Shaykh Google as Ḥāfiẓ al-ʿAṣr: The Internet, Traditional ʿUlamāʾ, and Self Learning

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Abstract

More than any other period, the last hundred years have witnessed a rise in the accessibility of information through books, media, and the internet. This introduced new ways of learning and sharing Islamic knowledge. In this article, I consider how traditional Islamic knowledge and pedagogical techniques are challenged by the growing number of lay Muslims participating in religious discussions through print and the internet. I explain why the *ulamā* perceive self-learning as a threat not only to the ostensibly proper understanding of religion but also to the redefinition and reinvention of their authority. I observe how print and digital media caused a shift away from the necessity of the teacher and facilitated autodidactic learning and claims to authority. Despite their criticism of self-learning, Traditionalists have embraced the internet in order to remain relevant and to compete with non-experts.

Writing is inferior to speech. For it is like a picture, which can give no answer to a question, and has only a deceitful likeness of a living creature. It has no power of adaptation, but uses the same words for all. It is not a legitimate son of knowledge, but a bastard, and when an attack is made upon this bastard neither parent nor anyone else is there to defend it. —Plato

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Introduction

Several scholars have written on the nexus of new media, the transmission of knowledge, and religious authority in Islam.[1] These works trace the development of new media and its challenge to authority. However, there remains a need to examine the educational methods of traditional learning in order to understand why religious scholars (the *ʿulamāʾ*) are critical of self-learning. Misunderstanding why the *ʿulamā* are opposed to religious education that takes place outside of traditional methods can result in mischaracterizing their opposition as being simply in defense of their own authority. To remedy this gap, this article will explain why traditionalist scholars consider their educational methods integral to the proper framework for understanding Islam.

In his article "The Death of Expertise," Tom Nichols argued that any assertion of expertise today is immediately dismissed as an appeal to authority. He insists that what has taken place is not the "death of expertise" per se but the collapse of distinctions between those of achievement in an area and those without. This difference is undermined by focusing on the errors and fallibility of specialists in order to deconstruct their authority. In such a climate, claims of expertise are viewed as specious efforts to stifle dialogue.[2] Perhaps this is most obvious in the practice of dismissing facts and expert opinions as "fake news." Nichols writes that this broader process is linked to globalized communication removing gatekeepers in publications. Prior to the internet, journals and op-ed pages were often strictly edited. Participation in public debate required submission of an article, which had to be written intelligently, pass editorial review, and stand with the author's name attached. This process, which previously applied to even local newspapers, has been overtaken by self-published blogs, comment sections in articles, and YouTube videos which can all be anonymous.[3]

The internet poses a challenge to clergy and experts in most religious traditions, but of these Sunni Islam is particularly challenged because of its not having formal ordainment of religious authority.[4] Prior to print and the internet the *ʿulamāʾ* were able to confine scholarly texts and material among themselves.[5] The internet has changed this drastically, and Traditionalist *ʿulamāʾ* who train in highly didactic systems are particularly challenged by it.

Defining Traditionalism

As a matter of clarification, it is useful to identify what Traditionalism means and how it is used throughout the article. Granting that this group is not monolithic, my usage of the term "Traditionalists" refers to Muslim scholars who consider adherence to a *madhhab,* speculative theology, and Sufi orders to be representative of the true embodiment of Islam.[6] Tradition is often used to refer to practices of a particular group that stands in contrast to modernity or accepting change, but this is not entirely accurate or fair.[7] In Islamic history, religious knowledge was primarily validated by a connection to past individuals and institutions, such as an *isnād* back to the Prophet, an *ijāza* traced back to a teacher, or a disciple connecting himself back to a Sufi master.[8] William Graham argues that "Traditionalism" is not a rejection of change, but consists of a belief that connection with a model past and persons is the only sound way of reforming society. Traditionalism is based on the past but is fluid and not stuck in it. Put differently, Traditionalism could be likened to science, where present works build on and cite past experiments which are deemed "credible."[9] Traditionalism is primarily a commentary tradition where it is essential to cite and take into consideration previous scholarship.[10] It is not a mere inheritance from the past but, as Muhammad Qasim Zaman notes, it is "constantly imagined, reconstructed, argued over, defended, and modified."[11]

What distinguishes Traditionalists from self-taught scholars is not necessarily the content of what it means to be an observant Muslim, but rather the proper modes by which religious knowledge is acquired. For Traditionalists it is not sufficient for one to hold the correct beliefs and practice the rituals of Islam. One must also acquire knowledge from a teacher who is well-grounded in the tradition through an established chain of teachers going all the way back to the Prophet. Mohammad Fadel writes:

