider of Muslims and as a source to support rather than negate Qur'anic text prompted the establishment of a long-overdue project to deal with *ḥadīth* sciences. In 2017, a royal decree ordered the creation of the compound of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salmān Bin 'Abd al-'Azīz Al Sa'ūd for the Prophet's *Ḥadīth*. Based in Medina, King Salmān's Complex is managed by a scientific council of the most renowned *ḥadīth* scholars in the Islamic world. A member of the Saudi *Hay'at Kibār al-'Ulama'* (Council of Senior Scholars) has been chosen to chair the complex, while a royal decree will appoint the rest of the Complex's council members.¹⁹²

The abovementioned theology for understanding the nature of Islam produced the basis for three significant Salafi-initiated rebukes of the *taṣawwuf* and two major Sufi-initiated counterarguments against Salafism.

The above preamble highlights the basis for the Salafi–Sufi arguments and counterarguments. It has boiled down several issues within the rubric of four major arguments as the foundation for the Salafi–Sufi polemic. Three arguments are theologically based, while the fourth argument is of socioreligious-cum-political concern.

3.1.2 Three Theological Refutations by Salafis

Salafism accuses Sufism of three significant issues in the form of arguments that pertain to *'aqīda* (creed), *sulūk* (behaviour; conduct), and *kufr* (blasphemy)

¹⁹² The Saudi King Salman issued a Royal Decree on establishing the “King Salman Complex”, the compound of King Salman for the Prophet's Hadith. <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/gulf/2017/10/18/King-Salman-orders-the-establishment-of-Basim-Assembly-for-the-Prophet-s-Hadith.html> (Accessed August 9, 2020); Staff writer, Al Arabiya <https://www.spa.gov.sa/1678298> (Accessed August 9, 2020)

3.1.2.1 Sufis are Deviant in Creed

The Salafī accuse the Sufis of deviating on credal grounds in two ways:

The first is in terms of the defilement of the creed by *shirkī* (polytheistic) deviation covered earlier due to Salafī adherence to *Ḥanbalī Atharī ‘aqīda* and Sufi adhering to *Ash‘arī ‘aqīda*. The two creeds differ in interpreting God’s attributes and Sufi practices of *istighātha* and *tawassul* at gravesites. Whether these practices could expel one out of the pale of Islam depends on the degree of *shirk* one commits, e.g., *shirk akbar*, *shirk aṣghar* or *shirk khafī* (see Chapters Three and Four)

The second is in terms of a total negation of the Islamic creed. It goes beyond mere *shirk* to a *kufīrī* (blasphemous) deviation, namely Ibn ‘Arabī’s *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being). Adhering to the unity of being would expel one out of the pale of Islam on the grounds of blasphemy, according to the Salafīs.

We have seen in Chapter One that the theory of *waḥdat al-wujūd* was the most abhorrent Sufi belief amongst the eighteenth-century Salafīs during the first Saudi state. We will come to see in Chapters Three and Four how amongst the Salafīs of the contemporary Saudi state and amid the turmoil of political Islam, Ibn ‘Arabī’s philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* was accused of calling for the unity of religions. The thought of Islam joining other religions as equals painted Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory as blasphemy. For this reason, the unity of religions is added to the Salafī pool of theological refutations of *taṣawwuf*. So theologically, two of the Salafī arguments against Sufism are credal in nature, wherein Salafīs accuse the Sufis either of falling for *shirk*’s three types (greater, lesser and concealed) or for believing in the theory of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, the antithesis of the *tawḥīd* creed of Islam, i.e., blasphemy. The third theological Salafī argument against Sufism is in the realm of their deviant Sufi behaviour, as explained below.

3.1.2.2. Sufis are Deviant in Behaviour

The Sufis consider their *sulūk* (specific conduct) a prerequisite for the Sufi *murīdīn* (seekers; Sufi disciples) on their journey to Allah. These conducts and behaviours are derived from the Qur’anic ethics as the Prophet Muḥammad and his companions lived and practised. This

manifests as Sufi behaviour and moral conduct towards God's creation, or how individuals relate to society as a whole, as detailed in Chapter Six.

But the Salafi view of the Sufi *sulūk* does not accept their claim of behaving in accordance with Qur'anic ethics. To the Salafis, the Sufi *sulūk*, is a manifestation of *bida'* (heretical innovations) exemplified in beliefs and practices that claim the existence of a hierarchy of Sufi saints. Called *quṭb*, *gawth*, *abdāl*, and *awṭād*, the saints possess esoteric powers and specific delegations bestowed on them by Allah with authority to control some aspects of the universe.¹⁹³ It is the Sufi saint *karāmāt* (miracles) that the Salafis abhor the most, leading to outlandish claims of false supernatural acts and behaviours to embezzle followers.¹⁹⁴ The Salafis characterise the Sufi *murīdīn* as those who succumb, in servitude, totally to their Sufi Shaykhs.

Another Sufi behaviour the Salafis despise is excessive *tawakkul* 'ala Allah (excessive reliance on Allāh) without initiating action. For Salafis, this characteristic is conducive to a lack of ambition and an excuse for complacency and non-productivity as members of society. This idea is called *darwasha*, meaning submissive lethargy (see Chapter Five).¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ 'Alā' I 'Abd al-Rahīm, *Al-Quṭb wa al-Ghawth wa al-Abdāl wa al-Awatād 'ind al-Ṣūfiyya* (The Sufi Quṭb, Gawth, Abdāl and Awatād) <https://salafcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%BA%D9%88%D8%AB-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B7%D8%A8-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B5-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9.pdf> (Accessed August 14, 2020)

¹⁹³ 'Alī Za'yūr, *Al-Karāma al-Ṣūfiyya wa al-'Uṣṭūra wa al-Ḥulm* (The Sufi Supernatural Wonders, Myths and Dream) <https://www.kutub-pdf.net/book/5276-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%84%D9%85.html> (Accessed August 14, 2020)

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Nora S. Eggen, Conceptions of Trust in the Qur'an https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274562445_Conceptions_of_Trust_in_the_Qur'an (Accessed August 19, 2020)

In response to Salafī arguments the Sufis directed two major counterarguments against Salafism.

3.1.3 The Two Sufi Theological Counterarguments

In their counterarguments against Salafī's opposition to *taṣawwuf*, the Sufis base their arguments on two primary claims.

3.1.3.1 Salafis Confuse *Aqīda* and *Fiqh*

The Sufis base their understanding of Islam on the notion that it pivots between the fixed and immutable, i.e., on a fixed '*aqīda* (creed) that evolves around the changing and mutable *fiqh* (jurisprudential rules). They thus accuse the Salafis of interpreting what is *fiqhī* to be '*aqadī*, thus falling victim to their own mix-up and baselessly rejecting *taṣawwuf* as deviant '*aqīda*-wise, as explained in Chapter Five.

The Sufis attribute the distortion in the Salafī understanding of Islam to their concentration on the *fiqh aspects* of *sharī'a*, where Islam is applied as a set of *fiqhī* (jurisdictional) rules of dos and don'ts as expressed in the Islamic *aḥkām* (rules) of *ḥalāl* (allowed; lawful), *harām* (prohibited), *jā'iz* (tolerable) and *mustaḥabb* (commendable). They do so while ignoring the spiritual essence of Islam sought through a pious wayfaring path wherein a believer seeks *al-ḥaqīqa* (Allah; ultimate reality), which implicates the second refutation.

3.1.3.2 Salafis Ignore *al-Ḥaqīqa*

A popular Sufi proverb is "*man taḥaqqaqā wa lam yatashara' faqad tazandaq, wa man tasharra'a wa lam yatahaqqaq faqad tafassaq*" (he who becomes a seeker of *ḥaqīqa* (a Sufi) without adhering to *sharī'a* has become heterodox, and he who adheres to *sharī'a* (a Salafī) without realising *ḥaqīqa* has become a reprobate sinner). This sums up the principal difference between Salafism and Sufism.¹⁹⁶ The Sufis claim that *al-ḥaqīqa* (the reality of Allah) softens

¹⁹⁶The Sufi argument is that *sharī'a*, based on the science of *fiqh* (jurisprudence; laws of dos and don'ts), where judges unempathetically pass judgment in the spirit of "justice is blind", hardens the heart.

the heart,¹⁹⁷ while *al-sharī'a* (based on *fiqh* or jurisprudence) hardens the heart.¹⁹⁸ For their part, the Salafis highlight Sufi deviation from the right path of Islam by accusing them of breaking the covenant of *tawḥīd* with Allah, which opens a floodgate for unorthodox beliefs and practices foreign to the pure *'aqīda* of Islam. The Salafis argue that they are, realistically, dealing with *'ilm al-ẓāhir* while the Sufi approach to *'ilm al-bāṭin* is rather chimerical. Accusations and counter-accusations of deviation from the path of true Islam are launched from the platform of *Sharī'a* versus *ḥaqīqa*.¹⁹⁹

To a Sufi *ḥaqīqa* is sought by traversing through *aḥwāl* (states) and *maqāmāt* (stations) that require seekers to purify themselves based on *sulūk* (conduct; behaviour) and *akhlāq* (ethics) as detailed in Chapters Five and Six. However, the Sufi journey to Allah ideally culminates in the state of *fanā'* and *baqā'* (annihilation in God and then survival through receipt of divine life).

The above major Salafi–Sufi refutational arguments are presented here to set the basis on which these two Sunni schools view each other on a theological basis. They are presented as three Salafi refutations against *taṣawwuf* and two Sufi refutations against Salafism. However, it is not the number of refutations that tips the balance of which side brings forth a stronger argument, one way or the other, to a genuine understanding of the Islamic religion. The soundness of arguments offered presents one of these Sunni schools of thought as the legitimate possessor of the intended *waṣāṭiyya* in Vision 2030.

¹⁹⁷ The Sufis base the relationship between the human and Allah on the concept that *al-rūḥ* (spirit; soul) is given to humans as *naḥkha* (breath) from Allah. A human consists of *rūḥ*, *naḥs* (self) and body. The heart is the catalyst between the *naḥs* and *rūḥ*; This is very important Sufi understanding of the nature of the relationship between humans and their Creator.

¹⁹⁸ Muḥammad El-Ghazālī, *Al-Jānib al-Āṭif min al-Islām: Baḥth fī al-Akhlāq wa al-Sulūk wa al-Taṣawwuf* (The Emotional Side of Islam: A study in Ethics, Behaviour and Sufism), (Cairo: Nahḍat Maṣr, 2005)

¹⁹⁹ Muḥammad Zakariya, *Sharī'ah and Ṭarīqat: Inseparable and Indivisible* Trans. Asim Ahmad <https://attahawi.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/shariah-and-tariqah-inseparable-and-indivisible.pdf> (Accessed on 13 December 2020).

3.2 Basis for Socioreligious-cum-Political Rebuttal: The Fourth Salafi Argument against Sufism

From a social point of view, the Salafis traditionally accuse the Sufis of lethargy and *darwasha*. Only recently, with the emergence of political Islam, was *taṣawwuf* seen as a political tool to eradicate Salafism, as detailed in Chapter Three. For this reason, it is refuted on a socioreligious and political basis, which forms the fourth major Salafi argument against *taṣawwuf*. The socioreligious and political Salafi rebuttal against Sufism is detailed in Chapter Three, and the Sufi counterargument is found in Chapter Five. However, from a societal perspective and to reinforce its hypothesis, this thesis presents a new perspective on understanding Islam, as explained in the following section.

3.2.1 A New Understanding of Islam from a Socioreligious-cum-Political Point of View

In terms of Sufism and its socioreligious aspects, this thesis argues that Sufism can contribute to a new understanding of Islam, which in turn can alter religious attitudes and support the socioreligious objectives of Vision 2030, as discussed in Chapter Six. This discussion relates to a broader context that examines the conflict between "new revisionist" Arab intellectuals, who seek to distance themselves from Islamic traditions, and fundamentalists wanting to reconnect with their roots. Inspired by Averroism, thinkers like Muḥammad ‘Ābid al-Jābrī, Muḥammad Arkūn, and Murād Wahba support secularization. Al-Sayyid asserts that these secularists believe that separating from the Arab-Islamic *turāth* (cultural tradition) is essential for reviving scientific and philosophical thought. They contend that the decline of Arab-Islamic civilization, due to the prominent Sufi al-Ghazālī's rejection of philosophy, can be reversed through the revival of Greek philosophical traditions (see Chapter Six). It is essential to acknowledge that this stance against *taṣawwuf* has a historical basis.

The Napoleonic campaign in Egypt and Syria at the close of the eighteenth century shook the Arab world from its deep slumber. This was during the period when the Ottoman Empire, which embraced Sufism, occupied the Arab land. Upon the arrival of European colonisers, the Arab world found itself lagging behind scientifically advanced Europe, which possessed the tools and modern means to colonise Arab nations. The defeated Napoleonic *Armée d'Orient* left

behind an enlightenment due to the scientific enterprises that had accompanied it.²⁰⁰ This realisation of the weakness of the Arab world triggered inward self-reflection among numerous scholars and intellectuals across Muslim lands. They then analysed the primary causes of their societies' scientific and socio-economic ills, intending to propose solutions for the way out.

Initiated in the eighteenth century, this struggle has persisted for the past 150 years among societies that are profoundly dependent on religion to provide ready answers to almost all aspects of life's problems and ills. To better analyse societal issues, several profound intellectual and philosophical studies were launched during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries; even in the twenty-first century, they are still treated as relevant by a host of thinkers (see Chapter Seven). After centuries of disconnection from philosophy, the *naql* versus *'aql* issue came to the fore again. Over time, a revival of intellectual enquiry gradually brought the sciences and humanities back into analyses of societal ills, albeit with restrictions on collaboration between rulers and religious establishments.²⁰¹

Even mysticism and Sufism were subjected to philosophical enquiry to examine their role and influence on religion whenever *sharī'a* laws were questioned regarding their viability for a rapidly changing world.²⁰² The scholar-reformer intentions were, and still are, to reform and reshape Islam to become more congruent with the demands of modern life. They argue that the traditional ways of understanding and interpreting Islam have reached a deadlock, given the demands of ever-emerging Muslim masses in a rapidly changing world. This is further evidenced by the unprecedented transformational reform of Vision 2030 and its adoption of the Islamic concept of *wasatīyya* to affect a socioreligious change based on a new understanding of the Islamic religion, which will be discussed in a Sufi context in Chapter Seven.

However, from the Salafi point of view of socioreligious-cum-political aspects, as explained in Chapters Three and Four, they are concerned with the dismissal of *taṣawwuf* as a deviant sect that aims to destroy Salafism rather than as an obstacle against philosophical and scientific advancement.

²⁰⁰ For example, the discovery of the Rosetta stone and the establishment of the field of Egyptology

²⁰¹ Sabine Schmidtke, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2016)

²⁰² Bilal Orfali, Atif Khalil and Mohammed Rustom, *Mysticism and Ethics in Islam* (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 2022) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvJYLNbOYSo&t=47s>

Conclusion

This chapter explains that the Salafī–Sufi polemic arises from their claims to possess the correct understanding of Islam and proper interpretation of *wasatīyya*. Based on their conflicting understandings of Islam, the dominant Salafī school in Saudi Arabia opposes *taṣawwuf*. This, in turn, prompted the Sufis to respond accordingly. However, the traditional Salafī–Sufi theological arguments have drifted into criticism that touches on individual socioreligious and, at times, political lives.

The Salafis rebuke the Sufis in four ways that fall under a theological or a socioreligious-cum-political dimension. Under the theological dimension, the Salafis describe the Sufis as deviating in creed *inhirāf* ‘*aqadī* and *inhirāf* *sulūkī* (behaviour). Further, the Salafis view the Sufis as adhering to a *takfīrī* (blasphemous) philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being), which is raised in contemporary Salafi arguments against *taṣawwuf* as the basis for the Salafī-purported Sufis call for the unity of religions. Under the socioreligious-cum-political dimension, Salafis identify the *taṣawwuf* as seeking to eradicate Salafism to instigate a socioreligious-cum-political societal change. Addressing these accusations and counteraccusations is germane to paving the way for answering this thesis’s primary research question, i.e., to assess the feasibility of whether the objectives of Vision 2030’s *wasatīyya* can be supported by the *al-iḥsān* school of the *al-Ḥaramayn*’s *wasatīyya*. These Salafi claims against Sufism will be elaborated on in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER THREE

The Salafi Arguments Against *Taṣawwuf*

This chapter examines the Salafi critiques of Sufism in Saudi Arabia, providing context for understanding the evolution of a government-influenced shift in Salafi attitudes. This shift requires a reclassification of Sunni Sufism, which will be addressed in Chapter Four. Collectively, these chapters establish the groundwork for analysing the responses of Sufis of the school of *iḥsān* of *al-Ḥaramayn*, represented by Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq, to Salafi refutations in Chapter Five, thereby elucidating the current state of Sufism in contemporary Saudi Arabia.

Chapter Two established the four primary Salafi refutations against *Taṣawwuf*. These four arguments have either a theological dimension or a socioreligious-cum-political one. Under the theological dimension, the Salafis see the Sufis as having *inhirāf ‘aqadī* (credal deviation), *inhirāf sulūkī* (behavioural deviation), and a *takfīrī* (blasphemous) philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being). This is raised in contemporary Salafi arguments against *taṣawwuf* as the basis for what Salafis see as Sufism’s call for the unity of religions.

Under the socioreligious-cum-political dimension, the fourth Salafi refutation of *taṣawwuf* surfaced on the Saudi media scene after a lengthy period of a somewhat subdued Sufi existence under the watchful eyes of the Salafi establishment. It represents fresh attention paid to Sufism due to a significant socio-religious-cum-political eruption of the *Ṣaḥwa* (Islamic awakening) phenomenon (see Chapter One).

However, the question can be posed as to when exactly and what caused Sufism, a traditionally repressed religious community, to lock horns with Salafism in polemical arguments. What caused the Salafis to fear a Sufi rise as a formidable active school of thought to be reckoned with in the Saudi public domain? Those are multifaceted questions that this chapter and the next seek to answer within the folds of various phases that constitute the third stage of the state of *taṣawwuf* in contemporary Saudi Arabia (see Chapter One). This chapter and Chapter Four analyse the state of *taṣawwuf* in modern Saudi Arabia throughout the various phases that have unfolded from 1979 through the present day.

This thesis argues that in modern Saudi Arabia, the Salafī encounters with Sufism took place during the following phases: a) a period that directly responded to the emergence of the “al-Mālkī phenomenon”; b) a period marked by the production of stepped-up academic literature that refuted Sufism; and c) a period marked by glimpses of budding partial recognition of *taṣawwuf* among Salafis and in the public domain. These phases will be analysed considering the two aforementioned dimensions of the theological and the socioreligious-cum-political.

I. Phase One: Direct Salafī Reaction to the al-Mālkī Phenomenon (1979–2003)

It was during the tenure of Shaykh Ibn Bāz (1910–1999) as chairman of *Hay'at Kibār al-'Ulama'* (Council of Senior Scholars), the highest official body of Saudi Salafī scholars, that Saudi Salafism locked horns with the Sufis of al-Ḥijāz. This was a time during which Sufism was beginning to be openly challenged through confrontations between Salafī scholars and the outspoken Ḥijāzī Sufi Sayyid Muḥammad 'Alawī al-Mālkī, referred to here as S.M. 'A al-Mālkī or just al-Mālkī for short. This confrontation gave rise to a vehement Salafī–Sufi literary battle into the public sphere in what this thesis, inspired by al-Baddāḥ, dubs the “al-Mālkī phenomenon”.²⁰³

Al-Baddāḥ describes S. M. 'A. al-Mālkī (1944–2004) as the foremost “*Da'iya* (preacher) of Sufism in this day and age” for his role in affirming, reviving and spreading Sufism not only in the Arabian Gulf but also in the wider Islamic world.²⁰⁴ Al-Mālkī's popularity in the 1980s came about as a result of his investigation and interrogation for eight arduous years by the Council of Senior Scholars, which resulted in the issuing of their declaration numbered 86, dated AH 11/11/1400 (1980) that stated their views on and decisions about al-Mālkī. The Council reviewed al-Mālkī's case, referring to his escalating activities in spreading heresies and *khurāfāt* (myths) and to his preaching *wathaniyya wa ḍalāl* (heathenism and aberrancy).

Al-Mālkī, at that time, was teaching in his ordinary circle at the Grand Mosque of Mecca and broadcasting a religious hortatory programme on Saudi national radio which was broadcast

²⁰³ al-Baddāḥ, *Sufi Movement in the Arabian ...*, p. 170

²⁰⁴ Bin Minī', *Dialogue with al-Mālkī...*; Al-Baddāḥ argues that al-Mālkī marked a new era of Sufism in the Arabian Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman).

every Friday from Jeddah. This was an indication of unofficial government recognition of Hijāzi Sufis. It was also an attempt to lessen the impact of the austere fundamentalist preaching customary of traditional Salafī preachers, especially in the aftermath of the ill-famed attacks of hard-line Salafī Juhaymān al-‘Uṭaybī on the Grand Mosque in 1979 (see Chapter One). The positive and soothing approach of the soft-spoken Hijāzi gained popularity, much to the unease of the ultraconservative Salafis.

Consequently, the semi-independent officially appointed Salafī body of Senior Scholars tasked with overseeing the morality of Saudi society and shielding it from any credal deviance were suspicious of al-Mālkī’s intentions. He was watched closely until they triggered their *raison d’être* to halt his growing popularity and activities. In their AH 1400 (1980) meeting, the scholars deliberated on his case and accused him of wrongdoings on two accounts. The first count was based on a letter the Council of Senior Scholars had received from a “concerned Muslim”.²⁰⁵ The letter informed the ‘*ulama* about al-Mālkī’s suspicious activities in Egypt, e.g., publishing Sufi books, especially a book titled *Al-Dhakha’ir al-Muḥammadiyya* (Muḥammadan Treasures), which contained Sufi teachings and *awrād* (pl. of *wird*, meaning supplications).

The anonymous Egyptian letter accused al-Mālkī of being affiliated with a newly formed, extremely deviant Sufi order named *Al-‘Uṣba al-Hashimiyya wa al-Sadana al-‘Alawiyya wa al-Sāsa al-Ḥasaniyya al-Ḥusayniyya* (The Hashimite Bondage and the ‘Alawite Custodians [of Ka‘ba], and the Ḥasanite and Ḥusaynite leaders) The order was led by a man calling himself al-Imam al-‘Arabī. This order’s emblem bears the Imam ‘Ali and the Prophet’s daughter and grandchildren: Fatima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. Given strong ties to the Prophet’s household, this highly significant religious statement has powerful religio-political connotations that likely raised the Salafī *ulama*’s suspicion.

The Egyptian Sufi order statement was understood to promote Sufism and its “polytheistic creed”, a claim concealed in the emblem’s outward declaration of devotion to the Prophet’s household with a Shī‘a leaning to Ḥusayn and a Sunni sympathy of Ḥasan, a reference connoting a *taqrīb* (closeness and reconciliation) between the Sunni and the Shī‘a sects through Sufism. It is also described in the Senior Scholars’ declaration as a new *Bāṭinī* (esoteric)

²⁰⁵ Ibid.; Al-Baddāḥ, *The Sufi Movement in...*, p. 170.

movement of the Isma‘ilī sect that reveres the Agha Khan, whose tomb is located not far from their headquarters.

In the political sphere, a reference to Ḥasan and Ḥusayn as custodians of the Ka‘ba is indicative of a politically charged hidden agenda, especially at a time when Iran’s desire to export its Shī‘a Islamic revolution had become apparent.²⁰⁶ The Salafī scholars reported that this Sufī order was targeting Egypt, the most populous Sunni Arab country. Next in line was Saudi Arabia, the bastion of Sunni Islam and home of the holiest shrines in the Muslim world. The Council summoned Al-Mālīkī for questioning regarding this obscure Egyptian Sufi order. He admitted that he knew of it but denied any affiliation with it or even approved of its beliefs and orientations.²⁰⁷

The second count that the Council levelled against al-Mālīkī was a reference to three of his books: *Al-Dhakhā‘r al-Muḥammadiyya*, *Al-Ṣalawāt al-Ma‘thūra (Inherited Prayers)*, and *Ad‘iya wa Ṣalawāt (Invocations and Prayers)*. These books were taken as indisputable evidence of his Sufi “deviancies”. But, according to the Council, al-Mālīkī denied authorship of one of the three books, *Ad‘iya wa Ṣalawāt*. The Committee referred to the heresies in *Al-Dhakhā‘r al-Muḥammadiyya*, and al-Mālīkī confessed to committing some errors that had escaped his attention.²⁰⁸

The Committee then demanded that he cite all of the “mistakes” in these books in a confessional testimony. He needed to admit his wrongdoing, declare his repentance and pledge to refrain from future errors. He was also required to ensure that this recantation was published in local newspapers, and he was to read it himself on the radio. His case would be referred to the royal court if he did not agree to these measures. This warning was officially sent to him in a decree no 788/2 dated AH 12/11/1400 (1980).

A letter from his Excellency, the General President of the Two Holy Mosques Affairs numbered 2053/19 dated AH 26/12/1400 (1980) mentioned two meetings to which al-Mālīkī was

²⁰⁶ Mabon, *Saudi Arabia and Iran...*

²⁰⁷ Al-Baddāh, *The Sufi Movement in...*

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

summoned. At the meetings, the Committee presented their declaration letter for him to confirm his agreement, but he adamantly refused to acknowledge it, let alone sign it despite, incessant attempts to convince him to do so. He stood firm in refusing to recant in writing.

A year later, in its 16th session, the Council held a meeting in Riyadh to review the latest developments and “recommended bringing the case to the knowledge of the Royal Court stating what steps should be taken to prevent this harm from afflicting the Muslim community”.²⁰⁹ A letter to the royal court containing a list of polytheistic issues propagated by al-Mālkī, a case report numbered 1280/2 and dated AH 28/7/1401 (1981). To further assert their claims and expedite matters, the Council met again two months later during its 18th session to discuss al-Mālkī’s ever-increasing activities, which spoke to his persistence and determination to spread “aberrant heresies”.

The Council saw that al-Mālkī must be stopped because what he was preaching touched on the Islamic creed. They claimed their differences with him were not over small matters or side issues. They were concerned that his activities would bring back to this country *al-wathaniyya* (heathenism), graves and Prophet worship, and revive rituals dedicated to other than Allah. They emphatically affirmed that the *da‘wa iṣlāḥiyya* (Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s reform movement) during the present third Saudi state encourages the spread of the Sunna and the eradication of heresies as well as the possible containment of Sufism. They warned that al-Mālkī aimed to negate this effort by announcing and disseminating his Sufi heresies.²¹⁰

In describing al-Mālkī, al-Baddāḥ states that the Senior Council of ‘Ulama report provides a host of facts about his “alleged” pernicious personality.²¹¹ He iterated that no other Sufi personality had the temerity to do so except for al-Mālkī as exemplified by the activities listed in the Council’s aforementioned declaration and many others. The Council’s report mentioned several books authored by al-Mālkī. Of these, the most dangerous were *Mafāhīm Yajib an Tuṣaḥḥaḥ*, *Al-Dhakhā’r al-Muḥammadiya*, and *Shafā’ al-Fu’ād fī Ziyarat Khayr al-‘Ibād*.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, p175.

²¹⁰ Ibid, p182.

²¹¹ Ibid, p179.

The council understood the contents of the books as legitimising a search for invocations and *istighātha* (pleading for help) from some being other than Allah and casting Allah's attribute of *rubūbiyya* (lordship) on Prophet Muḥammad. His books thus advocate for *al-shirk al-akbar* (the greater polytheism). Al-Mālkī was accused of setting out Sufi preaching campaigns through his *majālis bid'īyya* (heretical gathering salons), his Meccan school and the schools he endeavoured to establish abroad. In response to his activities and writings, several Salafi scholars attacked al-Mālkī in a series of publications discussed later in this chapter.

Al-Baddāḥ provides a list of some important Saudi personalities, such as writers and government officials who eulogised al-Mālkī in an exaggerated fashion in obituaries following his death in 2004.²¹² They praised his positive impact on the religious scene in al-Ḥijāz. All of these individuals were from the al-Ḥijāz region; collectively, they demonstrated how Sufism was part of regional identity (see Chapter One). As al-Baddāḥ notes, al-Mālkī also had amicable relationships with some Islamic leaders, such as the president and crown prince of the United Arab Emirates, the Indonesian president, and the president of Brunei, among others.²¹³

The recommendation from the highest religious establishment, which encouraged the government to take strong action against al-Mālkī went beyond an explicit concern for creed. It carried within its folds implicit political and socio-religious concerns that revealed through analysis of the overall role Sufism could play in influencing the future of Saudi society's socio-religious life.

Attacking Sufism by Salafis was assuming a traditional theological position. However, there was one exception when al-Baddāḥ's PhD thesis at the Islamic University of Medina, as a result of the changing socio-political climate of the country, addressed the socio-political impact of Sufism. The next phase of the Salafi reaction to Sufism addresses the views of non-Salafi intellectuals on Sufism; the liberals were not as engaged in the public domain as the Salafis.

²¹² His death occurred on a Friday that corresponded to the 15th of Ramadhan (H 1425), a date to which some Sufis attach significant religious meaning. It is ironic that the night before his death Saudi national television had broadcast in a popular satirical comedy show called *Tāsh Mā Tāsh* an episode titled *Wa Tā'alīmāh* (Oh, My Education) focused on religious tolerance in the educational system (a public sign of recognition of Sufi and other sects in response to societal suffering from the religious intolerance of the *Ṣaḥwa* era). S. M 'A al-M-ālkī was informed about this episode and smiled in amusement. The cause of his death was diabetes. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIXFk9CZe9w> (Accessed on 5 March 2021).

²¹³ Ibid, p 185.

The final phase, however, shows signs of interest in the topic of *taṣawwuf* among the Saudi intelligentsia.

This first phase is thus marked by open hostility towards al-Mālkī. It is analysed from a purely theological dimension, which includes arguments about deviance in creed and behaviour. As far as the socio-religious dimension is concerned, the dominance of the religious establishment over the socio-religious aspects of Saudi society was not threatened by *taṣawwuf* at this stage. Suspicion within the government and the religious establishment regarding the socio-religious impacts and political ramifications of *taṣawwuf*'s revival were in their infancy. *Taṣawwuf* was viewed as a subdued, deviant *ṭā'ifa* (sect) of Islam. Its revival by S.M. 'A. al-Mālkī, amid the budding yet robust socio-religious-cum-political phenomenon of *al-Ṣaḥwa* in the early 1980s, demanded immediate action to put an end to al-Mālkī's activities, especially as his books began to seep into the literary market.

This phase covers the period from the confrontation between the Council of Senior 'Ulama and al-Mālkī in the early 1980s up to roughly 2000. The confrontation was based on the Salafi conviction that *taṣawwuf* incorporates some polytheistic aspects within its more fundamentally heterodoxic beliefs, making it deviate from correct Islamic orthopraxy. Salafi's rebukes of the Sufi heretical creed and their deviant behavioural practices were covered in various Salafi publications during the period discussed later in the chapter. But it must be pointed out that *shirk* (polytheism) is the pivotal credal issue around which all other Salafi-Sufi arguments are centred.

Regarding the *sulūk* (behaviour) argument, there is a discrepancy in the interpretation of the meaning of *sulūk* across Salafis and Sufis. In their literature, the Sufis associate *sulūk* with *akhlāq* (behaviour associated with morality and ethics or personal conduct). In contrast, the Salafis associate Sufi *sulūk* with their bizarre *karāmāt* (miracles), the purported existence of a hierarchy of *awliyā'* (Sufi saints), reliance on esoteric knowledge, invocations in *tawassul* and *istighātha* at gravesites, exaggerated *tawākul* (total surrendering to Allah's plan without exerting any efforts to improve one's lot), the Sufi *murīd* (disciple) servitude to his mentor Shaykh, and the celebration of the Prophet's birthday (see Chapter Two). According to the Salafis, these Sufi creeds and behaviour have no basis in either the Qur'an or the Sunna. But

the Salafi literature of this period did more than refute *taṣawwuf*. Instead, it went so far as to defame al-Mālkī personally.

1.1 Literature on Salafi Refutations: Criticism and Critique of al-Mālkī

Al-Mālkī's three books titled *Al-Dhakhā'ir al-Muḥammadiyya* (The Muḥammadan Treasures), followed by *Shafā' al-Fu'ād* (Cure of the Heart) and *Mafāhīm Yajib an Tuṣaḥḥaḥ* (Concepts that must be Corrected) earned the most criticism from the Salafi establishment. For this reason, this thesis designates the three books as the key drivers of the revival of *taṣawwuf* in the Saudi public sphere. The books were printed in Egypt and distributed in Saudi Arabia, sparking a series of heated literary debates back and forth between Salafis and Sufis. The incessant Salafi defence of "true Islam" in defiance of al-Mālkī and his advocates was meant to warn mainstream Muslim readers against *taṣawwuf*'s deviant ways. This literature will be reviewed to highlight the arguments that are most characteristic of the Salafi critique of Sufism during this first phase.

Two key Salafi books were published in the early years of the heated Salafi interrogations of al-Mālkī expressing the spirit of this period of al-Mālkī's rebuke. They are Ibn Minī' 's *Hīwār ma' al-Mālkī* and Āl-Ashaykh's *Hadhihi Mafāhīmuna*, published in 1983 and 1986, respectively.²¹⁴ They initiated a Salafi literary campaign consisting of several books and other media in defence of Salafism and personal critiques of al-Mālkī and his advocates.²¹⁵ Of these

²¹⁴ The two primary Salafi publications that rebuke al-Mālkī are 1) Āl Ashaykh's *Hadhihi Mafāhīmuna* in refutation of al-Mālkī's book *Mafāhīm Yajib an Tuṣaḥḥaḥ* (AH 1406) and 2) Bin Minī', *A Dialogue with al-Mālkī...*

²¹⁵ The following publications were initiated as a result of the primary Salafi publications refuting al-Mālkī's Sufism:

- Abd al-Karīm Bin Ṣāliḥ al-Ḥumayd, *Tahdhīr al-'Ibād min Shaqā' al-Fu'ād* (Warning the Muslims from the Misery of the Heart), <https://ebook.univeyes.com/137037/pdf-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B0%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%B4%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%A4%D8%A7%D8%AF>, (Accessed on 16 February 2021).
- Al-Humayd degradingly refers to al-Mālkī's *Cure of the Heart* (referenced in Chapter Five) as the *Misery of the Heart*.
- Abi Bakr J. al-Jazā'irī, *Kamāl al-Ummah fī Ṣalāḥ 'Aqidatiha: Sharḥ Ayāt "wa la tuḥsidū fī al-arḍ ba'd iṣlāḥiha"* (The Perfection of a Nation is in the Righteousness of its Creed: Explaining the Verse "(56) And cause not corruption upon the earth after its reformation. And invoke Him in fear and aspiration. Indeed, the mercy of Allah is near to the doers of good.", Sura Al-A'raaf: Verse 56, <https://ar.islamway.net/book/5381/%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A->

two primary books Āl-Ashaykh's *Hadhihi Maḥāhīmuna* stands out as a comprehensive representation of the principle Salafi arguments against al-Mālkī and his Sufi discourse.

From these two sources, this thesis identifies seven principles of polytheism behind the Salafi refutations: five are taken from Āl-Ashaykh's *Hadhihi Maḥāhīmuna*, and two are added from al-Minī's *Hīwār*. It is worth noticing that Āl-Ashaykh's five principal arguments are not attributed to importance or hierarchy in a sequential order. For example, Āl-Ashaykh's list starts with *wasīla* followed by *shirk* and so on; this thesis has already identified the principle of *shirk* as the primary argument of the Salafi rebuke, as supported by six foundational sub-principles that justified painting all Sufi practices as components of polytheism, as explained later in this chapter.

[%D8%B5%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD-%D8%B9%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7](#), (Accessed on 16 February 2021) (published 1403).

- Abi Bakr J. al-Jaza'irī, *Wa Ja'ū Yarkuḍūn !!! Mahlan Yā Du'āt al-Ḍalāla !!!* (They Came Running!!! Slow Down O You, the Promoters of Aberrance), <https://www.alarabimag.com/books/32684-%D9%88%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A1%D9%88%D8%A7-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%B6%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%87%D9%84%D8%A7-%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%AF%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A9.html>, (Accessed on 16 February 2021) (published 1413).
- Safar al-Hawālī, *Al-Radd 'ala al-Khurāfiyyīn*, (Refuting the Myth Advocates), <https://ebook.univeyes.com/137115/pdf-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86>, (Accessed on 16 February 2021).
- Safar al-Hawālī, *Mujddid Millat 'Amr Bin Luḥayy* (The Revival of 'Amr Bin Luḥayy Creed), <https://ebook.univeyes.com/164923/pdf-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%AF%D8%AF-%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%88-%D8%A8%D9%86-%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%83-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%87%D8%B0-2>, (Accessed on 16 February 2021) (Published 1412).
- Samīr Bin Khalīl al-Mālkī, *Jalā' al-Baṣā'ir fī al-Radd 'ala Kitabayī Shafa' al-Fu'ād wa al-Dhakā'ir* (Clearing the Vision in Refuting the Two Books Titled Cure of the Heart and the Treasures), <https://www.quranicthought.com/ar/books/%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%B4%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81/>, (Accessed on 16 February 2021) (published in 1417).
- Samīr Bin Khalīl al-Mālkī, *Kashf Shubuhāt al-Mukhālīfīn*, (Uncovering the Obscurities of the Opposers), <https://ebook.univeyes.com/52174/pdf-%D9%83%D8%B4%D9%81-%D8%B4%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D9%86-%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%83%D9%8A>, (Accessed on 16 February 2021).

At this phase of the Salafī arguments, during which al-Mālkī's books were under Salafī scrutiny, the Salafī literature does not simply critique al-Mālkī's Sufi teachings. Instead, it criticizes him personally. Their refutation exceeded the credal and behavioural realm to arrive at personal criticism – a reflection of the severity of the deep-rooted abhorrence between these two Sunni schools of thought.

The Salafī refutation of al-Mālkī took two approaches, each of which had the unrelenting aim of destroying his “heretical” discourse. One of the approaches was to destroy his credibility as a genuine Muslim scholar. First, they stripped him of any respected religious or scholarly titles. For example, he was addressed simply by his first name Muḥammad, without the expected title of Doctor, given his academic credentials, or Shaykh in recognition of his religious status. Second, they cast doubt on the genuineness of his Ḥasanī genealogical ancestry that traces his bloodline to the Prophet Muḥammad, which, as customary, qualifies him to be called a *Sayyid* belonging to *al-Sāda al-Ashrāf* clan of al-Ḥijāz.

Indeed, Al-Ḥawālī and al-Minī²¹⁶ were vehement in discrediting his genealogy. Their claim was based on the fact that there is another family in Mecca named al-Mālkī of a Moroccan origin who claimed to be related to him and did not claim to be of *al-Sāda al-Ashrāf* ancestry, and to whom, it was presumed, that Muḥammad al-Mālkī was related.²¹⁶ To add further insult, Samīr al-Mālkī, a member of his clan and a staunch adversary within the Salafī community, made no effort to rectify the defamation. In truth, Samīr al-Mālkī was an ardent Salafī who authored two books critical of M. S. ‘A al-Mālkī. However, in her biography of S. M. ‘A al-Mālkī, al-‘Ubaydī traces his lineage back to the bloodline of the Prophet.²¹⁷

Al-Minī²¹⁸ accused al-Mālkī of self-importance and *ghaṭṭrasa* (arrogance) in that he indulgently entreated his misled followers to kneel in front of him and *yalaḥṣūn* (to lick) his hands.²¹⁸ Al-Ḥawālī wrote a long article against al-Mālkī titled *Mujaddid Millat ‘Amru Bin Luḥayy wa Dā‘iyat al-Shirk fī hadha al-Zamān* (The Revivalist of the Religion of ‘Amru Bin Luḥayy and

²¹⁶ Al-Ḥawālī, *Refuting the Myth Advocates...*, pp. 4-5.

²¹⁷ Al-‘Ubaydī, *The Ḥijāz Religious Scholar ...*, p. 37

²¹⁸ Bin Minī²¹⁸, *A Dialogue with al-Mālkī...*, p. 4

the Propagator of Polytheism in this Day and Age). This title describes al-Mālkī as reviving the pre-Islamic creed of ‘Amru Bin Luḥayy, the first Meccan to adulterate the early monotheistic Abrahamic creed of the Arabs by introducing idols to the Ka‘ba, and hence polytheism.²¹⁹

The attempt to discredit al-Mālkī also extended to his Sufi defenders. Al-Jazā’irī’s book refuting al-Mālkī touches on his advocates who came to the fore of heated debates to counterargue in his defence. In his book *Wa Jāu Yarkuḍūn!!! Mahlan ya Duāt al-Ḍalāl* (They Came Running!!! Slow Down, O You, the Promoters of Aberrancy), he listed them: Kuwaiti Yūsif al-Sayyid Hāshim al-Rifā‘ī, Bahraini Rāshid Bin Ibrāhīm al-Muraykhī, and Moroccans ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-‘Amru, and ‘Abd al-Karīm Murād. These Sufi Shaykhs and scholars are recognised and respected in their countries. The first, al-Rifā‘ī, has held several posts in the Kuwaiti government, including Minister of Communication in 1964. But in his book, al-Jazā’irī strips them from any religious titles – an unusual act in Arabic literature, where it is customary to use religious titles for important individuals. Even the title of his book spells out his hostility towards them.

This brief description of the Salafī denigration of Sufi Shaykhs should suffice to paint a picture of the hostile atmosphere engulfing the Salafī–Sufi relationship.

1.2 Salafī Theological Arguments

During this first phase of Salafī–Sufi rebuke, the Salafī Shaykhs’ criticism concentrated on their customary theological realm. The traditional Salafī discourse of this period lumps the Sufis among other deviant sects, part and parcel of the seventy-two *firaq ḍālā* (aberrant sects) destined to hellfire (see Chapter Two). As already discussed, the principle of shirk or polytheism is the primary Salafī argument from which all other arguments have sprung as by-products or sub-principles. The Qur’an indicates that early societies were monotheists at the time of the first Prophet Adam. However, as time passed, the early societies kept their ties to Allah through pious figures who gradually became revered as embodiments of Allah.

Polytheism began to seep into the purely monotheistic religion of these societies as they began to deify some of the pious men and women. Over time, they were worshipped as idols who

²¹⁹ Al-Ḥawālī, *Refuting the Myth Advocates...*

were believed to have been granted some of Allah's special attributes, e.g., the peculiarity of interceding with Him on behalf of the worshippers to fulfil their wishes or expiate unfulfilled vows by offering to them animal sacrifices. That is when Allah decided to send the Prophet Noah, who was tasked with rectifying society, back into monotheism.²²⁰ Beginning with the Prophet Noah, humanity began to experience five extended cyclical intervals of a call back to monotheism as followers gradually lapsed into polytheism for the same reasons as the first monotheists, i.e., sharing partners with Allah in worship.

A Prophet Messenger (Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad) headed the rectification of each historical interval. The last of these Messengers was Prophet Muḥammad, whose nation is still going through its cyclical experience of polytheism. But as no Messenger is expected after Prophet Muḥammad, his nation must self-correct its derailment into polytheism following a celebrated *ḥadīth*. This *ḥadīth* states that every one hundred years there will come a *mujaddid* (renewer; regenerator) who will correct the understanding of Islam.²²¹ That is the reason behind calling Shaykh Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb a *mujaddid*. The Salafis, therefore, claim the responsibility of preserving Islam on the right path of its righteous predecessors.²²²

The Salafis argue that the *Baṭiniyya* (esoteric), the Ismailis, and the Shī'a are the first Islamic sects to drift towards polytheism and its inevitable outcome of *kufr* (disbelief). Likewise, the Salafis argue that *taṣawwuf* has also fallen victim to polytheism and disbelief through several unorthodox polytheistic practices, such as *tawassul*, *shafā'a*, *istighātha*, *tabarruk*, celebration of the birth of the Prophet, and exaggeration of the Prophet's attributes. However, the *istighātha*, *tawassul* and *shafā'a* are permissible if only regulated by the *shari'a*.

²²⁰ There are five *ulūl'azm* (Archprophets; Prophets of strong will): Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad. See Sura Al-Aḥqāf, verse 35.

²²¹ The *ḥadīth* "At the beginning of every century Allah will send to this umma someone who will renew its religious understanding", <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/153535/the-hadith-at-the-beginning-of-every-century-allah-will-send-to-this-ummah-someone-who-will-renew-its-religious-understanding>, (Accessed 13 January 2021).

²²² The subject and qualification of the hundred-year interval regenerators are debatable among Muslims qualified for the description.

1.2.1 Polytheism: The Principal Refutation of *Taṣawwuf*

Polytheism occurs in three types: *shirk akbar* (greater polytheism), *shirk aṣghar* (lesser polytheism) and *shirk khaṭī* (concealed polytheism). This thesis is concerned with the genre *shirk* as the major Salafi–Sufi issue, where Salafism accuses *taṣawwuf* of falling victim to the three types of polytheism. The literal meaning of *shirk* in Arabic is “sharing”. In a religious context, it is defined as a transgression against the unique rights of Allah by setting up a partner or partners with Him in worship. The Salafis accuse the Sufis of taking the Prophet and *awliyā*’, who they claim to share some of Allah’s attributes, as partners of Allah. This is a practice that will necessarily lead to *kufṛ* (disbelief).

Linguistically, *Kuṭṭ* connotes covering something up or denying a fact or a belief. Islamically, it signifies absolute disbelief in the credal tenets of Islam, thus leading to more incredible disbelief that expels one from Islam. Alternatively, it can also signify a partial denial of some of the principles of Islam falling under *masā’il khilāfiyya* (debatable jurisprudential issues), which fluctuate between the credal and the jurisprudential in scholars’ opinions, thus leading to a situation of merely lesser disbelief. The lesser disbelief renders the believer sinful but still inside Islam, albeit vulnerable to “greater” or more incredible disbelief.

The third type of *kufṛ* is concealed disbelief, which will be alluded to in this chapter. *Kuṭṭ* is mentioned in the Qur’an and *ḥadīth* in both of its connotations, the linguistic and the Islamic. This makes it essential to distinguish between the two lest we mix them up and confuse their meaning unintentionally or purposely, as in the case of some Muslims who do so to justify the *takfīr* (accusation of apostasy) of rival or opposing groups.²²³

Belief and rituals should be dedicated to Allah following the Prophet’s *ḥadīth* “*Taraktukum ‘ala al-mahjja al-bayḍā’* (I left you on the clear path)”. In this, the word *al-mahjja al-bayḍā’* connotes the testimony of faith that there is no God but Allah. It thus emphasises a singular Allah and rejects any potential rivals to Him.²²⁴ In explaining this *ḥadīth*, the prominent Salafi

²²³ Source for the different meaning of *kufṛ*. See the Ash‘arite accusation of Saudi Salafis and refusal to invite them to the Grozny Conference in Chapter Two.

²²⁴ Āl-Ashaykh, *These are Our Understandings...*

Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān states that “Allah’s *ṣirāt* (path) is one and only one. It is distinct from numerous other aberrant paths, where each is headed by a *shayṭān* (Satan)”.²²⁵

As mentioned in the Sura al-Fatiḥa and as interpreted by most Salafī scholars, al-Fawzān states that among those who are misled onto the wrong paths of Satan are Jews and Christians. Jews are described as *al-maghḍūb ‘alayhim* (those who have incurred Allah’s wrath), while Christians are described as *al-ḍāllīn* (those who have gone astray). Among those who have gone astray, al-Fawzān includes Islamic groups, such as the *mutaṣawwifa* (aspirants to the state of Sufī) and the *mubtadi‘a* (innovators; heretics).²²⁶ Worshipping should be wholly and purely dedicated to Allah alone without mediators.

Conveying *‘ibādāt khālīṣa* (pure rituals) is performed in two complementary forms: *ibādā ṣāhira* (visible rituals) performed with the *jawāriḥ* (bodily-enacted rituals) and intentional rituals performed as *a‘māl al-qulūb* (works of the hearts). The Salafis claim that the Sufis association of their *awliyā’* to worship of Allah is akin to the *munāfiqīn* (hypocrites) whose bodily worship does not reflect their intention of the heart’s *ikhhlāṣ* (sincerity) to Allah. The Sufi actions of associating others with Allah in invocations are likened to those of hypocrites, who perform *al-shirk al-khaḥfī* (concealed polytheism) and are condemned to *al-darak al-asfal* (the lowest depth) of the hellfire. They are worse than those who declare their disbelief openly.

The oneness of worship is associated with sincerity: one does not exist without the other. This goes to show that the discourse of the *murji‘a* and *matūrīdiyya* (two Islamic “deviant groups” and consequently the Sufis are false).²²⁷ The prime condition for a Muslim to be in good standing with Islam is sincerity in heart-felt intentions without involving any other entity, such as *awliyā’*, as partners in Allah’s worship. A plethora of Qur’anic verses (e.g., 39:1–4) continuously remind Muslims not to worship others aside from Allah. Any action visibly dedicated to Allah is unacceptable if performed without sincere belief in the oneness of Allah

²²⁵ For an explanation of *ḥadīth* “I left you on the clear path”, see Ṣāliḥ Al-Fawzān, <https://alfawzan.af.org.sa/ar/node/15554>, (Accessed 02 January 2021)

²²⁶ Ibid. ; For an exegesis, See Muhammad Al-Amin Ash-Shanqiti, “Tafsīr of Chapter 001: Sura al-Fatiḥah (The Opening)”, <https://sunnahonline.com/library/the-majestic-quran/431-tasfir-of-chapter-1-surah-al-fatihah-the-opening> (Accessed 02 January 2021).

²²⁷ Āl-Ashaykh, *These are Our Understandings...*, p. 176

the *ma'būd* (worshipped) as per the *ḥadīth qudsī*, in which Allah declared that He would abandon those who take other gods alongside Him in worship.²²⁸

The most abhorred Sufi visible ritual involving their *awliyā'* in worshipping Allah is *ziyarat al-adriḥa* (tomb visits). The Sufis are known in the Salafī lexicon as the *'ubbād al-qubūr* (grave worshippers). The Salafis purport that, just as in ancient times, modern-day polytheists such as the Shī'a and Sufis follow blindly in the footsteps of their ancient Arab polytheistic predecessors.²²⁹

Prayers at gravesites can be performed in three modes: praying *for*, *via* or praying *to* the dead. Prayers for the dead are compliant with *sharī'a* law and acceptable. Still, prayers via (through) the dead, especially through *sujūd* (prostration), make the worshipper a polytheist in *uluhiyya* (Allah's worship) as well as in *mahabba* (love) of Allah. Prayers to the dead due to a belief that the *walyī*, (sing. of *awliyā'*) has the power to enact some of Allah's attributes makes the worshipper a polytheist in *rububiyya* (the lordship of Allah).²³⁰

In the Salafī lexicon, the term “grave worshippers” has become synonymous with *taṣawwuf*. Most of the abhorred deviations of Sufis, such as *tawassul*, *istighātha* and *shafā'a* are performed at the *awliyā'*'s gravesites and tombs. *Awliyā'* are believed to be responding to the seekers' invocations from their existence in the life of *barzakh* (a state of waiting, a precursor to the day of resurrection). To the Salafis, this behaviour displays Sufi ignorance of the correct Islamic creed and possible causes of apostasy.²³¹ For them, belief in the ability of the dead to respond to the prayers of living human beings negates the Qur'anic verse (39: 30) in which Allah said to the Prophet: “You will be dead and they will be dead.” According to Āl-Ashaykh, these rituals are so misleading they render the grave worshippers as disbelievers.²³²

²²⁸ Ibid, p 175.

²²⁹ Ibid, p194-195.

²³⁰ Ibid, p184-185.

²³¹ According to the Salafi teachings, whoever exists in the *barzakh* cannot be invoked by earthly people. On the contrary, whoever exists in the *barzakh* can benefit from earth-bound supplications.

²³² Āl-Ashaykh, *These are Our Understandings...*, p. 182

Ibn Taymiyya in *Al-Risāla al-Saniyya* condemned those who take *shafā'a* at gravesites as disbelievers. He classifies this behaviour as a *shirk ḍalāl* (aberrancy). Whoever performs it should be asked to repent, but if he or she refuses to repent they are liable to be declared an apostate and deserve to be punished by death.²³³ Imam al-Shawkānī designated anyone who makes vows or offers animal sacrifices at graves a disbeliever. He warns that Satan appears at gravesites disguised as an entity congruent with the worshipper's belief, i.e., as Prophet Muḥammad or a well-known *walyī* for a Muslim, as Jesus Christ for a Christian and so on.²³⁴ Āl-Ashaykh reminds the Sufis that one of the major aims of the Imam Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's movement, since its inception in the eighteenth century until now, is to cleanse the Arabian Peninsula of grave worship.²³⁵

The Salafis argue that the deviant Sufis justify their heresies in three ways: through a metaphorical *ta'wīl* (interpretation) to Qur'anic words and verses, through weak or false *Ḥadīth*, and through capricious dreams and allegories (see Chapter Two).²³⁶ Owing to these deviations, Āl-Ashaykh accused the Sufis of falling victim to the ultimate cause that might disbar them from Islam: polytheism.²³⁷

1.2.1.1. The Six Sub-Principles of Polytheism

Polytheism is the primary principle of the Salafī refutations of *taṣawwuf*. This is detailed in Āl-Ashaykh's *Hadhihi Maḥāhīmūna*, as well as in Ibn Minī's *Ḥiwār Ma' al-Mālkī*.²³⁸ Under the rubric of *shirk*, six Sufi practices are listed as sub-principles:

- 1) *Istighātha* (pleading for help when in distress)
- 2) *Wasīla* (the means; the conduit to reach something)
- 3) *Shafā'a* (intercession)
- 4) *Tabarruk* (seeking blessings)

²³³ Ibid, p. 189

²³⁴ Ibid, p. 193

²³⁵ Ibid, pp. 187-188

²³⁶ Ibid, pp. 215-221

²³⁷ Ibid

²³⁸ Ibid, Pp. 14-214; Bin Minī, *A Dialogue with al-Mālkī*..., p. 207

- 5) Celebration of the birth of the Prophet
- 6) Exaggerations of the attributes of Prophet Muḥammad

Of the six sub-principles of polytheism, three are closely related: *al-istighātha*, *al-tawassul* and *al-shafā'a*. They are related in meaning because they connote a plea for help and an effort to find the means to attain such help. Appealing in invocations for something only Allah can fulfil through *al-istighātha*, *al-tawassul* and *al-shafā'a* is among the most controversial issues across Islam. This issue underlies the accusations of various sects lobbying against one another.

These three sub-principles are performed to reach fulfilment from Allah and thus belong to Allah's domain. The other three sub-principles that could lead to polytheism belong to the domain of the Prophet Muḥammad. They are *al-tabarruk*, the celebration of the birth of Prophet Muḥammad, and the exaggeration of the Prophet's attributes. Even though these six sub-principles belong to the domains of Allah and the Prophet, the Salafis accuse the Sufis of ascribing some aspects of these principles to their *awliya*.

The Salafi use of polytheism as the principal basis for rebuking Sufism is supported by four points: a credal vis-à-vis jurisprudential approach in interpreting the religious texts, the equating of Sufis with pre-Islamic Arab polytheists, an adaptation of the Ash'arites' metaphorical interpretation of the Qur'an, and Sufi reliance on weak and false *ḥadīth*. In the following paragraphs, only the first three points will be addressed, as the fourth was discussed already in Chapter Two.

1.2.1.2. The Basis for Polytheism Claims About *Taṣawwuf*

The Salafi accusation of Sufi practices embodying polytheism has three bases. First, the Salafis' central conflict with Sufism is essentially credal in nature as the *Atharī* Salafis associate polytheism with the *Ash'arī* creed. Second, an analogy is drawn between the Sufi creed and practices and those of pre-Islamic Arab polytheists. Thirdly, it is claimed that the reliance of *Ash'arī* theology on metaphors in the *ta'wīl* (allegorical interpretation) of the Qur'an misled the Sufis to accept polytheistic beliefs and practices.²³⁹

²³⁹ See The Oxford Dictionary of Islam <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2358>, (Accessed on 19 January 2021).

Creed in the Salafi–Sufi Polemic: The Tripartite Oneness of Allah

The Salafi school of Saudi Arabia indiscriminately projects Sufism as synonymous with polytheism mainly due to its non-conformity to the concept of the tripartite oneness of Allah, which the Salafis firmly believe (see Chapter Two).²⁴⁰

According to the Salafi school, polytheism can only be combated by a sincere belief in monotheism as defined by Salafi theologist Ibn Taymiyya following the teachings of the Prophet’s Sunna and community, the basis for the *Hanbalī Atharī* creed.²⁴¹ The *Atharī* creed concept of a tripartite oneness of Allah consists of *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* (oneness of Allah’s Lordship), which refers to Allah the creator, *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* (oneness of worship), in which prayers and invocations are directed to none other than Allah the Divine. It also includes *tawḥīd al-asmā’ wa al-ṣifāt* (maintaining the unity of Allah’s names and attributes), which holds Allah’s attributes as unique to Him and thus unavailable for designation to any mortal prophet or saint (see Chapter Two).

However, the *Ash‘arī* creed of Sunni Islam does not accept the tripartite concept, thus creating a controversial credal polemic with the *Atharīs*. This impacts the ‘*aqīda* vis-à-vis *sharī‘a* (credal vis-à-vis jurisprudential) approach to interpreting religious rulings and determining verdicts, particularly in the case of apostasy.