> Mastery of religious values emerges through a process of acculturation that enables novices to embody those values. This process of acculturation is distinct from, and transcends intellectual cognition (*ʿilm*) of, religious truth. While religious truth may be a proper subject of instruction (*taʿlīm*), mere instruction, without reliable teachers who properly embody Islamic teachings, cannot produce properly acculturated religious subjects.[12]

Therefore, Traditionalists believe that individuals cannot achieve credibility or authority in the religious domain without a teacher. Accordingly,

Traditionalists do not view themselves as a reform movement, but individuals who are connected to the Prophet through a scholarly chain of authorities.[13] The teachers in this chain make up tradition. Historically, the *madhhab*s were part of a judicial process located in the courts and legislative branches of government. Because there is no state today that legislates by Islamic law, Traditionalists attempt to preserve the continuity of the legal tradition. In this article I use the term "traditional learning" to refer to the pedagogical process of "handing down" knowledge and the attitude of valuation and attachment to the maintenance of tradition (i.e. the content or ideas) through that process.

Traditionalism is a current within Sunni Islam that adheres to what is considered authentically rooted in revelation, has crystallized under the banners of scholarly juristic consensus (*ijmāʿ*), and has been passed on as Islamic knowledge (*ʿilm naqlī*) in chains of scholarly authority (*isnād*). It is a current that is didactic and instructional, which stands in opposition to autodidactic "do it yourself" Islam.[14] Zaman explains that "it is a combination of their intellectual *formation*, their *vocation*, and, crucially, their *orientation* viz., a certain sense of continuity with the Islamic tradition that defines the ʿulama as ʿulama."[15] Put simply, my use of the term Traditionalists broadly refers to *ʿulamāʾ* who serve as the guardians, transmitters, and interpreters of Islamic knowledge. For the *ʿulamāʾ* Islam can only be properly understood under the tutelage of a teacher. This must not be misunderstood as a complete rejection of the internet or books, but a rejection of them as the only means of learning and obtaining religious authority.

It is the sense of continuity that distinguishes Traditionalist *ʿulamāʾ* from other autodidactic, reformist, or modernist versions of Islam. Although Muslim feminists, progressives, secularists, and Salafis are all different, they share an anti-clericalist approach to the study of Islam. They tend to view the *ʿulamāʾ* as backward and as barriers that prevent people from identifying the "true" teachings of Islam. They take Traditionalists to be the object of reform rather than its agents. Traditionalists' insistence that lay people must perform *taqlīd* is often dismissed as an appeal to authority—a conclusion that, while it might be valid, also ultimately dismisses the legitimate question of how religious authority is produced.

In this article, I analyze Traditionalist criticisms of learning through the internet regardless of whether these critics themselves participate in online education. For Traditionalists who criticize learning from the internet, or complain about its being a source of confusion, often post their lectures on YouTube and consequently teach students whom they will never

meet. They therefore ironically become participants in the same modes of education that they caution against. While these critics do not condone learning solely from the internet, they do acknowledge the benefits and perhaps the necessity of participating in the online world in order to remain relevant. Additionally, there are many institutions that teach through and by nontraditional curricula despite some of their leaders being critics of those who speak about Islam without traditional training. For instance, AlMaghrib Institute uses the pedagogical forms of corporate weekend retreats in order to teach an Islamic curriculum, but they also have numerous instructors who do not have formal Islamic training. Graduates from traditional *madrasa*s have also resorted to using a range of media such as blogging, video and audio recording, as well as websites, to give religious instruction. Qibla, an online Islamic educational institution, is comprised of traditionally-trained scholars who emphasize the importance of direct scholarship with a teacher but note that the world has changed and traditional teaching methods must adapt to such change.[16]

Before examining how the internet challenges Traditional learning and expertise, I present how knowledge and authority were transmitted and preserved in Traditionalist circles.

The Teacher-Student *Isnād*

How does one become a scholar? What are the essential requirements, if any, for one to be deemed an expert of Islam? In traditional Islamic circles, knowledge was primarily meant to be transmitted through the teacher-student *isnād*, not solely through books.[17] Authentic knowledge was stored in scholars, and the art of memory was among the most highly prized arts; scholars were masters of mnemonic tricks.[18] Education through a teacher is what made knowledge trustworthy. The value and authority of knowledge were not inherent so much as generated through the process of knowledge being obtained through proper methods.