It is important to note that accusing the Sufis of greater polytheism, and hence greater disbelief is peculiar to the adherents of the Saudi Salafi school. Other Sunni Muslims (whether they consider themselves Salafis or not) who belong to the four Sunni *madhāhib* of Islam do not share the same attitude towards Sufism as the Saudi Salafis.²⁴² What Saudi Salafis consider a credal deviation that can lead to “greater” disbelief may be viewed by other Sunni schools as simply a reviled practice that could lead to committing a lesser disbelief, i.e., constituting only

²⁴⁰ Ṣāliḥ al-Munajjid, *Masā’il fī Tawḥīd al-Rubūbiyya wa al-Ulūhiyya* (Issues Related to the Oneness of Lordship and Worship) www.islamqa.info, (Accessed on 19 January 2021).

²⁴¹ Classic Salafi books on the subject include Ibn Taymiyya’s *Al-‘Aqīda al-Wāsiṭiyya*, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*.

²⁴² A reference should be made to the Wahhabi-influenced Caucasus Salafis, who are supported by the Wahhabi Salafis of the Gulf states against the Sufis of Dagestan and Chechnya, in Alexander Knysch, *Sufism: A New History of Islamic Mysticism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017).

a *ma'ṣiyya* (sin), which does not expel one from Islam. What the Saudi Salafi school considers an issue of creed, in other words, the others consider an issue of jurisprudence.

The oscillation between the credal and the jurisprudential *sharī'a* law is a rather problematic, lengthy, and debatable subject that I mention when addressing the Sufi response to Salafism in Chapter Five. The four Sunni jurisdictional *madhāhib*, which range between the *Atharī*, *Ash'arī*, and *Matūrīdī* creeds, differ in their criteria for excommunication from Islam (see Chapter Two). The severity of the issue of the “greater disbelief” and the accusation of apostasy prompted Āl-Ashaykh in his *Hadhihi Maḥāhimuna* to designate a chapter titled *Al-Takfīr* (accusations of apostasy) to warn Sufis, as well as the general public that the deviant Sufi rituals could lead to disbelief.

Equating the Sufis with Pre-Islamic Arab polytheists

Of the three components of the tripartite oneness of Allah, the Salafis purport that what the pre-Islamic polytheists, as well as the Salafis and Sufis, unanimously believe in is the first component, i.e., the lordship of Allah, the *Rabb* (lord, creator). However, the most controversial and contentious polemic concerns the second and third components, specifically the oneness of Allah, the *ilāh* (worshipped deity), and the unity of Allah's names and attributes.

The Salafis assert that polytheism occurs when a believer in Allah presumes that He has designated some of His attributes to His prophets and pious *awliyā'*, who are embodied in some idols, as the pre-Islamic Arabs believed, or in the Sufis' pious *awliyā'*, as they believe. The polytheists direct their worship to Allah, the creator, through revered mediators who are presumably authorised by Allah either to act on His behalf or facilitate a connection to Him. The Salafis consider this an *ishrāk* (sharing) in *ulūhiyya* (worship), wherein a Sufi falls victim to polytheism despite full recognition of the one creator.

This Salafi assertion is stated in Āl-Ashaykh's *Hadhihi Maḥāhimuna* to refute al-Mālkī's claim in his *Maḥāhīm Yajib ann Tuṣaḥḥah* that the pre-Islamic Arab polytheists took their idols as fully pledged *arbāb* (lord creators) worthy of being worshipped directly and wholeheartedly. In other words, they bypassed Allah, the worshipped deity. Āl-Ashaykh reasserts that because they do

not consider Allah's names and attributes as part of the oneness of Allah, the Sufis do not distinguish between the oneness of *rubūbiyya* and the oneness of *ulūhiyya*.

In negating the tripartite Salafi *tawhīd*, al-Mālkī introduces the *tawhīd maḥḍ* (pure; not mixed monotheism) that believes in Allah as the sole creator of man and his *af'āl* (actions) and that no one except Allah, the absolute, affects the course of existence. Any belief other than that falls under polytheism. Āl-Ashaykh argues that al-Mālkī's definition does not express the *tawhīd maḥḍ* that the Salafis promote, which combines the three components of the *tawhīd*: *ribūbiyya*, *ulūhiyya*, and *asmā'* and *ṣifāt*. Al-Mālkī's *tawhīd maḥḍ* is precisely what the early Arab polytheists believed, as interpreted under the Salafi understanding of the Qur'ān and *Hadīth*.²⁴³ Both Arab polytheists and Sufis believe in Allah, the Lord creator, and Allah, the divinely worshipped entity, Who delegates His attributes to their idols or pious saints. When it came to worshipping Allah, they transgressed against His unique divinity by setting up their idols as partners (co-deities) with Him. Āl-Ashaykh calls al-Mālkī's discourse *shirk maḥḍ* (pure polytheism).²⁴⁴

The conflict over the nature of early Arab polytheism stems from an exegetical controversy in interpreting the Qur'anic verse (39:03), where the pre-Islamic polytheists state, "We only worship them that they may bring us nearer to Allah in position". Āl-Ashaykh quotes al-Mālkī's statement that "this verse proves that those polytheists did not take what Allah said about them seriously".²⁴⁵ This means they were scornful, saying they only worshipped their idols as a means to draw nearer to Allah, but in reality, they were dedicating their worship totally to the idols as *andād* (rivals) to Allah.

Āl-Ashaykh strongly rejects al-Mālkī's presumption that the polytheists were condemned to hellfire by Allah on the basis of mere superficial scorn. He quotes the Qur'anic verses that articulate how clear and decisive Allah's words are for Him to be possibly scorned. Verse (86:13) states that, the Qur'an is a decisive statement and not amusement.

²⁴³ Āl-Ashaykh, *These are Our Understandings*..., p. 117

²⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 118

²⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 104

Still, the Sufis distinguish themselves from the Arab polytheists by asserting their belief in both aspects of the oneness of Allah, the *Rabb* (Lord) and the *ilāh* (worshipped entity). In contrast, the early Arabs directed their worship solely to idols. However, the Ash‘arite Sufis do not distinguish between these two elements of the oneness of Allah (the creator and the deity). To them, the oneness of lordship and the oneness of worship are exchangeable in meaning an issue related to Allah’s attributes, which undergird the *Atharī-Ash‘arī* credal accusations and counteraccusations of misinterpretation of Allah’s names and attributes. The Salafis assert that the early Arabs recognised Allah as the Lord Creator but shared their idols with Him in worship. They thus draw parallels between the early Arabs and the Sufis in polytheism.

Āl-Ashaykh argues that, by claiming the pre-Islamic Arab polytheists believed in their idols as *arbāb* (Lords; creators) and *āliha* (worshipped deities), al-Mālkī is only attempting to differentiate the Arab polytheists from the Sufis who utilise the Prophet and the *awliyā’* as mediators and intercessors to reach Allah. Furthermore, al-Mālkī dubiously claims that unlike the early Arab polytheists, the Sufis do not ascribe any of Allah’s attributes to their *awliya’*. However, Allah answers their prayers and fulfils their invocations due to their special reverence and favouritism with Him, i.e., these *awliyā’* do not function independently of Him.

Al-Mālkī claims that the fulfilment of invocations is enacted solely by Allah *al-khāliq wa al-ma‘būd* (the creator and the worshipped), i.e., the *tawḥīd maḥḍ*. Āl-Ashaykh contested this issue as a contradiction and *kadhib* (lies) because the Sufis believe that their saints act on behalf of Allah as they ascribe to their *qutb* and *abdāl* the ability to control some aspects of existence (see Chapter Two). Āl-Ashaykh argues that the Sufis justify their dubious deviations by misinterpreting the Qur’anic text.²⁴⁶

Literal vs Figurative Meaning in Language and the *Sharī‘a*

Interpretation of the Qur’an and *ḥadīth* is highly debated and controversial across every Islamic school of thought.²⁴⁷ Debates centre on the two types of exegesis peculiar to the Arabic

²⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 116

²⁴⁷ Aḥmad al-Hāshīm, *Jawāhir al-Balāgha fī al-Ma‘ānī wa al-Bayān wa al-Badī‘* (Jewels of Phrase-making, Speech and Style) <https://www.hindawi.org/books/85925824/2.2/> (Accessed 16 February 2021).

language: literal vs figurative meaning. Among Sunni scholars, three attitudes are relevant to the figurative approach of interpreting Qur'anic words and verses. First, some scholars recognize the everyday use of metaphor in both the Arabic language and the Quranic words and verses; this is the opinion of *jumhūr al-‘ulamā’* (the majority of scholars). Second, other scholars recognize the use of metaphor in Arabic but not in the Qur'an. This is the opinion of al-Shanqīṭī in his *Aḍwā‘ al-Bayān*.²⁴⁸ Third, some scholars do not recognize the use of metaphor in Arabic or the Qur'an. This is the opinion of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim;²⁴⁹ a claim highly contested by many Muslim scholars of the Arabic language.²⁵⁰

For his part, Ibn Taymiyya argues that what was being misunderstood as metaphors is simply the true meaning of words and sentences expressed in ways peculiar to the Arabic language, which is a *ḥaqīqa*-based (inherently real in meaning) language. A language where differing but related (in meaning or root) words could convey various meanings depending on their *siyāq* (context) in the sentence or by adding or subtracting a word from a sentence to indicate a different contextual meaning from the original one. It is argued that Ibn Taymiyya did not reject the concept that different words convey one meaning or that one word could convey different meanings as part of the Arabic language. He simply argued there is no metaphor in the Arabic language.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ Muḥammad al-Shanqīṭī, *Aḍwā‘ al-Bayān fī Idāḥ of al-Qur‘an* (Sparks of Speech in Clarifying the Quran) <https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%A3%D8%B6%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A1%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A2%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A2%D9%86> (Accessed 10 February 2021).

²⁴⁹ Abu ‘Abd al-Mu‘iz, *Limādhā Rafaḍa Ibn Taymiyya al-Majāz* (Why did Ibn Taymiyya Refuse the Metaphor) <https://vb.tafsir.net/forum/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B3%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%88%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%88%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A2%D9%86/3362-%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6-%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%AD%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA> (Accessed 17 January 2021)

²⁵⁰ Al-Hāshīm, *Jewls of Phrase-making...*

²⁵¹ Sāmīḥ ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad, *Aqsām al-Majāz wa Ahkāmuh wa ‘Alāmāt al-Ḥaqīqa wa al-Majāz* (Sections of Metaphor and its Provisions and Signs of Truth and Metaphor), <https://www.alukah.net/sharia/0/75170> (Accessed on 20 January 2021); Moulay Idriss Mimouni, *Qaḍāyā al-Dilāla fī Allūgha al-‘Arabyya bayn al-Uṣūliyyīn wa al-Laghawīyyīn: Al-Ḥaqīqa wa al-Majāz* (Issues of Significance in the Arabic Language Between Fundamentalists and Linguists: The Truth and Metaphor),

As a Salafī of Ibn Taymiyya's school, Āl-Ashaykh argues that rather than relying on open speculation of metaphorical meaning, conveying the intended meaning of a sentence by composing it from a combination of words of real meaning is more precise.²⁵² The metaphorical vis-à-vis the language's real meaning is beyond this thesis's scope.²⁵³ Āl-Ashaykh brought the subject of figurative language to his rebuke of Sufism due to al-Mālkī's justifications for applying *al-majāz al-ʿaqlī* (mental metaphor) to justify the concept of *al-tawḥīd al-maḥḍ*, as well as Sufi practices of *shafāʿa*, *istighātha*, *tawassul* and *tabarruk*.

Āl-Ashaykh argues that al-Mālkī relied on a mental metaphor to wrongly prove that *tawḥīd al-rububiyya* and *tawḥīd al-uluhiyya* are correlated. They are two expressions that convey all of Allah's names and attributes. The Ashʿarites assert that the meaning of Allah the Lord and Allah the worshipped deity is interchangeable in the Qurʾan. Al-Mālkī asserts a believer knows that the Creator is the one who is worshipped, and reaching Him through pious *awliyāʾ* is only metaphorical in nature.

Āl-Ashaykh rebukes al-Mālkī's argument as false. He states that it promotes a misconception that monotheism only requires a believer to believe that Allah is the one Creator – in other words, to believe in *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* or Allah the Lord Creator. According to Āl-Ashaykh, belief in Allah, the one Creator, alone does not make one immune to polytheism. This sort of polytheistic belief has continued with certain Islamic groups and sects, such as the *Jabriyya* and the Sufi adherents of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Āl-Ashaykh reiterates by calling such polytheists *aḥfād al-Yunān* (descendants of Greek philosophers, in reference to Neoplatonism as discussed in Chapter Six) and *ahl al-kalām* (in reference to the deviant Muʿtazilites).²⁵⁴ They must believe in the tripartite oneness of Allah lest they drift into polytheism and apostasy. Āl-Ashaykh warns that such apostasy is justified under the pretext of mental metaphor. He references al-Ḥallāj and

<https://www.diwanaalarab.com/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2> (Accessed on 20 January 2021).

²⁵² Āl-Ashaykh, *These are Our Understandings...*, p128.

²⁵³ Ibid, p194-195.

²⁵⁴ The description, descendants of the Greek philosophers, is a reference to the influence of Neoplatonism on Sufism. It is also interesting to note that under the rubric of *ahl al-Kalām*, besides the Muʿtazilites, other Sunni *madhāhib* such as the *Ḥanafī*, the *Mālikī* and the *Shāfiʿī*, could be included, as major players in Muslim theology.

other *zanādiqa* (heretics) who claim they are Allah incarnate. Their heresies are justified as metaphors for Allah's ability to manifest Himself in his creation (see Chapter Six).²⁵⁵

Āl-Ashaykh criticizes al-Mālkī for relying on mental metaphor to justify practices such as *istighātha*, *tawassul*, *shafā'a*, and *tabarruk*. These are sub-principles of polytheism. Al-Mālkī argues that it is valid to perform these Sufi practices through the Prophet Muḥammad or the *awliyā'* to generate causes (for Allah to respond to) rather than to obtain results (from the *awliyā'* directly), which is the prerogative of Allah alone. He states that if a reference to anyone other than Allah is found in the invocations of a believer, such as a supplication to the Prophet or some *awliyā'*, it should be understood as a mental metaphor, i.e., with the belief that only Allah can answer the prayer.

For example, he explains that if someone utters *istighātha* (plea for help) to the Prophet. Their intention should be understood metaphorically as directed solely to Allah. Unlike the early Arab polytheists, who did not differentiate between the mediator and grantor of a plea, al-Mālkī argues that Sufis are seeking to access the means to reach Allah rather than to be independent of Him. Furthermore, al-Mālkī justifies any unintentional mistake by the seekers who direct their *tawassul*, and *shafā'a* ignorantly to an unqualified (meaning not saintly) mediator. As long as they believe that the response to their demands will only come from Allah, their intentions can be considered innocent and sincere.²⁵⁶

Āl-Ashaykh states that explanations of *istighātha* in such a fashion are repeated throughout al-Mālkī's *Mafāhīm* in order to distinguish between the *istighātha* of the early Arab polytheists, whom Allah has condemned to hellfire for their deviations and the Sufi *istighātha* that he preaches.²⁵⁷ Al-Mālkī reiterates that the Holy Qur'an emphatically states the Arab polytheists' *istighātha* never identified the mediator independently from Allah in granting their plea. Still, Āl-Ashaykh does not distinguish between the early Arab polytheists, who deserved the wrath

²⁵⁵ Āl-Ashaykh, *These are Our Understandings*..., p.124.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, pp. 119-120.

²⁵⁷ Also, this justification by al-Mālkī could be understood as a way to distinguish between the folk-oriented approach to the tombs of *awliyā'* in some Muslim countries, where worshippers are unaware of the *sharī'a* compliant supplications that should accompany practices such as *istighātha*.

of Allah, and the Sufi polytheists. He further articulates that the Arab polytheists, as stated in the Qur'an, aim their pleas directly (without mediators) to Allah at times of extreme distress, such as in fear of drowning at sea. This is solid proof against al-Mālkī's claim that they did not believe in Allah, the Lord Creator.²⁵⁸

Āl-Ashaykh cites another false claim by Al-Mālkī, which is that Prophet Muḥammad is “*ḥayy al-dārayn* (alive in the two worlds: the Here and the Hereafter)” and that he is in constant care of his umma (nation), able to control its affairs and aware of its state.²⁵⁹ Those who pray “*Ya Nabī* (O Prophet), cure me from disease, pay my debt, or resolve my affairs” are only metaphorically directing their requests to Allah through his Prophet.²⁶⁰ This is based on the Sufi belief that the Prophet Muḥammad is alive in his *ḥayāt barzakhiyy* (life in the *barzakh*, which is a phase of life between death and resurrection) and able to answer prayers and provide *shafā'a*. Āl-Ashaykh states there is no evidence or *sharī'a* proof that invocation and intercession are permissible by those in the state of *barzakh*.²⁶¹

It is worth pointing out that the Salafis approve *tawassul* if it is performed in the name of God's love to His Messenger. The Salafis argue that, after all, there is no veil between Allah and His creation. Why seek mediators if Allah states in the Qur'an (50:16), “And We have already created the man and know what his soul whispers to him and We are closer to him than [his] jugular vein”. And in verse (2:186) He states “And when my servants ask you, [O Muhammad], concerning Me - indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant and when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me [by obedience] and believe in Me that they may be [rightly] guided”.

²⁵⁸ Sura Al-Ankaboot: Verse 65, “And when they board a ship, they supplicate to Allah, sincere to Him in religion. But when He delivers them to the land, at once they associate others with Him.”, https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/index.php?ui=1&l=en#aya=29_65 (Accessed 10 February 2021).

²⁵⁹ Āl-Ashaykh, *These are Our Understandings...*, p.123

²⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 123

²⁶¹ Ibid, pp. 123-124

II. Phase Two: Indirect Salafi Reaction to the al-Mālkī Phenomena (2003–2015)

Salafism became subject to the threat of losing its dominance over Saudi society after it splintered into divergent groups during the *Ṣaḥwa* era, which caused in-country ideological setbacks associated with political Islam. Some of these groups were behind terrorist acts all over Saudi Arabia and associated with the infamous events of September 2001 (see Chapter One). The Salafis feared that the domain of *taṣawwuf* had begun to gain influence in the public sphere. A Salafi-initiated systematic refutation of *taṣawwuf* was stepped up at the institutional and university levels, producing scholarly work (at the graduate and postgraduate levels) that refuted *taṣawwuf* in terms of socioreligious, political, and traditional theological dimensions.

During this phase, a dramatic shift occurred in the literature on the Salafi establishment regarding *taṣawwuf*. The literature moved from traditional accusations of polytheism and unorthodox behaviour to much more strident warnings about Sufism's role in uprooting Islam, i.e., Saudi Salafism, from its foundations. This is evidenced in the academic theses of the period. For instance, Al-Ma'lawī's thesis warned against Sufism's propensity as fertile ground for the unity of religions theory.²⁶² Another example is Al-Baddāḥ's thesis, which conveyed a highly charged political message against *taṣawwuf*, seen as an instigator in favour of the eradication of Salafism.²⁶³

Still, the circulation of these two theses was limited to academia and the intelligentsia. It is the view of this phase in the third thesis, i.e., al-'Arīfī's thesis, that elaborates on the traditional view of Sufism within the Salafi establishment—a view perpetually transmitted to society via social media and a plethora of anti-Sufi publications found in bookstores throughout Saudi Arabia.²⁶⁴ Other publications of the period include al-Zayn's and al-Juwayr's works, as well as a series of YouTube lectures by al-Ḥarbī.²⁶⁵ Nevertheless, this conventional view is changing.

²⁶² Ma'lawī, *Unity of Religions in ...*

²⁶³ Al-Baddāḥ, *The Sufi Movement in...*

²⁶⁴ Al-'Arīfī Muḥammad, *Mawaqif Ibn Taimiyya min al-Ṣūfiyya* (Ibn Taimiyya's Attitude on Sufism) vol. 1 & vol.2, PhD thesis, Imam Muḥammad Ibn Sa'ud University, (Riyadh: Maktabat Dār al-Minhāj, 2012)

²⁶⁵ Samīḥ A. al-Zayn, *Al-Ṣūfiyya fī Naẓar al-Islam: Dirasa Taḥlīliyya* (An Islamic View of Sufism: An Analytical Study), (Beirut: Al-Dār al Afriqiyya al-'Arabiyya, 1993); Muḥammad al-Juwayr, *Juhūd 'Ulam' al-Salaf fī al-Qarn al-Sādis al-Hijrī fī al-Radd 'ala al-Ṣūfiyya* (Efforts of the Sixth Hejira Century Scholars in Refuting Sufism), 2007; Mamdūḥ al-Ḥarbī, *Al-Sufiyya wa Turūquha*, (Sufism and its Orders)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUcmLZNT3L0;Sufiyyat> (Accessed 26 September 2021);

This thesis posits that the change is due to the growing prevalence of the call for religious tolerance, which is a result of the socioreligious paradigm shift brought about by the transformational reforms of Vision 2030.

III. Phase Three: Signs of a Neutral Salafi Refutation (2015–Present)

The establishment of the National Dialogue Forum in 2003 (see Chapter One) served as a precursor to a comprehensive societal paradigm shift, marking the beginning of a transformation to a new era, as outlined in Vision 2030. This shift adopted an outlook of future openness to the world with socio-religious tolerance that called for accepting differences among others who are citizens and partners in a heterogeneous Saudi society. As far as Sufism is concerned, this was demonstrated in the unprecedented appearance of a literature fair to *taṣawwuf* in the Saudi publication and distribution market, especially in some traditional Salafi bookshops. Books such as Ṭāriq S. M. al-Bakrī's *Ibn Taymiyya wa Mawqifiḥ min al-Turāth al-Ṣuḥfī*.²⁶⁶

A striking example of Vision 2030 influencing the Salafi attitude on *taṣawwuf* is a PhD thesis completed at the Meccan University of Um al-Qura by al-Iqbālī. It was published as a book titled *Qirā'a Tarbawiyya fī Turāth al-Ṣūfiyya al-Mutaqaddmīn*.²⁶⁷ Even though it appraises the tenth-century *taṣawwuf* of Abu Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d.988), the book is described as an attempt to root the origins of Islamic ethical education and its philosophy of *tazkiyat al-naḥs* in the practices and teachings of Sufi heritage. In the spirit of changing attitudes towards *taṣawwuf* in Saudi Arabia, the bastion of Ibn Taymiyya's school of thought, I must draw the reader's attention to books published outside Saudi Arabia. However, they are intended for Ibn Taymiyya followers, such as al-Shu'aybī's 2018 *Ibn Taymiyya Ṣuḥfiyyan*.²⁶⁸

Ayman S. al-'Angarī, *Ṣuḥfiyyat wa Ashā'iriyyat al-Aḥsā', man Hum?* (The Sufis and Ash'arites of al-Aḥsā', who are they?) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a0FSkng0qQA> 15 April 2018

²⁶⁶ Al-Bakrī, *Ibn Taymiyya and his ...*

²⁶⁷ Al-Iqbālī, *Educational Reading on the ...*

²⁶⁸ Al-Shu'aybī, *Ibn Taymiyya was Ṣuḥfi...*

The change of attitude towards *taṣawwuf* was transmitted to the Saudi intelligentsia in the intellectual magazine *Al-Faysal* for an issue about *taṣawwuf*.²⁶⁹ This third phase's neutral attitude towards *taṣawwuf* involved the presentation of theological points of view from the Sufi perspective, as will be illustrated with arguments by the prominent Ḥijāzi Sufi Sayyid ʿAbd Allah Fadʿaq in Chapter Five and the philosophical approach to *taṣawwuf* by Raḍwān al-Sayyid in Chapter Seven.

But during this third phase, which is ongoing, the budding changes in Salafī attitudes towards *taṣawwuf* affect their refusal of it, as explained in Chapter Four.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the development of the four primary Salafī arguments that refute *taṣawwuf*, addressing its theological and socioreligious-cum-political dimensions. These refutations evolved through three distinct phases. Initially, in the first phase, attitudes were characterised by a complete rejection based on theological grounds, which was seen as a direct Salafī response to what is referred to as the al-Mālkī phenomenon. In the second phase, the refutations focused on socioreligious and political aspects, reflecting an indirect Salafī reaction to the al-Mālkī phenomenon. The third phase emerged due to the government-initiated socioreligious reforms outlined in Vision 2030, during which Salafis began to distinguish between "correct" and "incorrect" *taṣawwuf*, as demonstrated in some of their publications. This ongoing third phase indicates growing tolerance within the Salafī establishment towards *taṣawwuf*, allowing its introduction into mainstream society through various multimedia platforms. The neutral attitude of Salafism during this phase prompts a reevaluation of the critiques against Salafī beliefs, especially considering the perspective of Ibn Taymiyya, a key figure in Saudi Salafism. This approach provides a new understanding of Sufism, which Chapter Four will explore further.

²⁶⁹ Habbās al-Ḥarbī, *Al-Taṣawwuf min al-Hāmish ilā al-Wājiha* (Sufism from the Margin to the Fore) Article in Alfaisal Magazine. (Riyadh: King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, Jul-Aug 2019)

CHAPTER FOUR

Ibn Taymiyya and the Salafi Arguments Against *Taşawwuf*

In alignment with the socioreligious objectives of Vision 2030 and considering the evolving perspectives on Salafi attitudes towards Sufism explored in Chapter Three, it is crucial to reassess these attitudes through the lens of Ibn Taymiyya, the preeminent theorist of Saudi Salafism. In this chapter, Ibn Taymiyya critiques Sufism, illuminating both its positive and negative aspects. This reassessment will help establish a more nuanced mainstream understanding of Sufism, contributing to a fresh perspective on its essence. This foundation lays the groundwork for presenting the Sufi responses to Salafi critiques of Sufism by the esteemed Sufi scholar Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq in Chapter Five. This approach addresses the first sub-research question of my thesis, which aims to understand Sufism in Saudi Arabia.

As stated in Chapter Three, the three phases (1979–2015) of the Salafi refutation of *taşawwuf* in Saudi Arabia were approached with two dimensions in mind: a theological dimension and a socioreligious-cum-political one. During these three phases (see Diagram 1 in Chapter One), four Salafi rebukes emerged concerning these two dimensions. Three arguments fall under the theological dimension, while the fourth falls under the socioreligious-cum-political one.

A certain attitude towards *taşawwuf* characterised *each of the three phases*. For example, the first phase projected Sufism as a deviant sect on theological grounds, emphasising its polytheistic tendencies. These tendencies were exemplified by deviations in behaviour and creed that categorized it as an aberrant Islamic sect. In the second phase, Salafi’s criticism of Sufism broadened to incorporate two additional elements. The first element accused Sufis of contributing to the dismantling of Islam by promoting the unity of religions through concepts such as *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being) and *al-ḥulūl wa al-ittiḥād* (embodiment and fusion). The second element accused Sufis of an adverse socioreligious-cum-political impact on the Saudi socioreligious landscape. In the third phase, some Salafi literature emerged to recognise the type of Sunni *taşawwuf* that conforms to the *ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*—a change of attitude that this thesis attributes to the shifting socioreligious mode in Saudi Arabia, which is induced by Vision 2030 (see Chapter One).

The crux of the hypothesis of this thesis pivots on the third phase of the Salafi attitude to *taṣawwuf* (2015–present). For analysis, this thesis designates the first two phases as belonging to the pre-Vision 2030 period, while phase three belongs to the post-Vision 2030. Yet development during these three phases, as exemplified in each one of their particular characteristics, acted as a solid backdrop for building up a Salafi change of attitude that evolved from total rejection on theological grounds during the first phase to an adverse attitude on socioreligious-cum-political grounds during the second phase. It is the third phase that marked an unprecedented change in the Salafi attitude towards *taṣawwuf*, i.e., when signs of Salafi recognition of the *taṣawwuf* Sunni in both the academic and public domains were evidenced in publications that included works by al-Bakrī, al-Shu‘aybī and al-Iqbālī.²⁷⁰

The first two publications are on Ibn Taymiyya’s attitude towards *taṣawwuf*. They support my argument that Ibn Taymiyya did not reject *taṣawwuf* in its entirety – an attitude that has an impact on redefining Sunni *taṣawwuf*, as will be elaborated on later in the chapter. This change in attitude towards the Sunni *taṣawwuf* is significant for the thesis because it allows for a re-examination of the attitude of Ibn Taymiyya, the foremost theorist of the Salafi school of thought, on *taṣawwuf*. It also establishes the basis for a new take on defining and classifying Sunni *taṣawwuf*.

The pre-Vision 2030 theological refutations of *taṣawwuf* were disseminated by the Saudi Salafi school, which intentionally ignored Ibn Taymiyya’s early life affiliation with *taṣawwuf*. They also emphatically avoided stating that he was not against *taṣawwuf* wholesale, as profoundly expressed in his works.²⁷¹ These facets of Ibn Taymiyya’s thought were never the subject of academic research in the Saudi Salafis higher education institutes of Saudi Salafis, nor were they allowed to be transmitted in the public domain as such.

I argue that analyzing Ibn Taymiyya’s genuine attitude on *taṣawwuf* as it appears in his writing is essential to re-evaluating the contemporary Saudi Salafi theological refutation of *taṣawwuf*.

²⁷⁰ Al-Bakrī, *Ibn Taymiyya and his ...*; Al-Iqbālī, *Educational Reading on the ...*; Al-Shu‘aybī, *Ibn Taymiyya was Sufi...*

²⁷¹ Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al-Taṣawwuf* (The Book of Sufism) in *Majmū‘at al-fatāwā li Shaykh al-Islām*, (eds. ‘Amir al-Jazzār and Anwar al-Bāz 4th ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Wafā’ and Dar Ibn Ḥazm, 2011)

To reiterate, this chapter addresses the four contemporary Salafi arguments against *taṣawwuf*. Given that Salafi refutations of *taṣawwuf* are traditionally grounded in theology, Ibn Taymiyya's thoughts are relevant to the theological elements of the Salafi understanding of *taṣawwuf*. On the other hand, the social elements of the Salafi arguments are directed towards Sufi behaviour, such as excessively introverted and lethargic tendencies that prevent them from being active members of society. Due to the socioreligious circumstances of the present time (political Islam), contemporary Salafis accuse the Sufis of being a vehicle for Western powers to subdue Salafism, the defender of Sunni Islam.

So, in this chapter, I will address the four Salafi rebukes of *taṣawwuf* in terms of two dimensions: the theological and the socioreligious-cum-political.

I. Ibn Taymiyya and the Three Major Counterarguments

The argument I present here is that, in light of the socioreligious aspects of Vision 2030, there is an opportunity to take a fresh look at *taṣawwuf* from within the Salafi school itself. This is based on long-overdue scholarly research showing that Ibn Taymiyya, did not reject *taṣawwuf* in its entirety.²⁷² This requires reevaluating the Salafi theological arguments in light of Ibn Taymiyya's views on Sufism and his categorisation of *taṣawwuf*.

A reference to Ibn Taymiyya's classification of *taṣawwuf* invites a critique of both the contemporary Salafi classification, e.g., the one advanced by Shaykh al-Khamīs, as well as the Sufi classification, e.g., the one advanced by shaykh Gum'a (see Chapter Two). A comprehensive, all-encompassing definition and classifications of Sunni *taṣawwuf* that covers all of the types articulated by both the Salafis and the Sufis is essential for establishing grounds before launching an academically-based Salafi–Sufi counterarguments.

²⁷² Arjan Post, *A Glimpse of Sufism from the Circle of Ibn Taymiyya: An Edition and Translation of al-Ba'labakī's (d. 734/1333) Epistle on the Spiritual Way (Risālat al-Sulūk)*, (in *Journal of Sufi Studies* from Brill [A Glimpse of Sufism from the Circle of Ibn Taymiyya in: Journal of Sufi Studies Volume 5 Issue 2 \(2016\) \(brill.com\)](#) (Accessed 5 March 2024))

1.1 Ibn Taymiyya and *Taṣawwuf*

Salafi's pre-Vision 2030 arguments against Sufism were presented from two perspectives. First, Sufism was presented as a proponent of polytheistic practices and characterized by heretical behaviours foreign to the Islamic religion. Second, Sufism was accused of uprooting Islam from its foundation through the promotion of a theory of the unity of religions. It was also said that Sufism had enabled the exploitation of Islam by other political powers who sought to disrupt the socioreligious order of Saudi society and surrounding Arab Gulf countries (see Chapter Three).²⁷³

Salafi's post-Vision 2030 view on Sufism is based on anticipating a future tolerant attitude towards Sufism. Early signs of this attitude are evident in Salafi publications of the time regarding Salafi epitome Ibn Taymiyya's views on *taṣawwuf* (see Chapter Three). A re-examination of Ibn Taymiyya's attitudes towards Sufism shows that he was very much in line with the right *taṣawwuf* as preached by prominent Saudi Sufi Sayyid 'Ab Allah Fad'a (see Chapter Five).²⁷⁴

I argue that given the availability of Ibn Taymiyya's views on *taṣawwuf* to the intelligentsia and the public in general, mainstream Saudi society will likely have a positive outlook on *taṣawwuf*. This is assumed to be characteristic of post-Vision 2030 Salafi views on *taṣawwuf*.

The supposed Salafi post-Vision 2030 view of Sufism will be identified through reassessment of the theological dimension of the three major arguments in light of the postulated new Ibn Taymiyya-influenced attitude towards Sufism.

However, this thesis argues that it is essential to first address the controversial issue of how *taṣawwuf* is classified into different types. There are several controversial discrepancies between the Salafis and the Sufis regarding the classification of Sufism into types (see Chapter Two). This means the issue of the reclassification of Sufism deserves the status of a major

²⁷³ al-Baddāḥ, *Sufi Movement in the Arabian ...*

²⁷⁴ Ma'lawī, *Unity of Religions in ...*

argument of its own. My thesis brings forward the problem of classifying Sufism as a prerequisite to addressing the theological dimension of the three major arguments of refute.

In fact, the classification of Sufism itself is controversial and constitutes a major problem between the Salafis and Sufis that only adds confusion to the mainstream understanding of the nature of Sufism. This is a problem upon which the Sufi–Salafi polemic dwells. If not resolved, the Salafi refutation of Sufism cannot be addressed objectively; the subject of reclassifying Sufism will be addressed in this chapter by bringing forward all of the possible types of Sufism, whether in the Salafi or Sufi classifications under the rubric of an all-encompassing and comprehensive reclassification that accommodates what both Sufis and Salafis consider types of Sufism.

In the first phase of the Salafi rebuke of Sufism, the latter was identified as belonging to a generic type of deviant sect that embraces the principle of *shirk* and its six sub-principles (see Chapter Three). During the second phase, Sufism was referred to as incorporating different types within its folds, as stated in al-‘Arīfī’s *Ibn Taymiyya’s Attitude on Sufism* (referred to later in the chapter).²⁷⁵ My thesis emphasizes that reliance on a classification of Sufism by either Salafi or Sufi sources alone is inadequate. Such reliance fails to convey a realistic understanding of the varieties of Sufism communicated to mainstream Saudi society through literature and media channels. What is needed is an overarching classification of Sufism that encompasses all of the possible types that both Sufis and Salafis refer to when expressing their understanding of Sufism.

This is essential for ensuring comprehensiveness and impartiality when addressing arguments and counterarguments. So, based on the Salafi and Sufi classifications mentioned in Chapter Two, this thesis proposes a comprehensive reclassification of Sufism into four types congruent with Ibn Taymiyya’s attitude to Sufism, which will be explained as this chapter unfolds.

1.2. Reclassification of Sunni *Taṣawwuf*

Chapter Two noted that Salafis recognise three types of *taṣawwuf*: *taṣawwuf zuhdī* (ascetic Sufism), *taṣawwuf bid‘ī* (heretical) and *taṣawwuf kufrī* (blasphemous). The contemporary

²⁷⁵ Muḥammad, *Ibn Taymiyya’s Attitude...*

Azhari School of Egypt (which is recognised by the epitome of Saudi Sufism S.M.Ā. al-Mālķī) also recognises three types of *taṣawwuf*: *taṣawwuf Salafī* (Salafī Sufism) equals to *zuhd* (asceticism), *taṣawwuf Sunni* (Sunni Sufism), and *taṣawwuf falsafī* (philosophical Sufism).²⁷⁶ As far as the Sufī classification is concerned, adherents of the first two types, the *taṣawwuf Salafī* and *taṣawwuf Sunni*, are considered to belong to *ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a*.²⁷⁷ The Azharī Sufīs and the Sufīs of Saudi Arabia consider themselves adherents to the school of *ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a* (see Chapter Two).

Sufī and Salafī scholars differ in their definitions of what the term *ṣūfiyya* or *taṣawwuf* (two Arabic words that can be used interchangeably to mean Sufism) represents when applying the religious meaning to the linguistic connotation of the word Sufism. Linguistically, the most accepted meaning is that Sufism is a derivative of the word *ṣūf* (wool), the wear of the poor and the *zuhhād* (ascetics).²⁷⁸ But just as some Salafīs ascribe a non-Arabic origin when they attribute it to the Greek word *Sophia* (wisdom), some Sufīs try, rather pretentiously, to make the word derivative of a divinely soothing Arabic origin, such as *ṣafā'* (purity; clarity) of the self, or to give it a religious ascetic appeal by claiming to be named after *ahl al-ṣuffa*.²⁷⁹ However, within the context of Sufism in Islam, various types refer to a multitude of *turūq* (orders) and styles. For more derivations of the word *taṣawwuf*, see al-Hujwirī's *Kashf al-Mahjūb*.²⁸⁰

The relevance of the reclassified types to Saudi Arabia is established in the literature (see Chapters Two and Three). This thesis argues that the Salafī and Sufī classifications of Sufism are not true representations of different types of Sufism, each with their distinctive characteristics, transmitted to mainstream society today under the genre of *taṣawwuf*. They generate opinions that range between two extremes, either admiration and reverence or ridicule

²⁷⁶ S.M.Ā. al-Mālķī received his doctorate from al-Azhar University.

²⁷⁷ Gum'a, *Three Schools of Sufism...*

²⁷⁸ 'Azmī Ṭaha S. Aḥmad, *Madkhal ila al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī* (An Entry to Islamic Sufism), (Jordan: Dar Publishing, 2015) p. 14

²⁷⁹ 'Abd al-Mun'im Ḥifnī, *Al-Mawsū'a al-Ṣūfiyya* (Encyclopedia of Sufism), 5th ed. (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūli, 2006), p.1086.; Al-Bakrī, *Ibn Taymiyya and his...*

²⁸⁰ Ali bin Usman al-Hujwirī, *The Revelation of Mystery (Kashf Al-Mahjub)*, (Lahore-Karachi-Pakistan: Zia-ul-Qusan Publication, 2001) <http://www.sufi.ir/books/download/english/hojviri-en/KashfulMahjoob-en.pdf> (Accessed 30 October 2021)

and abhorrence, depending on the communicator. But as the Salafis have the upper hand in influencing Saudi society, it goes without saying whose views are the most prevalent.

The Salafis refute *taṣawwuf* on the basis that it is not an authentic Islamic sect because the term was not in common use as an Islamic term during the early years of the Prophet and his companions. This is an argument the Sufis reject by calling to their defence a *sharī‘a* rule that says: *lā mashāḥata fī al-iṣṭilāḥ* (no contestations or disputes over expressions or idioms meaning). This means it is the essence of the content’s intended meaning and not the title (wording) that counts.²⁸¹

However, it must be noted that despite the plethora of orders and styles of what is classified as *taṣawwuf*, prominent Sufi Shaykhs, such as Ahmad Zarrūq (1442–1493), provided an overarching all-encompassing general definition that expresses the quintessence of who could be described as a genuine Sufi. Zarrūq defined *taṣawwuf* as: “*Ṣidq al-tawajjuh ilā Allah* (sincerity in [one’s] focus/attention on God)”, which he reiterates “could be achieved in two thousand different ways” an indication of the many different ways that could lead to the same results.²⁸² Another Sufi definition describes *taṣawwuf* as “the knowledge which concerns mending the hearts”.²⁸³

For this reason, no type should be associated with *taṣawwuf* if it does not lead to either reaching the state of *tajallī* (where Allah reveals himself to the worshipper in accordance with the concept of *iḥsān* in the celebrated *Ḥadīth* of Jibrīl) or for the Sufis to reach the state of *fanā’* (annihilation in Allah). This can be understood as rectifying the heart, i.e., freeing it from the world’s ills, such as greed, revenge or hatred, in preparation for focusing one’s attention on God. But in the light of the differences surrounding the definition of *taṣawwuf* and amid these conflicting opinions about each type, not just between the Salafis and Sufis, but amongst the

²⁸¹ The Sufis argue that terms such as *fiqh*, *uṣūl*, *tawḥīd* in their trio divisions (*rubūbya*, *ulūhiyya* and *asmā’ wa ṣifāt*) are Salafi terms that were not in use during the early years of Islam. Likewise, the sciences of Sufism, like many other religious sciences, has developed over time.

²⁸² Zarrūq, *The Foundations of Sufism...*; Ahmad Zarrūq, *Qawā‘id al-Taṣawwuf* (The Principles of Sufism); Khushaym, ‘Alī Fahmī, *Zarrūq the Sufi* (A Guide in the Way and a Leader to the Truth), (Tripoli, Libya: General Company for Publication, 1976)

²⁸³ Mu‘ādh S. Ḥawwa, *Al-Tazkiyya: Taṣawwuf Ahl al-Sunna* (Purification of the Self: The Sufism of Ahl al-Sunna), (Amman, Jordan: Dār al-Farūq, 2021)

Sufis themselves, *taṣawwuf* is brought to the debate void of its essence as a noble path of a wayfaring journey dedicated to Allah.

This thesis aims to bring forward an academically based, all-encompassing classification that accommodates what the Sufis and Salafis classify as *taṣawwuf* for comparison and analysis. It must be noted, however, that in the three types of Salafī and Sufī classification mentioned above (see Chapter Two), both Sufis and Salafis agree on the definition of the type classified as *zuhdī* (ascetic) *taṣawwuf*. Where they differ is in their classification of the other two types: *taṣawwuf* Sunni (Sunni Sufism) and *taṣawwuf falsafī* (philosophical Sufism) in the case of the Sufis and *taṣawwuf bid'ī* (heretical) and *taṣawwuf kufrī* (blasphemous) in the case of the Salafis. Generally speaking, the Salafī classification concentrates on the negative aspects of *taṣawwuf*, while the Sufis focus on the positive aspects. We should nonetheless bear in mind that the Sufis themselves have ambivalent, or rather ambiguous, views on some of *taṣawwuf*'s types, e.g., philosophical Sufism.

In the contemporary Salafī classification, only the *taṣawwuf zuhdī* is considered to belong to *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a*. Notice that despite the inclusion of the *taṣawwuf zuhdī* associated with *ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a* in both the Salafī and Sufī classification of Sufism, it does not prompt Salafī acceptance of contemporary Sufis classifying themselves as belonging to *ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a*. This is due to a problematic credal issue between the *Atharī* Salafis and the *Ash'arī* Sufis (as discussed in Chapter Two).²⁸⁴ The early figures of *zuhd*, such as Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, or of *taṣawwuf Zuhdī*, such as Abu Ismā'īl al-Harawī and 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī were *Atharī* in '*aqīda*'.²⁸⁵ But all known contemporary Sufis are *Ash'rites* in '*aqīda*', which automatically excludes them from a *taṣawwuf zuhdī* that is acceptable by contemporary *Atharī* Salafis of Saudi Arabia. The Salafis thus do not recognize the contemporary *Ash'rite* Sufis who claim that the *taṣawwuf zuhdī* or *taṣawwuf* Sunni are of *ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a*.

²⁸⁴ Yasir Qadhi, *Salafī-Ash'arī Polemics of the 3rd & 4th Islamic Centuries*, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/muwo.12161> (Accessed On 13 September 2021).

²⁸⁵ Refer to 'Alī Gum'a classification where he mentions a plethora of Salafī Sufis, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFVuAK8cp38> (Accessed 25 July 2021). Aḥmad Bin Ḥanbal namesake of the *Ḥanbalī madhhab* was known as a *zāhid* and wrote *Kitāb al-Zuhd* (The Book of Asceticism). Of significance is the renowned *Ḥanbalī* Sufi, Abu Ismā'īl 'Abd Allah al-Anṣārī al-Harawī (d. 1089). He was a distinguished commentator on the Qur'ān and ḥadīth, celebrated for his exploration of the Sufi path in his work, *Manāzil al-Sā'rīn*. This influential text inspired Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya, a prominent disciple of Ibn Taymiyya, to compose his extensive commentary, *Madārij al-Sālikīn*, which is widely regarded among Sunni Muslims.

Another issue, which the Salafis find unfathomable, is the fact that Sufis who consider themselves belonging to Sunni *taṣawwuf* are affiliated with certain *turūq*. As *murīdīn* (disciples), they are prepared to accept the authority of a Shaykh in the form of total unequivocal obedience and servitude – two characteristics of *taṣawwuf* that are objectionable to Salafis.²⁸⁶

So by excluding the *zuhdī* and Sunni *taṣawwuf* from their genre of *taṣawwuf*, the Salafis endeavour to paint contemporary *taṣawwuf* wholesale as a deviant sect.²⁸⁷ It is important to note that, despite considering Ibn Taymiyya's *mamdūh* (praiseworthy) type of *taṣawwuf* ostensibly as part of *taṣawwuf* in some Salafi literature, they still include *taṣawwuf* as one of the seventy-three aberrant sects alluded to by al-ʿArīfī.²⁸⁸ Al-ʿArīfī's thesis states that Ibn Taymiyya addresses two categories of Sufism, the *mamdūh* (praiseworthy) and the *madhmūm* (blameworthy).²⁸⁹ Yet, by referring to the aforementioned Ibn Taymiyya's two categories of Sufism, this thesis highlights how his attitude towards Sufism does not fit with those of contemporary Salafis.²⁹⁰

By analysing Ibn Taymiyya's attitude to *taṣawwuf* as discussed in al-ʿArīfī's thesis, al-Bakrī's thesis, and above all Ibn Taymiyya's *Kitāb al-Taṣawwuf*, this thesis argues that Ibn Taymiyya's

²⁸⁶ The *murīd*'s obedience and total submission to a Sufi Shaykh is likened to a corpse in the hand of the undertaker; see ʿAbd Allah D. al-Sahlī, *Al-Ṭurūq al-Ṣūfiyya Nashʾatuha wa ʿAqāʾiduha wa Athārūha* (The Sufi Orders: Their Development, Creeds and Traditions) <https://ebook.univeyes.com/137083/pdf-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%A3%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%B9%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AF%D9%87%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%A2%D8%AB%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7> (Accessed on 26 September 2021)

²⁸⁷ As an example of the *Ashʿarī* negating the *Atharī*'s classification of *tawhīd* into three types: *tawhīd*, *al-Rububiyya*, *tawhīd al-Uluhiyya*, and *tawhīd al-asmaʾ wa al-ṣifāt*, see ʿAlī al-Jfīrī's explanation of the heresy of the trio-division of *tawhīd*. (41) الحبيب الجفري يوضح بدعة التقسيم الثلاثي للتوحيد - YouTube (Accessed on 13 September 2021)

²⁸⁸ Muḥammad, *Ibn Taymiyya's Attitude...*, p. 88. It is of importance to mention that when al-ʿArīfī relayed a narrative on Ibn Taymiyya's birth, life and death, he failed, or intentionally avoided, stating that he was buried, next to the grave of his brother Sharaf al-Dīn ʿAbd Allah, in the Sufi cemetery of Damascus despite that this is a known fact in the literature. (see subheading titled Death of Ibn Taymiyya in Muḥammad, *Ibn Taymiyya's Attitude...*, p. 68).

²⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 215

²⁹⁰ Muḥammad N. al-Albānī, *Maraʾiyukum fī Taqṣīm Ibn Taymiyya al-Taṣawwuf ila Sunnī wa Bidʿī* (What is Your Opinion on Ibn Taymiyya Dividing Sufism into Sunni and Heretical Types) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKIXRHU8TtM> (Accessed 22 July 2021)

classification of Sufism specifies three types that are either *mamdūh* (praiseworthy), *madhmūm* (blameworthy) or *marfūd* (rejected), as explained later in the chapter.²⁹¹

Under what Ibn Taymiyya classifies as praiseworthy or agreeable *taṣawwuf*, he includes prominent Sufis such as al-Junayd, Ibn Khafīf, al-Jīlānī and others as righteous Shaykhs belonging to *ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a*.²⁹² Among what he classifies as blameworthy or objectionable *taṣawwuf* are those who pretend to be Sufis to benefit from free stays at *khānqa* (Sufi lodges) or those who perform *khuza'balāt* (charlatanism) – adherents who display outlandish behaviour and *karāmāt*, such as the Sufis of *al-Baṭa'ihīyya*.²⁹³ This thesis refers to such adherents as *muṣtaṣwifa* (pseudo-Sufis). The third type, which this thesis designates as Ibn Taymiyya's rejected type, is represented by concepts of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being) and *ittiḥād wa ḥulūl* (unification and fusion in Allah) as advocated by Ibn 'Arabī, Ibn Sab'īn, al-Tilmisānī and others. They are included among what Ibn Taymiyya characterises as a vilified group called “the philosophers”. There is thus a philosophical type of *taṣawwu*.²⁹⁴

However, this thesis ascribes a fourth type to Ibn Taymiyya – one that is acceptable even if it is a detested version: *shaṭḥ* (ecstatic utterances, such as during *samā'*). Of all the controversial Sufis who belong to this type, the one Ibn Taymiyya appreciates is al-Bisṭāmī. Within this type, there is also behaviour (such as that of al-Ḥallāj) loathed by Ibn Taymiyya.²⁹⁵ Thus, Ibn Taymiyya's attitude is reclassified by this thesis into four types. The praiseworthy *taṣawwuf* of *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā'a*, which corresponds to the Salafī and Sufi classification of *zuhdī* and

²⁹¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *The Book of Sufism*...; Al-Bakrī, *Ibn Taymiyya and his*...; Al-'Arīfī, *Ibn Taymiyya's Stance on*...

²⁹² Muḥammad, *Ibn Taymiyya's Attitude*..., See also al-Junayd, vol.1, p.700 and vol. 2 p.403; Ibn Khafīf, vol.1, p.647 and vol.2, p. 500; al-Jīlānī, vol.2, p. 452; Al-Bakrī, *Ibn Taymiyya and his*..., refer to (al-Jīlānī, p. 436)

²⁹³ Ibn Taymiyya, *The Book of Sufism*..., p. 363. With regard to al-Baṭa'ihīyya see (pp. 244-257)

²⁹⁴ This thesis sees that it is necessary to categorize them (*waḥdat al-wujūd* and *ittiḥād wa ḥulūl*) as belonging to two different types: the philosophical and the *shaṭḥ* (ecstatic behaviour) as will be elaborated on in Chapter Five. These two concepts are lumped together under the rubrics of both philosophy and *shaṭḥ* (ecstatic behaviour).

²⁹⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *The Book of Sufism*..., He refers to al-Buṣṭāmī as a good example of a Sufi who says only following Qur'an and Sunna is permissible (p. 363). For more information on *Shaṭḥī* Sufism see 'Ab al-Raḥmān Badawī, *Shaṭaḥāt al-Ṣufiyya: Al-Juz' al-'Awal Abu Yazīd al-Buṣṭāmī* (The *Shaṭaḥāt* of the Sufis: The First Part, Abu Yazīd al-Buṣṭāmī), (Kuwait: Wikālat al-Maṭbu'āt) <https://www.alarabimag.com/download/15699-pdf> (Accessed 27 September 2021)

Sunni *taṣawwuf* respectively, as well as the other three types brought forward by this thesis as *muṣtaṣwifa* (pseudo-Sufis), *shatḥ* (ecstatic utterances), and *falsafī* (philosophical).

This Ibn Taymiyya-based classification of four types of *taṣawwuf* demonstrates an overall attitude of neither total rejection nor total acceptance. Unlike the prevailing Salafi view, then Sufism should not be projected as an unbalanced scale tipping toward a negative image, i.e., as a deviant sect that only faintly aligns with the beliefs of righteous predecessors.²⁹⁶

But, as the prevailing contemporary Salafi attitude to *taṣawwuf* does not accurately reflect Ibn Taymiyya's attitude to Sufism, and as Ibn Taymiyya is the epitome of Saudi Salafist theory, this thesis considers Ibn Taymiyya's attitude to Sufism, as presented here, to be a bona fide representation of a genuine Salafi classification of *taṣawwuf*. This should be juxtaposed against the Sufi classification of Sufism, thus producing a reclassification that this thesis holds pertinent for analysis of Salafi arguments and Sufi counterarguments.²⁹⁷

Based on this premise, I propose a reclassification of Sunni Sufism into four types. I prefer to call these types "approaches" to Sunni Islam's tier of *iḥsān* (beneficence). They are Sunni or righteous Sufism, *shatḥī* Sufism, *muṣtaṣwifa* (pseudo-Sufism), and philosophical Sufism (see Diagram 2). My argument for calling them approaches rather than types is that these classifications only concern *taṣawwuf* in its Sunni domain. As stated by Shaykh Zarrūq earlier, the ultimate aim of the Sufi is sincerity in reaching Allah. This distinguishes *taṣawwuf*, as discussed among the Sunni *madhāhib*, from what is referred to as *taṣawwuf* by other Islamic *madhāhib*, such as the Shī'a of Saudi Arabia, who describe it as *ʿirfān*, akin to gnosis.

Notice that not one of the four approaches (types) to *taṣawwuf* was referred to by Salafi scholars of *taṣawwuf* as belonging to other than Sunni schools aside from the time when they accuse some of being heretical to the Sunni *madhhab*. For example, Ibn ʿArabī, who the Salafis reject, is revered by many prominent Sufi Shaykh in Sunni Sufi *turūq* across the spectrum of Sunni

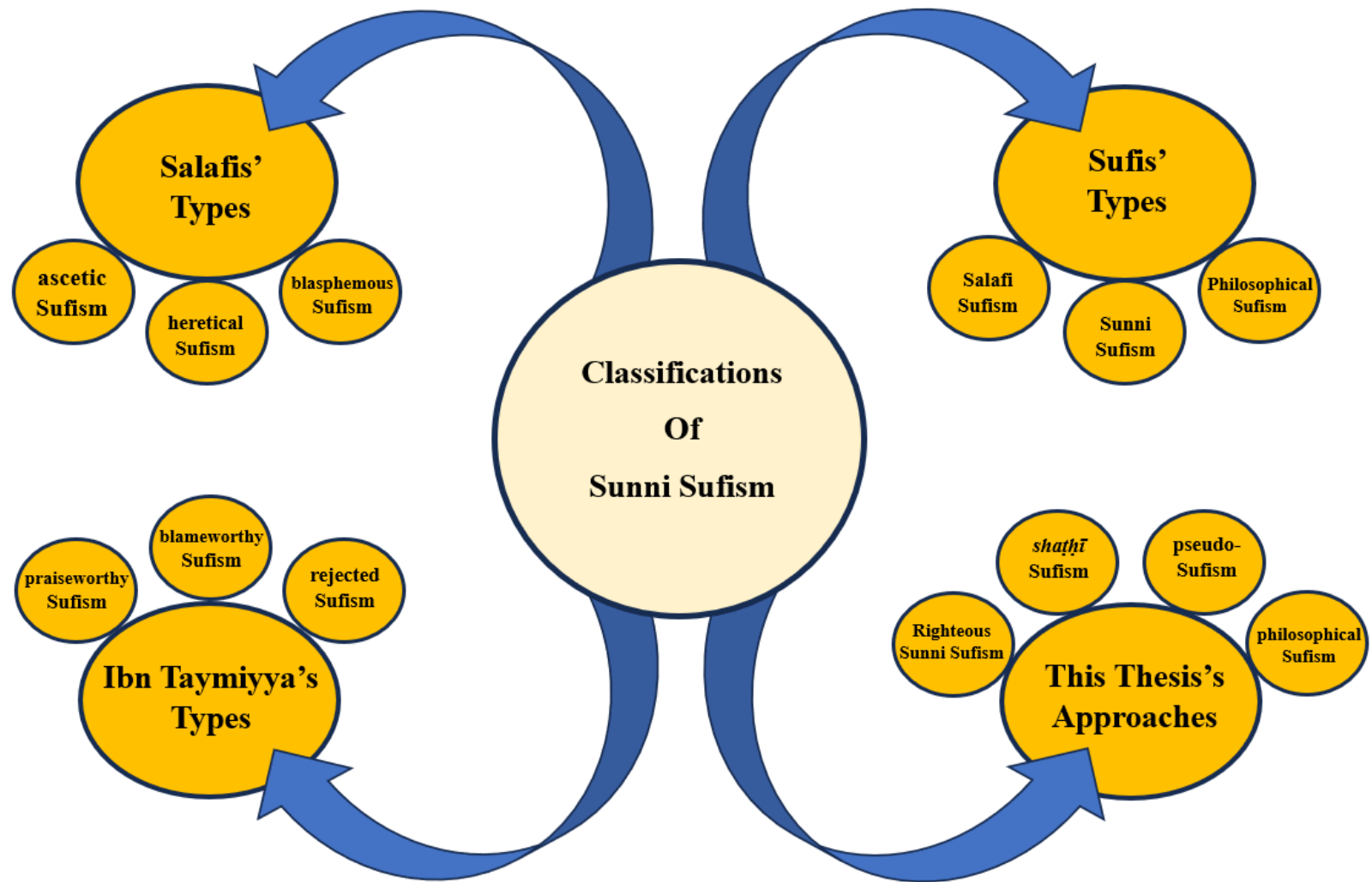
²⁹⁶ Moderate Sufis are ʿAbd Allah Bin Khafīf, al-Fuḍayl Bin ʿIyād and Abu Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī in Muḥammad, *Ibn Taymiyya's Attitude...*, p.647, p.496 and p.512 respectively.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

Ash‘arite schools. He is also revered in some Shī‘a schools, but he is a Sunni of the *Zāhirī madhhab* (see the eight Islamic *madhāhib* in Chapter Five).

Still, two important points about classifying *taṣawwuf* into four approaches should be brought to the reader’s attention. The first point is that the classification of Sufism into four approaches was only undertaken to distinguish and separate various types whose designated names the Salafis and Sufis consider a reflection of their particular characteristics. The distinctions do not indicate agreement with how Salafis and Sufis view these types as acceptable. For example, Salafis include the *shaṭḥī* (ecstatic behaviour) type in *madhmūm* (blameworthy) Sufism, while Sufis don’t mention it at all in their classification.

DIAGRAM 2



This Classification concerns the adherents of Sunni *madhāhib* (Jurisprudence) schools

To the Sufis the *shāṭḥ* is an involuntary outcome of the Sufi experience.²⁹⁸ While Salafism fully rejects the philosophical *taṣawwuf*, the Sufi attitude to it is controversially ambivalent (as alluded to in Chapters Five and Six).

The second point is that the classification designated as *muṣtaṣwifa* (pseudo-Sufism) or what Ibn Taymiyya classified as blameworthy *taṣawwuf* is to fool others or take advantage of them. This is lumped into the classification of the wrong approach to *taṣawwuf*. But in the approach called *muṣtaṣwifa* (pseudo-Sufism), i.e., the wrong approach to *taṣawwuf* I include the misguided illiterate masses who seek God's blessings via circumambulation of the tombs of Sufi saints and hoping for outlandish *karāmāt* in what is known as "folk religion" – a point we will return to when I address the views of Saudi Sufi Sayyid 'Abd Allah Fad'aq in Chapter Five.

So, the three major theological arguments made by Salafis against *taṣawwuf* will be re-examined in the light of the Ibn Taymiyya-influenced reclassification of *taṣawwuf* into four approaches. The fourth Salafi argument against *taṣawwuf*, i.e., the accusation that Sufism is part of the eradication of Salafism in the context of political Islam, will be discussed later in the chapter.

1.3 Ibn Taymiyya and the Three Salafi Theological Refutations of Sufism

As the foremost erudite theorist for contemporary Salafism, Ibn Taymiyya's attitude to Sufism is reviewed based on three primary sources: his *Kitāb al-Taṣawwuf*, al-'Arīfī's *Mawqif Ibn Taymiyya min al-Ṣūfiyya*, and al-Bakrī's *Ibn Taymiyya wa Mawqifiḥ min al-Turāth al-Ṣūfī*.²⁹⁹ These three books project Ibn Taymiyya's attitude to Sufism on the four aforementioned approaches to *taṣawwuf*. Here, the aim is to affirm the validity of the four approaches to *taṣawwuf* as the basis for addressing the contemporary theological dimension of the three Salafi refutations of Sufism. I also intend to establish a hierarchy for the four approaches in terms of their compatibility with or deviancy from the true path of *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā'a*. A first-

²⁹⁸ *Shāṭḥī* Sufism (ecstatic behaviours) include unorthodox utterances and a state of emotional ecstasy while engaged in *samā'* (listening) in *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah). The ceremonies are accompanied by instruments, dancing and singing.

²⁹⁹ See Muḥammad, *Ibn Taymiyya's Attitude...*; Al-Bakrī, *Ibn Taymiyya and his...*; Al-Jazzār, and Al-Bāz, eds. *Fatwas Collection of Shaykh ...*

hand, unmediated attitude that reflects Ibn Taymiyya's genuine opinion of Sufism during his lifetime and from his own writing is essential for establishing an unadulterated view of the subject. The transmission of Ibn Taymiyya's attitude towards *taṣawwuf* to contemporary mainstream society is presented as a reflection of the socioreligious-cum-political state of the nation. This is exemplified in the writings of the two Salafi publications by al-ʿArīfī and al-Bakrī. Al-ʿArīfī's *Mawqif Ibn Taymiyya min al-Ṣūfiyya* effectively warns against Sufism as a deviant sect, as alluded to earlier. His approach expresses the anti-Sufi attitude of the traditionally government-supported Saudi Salafi school that this thesis argues is far from the orientation of Vision 2030. Al-Bakrī's *Mawqif Ibn Taymiyya min al-Turāth al-Ṣūfī* transmits a truer version of Ibn Taymiyya's attitude to Sufism, which appears in his *Kitāb al-Taṣawwuf* and is more conducive to the orientation of Vision 2030.³⁰⁰

A review of Ibn Taymiyya's *Kitāb al-Taṣawwuf* will reveal his attitude first by pointing out that he intends to purify rather than to express disapproval of *taṣawwuf*. Second, it will identify his four approaches to *taṣawwuf*. Third, it will examine the theological dimension of the three major Salafi arguments in relation to the four approaches to Sufism.

1.4 Ibn Taymiyya Defends Righteous Sufis

It is clearly stated in *Al-fatwa al-Ḥamawiyya al-Kubra* that Ibn Taymiyya highly respected the prominent Sufi Shaykhs of his era and put them on an equal footing with any righteous Shaykhs of *ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamāʿa*. In this fatwa, which addresses belief in the *ṣifāt thabita* (fixed attributes) of Allah in the Qur'an and Sunna, the editor notes that, to support the compatibility of his opinion with *sharīʿa*, Ibn Taymiyya "added to the fatwa's prodigious texts opinions by eminent ulema from the four jurisprudence schools and the *Ṣūfiyya*".³⁰¹

³⁰⁰ Al-Bakrī, *Ibn Taymiyya and his...*

³⁰¹ Quṣay al-Khaṭīb, ed. *Al-Fatwa al-Ḥamawiyya al-Kubra* H 1401: <https://ar.islamway.net/book/25811/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%89-%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B7%D9%8A%D8%A8-%D8%B7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9> (Accessed on 26 September 2021)

But after realising that aberrant practices and behaviour had started to corrupt *taṣawwuf*,³⁰² Ibn Taymiyya wrote *Kitāb al-Taṣawwuf* (The Book of Sufism) to separate the wheat from the chaff and distinguish between genuine and pseudo-Sufis. Unlike some contemporary Salafis, e.g., al-‘Arīfī and al-Baddāḥ, or even some prominent Orientalists such as Massignon, there was very little support for the older Orientalists as well as the contemporary Salafi thesis that Ibn Taymiyya or the *Ḥanbalīs* are against *taṣawwuf*.³⁰³

Murād delivered a lecture on Ibn Taymiyya’s *Kitāb al-Taṣawwuf*, where he articulated a translation from Arabic about genuine Sufis.³⁰⁴ He quotes Ibn Taymiyya as saying that “the Sufis, in reality, are types of *siddiqīn* (truthful), of the highest degrees of people who are sincere and straight and close to the Lord ...they are singled out with *zuhd* and *‘ibāda* (asceticism and worship)”. Murād explains how Ibn Taymiyya points out that some scholars had a critical view of *taṣawwuf*; they condemned the Sufis and Sufism from the Sunna, which was followed by *ahl-al-Kalām* (of the Mu‘tazilite school).³⁰⁵

Murād continues his narration of Ibn Taymiyya saying that “the criticality is not between *ḥadīth* and *taṣawwuf* but between *Kalām* and *taṣawwuf*”. Sufis should be viewed as sincerely righteous Muslims who are making the greatest effort to obey Allah, as with any other Muslim. Amongst the Sufis is one who is brought nearest to Allah thanks to his spiritual efforts. There is the sort who are middle of the road in terms of *Ahl al-Yamīn* (people of the right hand). In both categories, there are people who make efforts and commit mistakes. Amongst them are those who might sin and either repent or not repent. There are also those who see themselves as belonging to Sufism but wrong themselves and disobey their Lord; they are people of innovation and *zandaqa* (heresy).³⁰⁶

³⁰² Muḥammad, *Ibn Taymiyya’s Attitude...*, p. 77

³⁰³ Post, *A Glimpse of Sufism...*

³⁰⁴ ‘Abd al-Ḥakīm Murād, *Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328) and his love of Taṣawwuf and the leading Sufis*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fe_RDOjOc_0 (Accessed 4 June 2024)

³⁰⁵ Influenced by Greek philosophy Mu‘tazilites introduced logical (rationalism) into theology (*‘Ilm al-Kalām*). See Daniel W. Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)

³⁰⁶ *Zandaqa* (heresy). It is an Arabized word from Persian that refers to the heresy of Manichaeism.

Murād continues, “of these innovators is al-Ḥallāj, whose views were repudiated by most scholars of Sufism. They do not consider him part of the path of Sufism”, which Murād thought “a bit contentious”. There were the bases for Sufism’s early differences, after which Ibn Taymiyya notes that “*taṣawwuf* branched out and diversified into three categories: *Ṣūfiyyat al-ḥaqā’iq* (the Sufis of true realities), *Ṣūfiyyat al-arzāq* (those involved in a *ṭarīqa* just to make a living), and *Ṣūfiyyat al-rasm* (those involved just for the sake of appearances).³⁰⁷ This three-fold categorisation corresponds with al-Ghazālī characterisation of *taṣawwuf* found in his *Kitāb Dham al-Ghurūr*”.³⁰⁸

According to Murād, Ibn Taymiyya clarifies that al-Ghazālī’s fatwa is against certain extremists and errors amongst people of *taṣawwuf* as much as he is against certain errors present amongst certain scholars of *tafsīr* or *fiqh*. In the same vein, Ibn Taymiyya is against those who commit errors regarding *taṣawwuf* but not against *taṣawwuf* itself., Murād states that Ibn Taymiyya was a great enthusiast for *taṣawwuf*, and particularly his *sanad* (sequential authorisation handed over by a genuine Sufi Shaykh) in *taṣawwuf* comes from his teacher Ibn ‘Umar, who gets it from Ibn Qudāma who gets it directly from Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī. So, there are only two intermediaries between these two Shaykhs (al-Jīlānī and Ibn Taymiyya) ... which is present in the *Silsila* after *silsila* (sequential approval chain) that Ibn Taymiyya is an important transmitter of the Qādirī *ṭarīqa*, and of course he writes his famous commentary on the *Futūḥ al-Ghayb* of ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī. He refers to him as *Shaykhuna* (our foremost Shaykh).³⁰⁹ Murād states in his narration that “there is a particularly close connection between ahl *al-Ḥadīth* (*Ḥanbalīs*) and the people of *taṣawwuf*”. Renowned *Ḥanbalī* scholars who were involved in the path of *taṣawwuf* are found in Ibn Rajab’s *Dhayl ‘ala Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*. Among them, of particular interest to this thesis is Ibn ‘Aqīl, to whom I will return in Chapter Seven in association with Raḍwān al-Sayyid and his interest in *Ḥanbalī* scholarship.

³⁰⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *The Book of Sufism*..., p. 9

³⁰⁸ *Kitāb Dham al-Ghurūr* is the tenth book of al-Ghazālī’s magnum opus *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, which is alluded to in Chapter Five. See Al-Ghazzali, *The Revival of the Religious Learnings*...

³⁰⁹ Muhtar Holland, *Revelations of the Unseen (Futuh al-Ghaib)*, (United States: Al-Baz Pub Inc., 1992) <https://www.amazon.com/Revelations-Unseen-al-Ghaib-al-Qadir-al-Jilani/dp/1882216016> . (Accessed on 26 September 2021)

Murād states, “it is hard to find anybody in the history of Islam who Ibn Taymiyya reveres more than ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī”. Murād continues:

Ibn Taymiyya himself says I’ve worn the blessed *khirqā* (patched robe) of Shaykh Abd al-Qādir, and between him and methere are only two Shaykhs: Ibn Qudāma and Ibn ‘Umar.³¹⁰ Among his disciples is the renowned scholar of Qur’anic exegesis Ibn Kathīr, who emphasised that al-Jīlānī is of the great Lords of the Shaykhs.³¹¹ The Great Sunni historian of the *Ḥanbalī* school al-Dhahabī also praises Ibn Taymiyya as a great *Ḥanbalī* Sufi.³¹²

In sum, according to Murād, Ibn Taymiyya’s attitude towards the Sufis and their *fiqhī* (of the jurisprudence school) Salafī counterparts is as follows: “Sufis criticise those who are hard in their hearts by not being affected by the Qur’an, and the Salafis criticise those who are too soft-hearted who think they are better than the hard-hearted”. Ibn Taymiyya criticises both as unreasonable. As is evident from his *Kitāb al-Taṣawwuf*, Ibn Taymiyya’s intention is to defend the *taṣawwuf* of the early righteous Sufis against the aberrancies of some deviant or pseudo-Sufis”.³¹³

1.5 The Four Approaches to *Taṣawwuf* in *Kitāb al-Taṣawwuf*

As noted already, this thesis specifies four approaches to Sunni *taṣawwuf*: 1) righteous Sunni Sufism, 2) *shaṭḥī* Sufism, 3) *muṣtaṣwifa* (pseudo-Sufism, which could also be called wrong *taṣawwuf*), and 4) philosophical Sufism. This thesis has set out Ibn Taymiyya’s views on Sufism and located them in three categories: a) praiseworthy Sufism, b) blameworthy Sufism and c) rejected Sufism. The four approaches to contemporary Sufism are contained within the three categories of Ibn Taymiyya, as explained below.

³¹⁰ Murād translates *khirqā* as a patched rope, meanwhile *khirqā* is a shroud possessed by a Sufi Shaykh and which he bestows on his *murīd* as a symbolic certificate of approval.

³¹¹ Ismā‘īl Ibn Kathīr (1300–1373) is a Sunni Shafī‘ī scholar and historian. Known for his Qur’anic exegesis. He was a disciple of both Ibn Taymiyya and al-Dhahabī.

³¹² Murād, *Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328)*...

³¹³ Ibn Taymiyya, *The Book of Sufism*..., p. 9

Of the four approaches to *taṣawwuf*, the first is found in the Ibn Taymiyya-based categorisation of Sufism, i.e., *sūfiyyat al-ḥaqā'iq* (true reality Sufism).³¹⁴ This categorisation falls under the *taṣawwuf maḥmūd* (praiseworthy Sufism). Ibn Taymiyya calls for preserving this version of Sufism to reflect the original *zuhd* and piousness of righteous predecessors; it is practised following the Qur'an and *sharī'a*. Here, he did not distinguish between Salafī and Sunni Sufism per se, as the Sufis classify Sufism nowadays.

The second approach, *shaṭḥī* Sufism, is viewed ambivalently by the Sufis and Ibn Taymiyya. Ibn Taymiyya's view of this approach warrants special attention, for it includes practices such as *samā'* (listening) and some *karāmāt* and behaviours that are sometimes points of contentious debate, whether they are included in either blameworthy or praiseworthy Sufism.³¹⁵ Some alleged *karāmāt* and *khawāriq* (supernatural miracles), which the Salafis often repeat as examples of Sufi deviancy, are laughable in their own right and have been subject to ridicule.³¹⁶ As for the *shaṭḥī* (or ecstatic utterances, which are sometimes accompanied by uncontrolled behaviour) some are tolerable if justified under temporary states of *sukr* (unconsciousness; ecstatic drunkenness) or *wajd* (spiritual ecstasy) as long as whoever experiences them disclaims them as unrealistic upon returning to a state of sobriety.³¹⁷

The third approach is pseudo-Sufism (blameworthy Sufism), which falls under Ibn Taymiyya's categories of *ṣūfiyyat al-rasm* and *ṣūfiyyat al-arzāq*. He warns against falling for their pretentiousness and falsity.³¹⁸ Finally, the fourth approach is the philosophical Sufism attributed

³¹⁴ Ibid, p. 14

³¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 7-16

³¹⁶ Al-Khamīs, *Sufism: Its Divisions*... He ridicules Sufi outlandish *karāmāt* with examples from two sources: Yūsif al-Nabhānī, *Jāmi' karāmāt al-Awlyā'* (A Compilation of the Miracles of the Saints) <https://ketabpedia.com/%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%84/%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9-%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A1-01/> (Accessed on 27 September 2021) and 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubr: Lawāqih al-Anwār fī Ṭabaqāt al-Akhhbār* (The Greater Levels: The Inseminators of Light in Informative Levels) <https://ketabpedia.com/%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%84/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A8%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%89-%D9%84%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B7%D8%A8%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA/> (Accessed on 27 September 2021)

³¹⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *The Book of Sufism*..., p. 321

³¹⁸ Ibid, p.14

to Ibn ‘Arabī and his school of thought. Ibn Taymiyya rejects it; however, it is controversial amongst the Sufis themselves, as discussed in Chapters Five and Six.³¹⁹

According to Ibn Taymiyya, the early Sufism of the *zuhhād* (ascetically pious), which was not tainted by later impurities, set an example to the following generations of *ahl-al-Sunna wa al-Jamā’a* Sufis, who flourished in the eighth century.³²⁰ They followed in the footsteps of the renowned Sufis of the *tabi’īn* (the generation who followed Prophet Muḥammad’s companions), such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (624–728), especially in Baṣra during a period of Islamic history in which other categories, i.e., blameworthy Sufism started to flourish. Due to intellectual interaction with Greek philosophy, the Mu‘tazilite school married logic to Islamic theology in what became known as *‘ilm al-kalām*. However, the Ash‘arite school split off and provided *taṣawwuf* with fertile ground to grow in a milieu of *ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā’a*’s tradition, yet with remnant roots embedded in *kalām* logic (see Chapter Two).

It should be understood, however, that the Abbasid caliphate gained more territory and wealth before being conquered in an era of weak caliphate rulers. The actual rule was gradually transferred to the Mamlūk (slaves) generals who were in full control of the struggling Muslim Empire during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Ibn Taymiyya’s era). This was an era that had a profound influence on *taṣawwuf*.³²¹ The socio-religious-cum-political milieu during this period which spanned Ḥasan al-Baṣrī’s era through Ibn Taymiyya’s era in the fourteenth century, was conducive to the emergence of individuals, who claimed to be Sufis but were actually associated with what came to be known as *shaṭḥī* Sufism, e.g., al-Ḥallāj (858–922).

It is interesting that the association of philosophy with Sufism was recognized at the time. Still Ibn Taymiyya did not include “philosophical Sufism” under his three-fold categorization. Instead, he expelled the “so-called Sufi philosophers” from Islam. Yet it is in this age of Islamic politico-religious *miḥna* (ordeal) during the Mamlūk Sultanate of Egypt and Syria, accompanied by the Mongol invasion of Syria (1299–1303), when Ibn Taymiyya came to the

³¹⁹ Ibid, p. 125

³²⁰ Ibid, pp. 7-8

³²¹ Nathan Hofer, *The Popularization of Sufism in Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt 1173–1325* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015)

fore as a defender of the Sunni *Ḥanbalī* Islam of *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā‘a*. This is an era marked by his attack on *Ash‘arī* theology and Ibn ‘Arabī’s philosophical Sufism, “as well as attempts to quell Sufi antinomian behaviour”.³²² As an accomplished scholar, Ibn Taymiyya was actively instrumental as a self-appointed defender of the righteous Islam of *ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a*, including its Sufi Shaykhs. His influence on the Sunni school of thought was profound throughout the Islamic world until today.³²³

Based on the abovementioned categorization of Sufism, the theological dimension of the three Salafi arguments will be examined in relation to the four approaches to Sufism. These approaches are contained in the three Ibn Taymiyya-based categories (the praiseworthy, the blameworthy and the rejected) to establish a hierarchy in terms of their compatibility with or deviancy from the true path of *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā‘a*. Here, Ibn Taymiyya’s attitude towards Sufism viewed by contemporary literature, i.e., al-‘Arīfī’s and al-Bakrī’s theses, will be juxtaposed against his attitude as stated in his own writing. This will establish the basis for the two views about Sufism among the Salafi establishment of Saudi Arabia, i.e., the pre-and post-Vision 2030 views.

1.6 The Three Major Arguments and the Three Categories of Sufism

The three major arguments against Sufism from a theological perspective, i.e., credal deviation, behavioural deviation, and the unity of religions theory, should be examined in relation to the three categories of Sufism specified by Ibn Taymiyya that are relevant today. The three categories will be examined regarding their compatibility with the genuine Sufism of the early *zuhhād* of *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā‘a*, i.e., their proximity to said Sufism.

It must be noted that Ibn Taymiyya’s categorization reflects the socioreligious and political milieu of his era. However, considering that Ibn Taymiyya’s school is the backbone of Saudi Salafism, this thesis aligns its four-approach classification of Sufism into the three categories of Sufism specified by Ibn Taymiyya, thus reflecting what should be the present-day Salafi attitude to Sufism. This should present a genuine Salafi attitude towards Sufism, which is

³²² Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyy: Maker...*, pp. 70-71. This period in Ibn Taymiyya’s ordeal with the government-supported religious authorities resulted in a public trial over his creed and seven years of exile in Egypt.

³²³ Ibid

conducive to intrareligious tolerance, aligning with the spirit of Vision 2030. The three Ibn Taymiyya-based contemporary Salafi categories will be discussed below: praiseworthy Sufism, blameworthy Sufism and rejected Sufism.

According to Ibn Taymiyya, the praiseworthy category is Sufism of *ahl al-sunna wa al-jamā'a*. The blameworthy category contains types of Sufism that do not, yet could (if abused) expel one from Islam. This is because their practices oscillate between praiseworthy and rejected depending on how they are judged *sharī'a*-wise. The rejected category, as the name indicates, expels one from Islam. Within these three categories of Sufism, one finds the basis for the theological dimension of the three Salafī arguments against Sufism: credal deviation, behavioural deviation, and promotion of the unity of religions theory.

Praiseworthy *Taṣawwuf*. This type is that of *ṣūfiyyat al-ḥaqā'iq* and classified as part of *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā'a*. Its adherents were designated in early Islam as *zuhhād* Sufis and contemporarily as Sunni Sufis.³²⁴ Despite Ibn Taymiyya's praise for this type of Sufism, he has concerns about the propensity of its adherents to perform deviant-cum-aberrant practices if they do not tread the path carefully. As far as the attitude of contemporary Salafism is concerned, al-Bakrī's opinion aligns with that of Ibn Taymiyya.³²⁵ However, their attitude, as projected by al-'Arīfī's and Āl al-Shaykh's views (see Chapter Three), as well as by mainstream Salafī social media channels, portrays contemporary Sufism indiscriminately as a sure repository of all deviancies-cum-aberrancies that Ibn Taymiyya warns against or rejects altogether. They do so without referencing his unequivocal approval of praiseworthy Sufism, which belongs to *ahal al-Sunna wa al-jamā'a*.³²⁶

In *Kitāb al-Taṣawwuf*, Ibn Taymiyya mentions some of these practices to discern not just deviant and aberrant ones but also what is acceptable by prominent Sunni Imams, e.g., Aḥmad Ibn Ḥambal. Ibn Taymiyya addresses several issues, some elaborately and others lightly. These issues include extreme asceticism, the relationship between the Sufī *murīd* and the Sufi *walī* or Shaykh, emphasis on *'amal* over *'ilm* (action over knowledge), unorthodox reverence for

³²⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *The Book of Sufism...*, p. 14

³²⁵ Al-Bakrī, *Ibn Taymiyya and his...*

³²⁶ Muḥammad, *Ibn Taymiyya's Attitude...*

Prophet Muḥammad, reliance on false *ḥadīth*, exaggeration of the Sufi *karāmāt* and *khawāriq* (miracles extraordinaire) to the point of *isqāṭ al-takālīf* (exemption from the required daily prayers), engagement in *samāʿ*, reliance on *ilhām*, *kashf* and *mushahadāt* (claims of seeing Allah in this world; theophany), grave worship, *tawassul* and *istighātha*.³²⁷

Some of these, such as reliance on false *ḥadīth*, exaggerated reverence for Prophet Muḥammad, grave worship, *tawassul* and *istighātha*, were addressed in Chapter Three under the six sub-principles of *shirk*. The others will be alluded to in the following discussion of the three categories. It should be noted that the Salafis frequently emphasise certain issues when disseminating Sufism to the public through the media. For example, the media disseminates an image of Sufis as grave worshippers who submit obediently and unquestionably to the will of their *awliyāʾ* and Shaykhs whom they believe to be favoured by Allah. Allah, in turn, answers their prayers and grants them special *karāmāt* and *khawāriq*. This means seeking the *baraka* (blessing) of the *walī*, *tawassul* and *istighātha* are mainstay Sufi practices. Sufis further claim that Allah bestows some of his attributes on them and assigns them special God-like functions that they inherit perpetually (from *walī* to *walī*) to keep Allah's religion alive on Earth through the appointment of *gawth*, *qutb*, *abdāl* etc.

Another issue the Salafis abhor as heretical is the *samāʿ* of *majālis al-dhikr*. This occurs during the *mawlid al-nabawī*, in which the heresy of *ḥaḍra* (presence) where Prophet Muḥammad is believed to attend the gathering himself takes place.³²⁸ The other issues are of a theoretical nature and are debated mainly in religious and scholarly circles. These include the claim of *mushahadāt* (witnessing the vision of Allah), where a Sufi sees Allah in this world (experiencing Divine vision; theophany). Their extreme *tawakkul* (trusting in Allah's plan) is believed to provide the means of their subsistence, allowing them to devoutly dedicate their existence to the goal of reaching Allah through extreme asceticism and by shunning the material world.

³²⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *The Book of Sufism...*

³²⁸ The *ḥaḍra* (presence) of Prophet Muḥammad during the supererogatory supplications of *majālis al-dhikr* (remembrance gatherings) is when Prophet Muḥammad's presence is purportedly felt. Supplicants then stand up in respect to bestow praises on him.

The Salafis accuse Sufis of claiming to attain the perfect bond with Allah through ‘*amal*’ over ‘*ilm*’, meaning that their physical ‘*ibādāt*’ (worshipping rituals) and *sulūk* (behaviour) take precedence over their knowledge of *sharī‘a* law derived from the Qur’an and Sunna. This is true even though the Sufis believe in the purification of *bātin* (inner self) by their spiritual guide to assure a *zāhir* (actual *action*) that follows *sharī‘a*. But unlike the Salafis who rely on ‘*ilm al-zāhir*’ based on *sharī‘a* knowledge to attain Allah’s *riḍa* (satisfaction) in this world and the hereafter, the Sufis emphasise the superiority of ‘*ilm al-bātin*’ based on *ilhām*, *kashf* and *mushahadāt* to reach *al-ḥaqīqā* (ultimate reality; Allah).

In *kitāb al-Taṣawwuf*, Ibn Taymiyya offers several opinions on the abovementioned practices. On the one hand, he considers some baseless or supported by false *ḥadīth* such as the existence of *gawth*, *qutb*, *abdāl* and *awṭād* etc. Others he considers outright heretical, such as exaggerated reverence of Prophet Muḥammad. All in all, these practices can be divided into those considered *sharī‘a*-compatible if implemented accordingly, and those considered non-*sharī‘a* compatible.³²⁹ On the other hand, some of them (despite their association with heretical Sufi behaviour) are acceptable if performed in a *sharī‘a*-compatible fashion, e.g., *samā‘*.

³²⁹ As outlined in Ibn Taymiyya, *The Book of Sufism*... the category of beliefs and practices incompatible with that of the *sharī‘a* include the *ḥadīth* about the existence of *awliyā‘* in the hierarchy of *abdāl*, *nuqabā‘*, *nujabā‘*, *awṭād*, and *aqṭāb*, who are found in specific numbers, is not true (p. 96); Some Sufis justify exempting some prescribed obligations, e.g., daily prayers, as a legitimate *sulūk* of the seeker (Ibid, p.96); Some Sufis designate some of their Shaykhs as *awliyā‘*, which is Allah’s privilege (Ibid, p.39); Love to other than Allah, e.g., to a Shaykh is anti-credal (Ibid, p.286); Vows at *Anbiyā‘* (prophets) and Shaykh’s graves is *shirk* (Ibid, p. 275); The false *ḥadīth* that claims if it were not for Prophet Muhammad Allah would not have created the world (Ibid, p. 57); The *al-khirqa* (initiatory cloak) is not an original Islamic tradition (Ibid, p.278); belonging to a Shaykh in this world and hereafter is sinful, and belonging to a *ṭarīqa* is cause to weaken the bond of Muslims as a *jamā‘a* (unified group) (Ibid, pp. 279-280). The category of *sharī‘a*-compatible practices, if performed accordingly, include experiencing the state of *fanā‘* and the temporary loss of consciousness as an uncontrollable emotional *wajd* (spiritual ecstasy) if experienced within the bounds of *sharī‘a* when hearing the Qur’an (Ibid p. 8- 10.; The path to Allah combines ‘*ilm* and ‘*amal*’ per *sharī‘a* (Ibid, p.18). To Ibn Taymiyya, there are three types of *al-ḥaqīqa*: *kawniyya* (cosmological), *heretical*, and *sharī‘a*-compliant. It is the heretical one that some Sufis fall for following the whims of the heart, i.e., *dhawq*, *wajd*, *maḥabba* and *hawa* (whimsical desires), without compliance with the Qur’an and Sunna. The *sharī‘a*-compliant *ḥaqīqa* should only be dedicated to that which Allah and His Prophet love (Ibid, p. 277). Regarding false *ḥadīth*, Ibn Taymiyya considers some Sufis genuine, e.g., al-Fuḍayl Bin ‘Iyād; others, such as Mālik Bin Dinār,, were known to commit mistakes. Al-Salamī uses *ahādīth mawḍū‘a* (false), so his narrations on *ahl al-Ṣuffa* in its majority are good, despite some weaknesses. Some are known to mix false and attested *ḥadīth*, e.g., al-Salamī, which Ibn Taymiyya is apologetic for (Ibid, p. 27); *Tawassul* and *shafā‘a* should be requested solely from Allah (Ibid, p. 287); *Samā‘* could be either *sharī‘a*-compatible, such as listening to Qur’an recitation, and non-compatible if dancing and instruments are used (Ibid, p. 303-328). In terms of *awliyā‘*, Ibn Taymiyya divides them into *awliyā‘ al-Raḥmān* (those affiliated with Allah) and *awliyā‘ al-Shayṭān* (those affiliated with Satan), especially the philosophers who think the *walī* is higher in status than the Prophet and *wilāya* (saintship) could be granted with rigorous worship (Ibid, pp. 90-169); Ibn Taymiyya offers basis for *khawāriq* and *karāmāt* when classifying them as compatible and non-compatible (Ibid, pp. 172-242).

In order for Saudi Sufis, who classify themselves as ahl *al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a*, to qualify for praiseworthy Sufism, the Salafis insist they must clearly state their position on these practices. So, the first major Salafī claim of Sufi credal deviation can be found within praiseworthy Sufism. Most of these practices fall under the rubric of *shirk* as deviation affecting the Islamic creed of *tawḥīd*. However, their impact regarding whether they lead to greater or lesser *shirk* varies depending on the different *fiqhī* (jurisprudential) school interpretations (see Chapter Two). Most of these controversial practices are contained within the principle of *shirk* and its six subprinciples detailed in Chapter Three. The Salafis accuse the Sufis of falling victim to these deviant practices, while the Saudi Sufis response will be articulated in Chapter Five,

Blameworthy *Taṣawwuf*. This category characterises two approaches to Sufism: *shāṭḥī* Sufism and pseudo-Sufism. Sufi behaviour plays a big role in these approaches to *taṣawwuf*, which are designated as blameworthy because even if they are practised by sincere Muslims who adhere to *tawḥīd* with good intentions, they still do have the propensity to slip into *ma'ṣiya* (sin) or even blasphemy. In other words, both types could harbour *shirk aṣghar* (lesser polytheism), which could lead to *shirk akbar* (greater polytheism). One could easily become a victim of the two types of polytheism, either knowingly or unknowingly, through *Shāṭḥī* or pseudo-Sufism.

Pseudo-Sufism is a practice conducted by charlatans who take advantage of misguided and ignorant masses to live off their misfortunes by deceiving them. They do so through the performance of fake abilities leading to extraordinary or supernatural acts in the hopes of resolving the predicaments of onlookers, provided they follow their advice. This type of pseudo-Sufism is exemplified in the famous debate between Ibn Taymiyya and the charlatan Sufis of the *Baṭā'ihyya dajājila* (charlatans; deceivers).³³⁰

With regard to *shāṭḥī* Sufism, Ibn Taymiyya assumes two stances. On the one hand, he is apologetic for those who are diligent in their *'ibadāt khālīṣa* (sincere worship), e.g., al-Bisṭāmī.³³¹ But some Sufis, in deep engagement with the *dhikr* or *samā'*, experience deep emotions that make them utter unorthodox words or statements. As soon as the ecstatic state concludes, they return to normal and even deny they uttered such words. On the other hand, Ibn

³³⁰ Ibn Taymiyya, *The Book of Sufism*..., pp. 244-251

³³¹ Ibid, p. 255

Taymiyya rejects *shaṭḥī* behaviour as blasphemous and says it should be avoided lest it leads to the heresy of Ibn ‘Arabī’s *waḥdat al-wujūd*, and al-Ḥallāj’s *Ḥulūl wa ittiḥād*.³³² Another example of *Shaṭḥ* is the *Murshida* Sufis, who claim their leader Ibn Tomurt receives his knowledge of the Qur’an and *ḥadīth* while he sleeps.³³³

Within blameworthy Sufism dwells pseudo-Sufism and *shaṭḥī* Sufism, two approaches to *taṣawwuf* the Salafis associate with deviant Sufi behaviour. If pseudo-Sufism is prone to the lesser type of *shirk*, it is *shaṭḥī* Sufism that could lead from the lesser to greater *shirk* of philosophical Sufism. So, within the blameworthy Sufism dwells the second major Salafi argument against Sufism, i.e., behavioural deviation or what this thesis calls folk religion *taṣawwuf*. The blameworthy *taṣawwuf* and Saudi Sufis’s attitude toward such Sufism, in terms of whether it leads to *shirk* will be addressed by Saudi Sufi Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad’aq in Chapter Five.

Rejected *Taṣawwuf*. Rejected *taṣawwuf* is basically what is labelled as philosophical Sufism. Under the category of philosophical Sufism, there falls a type of greater *shirk* of a different calibre than that of traditional greater *shirk* traditionally associated with *taṣawwuf*’s principle of *shirk* and its six subprinciples (see Chapter Three). As far as the Salafis are concerned, the greater *shirk* of philosophical Sufism could contribute to eradicating Salafism as the true preserver of the Islam of *al-Salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (the righteous forefathers) from its foundations. This *shirk* is the belief in and propagation of the unity of religions theory. It should be noted that the non-*sharī‘a*-compliant *shaṭḥī* type of Sufism, i.e., of al-Ḥallāj or, according to Ma‘lawī, the exaggerated *zuhd* and *shaṭḥ* of al-Biṣṭāmī and al-Shiblī, are causes for greater *shirk* that paves the way for philosophical Sufism and subsequently, the unity of religions.³³⁴

As far as the Salafi school is concerned nowadays, this type of *shirk* poses a much more serious threat to the Islamic creed of *tawḥīd* than the traditional six principles of *shirk* alluded to earlier. Professor of the Islamic ‘*aqīda* at the Islamic University of Medina, Dr. Shaykh Lutf Allah

³³² Ibid, p. 263

³³³ Ibid, pp. 260-263

³³⁴ Ma‘lawī, *Unity of Religions in ...*, p. 16. The al-Biṣṭāmī and al-Shiblī school of thought is considered pro unity of religions. However, Ibn Taymiyya praises Abu yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī and cites him as a good example to refute the deviant Sufis in Ibn Taymiyya, *The Book of Sufism...*, p. 255

Khoja, stated on the weekly televised programme *Ḥaqīqat al-Taṣawwuf* (The Reality of Sufism) that the theory of the unity of being and its subordinate concepts of *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād* are integral to Sufism. This is true whether they are attributed explicitly by adherents of philosophical Sufism and the school of Ibn ‘Arabī, or implicitly by some Sufi scholars through the concept of *waḥdat al-Shuhūd*.³³⁵

As an embodiment of the unity of being as well as the *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād*, Khoja describes the unity of religions as the other side of the coin of *taṣawwuf*. He cites an example of the call for unity between the three Abrahamic faiths exemplified in the Abrahamic House (see Chapter Seven).³³⁶ Salafi suspicion of the call for Abrahamic unity is stated by al-Ma‘lawī.³³⁷

Now that Vision 2030 has approved and promoted the study of philosophy in the Saudi educational system, the philosophical aspects of Islam in general and Sufism in particular should be addressed in light of the Salafi rejection of philosophy (see Chapter Six). This thesis predicts that the issue of philosophy will be problematic for the future outlook of Saudi society, with its majority of educated young people who are anxious and determined to experience their civilisational role as designated by Vision 2030. The Vision calls for opening up to the rest of the world, where questions of human rights and beliefs are not approached dogmatically but as inherent to philosophy, much to the dislike of the Salafi religious establishment.

Since the inception of the Saudi state in the eighteenth century, the concerns about the philosophical aspects of *taṣawwuf* have been of utmost importance. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, the theological ideologue of the Saudi state in the mid-eighteenth century, did all he could from the

³³⁵ Lutf Allah Khoja, *Ḥaqīqat al-Taṣawwuf - Waḥdat al-Wujūd wa ‘Ilāqatuha bi Waḥdat al-Adyān* (The Reality of Sufism – The Unity of Being and its Relationship with the Unity of Religions). *Waḥdat al-Shuhūd* (oneness of appearance or witnessing) as opposed to oneness of being, is a doctrine taught by the Indian Sufi Aḥmad al-Sirhindī as an attempt to integrate reformist Sufi ideas into Sunni Sufism (see author, *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*). For The reality of *waḥdat al-wujūd* see Ma‘lawī, *Unity of Religions in ...*, p. 463, and for the difference between Wahad al-wujud and waḥdat al-shuhūd, see Ibid, p. 469.

³³⁶ See “About the Abrahamic Family House” <https://www.forhumanfraternity.org/abrahamic-family-house/> (Accessed on 30 September 2021). The website stated that: “the vision for the Abrahamic Family House originated after the signing of the Document on Human Fraternity by Pope Francis and Grand Imam Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib in February 2019. This landmark will be a place for learning, dialogue, and worship – open to all and a true reflection of the UAE’s belief in tolerance and hospitality.” A prominent Sufi, Imam al-Ṭayyib is the current Imam of al-Azhar Grand Mosque and former president of al-Azhar University in Egypt. He was present at the controversial (Sufi, Ash‘arite, *Mutaridī*) conference in Grozny, Chechnya in 2016 (mentioned in Chapter Two).

³³⁷ Regarding the unity of religions in Abrahamic religions see Ma‘lawī, *Unity of Religions in ...*, pp. 113-131

outset to eradicate the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabī and Ibn al-Fāriḍ (see Chapter One). But in light of the aims of Vision 2030, this thesis argues that a philosophical approach to studying *taṣawwuf* is essential to Saudi Arabia of the future – an argument alluded to in Chapters Six and Seven. In light of the Salafi rejection of philosophy, the position of Saudi Sufis will be sought in Chapter Five.

II. The Socioreligious-cum-Political Dimension of Salafi Arguments

The fourth major Salafi argument concerns the socioreligious-cum-political dimension. Given that Ibn Taymiyya’s critique of *taṣawwuf* was theologically based, the above-mentioned four approaches to *taṣawwuf* do not lend themselves to accommodating *taṣawwuf* as an instrument of social or political change.

The socioreligious-cum-political dimension of the Salafi argument is a new accusation generated, as explained in Chapter One, for one of two reasons (or both). On the one hand, *taṣawwuf* was thought to re-emerge on the public scene as an outcome of the rise of political Islam in the early eighties. The Salafi establishment feared that Sufis could ally themselves with the Khomeini’s Iran-nurtured Shī‘a militant groups, especially as the militant Salafi factions of political Islam started to wreak terrorist havoc in Saudi Arabia (see Chapter One). On the other hand, as a reaction to Salafi hardliners and the 9/11 attacks, the revival of *taṣawwuf* was encouraged, especially by the United States, as a possible replacement for fundamental Salafism in Saudi Arabia.

The Salafis accused Sufism of being a stepping-stone used by the United States government to destroy the righteous Islam of *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā‘a*. This was achieved either through the promotion of the unity of religions theory under the pretext of interreligious dialogues or by exploiting *taṣawwuf* as a political force against Sunni governments in Saudi Arabia and Arabian Gulf states.³³⁸ Khoja argues that the United States could not find an easier pretext to defuse the

³³⁸ Al-Baddāh, *The Sufi Movement in...*

robustness of the Islamic *‘aqīda* than the vehicle of *taṣawwuf*.³³⁹ The RAND report from 2007 attests to that.³⁴⁰

Still, *taṣawwuf* did not participate in the politico-religious movements of *al-Ṣaḥwa* (the Islamic awakening) era, even as a soft power (see Chapter One). Sufism gained recognition as the antithesis of Salafism due to the damage incurred by Saudi Arabia as the epitome of twentieth-century fundamentalist Salafism following the infamous 9/11 attacks and the resultant founding of King Abd al-Aziz Center for National Dialogue in 2003).³⁴¹

The Saudi Sufi response to such accusations will be reviewed in Chapter Five.

Conclusion

This chapter concludes the analysis of the four Salafī arguments against *taṣawwuf*, offering insights into the state of Sufism in Saudi Arabia. It also sets the stage for the Sufi counterarguments presented in Chapter Five.

The Salafis criticized Sufism based on four refutational arguments. Three of these arguments fall under the theological dimension. They are the credal and behavioural deviations of Sufism and the promotion of the unity of religions theory. In light of Vision 2030's socioreligious aspects, which promote intra-Islamic *madhāhib* pluralism and openness to diverse religions and world cultures, it is important to reassess the classification of Sunni *taṣawwuf*, especially considering Ibn Taymiyya's favourable views on righteous *taṣawwuf*, as he is a key theorist of Saudi Salafism.

A comparative analysis of the contemporary Salafī three-type classification, the Sufi three-type classification and Ibn Taymiyya's fourteenth-century, three-type classification of *taṣawwuf* necessitated a re-classification of Sunni *taṣawwuf* by this thesis into four approaches (rather

³³⁹ Khoja, *The Reality of Sufism*...

³⁴⁰ Reference to a study of Sufism by the Rand corporation published in 2007. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2007/RA_MG574.pdf (Accessed on 01 October 2021)

³⁴¹ Itzhak Weismann, *Modernity From Within: Islamic Fundamentalism and Sufism*, in *Sufis and Salafis in the Contemporary Age*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p 317; For Salafī–Sufi political conflicts in the Caucasus and Yemen, see Knysh, *Sufism: A New History*...

than types) to Sunni Sufism. These are Sunni or righteous Sufism, *shaṭḥī* Sufism, *muṣṭaṣwifa* (pseudo-Sufism; wrong Sufism), and philosophical Sufism.

The fourth major Salafī argument against Sufism falls under the socioreligious-cum-political dimension. It is the accusation that Sufism is a vehicle for the destruction of Salafism, the defender of the righteous Islam of *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā‘a*. In Chapter Five, Sufi scholars, with a particular focus on Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq, critically examine the four arguments presented by Salafī proponents.

CHAPTER FIVE

Sufi Responses to Salafi Refutations of Sufism: Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq and the Two Holy Mosques School of *Ihsān*

This chapter examines Sufi responses to Salafī criticisms, focusing on the insights of Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq, a key advocate of *taṣawwuf* in al-Ḥijāz. Fad‘aq contends that Salafis fundamentally misunderstand *taṣawwuf* and calls for a reevaluation of their perspective. He introduces a Saudi interpretation of *taṣawwuf* that aligns with the teachings of the Two Holy Mosques school of *ihsān* and embodies the principle of *wasāṭiyya* as outlined in Vision 2030, thereby addressing the second sub-research question of the thesis.

In Chapter Four, four major Salafi arguments against Sufism were presented based on two dimensions: the theological and the socioreligious-cum-political. This is designated as the traditional Salafī approach to refuting *taṣawwuf*. However, this chapter presents Sufi’s counterarguments to Salafi’s arguments based on two approaches. Sufi arguments are, above all, a response to the aforementioned traditional approach and a response to a non-traditional approach that will be explained.

The first approach involves responding to the traditional Salafī arguments on the basis of theological and socioreligious-cum-political elements, as stated in Chapter Four. The second approach is based on Salafis intentionally or unintentionally denying Sufism its claim of being founded on the school of *al-ihsān*’s two quintessential principles: *sulūk* and *akhlāq*. *Sulūk* (conduct) and *akhlāq* (morals; ethics) are what individuals ascribe to in their pious wayfaring journey to Allah as expressed in the celebrated *Ḥadīth* of Jibrīl.³⁴² This thesis describes the second non-traditional approach as invoking two Salafi-disregarded Sufi principles. This thesis presents the arguments that bring forth this second approach as the foundation of the *wasāṭiyya* upon which the hypothesis of this thesis rests (the non-traditional approach will be revisited in Chapter Seven). Still, responses to the traditional Salafi arguments act as a background to set out Sufi responses to non-traditional arguments. This will be illustrated later in this chapter when addressing the contemporary state of Sufism in Saudi Arabia.

³⁴² A *Ḥadīth* where one should worship Allah as they see Him: if unable to see Him, however, they should be certain that Allah sees them (see *Ḥadīth* number 50 in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*). For an English discussion of this *Ḥadīth* see Murata, and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam...*

Chapter Four established that the prevailing type of Sufism in Saudi Arabia is classified as Sunni Sufism, which is also designated as true or real *taṣawwuf*. Based on this thesis' typological classification of Sufism, Sunni Sufism is one of four approaches to Sufism (see Diagram 2 in Chapter Four). Despite recent Salafi recognition of some positive aspects of the prevailing Sunni Sufism, the Salafi establishment, generally and unfailingly, categorises Sunni Sufism in Saudi Arabia as a deviant sect and refutes the claim that they belong to the path of the righteous predecessors. That is the path of *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā'a*, which, according to al-ʿAwnī, is a term that encompasses adherents of all of the mainstream schools of thought in Sunni Islam.³⁴³

Before addressing the Sufi responses, there is one important point to note about Sufism's geographic foci within Saudi Arabia. As Chapter One illustrates, Sufism today thrives in the al-Ḥijāz region west of Saudi Arabia (Mecca, Medina, Jeddah). To a lesser extent, in terms of the number of adherents, it also exists in the al-Aḥsā' region to the east of the country. Each region takes a different approach to defending Sufism and how it is represented publicly as a profound pious religious experience; the Sufi school in al-Ḥijāz is outspoken, whereas their counterparts in al-Aḥsā' are quieter (see Chapter One).³⁴⁴

This is due to the proximity of al-Aḥsā' to the Salafi school's bastion of influence in Najd, the central region of Saudi Arabia. This is also the result of the Eastern region's status as Saudi Arabia's Shī'a stronghold as well as the tolerant nature of the religious environment of al-Aḥsā', where the four Sunni *madhāhib* and the Twelvers Shī'a have coexisted peacefully for a long time.³⁴⁵ This makes the Salafi presence in al-Aḥsā' especially vigilant as Salafis consider both

³⁴³ Ḥātam Bin ʿĀrif al-ʿAwnī, *Takfīr Ahl al-Shahadatayn: Mawānī ʿih wa Manāṭātih* (The Excommunication of the Adherents of the Two Witnesses: Its Exculpation and Objectives), (Beirut: Nama Center for Research and Studies, 2015)

³⁴⁴ Al-Aḥsā' Sufis remain unobtrusive publicly when addressing Sufism. But in light of the tolerance bestowed on Sufism at the National Dialogue in 2003, al-Aḥsā' Sufis sought to speak about their Shaykhs. For example, a eulogy was delivered publicly by Shaykh ʿAb al-Ilāh al-ʿArfaj commemorating al-Aḥsā' s eminent Sufi Shayk Aḥmad al-Doghān (1914 – 2013) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=si2RbXkfDB4> (Accessed 25 May 2022)

³⁴⁵ Ḥasan Muṣṭafā, *Khariṭat al-Madhāhib wa Tarsikh al-Taʿadudiyya fī al-Suʿūdiyya* (The Jurisprudence Schools' Map and the Cementation of Pluralism in Saudi Arabia), 10 March 2022 <https://www.alarabiya.net/saudi-today/2022/03/10/%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B7%D8%A9%D9%8F-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B0%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%A8%D9%90-%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%AE%D9%8F-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9%D9%90-%D9%81%D9%8A->

Sufis and Shī‘a to be deviant sects that share certain traits in common.³⁴⁶ However, both al-Ḥijāz and al-Aḥsā’ Sufis derive their inspirations from the same traditional Sufi sources, as evidenced in al-Mālkī al-Ḥasanī’s writing.³⁴⁷ Al-‘Ubaydī made a reference to the pedagogical relationship between al-Ḥijāz and al-Aḥsā’ (see Chapter One).³⁴⁸ Therefore, this thesis deals with Sufism in the prevailing literature as representative of one overarching Sunni school of *taṣawwuf* in Saudi Arabia.

Sufi responses to Salafī refutations are presented to the public not so much through meagre Sufi literature as via multimedia, e.g., Sufism conferences transmitted in Sufi media channels and websites (based outside of Saudi Arabia) or popular Saudi televised talk shows that host prominent Sufis.³⁴⁹ Therefore, analysis of the content of Sufi counterarguments conveyed in these media interviews indicates the state of *taṣawwuf* in Saudi Arabia. To present the state of *taṣawwuf* in Saudi Arabia, this chapter primarily relies on the views of the outspoken Ḥijāzī Sufi Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq, referencing his mentor, the prominent Sufi of al-Ḥijāz, Sayyid Muḥammad ‘A. al-Mālkī as well as other influential Sufis on the Saudi scene, such as Shaykh ‘Abd Allah Bin Bayyah, al-Ḥabīb ‘Alī al-Jifrī, Shaykh Ajwād al-Fāsī and the Ash‘arite *taṣawwuf*-sympathizer, al-Sharīf Ḥātam al-‘Awnī.³⁵⁰ It is worth noting that ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq’s father, a Meccan Bā‘alawī scholar, began hosting the *rawḥa*, a gathering for *dhikr*, religious guidance, and homilies, in his home in 1924. ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq has continued this

[%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%8F%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9](#) (Accessed 10 March 2022).

³⁴⁶ Zayd ‘A. al-Faḍīl, *Al-Taṣawwuf: Ṣaḥīḥa Silbiyya am Qīma Ījābiyya* (Sufism, a Negative Phenomenon or a Positive Value), (Beirut: Maktabat al-‘Aṣr al-Ḥadīth, 2007), p. 40. Al-Faḍīl states that the relationship with the shī‘a is based on the deification of *awliyā’* and the lineage to Imam ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib.

³⁴⁷ ‘Abbās ‘A. al-Ḥasanī, al-Mālkī. *Ṣafahāt Mushriqa min Ḥayāt al-Imām al-Sayyid al-Sharīf ‘Alawī. ‘A. al-Mālkī al-Ḥasanī* (Bright Pages in the Life of the Imām al-Sayyid al-Sharīf ‘A. ‘A. al-Mālkī al-Ḥasanī), (Riyadh: King Fahad National Library, 2003), p.230. In this book the author praises the Sufis of al-Aḥsā’.

³⁴⁸ Al-‘Ubaydī, *The Ḥijāz Religious Scholar ...*, p. 74 & p. 101

³⁴⁹ An example of a Sufism-based, UAE-supported, organization is the Tabah Foundation at <https://www.tabahfoundation.org/en/> (Accessed 22 April 2022). Established by Al-Ḥabīb ‘Alī al-Jifrī. Its consultative council members are eminent Sufis from several Arab countries: the late M. S. al-Būṭī, ‘Abd Allah Bin Bayyah, Nūḥ al-Qudāt, ‘Alī Gum‘a, ‘Umar Bin Ḥafīz. In Saudi Arabia, see Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq’s website, which hosts his articles is <http://abfadaaq.blogspot.com/> (Accessed 15 May 2022).

³⁵⁰ Even though the emphasis mainly falls on Saudi Sufis to put Sufism in a Saudi context, other prominent Sufis from the Arab world will be quoted in support of Sufi arguments.

tradition in his house in Jeddah. This gathering is now unique as it is the only religious assembly with women among its attendees.³⁵¹

Interestingly, all of the aforementioned Sufi personalities are either from the Ḥijāz region or have other connections to it.³⁵² For example, two of them, Bin Bayyah and al-Jifrī, are not Saudis; however, they greatly influence the contemporary Sufi scene in Saudi Arabia and beyond, to the other Arabian Gulf states and even the broader Arab world. The other four personalities are Saudi citizens and residents of al-Ḥijāz.³⁵³ One notices the absence of any prominent Aḥsā'ī (from al-Aḥsā') Sufi participants in the public representation of Saudi Sufism.³⁵⁴

These interviews mirror the Sufi opinions transmitted to large numbers of viewers and listeners. Although written Sufi literature is not widely published or read in a traditionally Salafi-influenced country such as Saudi Arabia (see Chapter One), my thesis diligently endeavours to reference relevant written text.

But before addressing Sufi responses to the traditional and non-traditional approaches of the Salafi arguments, attention must be drawn to the two premises that relate to the hypothesis of this thesis, particularly in light of the country's Vision 2030 (see Introduction). The first premise is that Vision 2030 supports intra-Islamic *madhāhib* pluralism in Saudi Arabia. The second

³⁵¹ Sinani, *Ṣufī Scholars Practices*..., p. 223

³⁵² Al-Habīb 'Alī al-Jifrī, who was born in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, is a Yemenite Sufi of the Āl Ba 'Alawī Sufi *Tarīqa*, which is popular in al-Ḥijāz in connection to the Sufi Shaykhs of al-Ḥaram al-Makkī, <https://www.alhabibali.com/> (Accessed 15 May 2022); For information on the Āl Ba 'Alawī Sufis in Saudi Arabia, see Besnik Sinani, Shaykh Bin Bayyah, is a Mauritanian national with a distinguished biography that illustrates his engagement with the highest governmental, academic and religious authorities in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. See his website at <https://binbayyah.net/> (Accessed 15 May 2022); Besnik Sinani, *In The Path of The Ancestors : The BĀ 'ALAWĪ Order and The Struggle for Shaping The Future of Islam* https://www.academia.edu/40571319/IN_THE_PATH_OF_THE_ANCESTORS_THE_B%C4%80_%CA%B_FALAW%E1%BF%99_ORDER_AND_THE_STRUGGLE_FOR_SHAPING_THE_FUTURE_OF_ISLAM_1 (Accessed 14 March 2024)

³⁵³ Three of the Ḥijāzi personalities belong to the *Sada* and *Ashrāf* of al-Ḥijāz, i.e., the Prophet's lineage.

³⁵⁴ Only recently have some Sufi voices from al-Aḥsā' been heard, e.g., Shaykh Ibrāhīm al-Khalīfa explains the meanings of Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poem in praise of God and the Prophet: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkE2IJvqqko> (Accessed 10 April 2023), or in lecturing in Medina about the love the Prophet: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e12wVFXGE6o> (Accessed 10 April 2023). A eulogy was delivered publicly by Shaykh 'Ab al-Ilāh al-'Arfaj commemorating al-Aḥsā' s eminent Sufi Shaykh Aḥmad al-Doghān (1914 – 2013): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=si2RbXkfDB4> (Accessed 25 May 2022).

premise is that Saudi Arabia's future socioreligious outlook, represented in Vision 2030, is progressing with a broader outlook encompassing coexistence with the world's religions and cultural traditions. That progress is attested by Saudi Arabia hosting the International Interfaith Forum in Riyadh.³⁵⁵ This is imperative given that most Saudi Arabian citizens are young, educated, and have an open outlook on the world (see Chapter One).³⁵⁶

The first premise postulates that Vision 2030 is conducive to an intra-Islamic religious pluralism that includes all the religious schools of thought in the country – a prerequisite for the second premise, which presumes religious openness to the world's traditions and beliefs. This second premise calls for consideration of two aspects of Sufism to present a comprehensive view of Sufism congruent with the country's Vision 2030, which also operates within the boundaries of the tenets of Islam. These two aspects are the psychological and philosophical approaches to Sufism.

Thus, this thesis proposes bringing forth Sunni *taṣawwuf* in association with the philosophical and psychological aspects of Sufism as contributors to the intended *wasatīyya* of the socioreligious elements of Vision 2030. These two premises and their relationship to a *sulūk* and *akhlāq*-based *wasatīyya*, as the basis for the hypothesis of the thesis, will be discussed in Chapter Six. This chapter addresses the state of Sunni Sufism concerning the Sufi counterarguments of a) the traditional Salafi approach, which prepares the ground for b) the two Salafi-disregarded-principles, known as the non-traditional approach, that involve *sulūk* and *akhlāq*.

I. Sufi Responses to the Traditional Salafi Arguments

As explained earlier, Chapter Four identified four major Salafi arguments against Sufism. Three of them fall under a theological dimension as they involve the aberrant Sufi *'aqīda*, the deviant Sufi *sulūk*, and the issue of a call for the unity of religions. The fourth argument falls under a socioreligious-cum-political dimension concerning the negative socioreligious impact

³⁵⁵ Omar al-Badouī, "Riyadh Interfaith Forum Emphasizes on Tolerance" <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3641256/riyadh-interfaith-forum-emphasizes-tolerance> (Accessed 21 November 2022). On 11 May 2022 the Muslim World League (MWL) launched the forum called "Common Values among Religious Followers", in the presence of around 100 religious leaders and scholars in Riyadh.

³⁵⁶ Saudi Arabia Population Statistics 2022 <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/saudi-arabia-population/> (Accessed 15 May 2022).

of Sufism on society. Based on the research thus far, it is evident that four major players have traditionally influenced the Sufi relationship with the socioreligious composition of Saudi Arabia. The players are the government, the official religious establishment, the *Ṣaḥwa*-splinter movements known as *tayārāt Islamiyya* (Islamic currents; movements), and proponents of *al-ḥadātha* (modernity).