Throughout the Muslim world, scholars have a wide range of differences on a host of Islamic topics. However, religious authorities have also been careful in uniting that diversity within a harmonious prism, at the root of which is the connection between teacher and student. By this account, when the chain of Muslim teachers who trace their learning back to the earliest Muslim schools of theology and law are bypassed, whether through self-study or studying in western universities, knowledge loses its authenticity and authority. Traditionalist Muslim scholars believe that the transmission from a teacher to a student creates and transfers authority. It

is the living tradition that passes on sacred learning. To innovate one's own commentary on tradition, without the collective commentaries of generations explained by a teacher, is considered inauthentic.[19]

In this chain, the teacher is expected to gradually guide the student in the studying of texts through a curriculum. Without the teacher, students would be left on their own and may arbitrarily study advanced texts they are ill-equipped to deal with. Muḥammad ʿAwwāma (b. 1940), a Syrian ḥadīth scholar, explains that today people approach classical sources and proof-texts directly without studying the basics of Islam. This often results in them considering their opinions to be superior to the four *madhhab*s.[20] In traditional Islamic learning, students were given the tools to understand scripture before approaching scripture directly. Consequently, the core of the curriculum was the study of *fiqh* works, whereas ḥadīth collections and commentaries on the Qurʾān were studied only as supplements to the law. A teacher was essential to this process of learning. Students typically began with memorizing the Qurʾān and learning from local scholars. If they proved themselves capable, they would then travel from city to city learning from scholars of different specialties. As students completed the study of a book with a teacher, they would receive an *ijāza* (license to teach) testifying to their accomplishments.[21] A student's knowledge was evaluated based on the number of certificates he obtained as well as the scholars he received them from.[22]

Unlike the modern university system, it was not where one studied but rather with whom one studied that was important in traditional Islamic learning. This is noted from the biographical dictionaries of medieval scholars, which tell us little about where the person studied and are virtually silent about the schools in which a young scholar received his training. It is not that information about one's education was unavailable, but that one's teachers were most important. Historians and biographers regularly provided long lists of scholar's teachers, a sort of curriculum vitae. One of the most critical elements of this curriculum vitae consisted of the names of those on whose authority one transmitted Islamic texts.[23]

In their earliest stages, students would learn the Qurʾān and Sunna through the scholarly class. It was understood that novice students, let alone laity, cannot extract rulings from these sources independently, for that job was limited to the *mujtahid*. Lay Muslims having direct access to scholarly texts without the tutelage of a teacher would prove catastrophic for the scholarly class. Traditionally-trained scholar Yusuf Talal DeLorenzo argues that, for instance, very few people are equipped to analytically

work with Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ,* a work that is readily available online in Arabic and translation. He points out that in traditional learning circles the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* was studied only after a student had spent years learning the classical disciplines such as Arabic, rhetoric, and literature, the rational sciences of logic and Islamic legal theory, the many Qurʾānic sciences from elocution (*tajwīd*) to Qurʾānic exegesis (*tafsīr*), and the science of ḥadīth. Only after a student had demonstrated his mastery of these subjects was he allowed to attend lessons on the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī, which were usually given by the most learned and respected of all teachers.[24]

DeLorenzo goes on to state that in the traditional educational scheme, there were many reasons for this graduated approach. The status accorded to Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* was so elevated that only those who had mastered the classical disciplines were considered prepared to take on its study. The *Ṣaḥīḥ* is so full of technical nuances related to principles of ḥadīth (*uṣūl al-ḥadīth*) and the biographical handbooks (*ilm al-rijāl*) that a thorough understanding of those subjects is required if they are to be entirely appreciated. Similarly, unless one has mastered other classical disciplines, there is much of significance that will be overlooked.[25] DeLorenzo explains that bypassing a teacher and studying texts directly results in profound misunderstanding of scripture:

> The word I recall the shaykh using to describe what results when the unprepared non-scholar attempts to read the hadith literature was *fitnah*, or a trial, in the sense that the person would be so confused and overcome after undertaking such an uninformed and one-dimensional reading of that literature (i.e., in translation without the presence of a shaykh to guide him/her through the obstacles) that he or she would face a crisis in their religion, a trial of spiritual proportions.[26]

The insistence on learning from a teacher was meant to supervise the student's methodology and interpretation of scripture. Without the supervision of a teacher, knowledge was not considered legitimate. ʿAwwāma explains that even those who have reached great scholarly achievements are still in need of a teacher or peer to provide feedback for knowledge to be authentic.[27] Studying with a teacher and having a group of scholars to consult is necessary even for the greatest of scholars. Studying with a teacher for a few years and then resorting to self-study without scholars is insufficient.[28]

In order to accrue legitimacy as scholars, students were required to spend a significant period of time learning from scholars. The completion

of the study of the book would involve a reading back of the text along with its explanation. If this were done to the teacher's satisfaction, the student would then be given a license to teach (*ijāza*). The *ijāza* system was a scholar's method of licensing others to teach his works and serves as a testimony to the student's scholarship. The student was left in no doubt that he was a trustee in his generation as part of the long tradition of Islamic learning handed down from the past, and he was now responsible for continuing this chain to the next generation.[29]