Regarding Sufism, the government's position has shifted from foe to “potential” friend. The government has neutralised the position of figures of the *Ṣaḥwa* Islamic movement (see Chapter One). While the religious establishment remained adamant about *taṣawwuf*, they reluctantly put themselves in the government’s shoes. The relationship between Sufism and the liberals of the *al-ḥadātha* school of thought is not yet clearly defined (a subject alluded to in Chapter Six).³⁵⁷ However, as far as society is concerned, Sufism has more of an impact on the socioreligious than the strictly theological one.

Only two Salafī arguments constantly surface against Sufism regarding theological issues: the issue of *‘aqīda* (creed) and the issue of *sulūk* (behaviour; conduct). The third issue, the unity of religions, has never been discussed in relevant interviews, which suggests its irrelevance to the public (see Chapter Four).

At the same time, Sufi responses to traditional Salafī arguments take two approaches. First, they define the nature of *taṣawwuf* as described by Sufi scholars of Saudi Arabia. Second, they examine the contemporary state of *taṣawwuf* in Saudi Arabia.

1.1 *Taṣawwuf* in Changing Conditions

It is interesting to note how *taṣawwuf* has steadily gained its place on the Saudi religious landscape. Sufi Shaykhs of the Meccan school always refer to themselves as belonging to *the Madrasat al-Iḥsān fī al-Halaqāt al-‘Ilmiyya fī al-Ḥaramayn* (the *Iḥsān* school of the learning circles at the two Holy Mosques).³⁵⁸ This description of *taṣawwuf* requires elaboration. Chapter One reviewed all the Sufi *ṭurūq* that thrived in al-Ḥijāz until its annexation into the

³⁵⁷ Al-Ḥarbī, *Sufism from the Margin* ..., pp. 11-63.

³⁵⁸ ‘Abd Allah al-Mudayfir, *Liḳā’ al-Jum‘a: Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad’aq* (The Friday Encounter: With Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad’aq) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z0cre2XXsS0>) (Accessed 16 May 2022).

realm of the Saudi dynasty in 1926. What needs to be researched is the nature of the *al-Ḥaramayn* school of *taṣawwuf* in the pre-Saudi era compared to the post-Saudi era. This requires independent research, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. What concerns us in this research is the nature of *taṣawwuf* today, an extension of the Sufi lineage of the *Ḥaramayn* school of scholars.³⁵⁹ The present school of Ḥijāzi *taṣawwuf* does not present itself as belonging to a particular *ṭarīqa*. Instead, it projects itself as *Madrast al-Iḥsān*. Sayyid M. ‘A al-Mālkī states that the contemporary *Ḥaramayn* school of *taṣawwuf* is *jāmi‘a* (encompassing all) of the known Sufi *ṭurūq*; this translates as the Meccan school being the encompassing school of *al-Iḥsān* for all Islamic schools of thought (Sufis and non-Sufis) without associating itself with a particular *ṭarīqa*.³⁶⁰

Fad‘aq mentions in al-Amīr’s interview that traditionally, during the time of his grandfather and father (renowned scholars in *Ḥaramayn* circles), the term *Ṣufī* was never used to refer to scholars of *iḥsān*. Rather, each was referred to as *‘ālim* (or scholar knowledgeable in *sharī‘a* sciences).³⁶¹ In light of the historical background of *taṣawwuf* in al-Ḥijāz, or the school of *iḥsān*, the claim that it encompasses all Muslim schools of thought was most likely made for two reasons. The first reason was to avoid any confrontation with the country’s anti-*ṭurūq* Salafī religious establishment. The second was likely to avoid alienating any *ṭarīqa* or school of thought that sees the *Ḥaramayn* school as a beacon for *al-‘ulūm al-shar‘iyya*.

Still, this does not mean we should accept that the Meccan school of *iḥsān* is free from the influence of various Sufi *ṭurūq*. After all, generations of Sufi Shaykhs of various Sunni *madhāhib* and *ṭurūq* have functioned as muftis in Mecca, e.g., Daḥlān and the Āl Bā‘alawī.³⁶² One must also bear in mind that al-Mālkī himself was influenced by the school of al-Azhar,

³⁵⁹ Ḥamad ‘A. D. al-Ḥusaynī, *Imām Dar al-Bi‘tha al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bin ‘Alawī al-Mālkī al-Ḥasanī wa Ātharuh fī al-Fikr al-Islāmī* (Imam of Mecca of the Message Sayyid Muḥammad Bin ‘Alawī al-Mālkī al-Ḥasanī and his Heritage in Islamic Thought), (Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2010) pp. 247-151.

³⁶⁰ Ibid; al-Mālkī, *Misconceptions that Must ...*

³⁶¹ ‘Yahya al-Amīr, *Al-Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq ḍayf Yahya al-Amīr fī Yā Hala al-Muwajaha* (Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq is Guest of Yahya al-Amīr in Ya Hala’s Face to face) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djofwCoRyeA> 13 January 2017 (Accessed 15 May 2022).

³⁶² Turkī al-Dakhīl, *Idā‘āt ma‘ al-Ḥabīb ‘Ālī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn al-Jifrī* (Idā‘āt with al-Ḥabīb ‘Ālī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn al-Jifrī) Published 7 December 2012 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fa5jlq5Rf5w> (Accessed 15 May 2022). Sinani, *Ṣufī Scholars Practices...*, p. 152

which is a *ṭarīqa*-oriented school par excellence. So, *taṣawwuf* in Saudi Arabia cannot escape the Salafi criticism of involvement in the customary “deviant” ritualistic *sulūk* common to *taṣawwuf* as a whole.

In ten objections, Shaykh ‘Abd Allah Bin Bayyah summed up the common Salafi arguments against *taṣawwuf*.³⁶³ Bin Bayyah sought to refute these Salafi objections as either the result of a mix-up between *uṣūl* (credal foundations) and *furū‘* (branches of *uṣūl*; *fiqh*), or due to the traditional Salafi aversion to *ta’wīl* (rational interpretation as opposed to literal) of the religious text in search for *maqāṣid al-fiqh* (the objectives behind the jurisdictional laws).³⁶⁴

As Chapter Four detailed, the Salafis painted Sufism in a negative light for decades. However, an image of *taṣawwuf*, as portrayed by its proponents, started to emerge as a result of the activities of the King Abd al-Aziz National Dialogue Centre (KANDC), which was established in 2003 in the aftermath of the infamous events of 9/11 and the concurrent pan-country anti-government militant outrage that glaringly exposed the Draconian side of the *Ṣaḥwa* era (see Chapter One).

The inclusion of *taṣawwuf* on the official platform of the National Dialogue Conference in Mecca generated considerable media interest in *taṣawwuf*, which has, in turn, prompted public interest in Sufism.³⁶⁵ This resulted in popular television talk shows inviting prominent Sufi scholars to appear and intellectual magazines inviting articles about Sufism.³⁶⁶ There, *taṣawwuf* was described as prospering beyond the *madhāhib fiqhiyya* of mere jurisprudence

³⁶³ ‘Abd Allah Bin Bayyah, *Al-Ta’ṣīs al-Sharī‘ī li al-Taṣawwuf – Nuskha Muzayyada* (The Legitimate Sharī‘a Rooting of Sufism - Additional Version) <https://binbayyah.net/arabic/archives/1185> (Accessed 16 May 2022). Most of the ten objections were alluded to in Chapters Three and Four of my thesis. Bin Bayyah provides the *sharī‘a* compatibility of these objections just as al-Mālkī endeavoured to do in his *Maḥāḥim Yajib an Tuṣaḥḥaḥ*.

³⁶⁴ The *Ḥanbalī* Salafis are accused of limiting themselves to literal interpretation when dealing with *fiqhī* rules which misses the point of attaining the objectives of *sharī‘a*. The *Maqāṣid* school argues that a literal understanding should apply only to the tenets of *‘aqīda*, while *fiqhī* issues are subject to interpretation. Fad’aq in Al Dakhīl’s interview mentions the prominent Sufi al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhi as amongst the first to refer to *fiqh al-Maqāṣid*.

³⁶⁵ Zayd ‘Alī al-Faḍīl, *Waqi‘ al-Taṣawwuf wa Dawruh al-Mustaqbalī* (The Reality of Taṣawwuf and its Future Role), (Alfaiṣal Magazine, 1 July 2019) <https://www.alfaisalmag.com/?p=16025> (Accessed 26 May 2022).

³⁶⁶ Al-Ḥarbī, *Sufism from the Margin ...*

and within the realm of the human condition of the highest individualistic *sulūk* and *akhlāq* “based on *manẓumat qiyām* (a set of values) rather than *miswadat aḥkām* (a draft of rules)”. The Salafis have used their social media accounts and multimedia to attempt to counter any positive images that the media presents of *taṣawwuf*.³⁶⁷ Salafī arguments and Sufi counterarguments in the multimedia highlight the important aspects of the state of *taṣawwuf* in Saudi Arabia.

After the death of the epitome of contemporary Saudi Sufism Sayyid M. ‘A. al-Mālkī (see Chapter One), ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq’s name, a promising young Shaykh of a Meccan Sufi lineage emerged as his possible successor not only in the local media, but also in international newspapers.³⁶⁸ The most pressing issues with the state of *taṣawwuf* in Saudi Arabia are covered in several interviews with Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq.³⁶⁹ Three of these interviews, which were conducted by the most intellectually popular of the talk-shows in Saudi Arabia, have been chosen for analysis.³⁷⁰

The frequency and emphasis of recurring questions in the three interviews enable the identification of the primary issues. These can be categorised into three general types of issues emerging in Salafī–Sufi arguments and counterarguments: a) issues with *takfīr* (an accusation of apostasy), b) issues with negative vs. positive Sufism, and c) issues with socioreligious-cum-political engagement.

The issues within each category were examined with the aforementioned two premises in mind: intra-Islamic *madhāhib* pluralism and the broader scope of interfaith tolerance, i.e.,

³⁶⁷ Al-Ḥarbī, Sufism and its Orders...; Al-‘Angarī, *The Sufis and Ash‘arites* ...

³⁶⁸ In al-Dakhīl’s interview, a reference was made to Okaz (a popular Saudi newspaper) and to *The Washington Post*. For the American publications, several are found in Al-Dakhīl eds. Sufism in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf... pp. 252-299.

³⁶⁹ Shaykh Aḥmad, the eldest son of Sayyid M. ‘A. al-Mālkī and current head of their Meccan school, approaches *taṣawwuf* differently than Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq, who is a prominent public figure. Aḥmad’s quiet dedication contrasts with Fad‘aq’s visibility, raising the question of whether this could lead to differing perspectives on Ḥijāzī *taṣawwuf*. This distinction may highlight the difference between viewing *taṣawwuf* as an individual religious experience versus a socioreligious reform initiative in Muslim society.

³⁷⁰ Turkī al-Dakhīl, *Iḍā‘āt: Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq* : <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2EB54D3D58A07FFF> - Duration of Interview: 45 mints-(Accessed 16 May 2022); Al-Mudayfir, *The Friday Encounter*...; Al-Amīr, *Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq*...

tolerance and coexistence with the religious and non-religious world traditions. This thesis postulates that these two premises are propelling the socioreligious- cum-political paradigmatic shift of Saudi Arabia from that of the *Ṣaḥwa* era's intra-Salafi factional fanaticism to the openness of the *al-Islam al-wasaṭī* (Islamic *wasatiyya*; moderation), i.e., the Islam of *fiqh al-maqāṣid*.³⁷¹

Meccan scholar Sayyid 'Abd Allah Fad'aq (b 1970) links the past and the future of the state of Sufism in Saudi Arabia.³⁷² His views should offer a clear picture of the state of Sufism in Saudi Arabia, including its past, present, and possible future outlook.

1.1.1. Rejection and *Takfīr*

The term *takfīr* (excommunication from Islam) in the context of this thesis is applied to a Muslim who commits *shirk akbar* (greater polytheism), that is, worshipping Allah in association with a partner (*a walī*) who is believed to possess some of Allah's attributes in terms of the ability to fulfil the worshipper's supplications (see greater *shirk* and lesser *shirk* in Chapter Two). Due to variations in scholarly interpretations of the meanings of Allah's attributes in the Qur'an as well as of *istinbāṭ* (the process of deriving *sharī'a* meanings or laws from the religious text) by different schools of thought, the intra-Islamic sects were rejected and at times expelled, in *takfīr*, each other from Islam. Add political ambition to the formula of *takfīr*, and the outcome manifests in credal conflicts that sometimes lead to violent rivalries.

The use of *takfīr* as a form of severe rejection between antagonistic Islamic groups wherein each claims to have a purer and more superior understanding of the Islamic 'aqīda and *fiqh* than their rivals, is rooted in Islamic history, as al-Ghazālī mentioned in the eleventh century CE.³⁷³ Sunni Islam is not spared from internal divisions; it too splits, as Qādhī puts it, into

³⁷¹ Muhammad Haniff Hassan, *Wasatiyyah* as Explained by Prof. Muḥammad Kamal Ḥassan: Justice, Excellence and Balance https://www.jstor.org/stable/26351233?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents (Accessed 16 May 2022).

³⁷² For more information about Dr. Sayyid 'Abd Allah Fad'aq, see Al-Dakhīl, *Sufism in Saudi Arabia* ..., p 283.

³⁷³ Abu Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Iqtisād fī al-I'tiqād* (Moderation in Belief) translated by 'Ala'iddīn M. Ya'qūb, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). In this book, al-Ghazālī (1058–1111) discusses the unjustified *takfīr* between Islamic groups. Among the Islamic sects that thrive in Saudi Arabia are the Shiite Ismailis. This sect is not recognized as one of the Islamic *madhāhib*, an issue requiring a separate study.

“Ash‘arism and Salafism”.³⁷⁴ But in a significant act to prevent Islamic *intra-madhāhib* divisions, the Azhar school of theology, the highest in Sunni Muslim lands and a bastion of *taṣawwuf*, acknowledged eight *madhāhib* of Islam: the four Sunni *madhāhib*, the *Ẓahirī madhhab*, the *Abāḍī madhhab*, the Shī‘a *Ithna‘ashrī madhhab*, and the Shī‘a *Zaydī madhhab*.³⁷⁵ These eight *madhāhib* were recognized in a 2005 resolution at the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in Mecca.³⁷⁶

As alluded to in previous chapters, the school of the Ḥijāzī *taṣawwuf* is influenced by the al-Azhar school of *taṣawwuf*. The Ḥijāzī school is an umbrella for all Muslim schools of thought.³⁷⁷ This means the *takfīr* of other Muslims, as I later demonstrate, is not inherent in the Ḥijāzī school of *taṣawwuf*.

It is the Salafis who, by claiming to be the *firqa al-najīyya* (the only salvaged group), have lumped all other Islamic groups under the cloak of *takfīr*. The Saudi Salafī establishment controversially taints the majority of their fellow Sunnis with *takfīr* simply because they are Ash‘arite in ‘*aqīda*’ (creed), as opposed to the Salafī-Sunnis who are *Atharī* (Salafī *Ḥanbalī*) in creed.³⁷⁸

Takfīr in *uṣūl al-dīn* (principles of Islam that are the basis of ‘*aqīda*’) and in *furu‘ al-dīn* (branches of Islam; the basis for *sharī‘a* laws), according to Fad‘aq, is one of the significant

³⁷⁴ Yasir Qadhi, *The Genesis of the ‘Salafī-Ash‘arī’ Divide*, Assembly of Muslim Jurists of America 13th Annual Imam Conference Chicago, IL <https://www.amjaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/The-Genesis-Dr.-Yasir-Qadhi.pdf> (Accessed 16 May 2022). Qadhi dates this intra-Sunni divide back to the first century of Sunnism, the 3rd AH/8th CE centuries. This would be manifest later in what he describes as Ash‘arism and Salafism with their theological tensions suffered by Sunnism.

³⁷⁵ ‘Alī Gum‘a, *Marja‘iyyat al-Azhar* (The Reference School of al-Azhar) <https://www.draligomaa.com/index.php/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A9%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%85/item/665-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AC%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B2%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%81> (Accessed 16 May 2022).

³⁷⁶ See The Council of the International Islamic Fiqh Academy of the Organization of the Islamic Conference Resolution No. 152 (1/17) Islam and the One Ummah: Theological, Jurisprudential, and Educational Schools at <https://iifa-aifi.org/ar/2200.html> (Accessed 16 May 2022).

³⁷⁷ Al-‘Ubaydī, *The Ḥijāz Religious Scholar ...*, p. 138.

³⁷⁸ Qadhi, *Salafī-Ash‘arī Polemics...*

causes stagnating the umma of Islam. This is unjustifiably locking Islam up inside the delusional imprisonment of the jurisprudential rule of *ḥalāl* vs *ḥarām* (permissible vs forbidden).³⁷⁹ In *Yahala-al-Muwajaha*, Fad‘aq, an accomplished jurist of *Shafi‘ī fiqh*, accuses the official judicial Salafī establishment rule of condemning the nation to stagnation mainly because their fear of change prevented it from updating old jurisdictional laws of *fiqh* to accommodate modern life. He states that this could be rectified by resorting to the flexible tools of *fiqh al-maqāṣid* (a jurisprudence that explores the objectives behind *sharī‘a* laws).³⁸⁰

In his writings about *fiqh al-Maqāṣid* and *fiqh al-wāqī‘* (the jurisprudence of reality), Bin Bayyah calls for the open-minded revival of the science of jurisprudence to accommodate contemporary, domestic and global issues of life.³⁸¹ The fact that these two Sufi scholars (Bin Bayyah and Fad‘aq) are concerned with advancing Islamic jurisprudence to meet the needs of modern life is a significant response to the Salafī accusation that Sufism is complacent and eccentric in nature.³⁸² Bin Bayyah and Fad‘aq represent the progressive Muslim jurists who promote an Islam that interacts with contemporary issues.³⁸³

This thesis attributes such flexibility to the Ash‘arite use of *ta‘wīl* (interpretation beyond literalism), which surpasses the Salafī literal derivation and application of restrictive *sharī‘a*

³⁷⁹ A reference made to a recent interview, with Sa‘ad al-Shithrī, from the Salafī establishment about changes in the puritan Salafī school views of *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* to accommodate the 2030 socioreligious government-promoted lifestyle. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wi9JXD0CaKc> (Accessed 15 May 2022)

³⁸⁰ Al-Amīr, *Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq...*

³⁸¹ ‘Abd Allah Bin Bayyah, *Mashāhid min al-Maqāṣid* (Episodes of the Fiqhī Objectives), 5th ed. (UAE: Al-Muwaṭṭa’ Center, 2018); see also Maqasids and the renewal of ‘uṣūl al-fiqh in Abdallah Bin Bayyah’s discourse by Rezart Beka <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dThm4K02LQ8>, 2-5 May 20021 (Accessed 17 May 2022).

³⁸² *Fiqh al-Maqāṣid* is seen by Islamic contemporary scholars, such as Ṭaha J. al-‘Alwānī as a means to an advanced Islamic legal theory, See <https://www.alarabimag.com/books/15626-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%A9.html> (Accessed 17 May 2022); The Salafī Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Fozān disagree with interpreting *fiqh al-wāqī‘* to accommodate modern life, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJtZQWGle5w> (Accessed 17 May 2022); The Salafī Shaykh Sulaymān al-Ruḥaylī associates *fiqh al-wāqī‘* with Islamic movements, i.e., Sayyid Quṭb (a Muslim Brotherhood), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDIb5sUvkCY> (Accessed 17 May 2022). However, the first to revive *fiqh al-maqāṣid* was the thirteenth-century Muslim scholar Abu Ishāq al-Shāṭibī, as alluded to in Chapter Seven.

³⁸³ In al-Dakhīl’s interview, to establish *sharī‘a* credentials on *fiqh al-wāqī‘*, Fad‘aq refers back to Caliph ‘Umar and the well-known eighth-century Sufi al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī.

rules quite often with reliance on centuries-old jurisprudence precedents.³⁸⁴

Fad'āq states that the literal and unchanging religious text is the concern of the *uṣūl al-dīn*, which is *thawābit* (fixed basis of religion). *Uṣūl al-dīn* concerns the '*aqīda*. '*Aqīda* in Allah is fixed because Allah, the real (*al-ḥaqīqa*), is unchanging. However, the jurisprudence (*sharī'a* laws of *fiqh*), which belongs to the *furū'* (branches) of *uṣūl* are the concern of life's *mutaghayyirāt* (changing) circumstances. Hence, *sharī'a* and reality should be compatible in practice.³⁸⁵

In al-Mudayfir's interview, Fad'āq states that *fiqh al-maqāṣid* represents a *wasāṭiyya* that injects spirit to *sharī'a* laws. This means Islamic jurisprudence has to be flexible and accommodating (see the views of Imam al-Juwaynī in Chapter Six). This distinction between *uṣūl* and *furū'* in order to view Islam progressively indicates two important points. On the one hand, it presents Sufi jurists as active and progressive in dealing with contemporary issues. This casts adherents of *taṣawwuf* in a different light than their common portrayal as mere complacent (stuck in the *maqām* of *tawakkul* and *tawākul*) wayfarers in search of annihilation in Allah. On the other hand, according to Fad'āq, the *takfīr* of the Sufis, without paying heed to the intricate differences between the *uṣūl* and the *furū'* is leading the Salafis to a grave mistake of further dividing the nation of Islam in *takfīr*.³⁸⁶

Being Ash'arite in '*aqīda*, the Sufis suffer a double *takfīr* blow from the Salafis. In response, the Ash'arites convened at the controversial Grozny Conference and declared themselves the genuine *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā'a*.³⁸⁷ Al-'Awnī participated in the conference and delivered a speech confirming the keynote speaker's definition of *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā'a*.³⁸⁸ It should be noted that Fad'āq criticises the Grozny Conference as an umma-divider by

³⁸⁴ Fad'āq, in al-Dakhīl's interview, states that Aḥmad Bin Ḥanbal's *madhhab* contains several branches of *fiqh*; however, the Wahhabi Salafis limit themselves to the strictest of approaches.

³⁸⁵ This explains the proverbial saying amongst Muslims that Islam is valid for every *zamān* (time) and *makān* (place). See Muḥammad al-Shaykh, *Ma'nā al-Islām Ṣāliḥ li Kul Zamān wa Makān* (Meaning of Islam is Valid for Every Time and Place), <https://www.al-jazirah.com/2017/20170418/lp6.htm> Published on 18 April 2017

³⁸⁶ As stated in interviews of Fad'āq by al-Mudayfir, al-Amīr and al-Dakhīl.

³⁸⁷ Refer to Saīd Foda's and Ḥātam al-'Awnī's speeches in the conference. These can be found on the Sufi website Ṭābah, <https://tabahfoundation.org> (Accessed 15 May 2022)

³⁸⁸ Ibid. Refer to Foda's speech.

instigating *tā'ifiyya* (sectarianism).³⁸⁹ Moreover, he praises the Saudi religious establishment for not officially reacting to the Grozny conference.³⁹⁰

However, the Salafis argue that the Ash'arites are historically known for accusing Salafis of *takfīr*.³⁹¹ The Salafī–Ash'arite reciprocal *takfīr* is well-known (as referenced by al-Ghazālī earlier) However, unlike the Sufis or Ash'arites, hardliner Salafis deemed it lawful to kill those accused with *kufīr* (apostasy). Al-ʿAwnī goes so far as to ascribe the violent ideology of *takfīr*, which justifies killing, to its source in none other than Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's *al-Durar al-Saniyya*, where Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb lists ten justifications for killing the *kuffār* (apostates), i.e., adherents of Wahhabi-opposed Islamic schools of thought.³⁹² For this reason, Shaykh Aḥmad Zaynī Daḥlān Makkī (1816–1886), a descendent of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī and the Shafīʿī mufti of Mecca and one of the eminent Shaykhs of *madrasat al-iḥsān* (*taṣawwuf*), long-ago refuted Wahhabism as an instigator of *fitna* (tribulations) among Muslims.³⁹³

The ten Wahhabi justifications for murder, al-ʿAwnī affirms, are principles adopted by contemporary terrorist groups. These include the Muslim Brotherhood operating pan-Islamically, al-Qāʿida *operating globally*, al-Nuṣra *operating in regional struggle*, and the

³⁸⁹ Al-Amīr, *Sayyid ʿAbd Allah Fadʿaq...*

³⁹⁰ If the Saudi Salafī establishment did not react officially by issuing declarations or launching media campaigns, the media is rife with sympathetic fellow-Salafis berating the conference. Refer to *Muʿtamar bi al-Kuwait Raddan ʿala Grozny: al-Salaf hum al-Sunna.. wa la li al-Thawrāt* (A Conference in Kuwait in Response to Grozny: The Salaf - Adherents to Righteous Predecessors- are the Sunna. and No to Revolutions), It took place on 12 November 2016, al- Quran website: https://ahlalquran.com/arabic/show_news.php?main_id=39305 (Accessed 15 June 2002)

³⁹¹ Muḥammad H. I. al-Jazāʾirī, *Zāhirat al-Ghulūw fī al-Takfīr ʿind al-Ashʿara* (The Phenomenon of Excessive Takfīr by the Ash'arites), <https://www.islamancient.com/%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%BA%D9%84%D9%88-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%83%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A9/> (Accessed 17 May 2022).

³⁹² Muḥammad Bin ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, et al, *Al-Durar al-Saniyya fī al-Ajwiba al-Najdiyya* (The Pure Pearls in the Najdi Responses) https://archive.org/details/1241825/00_41814/mode/1up (Accessed 17 May 2022).

³⁹³ Aḥmad Zaynī Daḥlān wrote *Fitnat al-Wahhabiyy* (The Tribulations of Wahhabism), which was published in 1878; he also wrote *Al-Durar al-Saniyyah fī al-Radd ʿala al-Wahhābiyyah* (The Pure Pearls in Rebuking the Wahhabis) https://archive.org/details/Durar_Sunya/page/n8/mode/2up (Accessed 17 May 2022).

Sururiyyūn who ravaged the country with terror during the *al-Ṣaḥwa* era. Al-‘Awnī challenged his interviewer to name a single terrorist incident ascribed to *Ash‘arī* or *Ṣufī* groups, a challenge his interviewer acknowledged that he couldn’t answer. In his *Maḥāhīm*, Sayyid M. ‘A. al-Mālkī warned about terrorism as the inevitable consequence of hatred and rejection of the other, which Salafis instil continuously in their zealous yet malleable and young disciples.³⁹⁴

Fad‘aq moves the battle between the Sufis and the Salafis into the realm of *khilāf fiqhī* (*sharī‘a* laws subject to differing opinions) inserted into the rigid gloves of *khilāf ‘aqadī* (treated as a difference based on unchanging *uṣūl*). To treat *fiqhī* issues with the tools of *‘aqadī* literal interpretation is to turn *masā’il khilāfiyya* (issues subject to alternative opinions) into *masā’il qaṭ‘iyya* (definite laws). For example, the Salafis accuse the Sufis of *shirk akbar* by calling them *‘ubbād al-qubūr* (grave worshippers). Such practice needs to be elaborated on from a *fiqhī* point of view, as explained later.

With regard to Salafis accusing Sufis of *takfīr* based on their propagation of philosophical Sufism of *waḥdat al-wujūd* ascribed to Ibn ‘Arabī or the *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād* associated with al-Ḥallāj, al-Mudayfir enquired about Fad‘aq’s interpretation of these issues. Fad‘aq replied that he is not entitled to declare who is *kāfir* (apostate) and who is not. He reiterated that “al-Ḥallāj was a victim of his own making. Philosophy in Sufism and beliefs in *waḥdat al-wujūd* and the *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād* breed negative Sufism. Just as there is righteous and aberrant Salafism, so there is a righteous and aberrant Sufism”.³⁹⁵

Al-Mudayfir brought up the case of the declared apostate Ḥamza Kashgharī. He indicated that the Salafis scored a point against Fad‘aq for not condemning the long-imprisoned Saudi human rights activist. Fad‘aq said he did not support Kashgharī’s cause but favoured a timely, fair trial to end his ordeal. This raised the subject of whether an apostate should be killed. Fad‘aq stated that issuing a verdict on apostasy is not black and white. Again, this is a prime example of not exploring all possible *sharī‘a* laws in this regard. When it comes to apostasy,

³⁹⁴ See Muḥammad ‘A. al-Mālkī in a television programme named after his book *Maḥāhīm Yajab an Tuṣaḥḥaḥ* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_05Z4etxug (Accessed 17 May 2022).

³⁹⁵ Al-Mudayfir, *The Friday Encounter...*

Fad‘aq thinks the official religious establishment does not take all possibilities into account. After alluding briefly to the possible *Sharī‘a* approach to apostasy, he concluded that he opposes the killing of apostates and declared that there is no such law in the Qur’an.³⁹⁶

Fad‘aq narrows the polemical gap between Salafis and Sufis into mere *masā’il fiqhiyya* that can be dealt with without getting caught in the quagmire of the reciprocal vengeance of *takfīr*. This is not to defend *al-taṣawwuf* as free from any deviancies. Just as there is true and false Salafism, there is genuine and false Sufism or positive and negative *taṣawwuf*.

1.1.2 Negative vs. Positive Sufism

Fad‘aq states that the word *Ṣūfiyya* was not in everyday use in al-Ḥaram (Mecca Grand Mosque) when his father and the Meccan ulama taught there. The classes there were *majālis ‘ilm* (gatherings of learning) to teach *tazkiyat al-naḥs* (the purification of the self and the heart).³⁹⁷ The individual teacher was known as *‘ālim*, and the commonly circulated words *Ṣūfiyya* or *Ṣūfī* are latecomers. The media popularised the term “Sufism” as an indiscriminately broad concept that applies to true *taṣawwuf*, adulterated Islamic *taṣawwuf* and even non-Islamic Sufism that crept under the cloak of the genre Sufism, thus resulting in confusion between real *taṣawwuf* and pseudo-Sufism.³⁹⁸

The problem lies in the name *al-Ṣūfiyya*, which, according to Fad‘aq is divided into either good Sufism of *al-iḥsān* school or bad Sufism characterized by all kinds of myth and *darwasha* (a term used pejoratively to describe a passively dull religious person who is easily misled by charlatanism).

Fad‘aq thus separates *taṣawwuf* into an acceptable Sufism and a rejected one. The acceptable *taṣawwuf* is that which belongs to *madrasat al-iḥsān* of *al-Ḥaramayn*; it is “the *taṣawwuf sulūkī tarbawī akhlāqī* (concerned with teaching ethical conduct; morals), which is

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Gavin Picken, *Tazkiyat al-naḥs: The Qur’anic Paradigm (Journal of Qur’anic Studies Vol. 7, No. 2)* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 101-127 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25728182> (Accessed 18 May 2022)

³⁹⁸ Al-Mudayfir, *The Friday Encounter...* ; see Mark Sedgwick, *Western Sufism: From the Abbasids to the New Age*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)

the Sunni *taṣawwuf* that all Muslims accept.”³⁹⁹

Fad‘aq refers to it as *taṣawwuf mūjab* (positive) or *al-Ṣūfiyya al-ḥaqīqiyya* (the real Sufism). Within real *taṣawwuf*, there are two core issues. The first concerns Sufi practices Salafis deem *sharī‘a*-antithetical. However, Sufis deem them *sharī‘a*-compatible with other Sunni (other than Salafi) recognized *fiqhī* opinions. The second concerns practice that Sufis deem wrong *sharī‘a*-wise. Nonetheless, they are being practised owing to the ignorance of their practitioners, who are unaware of the correct science of *fiqh*. These are classified under folk religion.

Still, these practitioners are not thrown out of Islam; according to Fad‘aq and al-‘Awnī, they should be gently taught to distinguish between right and wrong *fiqhī* practices. With regard to the practice of *zyārat al-qubūr* (visiting revered graves) to perform *tabarruk* and *tawassul*, Fad‘aq explains that Salafis again mix up matters of *‘aqīda* and issues of *fiqh*. Visiting graves is a Sunna *mu‘akkada* (confirmatory), but *tawassul* is not a matter of *‘aqīda*. Instead, it is a *fiqhī* issue.⁴⁰⁰

Regarding the perceived practice of grave worship – that is circumambulating the tombs of saints – it could be interpreted as a serious case of greater *shirk*. Al-Jifrī likens this practice to circumambulation of the Ka‘ba. In this interpretation it does not belong to the realm of *‘aqīda* but to *fiqh*. It is not a *shirkī* act since the performer does not worship the Ka‘ba. As a *fiqhī* rule, circumambulation is a required ritual in the case of Ka‘ba and forbidden in the case of graves; however, the act itself does not lead to *shirk*.⁴⁰¹

Al-Mudayfir inquisitively enquired about graves as *mazārāt* (sites for visitation) in Saudi Arabia. Fad‘aq mentioned two of the most important gravesites in Medina. One is the burial

³⁹⁹ Al-Mudayfir, *The Friday Encounter...*

⁴⁰⁰ Fad‘aq cites the *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet asked believers to visit graves, for it reminds them of the day of judgement: see *Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn*, a popular book among Sunnis. Fad‘aq emphasizes that the essence of *tawassul* is to Allah. The *walī* in the grave is loved by Allah for his or her piousness, but not enact Allah’s will; so he is only a facilitator revered for his piousness. He likened this to when choosing an *Imām* to lead a prayer; people choose the most pious amongst the group.

⁴⁰¹ Al-Dakhīl, *Idā‘āt with al-Ḥabīb ‘Alī...*

place of martyrs of the battle of *Badr* near Medina.⁴⁰² It is forbidden to visit this site. The other site is *al-Baqī'*, the burial place of members of the Prophet's household (some of his companions and many revered Muslim notables). Hence, it is popularly named *Jannat al-Baqī'* (the Paradise of *Baqī'*), but visits to the site are considered a *bid'a* (heresy) by the Salafis. Fada'q reiterated that no visits to graves are associated with deviant *shirkī* beliefs. But if there are any such graves where "Sufi rituals" are performed, he instructed that onlookers should "show me so that I can go there to correct people's misconceptions."⁴⁰³

Al-Mudayfir asked if the *mawlid nabawī* (the Prophet's birthday) is being secretly commemorated. He noted it is commonly suggested that some heretical practices, such as dancing and performing impulsive trickery with sharp instruments (as a show of supernatural abilities) are performed at these gatherings. He enquired why the authorities stopped some of the *mawlid* celebrations. Fada'q explained that these *mawlid* celebrations are active year-round; they commemorate an event that reminds Muslims of the Prophet's coming to the world.⁴⁰⁴

During such gatherings, the life story of the Prophet is recited – often in rhythmic phrases to break up the monotony of listening to an overly repetitive recitation. However, no such practices regarding charlatan trickeries and outlandish behaviour are acceptable. Moreover, these events are not held secretly; how could that be done in the age of the mobile phone camera? The authorities are usually informed about these events by slanderers (troublemakers). Unfortunately, some of these *mawlid* celebrations are stopped without proof of wrongdoing. Some slanderers claim, "with an erroneous imagination, the Sufis sanctify a column in the *Haram Makkī* which marks the birthplace of the Prophet. While in fact, he was born in the location of what is now Mecca Public Library".⁴⁰⁵

Another Sufi practice the Salafis can't find any justification for is the Sufi *murīd* (disciple)

⁴⁰² The Battle of Badr was the first significant battle for the nascent Islamic religion that saw a smaller number of Muslims' defeat to their larger rival, the Quraysh tribe.

⁴⁰³ Al-Mudayfir, *The Friday Encounter...*

⁴⁰⁴ The birth date of Prophet Muḥammad is not fixed. He was born on a Monday on either 9th or the 12th of *Rabī' Awwal* H (22 April AD571).

⁴⁰⁵ Al-Mudayfir, *The Friday Encounter...*

submitting to *ṭā'a muṭlaqa* (absolute subserviency) to his Shaykh by paying him a *bay'a muṭlaqa* (an equivocal allegiance). In al-Dakhīl's interview, Fad'aq stated that *murīd* surrender of the mind to his Shaykh is an erroneous stupidity.⁴⁰⁶ Rather, he explains the Shaykh is merely a *murshid* (guiding advisor); a follower selects him for his piety and depth of *sharī'a* knowledge, while he selects a follower as a dedicated *murīd* to be guided, especially in times of tribulation on his wayfaring journeys.

The Shaykh–*murīd* relationship thus has nothing to do with charlatanism and magic. Al-Mudayfir asked if the *murīd* could change his Shaykh for any reason. Fad'aq stated that it is permissible to change the Shaykh as the *murīd* sees fit.⁴⁰⁷ Compared to other Sufis, such as al-Mālkī and even more so al-Jifrī, Fad'aq seems less demanding when it comes to dedication to a guiding Shaykh. Fad'aq makes the Shaykh sound like a dear friend with deep knowledge rather than an unrelenting teacher to whom one must bestow total obedience.

Regarding Sufi costume, which distinguishes them from customary Saudi dress, al-Mudayfir questioned whether it was intended to affirm their Sufi identity. In turn, Fad'aq wondered why he typecast the Sufis. He pointed out that the turban and the *Jubba* (a loose outer garment with long sleeves) are traditional Meccan dresses. Prophet Muḥammad wore the turban. So, wearing it is a desired Sunna that is a personal choice.

Al-Mudayfir enquired if the Sufis attribute the Salafī misinterpretation of Sufi practices to their dryness and austerity in their spiritual approach to Allah; this justifies their attitude of claiming to fight *shirk*, grave worship and the exaggerated reverence of Prophet Muḥammad. Fad'aq tersely replied that “it is a matter of cultural mannerism” [the desert dweller Najdi is dry in mannerism compared to the soft-spoken urban Hijāzī]; “true *Ṣūfiyya* and true *Salafīyya* love Prophet Muḥammad equally [but] each differs in how this love is displayed”.⁴⁰⁸

There are two types of rejected Sufism. One is pseudo-Sufism, which is characterized by

⁴⁰⁶ Turkī al-Dakhīl, *Idā'āt: Sayyid 'Ab Allah Fad'aq*: <http://www.alarabiya.net/programs/2006/06/11/24595.html> dated 9-6-2006 (Accessed 16 May 2022).

⁴⁰⁷ Al-Mudayfir, *The Friday Encounter...*

⁴⁰⁸ The Salafī-Najdis come from a desert lifestyle of enduring hardship, while the relatively, softer lifestyle of Hijāzī urbanites' is reflected in their mannerisms (see Chapter One).

charlatan behaviour, dancing, piercing the body with sharp instruments, or claiming special favour from Allah. The other is the *taṣawwuf falsafī*. Fadʿaq categorizes both types as falling under (*al-Sūfiyya al-Sāliba*) negative Sufism. In terms of pseudo-Sufism, Fadʿaq renders some Sufi *sulūk* unacceptable. These include beliefs and behaviour such as claiming to possess *ʿilm al-ghayb* (prescience), *suqūṭ al-Takālīf* (exemption from required *furūd* or duties, e.g., praying five times daily), or circumambulating the tombs of *awliyāʾ* believing in their ability to fulfil invocations on behalf of Allah.⁴⁰⁹

When it comes to philosophical Sufism, Fadʿaq’s position is precarious in the sense that it defies the mainstream Sufi attitude about Ibn ʿArabī and al-Ḥallāj. Without any further ado, he firmly rejects philosophy, saying that “al-Ḥallāj was a victim of his followers as well as his enemies”. Yet, unlike the Salafis, Fadʿaq does not condemn them as apostates. When asked if he considers Ibn ʿArabī and al-Ḥallāj apostates, he replies that he is not entitled to excommunicate them as *ahl al-Sunna*.⁴¹⁰

When addressing pre-determined issues such as *ḥulūl* and *ittiḥād*, and *waḥdat al-wujūd* Fadʿaq appears to diplomatically avoid unfruitful confrontations not only with the Salafi establishment but also with mainstream Saudi society. These philosophical Sufi concepts are controversial amongst the Sufis themselves if understood in certain ways and acceptable if understood in other ways. However, Sayyid M. ʿA. al-Mālkī was apologetic for Ibn ʿArabī. He claims that Ibn ʿArabī’s books were adulterated by his enemies.⁴¹¹ Muhanna claims that the whole theory of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, discussed in Chapter Six, is misunderstood by Ibn ʿArabī’s opponents.⁴¹² In explaining *Al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, Yusrī justifies al-Ḥallāj’s “blasphemous” utterances as an outcome of an intense ecstasy within an earnest process of annihilation in Allah.⁴¹³ Ibn ʿArabī and al-Ḥallāj will be revisited in Chapter Six.

⁴⁰⁹ Al-Mudayfir, *The Friday Encounter...*

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Al-Mālkī, *Misconceptions that Must be ...*

⁴¹² Muḥammad Muhanna, *Ḥaqīqat Waḥdat al-Wujūd / al-Ṭarīq ila Allah* (The Reality of the Unity of Being / the Spiritual Wayfaring to Allah), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeFjLvZTS1k> (Accessed 20 May 2022).

⁴¹³ Yusrī Jabr, *Sharḥ Kitāb al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya* (Explanation of the Risala Qushayriyya Book) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJPkRt534tA> (Accessed 20 May 2022).

Regarding some Sufis claiming special favour and *karāmāt* and *kashf* from Allah, Fad‘aq shuns such claims as unnecessary. Still, certain *karāmāt* (extraordinary miracles) are mentioned in the Qur’an and recognised by all Muslims. Nowadays, Sufi *karāmāt* are ridiculed by Salafis as false and used to cultivate undeserved credit among their misled followers. In a television debate with a Salafi Shaykh, the Hijāzi Sufi al-Fāsī mentioned that he is able to perform Hajj rituals while sitting in his home.⁴¹⁴ This was a demonstrable Sufi myth that the Salafi Shaykh was happy for Saudi audiences to hear.⁴¹⁵ Traditionally, Sufis are known to refrain from talking about *karāmāt* as much as a woman shies away from speaking publicly about her menarche.⁴¹⁶

1.1.3. Socioreligious-cum-Political Engagement

As alluded to earlier, the Salafī establishment attacked Sufism on religious grounds during the *Ṣaḥwa* era. After the infamous events of 9/11, the government tolerated and encouraged Sufism to come out into the open. This period saw Salafī Attacks on Sufism change strategy and find new political ground. Accordingly, Sufism was accused of facilitating a Western hegemonic agenda to replace Salafism.

With the era of Vision 2030, which saw the official recognition of Sufism as a legitimate school of thought, the government gave strong hints that it could split from Wahhabi Salafism (as alluded to later in the chapter). Given awareness that such a split would create a socioreligious vacuum, Vision 2030, in a preemptive move to fill the vacuum (of strict Wahhabi Salafism), put forward the Qur’anic concept of “*wasatīyya*”.

The salience of Vision 2030’s efforts at religious reform are indicative of the intended *wasatīyya*. For example, in the midst of the country’s ongoing phase of transformative reform, government discourse includes calls to return to the Islam of the pre-*Ṣaḥwa* era. This

⁴¹⁴ Ajwād al-Fāsī is the Shaykh of *al-Ṭarīqa al-Fasiyya al-Shaziliyya*. It is claimed that six million people, mainly in South-East Asia follow this *ṭarīqa*.

⁴¹⁵ Aḥmad al-‘Arfaj, *Al-Maydān- Al-Taṣawwufi al-Su‘ūdiyya – al-‘Abd al-Karīm/ al-Fāsī* (Sufism in Saudi Arabia – al-‘Abd al-Karīm vs al-Fāsī), Published 17 December 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUTu-VMsR8o> (Accessed 25 May 2022).

⁴¹⁶ ‘Alī Gum‘a, *Wa Allahu Ā‘lam - ‘Alī Gum‘a Yataḥadath ‘an Aṣḥāb al-Karāmāt* (Ali Gum‘a Talks about those of Karāmāt) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_Hzcefz5-o (Accessed 25 May 2022).

is sometimes seen as returning to the purity of the early Islamic days of Prophet Muḥammad and his companions, i.e., when there were no distinctions between Muslims in terms of *madhhab* or political-orientation.⁴¹⁷ In other words, Vision 2030 calls for commencing with a clean slate for the reestablishment and transmission of a *wasatī* Islam that characterises mainstream socioreligious life in Saudi Arabia.⁴¹⁸

This thesis argues that this discourse is idealistic and needs to be translated into practical solutions capable of accommodating *intra-madhāhib* polemical differences (to project their viabilities within the vast possibilities of *sharīʿa*-acceptable *fiqhī* differences). This will pave the way for intra-Islamic religious pluralism (as in the two premises mentioned earlier in the chapter).

The definition and the mechanism for implementing this hopeful *wasatīyya* are not yet clearly stated by Vision 2030, i.e., to encompass the variety of *madhāhib* and schools of thought (practically, because Salafī Wahhabism-influenced school of *fiqh* still prevails in Saudi Arabia).

The Salafī form of *wasatīyya* cannot be translated into applicable laws based on *al-firqa al-nājiyya* (the rescued group, i.e., the Salafis) for resolving *intra-madhāhib* conflicts in the country's official judicial system, which is based on the Islamic constitution of the country.⁴¹⁹ Examining Sufi counterarguments against Salafī claims reminds one of the conceptions of the Sufi school that centre on the relationship between the Creator (Allah) and the created (all of humanity). A concept based on Shaykh Aḥmad Zarrūq definition of *taṣawwuf* (see Chapter Four), this thesis dubs the relationship between the human being and God as “the perpetual anthropo-theo-conscious realisation” is believed to underpin a *wasatīyya* conducive to an intra-Islamic pluralism and pan-human coexistence; this is the antithesis of the insular Salafī *wasatīyya* detailed in Chapter Two.

⁴¹⁷ Wood, “*The Absolute Power*”...

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ The constitution is based on the Qurʾan, but with Salafī Wahhabi approach to its *tafsīr* and *fiqh*.

This thesis proposes that Sufism's *wasatīyya* could represent the emerging mainstream common denominator (catalyst) between the significant contemporary players who shape the socioreligious composition of Saudi society: the government, the ulama of the religious establishment, and the vestiges of political-Islam movements.⁴²⁰ In light of Vision 2030, we can also add larger and stronger (than in previous eras) *ḥadātha* (modernity) liberal advocates and minority Shī'a sects, as well as an emerging "legitimate" *taṣawwuf* schools of thought. This new socioreligious outlook would thrive in a vibrant civil society where a socio-liberal school of *al-ḥadātha* is advancing steadily, especially under the patronage of Vision 2030.

In a religious-based society recently unshackled from the straitjacket of Salafi austerity, *taṣawwuf*-based *wasatīyya* could provide cohesion between all of the socioreligious components of society. Sufism's all-encompassing-*wasatīyya* can facilitate a breakthrough towards a socioreligious outlook congruent with Vision 2030 goals. Sayyid 'Abd Allah Fad'aq, the promising outspoken figure for *taṣawwuf* in Saudi Arabia, attests this. Throughout the three aforementioned interviews with Fad'aq, the attitude towards *taṣawwuf* transmitted to the (Salafi-indoctrinated) public paints it as a suspiciously deviant, misunderstood, and closed sect of Islam that must be newly unpacked to the Saudi public. Salafis have traditionally portrayed Sufism as a double-edged threat to society and government.

During the current third phase (see Chapters One and Three) of Saudi Arabia's transformative reform (2015–present), the content of these interviews reveals the early signs of Saudi society's socioreligious rite of passage into a new outlook on Islam. This outlook welcomes intra-Islamic pluralism and the coexistence of world religions and traditions. It is a major rite propelled through the political will and patronage of government.⁴²¹

This major government-driven societal move forward has been well-received by liberally oriented segments of society as well as minority groups such as Sufi advocates and the Shī'a. This thesis deduces that the shift from austere Salafism to religious pluralism is being

⁴²⁰ In this thesis the Saudi figures of political Islam, (whether neutralized by government and drawn to its side or not) are well and alive. Even after decades of the *Ṣaḥwa* official eradication, its vestiges or dormant effects are still felt See Al-'Aql, *The Neo-Ṣaḥawīs* ...

⁴²¹ Wood, "The Absolute Power"...

inconspicuously carried out via the *taṣawwuf* school of thought. Oddly, it is also advanced via what Fad‘aq calls a “Saudi brand of *taṣawwuf*,” as will be explained later.

This deduction is arrived at based on two observations. First, in an anti-Sufi, Salafi-influenced society where popular semi-public media is government-controlled, the fact that a prominent Sufi is interviewed on popular television channels and his articles are published in national newspapers (as well as the publication of his thoughts and activities on his website and other official websites) demonstrates political sanction of this socioreligious transformation.

Second, these interviews appear to educate society about an available choice within Islam that has been ignored for a long time and could offer a window of opportunity. This is an opportunity to reconcile differences within society and discover a platform (from within Islam) on which to coexist with other world traditions peacefully. Unlike what the Salafis have propagated, this thesis argues that the socioreligious-cum-political polemics are Salafi-instigated problems rather than instigated by Sufism itself.⁴²²

This thesis highlights the significance of Fad‘aq’s interviews with al-Dakhīl, al-Mudayfir, and al-Amīr (in 2006, 2012, and 2017, respectively) wherein Fad‘aq calls for a Saudi form of renewed Sufism. This would be a Sufism that nurtures a *waṣṭiyya* to embrace the country’s influential socioreligious players in an intra-*madhāhib* pluralism.

It is essential to note that Saudi Arabia is a significant religiopolitical and economic actor within its immediate Arabian Gulf environment, as well as in the broader Arab and Middle Eastern geopolitical landscape. Given the geopolitical and socioreligious significance of Saudi Arabia in the Gulf region and the Middle East, it is worthwhile to consider the interactions between its socioreligious and political environment and that of its neighbouring countries.

Fad‘aq brings forth a Saudi brand of renewed Sufism that calls for an equidistant standpoint

⁴²² The Salafi-Sufi polemic should be seen in the context of the religious and sociopolitical events that are contributing to a paradigm shift towards a liberal society with deep religious roots. The immature liberal movement will have to come to fruition one day, thus drastically changing traditional views and attitude towards religion by youth growing up with liberal values. This discussion will be alluded to in Chapter Six.

from the major socioreligious players and can be viewed from two perspectives. On the one hand, it should be viewed from within its Arabian Gulf socioreligious-cum-political context. On the other hand, within its Saudi milieu, its characteristics are proposed as the antithesis of all negative Salafī claims about Sufism. As Fad‘aq advocates, it is a *taṣawwuf* free from the confusion of the publicly transmitted mixed bag of negative views. A Sunni *taṣawwuf* manifests the third cornerstone of Islam: *al-iḥsān*.⁴²³

1.2 Sufism in the Political Context of the Arabian Gulf and Beyond

To understand the relationship between Sufism and "political Islam," as well as the concept of the so-called "political Sufism," it is essential to acknowledge Sufism's influence on the social, religious, and political landscapes of the broader Arab and Islamic worlds, including the Gulf states in the context of global politics.⁴²⁴ While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to address Sufism's role in every Arab and Islamic nation, its impact in various sociopolitical contexts is significant.⁴²⁵

Sedgwick examines how Sufism has rallied in state politics as a viable alternative to Salafism in Egypt, Morocco, the United States, and the United Kingdom.⁴²⁶ He argues that Sufism's enmity with Salafism does not mean that it is a natural ally to those who oppose Salafism, "especially when they are opposing Salafism for their own reasons."⁴²⁷ Bouasria highlights the intricacies of Sufism's involvement in Moroccan monarchy and party politics.⁴²⁸

⁴²³ Al-Amīr, *Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq...*

⁴²⁴ Farah al-Shareef, "The Problem of 'Political Sufism'," *The Maydan*, 15.12.2018, <https://themaydan.com/2018/12/problem-political-sufism/> (Accessed on January 15, 2025)

⁴²⁵ Sinani, *Ṣuḥfī Scholars Practices...*, pp. 242-255. With regard to the other (GCC) states, Bahrain is striving to maintain a balance between its Sunni and Shī‘a citizens. The Kuwait parliament is influenced by its Salafis, liberals and Shī‘a representatives. The unobtrusive Sufis of Kuwait and Bahrain are not active publicly. Oman, which is of the Abāḏī *madhhab*, steers clear of getting involved in Gulf religiopolitical matters. For *taṣawwuf* in the Gulf countries, see Al-Dakhīl, *Sufism in Saudi Arabia...* It is a *wasāṭiyya*, as this thesis postulates, where all Islamic non-political groups who belong to the eight recognized *madhāhib*, find a common reference point. This thesis postulates that it is a Saudi-supported school of thought-in-waiting whose foundational grounds are already laid down, with Saudi Arabia as the leader of the ICO (Islamic Conference Organization).

⁴²⁶ Mark Sedgwick, 'Good Muslims': Sufism in the Battle against Jihadi Salafism, in Lloyd Ridgeon, ed. *Sufism and Salafis in the Contemporary Age*, Bloomsbury, London, (2015), pp. 105–117

⁴²⁷ *Ibid*, p 117

⁴²⁸ Abdelilah Bouasria, *Sufism and Politics in Morocco: Activism and Dissent*, Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Democratization and Government

Historically, Iraq's Ba'ath Party supported specific Sufi *ṭurūq*, such as the *Refā'iyya*, in an effort to unify the Sunni and Shī'a communities in opposition to Khomeini's Iran, but their efforts ultimately failed. Today, Iraq is primarily governed by Shī'a ruling parties aligned with pro-Iran positions.⁴²⁹ The Syrian government has attempted to maintain a pluralistic social balance through Sufism; however, it has failed to establish ethno-religious pluralism and democracy, which has contributed to its recent downfall.⁴³⁰ Additionally, Alexander Knysh has studied Sufism and politics in the Caucasus and South Yemen. These two regions have experienced Sufi-Salafi conflicts amid their resistance against atheistic, Soviet-backed communist regimes.⁴³¹ Bennett and Alam examine the political dimensions of Sufism, particularly in relation to pluralism and democracy, across various regions of Asia.⁴³²

On the other hand, significant trends related to Sufism are emerging within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Saudi Arabia is transitioning from its traditionally hardline Salafism to a more moderate approach represented by the concept of *wasatīyya*, aligning more closely with the UAE's policies of religious pluralism and cultural openness aimed at countering the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁴³³ In contrast, Qatar has established itself as a centre for the Muslim Brotherhood, positioning itself in rivalry with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The UAE has become a hub for *taṣawwuf*, promoting initiatives like the *Ṭābā* Foundation, the Abrahamic Family House, and the World Fraternity Accord that emphasise unity among diverse cultures (see Chapter Seven).

Taṣawwuf has established a presence in the UAE and is gaining traction in Saudi Arabia, with each country embracing it under its unique sociopolitical objectives. For instance, in the 1980s, Saudi Arabia granted asylum to the Ba'Alawi Sufis from Yemen as a strategy to combat the spread of atheistic communism, even while simultaneously launching Salafi campaigns

⁴²⁹ Jordan, *A History of Ba'athist ...*, p. 365

⁴³⁰ Ibid, p. 364

⁴³¹ Knysh, *Sufism: A New History...*, pp. 176–231

⁴³² Clinton Bennett, and Sarwar Alam, eds. *Sufism, Pluralism and Democracy* (UK: Equinox Publishing Ltd., Sheffield, 2017)

⁴³³ Sinani, *Ṣufī Scholars Practices...*, p. 252

against Sufis in Al-Hijaz.⁴³⁴

Within the broader Arab context, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt are political allies, with Egypt's al-Azhar Institute playing a significant role in both shari'a and *taṣawwuf*. This raises questions about the motivations behind these countries' support for *taṣawwuf*, particularly in the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Whether they aim to free Islam entirely from political influences or merely to sever ties with political Islam is a complex issue that warrants further independent study.

The situation may become even more complicated if Saudi Arabia attempts to promote a uniquely Saudi brand of Sufism, as suggested by Fad'aq. If this effort is coordinated with the UAE and Egypt, it could result in a politically neutral Islam that promotes Sufi-based *wasāṭiyya*. Fad'aq proposes establishing an *iḥsān*-based Saudi school of *taṣawwuf*, extending the teachings of the school of the Two Holy Mosques.

1.3 Renewed Sufism: A Saudi Arabian Brand

The basis for Fad'aq's argument to renew Sufism under what he brands Saudi Arabian-initiated "*madrasat al-iḥsān*", whether it is genuinely an inconspicuously government-supported endeavour or just presumed, can be easily extracted from the interviews.

The Sufi concept of the perpetual anthropo-theo-conscious realisation refers to a personal experience. This concept's application could effectively characterise individual conduct towards tolerating different others. However, dragging *taṣawwuf* into socioreligious and political national affairs (i.e., politicising *taṣawwuf*) runs counter to the essence of Sufism as a spiritual, individualistic experience. The paradox of accusing *taṣawwuf* of playing a destructive role to the Salafi ideological base while inviting *taṣawwuf* to reform Saudi Arabia's future socioreligious outlook needs further academic analysis. However, this thesis postulates that the justification for reverting to *taṣawwuf* as a contributor to Vision 2030's reform endeavour lies in its roots in the *sulūk* and *akhāq* of the individual. If considered collectively, these extend to society as a whole. That, in turn, could form the basis for a paradigmatic shift in the intra-and inter-religious relationships in Saudi society, which will

⁴³⁴ Ibid, pp. 155–160

be addressed in Chapters Six and Seven.

Bearing in mind that Sufism in Saudi Arabia has been given a chance to express itself on the official platform of the National Dialogue Forum since 2003, this thesis considers the Fad‘aq’s three highlighted interviews as part of a continuous process of providing Sufism with a platform to set out its position to the general public. It is interesting to note *taṣawwuf* is an individual experience that depends on *dhawq* (tasting, first-hand experience), *kashf* (lifting the veil between humans and the extra-phenomenal world) and annihilation in Allah. Still, this thesis proposes that *taṣawwuf* is a viable option for contributing to a significant socioreligious reform.