This method of learning included reading an entire text line by line in the presence of a teacher who provided guided commentary on each statement. Often this was accompanied by a careful grammatical analysis of why each word was selected and what it implies. The teacher would shed light on what kind of theological and legal messages the author is delivering in his phrasing. This didactic fashion of teaching was often accompanied by students' questions and teacher-student debates. This form of active learning was meant to yield increased structure, feedback, and interaction, prompting students to become participants in constructing their own knowledge rather than passive recipients. For Traditionalists this was the only way to read a text and retain its authority in uncertain terms.[30]

In ḥadīth circles, whenever a student finished explaining a ḥadīth to his teacher, the student would place a mark next to the ḥadīth to distinguish it from those that had not yet been so read. Even when a student knew ḥadīths through books, he was not entitled to use those ḥadīths for teaching or his own compilation until he received them through such recognized methods of learning. This supervision served as a form of peer review. Ḥadīth scholars labeled someone who bypassed this process as being a *sāriq al-ḥadīth* (ḥadīth thief). Despite the fact that the information itself was accurate because it was taken from the teacher's book, the individual was not considered an authority in the ḥadīth because of the method by which he obtained it.[31]

Learning a text with a teacher was meant to ensure that texts were not distorted or severely misconstrued. At a practical level, many Arabic texts (whether individual ḥadīths or entire books) were written without many vowels and diacritical marks. Reading a book properly required learning it from a teacher who heard it read aloud.[32] Muhammad Mustafa al-Azami (d. 2017) argues that at times, Muslim scholars intentionally used difficult words or script to force students to learn directly from scholars. He states that even the third Caliph ʿUthmān made certain the Qurʾān was written in a fashion that would ensure that a student would learn it directly from a

scholar and not on his own. Although they existed and were employed at the time, skeletal dots and diacritical marks were both absent from ʿUthmān's compilation of the Qurʾān. By its consonant-heavy and dot-less nature, ʿUthmān's Qurʾān was shielded from the guiles of anyone seeking to bypass oral scholarship and learn the Qurʾān on his own; such a person would be readily detected if he ever dared to recite in public.[33] Among the arguments that Traditionalists make is that scripture was always divinely sent with a prophet to explain its contents. Prophets were sent without scripture, but scripture was never revealed without a Prophet.[34] This rationalization is based on the notion that people would not have the capability to properly understand scripture without the teaching of a Prophet.[35] The Prophet's explanation of the Qurʾān was meant to preserve its meaning, without which the text would be misunderstood. Part of the preservation of scripture and text is to preserve and pass down its "proper" understanding. As a result, traditional religious authority is characterized through established, supervised approaches to texts. When learning and education take place outside of this supervised system it can become haphazard. Traditionalists like ʿAwwāma characterize modern auto-didacticism as educational disorder (al-fawḍa al-ʿilmiyya).[36]

Ultimately, the teacher-student link was intended to prevent non-experts from speaking on behalf of religion. Traditionalists believe that only those who have undergone particular training have the right to interpret scripture.

Imitating the Prophet

Sunni Muslims hold the Prophet's Companions in the highest regard because they are believed to have embodied his teachings and etiquette.[37] The Andalusian literalist scholar ʿAlī Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) stated that no one can ever surpass the generation of the Companions, who are unrivaled in their righteousness.[38] The status they were given in Sunni doctrine is a result of their being the nearest to the Prophet in time as well as their application of Islam. Education at the hands of scholars who link themselves back to the earliest generations is an attempt at attaining a portion of the Prophetic inheritance. Therefore, Traditionalists hold the scholarly class in high esteem because they collectively embody knowledge and characteristics that can be traced back to the Prophet.[39]

Scholars attempted to embody the teaching methods of the Prophet because his pedagogical techniques were considered to have the greatest impact. A famous ḥadīth describes scholars as "heirs of the Prophets," and

Traditionalist *ʿulamāʾ* viewed themselves accordingly.[40] This manifested it-self by how a scholar's closest students were called his *aṣḥāb* (companions). George Makdisi explains that earlier scholars intentionally modeled their relationship with their students on that of the Prophet and his Compan-ions. He states, "Just as the Prophet was the leader with followers, each school consisted of a leader, imam, with followers, *ṣāḥib*, pl. *aṣḥāb*."[41] Schol-ars attempted to replicate the Prophet-Companion/teacher-disciple mode of transmission in all of the Islamic sciences. The importance of the Proph-et as a pedagogical role model is noted from the many ḥadīth collections which contain chapters that specifically describe how Muhammad taught his community. These ḥadīth collections can be seen as handbooks of pro-phetic pedagogy.[42]

Imitating the Prophet's pedagogical methods was important because of the knowledge the teacher transmits to the students but also for the per-sonal characteristics the students inherit from their teachers. Education is not merely information or knowledge, but it consists of fostering morally upright individuals. The traditional educational paradigm emphasizes the importance of specific religious rituals, behaviors, and norms of attaining knowledge. Kasper Mathiesen notes that being a student in traditional learning circles "implies *suḥba*, studying with and being in the presence of *ijāza*-holding scholars in order to absorb their spiritual *ḥāl* (state of heart and being)."[43]

The teacher-student relationship was meant to ensure that students learn from their teacher's spiritual state. By shadowing a scholar, a student was expected to absorb his spiritual state in intellectual exchanges and in mundane activities. This provided the student with a model of scholarly eti-quette and instilled a reverence for the scholarly class. The spiritual element of learning necessitates the insight of a teacher and cannot be accomplished by self-learning. In some cases, such as ḥadīth transmission, it was not common for students to have a close relationship with the ḥadīth-master they transmitted from. Nevertheless, the student would learn to observe the scholars in general. In other words, it was not always necessary to close-ly accompany one particular scholar, for learning from multiple scholars could have a similar impact.[44]

Muslim scholars since the third century after the Hijra have produced a large number of works presenting guidelines for knowledge acquisi-tion.[45] The existence of these guidelines demonstrates that in contrast to most modern education systems, in traditional Islamic learning a teacher

is primarily a *murabbī* (mentor). Yedullah Kazmi argues that emphasis in education has more recently shifted from who the teacher is to what the teacher teaches. In other words, the knower is distinguished from what he knows so that the scholar is simply a transmitter of information. Describing this phenomenon, Kazmi writes:

> What a teacher is expected to bring to the class is what he/she knows and not what he/she is. What a teacher is is purely an accidental quality with little or no relevance to his/her competence as a teacher as long as he/she has the necessary credentials and no criminal record.[46]

The shift from who the teacher is to what he teaches closely relates to the purpose and nature of education. Islamic sciences were not distinct from spirituality. Jon Anderson makes the interesting observation that the modes of transmission, the master-pupil relations, and the cohort networks of Sufism and Traditionalist *ʿulamāʾ* are very similar.[47] Many Sufis were not only spiritual seekers but scholars of ḥadīth and jurisprudence. Those who were not such scholars were nevertheless learned to some degree in religious sciences.[48] Even *madrasa*s built exclusively for training *ʿulamā* were often paired with *khanqah*s.[49] Scholarship was usually a central part of the spiritual endeavor. The process of traveling and learning from a scholar was considered a spiritual experience in itself, one that was based on nostalgia and longing for a connection with the Prophet.[50] Scholars and ḥadīth narrators wanted to be as close to the Prophet as time allowed. They used *isnād*s as a means to teleport back to the Prophet, and the shorter *isnād*s were better not only because they decreased the likelihood for error in transmission, but because they became a means of close connection to the Prophet's blessings. In Sufism, the *isnād* was the chain of transmission for the Prophet's blessings, teachings, and esoteric knowledge.[51]

Kazmi argues that there are two kinds of knowledge: theoretical and personal. Theoretical knowledge is what we normally associate with the term *knowledge*: "It is abstract, formal, impersonal, universalizing and almost completely objectifiable in language, either natural or artificial or a combination of the two."[52] Personalized knowledge is incapable of being fully formalized or objectified and is entirely dependent on linguistic communication and, more importantly, through styles and strategies for living.[53] Although these two forms of knowledge are distinct, for traditional scholars they cannot be separated; when they are, knowledge loses its legitimacy. In traditional learning circles, it was only when they were combined that knowledge was considered authentic and proper.

This personalized-theoretical knowledge is communicated not only through language but also, among other things, through strategies for living and orientation to knowledge and the world. Obtaining knowledge only through reading texts is considered insufficient since it does not produce the essential processes of self-transformation and moral and spiritual purification that are at the core of Islamic education.[54] The teacher-student relationship, on this model, is based on presence, closeness, and fellowship. The passing of information and knowledge can occur over the internet, but it takes place in a space that fosters distance and disembodiment. As religious education shifts to the internet, we can therefore expect a reduction in Traditionalist standards of knowledge production.