This study of *taṣawwuf* in Saudi Arabia is not theological because it aims to examine individualistic or prevailing methods of attaining the Sufi wayfaring experience. *Taṣawwuf* is an individual experience practised personally and discretely. This research is concerned with the impact of *taṣawwuf* on the future socioreligious outlook of society, especially in light of the openness of the country’s Vision 2030. In other words, *taṣawwuf* is a manifestation of the school of *iḥsān* that makes Muslims aware of the basis of this third cornerstone of Islam and prepares them to experience what this thesis describes as the perpetual anthropo-theo-conscious realization.

This school is supported by two components, *sulūk* and *akhlāq*. The *sulūk* and *akhlāq* collectively shape a mindset towards life that can characterize a society. From the interviews, it is evident that the third cornerstone of Islam was not emphasized in Saudi religious education, while the Salafi-*fiqh*-based curriculum was taught in public schools. The school of *iḥsān* is what the outspoken Saudi Sufis are promoting. Currently, government-supported media allows the *taṣawwuf* school of *iḥsān* to express itself freely, as demonstrated by the interviews with Fad‘aq.

The al-Dakhīl, al-Mudayfir and al-Amīr interviews indicate how Sufism was transmitted to Saudi society. Analysis reveals that the main topics of the discussions were an emphasis on deviant *sulūk* (grave worship, *tawassul*, *tabarruk*), the Western media, and the RAND Corporation reports. Additional topics included *fiqh al-maqāṣid*, the revival of *majālis ‘ilmiyya* (teaching classes) of different *madhāhib*, successors to al-Mālkī, association with

the Shī‘a and relationship with government, leaders of *tayyārāt Islamiyya* (figures of Islamic movements), prominent Islamic personalities, and the official Salafī establishment,

The question is, what characterises the Saudi brand of Sufism? According to Fad‘aq, Sufism is non-political. It pays allegiance to the king yet welcomes the leaders of political Islam. It is non-militant yet supports *jihād* under the banner of *walī al-amr* (the King). It recognises the eight legitimate Islamic *madhāhib*, but affirms its Sunnism. By highlighting the main points raised in these interviews, it is clear that the *madrasat al-ihsān*’s *wasatīyy* founded on the *sulūk* and *akhlāq* could contribute to fulfilling the intended Vision 2030’s new socioreligious outlook. These main points are detailed below.

First, Sufism is not a political movement but a school of *ihsān*. It does not claim to have a leader and is not dependent on foreign financial or political support. It does not ally itself with a particular Sunni *madhhab*, political Islam or sectarian Islam. In 2006, al-Dakhīl quoted the *Washington Post* describing the rise of Sufism in Saudi Arabia with Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq as its rising star in al-Ḥijāz.⁴³⁵ In 2012, al-Mudayfir asked Fad‘aq if he were the enlightenment leader of al-Ḥijāz Sufis.⁴³⁶ To this, Fad‘aq commented, “Sufism is not a political movement. The Sufis pay allegiance to *walī al-amr*. I am not an enlightenment leader.”⁴³⁷

In the same interview, Fad‘aq made it clear that Sufism as a school represents the majority of the Islamic world (Ash‘arites) Sunnis and the different *fiqhī madhāhib*, *shāfi‘ī*, *Mālikī* and *Hanafī*. He said, “I want people to know what *taṣawwuf* is. The *taṣawwuf* we learned does not teach rejecting others, *taṭarruf* (extremism), or violence”. With regard to associating *taṣawwuf* with Shī‘ism, Fad‘aq stated in al-Mudayfir’s interview that “with all due respect to our brothers the Shī‘a and while acknowledging Shī‘ism as a recognized Islamic *madhhab*, we are not connected with the Shī‘a in any way except in the love and reverence for the Prophet

⁴³⁵ Al-Dakhīl, *Iḍā‘āt: Sayyid ‘Ab Allah...*

⁴³⁶ Al-Mudayfir, *The Friday Encounter...*; Faiza Saleh Ambah, *In Saudi Arabia, a Resurgence of Sufism Mystical Sect of Islam Finds its Voice in More Tolerant Post-9/11 Era.*; the Washington Post; May 2 2006, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2006/05/02/in-saudi-arabia-a-resurgence-of-sufism-span-classbankheadmystical-sect-of-islam-finds-its-voice-in-more-tolerant-post-911-eraspan/bdfd5280-fcda-4640-9f17-92f52c48f07c/> (Accessed 15 June 2022)

⁴³⁷ Al-Mudayfir, *The Friday Encounter...*

and his household”. After all, he reiterated, “all Muslims love the Prophet and his household”.

Al-Mudayfir mentioned the RAND Corporation reports published in 2004 and 2007 that recommend supporting Sufism as a means to eradicate Wahhabism. He also asked Fad‘aq if the Saudi Sufis had received any financial aid from the RAND Corporation. Fad‘aq replied “There is no connection between Saudi Sufis and the RAND Corporation. Actually, it is the Salafis who disseminate their funds around the world to propagate the *da‘wa* (the call for Salafī Islam).”⁴³⁸ He reiterated that “This RAND report is not a *waḥī* (revelation) from the heavens” that demands acceptance from anyone with a political agenda. Rather, he noted “This shows we Muslims lack sound research centres, which makes us depend on RAND Corporation and Gallop and their like”.⁴³⁹

Al-Mudayfir further observed, “It has been said that there is a Sufi-liberal-Shī‘ī alliance [to separate] the state from Wahhabism”. Fad‘aq responded with a mix of lamentation and sarcasm, adding to the list of the purported alliance “and Abāḍī!”⁴⁴⁰

Second, Sufism is on good terms with the government. Al-Dakhīl enquired about how “in September 2005, the newspapers mentioned that you met the Minister of the Interior Prince Nayif Bin ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. What called for this meeting?” Fad‘aq replied, “The meeting was called due to rumours among denounciators that Sufism is probably a bunch of *darwasha*. I spent two hours with him like father and son”. Al-Dakhīl wondered, “Was the call because the political allegiance of the Sufi school is in doubt?” Fad‘aq answered, “Not at all. There was no talk about allegiances and loyalties. We spoke all about world affairs. This was in the news.”

Al-Mudayfir noted that “since 2003 (through the National Dialogue Forums), the *Ṣūfiyya* and its prominent figures have drawn closer to the state” – an indication of implicit acceptance. But when asked about his meeting with Prince Nayif, Fad‘aq denied any reprimand or talk of political allegiance or religious deviancy. He stated instead, “The prince left his door wide

⁴³⁸ On the financial support provided by the Gulf states' Salafis to the anti-Sufi Salafī rebels in the Caucasus, see Knysh, *Sufism: A New History...*, pp. 176–231

⁴³⁹ Ibid.; RAND Corporation /<http://www.rand.org>

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid; for Salafī accusations of Sufi political involvement, see al-Baddāḥ, *Sufī Movement in the Arabian ...*

open for me to reach him any time”.⁴⁴¹

Al-Dakhīl noted, “You spoke to King ‘Abd Allah with a request to allow teaching the other Sunni *madhāhib* in the Meccan *Ḥaram*. Tell me about it.” Fad‘aq replied: “We talked about the abandoned *durūs shar‘iyya* that were taught during King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz’s reign in the Meccan *Ḥaram*, hoping they will be resumed again. I requested on behalf of all the students of *sharī‘a* of all the *madhāhib* and not in my name. There is a need to increase the number of teachers in the *Masjid al-Ḥarām* (Great Mosque of Mecca).” Al-Dakhīl: “Did any results come out of this?” Fad‘aq responded, “No, but that is expected to happen because this issue is the prerogative of the King and not the Presidency of *al-Ḥaramayn* Affairs.”

Fad‘aq demonstrates the government’s sincere desire for pluralism. He mentioned how in a public reception in Qaṣīm, King ‘Abd Allah had blamed the Salafī establishment’s *ulama* for leniency regarding the abhorred practice of dividing citizens into unacceptable categories (with the intention of debasement) such as secularists, Islamists, fundamentalists, liberals and others.⁴⁴² Fad‘aq reiterated how “again, the King at the *Majlis al-Shūra* (the nation’s council) stated that playing on the chords of liberalism, regionalism, and sectarianism categorizing society into groups with negative connotations of supremacy is an abhorrent practice that negates the tolerant nature of Islam”. Still, Fad‘aq welcomes what he calls “positive categorisation”, by which he means the different schools of thought that add richness to the Islamic tradition, especially in the realm of *fiqh*.

Third. Sufism’s relationship with the official Salaf establishment is straightforward and clear. Hands are extended for a relationship based on real Salafism and real *taṣawwuf*. When asked about his relationship with individuals in the official religious establishment, Fad‘aq declared that it was “wonderful”. Al-Mudayfir referenced Shaykh Sālih Āl Ahsaykh’s attacks on and the Mufti’s criticism of Sufism (see Chapter Three). Fad‘aq responded, “I am in contact with [Shaykh Salih Āl-Ashaykh, Minister of Islamic Affairs], and our relationship is good”. He also explained, “In a Mecca Hajj Club meeting, I told the Mufti that he is a mufti for all of Saudi Arabia and not for the *Ḥanbalīs* or the Najdis only; [he is] mufti for Mecca, Medina,

⁴⁴¹ Al-Mudayfir, *The Friday Encounter...*

⁴⁴² Khālīd F. J. al-Ḥaqbānī, *Na‘am li al-‘Aṣabiyya al-Waṭaniyya – al-Sa‘ūdiyya* – (Yes to the –Saudi– National Loyalty), Al-Riyadh Newspaper, <https://www.alriyadh.com/176197> 2 August 2006 (Accessed 20 May 2022).

Riyadh and the entire country and across all the Sunni *madhāhib*, as well as the Shī‘a. He welcomed my remarks and expressed openness to all”.

But, al-Mudayfir commented, “The Mufti said the leaders of the Sufi *ṭurūq* are aberrant and deviant from the straight path of Islam. There was a *fatwa* issued by *kibār al-‘ulama* (senior scholars) headed by Shaykh Ibn Bāz against al-Mālkī. Shaykh al-Minī‘ refuted al-Mālkī. These are the attitudes of the official religious establishment against Sufism” (see Chapter Three). Fad‘aq replied:

“In his speech, the Mufti associated Baha’i and Sufism. I wish he added only two words to his speech [that is] not to generalize about Sufism. [I wish] he had said ‘those that I encountered of Sufis’, and not ‘all Sufis are so and so’. Generalization is not acceptable. Regarding the *fatwa* of Shaykh Ibn Bāz and Ahaykh Ibn Minī‘, what counts is not the *fatwa* but the outcome of the *fatwa*. After the *fatwa* Sayyid M ‘A. al-Mālkī met with the ‘*ulamā*’ in the presence of King Fahd, so the *fatwa*’s aftereffect is null. Al-Mālkī died and was buried in Mecca (the Crown Prince paid condolences to his family in person).”

However, Fad‘aq does not call for downplaying Wahhabism. Instead, he advocates for co-existence with other religious schools of thought. He emphasized that it is a prerogative of the state to adopt a specific *madhhab*, yet other *madhāhib* can have space to implement their different *fiqhī* rules so long as they are derived from the same *usūl* (‘*aqīda*). Today, the state’s authority, represented by the King and not the religious establishment, allows other *madhāhib* and schools of thought to resolve issues by implementing their *sharī‘a* laws.

The Sufi attitude towards Wahhabi Salafism varies. Al-Mālkī in *Mafahīm* claims that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was portrayed by his disciples as the fiercest enemy of *taṣawwuf* when he is not.⁴⁴³ Despite the Salafi–Sufi conflict, Fad‘aq does not call for a separation between the state and the one *madhhab* (the *Ḥanbalī* school). In reality, he referred to their inseparability as that of Siamese twins – when they are separated, one or the other dies.⁴⁴⁴ All opponents of Salafism do not share this view. In an interview with al-‘Awnī, al-Mudayfir mentioned a New York

⁴⁴³ Al-Mālkī, *Misconceptions that Must be ...*, p.p. 83-85.

⁴⁴⁴ Al-Mudayfir, *The Friday Encounter...*

Times article suggesting the separation of the state and Wahhabism (something Saudi economist Ḥamza al-Sālim has also proposed).⁴⁴⁵ Al-‘Awnī stated that the alliance between Bin Sa‘ūd and Bin ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was not on *Nuṣrat al-Islam* (a pan-Islamic support). Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb does not represent Islam.

The abovementioned interview took place in 2014.⁴⁴⁶ Interestingly, in 2022, the Saudi government declared 22 February the official day of establishing the first Saudi state (to which the present third Saudi state is an extension). The significance of this date is that it predates by seventeen years the previous date when the two Muḥammads (M. Ibn Sa‘ūd and M. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb) met in 1744. This date traditionally marks the establishment of the first Saudi state. The new date marks a departure – divorce– from the customary association of Muḥammad Bin ‘Abd al-Wahhāb with the establishment of the Saudi state in the famous meeting between the *Muḥammadayn* (the two Muḥammads) referred to in Chapter One.⁴⁴⁷

In an article in *The Atlantic*, the Crown Prince, the architect of Vision 2030, described Muḥammad Bin ‘Abd al-Wahhāb as a mere soldier serving the state. Thus, Saudi Arabia, despite its diligent service to the holy sites within its boundaries, is not particularly a religious – theocratic– state. This thesis translates the claim as a significant development intended to accommodate, within its folds, all the religious schools. These include, as the Crown Prince stated, the Shī’a”.⁴⁴⁸ As far as the hypothesis of this thesis is concerned, this marks an opportunity for a possible contribution to the new outlook on the socioreligious aspects of Vision 2030 based on the previously mentioned two premises.

Fourth. Sufism stands equidistant from all schools of thought, including the *tayyārāt Islamiyya* (Political Islam’s currents) as represented by their leading figures. In the interview with al-Mudayfir, Fad‘aq mentioned receiving visits in his *majlis* from leaders of *tayyārāt Islamiyya*.

⁴⁴⁵ Craig S. Smith, *A Movement in Saudi Arabia Rushes Towards an Islamic Ideal, and Frowns on the U.S.* (New York Times, December 9, 2002); Elain Sciolino, *Jidda Journal; where the Prophet trod, He begs, Tread Lightly* (New York Times, February 15, 2002).

⁴⁴⁶ ‘Abd Allah al-Mudayfir, *Liqā’ al-Jum‘a, al-Shaykh Ḥatam al-‘Awnī* (Al-Mudayfir hosts Shaykh al-‘Awnī) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FPg0inv45-8> (Accessed 20 May 2022).

⁴⁴⁷ Noor Nugali, *Saudi Arabia to Celebrate Founding Day on Feb. 22 Every year, Says Decree*, Arab News <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2013241/saudi-arabia> (Accessed 20 May 2022).

⁴⁴⁸ Wood, “*The Absolute Power*”...

Al-Mudayfir referred to Shaykh Sulaymān al-‘Awda (an anti-government activist currently in prison), saying, “Also, you were visited by Shaykh ‘Āyid al-Qarnī [once an *al-Ṣahwa* Islamist]⁴⁴⁹ and an *inshād dīnī* (religious chant) was recited during the visit”. Fad‘aq replied, “Many Islamic personalities have visited me, including Shaykh Aḥmad al-Khalīlī (the *Abāḍī* Grand Mufti of Oman), Muḥammad Salīm al-‘Awwa (a moderate Islamic Egyptian thinker), Shaykh Aḥmad Zakī Yamānī (the late Saudi Minister of Oil and Mineral Resources) and many others have visited my *majlis*. “My *majlis* is open for all schools”.⁴⁵⁰

Al-Mudayfir commented, “But when Shaykh ‘Āyid al-Qarnī led the prayer in your *majlis*, did your followers protest his leading the prayer?” Fad‘aq noted, “Yes, some in the *majlis* did not like this...; this is why we need more communication and interaction to lessen such feelings. The followers are in disarray. If the leaders gather, the followers will follow suit”.⁴⁵¹ In the interview with al-Dakhīl, Fad‘aq further explained, “The point is I want to spread the thought that what unites us is greater than what divides us”.

Fifth. Fad‘aq calls for a Saudi brand of Sufism. After listening to Fad‘aq describe *taṣawwuf* as a representation of the school of *iḥsān*, al-Dakhīl commented: “You are calling for a different kind of *taṣawwuf*. A *taṣawwuf* which is different than the propagated stereotyped one”.⁴⁵² In al-Mudayfir’s interview, Fad‘aq called for a renewal of the understanding of what *taṣawwuf* should be. The school of *iḥsān* in *al-Ḥaramayn* should be revived as a Saudi brand of Sufism. It is based on *sulūk* and *akhlāq*. It does not deify Shaykhs (the bond is between the individual and Allah); it is not a particular form of *ṭarīqa* (it encompasses all Muslims); and it revives the different *madhāhib*’s *majālis ‘ilmiyya* – above all *fiqh al-maqāṣid*. Fad‘aq emphasized, “The world around us and the international circumstances are changing. We must change as the world changes”.⁴⁵³

Sixth. Fad‘aq stated his views on current civil issues. When al-Dakhīl asked about Fad‘aq’s

⁴⁴⁹ Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics ...*, pp. 202-204.

⁴⁵⁰ Al-Mudayfir, *The Friday Encounter...*

⁴⁵¹ Ibid

⁴⁵² Al-Dakhīl, *Idā‘āt: Sayyid ‘Ab Allah...*

⁴⁵³ Al-Mudayfir, *The Friday Encounter...*

opinion on women driving (at the time, this was a hot issue opposed by the Salafi establishment). He responded by saying that the King said driving is a cultural issue.⁴⁵⁴ For Fad‘aq, women’s rights should go beyond mere driving as in the *sharī‘a* there are a lot of unexplored rights women could take.

It is interesting to note that, unlike the Salafis, the Sufi attitude towards women is more welcoming. Among the revered Shaykhs in one of his books, for example, al-Mālkī mentions al-Shaykha Ummat Allah al-Dahlawiyya, a pious Medinian Sufi woman.⁴⁵⁵ It is interesting to note, thanks to Vision 2030, that only recently, in 2022, out of four assistants to the General Presidency of the Grand Mosque and the Prophet’s Mosque, a PhD-holding woman was appointed as an assistant to the president.”⁴⁵⁶

II. The Two Sufi Principles

The Salafis have never recognised *taṣawwuf* as the practical application of the school of *iḥsān*. So, they disregard the view of Sufism as a school based on *sulūk* and *akhlāq*. Even if they cite words of wisdom from the Friday sermons of prominent Sufi Shaykhs, as Fad‘aq mentioned earlier in al-Dakhīl’s interview, they quote them as distinguished scholars without reference to them being Sufis (e.g., Imam al-Nawawī and others). In the current environment where *taṣawwuf* is allowed to make a comeback, it is essential to include in the argument for *taṣawwuf* the principles of *sulūk* and *akhlāq* as features in the writings of prominent Sunni Sufi Shaykhs.

In the 2030 Vision intended-*wasatīyya*, especially in light of a society of a majority of educated youth, this thesis postulates that the *sulūk* and *akhlāq* should be a mainstay for the religious education system. Additionally, in the spirit of what this thesis proposes as the perpetual anthropo-theo-conscious realisation concept, this thesis draws attention to two

⁴⁵⁴ The ban on women driving was lifted on 24 September 2017.

⁴⁵⁵ Muḥammad ‘A. al-Mālkī, *Fihrist al-Shuyūkh wa al-Asānīd li al-Imām al-Sayyid ‘Alawī Bin ‘Abbās al-Mālkī al-Ḥasanī* (Index of the Shaykhs and the Authentic Referencing of al-Imām al-Sayyid ‘Alawī Bin ‘Abbās al-Mālkī al-Ḥasanī, 2003). Historically pious women are revered in Sufi circles; see Qays K. al-Janābī, *Riḥlat al-Taṣawwuf fi al-Amṣār al-Islāmiyya* (Sufism’s Journey in the Islamic Countries), (Beirut: Dār al-Intishār al-‘Arabi, 2017)

⁴⁵⁶ Saudi Arabia Further Develops Women's Role in the Presidency of the Two Holy Mosques <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3464656/saudi-arabia-further-develops-womens-role-presidency-two-holy-mosques> (Accessed 20 June 2022)

aspects of Sufism. They are the psychological aspects (as a process of *tazkiyat al-nafs* and mending the heart) and, given that philosophy has recently been incorporated into the Saudi education system, the philosophical aspect where an Islamic philosophy for life is sought.

Given the controversial positions that both Sufis and Salafis hold regarding philosophy, this thesis argues that the relevance of Sufism to philosophy should be examined within the framework of a *wasīṭiyya* that aligns with the socioreligious objectives of Vision 2030. It posits that an innovative philosophical interpretation of Islam should support a new approach to the future outlook of socioreligious aspects of life in Saudi Arabia. Consequently, a new philosophical narrative must reinforce Fad‘aq’s views to fulfil the two premises of Vision 2030, as explained in Chapters Six and Seven.

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the Sufi counterarguments to Salafi claims to extend from two dimensions – one theological and one socioreligious-cum-political. It did so from two approaches: a traditional and a non-traditional approach. The traditional approach addresses four arguments, three of which fall under the theological dimension, while the fourth falls under the socioreligious-cum-political dimension. In the traditional approach, the Sufis ascribe Salafi accusations of purported deviancy in *‘aqīda* (creed) and *sulūk* (behaviour; conduct) to mere misinterpretation of a *fiqhī* (jurisprudential) nature, rather than *‘aqadī* (credal) that has to be corrected *sharī‘a*-wise. The traditional approach sets the base to explore the non-traditional approach, which contains two Salafi-disregarded principles of Sufism: the *sulūk* and the *akhlāq*. According to this thesis, these are the basis of the school of *iḥsān* and foundational to the Sufi *wasāṭiyya*.

With the revival of the non-traditional approach in mind, Fad‘aq proposes three pathways to a renewed Sufism for what he calls a Saudi brand of *taṣawwuf*. The first pathway is by correcting the Salafi religious establishment’s publicly instilled image of *taṣawwuf* as an *inhirāf ‘aqadī* (deviant in creed) sect. This is because the real polemics between Salafis and Sufis are *fiqhī* (jurisprudential) in nature, i.e., *masā’il khilafīyya* (debatable issues).

The second pathway is by bringing forth the two Salafi-disregarded Sufi principles, *akhlāq* and *sulūk*, as vital contributors to teaching the third pillar of the Islamic religion, *al-iḥsān* in

the tradition of the teaching circles of the two Holy Mosques. This Meccan tradition encompasses the school of *al-Ihsān* (the crux of Sufism) as the third hierarchical tier of fulfilling the three pillars of the Islamic religion (Islam, *imān* and *ihsān*) for all Islamic schools of thought (Sufis and non-Sufis) without associating itself with a particular *ṭarīqa*. It does not deify Shaykhs (the bond between the individual and Allah) and encompasses all Muslims. However, according to Fad‘aq, the Saudi brand of Sufism is non-political. It pays allegiance to the King yet welcomes the leaders of political Islam. It is non-militant yet supports *jihād* under the banner of the King. It recognises the eight legitimate Islamic *madhāhib* but affirms its Sunnism. Most importantly, it revives *fiqh al-maqāṣid* (the objectives behind *sharī‘a* law).

The third pathway is by employing *fiqh al-maqāṣid* in combination with the traditional Sufi definition of *wasāṭiyya* as a balance between the *nafs*’ worldly demands and the *rūḥ*’s longing for wayfaring to Allah through purification of the heart as the catalyst between *nafs* and *rūḥ*, i.e., *sulūk* and deep respect for Allah’s creation (humanity), *akhlāq*, in the spirit of the perpetual anthropo-theo-conscious realization. This way, a comprehensive *wasāṭiyya* could be reached. Yet bearing in mind that this thesis is concerned with the impact of *taṣawwuf* on the future socioreligious outlook of society, rather than *taṣawwuf* as an individualistic wayfaring experience, a *wasāṭiyya* that emphasises the impact of *sulūk* and *akhlāq* on the individual could reflect positively on society’s attitude. This attitude would be congruent with Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 as stated in the two premises of in-country intra-Islamic *madhhabī* pluralism and the harmonious coexistence of religion and culture worldwide.

In interviews with the eminent Ḥijāzi Sufi Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq, three categories were observed as an outstanding basis for Salafī–Sufi polemics. These categories are *takfīr*, negative Sufism vs positive Sufism, and socioreligious-cum-political engagement. This chapter argues that the Sufis provide sound counterarguments regarding the first two categories. With regard to the third category, four significant playes influence the relationship between Sufism and the socioreligious composition of Saudi Arabia: the government, the official religious establishment, the *Ṣaḥwa*-splintered politically-oriented movements of Salafism, and the proponents of *al-ḥadātha* (modernity).

In terms of the Sufi response to Salafī claims, this thesis argues that the non-traditional approach involving Sufi principles of *sulūk* and *akhlāq* in a collective sense (applied to

society) could very well have a positive impact on the socioreligious-cum-political rather than the strictly theological. The principles of *akhlāq* and *sulūk*, which are integral to *taṣawwuf*, should be explored as potential contributors to the socioreligious-cum-political, especially in promoting a *waṣāṭiyya* congruent with the aims of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. But in light of the socioreligious reform of Vision 2030 in a country opening its arms to the world as its population skews young and educated, this thesis argues that the principles of *sulūk* and *akhlāq* inherent in Islam and embodied in the Sunni *taṣawwuf* school of *iḥsān* are also central to the *waṣāṭiyya* that undergirds a narrative for a philosophical approach to *taṣawwuf*, which will be explained in Chapter Six.

CHAPTER SIX

Taṣawwuf and the Islamic Philosophy of Wasaṭiyya

Chapter Five highlighted the Sufi concept of *wasatiyya*, which is embedded in the principles of *sulūk* and *akhlāq* within the school of *iḥsān*. These principles are essential for achieving the socioreligious objectives outlined in Vision 2030, particularly in fostering intra-Islamic pluralism and promoting the coexistence of diverse religious and cultural traditions. This chapter presents these objectives through a new perspective on Islamic philosophy. Interestingly, although there has historically been a separation from philosophy in Salafi-influenced Saudi society, a movement exists to reintegrate philosophy into the education curriculum.⁴⁵⁷ The argument presented in this chapter is that the principles of *sulūk* and *akhlāq* are also central to the philosophical approach to *taṣawwuf* (see Chapter Four for Sufism's typology).

Therefore, we focus on a philosophy of *taṣawwuf* within a broader Islamic framework that I refer to as Qur'anic. The philosophy of Sufism emphasizes the individual relationship between human beings and their Creator while also considering the social and physical environment. This perspective is rooted in the Qur'anic term *amāna* (trusteeship), as interpreted by Shaykh Ibn 'Āshūr in verse (33:72).⁴⁵⁸ Based on this Qur'anic interpretation, the Moroccan Sufi philosopher Ṭaha 'Abd al-Rahmān develops his theory of *Intimā'iyya* (Trusteeship) by

⁴⁵⁷ First Philosophy Conference in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, took place on 9th December 2021, <https://www.spa.gov.sa/w1662745> (Accessed 11 January 2025)

⁴⁵⁸ Verse 33:72, in King Saud University Moshef, states: "Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and feared it. However, man undertook to bear it; indeed, he was unjust and ignorant." Shaykh Ibn 'Ashūr's tafsīr (*al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*) interprets the term *amāna* (trust), as encompassing not only individual responsibilities to uphold and promote justice but also as an ethical duty entrusted to humans to preserve the earth's physical integrity and maintain social order. *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*: https://www.greatafsirs.com/Tafsir_Library.aspx?FromMainTafsir=1&MadhabNo=7&TafsirNo=54&SoraNo=33&AyahNo=72&LanguageID=1#:~:text=%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AC%D9%88%D8%B2%20%D8%A3%D9%86%20%D8%AA%D9%83%D9%88%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A9%20%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A9.%D9%81%D9%8A%20%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81%20%5B172%5D. (Accessed 26 March 2025).

Based on this Qur'anic interpretation, the Moroccan Sufi philosopher Ṭaha 'Abd al-Rahmān develops his theory of *Intimā'iyya* (Trusteeship) by emphasising humanity's responsibilities towards themselves, other humans, and the environment. The concept of *amāna* is mentioned in five verses of the Qur'an. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss each verse in detail, the significance of this concept is evident.

emphasizing humanity's responsibilities towards themselves, other humans, and the environment as when Allah entrusted man as a *khalīfa* (viceregent) on the planet (02:30).⁴⁵⁹ It is a Sufi conceptualisation that we should be as near to Allah as possible, feeding on the capacity to love and be loved by Allah and using our capacity to spread this love to God's creation as embodied in the third tier of Islam, *al-iḥsān* (see Chapter Five).⁴⁶⁰ This love is attained and transmitted by emulating the Prophet Muḥammad in *sulūk* and *akhlāq*, as mentioned in verse (68:4), in which God describes Prophet Muḥammad: “And indeed, you are of a great moral character”. However, this love for God's creation can encompass all humanity within a universal Qur'anic philosophy. This means that Sufi philosophy should be viewed within the broader context of a Qur'anic philosophy, as discussed later in this chapter.

As far as the principles of *sulūk* and *akhlāq* are concerned, my thesis argues that the Qur'an reveals a five-dimensional-relationship between humans and the following: Allah, the self, other humans, the environment (God's creation; ecology), and the universe (the cosmos). My argument is undergirded by both ancient and contemporary theological scholarship, along with an ecological and cosmological foundation rooted in Islamic teachings. Psychological fulfilment and ethical values are derived from the first three dimensions of the above-mentioned five-dimensional relationship concept. These three dimensions are inherent to the *sulūk* and *akhlāq* of the school of *iḥsān*, as explained by Fad'aq in Chapter Five and discussed in al-Ghazālī's theological writings, such as *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* or the *Iḥyā'*. The other two dimensions, ecology and cosmology, are introduced as Islamic principles by Dr. Llewellyn, the environmental planner at the Saudi Wildlife Authority. In an interview, he outlined a lecture titled "Ethical Teachings of Islam Applied to the Natural Environment".⁴⁶¹ He outlines the principles of Islamic ethics, which include *tawḥīd*, *taqwa*, *iḥsān* (the utmost good),

⁴⁵⁹ In Verse (02:30) the Qur'an describes humans as *khalīfa* (viceregent) of Allah on earth. Thus, they carry an *amāna* (trusteeship), taking on a responsible role as accountable and intelligent beings who care for the planet and do not pose a threat to existence or other creatures. Refer to Ṭaha 'Ab al-Raḥmān's theory of *Intimā'iyya* in Mohammed Hashas, Mutaz al-Khatib, eds. *Islamic Ethics and the Trusteeship Paradigm: Taha Abderrahmane's Philosophy in Comparative Perspectives* (Holland: Brill, 2021) <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/42546> (Accessed 24 January 2025)

⁴⁶⁰ For an explanation of *iḥsān* and love, see Murata and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam...Qur'an* (3:31-32), Say: “If you love God, follow me, and God will love you and forgive your sins, God is Forgiving, Compassionate”... P. 186; Pp. 267; P. 285-88; Pp. 309-12

⁴⁶¹ Shoaib Ahmad Malik, *Islamic Environmental Ethics with Dr. Othman Llewellyn* https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=316286870057985 (Accessed 17 December 2024).

and *rahma* (compassion). Llewellyn references prominent Sunni *tafsīr* scholars, such as al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr, to explain the Qur'anic term "Allah *rubb al-ālamīn*," which means "the Lord of all beings in the world." This perspective emphasises that each species represents a distinct world. Each generation is also considered a world in itself. Therefore, God is recognised as the Lord of all beings. All living beings possess intrinsic value; thus, excluding any being from moral consideration violates the principle of *tawhīd*. In the same lecture, he reflected on Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth.⁴⁶² *Al-Mīzān* means balance or equilibrium in Arabic.⁴⁶³ It is a project undertaken under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme, initiated by several scientist-scholars of Islam who addressed environmental issues concerning the Earth on which we live, within a vast and glorious cosmos. The Lord unfolded everything in equilibrium (*mizān*) with each other (55:7; 8; 9). For a discussion on cosmology and creation in the Qur'an, see Imam al-Ghazali's explanation later in this chapter. It is essential to note that the principle of *rahma*, one of Llewellyn's five principles, will be revisited when discussing Raḍwān al-Sayyid's new approach to a narrative for Islamic philosophy in Chapter Seven. It should be noted that Sufis are included in the comprehensive list of Muslim scholars participating in *al-Mizan*, which can be termed as a document of an Islamic environmental ecumenism.⁴⁶⁴ In terms of a human being's earthly actions, *Al-mīzān*, as interpreted by Sayyid Muḥammad 'Alawī al-Mālkī and grounded in the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunna, serves as the scale on which an individual's deeds—both good and bad—will be evaluated on the Day of Judgment.⁴⁶⁵

Regarding the individual, the Sufi *sulūk* reflects two aspects of human behaviour and conduct. On the one hand, it is an ethical reflection on individual dealings with their surroundings, which invites consideration of "Sufism as an ethical panacea."⁴⁶⁶ On the other hand, according to al-

⁴⁶² Emily Echevarria, *Parliament of the World's Religions* "Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth" Unveils an Islamic Approach to Environmental Stewardship at the United Nations Environment Assembly [https://parliamentofreligions.org/climate-action/al-mizan-a-covenant-for-the-earth-unveils-an-islamic-approach-to-environmental-stewardship-at-the-united-nations-environment-assembly/#:~:text=Key%20amongst%20the%20outcomes%20of,urging%20collective%20action%20to%20comb](https://parliamentofreligions.org/climate-action/al-mizan-a-covenant-for-the-earth-unveils-an-islamic-approach-to-environmental-stewardship-at-the-united-nations-environment-assembly/#:~:text=Key%20amongst%20the%20outcomes%20of,urging%20collective%20action%20to%20combat) at (Accessed 17 December 2024)

⁴⁶³ *Mīzān* mentioned in Sura ar-Rahmaan verses 5, 6, 7, 8 in King Saud Electronic Moshef

⁴⁶⁴ Echevarria, *Parliament of the World's Religions*...

⁴⁶⁵ Al-'Ubaydī, *The Hijāz Religious Scholar* ..., pp. 639-648

⁴⁶⁶ Michael Arnold, *Sufism as an Ethical Panacea* "Mysticism and Ethics in Islam", Sheikh Zayed Chair of Arabic and Islamic Studies, conference American University of Beirut (May 2– 3, 2019).

Najjār, it is a psychological reflection of one's dealings with oneself, enabling the maintenance of a balanced and meaningful life.⁴⁶⁷

This latter aspect is expressed in the Qur'anic verse (65:7), which invites exploration of the human psyche as articulated in the Qur'an and Sunna.⁴⁶⁸ The individual's *sulūk* (psychological make-up) plays an effective role in the make-up of one's *akhlāq* (ethics); thus, the collective *akhlāq* of individuals as members of society comprises the ethical philosophy that prevails in society. Therefore, the *sulūk* is the individual's concern, and the *akhlāq* reflects both the individual and society. This was addressed in a lecture that relates *sulūk* and *akhlāq* to *wasāṭiyya* delivered by the influential Sufi 'Alī al-Jifrī.⁴⁶⁹

It is worth noting that Sunni Muslim theologians respond differently to the application of philosophical approaches when addressing Qur'anic concepts. A case in point arises when addressing a philosophy of *wasāṭiyya*, especially in a Sufi context (see the Salafī definition of *wasāṭiyya* in Chapters Two and Three). However, the aversion to importing philosophy into Islamic theology is characteristic of all Sunni *madhāhib*, mainly when dealing with the theology of *'ilm al-kalām*.⁴⁷⁰ So, in light of my proposal to address *wasāṭiyya* in Sufi philosophical terms, there is a need to reassess the Sunni school's attitude towards philosophy in general as well as with the *taṣawwuf*'s school of *iḥsān*'s two principles of *sulūk* and *akhlāq*, or, the basis of *wasāṭiyya*.

https://www.academia.edu/40488561/Sufism_as_an_Ethical_Panacea_Situating_the_Science_of_Tasawwuf_in_Islamic_Ethics

⁴⁶⁷ 'Āmir Al-Najjār, *Al-Taṣawwuf al-Nafsī* (Psychological Sufism), (Cairo: Al-Hay'a al-Maṣriyya al-Āmma li al-Kitāb, 2016). For Sufism's contribution to Islamic psychology, see Amber Haque, and Abdullah Rothman, eds. *Islamic Psychology Around the Globe*, (Washington: International Association of Islamic Psychology, 2021)

⁴⁶⁸ For a Sufi perspective on the human psyche, in line with the Qur'an and Sunna, see Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ 'Alī al-Jifrī, *Al-Wasāṭiyya al-Shar'iyya wa al-I'tidāl al-Wā'i* (The Sharia-Compatible Wasāṭiyya and the Conscientious Moderation) <https://youtu.be/IDbbrvNPpCc> (Accessed 1 August 2023)

⁴⁷⁰ Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim 'Ilm al-kalām* is the science of speech (words of Allah) intended to harmonize reason and revelation; see Anju Ajma, *'Ilm al-kalām* https://www.academia.edu/35253736/'Ilm_al_kalam (Accessed 25 February 2023)

I. Defining Philosophy in an Islamic Context

Abu 'Izzah wonders, “What prompted the *su'āl dīnī* (the religious question) of *raison d'être* in the human being that produced different styles of thoughts, including philosophical thought?” He further asks, “What instigated the insatiable human quest to explore the *mā warā'* [metaphysics; supernatural], which set the thinking faculty in motion on a trek to uncover the mysterious unknown?”⁴⁷¹

The human mind did not ascertain concrete answers to such questions. Yet, in its metaphysical and cultural anthropological domains, philosophy serves as the basis for analysing the development of human thought. Overall, it has been established that humans are not content with merely living their lives. Instead, they continually endeavour to understand it, i.e., to search for meaning behind their existence: a quest the Qur'an identifies as the *raison d'être* for creation. The Qur'an (51:56) states that Allah's purpose for creating the *jinn* (unseen beings) and *ins* (human beings) is for them to *ya'budūn* (worship) Him.⁴⁷²

Ibn Jurayj and Mujāhid interpret *ya'budūn* as connoting “to know Allah”.⁴⁷³ Knowing Allah consists of two aspects *dunyawī* and *dīnī*, i.e., the material (of this world) and the immaterial (the domain of metaphysics). In other words, these two aspects refer to the *ẓāhir* (exoteric) and *bātin* (esoteric). This brings to the fore the works of Ash'arite and Sufi theologians and philosophers, such as al-Juwaynī, al-Ghazālī, and Ibn 'Arabī.⁴⁷⁴ Knowing Allah is through

⁴⁷¹ Al-Ṭayyib Abu 'Izzah, *Dilālat al-Falsafa wa Su'āl al-Nash'a: Naqd al-Tamarkuz al-Urūbbī* (Notion of Philosophy and the Question of its Origin: Critique of European Centrality), (Beirut: Nama, 2012), p. 25

⁴⁷² Sedeer El-Showk, *The Islamic View of the Multiverse*, 2016 <https://nautil.us/the-islamic-view-of-the-multiverse-236331/> (Accessed 29 December 2022)

⁴⁷³ Sa'ad 'A. al-Ḥumayyid, *Al-Aluka al-Shar'iyya: Interpreting verse (51:56)*, <https://www.alukah.net/sharia/0/122874/%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86-%D2%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%86%D2-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%82%D9%88%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%82%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%86%D8%B3-%D8%A5%D9%84%D8%A7-%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%86/> (Accessed 27 December 2022).

⁴⁷⁴ The Islamic *dīn* (religion) in its social context differs from Emile Durkheim's theory on the sociology of religion. The Islamic religion embodies what Mircea Eliade observes in the *Sacred and the Profane*: that people are connected “unconsciously” as manifested in space, time, nature and the cosmos. In Islam, the believer is connected consciously to what this thesis dubs the perpetual anthropo-theo-conscious realisation (see Chapter Five). This thesis also proposes a possible interpretation of ibn 'Arabī's theory of the unity of being in the context

realisation of His attributes, as exemplified by the Prophet Muḥammad's Sunna, and involves understanding Allah's quality of being the *ẓāhir* and the *bātin* as described by the Qur'an. My argument here is that the Qur'anic verse *awwal* and *ākhir* (the first and the last) and *ẓāhir* and *bātin* (exoteric and esoteric) (57:3) represent a Qur'anic theory of epistemology and philosophy in a nutshell – a philosophy derived from both revelation and rational thinking. To be relevant to this thesis, the topic of philosophy will be addressed in this Qur'anic context, as explained below.

The difference between philosophy and the Qur'anic term *ḥikma* should be clarified. Academically, philosophy involves a methodology that seeks to find coherent answers to philosophical enquiries. According to the Oxford Dictionary, these enquiries concern philosophy as “the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge and existence”.⁴⁷⁵ Murata and Chittick typically define *ḥikma* as “the discernment of truth along with its application to concrete situations”.⁴⁷⁶ The Qur'anic *ḥikma* is the wisdom (prudence) received either directly from Allah through *wahī* (revelation) or *ilm laddunī* (God-inspired knowledge) or through the Allah-endowed gift of *albāb* (sound minds) for persons who *yatafakrūn* (engage in deep thinking) or through *qulūb ya 'qilūn bihā* (hearts to reason with, i.e., spiritual hearts; conscious hearts), meaning intelligence involving mind and heart as alluded to in verses (2:69) and (22:46).⁴⁷⁷

of the sacred and the profane as a perpetual conscious connection between the *ẓāhir* and *batīn*, a proposal that merits independent research.

⁴⁷⁵ New Oxford American Dictionary, 2005.

https://www.google.com/search?q=the+study+of+the+fundamental+nature+of+knowledge+and+existence+in+oxford+dictionary&source=hp&ei=LuUPZM-vLcOZkdUP9vCRsA8&iflsig=AK50M_UAAAAAZA_zPq-lswzSmJ8kGbFhXActK801QskX&oq=the+study+of+the+fundamental+nature+of+knowledge%2C+and+existence+in+Oxford+Dictionary&gs_lcp=Cgdnnd3Mtd2l6EAEYADIECCEQCjoKCAAQ6gIQtAIQQZoTCC4QxwEQ0QM01AIQ6gIQtAIQQZoUCAAQ6gIQtAIQigMQtwMQ1AMQ5QI6BQgAEJECOGgILhCDARCAzoICAAQsQM0QgwE6CwgAEIAEELEDEIMBOgsILhCABBCxAxCDAToRCC4QgAQQsQM0QgwEQxwEQ0QM6BAgAEEM6CgguELEDEIMBEEM6BQgAEIAEOg4ILhCABBCxAxDHARDRAzoICAAQsQM0kQI6CAGAEIAEELEDOgUILhCABDoICC4QgAQQ1AI6CggAEIAEEYQ_wE6CAguENQCEIAEOgYIABAWEB46CAGAEBYQHhAPOgUIABCGAZoGCAAQHhAPOgYIABAIEB5Q0D5YtLQEYKPCBGgDcAB4AIAhQKIAfRekgEGMC41OC4ymAEAoAEBoAECsAEK&scient=gws-wiz (Accessed 14 Mar 2023).

⁴⁷⁶ Murata, and Chittick, *The Vision of Islam...*, p. 182

⁴⁷⁷ Al-Ṭāhir Bin 'Āshūr, Qur'anic exegesis titled *Tafsīr al-Tahrīr wa al-Tanwīr* (Interpretation of Verification and Enlightenment) <https://quran-tafsir.net/ashour/sura22-aya46.html>

According to the Qur'an, philosophy is *ḥikma* acquired through a process of enquiry involving intelligence that engages the mind or a combination of mind and heart.⁴⁷⁸ This means the Qur'an does not rule out the process of philosophical enquiry. However, the faculty that leads to coherent answers resides in a combination of the mind (intellect) and the spiritual heart (conscience; empathy). Philosophical enquiry in the Qur'an, which I call Qur'anic philosophy, thus involves the heart (empathy; consciousness), mind (rational intellect) and observation as well as the inspiration to assess problematic enquiries in search of coherent answers.⁴⁷⁹

Philosophical enquiries and methodologies can be qualified as Islamically compatible, i.e., when dealing with issues that concern Islam's immutable principles (‘*aqīda* or *uṣūl*’) in which the ideal *sulūk* and *akhlāq* of the individual and society are set by Allah in the Qur'an as explained by al-Juwaynī later in the chapter. Alternatively, this could include when mutable principles (*fiqh* or *furū'*) from which human beings interpret how these ideal *sulūk* and *akhlāq* should be conducted. Whatever the case, they must meet the criteria of the *‘ilm al-kalām* (Islamic scholasticism; literally “science of dialectical speech”) to avoid any deviation from the principle of *tawḥīd*, the pivotal pillar of Islam.⁴⁸⁰

The function of *fiqh* is to interpret God's ideal revelations (*sharī‘a*) about *sulūk* and *akhlāq* as compatible with a human lifestyle subject to chronic change. *Fiqh* is the responsibility of the *fuqahā'* (jurisconsults), who consider individual objectives in the context of society's collective objectives. This Qur'anic philosophical view has been addressed by Imam al-Juwaynī, as later discussed.

Therefore, addressing a *wasṭiyya* based on a philosophy of *taṣawwuf* within a broader Islamic framework (and considering the controversial nature of philosophy from an Islamic perspective) necessitates a discussion on why philosophy has been and remains a subject of controversy. This discussion aims to identify the conflicts associated with philosophy and

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid

⁴⁷⁹ For an elaboration on the relationship between philosophy and revelation Ibrāhīm Burshāshin refers to the Qur'an as the genesis of Islamic philosophy and to the Greek epic, *The Iliad* (8th century BC) as the genesis of Greek philosophy. See Ibrāhīm Burshāshin, *Al-Waḥī wa al-Falsafa: Madkhal li Fahm Turāthuna al-Falsafī* (Revelation and Philosophy: An Entry to Understanding our Philosophical Heritage), (Cairo: Dār al-Kalima Publishing, 2019).

⁴⁸⁰ Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim...*

explore possible ways out of this historical impasse. Given the controversies surrounding philosophy, how can an Islamic Qur'anic philosophy address twenty-first-century issues, as demanded by Vision 2030, especially in socioreligious terms?

My argument is that as far as dealing with critical contemporary issues that encompass Islam as a whole, i.e., issues concerning Qur'anic or *ḥadīth* theological arguments involving either creation (ontology and cosmology) or socioreligious issues that affect human relationships or ecological issues, philosophical enquiries must be considered in a new way of approaching Islamic philosophy. This will be a philosophy understood in the context of the Qur'anic philosophy encompassing the *sulūk* and *akhlāq* underlying the aforementioned five Qur'anic relations.

It should also be noted that issues concerning inter-human relationships and ecology fall in the domain of *akhlāq* (ethics). I argue that here, *taṣawwuf*, as both a process of purification of the heart and an *akhlāq*-based approach to God and His creation, could play a vital role in addressing issues concerning inter-human relationships and ecology through the domain of *waṣṭiyya*. In this argument, the philosophy of *taṣawwuf* is key to addressing philosophical enquiries as an essential element that supports broader Islamic philosophical enquiries. As this chapter later details, Raḍwān al-Sayyid proposed such an outcome.

Given the context of a society averse to subjugating religious issues to philosophical enquiry, we are impelled to identify when philosophy conflicts with religion. This conflict hinders its acceptance as a means of resolving issues exigent to *ḥadātha* (modernity), which I have referred to as the *naql* vs *'aql* syndrome (relying on literal narration of interpreting sacred text as opposed to relying on logic and reason) (see Chapter Three).

The point here is that to remain *sharī'a*-compatible, the aforementioned two premises of Vision 2030 should be addressed in light of a Qur'anic philosophical approach. Points where so-called "Sufi philosophy" conflicts with Islam should be highlighted to pave the way for my argument about the need for a new approach to the philosophy of Islam, wherein *taṣawwuf* plays a positive role in the realm of *sulūk* and *akhlāq*.

The remainder of this chapter is thus dedicated to highlighting historically significant Sufi-related philosophical controversies involving *taṣawwuf* that have unfolded between mainstream Islamic religion and philosophy. As I elaborate in Chapter Seven, this will lay the groundwork for addressing a way out of the civilizational impasse between religion and philosophy.

1.1 Four Major Sufi-Related Philosophical Controversies

It is interesting to note that subjecting Islamic principles of *‘aqīda* and *sharī‘a* to philosophical enquiry and debate came as a reaction to the literary works of the early Sufi Muslim philosophers. The literature reviewed here notes that *taṣawwuf*-related philosophical controversy was initiated during the early Islamic centuries (between the seventh and twelfth centuries CE), the aftermath of which still persists today. Over time, *the zuhd* (asceticism) of the early Muslims acquired the name *taṣawwuf*. The rapidity of the expansion of the Muslim Empire, indulgence in vast worldly gains and exposure to the religious and philosophical traditions of conquered lands were precursors to what came to be known as philosophical *taṣawwuf*. As a newcomer to the Muslim tradition, philosophical *taṣawwuf* (or rather, “the philosophy of the Sufis”) brought with it several controversies. I classify these controversies into two categories. The first refers to the controversies resulting from a conflict between the traditionalist Salafī religious community (*ahl al-ḥādīth*) and the emerging *taṣawwuf*, which was designated as philosophical *taṣawwuf* and associated with al-Ḥallāj, al-Suhrawardī and Ibn ‘Arabī’. For the purpose of classification, the thesis designates this category as the “*‘irfānī taṣawwuf* controversies”.⁴⁸¹ This is not to say that philosophical *taṣawwuf* was accepted unquestioningly by master Sufis of the time. Rather, the Sufi attitude towards it was, to say the least, ambivalent, falling somewhere between abhorrence and justification because it was misunderstood.

The second category encompasses a three-part type of controversy. In addition to the conflict between Salafis and the logician-philosophers (those engaged in logic and the sciences, such as al-Fārābī, Avicenna and al-Ghazālī), this was the result of a conflict between the “Sufi” logician-philosophers themselves – one exemplified by the conflict between Abu Ḥāmid al-

⁴⁸¹ ‘Adnān Ibrāhīm, *Kayfa Tata ‘āmal ma‘ al-Turāth al-Falsafī al-Ṣufī (al-Ḥallaāj wa Ibn ‘Arabī)* (How to Deal with the Sufi Philosophical Tradition: al-Ḥallāj and Ibn ‘Arabī), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysqmpRtudqM> (Accessed 14 January 2023)

Ghazālī (1058–1111) and Avicenna (980–1037) as well as a controversy between al-Ghazālī and non-Sufi Muslim-logician philosopher Averroes (1126–1198). Here, I refer to these as the “logician-*taṣawwuf* controversies”. These two categories will be discussed below. I begin by briefly reviewing the background of the early years of the transition of *taṣawwuf* to set the scene for addressing the controversies associated with Sufi philosophy, one that is now cited indiscriminately and discussed among the mainstream intelligentsia as *taṣawwuf falsafī* (philosophical Sufism).

During the Abbasid Empire’s zenith in Iraq, the cities of Kūfa (Najaf) and Baṣra became renowned respectively for their expertise in fiqh sciences and a strong inclination towards *taṣawwuf*. During the second Hejira century (eighth century CE), *taṣawwuf* took a significant turn to emphasise *al-ḥubb al-ilāhī* (divine love and devotion). Yāsīn attributes the roots of philosophical *taṣawwuf* to the ascetics of this period, such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (642-728), the mystic woman Rabi’a al-‘Adawiyya (714–801), and Mālīk Bin Dinār (d.784).⁴⁸² The theme of *taṣawwuf* was *al-ḥubb al-ilāhī*, wherein the relationship between the lover and their beloved was understood as an expression of the *jamāl* (beauty) of Allah the creator and His *jalāl* (majesty). Their devotion involved an unconditional dedication to divine love, rather than worshipping Allah merely to win His rewards or avoid His wrath.⁴⁸³

This period in Islamic history saw the inclusion of many peoples from diverse cultures, each with their distinctive philosophies and religious backgrounds. Arab-Islamic culture intermixed with the cultures and religions of Christendom, Persia, and the Indian subcontinent. Through Christian and Jewish translators, the logic and metaphysics of Greek philosophy were translated into Arabic.⁴⁸⁴ Devotion to pure unconditional love and dedication to seeking the essence of a relationship between humans and the divine were just some of the ideas in the newcomer philosophies that found their way into the Islamic tradition owing to their congruency with the

⁴⁸² Ibrāhīm Yāsīn, *Madkhal ila al-Taṣawwuf al-falsafī: Dirāsa Saycomitaḥfizīyīya* (An Entry to Philosophical Taṣawwuf: A Psycho-metaphysical Study) (Muntada Sūr al-Azbakiyya, 2002) https://www.mabahij.net/2020/01/pdf_65.html (Accessed 26 February 2023)

⁴⁸³ Rabia Terri Harris, *The Kitāb Al-Jalāl Wa-l Jamāl of Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi* (On Majesty and Beauty) <http://www.sufi.ir/books/download/english/ibn-arabi-en/jalalwajamal-en.pdf> (Accessed 12 Mar 2023)

⁴⁸⁴ ‘Alī S. al-Nashshār, *Nash’at al-Fikr al-Falsafī fī al-Islām: Al-zuhd wa al-Taṣawwuf fī al-Qarnayn al-Awāl wa al-Thāni al-Hijriyyayn* (The Development of Philosophical Thought in Islam: Ascetism and Sufism in the First and Second Hijra Centuries), 8th edition (Cairo: Dar al-Ma‘ārif, 1977)

Qur'an as in verse (5: 54), in which God described the believers as, "He loves them, and they love Him".⁴⁸⁵

Al-Nashshār attributes the onset of the Greek philosophy's influence on Islam to the school of Antioch. Antioch was the Roman capital of Syria, which Muslims conquered in the early years of the first Islamic century (seventh century CE). According to al-Nashshār, Antioch had flourished as a refuge for Alexandrian scholars who migrated there because the scholarly environment in Alexandria was unstable, despite a harmonious coexistence between Muslims and Christians. Antioch replaced Alexandria as a centre of learning and established connections with Constantinople, the source of Greek literature, which was obtained through Muslim places of learning in Baghdad.

As a centre of learning, Antioch endured for a hundred and thirty years before the transfer of its school to Ḥarrān in Syria. The Antiochian school was concerned with translating Greek literature into the Syriac language and then to Arabic. One of the early Sufi scholars who lived and studied in Antioch was Aḥmad bin 'Āṣim al-Anṭākī (d. between 835 and 853).⁴⁸⁶ Al-Nashshār designated him as the first philosopher of *taṣawwuf*.⁴⁸⁷

Influenced by Greek philosophy and logic in particular, the Mu'tazilites in Baghdad introduced rationalism to support their theological arguments in *'ilm al-kalām*. They did so to counter arguments by their fellow Muslim opponents as well as non-Muslim criticism of the Qur'an. Such criticisms extended mainly from four principles: the *tawhīd* (Divine Unity), the *'adl* (Divine Justice) of Allah, the free will of human action, and the creation of the Qur'an. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal opposed the Mu'tazilites doctrine that the Qur'an was created; to him, the Qur'an, as the words of Allah, is as eternal as Allah. He rejected the application of philosophy to theology, laying the groundwork for the Salafī aversion to philosophy that persists in Salafī circles.

⁴⁸⁵ For a discussion on Sufi views of God's love in this verse compared to the *mutakalimūn* (rational theologians), see Murata and Chittick's *The Vision of Islam*. P. 258

⁴⁸⁶ 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Ḥifnī, *Al-Mawsū'a al-Ṣufiyya* (The Sufi Encyclopedia), (Cairo: Madbouly Bookshop, 2006), p. 55

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid, (pp. 338–350)

Still, the Mu‘tazilites were supported by the intellectual Caliph al-Ma‘mūn (786–833). Ibn Ḥanbal underwent his famed *miḥna* (ordeal) to resist their approach to the *uṣūl* and *furū‘* of Islam. Abu al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (873–936), the founder and namesake of the *Ash‘arī* creed (the creed to which today’s Sufis adhere), was a member of this school for forty years and it influenced his combination of rationalism with *‘ulūm shar‘iyya* (see Chapter Two).⁴⁸⁸

To help the highly wealthy and vast Abbasid empire solidify its position as a world power, the academy of *Dār-al-Ḥikma* (The House of Wisdom) was established by the Abbasid Caliph Harūn al-Rashīd (786–809) as a repository of knowledge. The repository aimed to acquire the best of what the world had to offer at the time. Through the diligent efforts of translators, it was affirmed as a full-fledged academy of philosophy and sciences during the reign of al-Ma‘mūn.

Thanks to intense intellectual activity and the conversion to Islam of individuals deeply rooted in their indigenous religious and cultural traditions, the eighth to the thirteenth centuries CE saw *taṣawwuf* take a new turn with a philosophical bent. During this period of intense intellectual debates between advocates of intellectual products from surrounding civilizations and Muslim theologians, as well as among Muslim scholars, there were two developments in *taṣawwuf*’s history. The first saw the establishment of the school of al-Junayd (830–910) as the affirmed representative of Sunni *taṣawwuf* with its distinct wayfaring (*fanā’* and *baqā’* in Allah) school. Al-Junayd’s *taṣawwuf* is known as “sober *taṣawwuf*” (see Chapter Four). The second saw Sunni *taṣawwuf* set apart from what came to be known as *taṣawwuf falsafī* (philosophical Sufism).⁴⁸⁹

My argument here is that the impact of the *taṣawwuf falsafī* on Islam can be summed up in four major controversies associated with four Sufi philosophers and two types of philosophies: the philosophy of the *‘irfanī taṣawwuf*, which generated three controversies, and the philosophy of the logician *taṣawwuf* that gave rise to a fourth. It is the fourth controversy that still persists today, as I will elaborate on in relation to the hypothesis of my thesis.

⁴⁸⁸ Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). pp. xvii–xviii; Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern...*, p.51

⁴⁸⁹ Yāsīn states that *taṣawwuf falsafī* shifted from the path of the Suni *taṣawwuf* with its basis in the Qur’an and Sunna, e.g., the schools of al-Qushayrī, al-Junayd, al-Ghāzalī and others; see Yāsīn, *An Entry to Philosophical...*

1.1.1. The *ʿIrfānī Taṣawwuf* Controversies

As Hāla Fuʿād, a professor of *taṣawwuf* at Cairo University, explains, the *ʿirfānī* philosophical *taṣawwuf* was characterised as a “fantastical imagination”.⁴⁹⁰ It was also the *taṣawwuf* of extreme *shaṭaḥāt* (pl. of *shaṭḥ*, an ecstatic utterance), often outrageous in character, experienced by the Sufi while in deep state of *fanāʾ*. Its development spanned five centuries, from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries CE. Three significant controversies related to *ʿirfānī taṣawwuf* have affected the Sunni Islamic world through *takfīr* and accusations of apostasy, each presenting a distinct philosophical perspective. Two of them resulted in the execution of their proponents, i.e., al-Hallāj and al-Suhrawardī. The third, associated with Ibn ʿArabī, remains a topic of debate and discussion in some schools of Sufism and among perennial philosophers, such as Sayyed Hossein Nasr. These three philosophical controversies are addressed below.

Al-Hallāj’s Philosophy

A precursor to what came to be classified as a “psycho-metaphysical philosophy” of *taṣawwuf*, or psychological *taṣawwuf*, emerged with al-Bisṭāmī (804– 874), who philosophized his experience and al-Hallāj, who applied it intensely.⁴⁹¹ Ḥusayn Bin Manṣūr al-Hallāj (858-922), who was born in Persia and lived and died in Baghdad, was famous for his ecstatic *shaṭaḥāt*. His utterances suggested an impersonation of God, prompting the Sunni *fuqahāʾ* to accuse him of preaching the concept of *ḥulūl* (the embodiment of God in a Sufi body) and *ittiḥād* (union with God). It was likened to the embodiment of God in Jesus Christ and the Hindu concept of reincarnation, i.e., the Sufi becomes God-incarnate, even briefly. He was also suspected of being a Qarmaṭian who promoted a *bāṭinī* (esoteric) Neoplatonism-influenced Ismaili theology.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹⁰ Hala Fuʿād in *Yatafakarun* with Ibrahim Issa <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pi3KMrjA7ks> (Accessed 26 February 2023)

⁴⁹¹ Al-Nashshār, *The Development of Philosophical ...*, p. 293; the term psycho-metaphysical is borrowed from Yāsīn, *An Entry to Philosophical...*

⁴⁹² The contemporary Ismāʿilī philosophy argues that Neoplatonism is congruent with many Qurʾānic verses and has become integral to Islamic esoteric theology; see Khalil Andani, *Islamic Neoplatonism in the Philosophy of Religion* <https://youtu.be/CM2PHJsn9xQ> (Accessed 22 Jan 2023).

Yāsīn argues that Nicholson and Massignon claimed that al-Ḥallāj was fully dedicated to the theory of God's embodiment in the human being thus he set *taṣawwuf*'s course in the direction of philosophical Sufism.⁴⁹³ Massignon identifies the presence of a Christian tone and Sufi expressions in al-Ḥallāj's statements. In the *Ṭawāsīn* Massignon attributes to al-Ḥallāj a significant concept new to Islam – the many (in number) in the absolute one.⁴⁹⁴ Yāsīn criticizes Massignon's interpretation of al-Ḥallāj, claiming he lacked knowledge of Sufi expressions and failed to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the historical circumstances and deep symbolism inherent in the Sufi use of language.⁴⁹⁵

If al-Ḥallāj is controversial amongst Orientalists, he is even more so among Muslim scholars. The attitudes to al-Ḥallāj were divided between his supporters and the *fuqahā'* (Sunni jurists). The former considered him a martyr and argued that he would be resurrected, while the latter accused him of apostasy. At the same time, some traditionalist Sunnis abstained from stating opinions about him.⁴⁹⁶ The moderate Sufis disapproved of him, e.g., 'Amru bin 'Uthmān al-Makkī and al-Junayd, as mentioned in al-Salamī's *Wafīyyāt al-A'yān*.⁴⁹⁷ According to Yāsīn, however, al-Ḥallāj himself was a preacher of silence who believed he should not disseminate divine secrets. Yāsīn thus claims there is no basis for the Orientalist attempt to describe him as an Ismā'īlī or Qarmatian – or even as a Christian who, as Reike purported, claims divinity.⁴⁹⁸ To exceed Orientalist speculations, Kremer assigned him a theory of the unity of being, which was unheard of until the fourteenth century CE, when Ibn 'Arabī gave it its final form.⁴⁹⁹

Taftazānī argues the *ḥulūl* that al-Hallaj prescribes, which occurs when *Lahūt* (divinity) is embodied in *nasūt* (human nature), is metaphorical and not real. He supports his argument by

⁴⁹³ Yāsīn, *An Entry to Philosophical...*

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid, (pp. 45–46); Lous Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallāj, Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, Volume 4: Biography and Index, Trans. Herbert Mason, (Princeton Legacy Library, 2019)

⁴⁹⁵ Yāsīn, *An Entry to Philosophical...*, p. 46

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid, (pp. 45–46)

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid, (pp. 46–47)

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid, (p. 49)

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid, (p. 47)

referring to al-Salamī in his *Ṭabaqāt* quoting al-Ḥallāj as saying, “Humanity was never connected with Allah nor did it separate from Him”.⁵⁰⁰

Al-Suhrawadī’s Philosophy

Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawadī (1154–1191) was born in Suhraward, Iran. He lived in Aleppo and was killed there by Saladin for his heretical philosophy, hence his alias “*al-maqtūl*” (the murdered).⁵⁰¹ According to Yāsīn, his controversial addition to philosophical *taṣawwuf* was the differentiation between the *naql* and ‘*aql* in terms of a historical possibility and a rational possibility.⁵⁰² In a leading question, he was asked whether the Prophet Muḥammad was the last Messenger of God to humanity, as firmly stated in fundamental Islamic doctrine; if not, would it be possible for Allah to create a new Prophet to send to humanity? This was a leading question. An affirmative answer would mean there was no basis for Muḥammad’s claim of being the last prophet. Conversely, a negative answer would suggest that al-Suhrawardī doubts God’s ability to create as He pleases.

Al-Suhrawardī answered the question by stating that it would be possible for God to create a new prophet, but it would not occur without the willingness of Allah. Yet even the mere possibility of the existence of another prophet after Prophet Muḥammad was considered an outrageous (heretical) idea.⁵⁰³ The leading question above was a pretext for killing him for his *ishrāqī* (illumination) philosophy.⁵⁰⁴

Yāsīn argues that Al-Suhrawardī, the ascetic Sufī philosopher, introduced new concepts of *Imama* (Muslim religious leadership) and the theory of Sufī *quṭbiyya* (spiritual leadership privileging Sufis) in the Sufī saintly hierarchy, and the idea of the *ḥakīm muta’allih* (the God-like wise person), the *khalifat Allah* (God’s deputy on earth) of whose existence the earth is

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid, (p. 50); Al- Taftazānī, *Entry to the Islamic Sufism...*, p. 128

⁵⁰¹ Roxanne D. Marcotte, *Suhrawardi Al-Maqtul, The Martyr of Aleppo*
https://www.academia.edu/22227326/2001_Suhrawardi_al_Maqtul_The_Martyr_of_Aleppo_in_Al_Qantara_32_2_2001_385_419 (Accessed 18 February 2023).

⁵⁰² Yāsīn, *An Entry to Philosophical...*

⁵⁰³ Ibid, (p. 57)

⁵⁰⁴ Marcotte, *The Martyr of Aleppo...*

never deprived.⁵⁰⁵ In fact, the concept of *qutbiyya* was not an innovation of al-Suhrawardī as it was mentioned by al-Hujwīrī and other Sufīs.⁵⁰⁶ But if such a person is visible, he is described as the king – a known *khalīfa* who receives inspiration from Allah. If he is incognito, then he is called a *qutb*.⁵⁰⁷ The *Ishrāqiyya* school was instrumental in crystalising the formulation of the *Shī‘a* creed in cooperation with the schools of Najaf, Isfahān, Shīrāz and Qazwīn.⁵⁰⁸

Al-Suhrawardī’s theory of *wujūd* was expressed in deeply symbolic language based on the theory of *fayḍ* (effusion), which emanates from *nūr al-anwār* (the light of lights). From this *yafīḍ* (overflows) on the ‘*awālim* (realms) of the ‘*uqūl* (minds; intellects), *nufūs* (souls) and *ajsām* (bodies). The first of the three realms, the ‘*ālam al-‘uqūl*, covers the *anwār qāhira* (compelling lights) that include the ‘*aql fa‘āl* (effective mind) or *rūḥ al-Qudus* (Holy Spirit). The second of the three includes the *nufūs* that manage the cosmos and human bodies. The third covers the elemental bodies or bodies in the cosmos of the moon. Yāsīn states that all these ideas are mythical, i.e., not verifiable.⁵⁰⁹ They are a mixture of Neoplatonic, Persian, Hermitic, Zoroastrian and Gnostic ideas. He ascribes to the Avicennian philosophy the belief that God, as the first light, is *wajīb al-wujūd* (necessary being).⁵¹⁰

Ibn ‘Arabī’s Philosophy

Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī (1165–1240) was born in Mercia, Andalusia, and died in Damascus. He was the most significant of the three Sufi thinkers, as the philosophy of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the unity of being) attributed to him is still subject to debate today as the most misunderstood Sufi concept. It is no exaggeration to say that Ibn ‘Arabī, singlehandedly held the torch of Sufism as a universal concept transcending all religions and existential philosophies. ‘Afīfī, a PhD student of Reynold Nicholson at Cambridge, describes Ibn ‘Arabī as “characterised by

⁵⁰⁵ Yāsīn, *An Entry to Philosophical...*

⁵⁰⁶ ‘Alī b. ‘Uthmān al-Jullābī al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb: The Revelation of the Veil*, (United Kingdom: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2000) p. 214, Translated by Reynold A. Nicholson

⁵⁰⁷ Yāsīn, *An Entry to Philosophical...*

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid, (p. 58)

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid, (p. 58)

⁵¹⁰ Ibid, (p. 56)

strong faith, inventive and prolific literary work, deep esoteric vision and above all, ambiguity of writing style.”⁵¹¹

Al-Futūḥāt al-Makiyya is considered his seminal work on Sufism.⁵¹² Chittick’s translation of Ibn ‘Arabī as a great theoretician of Sufism is largely based on the *Al-Futūḥāt*.⁵¹³ Nonetheless, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* is the undisputed quintessence of his spiritual teachings in which he reviews the spiritual meanings and wisdom of twenty-seven prophets. These two works are still debated in Sufi and spiritual philosophical circles, especially in terms of controversial discussions on the universality of the Islamic religion. He is the only Sufi with an academic society named after him, with its headquarters at the University of Oxford.⁵¹⁴

Thanks to Ibn ‘Arabī, the beginning of the thirteenth century CE saw *taṣawwuf* undergo a major transformation in which it was mixed with a sort of divine philosophy.⁵¹⁵ *Taṣawwuf* thus became a search for divine reality and its manifestation.⁵¹⁶ Through the contributions of Ibn ‘Arabī and his disciples, who have now come to be known as the Ibn ‘Arabī school of Sufi philosophy, several controversial concepts foreign to Islamic theological thinking were introduced. Al-Suhrwardī’s *ḥikmat al-ishrāq* resonated with Ibn ‘Arabī’s existential philosophy. However, Ibn ‘Arabī elevated Sufi existential philosophy with the theory of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being or existence), which is attributed to him. Chittick states that Ibn ‘Arabī did not explicitly mention *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Ibn al-‘Arabī’s cosmology posits that God is the sole existence, with creation serving as a manifestation of the Divine.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹¹ Ibid, (p. 61)

⁵¹² Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makiyya* (The Meccan Revelations) was more than 4000 pages in length. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha‘rānī (d.1565) abridged this work in a book titled *Lawāqih al-Anwār* (The Pollens of Light). The controversies this voluminous work generated prompted some Sunni scholars to derogatively call it *al-Qubūḥāt al-Halakiyya* (The Grotesque Destroyers).

⁵¹³ William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Cosmology*, (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998)

⁵¹⁴ The Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society (MIAS) <https://ibnarabisociety.org> MIAS was founded in 1977 to promote greater understanding of the work of Ibn Arabi and his followers. It was registered in the United Kingdom with branches in Australia, Spain and the United States.

⁵¹⁵ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God...*

⁵¹⁶ Yāsīn, *An Entry to Philosophical...*

⁵¹⁷ Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God...*

Among his disciples was his stepson Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (1207 – 1274). Ibn Arabī's teachings directly or indirectly influenced many renowned Sufis, such as Ibn Sab'īn (1217 – 1271), Shabastārī (1288 – 1340), 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Jāmī (1414 – 1492), 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (1365 – 1424) and al-Qāshānī (d. 1353).

His intellectual impact surpassed that of intellectual Sufis in influencing medieval Christian philosophers such as Lully and Dante.⁵¹⁸ Each member of Ibn 'Arabī's school produced concepts worth reviewing. Ibn 'Arabī completed the theory of *al-insān al-kāmil* and *al-haqīqa al-Muḥamadiyya* (the complete or perfect human being as represented in the persona of Muḥammadan reality), which influenced the thinking of his disciple Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī and was also adopted by Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī.⁵¹⁹ The idea of the perfect human being still resonates in Sufi thought, as noted by S.M. 'A al-Mālkī in his work "*Muḥammad SAWS: the Perfect Being*".⁵²⁰

The theory that all creatures are the word of God is also attributed to Ibn 'Arabī. Al-Qūnawī further developed this particular theory to encompass esoteric symbolism and ambiguity.⁵²¹ These and *al-waḥda al-shuhudiyya* (unity of witnessing reality) are, according to Yāsīn, a clear influence of the *kalām* of *mu'tazila*. In Yāsīn's opinion, they led to a theory of *maḥāṭih al-ghayb* (keys to the unknown) and a complete theory of *khayāl* (imagination) by Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī in his Sufi philosophy.⁵²²

During this period, *waḥdat al-wujūd* appeared in its complete form as a philosophy. It was Ibn Sab'īn who completed its formulation as a theory. This theory advocates the oneness of existence as a *kawnī* (universal) fabric that emanates from Allah's will through His order of *kun*

⁵¹⁸ Ibid, p. 59

⁵¹⁹ Ibid, p. 62

⁵²⁰ Muḥammad 'Alawī al-Mālkī, *Muḥammad SAWS al-Insān al-Kāmil* (*Muḥammad SAWS the Perfect Being*), (Medina, Saudi Arabia: Al-Rasshīd Press) (10th Edition, 1411 [1991]). Al-Mālkī asserts that the Prophet's perfection comes from God's choice of him as the final messenger to convey complete religion and perfect ethics. He describes the Prophet as flawless in body and mind. This contrasts with the Salafī belief that Sufis exaggerate their reverence for him. Some Salafī scholars cite Qur'anic verse 18:110, where God states that the Prophet is human like everyone else.

⁵²¹ Yāsīn, *An Entry to Philosophical...*, p. 62

⁵²² Ibid, p. 62 & p. 77

f'yakūn (“Be”, and it is), as in verse (2:117).⁵²³ It also includes the theory of the sub-ranks of the two main Qur’anic ranks of *‘ālam al-ghayb* (transcendental; divine; the intangible unseen existence) and *‘ālam al-shahāda* (the tangible seen or witnessed existence). In these terms, the world is a manifestation of the divine names of Allah, the *bāṭin* and the *ẓāhir*.

My argument is that provided it is understood in a context that does not contradict the Islamic concept of *tawḥīd*, Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the unity of being) is a true representative of Islam as a universal *dīn*. This argument needs deep analysis beyond the scope of this thesis. However, Yāsīn’s thoughts on this theory are very important. Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory of the unity of being was deduced from his writings and poetry, where his sentences were interpreted to mean there are no traces of possible (contingent) existence to counter the *wajīb al-wujūd* (the necessary reality: Allah).⁵²⁴ Some understand this to mean that our existence is in God’s imagination and whatever our minds produce is imagined by Him. Yāsīn argues that this is a misconception of Ibn ‘Arabī’s thoughts. What Ibn ‘Arabī was referring to was not our *khalq ẓāhir* (tangible existence). Still, the existence of the realm of *jabarūt* (that which Allah had not yet willed into being) becoming real within the realm of *mūlk* (what we witness in our earthly existence), i.e., our consciousness.⁵²⁵

Some scholars also interpret his poetry to mean that he preached in favour of the unity of religions (see Chapter Four). Yāsīn argues that Ibn ‘Arabī did not mean all religions are correct, including the worship of idols. Rather, he meant through the process of the *shuhūd qalbī* (the witnessing through the heart, i.e., the spiritual heart), which allows for a profound mystical experience of cosmic consciousness that helps individuals realise God is indeed the absolute and one Creator. He is aware of all well-intended human beliefs in one Creator. Ibn ‘Arabī loves God and all of God’s creation.

⁵²³ Allah is the originator of the heavens and the earth. When He decrees a matter, He need only say that it, “be,” and it is (2:117), [Al Quran - KSU Electronic Moshaf project](#) (Accessed 25 February 2023). In modern astrophysics this could refer to creation from the *‘adam* (dark matter) to its manifestation in the real world. The verb *yakūn*. In the expression *kun fa yakūn* (connoting a command to exist), the verb *yakūn* is a present continuous verb. That suggests the creation of the universe is perpetual in the fabric of existence. It is mentioned in eight locations in the Qur’an.

⁵²⁴ Philip Suciadi Chia, *The Divine Knowledge in Relation to Determinism in the Philosophy of Avicenna* (Sophia, v. 61 no. 2, 2022) pp. 319–329

⁵²⁵ Yāsīn, *An Entry to Philosophical...*

Ibn ‘Arabī’s *waḥdat al-wujūd* theory is received positively in the West. Yet in the East, its home base, it is viewed ambivalently. For one, it is rejected by a mainstream society influenced by traditional religious schools of thought. For another, Sufis who revere Ibn ‘Arabī as a Shaykh of high status, differ in their attitudes towards and interpretation of his theory. Salafīs go as far as identifying the theory as the basis for the abhorred concept of unity of religions (see Chapters Four and Seven).

Of the three *‘irfānī taṣawwuf* controversies, the philosophical school of Ibn ‘Arabī stands out as the most controversial and problematic in its conceptual and theoretical approaches to Islam, including in the present. It touches on contemporary issues regarding the universality of the Qur’an and Islam as a religion that claims to be God’s final message to humanity. However, the claim of the universality of Islam should be demonstrated through the *‘aql* and *naql* methodologies of *‘ilm al-kalām*, i.e., by engaging in the literal *tafsīr* and *ta’wīl* (rational reasoning) of Qur’anic verses. This point will be addressed when we discuss Raḍwān al-Sayyid’s philosophical approach to Islam in Chapter Seven.

Regardless, *‘aql* and *naql* remain the most polemical Islamic issue nowadays. This leads us to address *‘aql* vs *naql* as the fourth major controversy, which started as a theologian-logician controversy over philosophy and evolved into a present-day controversy between the *ḥadāthiyyūn* (modernists) and the Salafī *usūlīs* (fundamentalists).

1.1.2 The Logician *Taṣawwuf* Controversies

The Sufi logician philosophers are associated with a three-part category of controversies alluded to above.⁵²⁶ At the outset, the Islamic schools recognized as having addressed philosophical

⁵²⁶ There are three parts because the controversy involves the philosophy of *taṣawwuf* in three ways. First, traditional Salafīs rejected al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, and Avicenna, the logician and scientist-philosopher, who attempted to reconcile Neoplatonism with Muslim theology. Salafīs rejected them as impious *malāḥida* (disbelievers), especially Avicenna, who was an *Ismā‘īlī bāṭinī* (esoteric). Second, al-Ghazālī, a Sufi and a philosopher logician, in his own right, rejected the above three Neoplatonism philosophy promoters as disbelievers in Qur’anic ontology (see al-Ghazālī’s *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), even though al-Ghazālī was, and still is, attacked by Salafīs as a deviant Sufi. And third, the historical debate between Averroes and al-Ghazālī, in which Averroes defended the abovementioned three Greek-influenced philosophers, and especially Aristotelian philosophy, against al-Ghazālī in his magnum opus *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (The Incoherence of the Incoherence). Averroes’ attacks on al-Ghazālī meant the latter was looked upon (by Arab modernists) as the destroyer of philosophy and a promoter of *taṣawwuf*’s *tawākul* (complaisance) in the Arab world. This meant the Arab-Islamic nation’s lack of scientific advancement was unjustifiably attributed single-handedly to al-Ghazālī. Al-Ṭā’ī, a professor of theoretical physics, argues that al-Ghazālī was more advanced scientifically than Averroes. See Basil

enquiries were the creation of early Muslim scientist-philosophers such as al-Kindī, al-Fārābī (Alpharabius) and Ibn Sīna (Avicenna). Their approaches to philosophy were based on understanding and critiquing the philosophies of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.⁵²⁷ It is well-established that Neoplatonism was the most influential aspect of Greek philosophical thought for these early Muslim philosophers, whose philosophies flourished due to intellectual engagement with the curricula of *Dar al-Ḥikma* Academy of Baghdad, especially when it was actively involved in the translation movement.⁵²⁸

Yusuf bin Ishāq al-Kindī (801–873), a multilingual translator, son of a high-level government official and one-time head of the academy, was named *faylasūf al-‘Arab* (the philosopher of the Arabs) because he was of Arab descent. Neoplatonism was known to Muslims since their interaction with Greek influence in newly-conquered northern Middle Eastern regions such as Egypt and the Levant. However, its effects became apparent in Baghdad’s intellectual circles in the second century AH (eighth century CE). Two of these three great early philosophers, al-Fārābī (870–950) and Avicenna (980–1037), are described by Madkūr as Sufī philosophers.⁵²⁹ Fascination with Greek philosophy was contemporaneous with the translation movement. However, due to the excessive number of translation activities, what was read as *Theologia Aristotelis* turned out to be a paraphrase of Plotinus’ fourth, fifth and sixth Enneads, along with Porphyry’s comments.⁵³⁰

It is worth noting that those mentioned above three early Muslim philosophers did not adopt Greek philosophy uncritically. They added their own critique and contributions. They were attempting to reconcile Greek philosophy with their Islamic schools of thought; in other words,

Altaie, God, *Nature and the Cause: Essays on Islamic Science (Islamic Analytic Theology)*, (Dubai: Kalam Research and Media, 2016)

⁵²⁷ Ibrāhīm Madkūr, *fī al-Falsafa al-Islamiyya: Manhaj wa Taṭbīq (Islamic Philosophy: Method and Application)* Volume 1 (Dar al-Ma‘ārif al-Maṣriyya, 1976)

⁵²⁸ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, *Ifloḥin ‘ind al-‘Arab* (Plotinus in Arab Writings). Porphyry (234–305 CE), a Neoplatonic philosopher was born in Tyre, Roman Phoenicia (modern Lebanon) p.p 179–185 <https://www.noor-book.com/%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A3%D9%81%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%8A-pdf>

⁵²⁹ Madkūr, *Islamic Philosophy: Method and ...*

⁵³⁰ Ibid, p. 182

they were trying to synthesise Greek philosophical ideas with Qur'anic revealed text, which involved filtering Islamic sacred texts through *'ilm al-kalām*. Even so, some of the Greek-influenced theories about God, such as the notion of an incorporeal return on the day of resurrection (i.e., only the soul returns without the body) and cosmology, were so antithetical to the Qur'anic view that Abu Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī accused these philosophers (especially Avicenna) of blasphemy.

Al-Nashshār went so far as to refer to these early Muslim philosophers as Greek philosophers. Madkūr and Muṣṭafa 'Abd al-Rāziq defend them as not mere copiers of Greek philosophy, as some Orientalists claim, but as synthesisers and creative improvisers who, in their own right, added concepts to Greek philosophy that were then translated back into Latin without crediting the synthesizers' improvisations.⁵³¹

We focus on Abu 'Izzah's observation of the lack of critical philosophical analysis, using al-Ghazālī as an example.⁵³² In the early years of Muslim philosophy, al-Ghazālī instigated the first philosophical controversy in which certain treatises were interpreted as conflicting with revelation. He wrote *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa* (demonstrating his grasp of the tools of philosophy), then went on to criticise the three early Muslim philosophers – mainly Avicenna, whose Greek-influenced treatises on the ontology and cosmology of the universe contradict Qur'anic teaching on the subject.

Aristotelian philosophy was extensively explored, and its influence still survives in the Arab world today due to its revival by Averroes in the thirteenth century.⁵³³ Actually, the

⁵³¹ Ibid, p19-28; Muṣṭafa 'Abd al-Rāziq (1885–1974) was an Egyptian reformer philosopher; known for his *Tamhīd li Tārīkh al-Falsafa al-Islāmiyya*, (Introduction to Islamic Philosophy), (Cairo: Āfāq Bookshop & Publishing House, 2020), p. 38. In pp. (40–41) 'Abd al-Rāziq argues that if the orientalist relate *'Ilm al-Kalām* and *taṣṭawwuf* to philosophy, it is justified to relate *'Ilm uṣūl al-fiqh*, which deals with issues of the nature of *'ilm al-kalām*, to philosophy.

⁵³² Abu 'Izzah (p.12). In p. 12 Abu 'Izzah mentions the exemplary attitude of al-Ghazālī who wrote *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (The Incoherence of the Philosopher) only after writing the *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa* (The Objectives of the Philosophers), al-Ghazālī shows an understanding of all aspects of the translated Greek philosophy books of the time enabling him to absorb the Greek intellectual tradition. This is what made his critique sound in many aspects.

⁵³³ In order to prove the alignment of Aristotelian philosophy with the *sharī'a*, Averroes wrote his celebrated work expressing the harmony between religion and philosophy. See Averroes, *Kitāb Fasḥ al-Maqāl Fī ma Bayn al-Ḥikmata wa al-Sharī'a min al-Ittiṣāl* (The Decisive Treatise, Determining the Nature of the Connection between Sharia and Philosophy), <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.31826/9781463237233-003/pdf> (Accessed 12 Mar 2023)

contemporary Arab *tanwīr* (enlightenment) movement still derives its impetus from Averroist philosophy in the writings of Muḥammad ‘Ābid al-Jābrī and Murād Wahba, two proponents of secularisation.⁵³⁴ Averroes, a theologian and an Aristotelian apologetic designated as the grandfather of Arab *hadātha* (modernity), launched harsh criticism of al-Ghazālī such that in scientific circles up to the present, al-Ghazālī is accused of single-handedly hindering the advancement of philosophy and therefore of scientific methods in the Muslim and Arab world.

Given the pivotal role that al-Ghazālī played in promoting Sunni *taṣawwuf*, this historical Averroes versus al-Ghazālī intellectual conflict is the basis of the fourth major (and still debated) controversial relationship between *taṣawwuf* and philosophy. It must be noted that Averroes was born fifteen years after al-Ghazālī’s death. The Averroes–al-Ghazālī literary debate propagated amongst the Arab modernist intellectuals as a school of thought that claims the influence of al-Ghazālī’s zealous Sufī teaching, e.g., *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (The Revival of Religious Sciences), is to blame for killing interest in philosophy and therefore in logic and mathematics, which are the basis for scientific knowledge and hence for the demise of the Golden Age of Islam traditionally dated from the ninth to the eleventh centuries.

This conflict has taken what I describe as a ‘*aql* versus *naql*’ syndrome (see Chapter Three) to another level of the impasse between philosophy and religion. A controversy that started between logicians known as Sufīs (al-Ghazālī versus Avicenna) developed through the present day as a conflict of ‘*aql* vs *naql*’ i.e., between logic and revealed text, and therefore between Averroes and al-Ghazālī.

After a lapse of nearly nine centuries, the impact of the Averroes versus al-Ghazālī controversial intellectual debate over philosophy still persists. Nowadays, it is presented as a debate between proponents of the ‘*ulūm ‘aqliyya*’ (rational sciences) and ‘*ulūm naqliyya*’ (transmitted sciences), which implies that al-Ghazālī, a purportedly staunch antagonist of philosophy, was the cause for the demise of the rational sciences. Two questions beg for answers here. The first question is, was al-Ghazālī really to blame for nine centuries of decline in the scientific and philosophical

⁵³⁴ Muḥammad ‘Ābid al-Jābrī, *Ibn Rushd Sīra wa Fikr Dirāsa wa Nuṣūṣ* (Averroes Biography and Thought, Study and Texts), (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-‘Arabiyya, 1998); Mourad [Murād] Wahba and Mona Abusenna, *Averroes and the Enlightenment* eds., (Prometheus Books New York: USA, 2010). Ibn Rushd centers and societies of philosophy exist in Morocco, Egypt and Germany.

fields of Islamic civilization? The answer to this question will be addressed by considering the al-Ghazālī and post-al-Ghazālī state of science and philosophy, albeit bearing in mind that al-Ghazālī was an Ash‘arite Sufi whose influence still prevails today through his *Iḥiyā’* and other widely read books.

The second question is, could such an anti-science and anti-philosophy *taṣawwuf* nurture a milieu for a *wasāṭiyya*, as my thesis proposes, that could contribute to a new approach to a philosophy of a universal Islam that meets the socioreligious goals of Vision 2030? Chapter Seven will address this question in relation to philosophy, *taṣawwuf*, and Vision 2030.

1.1.2.1 Al-Ghazālī’s State of Science and Philosophy and Beyond

The Arabic and Islamic worlds were awakened to their plight right after the advent of European colonization of their lands in the nineteenth century and the realization of a civilizational scientific gap that separated them from Western Europe.⁵³⁵ This instigated a re-examination of the causes and effects behind the perceived civilisational chasm. A rift within scientific and philosophical thoughts of the Golden Age of Islam (which lasted from the ninth to the eleventh centuries CE) was to blame.

However, problem lies in the fact that Arab-Islamic intellectual achievements (both philosophical and scientific) of the post-Ghazālīan era were rarely recognised in serious Western scholarly works. This remained the case until the last decades of the twentieth century as we will see in the works of al-Sayyid and Saliba discussed later in this chapter. An analysis of relevant politico-economic factors should be re-evaluated to understand the causes for the purported lack of scientific and philosophical breakthroughs in the Arabic and Islamic worlds.

One of the present-day philosophers of Islam who has studied this phenomenon (i.e., the lack of intellectual achievement) and proposes a way out of it is Raḍwān al-Sayyid. His thesis rests on re-assessing methodologies for studying Arab-Islamic *turāth* or *mawrūth* (cultural heritage or tradition) in a new light. He presents three views of Arab-Islamic heritage.

⁵³⁵ Gerhard Bowering argues that the Islamic political thought was challenged by the ascent of Western culture and political systems (colonialism and its aftermath), which instigated the revival movements and nationalism. See Gerhard Bowering, ed., *Islamic Political Thought: An Introduction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 4–6

1.1.2.2. Three Views on Arab-Islamic Heritage

Al-Sayyid (b. 1949), a dual-national (Lebanese-Saudi) Sunni theologian and scholar of political Islam, argues that labelling centuries of Arab-Islamic history as “ages of ignorance” or “dark ages” is not supportable.⁵³⁶ He explains that this label arises from a political and ideological struggle for authority between two schools of thought that started to emerge during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Each upheld its view of Arab-Islamic heritage by citing the part of literature that serves its purpose. They are the *ḥadathīyyūn* (liberal modernists) on the one hand and the Islamist *uṣūlīs* (fundamentalists) on the other. Al-Sayyid offers a third view on Arab-Islamic heritage, which I later explain.⁵³⁷

The 1798 Napoleonic campaign in Egypt and Syria generated a prolific interest in studying Islam and Arab culture within European academia. This resulted in the birth of departments of Islamic studies in major Western universities, which attracted Western, Arab, and Muslim researchers. The latter two became acquainted with both European culture and Western research methodologies.⁵³⁸

This newly acquired knowledge then sparked the Arab enlightenment movement initiated by Muḥammad ‘Abdu (1849–1905) at the Islamic University of al-Azhar. ‘Abdu’s enlightenment project did not come to fruition but ended up in a split between two opposing schools of thought that materialised as the *ḥadathīyyūn* (liberal modernists) and the *uṣūlīs* (Islamists; al-Sayyid calls them *ihyā’iyyīn* or neo-revivalists).

⁵³⁶ Raḍwān al-Sayyid is a Sunni Ash‘arite Lebanese who holds a degree in theology from al-Azhar University in Egypt and a PhD in Islamic studies from the German University of Tübingen. His PhD was supervised by the foremost scholar of *‘ilm al-kalām* Josef van Ess. In 2017, al-Sayyid was awarded the highest Saudi scholarly accolade, the King Fayṣal International Prize in Islamic Studies. In 2021 he was granted Saudi Arabian nationality by a Royal decree.

⁵³⁷ Raḍwān al-Sayyid, et al. eds. *Naḥwa I‘ādat Binā’ al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya* (Towards Reconstructing the Islamic Studies), (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishing, 2019), see a lecture by Raḍwān al-Sayyid, *I‘ādat Binā’ al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyya* (Reconstructing the Islamic Studies) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7-5KSYjG9k&t=24s> (Accessed 13 May 2021)

⁵³⁸ Interest in Islamic studies began with the Arabic language school of Antoine Silvestre de Sacy (1758–1838) in Paris. Rifā‘a al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, who studied in this school was appointed head of the School of Languages in Cairo in 1937.

Al-Sayyid argues that Arab proponents of modernity followed in the footsteps of what he calls the *al-murāji ‘ūn al-judud*, or “neo-revisionist” Europeans (Adam Mez and Patricia Crone), who drew an analogy between the medieval European “Dark Ages” and the Islamic “Dark Ages.”⁵³⁹ In this argument, the only path to enlightenment for emerging Arab-Islamic nation-states is to follow in the footsteps of Europeans by achieving an indigenous form of enlightenment. The neo-revisionists argue that Europeans were able to build a flourishing civilization only when they eradicated the authority of the Catholic Church and went back to their Greco-Roman heritage for guidance and revitalization. In the same vein, they adopted the view that the cause of the Arab-Islamic civilisational eclipse was a religious hegemony that began with al-Ghazālī’s rejection of philosophy; only a revival of the Arab-Islamic Golden Age spirit of Greek philosophy would rescue Arab nations from their plight.

Al-Sayyid argues that following their European new-revisionist mentors, some Arab scholars, e.g., Muḥammad Arkūn and Muḥammad ‘Ābid al-Jābrī, and their followers foresaw that to revive a spirit of scientific and philosophical ardour, an Arab enlightenment could only emerge by abandoning the Arab-Islamic *mawrūth* or *turāth* (Islamic heritage or tradition) that had accumulated since the demise of the Arab-Islamic Golden Age. Al-Sayyid claims these Arab modernists want to do away with the Islamic religion altogether.⁵⁴⁰ The Arab intellectual *ḥadāthiyyūn* (modernists) blame the anti-philosophical religious thought, especially the anti-Averroist, Ghazālīan Sufī Ash‘rite tradition, as the cause of the Arabs and Muslim civilisational predicament.

On the other hand, according to the Sunni *uṣūlī* school, estrangement from the era of Prophet Muḥammad and his four guided successors set Islamic traditions astray until the present day. In this argument, this era was followed by Muslims gradually breaking away from the *aṣl* (original source; fountainhead) of true Islam and subsequently drifting to *taṣawwuf* and other heretical schools of thought such as mu‘tazilites, *jahmiyya*, and so on, as foreign ideas encroached from other cultures. These foreign encroachments adulterated the purity of early Islam and caused

⁵³⁹ Patricia Crone, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1977); Adam Mez, *Renaissance of Islam: The History, Culture and Society in the 10th Century Muslim World*, (I.B. Tauris, 2017). Al-Sayyid states that these neo-revisionists were the antithesis of classical European Orientalists whom he praised such as Josef van Ess, Montgomery Watt, George Makdisi and others.

⁵⁴⁰ Al-Sayyid, *Towards Reconstructing the Islamic...*

the nation of Islam to go astray. Only by reviving the *uṣūlī* tradition of that early Islamic era that Islamic nations can be put back on the right track. These *uṣūlīs*, influenced by the Salafi Ḥanbalī school, are also antagonistic towards al-Ghazālī's *Ash'arī* Sufi teachings (see Chapter Two).

This means that both schools, the modernists and the *uṣūlīs*, yearn to divorce the Arab-Islamic nation from its blameworthy heritage. They find inspiration either by relying on Averroist Aristotelian philosophy, as in the case of the liberal modernists, or by falling back on the era of Prophet Muḥammad and his companions, as in the case of the *uṣūlīs*. Still, the claim of the universality of Islam needs to be demonstrated through the interpretation of '*aql* and *naql* by engaging with the literal *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* (rational reasoning) of Qur'anic verses – a point addressed by the discussion of al-Sayyid's philosophical approach to Islam in Chapter Seven

In agreement with al-Sayyid, I argue that neither the *ḥadathīyyūn* modernist nor Islamic *uṣūlī* proponents are correct. It would be erroneous to divorce ourselves wholesale from our centuries-long Arab-Islamic heritage in order to concentrate solely on either the early period of Prophet Muḥammad and his disciples or on the Greek-inspired Golden Age of Islam. Raḍwān al-Sayyid presents this view in several books and lectures in which he proposes revisiting rich Arab-Islamic heritage in a new light to provide a foundation for guidance in the future.

In reality, the conflict between intellectual proponents of modernity and traditional religious proponents is threefold: modernists conflict with the entirety of the Islamic tradition, the Salafi Ḥanbalī school conflicts with both modernists and Ash'arites (Sufis), while the Ash'arites conflict with both the Ḥanbalī madhhab and modernists. Antagonism between the Sunni madhāhib, specifically the Ḥanbalīs and the Ash'arites, has been discussed in previous chapters. The conflict addressed here lies between the liberal modernists and the religious Sunni tradition in general, bearing in mind that the Ash'arites are the majority Sunni Muslims and the fact that *taṣawwuf* is associated with the Ash'arites today. This highlights the modernist argument blaming the eclipse of the Islamic Golden Age on Sufi Ash'arite al-Ghazālī.

Al-Sayyid advocates for a historicist approach to the Islamic cultural tradition, viewing it as a process of successes and failures. This perspective calls for an academic critique of Arab-Islamic culture. Both insider and outsider viewpoints are essential. As Patricia Crone notes,

"You cannot see it unless you stand outside it".⁵⁴¹ Knysh supports this, highlighting the importance of combining these perspectives for accurate representation.⁵⁴² The process of historicism aims to illuminate ways to create a brighter future for Arabs, Muslims, and beyond. In the spirit of historicism, al-Sayyid prompted me to review the literature on the Ghazālīan and post-Ghazālīan eras of science and philosophy.

Al-Ghazālī refuted the Greek-influenced early Arab philosophers in their cosmological and ontological arguments regarding God's existence and the universe's origin, which he stated was created from non-existence. For their part, the philosophers thought its existence combined being *azalī* (infinite in the past), *abadī* (infinite in the future), *amadī* (continuous in time) and *sarmadī* (everlasting). Al-Ghazālī argued that the universe was created by Allah from nonexistence to its present state of existence, and it will ultimately come to an end. His arguments were taken as a wholesale rejection of philosophy.

Al-Ghazālī stands out as a first-rate philosopher in his own right, and his adversaries acknowledge his prowess by describing him as a master of Aristotelian logic.⁵⁴³ His arguments are based on the Qur'an and congruent with the Big Bang theory, according to Griffel, who studied original manuscripts by and about al-Ghazālī. In response to those who thought al-Ghazālī destroyed scientific and philosophical thought in Islam, Griffel states that "[al-Ghazālī] thought about sciences in a very modern way". He supported a cosmology that acknowledges God as the world's creator; if translated into contemporary language, God caused the Big Bang, and everything since that moment is the cause or effect of that event.⁵⁴⁴

It is important to note that Knysh introduces a third perspective into the discussion surrounding sacred texts, emphasizing the conflict between *naql* (transmitted knowledge) and *'aql* (rational knowledge). This debate highlights the contrast between the literal interpretations of traditional

⁵⁴¹ Patricia Crone, *Pre-Industrial Societies: Anatomy of the Pre-Modern World* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2015), p.158

⁵⁴² Knysh, *Sufism: A New History...*, p. 231

⁵⁴³ Basil al-Taie, *God, Nature and the Cause: Essay on Islamic Science*, (Dubai: Kalam Research and Media, 2016)

⁵⁴⁴ Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, Academia [Al Ghazali's Philosophical Theology.pdf](#) (Accessed 20 February 2023); Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology*, Yale University https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cY-u_37SNz4 (Accessed 20 February 2023).

Sunni theologians and the rationalist viewpoints of the Mu‘tazilites and philosophers. Knysh offers a critique of both camps, challenging their dismissal of Sufi thought, as articulated by al-Ghazālī.

Each school of thought—the *mutakallimūn*, philosophers, and Sufis—possesses a unique understanding of the world. Sufis integrate concepts from both the *mutakallimūn* and philosophers while also presenting their distinct ideas rooted in personal experience, including *dhawq* (taste), *mushāhadah* (witnessing), and *muraqaba* (vigilance of the divine presence).

Every religious group attempts to establish its understanding of God, humanity, and the universe as the most valid. Sufis argue that their insights are deeper because they stem from spiritual practices (*mujahadāt*) rather than abstract reasoning. Through self-purification, which al-Ghazālī describes as divine outpouring, Sufis believe they gain access to pure knowledge beyond rational and received knowledge. This assertion of superior access to revealed knowledge contradicts that of other scholars, despite al-Ghazālī’s widespread respect as a theologian and logician.⁵⁴⁵

Another historian who writes about post-Ghazālīan scientific accomplishments is George Saliba, an Islamic studies scholar at Columbia University. Saliba attributes the paucity of accomplishments in the scientific field to economic factors (rulers used to patronize philosophers and scientists) caused by the political turmoil of the era and the rise of new world powers following the discovery of the New World which was itself followed by the Age of Discovery that was heightened during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These discoveries redirected the trade route by circumnavigating around Africa, thus bypassing Muslim lands.⁵⁴⁶

Despite this, Saliba identifies some significant scientific works during this era. Suppose al-Sayyid ascribes the lack of recognition of the achievements of the years stigmatized as “dark

⁵⁴⁵ Alexander knysh, Hira 49 | *Alexander Knysh | Insights on Islamic Sufism | Arabic literature | Mystical Language* (35:00): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3une1gegKzE> (Accessed 22 December 2024)

⁵⁴⁶ George Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of European Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2007) pp. 250–251

ages” to the lack of thorough academic research into cultural heritage. In that case, Saliba refers to this academically overlooked period in Islamic scientific history, which was largely overlooked by European classical historians of the Renaissance, with the term “periodization” referring to the period during which no important works were supposed to have been recorded.⁵⁴⁷

In two insightful works covering the period from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries and the scientific works produced in the eastern domain of medieval Islam Saliba debunks what he called the fallacies of “periodization”.⁵⁴⁸ He adds that this does not mean no similar achievements were taking place in the Western domain of medieval Islam or that no such works were accomplished before or beyond the fifteenth century, such as the work of the great Iranian polymath astronomer ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ṣūfī (903–986).

Saliba refers to documents that record achievements in almost every scientific discipline, listing the names of numerous scientists in the fields of mechanics, logic, mathematics, astronomy, optics, pharmacology, and medicine. He states how “every one of those fields witnessed a genuinely original and revolutionary production that took place well after the death of al-Ghazālī and his attack on the philosophers, and at times well inside the religious institutions”.⁵⁴⁹ Saliba reiterates that “It is not only that the classic narrative could not actually account for the prolific scientific production at a time when the whole Islamic world was supposed to have been gripped by religious fervor, as the classic narrative dictates”.⁵⁵⁰ He goes on to note that “as a result, a whole chapter of scientific activities migrating across cultures remains almost completely lost to this day”.⁵⁵¹

Saliba goes on to emphasize that “had it not been for the few maverick efforts [various Western scholars], no one would have known that there was such a rich chapter of scientific exchange

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid, p. vii

⁵⁴⁸ George Saliba, *A History of Arabic Astronomy: Planetary Theories During the Golden Age of Islam*, (New York: New York University Press, 1994) p.7

⁵⁴⁹ Saliba, *Islamic Science and...*, p. 21

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid, p. 22

between Islam and Byzantium in a completely unexpected direction”.⁵⁵² As an example, one of the great thinkers of the era after al-Ghazālī, Saliba cites the Damascene astronomer, mathematician, engineer and timekeeper for the Umayyad Mosque ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Ibn al-Shāṭir (1303–1375), whose work was certainly recognized by Copernicus.⁵⁵³ He thus invites scholars of Islamic studies to uncover the basis of more theories in the fields of knowledge that have influenced advancement in the sciences, especially in what were considered stepping stones during the European scientific enlightenment era.⁵⁵⁴

As far as philosophical achievements are concerned, reference must be made to Imam *al-Haramayn* Abd al-Malik al-Juwaynī (1028–1085), an Ash‘arite theologian and philosopher of the correlation between *sharī‘a* and *fiqh* or the social order and politics as illustrated in his *Ghyāth al-Umam fī Iltiyāth al-Zulam* (a book generally known as *The Ghyāthī*). He was celebrated as the foremost influential theologian and jurisconsult of his time in the *Shafī‘ī madhhab*, ranked second to the founder Imam al-Shāfi‘ī. He was a great Ash‘arite of the calibre of the founder Imam al-Ash‘arī. Abu Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, who was among his notable disciples, wrote abridged versions of his prolific works. Al-Ghazālī, the Sufī Ash‘arite theologian and logician philosopher, was an extension of Imam al-Juwaynī.

In a seminal work on al-Juwaynī’s life and thought, Siddiqui wrote that he was influenced by his time’s troubled political and religious milieu in a world where the Shī‘a madhhab was competing for power over the vestiges of a weak Abbasid caliphate’s titular power. It was a period when powerful dynastic families ruling far-flung regions of a falling empire competed for authority.⁵⁵⁵

Al-Juwaynī was a theologian of *‘ilm al-kalām* who took it beyond traditional Ash‘arite interpretations. Reference to his work thus prevails in the creative works of al-Ghazālī, al-

⁵⁵² Ibid, p. 22

⁵⁵³ Ibid, p. 208

⁵⁵⁴ Saliba, *A History of Arabic...*, p.8

⁵⁵⁵ Sohaira M. Siddiqui, *Law and Politics Under the Abbasids: An Intellectual portrait of Al-Juawyni* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). p. 3

Shāṭibī and Ibn Khaldūn.⁵⁵⁶ Al-Juwaynī was the first thinker to theorize, on a Qur’anic foundational basis, about community and politics in Islam. He discerned the difference between *sharī’a* (God’s law as abstraction, which means “the way”) and *fiqh* (which means “understanding”), setting the basis for *maqāṣid* (the higher objectives) of the *sharī’a*. Siddiqui ascribes this to al-Juwaynī’s obsession with the principles of uncertainty and continuity as illustrated in concepts such as “nomos”, governance and government.⁵⁵⁷

This is interpreted philosophically as the difference between *sharī’a* and *fiqh*; that is, the uncertainty inherent in *fiqh* and the social continuity inherent in the community's cohesion. In the former al-Juwaynī draws a Qur’anic relationship between *naql* (revelation) and *‘aql* (rational thinking), where the certainty of revelation in God’s words is the basis of *sharī’a*, which is perfect compared to the imperfection of *‘aql* (human rational interpretation of *sharī’a* in the process of producing *fiqh*). Hence, the rational thinking of the jurist is fallible and characteristic of *fiqh*, which explains the acceptance of differences and variation between *fiqhī* jurisdictions (pluralism in Sunni Islam), a quality described by scholars of Islam as the *sine qua non* of Islamic law.⁵⁵⁸ In the latter, al-Juwaynī prioritize the continuity of the *Jamā’a* (community), i.e., maintaining social order, over trying to reach the perfection of the law. By doing so, he avoids the inflexibility of interpreting the *sharī’a* in accordance with a particular (adamant) point of view that could hinder the social continuity of the community.

Al-Juwaynī further distinguishes between governance (God’s perfect, revealed *sharī’a*) and government (laws derived from *sharī’a* by fallible human interpretation). In cases where the *sharī’a* is absent from or not clear on addressing certain issues, it is left to the human intellect to resolve them. In other words, there is room to change the objectives of the laws in different times and environments. In this fashion, al-Juwaynī theorized the *sharī’a* derived objectives of the law, hence *fiqh al-Maqāṣid* (the higher objectives of *sharī’a*), which both Fad’aq and Bin Bayyah called for (see Chapter Five). Siddiqui states that “Al-Juwaynī’s depiction of the *sharī’a* in the *Ghiyāthī* fits Cover’s definition of “nomos”, wherein Cover claims that “we inhabit a

⁵⁵⁶ Naṣīf Naṣṣar, *Al-Fikr al-Wāqī ‘ī ‘ind Ibn Khaldūn: Tafsīr Taḥlīlī wa Jadālī li Fikr Ibn Khaldūn fī Bunyātih wa Ma’nāh* (Ibn Khaldūn’s Realistic Thought: Analytical and Dialectical Interpretation of the Structure and Meaning in Ibn Khaldūn’s Thought), (Beirut: Dar al-Ṭalī’a li al-Ṭibā’a wa al-Nashr, 1981), p. 70

⁵⁵⁷ Siddiqui, *Law and Politics Under...*, p. 9

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 16

nomos – a normative universe. We constantly create and maintain a world of right and wrong, the lawful and unlawful, the valid and void”.⁵⁵⁹ This gives rise to the social governance mechanism whose strength and force stand in a dialectical relationship with the legal knowledge present in a given society.⁵⁶⁰

I argue that the robustness of al-Juwaynī’s principles of uncertainty and community are integral to, on the one hand, ethics in a changing world. This means when interpreting the *sharī’a* for the production of appropriate laws. On the other hand, it is also integral to *wasāṭiyya* for coexistence, i.e., the *wasāṭiyya* of the Qur’an, as discussed earlier in the chapter, when Allah said He made His creation *ummatan wasāṭā* (a just community). As an ethical value, *wasāṭiyya* commanded society to be a just witness over *al-nās* (the people). It should be borne in mind that *nās* in the Qur’an is inclusive of humanity, as in verse (2:143) “And thus we have made you a just community and that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be witness over you...Indeed Allah is, to the people, Kind and Merciful.” So, *wasāṭiyya* is commanded to society as a collective effort for justice and coexistence.

The foundational basis of *sharī’a*’s *maqāṣid* (higher objectives) theorized by al-Juwaynī was further addressed by al-Ghazālī and elaborated on by ‘Iz al-Dīn bin ‘Abd al-Salām. However, the Sufi theologian scholar who elucidated it as a robust theory of *maqāṣid al-sharī’a* was Abu Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Shāṭibī (1320–1388) in his magnum opus, *Al-Muwāfaqāt*. This became known in Islamic jurisprudence for setting out the five essential Qur’anic human rights.⁵⁶¹ They are: life, faith, intellect, property, and lineage (the right to reproduction and well-being). Ibn ‘Āshūr considers al-Shāṭibī’s theory foundational to a new theory in the system of Islamic epistemology.⁵⁶² It must be noted that al-Shāṭibī’s theory inspired ‘Abdu in his enlightenment movement project (see Chapter Seven).

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 278

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 279

⁵⁶¹ Jasser Auda, *Maqasid al-Shariah as Philosophy of Islamic Law: A Systems Approach*, (London, Washington: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2007)

⁵⁶² Al-Sayyid Walad Abāh, *Al-Fikr al-‘Arabī al-Mu‘āṣir wa Iṭrūḥat Maqāṣid al-Sharī’a* (Contemporary Arab Thought and the Thesis of the Higher Objectives of the Sharia), (Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development, 2023)
<https://aridd-jo.org/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AA/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%83%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A->

When considering *taṣawwuf* and philosophy, the contributions of Sufi philosophers such as ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406) have great relevance. He is known for his seminal work, the *Muqaddima*, the writing of which ranked him as the foremost philosopher of history and a pioneering theorist of the social sciences. Robert Irwin quotes Arnold Toynbee describing, in his 1934 magnum opus *A Study of History*, Ibn Khaldūn’s theoretical treatise on history, the *Muqaddima*, as “the greatest work of its kind that has ever been created by any mind in any time or place”.⁵⁶³

Ibn Khaldun wrote about the phenomenon of *taṣawwuf* in his *Muqaddima*. He rejected the philosophical thought of Ibn ‘Arabī’s *wahdat al-wujūd*. Nonetheless, according to Mansiyya, Ibn Khaldūn, as a theologian and philosopher, was methodical in his engagement with logic in writing his philosophical social science theories. In a lecture on Ibn Khaldūn’s interpretation of the epistemology of *taṣawwuf* as a spiritual phenomenon in Islamic culture, Mansiyya explains that this spiritual phenomenon is inseparable from human beings’ existential makeup, according to Ibn Khaldun’s social theory.⁵⁶⁴

What remains to be mentioned about al-Shāṭibī and Ibn Khaldūn is that they were of the school of al-Junayd of Baghdād, which represents a type of *taṣawwuf* described by Ibn Taymiyya (see Chapter Four) as *Sūfiyyat al-ḥaqā’iq* (the *taṣawwuf* of truth) and by the Saudi Sufi Fad‘aq as the “righteous *taṣawwuf*”, i.e., a *taṣawwuf* in the style of the school of *al-Ḥaramayn* (based on *sulūk* and *akhlāq*), which is free from consuming engagement in *turūqiyya* (belonging to *turūq*,

[%D9%88%D8%A3%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%A9%D8%8C-%D8%A8/](#) (Accessed August 2023)

⁵⁶³ Robert Irwin, *Ibn Khaldun: An Intellectual History*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018)

⁵⁶⁴ Muqād ‘Arafa Mansiyya, *Ibistimologiyyat al-Taṣawwuf wa Tārīkhih fī Kitāb al-Muqaddima li Ibn Khalūn* (Epistemology of Sufism and its History in Ibn Khaldūn’s *Muqaddima*) (L’Academie Tunisienne Beit al-Hikma, 2022) <https://youtube.com/watch?v=Pz7jDSz1WUo&feature=share> (Accessed 5 August 2023). For further reading on Ibn Khaldūn and *taṣawwuf* see, Muḥammad Āyat Ḥammu, *Ibn Khaldūn: Bayn Naqd al-Falsafa wa al-Infītāh ‘ala al-Taṣawwuf* (Ibn Khaldūn: Between Criticism of Philosophy and Openness to Sufism), (Beirut: Dar al-Talia, 2010)

i.e., Sufi orders).⁵⁶⁵ These Sufi logician-philosophers were fully dedicated, as theologians, to their work as judges and rigorous scholarship.

Raḍwān al-Sayyid presents a new approach to Islamic philosophy, grounded in the works of al-Juwaynī and al-Shaṭībī, where *the ethical values of taṣawwuf* are integrated into an overarching Islamic philosophy, as explored in Chapter Seven.

Conclusion

The principles of *sulūk* and *akhlāq* are essential to the Sufi concept of *wasāṭiyya* within the school of *Iḥsān*. They play a crucial role in achieving the socioreligious objectives outlined in Vision 2030, particularly in promoting intra-Islamic pluralism and encouraging coexistence among diverse religious and cultural traditions. This chapter examined these objectives from a fresh perspective on Islamic philosophy.

Despite the historical separation between philosophy and the entire education system in Salafi-influenced Saudi society, there is a pressing need to reevaluate this relationship. This reassessment is especially relevant now, as a movement exists to reintegrate philosophical studies into the educational curriculum.

However, an ongoing debate exists between Islamic *uṣūlīs*, who traditionally reject the study of philosophy, and Arab liberal revisionists, who argue that the suppression of philosophy, attributed to Abu Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, has impeded the Arab-Islamic struggle for progress. This conflict underscores a broader struggle for authority in overcoming civilizational stagnation. In a fresh perspective on Islamic philosophy, Raḍwān al-Sayyid advocates for examining Islamic cultural traditions as an ongoing historical process marked by achievements and setbacks. This analysis aims to illuminate the Arab-Islamic civilizational impasse and contribute to the creation of a more promising future for Arabs, Muslims, and the broader world.

⁵⁶⁵ Yumna Ozer, *Ibn Khaldun on Sufism: Remedy for the Questioner in Search of Answers*, (US: The Islamic Text Society, 2017). Ibn Khaldun's treatise discusses, among other issues, the connection between religious law and the Sufi path, as well as the roles of jurists and Sufi masters.

Given Saudi Arabia's historical reluctance towards philosophy, this chapter calls for Islamic studies to bridge the Sufi philosophy of *wasatīyya*—anchored in *sulūk* and *akhlāq*—with a comprehensive five-dimensional Qur’anic ethical philosophy. This connection lays the groundwork for a well-rounded Islamic philosophy.

I contend that *sulūk* and *akhlāq* establish the foundational basis for a philosophy of *wasatīyya* within *taṣawwuf*, which is essential to the overarching framework of Islam as a universal faith. This chapter defines Islamic philosophy as rooted in the Qur’anic attributes of God, particularly *ẓāhir* and *bātin*, and contextualizes it through a Qur’anic understanding of *sulūk* and *akhlāq*. This understanding delineates five key relationships: those between humans and Allah, the self, other individuals, and the environment, reflecting God's creation and the necessity of ecological balance.

I assert that the Qur’anic philosophy outlined in this chapter, along with the Sufi *wasatīyya* rooted in the principles of *sulūk* and *akhlāq* as advocated by Fad‘aq of the Two Holy Mosques School, are essential components of a new narrative for a comprehensive Islamic philosophy. This philosophy supports the socioreligious and political dimensions of Vision 2030, as discussed by Raḍwān al-Sayyid in Chapter Seven.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A New Philosophy for Islam: *Taṣawwuf's Wasaṭiyya* and Vision 2030

In alignment with Vision 2030's call for a *wasatiyya* that fosters “modern Islam” in Saudi Arabia's socioreligious future, this thesis advocates for a broader approach to reform. It moves beyond traditional Salaf–Sufi debates to encompass a comprehensive philosophical perspective grounded in Islamic principles of *sulūk* and *akhlāq*.