Decline of Traditional Education

The decline of traditional Islamic education had been drastically altered as early as the late 1700s. Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt and the introduction of the printing press were important factors affecting religious authority.[55] Later, the fall of the Ottoman Empire, colonization of Muslim lands, and the rise of secular governments in the Muslim world further contributed to the decline of the traditional pedagogical methods necessary to religious authority. Modernization, the institutionalization of religious knowledge, and the breaking up of the "old" order of learning have produced a "democratization" of knowledge acquisition and transmission. Several socio-political events served as points of entry that led to the deterioration of the infrastructure of Islamic educational institutions, which undermined and neutralized the teachers who were perceived as a threat to secular governments. These include the push to modernize the Ottoman Empire, the imbalance of political powers, and the weakening of traditional elites.[56] The caliphate served as an embodiment of Muslim unity in terms of scholarship too, not only politically. Those who had religious authority, and therefore spoke for Islam, were traditionally-trained scholars who held influential positions in government and education. In the Ottoman Empire, the role of the scholars expanded as the respective bureaucracies expanded. It was the scholars who were responsible for the education of the nobility, who staffed various levels of judiciary, and who oversaw the charitable establishments of the Empire. Members of this scholarly class ranged from those who led prayers in small towns to the most prestigious courtiers.[57]

Through their positions as judges, muftis, guardians of religious endowments, scribes, and market inspectors, the ʿulamāʾ served as the mouthpiece for various branches of Islamic tradition. They held the recognized

authority to interpret scripture and define the religious outlook of society.[58] Yet through the influence of European and colonial powers and the rise of secular governments in the Muslim world, traditional ʿulamāʾ became disenfranchised and replaced by new elites. There developed a vacuum in religious authority, and it was not clear who spoke for the religion. This fragmented the authority of the ʿulamāʾ as the sole authoritative voice of Islam and opened the door for reformers who were critical of the scholarly class.

Reformers believed that the traditional pedagogy led to exaggerated reverence for teachers, which resulted in blind and uncritical imitation of scholarship. Traditional education was criticized as being limited to the memorization of texts and the study of commentaries of legal manuals that had little bearing on the contemporary world. The Egyptian Mohammad ʿAbduh (d. 1905) deemed traditionally trained ʿulamāʾ to be backward, irrelevant, and out of touch with contemporary issues because they were studying manuals, commentaries, and glosses that were not able to address the issues of modern times. He sought to introduce new methods that would provide solutions to the problems of the Muslim world. ʿAbduh's first experience with learning by rote, memorizing texts and commentaries of laws for which he was given no tools of understanding, was formative to his later commitment to a thoroughgoing reform of the Egyptian educational system.[59]

ʿAbduh was at the forefront of replacing traditional learning methods with the modern university system. To meet the threat of European-style institutions, many Islamic educational institutions were compelled to introduce western methods such as formal curricula, new subjects, entrance and course examinations, formally appointed faculties, and budgets that were subject to external governmental control.[60] The Tunisian scholar Ṭāhir b. ʿĀshūr (d. 1973) was also influenced by the efforts to reform education in Egypt and the opinions of ʿAbduh expressed in the *Manār* journal. Scholars like ʿAbduh and Ibn ʿĀshūr were products of the nineteenth-century Euro-Ottoman culture of modernization. They sought to reform what appeared to be a lack of dynamism and innovation in Traditionalist organizations. For these individuals, the formulation of a defined plan by ʿulamāʾ who are aware of the requirements of the time and place is the first step toward educational reform.[61] Traditionalists often criticize ʿAbduh for his role in discounting the works of classical scholars. Muḥammad ʿAwwāma rebukes ʿAbduh for criticizing most of the books that were being taught at al-Azhar, because this led many young intellectuals to also label them as

outdated and as a result to dismiss the scholars themselves. He states that this was the first rupture that disconnected Muslims from their scholarly tradition—perhaps an exaggeration but, according to ʿAwwāma, ʿAbduh and others like him were the first in Islamic history to petition for a method of studying Islam that was critical and dismissive of classical scholarship.[62] For instance, Ṭāhā Ḥussein (d. 1973) a distinguished figure in Egypt's modernist movement, was inspired by ʿAbduh's criticism of previous scholarship. He promoted the idea that Islamic scholarship and most of its sciences were full of inaccuracies and fabrications. Ḥussein contended that pre-Islamic poetry was fabricated by later Muslim scholars for several reasons, one of which was to give credence to Qurʾānic myths.[63] Hussein's views attracted significant backlash which led him to abandon some of his more radical claims. Nevertheless, his highly critical approach left a significant impact.

Between the late eighteenth until the early twentieth centuries, sweeping transformations produced by modernization programs as well as European imperialism were leaving their impact on the position of traditionally trained ʿulamāʾ, facilitating the emergence of new spokesmen for Islam. Moreover, modern education brought with it new disciplines and methods of teaching, depriving the ʿulamāʾ of their centuries-old monopoly over the educational process. This produced new types of professionals and intellectuals who considered traditional Islamic knowledge irrelevant.[64] Since the ʿulamāʾ were supported by the Ottoman Empire, many of their institutions lost funding with the Empire's decline. Traditional scholarship and education declined when the state stopped supporting them.[65]

With the world rapidly changing from technological and scientific perspectives, many in the Muslim world aspired to catch up with the west and the traditional method of learning became more unpopular. Today, sharīʿa sciences are considered to be the domain of the underachiever. A degree in sharīʿa, generally speaking, does not lead to a well-paid career. The Tanzimat reforms of Ottoman Sultan Maḥmūd II adopted some aspects of western law, and thereby initiated a challenge to the supremacy of Islamic law. However, the fall of the Empire resulted in replacing the entire Islamic legal system with western substantive law. Consequently, the state, which was the major funder of education and employer, no longer needed experts in Islamic law.[66] Colonial governments' consolidation of education systems further marginalized Islamic knowledge. Along with a shift in education, Muslim legal systems were largely replaced by the introduction

of European codes. David Waines notes that, "In both cases it meant that those trained in traditional Islamic knowledge, the *ʿulamaʾ*, were disenfranchised and replaced socially by a new secularized Muslim elite."[67]

The shift away from employing the *ʿulamā* in governmental positions is important to understand the rise of intellectuals who did not undergo traditional training. However, their unemployability is also important for understanding how the *ʿulamāʾ* viewed themselves. The notion that the *ʿulamā* were merely "religious" professionals was novel. Prior to the rise of secular states, the primary function of the *madrasa*s was the education of scholars for state employment.[68] Although the loss of this function has meant the Sharia is now institutionally inoperative, it remains an important moral resource.

New educational systems paralyzed Traditionalist institutions. Scholars and students who studied in the Traditional system for years were out of work and not recognized by the state. Most students entering college sought to become doctors, engineers, teachers, or lawyers. It was students who could not get into any of these schools due to poor grades that would study Islamic sciences in the departments and faculties newly established at modern universities. The state and public accepted them as religious authorities due to this accreditation—which outraged Traditionalist scholars, who had undergone a much more rigorous curriculum and educational system and now had little hope in a career or being accepted anywhere outside of Traditionalist circles.[69] Göran Larsson explains that "Slowly, it became more rewarding to hold a doctoral degree from a Western university than to have a similar degree from an Islamic educational institution."[70]

The adoption of the modern university system over the traditional education helped diminish the authority of the *ʿulamāʾ* and paved the way for others to be considered authorities. Eickelman explains that the introduction of mass higher education in the Middle East has eroded the position of Traditionalists. He notes that "Religious authority in earlier generations derived from the mastery of authoritative texts studied under recognized scholars. Mass education fosters a direct, albeit selective, access to the printed word and a break with earlier traditions of authority."[71] ʿAwwāma laments that the shift in educational methods produced a new generation of professors who teach Islam based on what they think, even if that disagrees with the four schools of law or ḥadīth scholars such as Bukhārī or Muslim.[72]

The style of religious training through university system constitutes a significant break with the earlier emphasis on the written word, mediated

by an oral tradition and geared toward a mastery of accepted religious texts acquired through studying with recognized religious scholars. The university system delineates subjects and prescribed texts are taught by a changing array of teachers; competence is measured by examination.[73] Even the prestigious al-Azhar University was forced to abandon its age-old policy of requiring complete memorization of the Qurʾān as a pre-requisite for admission.[74]

Ultimately, the post-Ottoman political, educational, and religious context (shaped by colonization, modernization, and globalization) facilitated the contestation of traditional ʿulamāʾ and the issue of religious authority took center-stage. Traditionalists responded to the diversification and fragmentation of authority in the contemporary world by insisting that following the madhhabs protects individuals and the community from inconsistent application of Islamic law. In their view, bypassing traditional learning opens the door to legal anarchy and disorder.[75]

The New Media's Impact on Traditional Learning

With the rise of the internet, the mass consumption of Islamic knowledge is now at people's fingertips. Before the internet, anyone looking for detailed information on Islam had to consult a scholar or search through technical volumes. The overload of Islamic information available today has allowed people to learn without leaving their homes. While access to information is a great benefit to many, it comes with some pitfalls. The introduction of the printing press in the Muslim world played a certain role in the decline of traditional education, for an increased availability of books made it easy to learn without studying directly with a scholar. Because scholarship in the Ottoman Empire was primarily based on the ijāza system, those who claimed authority outside this system were not considered credible.