The chapter presents a philosophical narrative that enhances our understanding of the principles of *sulūk* and *akhlāq* in Saudi Sufism, emphasising their role in supporting the key objectives of Vision 2030, which includes fostering intra-Islamic pluralism and promoting the harmonious coexistence of diverse religious and cultural traditions. It introduces a new philosophical framework proposed by Raḍwān al-Sayyid and analyses its viability. The aim is to assess the feasibility of integrating Saudi Sufism's *wasatiyya* with al-Sayyid's narrative to achieve the socioreligious objectives outlined in Vision 2030.

As the title suggests, my thesis is built on three pillars: the Salafī refutation of *taṣawwuf*, the Sufī counterargument to Salafī claims, and the Qur'anic concept of *wasatiyya* (middle way), which the government has adopted as the basis for the socioreligious elements of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 (see Introduction). Chapters Two, Five and Six explain how the meaning of *wasatiyya* is interpreted differently by Salafis and Sufis. After comparing Salafī and Sufī definitions of *wasatiyya*, I argue that the *wasatiyya* of *taṣawwuf* could genuinely contribute to the two socioreligious premises of the Saudi Vision 2030:

This *wasatiyya* is intended to represent Saudi Arabia's new outlook to the rest of the world based on the two principles of *sulūk* (conduct; behaviour) and *akhlāq* (ethics). These constitute the basis of the Two Holy Mosques' school of the *taṣawwuf* principles articulated by the outspoken Saudi Sufi 'Abd Allah Fad'aq (see Chapter Five). In Chapter Six, the concept of Sufism's *wasatiyya* was discussed in the context of a Sufi philosophy. This philosophy is an integral component of a Qur'anic philosophy of *sulūk* and *akhlāq* that, in turn, comprises a philosophy of Islam. Raḍwān al-Sayyid advocates for such an understanding as an essential element of his comprehensive three-part reform of Islam, discussed in this chapter.

We should remember the discussion in previous chapters of how Saudi Arabia's traditionally Salafi religious institutions are undergoing massive reforms through the socioreligious elements of the country's Vision 2030. This chapter will examine the readiness of the Vision 2030 socioreligious elements to fulfil the two aforementioned premises on conceiving and adopting a *taṣawwuf*-based *wasāṭiyya*.⁵⁶⁶

It is also important to note that the goal of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 reforms is twofold. On the one hand, the reform involves a comprehensive upgrade of the quality of life for citizens. On the other, it endeavours to achieve a quantum leap forward in the country's intellectual and scientific role to become a vital contributor to twenty-first-century global civilization. To achieve this goal, Vision 2030 encompasses development in all aspects of Saudi life, whether economic, scientific, medical, social, religious or political. Consequently, Vision 2030 has taken essential steps in revitalising in-country research in various fields of knowledge. One of the major strategies for achieving this is the extension of Saudi citizenship to prominent foreign researchers and scholars in various disciplines.

In 2021 the first list of twenty-seven renowned researchers in different fields was published.⁵⁶⁷ The list included energy experts, scientific and medical researchers, and religious or academics. Five scholars of Islamic studies were among these prominent individuals.⁵⁶⁸ Three had ratified the 2019 *Wathīqat Makkah* (The Mecca Declaration), a significant document for intra-Islamic *madhāhib* recognition, coexistence and cooperation among Sunnis and Shiites.⁵⁶⁹ The

⁵⁶⁶ Yasmine Farouk, and Nathan J. Brown, *Saudi Arabia's Religious Reforms Are Touching Nothing but Changing Everything*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 7, 2021 <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/06/07/saudi-arabia-s-religious-reforms-are-touching-nothing-but-changing-everything-pub-84650> (Accessed 7 September 2023)

⁵⁶⁷ Refer to al-Arabia News <https://www.alarabiya.net/saudi-today/2021/11/15/%D9%85%D9%86%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%B4%D8%AE%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%B7%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9> (Accessed 7 September 2023)

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹ See the "Conference on The Charter of Makkah" <https://themwl.org/en/chartermakkah> (Accessed 22 August 2023) The Mecca Declaration is also known as the Mecca Document.

traditionally Salafi Saudi Arabia has overcome the Islamic *madhhabī* divide; on this list of scholars, one can find Lebanese Shiite Muḥammad al-Ḥusseini and Bosnian Sunni Shaykh Mustāfa Tseric, among others.⁵⁷⁰

Of particular significance to my thesis is the granting of Saudi citizenship to Lebanese Sunni scholar of *sharīʿa*, political Islam and Islamic philosophy Dr. Raḍwān al-Sayyid, who I briefly introduced in Chapter Six.⁵⁷¹ In my opinion Raḍwān al-Sayyid stands out as the theorist of the socioreligious-cum-political elements of Vision 2030. I argue that if he is not the principal theorist of the socioreligious-cum-political elements, he is definitely the only visible one (as his writings and media appearances indicate) amongst other would-be possible intellectual theorists.

As discussed in Chapter Six, al-Sayyid proposed a new approach to Islamic philosophy for the twenty-first century. In this chapter, I will address his philosophical approach as part of a new three-part comprehensive socioreligious and political narrative for reforming Islam in contemporary Arab nation-states. This is a narrative, I argue, congruent with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 socioreligious-cum political outlook. This chapter further highlights al-Sayyid's attitude towards *taṣawwuf* as a component of his new philosophical approach to Islam.

As I defined it in Chapter Six, *taṣawwuf* is an Islamic school of ethics derived from the five Qur'anic relationships between humans and God, the self, other humans, the environment (ecology) and the universe (cosmology). These relationships are the basis for an all-encompassing Islamic philosophy of ethics, i.e., the foundation for a universal Qur'anic *wasatīyya* (a middle way where universal justice and coexistence prevail). And because *taṣawwuf* is founded on individual *sulūk* and Qur'anic ethics, these five-Qur'anic relationships

⁵⁷⁰ In a television interview, Al-Husseini praised the International Fraternity Document between Shaykh al-Azhar and the Pope and the establishment of the Abrahamic House for dialogue and understanding between Muslims, Christians and Jews. See Alghad TV, "The Human Fraternity Conference reflects the UAE's Vision of Tolerance and coexistence between religions" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqUQjXRNDU0> (Accessed 02 November 2023)

⁵⁷¹ Al-Sayyid worked in various Arab countries (Lebanon, Oman and the UAE) as an editor of Islamic publications that promoted tolerance and religious coexistence. He lectured at Oxford as well as in Chicago and Germany. He is a member of the Supreme Council of the Muslim World League and one of the senior scholars who ratified the Makkah al-Mukarramah document. Currently, he holds the position of Professor of Islamic Studies at Shaykh Muḥammad Bin Zayed University in Abu Dhabi.

are the basis for *taṣawwuf's wasaṭiyya*. By elucidating these relationships, I relate my hypothesis of a *wasatiyya* inherent in *taṣawwuf* to al-Sayyid's new approach to Islamic philosophy, which is integral to his comprehensive reform narrative.

Al-Sayyid was granted Saudi nationality for his intellectual contribution to Islam at a time when the socioreligious aspect of Vision 2030 was transforming the traditionally Salafi-influenced Saudi Arabia into a new outlook of Islam.⁵⁷² As explained in his numerous books and lectures, his work centres on political Islam and the entangled dialectical relationship between religion and the nation-state as the most formidable obstacle to reforming Arab nation-states in their quest for modernity.⁵⁷³

What prompted al-Sayyid's interest in researching the obstacles to the successful religious and political reform of the Arab nation-states was the turmoil created by hyperactive political Islamic movements. These movements strive to replace the semi-secular (civic) nation-states newly formed in the wake of the First World War with purely Islamic governments.⁵⁷⁴ In the aftermath of several "inefficient" attempts to reform Islam that were intended to transform the Arab nation-states into modern ones. Al-Sayyid provides a three-part formula he calls "a comprehensive narrative for reform", i.e., a religiopolitical reform project that should overcome the deficiencies of past reforms, as explained later in the chapter. He states that his narrative is comprehensive because it includes both religious and political aspects, i.e., the relationship between Islam and the nation-state – between religion and politics, in other words, which he argues previous reforms have stopped short of addressing.

⁵⁷² Arab News, "King Faisal International Award Winner Urges Review of Islamic Political Thought", <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1128666/amp> (Accessed 1 November 2023)

⁵⁷³ Al-Sayyid, *Politics of Contemporary Islam*...

⁵⁷⁴ The newly formed Arab nation-states, both monarchies and republics, based their constitutions on Islam's *sharī'a* law or *fiqh* (with the exception of Lebanon). However, they adopted Western models of ministerial institutions to run the affairs of their states. Al-Sayyid describes the newly formed Arab republics as the *jumhūriyyāt khālida* (the eternal republics), a derogatory term connoting non-democratic governments monopolized by dictators who not only hold power for a lifetime, but also hand it down to their children or chosen successors. See Turkī al-Dakhīl's *Iḍā'āt* interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRczBFDuOI8&t=204s> (Accessed 02 November 2023). The term civic is used to indicate a semi-secular nation-state where, compared to Western secular state, there is no real decoupling of the state and from religion.

The term “political Islam” originated from the ambition of the *Jamā‘at al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*, also known as the Society of the Muslim Brothers (established in 1928), to eradicate the newly formed semi-secular Arab nation-state in Egypt. Their political aim is to revive the Islamic Caliphate and govern the nation in accordance with *sharī‘a* law.⁵⁷⁵ This is a *sharī‘a* law whose interpretation they claim to have a thorough understanding of, hence their right to oversee its application in the courts of law. They thus appoint themselves as the legitimate ruling body capable of governing by *sharī‘a* law. This movement spread to other Arab and Islamic countries, giving rise to militant groups like *Jihād Islāmī* and fostering a culture of violence that disrupted the Middle East, the Western world, and other Muslim nations (see Chapter One). Despite the upbringing of their founder Ḥasan al-Banna (1906–1949), in a Sufi milieu, he adopted a hardline Salafi ideology that contradicts the non-violent Sufi school. Fundamentalist Salafis accuse Sufis of complacency on issues of *jihād* as a religious duty to fight.⁵⁷⁶

Yet in Egypt, where *taṣawwuf*’s *ṭurūq* (Sufi orders) thrive with a sizable number of followers, al-Banna endeavoured to recruit Sufi youths to his organisation. During the fifth convention of the Muslim Brotherhood Society in 1938, he gave an ambiguous (or rather contradictory) description of his movement as a “*da‘wa salafiyya wa ṭarīqa sunniya, wa ḥaqīqa sufiyya*”, translated as a Salafi call belonging to the Sunni *madhāhib* and Sufi truth. It could be that al-Banna intended to establish a “Sufi military wing” of the Muslim Brotherhood to serve his organization. This idea has always been consistent with the Muslim Brotherhood’s protocol and plans. The association of his organization with *taṣawwuf* alerted the leaders of the Sufi *ṭurūq* to resist such plans.⁵⁷⁷ The Salafi accusation of *taṣawwuf* as a deviant and lethargic exogenous

⁵⁷⁵ Saudi Arabia and several other Arab and Western countries designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group.

⁵⁷⁶ For the radical Islamists the word *jihād* connotes fighting against the enemies of Islam, For the Sufis, it connotes the inward struggle of a person’s worldly desires that obstructs purification of the heart.

⁵⁷⁷ Mohammad El Huseini, ed., *Akhwanat al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī* (Brotherhood of Islamic Sufism) <https://www.alarabiya.net/podcast/jamaat/2022/06/15/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A> (Accessed 1 November 2023); Rasha Tubeileh, ed., *Trends Study refutes relationship between “Sufism” and “Muslim Brotherhood”* Al Etihad Newspaper <https://www.aletihad.ae/news/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA/4279849/%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%80-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%B2--%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%AD%D8%B6-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%80%D9%80%D8%A9-> (Accessed 1 November 2023)

sect foreign to Islam has stood in the way of considering *taṣawwuf* a worthy school of thought in the institutions of Islamic studies until the 1940s, as al-Sayyid articulated later in this chapter.⁵⁷⁸

In the midst of the conflicting Arab religiopolitical scene the growing international reputation of Islam as a terror-prone religion (especially in the aftermath of the infamous events of 9/11) and the call for modernity by Arab and Muslim reformers, al-Sayyid's proposal for reforming Islam in the context of the contemporary Arab nation-state was born. The daunting intellectual question has always been: what obstructs Muslim societies from achieving their desire to be effective participants in global civilization? His scholarly research on political Islam led him to conclude that Muslim societies are trapped in a conflict between two opposing schools of thought, with each hindering this desire in their own way.

As discussed in Chapter Six, the conflict lies between the ideas of “new revisionist” Arab intellectuals, i.e., those who preach cutting ties with Islamic *mawrūth* (tradition; heritage) as though it were a heavy burden that should be discarded, and the *uṣūlī* (fundamentalists) who want to go back to the grassroots of Islam – to the early era of the Prophet Muḥammad and his companions – to correct the venture down a historical path that led astray, i.e., a belief that results in the political aim of re-establishing the Islamic Caliphate or what is called *al-Dawla al-Islamiyya* (the Islamic State).

In his *Siyāsāt al-Islām al-Mu‘āṣir*, al-Sayyid critiqued both schools of thought as unrealistic. This triggered vehement criticism of his analysis from both schools.⁵⁷⁹ Their struggle over Islam is caused by the civilisational gap that afflicts Arab nation-states and hinders the transformation of their societies to modernity. Analysis of this struggle led him to attribute the cause of the civilisational impasse to a mix-up between the role of religion and the function of the newly-born nation-state, i.e., failure to discern the difference between religion and politics in the formation of the Arab nation-states.

⁵⁷⁸ Orfali, Khalil, and Rustom, *Mysticism and Ethics in Islam...*; Raḍwān al-Sayyid was one of three organizers of the conference whose contents were edited in a book, see Orfali, Khalil, and Rustom, *Mysticism and Ethics in Islam...*

⁵⁷⁹ Al-Sayyid, *Policies of Contemporary Islam...*

It is a conflict whose consequences are creating discord between opposing religious groups as well as between religious groups and liberal modernists. Often, these conflicts are resolved violently and spill over into the international scene. International terrorism has fostered a mutual sense of threat and mistrust between Islamic societies and the rest of the world. The Islamic fundamentalists capitalized on this presumed threat to induce an Arab *sha‘bawī* (populist) feeling that the rest of the world, especially the West, is conspiring against Islam.⁵⁸⁰ The secular Egyptian philosopher Murād Wahba emphasizes the danger of religious fundamentalism as he cautions against the prognosis of clashes between the three *uṣūliyyāt* (radical fundamentalists) in the Middle East – Jews, Christians and Muslims – each claim to possess the absolute truth and aim eventually at eradicating the other two.⁵⁸¹

Al-Sayyid presents his comprehensive religiopolitical narrative to resolve the civilizational impasse of Arab nation-states. Religiously, he calls for a “new philosophical approach to Islam.” Politically, he suggests a well-founded *shar‘iyya* (legitimate) and stable nation-state that treats, under the auspices of justice and security, all of its citizens equally regardless of creed or social status. That would be a civil nation-state that derives its legitimacy and strength from its citizens believing and trusting in it.⁵⁸² It is a nation-state where the role of religion is not to interfere with running state affairs. In other words, there is a distinction between the management and the politics of religion, as explained later in the chapter in parts three and four of al-Mudayfir’s interview.

However, before introducing his reform narrative, two points are worth noting. The first is that his narrative was introduced to the Saudi public via the mass media through popular, widely viewed current affairs television talk shows. The second point is the relationship between his reform narrative and the desired *wasatīyya* of Vision 2030. Since al-Sayyid is a proponent of the Islamic ethics inherent to *taṣawwuf*, I argue that *taṣawwuf*’s *wasatīyya* is a viable vehicle for conveying the desired *wasatīyya* of Vision 2030, notwithstanding, in a country where

⁵⁸⁰ Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991)

⁵⁸¹ Murād Wahba, *Maṣīr al-Islām al-Siyāsī* (The Fate of Political Islam), (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2020), p.14

⁵⁸² In the Arab world the term *al-dawla al-madaniyya* (the civil nation-state) is used over “secular” state. The term *‘almānī* (secular) is abhorred because it connotes the separation or even eradication of religion from the responsibilities of the state.

taṣawwuf is traditionally looked upon negatively and where *taṣawwuf* was only recently covered in the media, to express its views as an Islamic school of thought (see for example the interviews in Chapter Five with Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq, the newly emerging voice of *taṣawwuf* in Saudi Arabia).

Al-Sayyid’s three-part project, which he calls narrative, is detailed in numerous publications, academic lectures and media interviews. To introduce al-Sayyid’s narrative to the Saudi public, he was interviewed at al-Dhaydī’s *al-Nadwa* on 9 April 2022 and at al-Mudayfir’s *Fī al-Ṣura* on 20 December 2022.⁵⁸³ The interview with al-Mudayfir was more extensive and longer than with al-Dhaydī, so that I will elaborate on the former.⁵⁸⁴ Al-Mudayfir is known to host intellectuals, social and religious thinkers, and senior government officials to discuss current issues of public interest. He is also known to be well-prepared, having reviewed the background, contribution and significance of his guest’s work, which is reflected in the specificity and selectivity of his questions.

I treat this interview as introducing al-Sayyid’s tripartite reform ideas to the Saudi public in general and to the intelligentsia in particular via mass media and multimedia. I will highlight his major thoughts as presented in the interview. To further clarify his narrative and support my analysis of his ideas, I will reference literature by him or about him. I agree with the argument put forward by Wahba that any reform project will not bear fruit if it does not turn into a publicly-supported *tayyār* (current; movement) with popular followers, i.e., a mainstream idea that is nurtured by the intelligentsia and then brought into being by the state for the benefit of the citizens.⁵⁸⁵ So, I consider the public broadcasting of these interviews a step forward in the call for the Saudi public to become familiar with a new state-supported approach to the socioreligious-cum-political philosophy of Islam.

⁵⁸³ Mishārī al-Dhaydī, *Al-Nadwa* (symposium) Differences Between Reform and Religious Renewal <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ez9Psxxe748> (Accessed 30 August 2023)

⁵⁸⁴ ‘Abd Allah al-Mudayfir, *Fī al-Ṣura* is a weekly programme broadcast from the UAE by Rotana *Khalījīyya* Television, as part of the Saudi owned Rotana Media Group. The programme specializes in addressing current public affairs and is directed mainly towards Saudi intelligentsia

⁵⁸⁵ Murād Wahba, (The Fate of Political Islam...), p.26

Al-Sayyid calls his reform narrative a long-term project that is trusting in a gradual build-up of public support, particularly among the intelligentsia and the young in Arab societies. This applies to the Saudi situation where the socioreligious aspects of Vision 2030 aim to fulfil the two aforementioned premises, as articulated by al-Sayyid in the interview. In previous chapters, we witnessed Saudi Arabia's rapid government-driven socioreligious changes from a prevailing Salafi-influenced antagonism to acceptance of what was once considered deviant schools of thought (whether the Sufis, Shīa or liberals) through the efforts of King Abd al-Aziz Center for National Dialogue.⁵⁸⁶

The outcome of these changes is demonstrated by embracing ideas once ruled unacceptable. On the educational side, for example, philosophy was introduced into the Saudi secondary school curriculum, followed by the holding of the first-ever philosophy conference in Saudi Arabia in 2021.⁵⁸⁷ In 2023, also for the first time in Saudi history, the Saudi Cabinet approved the establishment of branch campuses by foreign universities in the country.⁵⁸⁸ On the religious side, the country hosted its first international interreligious conference in Riyadh in 2022 to promote peace and coexistence among the world's religions (see Chapter Four).⁵⁸⁹ With such an attitude towards philosophy and the world's religions, introducing a new philosophical approach to the reform of Islam, such as al-Sayyid's narrative, is consistent with Saudi Arabia's new socioreligious-cum-political outlook.

As mentioned earlier, this chapter aims to examine how receptive the socioreligious elements of Vision 2030 are to a new approach to the philosophy of Islam as proposed by al-Sayyid. And because *taṣawwuf* is integral to his philosophy of Islam I should address the following: a) provide an overview of al-Sayyid's attitude on *taṣawwuf*; b) review his three-part reform

⁵⁸⁶ See King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue at https://www.my.gov.sa/wps/portal/snp/agencies/agencyDetails/AC363!/ut/p/z0/04_Sj9CPykssy0xPLMnMz0vM_Afljo8zivQIsTAwdDQz9LQwNzQwCnS0tXPwMvYwNDaz0g1Pz9L30o_ArAppiVOTr7JuuH1WQWJKhm5mXlq8f4ehsbGasX5DtHg4Au7FKQA!!/ (Accessed 1 November 2023)

⁵⁸⁷ Aljohara Zarea, *Philosophy Conference* <https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/627295> (Accessed 2 November 2023)

⁵⁸⁸ Mohammed Al-Kinani, Foreign Universities to Open Branch Campuses in Saudi Arabia, 22 October 2023: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1576231/saudi-arabia> (Accessed 22 October 2023)

⁵⁸⁹ First International interreligious conference, <https://saudigazette.com.sa/article/620542/SAUDI-ARABIA/100-religious-leaders-gather-in-Saudi-Arabia-for-ground-breaking-conference> (Accessed 2 November 2023)

narrative, and c) relate al-Sayyid's new approach to the philosophy of Islam to my proposed *wasāṭiyya* of *taṣawwuf*, i.e., the hypothesis of this thesis, in the context of the two premises of the socioreligious elements of Vision 2030.

I. Al-Sayyid's Attitude on *Taṣawwuf*

Al-Sayyid undertook his postgraduate degrees in Germany following most of his Azharite professors, who studied in Europe. Some of the most prominent Azharite Shaykhs studied at the Sorbonne, such as prominent Sufi and onetime Minister of Islamic Endowment Shaykh 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, who taught Raḍwān al-Sayyid and his colleague, the present rector of al-Azhar Shaykh Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib. Interestingly, Shaykh Maḥmūd adopted *taṣawwuf* while studying in France under the influence of French converts and scholars of Islam. One of his teachers was the renowned Catholic scholar of Sufism, Louis Massignon (see part two of al-Mudayfir's interview in this chapter).

His interest in *taṣawwuf* and its ability to shape his new philosophy of Islam is illustrated by his role as one of three organizers of a 2019 conference titled *Al-Taṣawwuf wa al-Akhlāq fī al-Islam* (Mysticism and Ethics in Islam), sponsored by the Shaykh Zayed chair at the American University of Beirut (AUB).⁵⁹⁰ At this conference the three organisers gave brief consecutive introductory speeches referred to in the following paragraphs.⁵⁹¹

The conference called for the revival of academic studies in *taṣawwuf* as a fully-fledged Islamic science, especially its contribution to Islamic ethics. At the time, al-Sayyid was a Visiting Professor at AUB's Shaykh Zayed chair. He began his conference speech with a remark in praise of the signing of the International Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together by the Sufi Grand Imam of al-Azhar Shaykh Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib and Pope Francis in Abu Dhabi, UAE, on 4 February 2019.⁵⁹² He praised what he called "spiritual

⁵⁹⁰ The conference was held under the auspices of the Shaykh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan Chair for Arabic and Islamic Studies in commemoration of the centenary of his birth on May 2–3, 2019. Thirty international scholars of Sufism and ethics contributed to the conference: See Bilal Orfali, Atif Khalil and Mohammed Rustom, (*Mysticism and Ethics in Islam...*). The three conference organizers were Bilal Orfali, Momammad Rostum, and Raḍwān al-Sayyid.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid (see YouTube recording between minutes 6:00–25:30)

⁵⁹² See Ahmad al-Ṭayyib, and Pope Francis. "A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together", *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 3 May 2019

diplomacy”, which was actualized in the UAE when the fraternity document was signed on a date commemorating the International Day of Human Fraternity.

Even though *taṣawwuf* is considered an academic *takhaṣṣuṣ* (major) in some Islamic institutions such as al-Azhar and has been included in the field of Islamic studies since the nineteenth century, it has not become a fully-fledged primary course of study like those on the Qur’an, *Ḥadīth*, *tafsīr*, *‘ilm al-kalām*, philosophy or literature. It is only a branch for those interested in studying the deviant unorthodoxy of the most famous Sufis, wherein *taṣawwuf* and Sufi *turūq* are lumped into the phenomenon of al-Islam *al-sha‘bī* (folk religion; popular religion). Both the Salafis and the modernity proponents of *‘aṣr al-nahḍa* (the Arab Enlightenment era of reforming Islam) were not receptive to the idea of *taṣawwuf* for two reasons. First, they did not accept that the teachings of Sufi masters belonged to *ṣaḥīḥ al-dīn* (righteous Islam). Second, phenomena such as *darwasha* and claims of outlandish miracles or ecstatic chanting and dancing, the cultural by-product of folk religion associated with *taṣawwuf*, represent the ultimate in religious degeneracy.

So, al-Sayyid argued during his Sufi conference lecture that *taṣawwuf* was considered beyond the reach of prior Islamic reforms. Some reforms gave rise to calls to get rid of *taṣawwuf* in general and its *turūq* in particular. Alone, Shaykh Mustāfa ‘Abd al-Rāziq, professor of Islamic philosophy at the Egyptian University who became the Azhar rector in 1945, was able to give *taṣawwuf* a respected status in academic studies. As stated in his *Tamhīd li Tārīkh al-Falsafa al-Islamiyya*, he positioned scholars of *taṣawwuf* among the four major fields of Islamic studies in the following order of importance: *‘ulamā’* of *uṣūl*, *fuqahā’*, the *mutakallimūn*, the Sufis and the philosophers.⁵⁹³

At the beginning of the 1960s, the *ta‘ammul* (meditation, contemplation) became of increasing interest to the Arab intellectuals. There was a multifaceted interest between *allā’ aql* and *al-‘aql* (the irrational and the rational), wherein the Arab intellectuals considered *taṣawwuf* part of irrational Islamic heritage. To experience modernity, getting rid of the *mawrūth* (inherited Islamic traditions) is a must.

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html (Accessed 30 October 2023).

⁵⁹³ ‘Abd al-Rāziq, *Introduction to Islamic Philosophy...*

The last century has seen the new revisionists in the West, proponents of *sharī'a* in the East, Arab left intellectuals and those who preached severance of ties with the past. In light of that, al-Sayyid reiterates how “a group of us at the *Majallat al-Ijithād* called for a renewed reading of the *mawrūth* and *taqlīd* (tradition). We emerged to free the literature from the presumed and imposed *qaṭī'a* (break with the past)”. Continuing, he notes that

We aimed to shed light on the vast obscurity in the history of Islamic civilisation of the purportedly one thousand years of *inhiṭāt* (degeneracy). Now, in the 21st century, the new reading of our intellectual heritage and civilisation is rapidly gaining ground in all fields of Islamic studies in Europe and America. it is beginning to bear fruit amongst Arab researchers. Newly discovered manuscripts will help us find a new interpretation of the literature, demonstrating the relationship between *taṣawwuf* and *akhlāq*.

Referencing Thomas Bauer's book *Why There Were No Islamic Middle Ages?* Al-Sayyid emphasises that our understanding of Islamic civilisation is evolving, reflecting a dynamic and progressive vision for the future.⁵⁹⁴ This conference is a practical follow-up application of renewing Islamic studies by Shaykh Zayed's chair at the AUB to restructure Islamic Studies. Islamic Studies consider *taṣawwuf* an important *ṭayyār* (movement) in Islamic civilisation. It is an academic field of research where Islamic values and *akhlāq* should be researched as they are studied now concerning *fiqh*, *ʿilm al-kalām* and literature. Al-Sayyid articulates the importance of *taṣawwuf* stating: “It is a work which relates to the philosophy of religion just as it is also connected with the philosophy of civilisation”.

Following al-Sayyid, Bilal Orfali delivered his talk where he criticised the lack of research on *taṣawwuf* and *akhlāq* in the departments of Islamic Studies across universities in the Islamic world. He drew the researcher's attention to two issues. First, he noted that it was false to think only Greek philosophy has addressed ethics and that the Islamic civilisational discourse on ethics was grounded in theories of Hellenistic philosophy as is, hence, a mere continuation of it. Second, he observed that estrangement from the Sufi contribution in *ʿilm al-akhlāq* (science of ethics) can cause the loss of all of the ethical richness of this science.

⁵⁹⁴ Thomas Bauer, *Why There Were No Islamic Middle Ages?* (German: C.H. Beck, 2020)

This way, a great opportunity to reinstate *taṣawwuf* while restructuring Islamic Studies would be lost. Yet, at the same time, this method could be instrumental in addressing contemporary ethical issues in Islamic societies. He warned conferees that the Greek system of ethics lacks the subtleties found in Sufi *akhlāq*. The latter is based on the progression in *maqāmāt* (stations), e.g., *zuhd* (asceticism), which calls on humans to own things and not be owned by them. *Riḍa* (satisfaction with one's lot), or *al-faqr* (poverty) emphasizes the need for humans to receive God's blessings or *tawāḍu'* (humbleness; humility). According to Orfali, this would not be considered good manners in the Greek system of ethics.

The purpose of studying the ethics of *taṣawwuf* is an invitation to encourage the reinstatement of the *akhlāq* of Islam for a world of tolerance much needed at the present time. The ethics of *taṣawwuf* is a call to emulate Prophet Muḥammad, whose *akhlāq* embodied the Quranic ethics. Islam is an ethical religion, and *taṣawwuf* is a realisation of that. Orfali ended his speech by pointing out that the AUB was at the forefront of Middle Eastern universities, having added *taṣawwuf* to its curriculum in the 1960s.

Mohammed Rustom summarised (in English) the conference panel titles and briefly described the material for discussion. Of interest is the panel discussion that addresses the meaning of ethics and mysticism vis-à-vis Islam and each other. There is a regional context in which these two terms were historically enacted. It should be noted, as well, that the papers delivered at this conference were published in a book with the same title.⁵⁹⁵

Once we have established the unequivocal association between al-Sayyid and the ethics of *taṣawwuf*, the relationship between *taṣawwuf* and his approach to a new philosophy of Islam integral to his comprehensive three-part reform narrative can be easily understood.

II. Al-Sayyid's Comprehensive Narrative

Within a two-hour period, al-Mudayfir interviewed al-Sayyid on his new comprehensive narrative for reforming Islam in contemporary Arab nation-states. This reform involves the

⁵⁹⁵ Bilal Orfali, Atif Khalil and Mohammed Rustom, *Mysticism and Ethics in Islam...*

relationship between political Islam and Muslims with their own nation-state and the rest of the world. In other words, it is a reform narrative grounded in a new philosophy of Islam in the modern Arab nation-state. For convenience, I divide the interview into five consecutive parts, each of which covers a certain duration. In the first part (commencing at 3:30), al-Sayyid presents three duties he believes Arab intellectuals are responsible for taking upon themselves if a genuinely comprehensive (religious and political) reform is to be effective (see section 2.2 below). These three duties are the basis on which he founded his *sardiyya jadīda* (new narrative) for reforming Islam.

In the second part (commencing at 4:30), al-Sayyid, briefly reviews seven significant Islamic reform projects attempted at various times over the past one hundred years. By studying the strengths and shortcomings of the projects, he used them as stepping stones to formulate and launch his prescribed comprehensive reform. In the third part (commencing at 38:00), he covers events I presumably consider part of a transition to his comprehensive reform narrative. In the fourth part (commencing at 43:00), he presents his philosophy for reforming Islam in the context of the modern nation-state. Here he explains why intellectuals have to affect change that leads to reform. Finally, in the fifth part (commencing at 1:00), al-Mudayfir highlights several newspaper quotes and clips of television interviews with several writers and Arab thinkers concerning his reform narrative.

The interview addresses key questions that function in two ways. Generally speaking, the host advocated for the Saudi intelligentsia by addressing what the Saudi public would need to know about the proposed comprehensive reforms and identifying likely concerns or reservations. Still, one should recall that the literature reviewed by al-Sayyid or about him all indicates that his narrative aims at workable reform to Islam, the religion of the people of the modern nation-state – religion in the whole meaning of the word. This includes a social bond that holds society together, which means any societal changes are bound to affect the religion itself. This relates to the immutable and mutable within the structure of Islam.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁶ In the classical approach to defining religion, it is notable that al-Sayyid references Max Weber's work during the interview, alongside his writings about Weber in several of his works. Regarding his comprehensive project, see Al-Sayyid, *The Nation, the Community ...* In a book dedicated to Raḍwān al-Sayyid, several of his colleagues published a work titled *Al-Umma wa al-Dawla wa al-Tārīkh wa al-Maṣā'ir* (Community, State, History and Destinies), (Beirut: Arabiya Network for Research and Publishing, 2011)

Al-Mudayfir opened his interview by referring to a speech al-Sayyid delivered during a ceremony in 2017, under the auspices of King Salmān, during which he was awarded the King Faysal International Award for Islamic Studies. In his speech, al-Sayyid highlighted three conditions that he called prerequisite duties for the reform of Islam in the context of modern Arab nation-states (see part one of the interview). Al-Mudayfir asked al-Sayyid to elaborate on these three duties. Al-Sayyid responded by stating they are the foundational basis for his *sardiyya jadīda Shāmila li iṣlāḥ al-Islam* (new comprehensive narrative to reform Islam).

He further emphasises that the Arab intellectuals ought to diligently undertake these three duties to succeed in affecting a comprehensive reform. The aim is to attain a reform that could free Arab nation-states from their present civilisational impasse – an impasse creating a gap between the Arab nation-states and the rest of the advanced world. It prevents them from bringing about intellectual and scientific advances that would benefit their societies and the world. The question of why al-Sayyid assigned these three duties to Arab intellectuals is answered in part three of the interview.

Regarding the role of *taṣawwuf* in al-Sayyid’s reform narrative, it was not emphasized as much as it deserved, despite being mentioned twice in the interview.⁵⁹⁷ I believe both al-Sayyid and the host deliberately avoided discussing *taṣawwuf*. However, I discuss al-Sayyid’s narrative with a focus on its relationship to *taṣawwuf*, as stated in his other lectures and publications, where *taṣawwuf* is mentioned.⁵⁹⁸ It should be noted that al-Sayyid, an Azharite Sunni theologian, distinguishes between the *taṣawwuf sha‘bī* (folk’s *taṣawwuf*) and righteous *taṣawwuf* based on *sulūk* and *akhlāq* (see Chapter Five).

Nonetheless I attribute the deliberate reluctance to identify *taṣawwuf*, as a foundation for Islamic ethics on behalf of both host and guest is due to an unwillingness of Saudi audiences to accept arguments where *taṣawwuf* is talked about positively as a basis for *ahklāq* that undergird

⁵⁹⁷ The first mention of Sufism occurs in part two of the interview when he notes the attraction of Salafis to Muḥammad ‘Abdu’s reform due to his rejection of *taṣawwuf* and *ṭurūqīyya* (association to Sufi *ṭurūq*), a point I will address when I discuss ‘Abdu’s reform project later in this chapter. The second mention occurs in part five of al-Mudayfir interview when he expressed annoyance about al-Jābrī’s criticism of al-Ghazālī for being a *‘irfānī* Sufi.

⁵⁹⁸ For an article in Arabic where he made positive reference to *taṣawwuf*, see Al-Sayyid, In the Aftermath of the Religious ...

the *sakīna* (spirit of tranquillity and peacefulness as in the Qur’anic verse 48:04). Al-Sayyid describes *sakīna* as prerequisite factor in creating openness between Muslims and non-Muslim others, as is pointed out in the interview. But the view on Sufism among the Salafi-influenced Saudi society needs reformulation and reintroduction, even if that means replacing the word *taṣawwuf* with another, more acceptable, term based on the *fiqhī* rule “*lā mashāhata fī al-iṣṭilāḥ*” in the fashion of the school of *al-Ḥaramayn* (see Chapter Five).⁵⁹⁹ I say that because al-Mudayfir is known to be a well-prepared host. The detail of his questions, for which he demanded intricate responses, indicates his familiarity with the major ideas of al-Sayyid’s narrative, such as the ethics of *taṣawwuf*.

To address al-Sayyid’s narrative of reform, Section 2.1 briefly introduces seven prior reform projects as a prelude to his. I analyse their relationship to *taṣawwuf*. Section 2.2 then specifies the three pillars upon which he bases his three intellectual duties and their relationship to *taṣawwuf*. Section 2.3 addresses his proposal for a new philosophy of Islam, which is part and parcel of his narrative. Finally, I relate his philosophy to Vision 2030.

2.1 Seven Prior Reforms and *Taṣawwuf*

As a background for his reform project, al-Sayyid outlines seven prior reform projects undertaken by the newly formed Arab and Islamic nation-states in the past one hundred years. These represent attempts to bring together Islamic values and a changing lifestyle brought about by European modernity. Reforms occurred during a period when all Muslim countries were either directly colonised by Europeans or influenced, both politically and culturally, by Western Europe (and later the United States). This period was characterised by the need for Arab nation-states to modernise by adopting Western scientific advancements, government systems and civil laws rooted in Napoleonic civil law, albeit with modifications and adaptations to the prevailing Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence).

These reforms were expressions of the desire to bridge a gap between East and West without Islamic identity and values giving way to a dominant Western culture. Intellectuals and religious schools called for the Islamic nation to wake up, although this call was tempered by

⁵⁹⁹ The *fiqhī* rule “*lā mashāhata fī al-iṣṭilāḥ*” (no contestability over an expression) refers to the meaning behind the expression being more significant than the language used in the expression itself.

the desire to maintain an Arab cultural identity intertwined with Islamic values. In effect, then these reforms intended to requalify Islamic *sharī'a* to accommodate modernity without obstacles.⁶⁰⁰

Each of the seven reforms has significance. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to go over the reforms in detail, I will briefly illustrate their significance before relating them to *ṭaṣawwuf* when applicable (see part two of the al-Mudayfir interview).

To begin, the first reform was initiated in the mid-1800s by the Ottoman Empire, under whose ruling authority most of the Arab lands were governed. The Ottomans published *Majallat al-Aḥkām al-Adliyya*, which was the first attempt to codify the *sharī'a* into a civil law based on the *Ḥanafī madhhab* (later adopted by other Sunni *madhāhib*) in what was known as the period of *tanzīmāt* (modernisation of the legal system). It was effective well into the last decades of the twentieth century.⁶⁰¹

The second reform was that of Muḥammad 'Abdu (1849–1905), which was, in my opinion, the most interesting and significant of all past reforms through the present day. I consider 'Abdu's effort the most influential on al-Sayyid's reform narrative. 'Abdu launched his reform from the al-Azhar religious institute in Egypt and sought to promote a secular education curriculum after the French state model. He wanted Egypt to adopt the French education system, wherein young people would be educated through civil, rather than religious, education, and there would be a system of *tarbiya waṭaniyya* (national education) for all of the country's youth.

While in exile in Tunisia, 'Abdu read al-Shāṭibī's *Maqāṣid* and a model for political reform in the writings of Khayr al-Dīn al-Tunīsī (1820–1890).⁶⁰² According to al-Sayyid, 'Abdu was the

⁶⁰⁰ The identities of non-Muslim or non-Arab minorities is a complex subject that deserves separate research. However, al-Sayyid's approach is inclusive of preserving the rights and identities of these minorities.,

⁶⁰¹ Habibur Rahman, *An Appraisal of Majallat al-Ahkām al-Adliyyah: A Legal Code of Islamic Civil Transactions by the Ottoman*: https://www.academia.edu/37678387/An_Appraisal_of_Majallat_al_Ahkām_al_Adliyyah_A_Legal_Code_of_Islamic_Civil_Transactions_by_the_Ottoman (Accessed 30 October 2023)

⁶⁰² Khayr al-Dīn al-Tunīsī, a reformer who was inspired by the European models in the process of *tanzīmāt* (modernization for the Tunisian political and economic systems). In 1867 he wrote *Aqwām al-Masālik fī Ma'rifat al-Ḥwāl al-Mamālik* (The Surest Path to Knowledge Regarding the Conditions of Countries).

first to introduce al-Shaṭībī's *Maqāṣid* to Egypt, which resulted in its popularity as a means for deriving rules based on the objectives of the *sharī'a* (see Chapter Six) through *ijtihād* (deriving rules independently) in *fiqhī sharī'a* as compared to rules derived based on *qiyās* (precedence). But according to al-Sayyid, the *Maqāṣid* was a tool abused by the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi fundamentalists – a point alluded to with reference to the al-Sanhūrī reform project when al-Sayyid was asked if Salafis supported 'Abdu's reform. Al-Sayyid responded that they did so only at the beginning of his reform years because 'Abdu was against the *taṣawwuf* and the *turūq Ṣūfiyya* (Sufi orders).

Al-Sayyid did not elaborate on the relationship between 'Abdu and *taṣawwuf*. According to Sedgwick, 'Abdu was a Sufi raised in a Sufi environment. Following his uncle Darwīsh's footsteps, he aligned himself with the Madaniyya order. This order transcends being merely a branch of popular religion; it embodies a revivalist and reformist movement that underscores the importance of spiritual experience alongside the proper practice of Islam.⁶⁰³

Like Ibn Khaldūn (see Chapter Six), Abdu opposed folk *taṣawwuf*, not righteous *taṣawwuf*. According to Ḥilmī, 'Abdu's first Sufi mentor was his uncle Khidr Darwīsh, who encouraged him to seek higher education at the Azhar Institute, the highest in the country.⁶⁰⁴ According to al-Ḥaddād, 'Abdu, in his *Risālat al-Tawḥīd*, sought to revitalise his school with *Akhlāq* of *taṣawwuf* and *tarbiyyat al-nafs* (disciplining the self).⁶⁰⁵ It should be noted that 'Abdu's mentor, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī was a proponent of Ibn 'Arabī's *waḥdat al-wujūd*.⁶⁰⁶ In 1885, however, 'Abdu broke off his association with Afghānī.⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰³ Mark Sedgwick, *Muhammad Abduh: Makers of the Muslim World*, (London, England: Oneworld Publication, 2010), p. 17

⁶⁰⁴ Muḥammad Ḥilmī 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Al-Taṣawwuf fī Siyāq al-Nahḍa: Min Muḥammad 'Abdu ila Sa'id al-Nursī* (Taṣawwuf in the Context of the Enlightenment: From Muhammad Abdu to Said Nursi), (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥada al-'Arabiyya, 2018)

⁶⁰⁵ Muḥammad al-Ḥaddād, *Muḥammad 'Abdu: Qirā'a Jadīda fī khiṭāb al-Iṣlāḥ al-Dīnī* (Muḥammad 'Abdu: A New reading in the Discourse of Religious Reform), (Beirut: Dar al-Ṭalī'a for Printing and Publishing, 2003), Pp.126-141

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid. pp.118

⁶⁰⁷ Sedgwick, *Muhammad Abduh: Makers of...*, p. 77

The third reform was that led by “Pakistani” philosopher Muḥammad Iqbāl (1877–1938), who wrote *Tajdīd al-fikr aldīnī fī al-Islam*.⁶⁰⁸ The Sufi philosopher Iqbāl wanted to reform Islam in the footsteps of his Deobandi Sufi mentor, the Indian scholar and Ash‘arite reformer Shiblī al-Nu‘mānī who wrote *Al-Ghazālī* in 1902, and *The New ‘Ilm al-Kalām* in 1903.⁶⁰⁹ Iqbāl studied law in the United Kingdom, earned a PhD in Germany and admired Kant’s philosophy of ethics and religion, in which all duties are divine commands.⁶¹⁰ He called for the establishment of a modern nation-state supported by spiritual reform that could be disseminated through the works of Muslim intellectuals.

The fourth reform was that of the Egyptian jurist Abd al-Razzāq al-Sanhūrī (1895-1971), who followed the Ottoman reform of *Majallat al-Aḥkām al-‘Adliyya* as well as Muḥammad ‘Abdu’s reform. Influenced by Napoleonic law while studying in France, his work covered the relationship between *al-sharī‘a* law and what is known as *al-qānūn al-‘ām* (the common civil law). The Muslim Brotherhood exploited his *al-nizām al-kāmil* (the comprehensive code for *sharī‘a* law) to develop a judiciary system under the pretext of the *maqāṣid* (objectives) of *sharī‘a* to justify generating codes of law ranging from personal status law to the banking system. Al-Mudayfir asked al-Sayyid, “What is wrong with [codifying religion according to *sharī‘a*]?” Al-Sayyid replied, “They have appointed themselves as the sole interpreters of such codes, hence making Islam a mere dry jurisdictional system of codes void of the real essence of religion”. Al-Mudayfir asked, “What is religion [Islam]?”. Al-Sayyid responded, “Despite certain rules of *sharī‘a*, religion is a belief based on choice; its essence is an inner relationship with God the Creator”.

The fifth reform was initiated by the Tunisian reform-minded judge and scholar Shaykh al-Islam Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Bin ‘Ashūr (1879–1973).⁶¹¹ Muḥammad ‘Abdu influenced him. His best-known work is a contemporary Qur’anic exegesis titled *Tafsīr al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*

⁶⁰⁸ Mohammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, (Stanford University Press: California, United States, 2013). Iqbal was born in India before Pakistan gained its independence as a separate country in 1947, but known as the philosopher of Pakistan.

⁶⁰⁹ The Deobandi school of India shares some similarities with Wahhabi teachings.

⁶¹⁰ Allen W. Wood, *Kant: Religion Rational Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)

⁶¹¹ Basheer M. Nafi, *Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn ‘Ashūr, Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr – Tafsīr Ibn ‘Ashūr* (30 volumes), (Dār Ihya’ al-Turāth, 2000) *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* Vol. 7, No. 1 (2005), pp.1-32 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25728162>, (Accessed 1 September 2023)

(Interpretation of Verification and Enlightenment). In it, he refers to the esoteric method of Sufi interpretation of the Qur'an.⁶¹² He expanded the *maqāṣid* of *sharī'a* along with some Moroccan scholars, e.g., 'Allāl al-Fāsī (1910–1974). Their school aimed to go beyond the traditional *qiyās* (deriving laws by precedent) to take Islamic jurisprudence, as outlined in al-Shaṭībī's *maqāṣid*, to unprecedented extents. In addition to the five objectives (see Chapter Five), as al-Sayyid emphatically noted, “as put forward by al-Fāsī, human freedom and human rights [defined by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights] are congruent with the spirit of *maqāṣid*”. Al-Sayyid reiterated, “This is what prompted the Moroccan Sufi philosopher Ṭaha 'Abd al-Raḥmān to consider the five objectives of *maqāṣid* as a universal Islamic ethical umbrella and not a *sharī'a* law”.

The sixth reform is of the Algerian Malek Bennabi (1905–1973). Al-Sayyid describes him as the first Muslim thinker to draw attention to the bankruptcy of global civilisation. Citing Ibn Khaldūn's famous historical statement that “the defeated always want to imitate the victor”, he warned Arabs to free themselves of what he called “colonizability” by the Europeans. He thus wrote his *Shurūṭ al-Nahḍa* (Conditions for Renaissance), wherein he sets out three conditions for enlightenment that, if fulfilled efficiently, could attain a sort of civilisational rebirth: *al-insān* (the human capacity for creative thinking); the soil (raw material); and the *zamān* (a culture of time management).⁶¹³ In his *Al-Zāhira al-Qur'aniyya* (The Qur'anic Phenomenon), he argues that these conditions and the ethical message of the Qur'an as a promoter of civilisational achievement are connected. Interestingly, the preface of his *Al-Zāhira* was written by M. 'A. Drāz, who, according to al-Sayyid, is one of three scholars who wrote a universal theory of Qur'anic ethics, as explained later in the chapter.⁶¹⁴

⁶¹² Nabīl Aḥmad Ṣaqr, *Manhaj al-Imam al-Tāhir bin 'Āshūr fī al-Tafsīr* (The Method of Imam al-Tāhir bin 'Āshūr fī al-Tafsīr in the Exegesis of the Qur'an) (USA: University of Michigan, 2001)

⁶¹³ Malek Bennabi, and Asma Rashid, *The Conditions of Renaissance* <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20837052> (Accessed 15 November 2023)

⁶¹⁴ Malek Bennabi, *The Quranic Phenomenon*, (Turkey: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, 1983)

And lastly, there is the seventh reform. This was actually a set of recent reforms inspired by the historic Prophet Muḥammad's Charter of Medina.⁶¹⁵ Al-Sayyid references several conferences and a set of accords by official and civil religious establishments that sought to address the relationship between Islam's different *madhāhib* and Islam and the rest of the world. This was particularly important given the widespread antagonism towards Islam due to acts of terror, Sunni-Shī'a polemics, and, I would add intra-Sunni Sufi-Salafi polemics. These reforms are: *Mīthāq Ḥilf al-Fuḍūl al-Jadīd* (The New Alliance of Virtue), *Risālat Amman* (The Message of Amman, Jordan), The Mecca Declaration, The Document for Human Fraternity, and Bin Bayyah's UAE Forum for Peace. I would add to these conferences the 2022 International Ethics and Philosophy Conference in Abu Dhabi, where prominent Sufi 'Abd Allah Bin Bayyah delivered the opening speech.⁶¹⁶

Al-Sayyid argues that the seven aforementioned attempts at reform did not come to fruition and, therefore, did not have a tangible effect on their respective societies. The cause for their failure was the absence of a philosophy of life to affect a positive view within Muslim-Arab societies on their relationship to the entire world. He blames this absence on lack of education, especially religious education, as it plays a major role in instilling a vision of the world. As my thesis hypothesises, the *wasāṭiyya* of *taṣawwuf*, with its Qur'anic ethics could accomplish this.

A review of the seven prior attempts at reform shows that except for the Ottoman's *Majallat al-Aḥkām al-Adliyya*, the remaining six are associated with ethics and *taṣawwuf* in one way or another other, especially *taṣawwuf* as a school based on Qur'anic ethics, which in my opinion is the basis on which a sound Islamic philosophy of life could be founded. Still, we should acknowledge that each of the aforementioned reforms had its own capacity to effect a major

⁶¹⁵ Hamza Rafiq, *The Charter Of Medina and Magna Carta* (A Comparative Study) Published 2019, https://www.academia.edu/40130042/THE_CHARTER_OF_MEDINA_AND_MAGNA_CARTA_A_Comparative_Study (Accessed 15 November 2023)

⁶¹⁶ Mohammed bin Zayed University of Human Sciences organizes the International Ethics and Philosophy Conference <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D44i6o0Gh1w&t=2217s> (Accessed 2 November 2023); History of the Alliance of Virtue <https://www.allianceofvirtues.com/english/history.asp#:~:text=HISTORY%20OF%20THE%20ALLIANCE%20OF,rapaciousness%20of%20those%20more%20powerful>. (Accessed 1 September 2023); Kassim Ahmad, *A Short Note on The Medina Charter* <https://kassimahmad.blogspot.com/2007/03/short-note-on-medina-charter-by-kassim.html> (Accessed 1 September 2023); Abu Dhabi Conference on Philosophy and Ethics <https://uaenews247.com/2022/11/23/abu-dhabis-first-international-conference-on-philosophy-and-ethics-concludes-on-high-note/> (Accessed 3 November 2023).

change in the way they could and should have developed a societal-scale philosophy for adapting a custom version of modernity to their particular socioreligious and political situation. That is to say, the seven prior reforms aimed to establish a nation-state on modern terms, i.e., to a European standard, yet simultaneously desired to maintain traditional Islamic and Arab cultural values without devising, as al-Sayyid argues, a comprehensive narrative grounded in a new philosophy of religion to prop it up.

I argue their shortcomings lay in the fact that either they lacked a means for generating a comprehensive philosophy for life, i.e., combining the ethical philosophy of the Qur'an and the conditions for founding a sound nation-state, or their philosophy of life was well-defined (as in the case of 'Abdu's, Iqbāl's and Bennabi's, bearing in mind the socioreligious-cum-political circumstances in which they were drawn). Still, the societies concerned were not ready to understand and follow them. This argument is beyond the scope of my thesis and merits a separate study. Nonetheless, these reforms provided the stepping stones on which al-Sayyid built his formula for a comprehensive narrative with a new philosophy of Islam as part and parcel of it. His three-part narrative is a sound basis for a long-term philosophy of life that can be instilled in Arab societies, enabling them to become effective participants in global civilisation.

The religious reform intended to upgrade the jurisprudential system to accommodate a modern nation's *distūr* (constitution). According to al-Sayyid, it failed to achieve its purpose. Although only Iqbāl's religious reform was transparent in calling for spiritual enlightenment, his philosophy did not resonate with the minds of political decision-makers in the Arab world. The spiritual message of 'Abdu's reform was ambiguous, as illustrated by biographers and analysts' differing explanations of his reform goals.⁶¹⁷

2.2 Three Intellectual Duties for Reforming Islam

According to al-Sayyid, the first duty of intellectuals is to instil tranquillity into religion – peace, coexistence and justice. Reinstating tranquillity in Islam means revitalising the spiritual aspect

⁶¹⁷ Muḥammad 'Amāra, *Risālat al-Tawḥīd l'al-Imām al-Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abdu* (Muhammad Abdu's the Doctrine of Tawhid), (Beriut, Dār al-Shurūq, 1994); Muḥammad al-Ḥaddād, (Muḥammad 'Abdu: A New reading ...)

of Islam, i.e., qualities found in the principles of *taṣawwuf*'s *sulūk* and *akhlāq*. I argue that these principles of *taṣawwuf* underlie *sakīna* (the spirit of tranquillity and peacefulness as in the Qur'anic verse (48:04). Al-Sayyid highlights *sakīna* as a prerequisite for openness towards the different *madāhib* of Muslims and non-Muslims.⁶¹⁸

The second duty is for intellectuals to play a role in the *istinqādh* (salvation) of *al-dawla al-waṭaniyya* (the nation-state). It is about reclaiming the nation-state by realising the distinct difference between the affairs of the state and the role of religion. Government institutions should be managed independent of religious interference and subject to general civil law except where religion touches on the affairs of the citizens with *fiqhī* jurisprudence as with the Ministry of Justice or the Ministry of Islamic Endowment and Religious Affairs.

The third duty is to reformulate the relationship between the Islamic world and the rest of the world to correct its damaged reputation. Its distorted image needs to be rectified to have a peaceful relationship with the rest of the world, as the third part of al-Mudayfir's interview elaborates. Combining his new philosophical approach to Islam, as explained later in this chapter, with a firm belief in the *al-dawla al-madaniyya* (the civic or civil nation-state) will change how citizens view the rest of the world in terms of spiritual coexistence. Here, one must recall the five ethical Qur'anic relationships in which every human has a basic right to exist with dignity (see Chapter Six).

This takes us back to what I discussed in Chapter Six regarding the relationship between individual ethical values and the ethics of *taṣawwuf* which is embodied in the school of *ihsān*. In this school individual's ethical values constitute the collective ethical values of society. In other words, the collective *ahklāq* (ethics) of individuals as members of society comprise the prevailing societal ethical philosophy, which I argue relates *akhlāq* to Sufi *wasāṭiyya* (as expressed in a lecture by the eminent Sufi 'Alī al-Jifrī).⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁸ Al-Sayyid, *In the Aftermath of...*

⁶¹⁹ 'Alī al-Jifrī, *Al-Wasāṭiyya al-Shar'iyya wa al-I'tidāl al-Wā'i* (The Sharia-Compatible Wasāṭiyya and the Conscientious Moderation <https://youtu.be/IDbbrvNPpCc> (Accessed 1 August 2023)

Al-Sayyid's three duties reflect the reform needs of the twenty-first century, when political Islam's radical movements bolstered by a selectively-austere fundamental Salafi school of thought wreaked havoc in Islamic countries and abroad, thus creating a rupture in the relationship between Islamic nations and the rest of the world. In his comprehensive narrative, he explains the duty of the religious establishment to educate the public about a new philosophy of life based on coexistence with the other (see part four in al-Mudayfir's interview).

Most of the Arab nation-states that emerged as republics after the two World Wars of the twentieth century are still struggling to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of their citizens, as attested by the revolutions of the "so-called Arab Spring" at the beginning of the 2010s.

But our concern here is Saudi Arabia, which is stable politically and economically yet must still resolve certain socioreligious-cum-political issues. This is where al-Sayyid's duty to maintain the nation-state is applicable, as referred to in part three of al-Mudayfir's interview. With a stable nation-state and religious tranquillity, it is possible to fulfil the duty of improving relations with the rest of the world. This is expressed in al-Sayyid's new approach to a philosophy for Islam.

In response to political Islam, his three-part reform formula calls for a reaffirmation of the function of the nation-state as a political system of governance distinct from the function of religion. At the same time, religion functions as a system of belief and ethical values based on a relationship between the individual and God or the five Qur'anic ethical relationships mentioned earlier. Hence, there would be no role for political Islam (i.e. the Muslim Brotherhood Organization and its offshoots) in running the affairs of the nation-state.⁶²⁰

2.3 A New Approach to a Philosophy for Islam

In the third part of his interview, al-Mudayfir asks a key question, "You have summarised the reform projects that attempted to advance religious reform, which you say did not accomplish

⁶²⁰ Refer to an interview that took place on 16 July 2011, in the midst of the Arab Spring, hosted by the Saudi talk presenter Turkī al-Dakhīl and Raḍwān al-Sayyid Turkī al-Dakhīl's *Iḍā'āt* interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRczBFDuOI8&t=204s> (Accessed 02 November 2023).

the hoped-for comprehensive reform. At the present time, what is [your] vision for arriving at a [sustainable] reform – a reform that we need now and should extend to the future?”

Al- Sayyid answered, “[My vision] is a reform that should not allow a vacuum in religious thought and practices”. To elaborate, he explained, “I have mentioned how there are two methods now in use: the issue of *ta’šīl*, which is the literal follow-up of the traditional religious text for *qiyās* (to retrieve historical precedence) and the *maqāṣid* (*Sharī’a*’s objectives for devising laws)”.

Al-Mudayfir comments that “*ta’šīl* and *maqāṣid*, we already know. We need to know your opinion of a solution for the present time”. To this al-Sayyid replies:

From a political perspective, we ought to establish a relationship between religion and the state of Islam. And secondly, we must realise that we are part of the world’s civilisation. We ought to replace the *tārīkh ‘aqadī* [credal history of viewing our civilisational role] with a *tārīkh thaqāfī* [a cultural history that views and evaluates our civilisational interaction with the rest of the world in terms of success and failure]. This involves studying how Islamic culture arose and opened to the cultures of the ancient world and contributed to producing a grand civilisation. There were three [ancient] grand civilisations: the Chinese, the Islamic and the European. Islamic civilisation was more advanced than the Chinese, and the Chinese were more advanced than the Europeans. We never had a dark age, as Arab intellectuals claim these days. We need to adopt a new open vision of the world instead of the closed vision *jihādīs* fight to inculcate, and the *taqlīdiyyūn* (traditionalists) impose by insisting on deep regression into the past to preserve what the *uṣūlis* preach i.e., a frozen dogma.

Al-Sayyid continues:

In rewriting our cultural history, beginning with reviewing the relationship between religion and the state, one finds no conflicts between religion and the early Muslim *dawla* (state). All revolts against the state were political in nature – a competition for authority– even though they were painted as between a righteous religion versus a corrupt ruler purportedly tricking and exploiting

religion. In reality, the ruler was governing through the legitimacy of religion. This is what I proved in my research, which was the reason behind my award of the King Faysal Prize for Political Thought in Islam in 2017.

Al-Sayyid exclaims, “Now you will tell me this is a historical issue!” Al-Mudayfir interrupts, saying, “Yes, I want to know what is coming in the future [in other words, al-Sayyid’s new philosophy for reforming Islam]”. Al-Sayyid goes on to explain:

Listen, this is the basis for current projects. [Cultural history] is what we have gained from our ancestors and what has been accomplished in our civilisation; it should be used to correct our view so we can presumably see that we are now part of the world’s civilisation and we can without any obstacles re-emerge by directing our energy [to participate in the global civilisational process]. The Quran is always calling us to implement *al-amr bi al-ma ‘rūf* [to command through what is commonly accepted by the people] and to take *al-ma ‘rūf* which is the *muta ‘āraf ‘alayh* [what is commonly agreed upon] in the world or widely accepted by the society. This is what Muḥammad ‘Abdu discovered as reasons for *al-nahḍa* and civilisational advancement.

Al-Sayyid continued to explain:

This has opened our vision, and Islam is not an introverted, isolationist religion. Islam is a creative religion, and its Prophet was an innovative thinker whose creativity was a direct Divine revelation. So, if we possess this vision of Islam, then immediately, our wide vision of the world will burgeon. This is the first step in correcting our relationship with the world, [acknowledging] that we are part of the world and keen on seeing it flourish, advance, and be peaceful. This way you can play a positively effective role without the world turning against you. The world became against us when small groups of our youth exercised terror against it... [but] the world is vast and not limited to the vision [of fundamentalists].

Al-sayyid, pointing to the present state of some Arab countries, continued:

We have good signs of emerging enlightenment in Saudi Arabia, enlightenment and rebuilding in Egypt and a promising experience in the UAE. Also, enlightening efforts are happening in Morocco... we currently have the basis for an open nation-state [in the aforementioned countries], and the majority of youth and public opinion support this nation-state. Now, you might ask, would that reinstate *Sakīna* to religion?

In explaining factors that should reinstate tranquillity to religion, al-Sayyid reiterates that “we should ask ourselves about how we are part of the world’s civilisation and that we must participate in it. We should seek accomplishment and earn a Nobel Prize”, so our universities will become great. He then alludes to the responsibilities of the religious establishment by asking himself:

What are the duties of the religious establishment, which our youth detests? There are four duties in the present conflict [between the state and Islamists]. Firstly, [there is a duty] to preserve the unity of *‘aqīda* (creed of all Muslims) and *‘ibāda* (worship; ritual). Secondly, to enlighten the religious education [i.e., with Qur’anic ethics]. Thirdly, to regulate the issuance of an enlightened fatwa. And fourthly, the *irshād ‘ām* (religious public guidance). Regarding public guidance, religious authorities have completely failed because there have been twenty projects for religious guidance and not a single one bore fruit. The religious figures [moderate preachers] are not able to compete [with fundamentalist ideology] for they lack qualifications [socioreligious education]. Nonetheless, the other three duties were not fulfilled as they should be. Education is of the greatest importance and Saudi Arabia’s jurisprudence system. These fall under the responsibility of the religious establishment.

Al-Sayid continues,

With regard to fatwa issuance, there is a vacuum in this respect, and the religious establishment’s qualifications must be upgraded. This is now being thought of under the duress of terrorism. It behoves us, we the intellectuals, to take serious efforts [in correcting fundamentalist control over education]

because we are the most negligent who brush aside or ignore this issue [religious reform]. It was the German intellectuals who created the German state. The British intellectuals were the ones who invented the technology and caused the Industrial Revolution. The French intellectuals are the ones who...

Al-Mudayfir then interrupted, exclaiming, “And the Arab intellectuals?”

In response, al-Sayyid, in a complaining tone, replies: “Influential Arab intellectuals are spending their time in fear that we are creating an enemy out of the rest of the world because our religion holds us back. Therefore, they want to cut our relationship with religious tradition”. Al-Sayyid went on to express his views as follows:

Widening our understanding of the past and recognizing that our civilisation was great will lead to an open-world vision. Just as openness to the world was practised before (during the golden age of Islam), it can be practised now. Those who imagine our history as one of insularity and conflicts believe we face a world that prevents our advancement – an argument Bernard Lewis advanced as the cause for enmity between the Muslim world and the West.⁶²¹ As intellectuals and the religious establishment, it is our duty to take up this role. I say religious establishment because we don’t have anyone to assume its role in the *idārat* [management] of religion and not in the *siyāsāt* [politics] of religion.

Al-Mudayfir asked, “What is the difference between *siyāsāt al-dīn* and *idārat al-dīn*?”. Al-Sayyid responded that “the politics of religion is the responsibility of the state”. He gave an example in France when President Macron interfered in resolving a religious issue like wearing *ḥijāb* on official premises. Al-Sayyid continues:

And the management of religion concerns worship, religious public guidance, and religious education as has been summarised in the aforementioned four duties, which the religious establishment should not take lightly. Because religious education creates the individual’s vision of the world. That was what

⁶²¹ Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam...* Al-Sayyid met Lewis in Oman. Lewis was invited by the Omani Minister of Islamic Endowment to lecture on political Islam.

Muḥammad ‘Abdu tried to do by pushing forward the *trabīyya waṭaniyya* [nationalistic education], believing that that kind of education was what made the French civilisation.

Al-Mudayfir commented:

But what you say is not new. The nation-states have existed for a long time and have tried to perform their role. Our relationship with the other is the same as before, and the other probably has an issue with us. I do not know whether we are afraid of the world or the world is afraid of us.

Al-Sayyid responded, saying:

We were follower states [as former colonies] and could not do as we desired. The idea of the *mu’asasāt* [bureaucratic establishment and civil society] was not able to set roots [in society] despite the passing of one hundred years...Isn’t it a problem that the Muslim Brothers succeeded in Egypt in 2012? Egypt has been a nation-state since 1905. That means the nation-state failed to convince its citizens of its effectiveness, even though it was not at peace with the Muslim Brothers or *jihādiyyūn* to say that they fooled the state. The state appeased them only under the rule of President Sadat. But after a few years of freeing them from jail, the Muslim Brothers killed Sadat. The religious establishment must be rehabilitated in the four [aforementioned] religious duties. I consider that within 20 years of such a project [my narrative of] a cultural revolution will be felt. That means we should understand the past and surpass it by *ta’wīl* [interpreting its outcome] for renewal without restrictions. No religious ideologue nor intellectual thinker can impose what we should accept on us.”

In the fourth part of the interview, al-Mudayfir asked if al-Sayyid could summarise his narrative’s new vision. His comprehensive reform of Islam involves religious and political elements (a call for a distinction between the function of the state and the role of religion in the public space). Al-Sayyid is an Islamic studies scholar. He is detailing a reform of Islam within a strong nation-state not governed by religion. But as religion is part and parcel of society’s philosophy of life, the state accommodates it as such. Therefore, reforming Islam is the basis

of al-Sayyid's approach to a new philosophy for Islam. In response to al-Mudayfir's request Al-Sayyid elaborates:

I summarised it [his new narrative] in my writings as *salāmat al-dīn wa salām al- 'ālam*.⁶²² Firstly, it states that the relationship between God and his believers is based on *rahma* (mercifulness; clemency). The Qur'anic verse (7:156) "states, 'My punishment – I afflict with it whom I will, but My mercy encompasses all things'. ... some prioritise 'Adl (justice) over mercy, but justice is part of *rahma*. Secondly, the relationship between 'ibādihi [His created beings, i.e., people in general] Muslims and non-Muslims all over the world is based on *ta 'āruf* [to know each other through familiarity with what is commonly accepted in each society]. The Qur'an mentions twenty types of *ta 'āruf*. Thirdly, our duties towards ourselves and the world are the five *maqāsid* [objectives] of *sharī'a* [in reference to al-Shāṭibī's objectives]: protection of people's lives, property, health, religion [belief], and [dignity [the right of human race to exist]].⁶²³ *Rahma* and *m 'arūf*, which the Qur'an emphasises all the time – their opposite is *fasād fi al-arḍ* [corruption on earth].

Al-Mudayfir replied, "So, they [the basis for al-Sayyid's approach to Islamic philosophy] are *rahma*, *ta 'āruf* and the five *maqāsid* [The Safety of Religion and the Peace of the World]". These are the three pillars on which al-Sayyid bases his approach to a new philosophy for Islam—a philosophy that presents Islam as a universal religion for humans to coexist conscientiously. This aligns with the Sufi *waṣṭiyya* as represented in the five ethical Qur'anic relations detailed in Chapter Six.

I argue that these Qur'anic ethics are the basis for an Islamic philosophy of life that assigns a universal right to a dignified existence to all humanity. Here, I refer the reader to a lecture by al-Sayyid titled "The System of Values in the Qur'an and the Islamic Intellectual Experience

⁶²² Al-Sayyid, *In the Aftermath of...*

⁶²³ Usman Safiyanu Duguri, et al., *The Application of Maqasid Shari'ah in the Foreign Policy of Islamic States*, (International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 2021), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3827744 (Accessed 4 November 2023)

During Two Eras" on Qur'anic ethics.⁶²⁴ In this lecture, al-Sayyid refers to literature on the Qur'an and the relationship to Allah as predominantly ethical. He mentions Egyptian M. A. Drāz's 1950 *The Constitution of Morality in the Qur'an* and Japanese scholar Toshihiko Izutsu's 1959 *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran*. Al-Sayyid then engages in an interesting comparative critique of the approaches of Drāz, Izutsu and Muḥammad 'Ābid al-Jābrī to the ethics in the Qur'an – an important subject beyond the scope of my thesis.

In part five of the interview, al-Sayyid was asked to comment on several related clips from newspapers and television interviews. The most significant of these was the signing of the "Document on Human Fraternity" by Pope Francis and al-Azhar's Shaykh Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib. The signing of this document inspired the establishment of the interfaith complex, the Abrahamic Family House, in Abu Dhabi.⁶²⁵ As al-Mudayfir began to ask: "The Fraternity Document...", al-sayyid, knowing the controversy surrounding the establishment of this complex, interrupted him to say:

It is a great document. We and the Catholics constitute just about half the world's population. The Pope is a central authority. I met a Christian in Europe who grumbled about the Document [and said] that the Pope gave us much more than we deserve. In my opinion, it is a historical conciliation.

Al-Sayyid then related this to the enmity that resulted from the Catholic crusades and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of European colonization, most of which was carried out by Catholic Europeans (with the exception of the British, who were Anglicans). While the world agenda features human fraternity, the event did not generate the reaction it deserves from Muslims.

Al-Mudayfir then countered with his own interruption, pointing to the inefficiency of some conciliatory reforms, saying:

But, look [for example at] the Amman Message, King 'Abd Allah International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (was established in Vienna

⁶²⁴ Raḍwān al-Sayyid, *Niẓām al-qiyām fī al-Qur'an wa al-Tajruba al-Thaqāfiyya fī Zamānayn* (The System of Values in the Qur'an and the Islamic Intellectual Experience during Two Eras): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWdynxT3AWs> (Accessed 19 November 2023).

⁶²⁵ The Abrahamic Family House at Abu Dhabi <https://www.abrahamicfamilyhouse.ae/> (Accessed 24 November 2023)

in 2012 and relocated to Lisbon in 2022), this [fraternity] Document, and the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation's *Hilf al-Fuḍūl*...

Al-Sayyid quickly replied. "The Organization of Islamic Cooperation did the great Mecca Document". Al-Mudayfir continued, "...so many things, but I do not know to what extent these things are effective. [In sum], where does the essence lie in terms of the problem and solution concerning the relationship between Muslims and the world?"

Al-Sayyid answered,

The essence of the problem is that the world no longer trusts us. If one percent of us rebelled [in terrorist acts] the world would accuse all of us of terror. So, we must regain the world's trust in us by regaining our trust in ourselves. We must generate respected nation-states and control those terrorists [amongst us]. We must generate a new culture with a new vision of the world".

Al-Mudayfir returned:

For example, some have seen the Abrahamic Family House as a wonderful positive concept that shows tolerance and *ta'ārūf* and *ta'āyush* (coexistence) and *hiwār* (dialogue). [Others say] that it generates suspicion of a new vision of a new religion with a mysterious [hand in a velvet glove].

Al-Sayyid replied:

There is no new religion. The Abrahamic religion is our religion, [i.e., the *Ḥanifiyya* the Qur'an talks about]. To say that we belong to an Abrahamic religion does not mean we unite with Jews and Christians. It is they who are afraid of us. We are one-fifth of the world's population and will grow to one-quarter. Look at the tensions [Muslim terrorists cause] in Europe, France and Germany. Disillusion about *al-Ibrahīmiyya* is because they confuse it with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The Israeli issue is political.⁶²⁶ Do you think their

⁶²⁶ Refer to the 2020, US mediated, Abrahamic accord of bilateral agreements on normalization of Arab-Israeli relations, which was struck between Israel and UAE as well as Bahrain.

Ḥākhāmāt (rabbis) recognize that our religion is Abrahamic? We recognize them...

Al-Mudayfir interrupted, saying:

But Dr Hiba Jamāl al-Dīn wrote a book on how this is mere spiritual diplomacy [using the notion of] Abrahamic commonality with a neocolonial plan behind it.

Al-Sayyid responded:

“All of that is nonsense. There is no agenda or anything. The Qur’anic *Ibrahamīyya* is our *Ibrahīmīyya*. I do not know if the relationship with Israel is considered *Ibrahīmīyya*. President Sadat tried that, but [his efforts were] discarded, because the agreement with Israel was political. Why confuse it with religion? Especially as the Jews do not say that our religion is an Abrahamic religion – we recognize their [status as an Abrahamic religion], but they don’t recognize [ours]. There is no call for unity of religions in this, but an attempt to improve relations between the adherents of these religions.

Al-Mudayfir disagreed, saying, “It is not an attempt to relinquish some political rights [with reference to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict]!” To that al-Sayyid replied:

Nothing of that nature. The relationship with Israel is a [strategic political one] with no relationship to *al-Ibrahīmīyya*. It is not possible to relinquish the rights of Palestinians... the Qur’an calls for human fraternity. What I see in all of these issues, briefly, is that religious and political leaderships surged forward [in advancing the issue of human fraternity], but the masses don’t participate in it. Half the Egyptians do not know about the Fraternity Document, and [likewise] three-fourths of the Lebanese. What I say is that those authorities who made these documents must direct their attention to their public with attempts to convince them about [the benefits of] these issues.

Also, in the fifth part of the interview, al-Mudayfir discussed the nature of the relationship between al-Sayyid and the Lebanese-American scholar of *Ḥanbalī* Islam George Makdisi

(1920–2002). Al-Sayyid explained that he and Makdisi share a common interest in *Ḥanbalī* Islam, e.g., the work of Ibn ‘Aqīl, but they have different opinions over some issues.⁶²⁷ Attention must be drawn that ‘Abd al-Ḥakīm Murād included Ibn ‘Aqīl amongst the renowned *Ḥanbalī* scholars who were involved in the path of *taṣawwuf* (see Chapter Four). To begin with, the interest Makdisi and al-Sayyid share in studying Ḥanbalism is centred around Abu al-Wafa Ibn ‘Aqīl al-Ḥanbalī (1039–1120), especially in reviewing and commenting on his works such as *Al-Wāḍiḥ fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh* and *Kitāb al-Funūn*.

Al-Sayyid explains that Makdisi “has a strange idea that the real *ahl al-Sunna* are the Ḥanbalites”. Almudayfir curiously commented, “So, the only *ahl al-Sunna* is the *Ḥanbaliyya*”! Al-Sayyid continued, “[Because] they inherited *ahl al-Ḥadīth*, while the Ash‘arites are [considered by Makdisi] pseudo-Sunnis, even though they are the majority...he considers the *Ḥanbalī ‘aqīda* as the [genuine] Sunni *aqīda*. Actually, he [Makdisi] criticises all the Orientalists who praise the Ash‘arites.”

Al-Mudayfir told al-Sayyid that:

Mishārī al-Dhaydī in *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* [newspaper] wrote that at present Raḍwān al-Sayyid [directs his interest] in reinstating the status of Ḥanblasim and Salafism by freeing them from [theologically] unscientific purities that are far from the sobriety of science and in defence of the ignorant [austere Ḥanbalite scholars] among them. The question here is why Dr Raḍwān al-Sayyid is engrossed in reinstating Ḥanbalism and Salafism?

Al-Sayyid replied:

It is not Salafism [that I am interested in], but Ḥanbalism”. A response to which al-Mudayfir was quick to say, “That was his [al-Dhaydī’s] opinion”. Al-Sayyid was quick to say, “yes that is his opinion. But even the Saudi Salafism is a Salafism of the state...”. Al-Mudayfir interrupted: first yes or no then why [you are interested in them].

⁶²⁷ In part five of al-Mudayfir’s interview al-Sayyid explained that George Makdisi undertook his postgraduate studies in France under Louis Massignon and Henri Laoust. Laoust was among the first Orientalists to research Ḥanbalism. He wrote extensively on the *Ḥanbalī* madhhab. On Ibn Taymiyya he wrote *Siyāsat Ibn Taymiyya* (the politics of Ibn Taymiyya). Under his supervision Makdisi wrote the *Ṣu‘ūd* (insurgence of) *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*. He taught at Harvard and settled in Pennsylvania, where he further pursued this interest in Ḥanbalism.

Al-Sayyid:

I am interested in Salafism only partially, but overall, my interest is in Ḥanbalism. Because they are the origin of *ahl al-Sunna*. Now, I am writing a vast [three-volume] book titled *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a* to end my academic career. Its first volume is called *From Emergence to the Ḥanbalī Wisdom*. Because if it were not for the *miḥna* [ordeal; see Chapter Six] of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, there would not have been a revival of *ahl al-Sunna*. *Ahl al-Ḥadḥith* would have remained a small movement. *Ahl al-Sunna* only rose on the revival of Ibn Ḥanbal.

Al-Mudayfir continued, then “In your opinion, the *Ḥanbalīs* are the essence of *ahl al-Sunna*”. Al-Sayyid, “Yes, [even though] now they [Ash‘arites] surpass them [in number]. Al-Sayyid agrees with Makdisi’s idea that Ḥanbalī *‘qīda* is the essence of Sunni Islam. Still, he argues for developments in the Sunni *Madhhab* where the *Ash‘arī* became the prevailing *‘aqīda* that represents *ahl al-Sunna wa al-jamā'a*. Al-Sayyid goes on to explain,

At one time, distinguished *Ḥanbalīs* [scholars] such as Ibn ‘Aqīl were persecuted. Ibn Ḥanbal was the only one who attempted to establish a *‘aqīda*, [you could call it] catechism as in Catholic theology [that consists of itemised religious instructions] ... but his followers exaggerated in [doing so] like al-Jīlānī.

However, al-sayyid went on to emphasise that the main issue is that the Ḥanbalīs are loyal to the state in allegiance, but it is not permissible for the state to interfere in religion, i.e., a separation between state and religion, which constitutes one of his three-part comprehensive narratives covered in this chapter.

Al-Mudafir commented:

This means Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal did not interfere in the affairs of the state, and [he wanted] the state not to interfere in the affair of religion”. al-Sayyid emphatically said “never”, then continued, [if it is permissible to liken the two]

Ibn Ḥanbal was like the Protestants [in the relationship between the state and religion].” Al-Sayyid continues, “I want to talk about the Salafism of the state in Saudi Arabia, which is not radical fundamentalist. That means international terrorism, even though Osama Bin Ladin was a Saudi, did not really penetrate Saudi society, nor did the *Ikhwān* [Muslim Brotherhood] or the terrorist organisations. Only the *Surūriyūn* were able to penetrate it. There was a large group of youth who confused the *Salafiyya* and the *Ikhwāniyya* [Muslim Brotherhood] and produced this deviant sect [the *Surūriyūn*]. The revolt in Salafism took place outside Saudi Arabia.

Al-Mudayfir asked:

What do you think of the opinion that says Raḍwān al-Sayyid, if not against Salafism, he is not convinced by it? However, for pragmatic reasons with the Saudi government, he tries not to clash with it and instead concentrates on aspects of Salafism that are favourable.

Al-Sayyid, with a look of deep thought, replies:

Indeed, I don’t flatter [Salafism]; I am saying there is a side of Salafism that did not deviate or radicalise. There are strict Salafis, but they stay in their homes [minding their own business]. I am against Salafism going public to induce this considerable movement [of radical political Islam]. [I am for] Salafism, which is nurtured by the Saudi state. A *mutashaddid* (strict) Salafi from Qaṣīm described me as “a spokesperson for *ahl* al-Sunna”. This last statement drew a light chuckle from al-Mudayfir.

I believe al-Sayyid's interest in stating that the divide between Ash‘arī and Ḥanbalī Sunni Islam has faded is to pave the way for righteous Sufi ethics (see section I above), which, according to my thesis, is essential to his three-part comprehensive philosophy for Islam. He calls for accommodating it as natural to Sunni Islam. This brings us back to Fad‘aq’s promotion of reconciliation between the Salafi (*Ḥanbalī*) and Sufi (*Shāfi‘ī*) traditions during his *rawḥa* gatherings (see Chapter Five). In these gatherings, he frequently cites the views of the late Saudi

Mufti, Ibn Bāz, in his discussions. Sinani notes that this approach aligns with Fad‘aq’s efforts to position his activism within Saudi religious thought.⁶²⁸

As customary in concluding his programmes, al-Mudayfir ends the talk show by highlighting a message drawn from the interview. Al-Mudayfir wanted his audiences to quote Raḍwān al-Sayyid as saying that “the Arab intellectuals do not do justice to Sunni Islam”.

Now that we have understood al-Sayyid’s attitude on *taṣawwuf* and how it influences his comprehensive narrative, we will discuss the relationship between his narrative and the socioreligious elements sought in Vision 2030 as integral to his proposed new philosophy for Islam as it relates to the hypothesis of my thesis.

III. A New Philosophy for Islam, *Taṣawwuf*’s *Wasatīyya* and Vision 2030

I consider al-Sayyid’s comprehensive narrative for reform a vehicle that can accommodate my hypothesis from within the new philosophical approach to Islam. Building on the premise that al-Sayyid’s new approach to philosophy for Islam is fit as a theoretical basis for the new outlook articulated in the socioreligious elements of Saudi Vision 2030, al-Sayyid’s narrative sparked a eureka moment for me when I came across it during the fifth year of my thesis. The *wasatīyya* of *taṣawwuf*, which my thesis proposes can contribute to the country’s aspiration for a *wasatīyya* as a generic Qur’anic Islamic concept (see Introduction), should fulfil the two premises of the socioreligious elements of Vision 2030: intra-Islamic *madhāhib* pluralism and an openness to the world’s cultural and religious traditions. This development equally relates to what Sinani articulates: the “government’s promotion of a quietist religious alternative to Islamism.”⁶²⁹

⁶²⁸ Besnic Sinani, *Ṣūfī Scholars. Practices, and Communities in ...* (2020), p. 231

⁶²⁹ Sinani, *Ṣūfī Scholars Practices...*, p. 239

Conclusion

This Chapter aims to examine the receptivity of the socioreligious elements of Vision 2030 to the Qur'an-based Sufi *wasatīyya* that I have proposed. This chapter presented al-Sayyid's narrative to support my hypothesis about the *sulūk* and *ahklāq* basis for the *wasatīyya* of *taṣawwuf* – a *wasatīyya* derived from the five Qur'anic ethical relations explained in Chapter Six. This will permit the hoped-for societal change in attitude toward *taṣawwuf* as an embodiment of the five-dimensional Qur'anic ethical relationships. This is true even if the term *taṣawwuf* is presented under a different nomenclature to strengthen the likelihood of its acceptance, e.g., *iḥsān* for *taṣawwuf* as called for by the Saudi Sufi 'Abd Allah Fad'aq's school of *iḥsān* of the Two Holy Mosques. This will be explained in the concluding chapter, where I answer the research questions and address the hypothesis presented in the introduction of this thesis.

CONCLUSION

This chapter highlights the thesis's significance, summarises the key research findings that address the thesis's hypothesis, identifies the research objectives, and answers the research questions. It will also outline the thesis's organisational structure, highlighting the importance of the research, the research gap it filled in the literature, and its general findings that underlie its significant contribution to the socioreligious aspects of Vision 2030. It will also highlight the implications and limitations of the research and conclude with recommendations for future studies.

Salafi–Sufi polemics are as old as Saudi Arabia's 300-year history, in which the country's socioreligious life has been dominated by a government-supported Salafi establishment in a sub-culturally and Islamically heterogeneous society. This thesis is centred around a period in modern Saudi Arabia from 1979 to the present. It has divided this period into three phases. The first phase began in 1979, when Saudi Arabia experienced a tumultuous period known as *al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya* (Islamic awakening), during which political Islam's fundamentalist movements gained strength and significantly influenced society's socioreligious and political discourse in an unprecedented manner.

Even though *taṣawwuf* (Sufism) was peaceful and apolitical, it was accused by government-supported Salafis of engaging in the contemporary conflicts of political Islam. The rise of fundamentalist militant factions of political Islam during the *Ṣaḥwa* era culminated in the infamous 9/11 twin tower attacks in New York, which brought terrorist activities that had wreaked havoc in Saudi Arabia to the international stage and generated a poor reputation for the country. The association of terrorism with Saudi fundamental Salafism prompted Saudi society to embark on a self-reflective re-examination of the values of fundamental Salafi Islam that had been nurtured by the *al-Ṣaḥwa* movement and produced the militant political Islamic factions in its midst.

This was when the Saudi government was compelled to adopt a policy of dissociation from the ill-reputed fundamental Salafi Islam by initiating a conciliatory pluralist approach to its Salafi-dominated heterogeneous society. Typically, repressed sects such as Sufism and Shiism, as well as liberals and women activists, were all invited to participate in the discussion and debate

forums of the newly established King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Center for National Dialogue (KACND) in 2003, thus marking the launch of the second phase in Salafi-Sufi polemics.

This second phase was a precursor to a third phase that began when King Salmān was sworn in as the new king in 2015. In this third ongoing phase, the most ambitious plan in Saudi history for transformative reform was launched: Vision 2030. Vision 2030 is a comprehensive economic, social, and religious reform plan of which we focus primarily on its socioreligious aspects in this thesis. This thesis has examined the socioreligious aspects of Vision 2030, representing two key goals or premises on which the thesis’s hypothesis is based. The first goal is to instil a spirit of intra-Islamic *madhāhib* (jurisprudence schools) pluralism and promote openness towards the *ḥadathiyyūn* (modernists, including social liberals and women's activists). Given the Salafi-influenced school of thought that rejects all non-adherents to the Salafi school, fundamentalist Salafis have nurtured an antagonistic attitude towards the other religions and cultural traditions of the world – and especially those of the West. So, the second goal is to adopt a policy of openness and harmonious coexistence with the rest of the world.

To fulfil the two aforementioned premises of the socioreligious aspects of Vision 2030, the government reverted to the age-old and “controversial” Qur’anic concept of *wasatīyya* (middle way; moderation). *Wasatīyya* is regarded as a controversial concept because its definition varies according to the interpretations and understandings of the Qur’an and *ḥadīth* across different Islamic schools of thought, as well as across different historical timeframes. The two antagonistic Sunni schools, the Salafis and the Sufis, have contradictory interpretations of how *wasatīyya* should be defined.

In a Sunni-majority Saudi society, the government proposed that the concept of *wasatīyya* could lead the country into a desired harmonious coexistence and openness to the world without negatively affecting the Islamic creed and way of life. But in a Sunni-majority society, a concept of *wasatīyya* that doesn’t reference a particular Sunni school of thought will not be accepted. This thesis points out that a concept as controversial as *wasatīyya* only adds to the confusion if it does not specify what Sunni school of thought on which its principles are based. Thus, my thesis hypothesises that a Sufi-based *wasatīyya* could contribute to fulfilling the two socioreligious premises of Vision 2030. This is because *taṣawwuf* (as presented by Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq of the school of the Two Holy Mosques) is conducive to the dissemination of an

intra-Islamic *madhāhib* pluralism and coexistence with the proponents of *al-ḥadātha* (liberal modernists).

However, such a hypothesis presents us with several problems. Due to its historical antagonism with Sufism, Saudi society sees it as a deviant sect of Islam. It must also be proven, academically, that *taṣawwuf* could viably meet the socioreligious goals of Vision 2030. Consequently, addressing these two problems is the key objective of this study. In light of the aforementioned three phases of socioreligious development and sometimes political Sufi–Salafi polemics experienced and still negotiated by Saudi society, it is essential to identify the attitudes towards *taṣawwuf* held by the three relevant stakeholders, the Salafi establishment, the government and society. However, we should also point out the justifications for this thesis’s proposal that there should be a Sufi-based *wasatīyya* to fulfil the two socioreligious premises of Vision 2030. Addressing these two problems are formulated as primary and secondary sub-research questions as follows:

- **Primary research question:** In light of the Salafi–Sufi polemics and the aversion of Saudi society to Sufism, this asks whether the objective of *wasatīyya* can be supported by a Saudi version of Sufism, which is grounded in the principles of the *madrasat al-iḥsān* and the work of Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq.
 - i. First sub-research question: To what extent has Sufism been perceived and understood within the Saudi context?
 - ii. Second sub-research question: Are the suggestions for a Saudi brand of Sufism made by Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq realistic?

Before addressing the two research questions, I need to point out the significance of my research and the gap it bridged in studying Sufism in Saudi Arabia. To answer the research questions, I should also give a brief overview of the thesis chapters to understand their structure thoroughly.

In light of the historical antagonism between these two conflicting Sunni schools of thought, the importance of this thesis stems from its proposal that we should call for a *taṣawwuf*-based definition of *wasatīyya*. This would contrast with the prevailing Salafi school of *wasatīyya* and be congruent with fulfilling the two premises of the Vision 2030 *wasatīyya*. The thesis was thus

organised to set out the competing claims of these two Sunni schools of thought in terms of how each defines *wasatiyya*.

Significance of the Study and the Research Gap

The significance of the study comes from its uniqueness. This is the only academic research that addresses Salafi–Sufi polemics within the socioreligious context of Saudi Arabia, notwithstanding a recent thesis by Besnic Sinani, which approaches Sufism in Saudi Arabia in the context of orthodoxy and tradition (see Introduction). Despite the methodological shortcomings discussed in the section on limitations below, my thesis fills a gap in Sufi research in Saudi Arabia by casting a different light on Salafi–Sufi polemics, which contrasts with the one-sided view presented by Salafi academic scholarship on *taṣawwuf*. In traditionally Salafi-influenced and dominated Saudi universities, academic research focuses on demoting *taṣawwuf* by defining it as a deviant sect of Islam that revolves around *shirk* (associationism; polytheism), saint cults and grave worship.

Organisation of the Thesis

Chapter One outlines the background of the Sufi state within a government-supported, Salafi-dominated Saudi society, dating back to the founding of the country by the Saudi dynasty over 300 years ago. However, the scope of the thesis’s research focuses on the dramatic, consecutive changes in the attitude of the Salafi establishment, government, and subsequently Saudi society towards *taṣawwuf* in modern Saudi Arabia from 1979 to the present.

In modern Saudi Arabia, Sufism has experienced three phases of development. The Salafi establishment characterised the first phase, and the government maintained its old antagonistic attitude towards *taṣawwuf*. This phase was marked by the ordeal of the prominent Sufi of al-Ḥijāz, Sayyid Muḥammad ‘Alawī al-Mālkī, who clashed with the Salafi establishment after they accused him of propagating *shirk* among the Saudi population. These accusations were grounded in theology. They stopped short of drawing *taṣawwuf* into the quagmire of political Islam that prevailed at the time, despite the diligent attempts of the Salafi establishment to do that. Referred to as the *Ṣaḥwa* (Islamic Awakening), this fervent form of political Islam persisted from 1979 to 2003.

In the second phase (2003–2015), as a result of Salafi fundamentalist engagement with political Islam and subsequent terrorist campaigns that wreaked havoc both in Saudi Arabia and the Western World, the government questioned its unequivocal support for Salafism. Through the King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Center for National Dialogue (KACND), the government invited suppressed religious minorities, i.e., the Sufis and the Shī‘a, as well as liberals and women’s rights advocates, to participate in KACND forums. This period marked a remarkably favourable governmental attitude towards *taṣawwuf*, much to the horror of the Salafi establishment.

The change in government attitude towards *taṣawwuf* was evidenced in the participation of Sayyid Muḥammad ‘Alawī al-Mālkī, the Salafis’ archenemy, in the KACND forums. At the request of the Crown Prince, he was asked to deliver one of the forum’s concluding speeches. This phase was characterised by Salafis reverting to accusing Sufism of being a tool used by Western powers, especially the United States, to bring about a pro-Western socioreligious change based on eradication of Salafism and replacement with Sufism as the salient Sunni school of thought in Saudi Arabia. Salafi arguments against *taṣawwuf* were stepped up to present their claims on socioreligious-cum-political grounds and their traditional theological basis.

The third phase, which began in 2015 and is still ongoing, put the country through its most remarkable and comprehensive transformative reforms ever with Vision 2030. The socioreligious elements of Vision 2030 provided the reasons that positioned the underlying Sufi-defined *wasatīyya* to aim at the two aforementioned premises: openness to different others in the country (the Sufis, the Shī‘a and the liberal advocates) and harmonious coexistence with world cultures and religious traditions. As an outcome of the socioreligious aspects of Vision 2030, the tolerant attitude towards *taṣawwuf* in some Salafi circles during this phase resulted in a noticeably neutral attitude towards *taṣawwuf* as evidenced in the literature painting a fair view of *taṣawwuf* found in Salafi bookshops. If phases one and two describe the state of *taṣawwuf* in the past and the present, the third phase is pivotal for predicting the future of *taṣawwuf* and examining my hypothesis.

Chapter Two presented conflicting Salafi and Sufi definitions of *taṣawwuf*. The Salafis group *taṣawwuf* into three categories, while the Sufis classify it into three different types. This chapter

determined the basis on which Salafi and Sufi schools claimed a correct understanding of Sunni Islam over the other, therefore their deferring definition of *wasatiyya*. Thus, the basis for the theological and socioreligious-cum-political dimensions of Salafi–Sufi arguments were established and could, hence, be elaborated on in the rest of the thesis.

The attention of the reader is drawn here to what will be discussed in the rest of the thesis with regards to Salafi versus Sufi versions of *wasatiyya* (middle way; moderate Islam), bearing in mind their interpretation of the Qur'an and support for *ḥadīth* in their distinctive schools of thought in terms of creed (the Salafi *Atharī* versus the Sufi Ash'arites). The socioreligious-cum-political dimension of their counterarguments presented us with two distinct points of view. A purely Salafi view is that Sufism is a tool for eradicating Salafism, thus inviting rival powers to control the socioreligious and political outlook of society. In a Sufi view that emphasises *taṣawwuf*'s principles of *sulūk* (conduct) and *Akhlāq* (ethics) as constructive tools for building an ethical Islamic society based on the Qur'anic concept of *wasatiyya* is interpreted as a duty for implementing a harmonious and just coexistence with cultures around the world. Here, attention is drawn to the idea of *wasatiyya* in Sufi versus Salafi contexts concerning the two socioreligious premises of Vision 2030. This chapter set out the course for the thesis, where Chapters Three and Four focused accordingly on Salafi's refutations of *taṣawwuf*, and Chapters Five and Six looked at Sufi counterarguments.

Chapter Three presented four Salafi arguments. It explained that Salafi's claims about Sufism paralleled the abovementioned three phases of Salafi and government attitudes towards Sufism. Three of the Salafi claims emerge from theological arguments about Sufi deviancy based on *shirk* (polytheism) and blasphemy. The Sufis were accused of practising *shirk* based on their creed, e.g., giving their *awlyā'* (Sufi saints) equal status to Allah when responding to invocations. They were also accused of *taṣawwuf*'s aberrancy based on their *sulūk* (conduct; behaviour), e.g., seeking invocations at the tombs of Sufi saints and believing in outlandish *karāmāt* (miracles).

The third argument accuses the Sufis of blasphemy for purportedly calling for the unity of religions. The unity of religions theory is ascribed to the philosophical Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī's *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the unity of being). The fourth and final argument is the accusation that *taṣawwuf* is leading society, through pro-Western politics, to a corrupt socioreligious change

that aims to eradicate Salafism and tamper with genuine Islamic values that in the Salafi understanding, their brand of Sunni Islam. This fourth socioreligious-cum-political dimension is the Salafi accusation that Sufism is a mere tool of Western powers, especially the United States. Those powers aim to eradicate Salafism and neutralise society into accepting Western values and diluting the Islamic religion by promoting the concept of the unity of religions.

Chapter Four introduced the misunderstood or intentionally omitted ideas of Ibn Taymiyya on *taṣawwuf* and how these were dealt with in Salafi classifications and arguments. In this chapter, I discussed Ibn Taymiyya's attitude on *taṣawwuf* that prompted a reclassification of *taṣawwuf* into four types; however, instead of types, I designated them as four approaches to Sunni *taṣawwuf*. These four approaches are my possible contribution to the field where Sufi types by both the Sufis and Salafis, I identified as different ways to approaching *taṣawwuf* as follows: Sunni Sufism (righteous or genuine Sufism), *shatḥī* (ecstatic behaviour and utterances) Sufism, *muṣtaṣwifa* (pseudo-Sufism), and philosophical Sufism.

Chapter Five presented Sufi counterarguments to the four Salafi claims. The outspoken Ḥijāzi Sufi Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq put forward these arguments. His views are supported by citations from other contemporary Sufis revered by Saudi Sufis. Fad‘aq asked the Salafis to distinguish between different types of *taṣawwuf*. If we use Ibn Taimiyya's classification, these are the praiseworthy, blameworthy and rejected types of *taṣawwuf*; to use Fad‘aq's terms, there is a right and a wrong *taṣawwuf*. He proposed a Saudi brand of *taṣawwuf* as the right type based on the Meccan school of *iḥsān*. In doing so, Fad‘aq accused the Salafis of three errors. First, they failed to consider *taṣawwuf*'s two principles, i.e., *sulūk* and *akhlāq*, as integral to *taṣawwuf* itself. Second, they mixed up what belongs to the realm of *fiqh* (jurisprudence) with issues of *‘aqīda* (creed), thus unjustifiably expelling believers from Islam. And thirdly, they failed to explore the vast array of ways that *sharī‘a* rules, especially the *fiqh al-maqāṣid* (the objectives of the *sharī‘a*) are supposed to address concurrent issues as times change across each era of history. Through the Meccan Two Holy Mosques brand of *taṣawwuf*, which is based on *sulūk* and *akhlāq*, he called for society to begin to participate in global civilisation

In Chapter Six, the Salafi distaste for philosophy was discussed. My thesis advocates for a revival of Islamic philosophy, particularly in light of the country's new vision. Saudi Arabia has introduced philosophy to the education curriculum for the first time in its history. This

encourages Islamic scholars to approach the socioreligious aspects of Vision 2030 within a philosophical Qur'anic context, especially in terms of a Qur'anic philosophy of *wasatīyya*. This thesis identified a relationship between the concept of the Qur'anic *ḥikma* and the Greek-based definition of philosophy as a rational methodology for uncovering the truth behind the nature of things, i.e., a relationship between the Qur'anic concept of *'ilm laddunī* (God inspired knowledge) or the *bātin* (esoteric knowledge) and the attainment of knowledge through observation of the majestic *ẓāhir* (exoteric knowledge), which I presented as Qur'anic philosophy that underlies the concept of *wasatīyya*.

Ẓāhir and *bātin* are Qur'anic adjectives that pertain to Allah. This is also discussed as a relationship between the *'aql* (rational thinking) versus *naql* (the literal interpretation of sacred texts) in what my thesis terms “the *'aql* versus *naql* syndrome”. The Qur'anic-based philosophy is expressed as the relationship between God and humans as one of perpetual consciousness, which is congruent with Shaykh Aḥmad Zarrūq's definition of *taṣawwuf* as a sincere journey towards Allah. This thesis identifies such a relationship as a perpetual anthropo-theo-conscious realisation. In addition to the psychospiritual connection between humans and God, this Quranic relationship between existence and God is presented as a five-way ethical relationship between humans and Allah, the self, other humans, the environment (ecology) and the universe (cosmology).

This led me to articulate a Qur'anic philosophy of a Sufi-based *wasatīyya*, which is part and parcel of a comprehensive approach to Islamic philosophy as theorised by the Lebanese-Saudi Islamic philosophy scholar Dr. Raḍwān al-Sayyid. Al-Sayyid's philosophy is congruent with the socioreligious aspects of Vision 2030. Chapter Seven discusses the relationship between the *wasatīyya* philosophy of this thesis and al-Sayyid's new narrative of a comprehensive approach to Islamic philosophy.

Chapter Seven presents scholarly thought on Raḍwān al-Sayyid's new comprehensive narrative of an Islamic philosophy that accommodates my hypothesis. It does so in a format promoted in Saudi Arabia with government support to reinforce a new outlook expressed in the socioreligious-cum-political aspects of Vision 2030. As the last of the discussion chapters, this chapter presented an al-Sayyid new approach to Islamic philosophy formulated wherein the ethics of *taṣawwuf*, as proposed by Sayyid 'Abd Allah Fad'aq of the Two Holy Mosques school

of *Ihsān*, is integral to it. My argument for a Sufi-based *wasāṭiyya* is thus a potential contribution to fulfilling the two socioreligious premises of Vision 2030.

Highlighted Research Findings

The thesis presents several key findings regarding the state of *taṣawwuf* (Sufism) in Saudi Arabia and its potential role in the country's Vision 2030.

Here are the most significant general findings:

The thesis highlights that Salafis fundamentally reject Sufism on both theological and socio-religious-political grounds. The theological objection stems from the Salafi perception of Sufism as a deviant sect that promotes polytheism, the veneration of saints, and grave worship, while simultaneously advocating for the concept of religious unity. On the socio-political front, Salafis contend that the United States employs Sufism as a strategy to weaken Salafism and to reshape the Islamic values within Saudi society.

The thesis proposes that the diverse manifestations of Sunni Sufism should be regarded as distinct "approaches" rather than rigid classifications. It identifies four key approaches to Sunni *taṣawwuf*: Righteous Sunni Sufism, *Shatḥī* Sufism— characterised by ecstatic utterances, *Muṣṭaṣwifa* (also known as pseudo-Sufism or misguided Sufism), and Philosophical Sufism. This reclassification arises from an in-depth analysis of Ibn Taymiyya's critique of Sufism, also known as *taṣawwuf*.

The thesis highlights that Ibn Taymiyya, a prominent theorist of Salafism, did not entirely reject *taṣawwuf*. He distinguished righteous Sufism and pseudo-Sufism, defending the former.

The thesis contrasts Salafi and Sufi interpretations of *wasāṭiyya* (the middle way), arguing that Salafi *wasāṭiyya* is exclusive while Sufi *wasāṭiyya* is more inclusive.

The thesis presents a fresh perspective on the Qur'anic attributes of *ẓāhir* (exoteric knowledge) and *bāṭin* (esoteric knowledge), as well as the concepts of *ʿaql* (rational interpretation) and *naql* (literal interpretation) in sacred texts. These ideas form the foundation for a novel Qur'anic philosophy that explores the relationship between *ḥikma* (wisdom) and rational philosophy.

The thesis emphasised the concept of *taṣawwuf*'s *wasatīyya*, as explained by Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq of the school of *al-iḥsan* in the Two Holy Mosques, as principled on *sulūk* (behaviour; conduct) and *akhlāq* (ethics).

The thesis posits that the *wasatīyya* of *taṣawwuf* can be a foundational basis for a new, comprehensive approach to Islamic philosophy for life. This philosophy integrates the principles of *sulūk* (behaviour) and *akhlāq* (ethics) as essential elements, potentially supporting the socioreligious and political objectives outlined in Vision 2030¹². The work highlights Dr. Raḍwān al-Sayyid's advocacy for these principles as part of a novel narrative that aims for a holistic approach to Islamic philosophy. It suggests that this *wasatīyya*, as exemplified in the *sulūk* and *akhlāq* of the school of *iḥsān*, could effectively facilitate societal transformation.

The central contribution of this thesis lies in integrating the concepts of Fad‘aq and al-Sayyid. It posits that a distinct Saudi brand of *wasatīyya*, as outlined by Fad‘aq, when combined with the holistic approach to Islamic philosophy articulated by al-Sayyid, can effectively address the two socioreligious premises of Vision 2030¹⁴ and may have the potential to stimulate societal change.

Answers to the Research Questions

- **Primary research question:** In light of the Salafi–Sufi polemics and the aversion of Saudi society to Sufism, this asks whether the objective of *wasatīyya* can be supported by a Saudi version of Sufism, which is grounded in the principles of the *madrasat al-iḥsān* and the work of Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq.
 - i. First sub-research question: To what extent has Sufism been perceived and understood within the Saudi context?
 - ii. Second sub-research question: Are the suggestions for a Saudi brand of Sufism made by Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq realistic?

This thesis explores the feasibility of a Sufi-based *wasatīyya* of the *madrasat al-iḥsān* of the Two Holy Mosques to support the socioreligious goals of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, particularly given the historical tensions between Salafism and Sufism and society's wariness of the latter. It articulates two main objectives: advocating for intra-Islamic *madhāhib*

(jurisprudential) pluralism and promoting coexistence among diverse religions and cultures. The central research question is examined through two sub-questions that clarify Sufism's role in Saudi Arabia and its potential contribution to a *wasāṭiyya* aligned with Vision 2030's goals.

Concerning the first sub-question, "How has Sufism been understood in the Saudi context?" the thesis reveals the following:

The state of *taṣawwuf* in Saudi Arabia is best understood through four primary Salafī critiques of Sufism, along with the corresponding Sufi responses. The Salafī objections can be categorized into four main arguments, three of which pertain to theological concerns. These critiques emphasize perceived deviations in creed, notably concerning the Ash‘arite perspective on the tri-part tenet of *tawḥīd*, as well as behavioural deviations, such as the veneration of saints. Additionally, they challenge the promotion of the unity of religions theory, particularly as attributed to Ibn ‘Arabī as *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the unity of being). The fourth critique, however, takes on a socioreligious and political dimension, suggesting that Salafis believe the USA is leveraging Sufism to foster a pro-Western socioreligious and political transformation. This, they argue, undermines Salafism's predominance in Saudi society and threatens to shift cultural and political influences towards the West.

The Sufis counter the Salafī perspective by emphasizing that the conflict arises from differing understandings of *taṣawwuf*. Salafis often generalize and portray Sufism as an aberrant sect within Islam. Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq asserts that both righteous and erroneous forms of *taṣawwuf* exist. Shaykh Aḥmad Zarrūq characterises righteous *taṣawwuf* as embodying “sincerity in one’s wayfaring to God.” This sincerity is evaluated through dedicated worship, *sulūk* (conduct), and *akhlāq* (ethics). While Salafis present a one-dimensional, pessimistic view of *taṣawwuf*, Sufis argue that they recognize and differentiate between valid and invalid approaches to the practice. According to Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq, Salafis tend to conflate matters of *‘aqadī* (creedal matters) with those of *fiqhī* (jurisprudential matters), confusing that leads them to unjustly accuse some believers of greater *shirk* and blasphemy, effectively casting them out of Islam.

A re-evaluation of the various Sufi types and approaches to distinguishing between different concepts of Sunni *taṣawwuf* is essential to address the negative perceptions that continue to linger in mainstream Saudi society. Following 2003, and with the initiatives of the King ‘Abd

al-‘Azīz Centre for National Dialogue (KACND), the government has sought to integrate *taṣawwuf* as an intrinsic component of the Sunni *madhāhib* (jurisprudential schools) in Saudi Arabia. This effort is exemplified by the recent attempts to grant Saudi nationality to theologian philosophers, such as Raḍawān al-Sayyid, who regard Sufism as a manifestation of Islamic ethics integral to a comprehensive rethinking of Islamic philosophy.

In a society traditionally influenced by Salafi thought, the attitude toward *taṣawwuf* in contemporary Saudi Arabia has evolved through three phases: initial hostility, sociopolitical opposition, and a gradual acceptance of a more moderate form of Sufism.

However, the Salafi establishment in Saudi society continues to promote a general aversion to Sufism, which presents challenges to the thesis's proposal for a Sufi-based *wasatīyya*. Nevertheless, signs of changing attitudes are beginning to emerge as the government adopts a more tolerant religious approach, aligned with Vision 2030, which advocates for a moderate interpretation of Islam.

The thesis proposes classifying Sunni Sufism into four distinct categories: righteous Sufism, *shatḥī* Sufism (ecstatic utterances), *muṣtaṣwifa* (pseudo-Sufism), and philosophical Sufism. This classification reflects the distinctions made by Ibn Taymiyya regarding types of Sufism and draws upon Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq’s definition of *taṣawwuf*. Overall, the state of Sufism in Saudi Arabia remains fragile. Nonetheless, the initiatives led by intellectuals and official media programs, such as television talk shows, aim to promote an understanding of *taṣawwuf* as essential to Islamic ethics. These ethics have the potential to portray Islam to the world as a religion that embodies peace and justice, as conveyed through its Sufi-based *wasatīyya*.

Concerning the second sub-question, "What suggestions does Sayyid ‘Abd Allah Fad‘aq propose for a Saudi brand of Sufism?" the thesis presents the following:

Fad‘aq emphasizes the psychological aspects of Sufism as a process of *takiyat al-naḥs* (purification of the soul and heart) involving dedicated worship and behavioural and ethical adherence to Islamic principles of *sulūk* and *akhlāq*. He sees Sufis as productive societal members and advocates for a renewed Saudi Sufism rooted in the *madrasat al-iḥsān* of the Two Holy Mosques. Aware that the term *taṣawwuf* is not comprehensible in a Salafi-influenced

Saudi society, Fad‘aq does not mind referring to it as *ihsān* instead. This comprehensive approach is not tied to any particular *ṭarīqa*, embodying the essence of *taṣawwuf*, focusing on *sulūk* and *akhlāq* as essential for a *wasatīyya* aligned with Vision 2030's objectives. As a *Shāfi‘ī* jurist, Fad‘aq supports reviving *fiqh al-maqāṣid* (the higher objectives of *sharī‘a*) to promote a progressive jurisprudential approach benefiting society. He rejects *takfīr* and promotes intra-Islamic pluralism, differentiating true *taṣawwuf* from deviant practices and positing it as a personal path to God aligned with Islam's core teachings. Saudi Sufis are depicted as loyal citizens, promoting peaceful Sufism while acknowledging all legitimate Islamic *madhāhib*. This thesis posits that, despite challenges, a Sufi-based *wasatīyya* articulated by Fad‘aq can contribute to Vision 2030's objectives. Fad‘aq's methodology aims to reconcile different perspectives and establish coexistence with other traditions. Furthermore, integrating contemporary philosophical discourse into Saudi education could harmonise Sufi principles with modern societal dynamics, portraying Islam as a progressive faith akin to Raḍwān al-Sayyid's philosophical narrative. Al-Sayyid's philosophy revisits cultural heritage as part of a long-term project grounded in Qur’anic ethical values that govern the relationships between humans and their environment to underpin a Sufi-based approach *wasatīyya*. Fad‘aq and Raḍwān al-Sayyid's combined perspectives could enrich the Saudi philosophy of life rooted in a *wasatīyya* of coexistence. However, challenges persist in shedding negative perceptions of *taṣawwuf* propagated by Salafis as society embraces Vision 2030's universality of Islam, wherein *taṣawwuf* could play an essential role, as discussed in Chapter Seven.

Application of the Research

The findings of this thesis have both theoretical and practical applications. Theoretically, the long-suppressed notion of *taṣawwuf* in educational, religious discourse should be viewed from a perspective that differs from the negative Salafi-propagated attitude towards *taṣawwuf* as a deviant sect.

In this thesis, I examine the grounding of Sufism as practised in the Two Holy Mosques’ School of *Ihsān*, emphasizing the principles of *sulūk* (individual behaviour and conduct) and *akhlāq* (ethics). I advocate for using the term *ihsān* instead of *taṣawwuf*, as it carries more positive connotations within the Saudi context. Building upon Shaykh Aḥmad Zarrūq's definition of *taṣawwuf*, I propose viewing it as a continuous anthropo-theo consciousness concept. This

understanding is rooted in five Qur'anic ethical relationships that involve humans and their connections to Allah, the self, other humans, the environment (God's creation and ecology), and the universe (the cosmos). Together, these relationships establish the foundation for a Sufi-defined *wasatiyya* (moderation) proposed by Sayyid 'Abd Allah Fad'aq, which aligns with the two socioreligious objectives of Vision 2030. Practically, the contribution of Sufism's *wasatiyya* has the potential to promote a gradual yet meaningful shift in attitudes, fostering acceptance of intra-Islamic pluralism and coexistence with liberal modernists as equal citizens, fully entitled to their rights and obligations within the nation-state they inhabit.

Research Limitations

The research limitations stem from the methodology used to collect the data on which the findings are based. As I explained in the introductory chapter, the original design was to conduct semi-structured ethnographic interviews with a random sample of Saudi Sufis from both regions traditionally known for harbouring *taṣawwuf*, namely, al-Ḥijāz and al-Aḥsā'. However, due to the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic and other difficulties, such as collecting data via telephone interviews or email, I had to rely on the meagre literature produced by Saudi Sufis. Still, due to openness to other *madhāhib* that contributed to the KACND forum discussions the change of policies and later post-Vision 2030 publications that were neutral in attitude towards *taṣawwuf*, I was able to formulate a Sufi point of view – especially by drawing from extensive television talk show interviews with the outspoken Sufi of the Meccan school of The Two Holy Mosques in al-Ḥijaz, Sayyid Abdullah Fad'aq (see Chapter Five).

Future Research Directions

This study presents opportunities for further research in two areas. First, research could be conducted on related topics or extending from it. Second, several topics and concepts were important enough to refer to in the thesis but fell beyond its scope.

Research that would expand on this thesis includes collecting data to address the hypothesis set out here, which should involve a sufficiently large sample of Sufis and non-Sufis.

A study to reinstate Ibn Taymiyya's genuine attitude toward *taṣawwuf* is imperative to further distinguish between righteous and pseudo-*taṣawwuf* and avoid lumping all types of *taṣawwuf*

altogether as wrong *taṣawwuf*. In other words, this would bring forth the *sulūk* and *akhlāq* of *taṣawwuf* as pivotal principles for a new approach to Islamic philosophy. The definition of *taṣawwuf* provided by Shaykh Aḥmad Zarrūq should be re-examined in light of the concept I called perpetual anthropo-theo-conscious realisation (see Chapter Six). This concept is foundational to the Sufi concept of *wasāṭiyya*. It would, therefore, comprise a comprehensive approach to the Islamic philosophy offered by Raḍwān al-Sayyid.

Other related topics for research include the *‘aql* (rational reasoning) vs *naql* (literal interpretation) syndrome, viewed through a Qur’anic philosophy encompassing esoteric and exoteric knowledge. This syndrome has negatively influenced perceptions of secular sciences, often blaming theologians like the Sufi al-Ghazālī for hindering philosophy and science in Islamic culture. This perspective needs reassessment, especially within the context of Islamic civilisation as an interconnected tapestry of both lower and higher levels of philosophical and scientific productivity throughout history.

Conclusion

This chapter concludes an academically challenging yet profoundly stimulating exploration of the state of *taṣawwuf* (Sufism) in Saudi Arabia. It chronicles the history of Sufism, highlighting its transition from a period of repression within the Salafi-influenced mainstream of Saudi society to an emerging culture of tolerance fostered by the government and, consequently, the broader Saudi society. The primary insight offered by this thesis is the opportunity to view Sufism from a renewed perspective. In this light, Sufism, grounded in the principles of *sulūk* (behaviour; conduct) and *akhlāq* (ethics) of the *Iḥsān* School of the Two Holy Mosques, serves as a pivotal framework for a comprehensive Islamic philosophy that situates Islam within its universal context, benefiting both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This new perspective could position Saudi society as an active participant in global civilisation, driven by a philosophy that presents Islam as a religion of peace, harmony, and justice for all humanity.

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