Traditional educational methods consisted of a developed and layered scholastic tradition of religious interpretation, which otherwise constrains and regulates, in a rigorous fashion, the output of opinions. With the minimization of this method through the fall of the traditional institutions and the rise of print and the internet, it is striking how relatively easy it is to become an authority. The rise in new forms of communication and media (print, audio cassettes, television, and the internet) gave people an outlet to share their understandings of Islam even if they did not have formal training in Islamic sciences.[76] The use of audio cassettes in the 1960s and 1970s was even used by scholars to reach the masses. For example, the tapes of the famous Egyptian preacher ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Kishk (d. 1996) were distributed

all over the world. Mass higher education, print, and the internet provided unprecedented access to Islamic texts and subjected their interpretation to techniques outside the framework of Traditionalist education.[77] This expanded the pool of people who could participate in religious education.

As noted, the nineteenth-century introduction of the printing press in the Arab world led to the emergence of a new class of Muslim intellectuals who successfully challenged the authority of the *ʿulamāʾ*. Without this new medium, the reformers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would hardly have had the same impact.[78] For instance, print was essential to the popularity of Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999), the most influential Salafi of the twentieth century. In 1957, Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh (d. 2013), a Damascene Salafi, established a publishing house in Damascus, al-Maktab al-Islāmī, which early on built a reputation for itself as a scholarly press that published critical editions of classical works which bolstered the Salafi mission, including many of the writings of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and his student Ibn Qayyim (d. 751/1350). These publications were distinguished because they contained detailed tables of contents and indexes, few printing errors, and most importantly, rigorous documentation of ḥadīth. It was in this latter capacity—as the ḥadīth editor—that Shāwīsh hired al-Albānī and through which al-Albānī's scholarship would be showcased.[79]

Previously, al-Albānī's writings were published through a Damascene reformist journal, *al-Tamaddun al-Islāmī*, which had limited circulation. Shāwīsh published many of al-Albānī's earlier writings with al-Maktab al-Islāmī, and with his distribution networks established al-Albānī's name and reputation among Salafi publics in the Gulf and elsewhere. Indeed, it was al-Albānī's writings through al-Maktab al-Islāmī that attracted the attention of leading Salafis in Saudi Arabia such as the former mufti ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Bāz (d. 1999). Al-Maktab al-Islāmī was al-Albānī's exclusive publisher for decades until he had a falling out with Shāwīsh in the 1990s and the two parted ways. Shāwīsh's pivotal role in spreading Salafi teachings was best expressed by ʿAlī al-Ṭanṭāwī (d. 1999), who said, "Were it not for Zuhayr, the views of Nāṣir [al-Dīn al-Albānī] would not have circulated."[80] Shāwīsh and al-Maktab al-Islāmī helped spread a form of Salafism that focused on ḥadīth verification and authenticity as the basis for true religion.

In contrast, for centuries, the *ʿulamāʾ* had the exclusive prerogative to scriptural interpretation and religious authority. Laity had no role in scriptural interpretation and did not have the tools to challenge religious authority because texts and outlets to share opinions were limited. A clear

example of how the mass proliferation of religious texts (through print and internet) have changed this considerably is the rise in Qurʾānic translations over the last twenty years.[81] Using the internet, one can find hundreds of previously non-existent Qurʾān translations as well as ḥadīth corpuses in multiple languages.[82] It is important to note that none of these internet sites are specifically autodidactic, but their collective presence has a mass effect.

Charles Hirschkind notes that "the printing press threatened to unleash the sacred text from the structure of discipline and authority that governed its social existence and ensured its ethical reception."[83] This challenged traditional pedagogical methods and provided an outlet for autodidacts to redefine Islam by taking its interpretation out of the hands of the ʿulamāʾ and appropriating for themselves the authority to interpret Islam. Once a book was printed it was now beyond the sphere of a scholar's direct authority. It was no longer possible for him to influence the readers' attitude toward the text. Additionally, the reader who lost communication with the scholar frequently ignored the commentary and focused solely on the original.[84]

The laity's independence from religious scholars and their direct access to scripture pose a significant challenge to the ʿulamāʾ because the latter are often asked by lay Muslims to explain the authenticity of the proof-texts they use as well as their method of coming to religious judgments. Göran Larsson explains that new information and technology are the agents that started the process in which the authority of Traditionalist ʿulamāʾ came to be questioned. This paved the way for scholars who preferred ijtihād over taqlīd, because the former stresses the importance of the individual rather than of the scholar.[85] For instance, reformers like al-Albānī, a self-taught Salafi scholar, may have inspired a "do it yourself" form of Islam. Al-Albānī considers the teacher to be important in the learning process, but criticized taqlīd and over-reverence of the scholarly class.[86] In particular, he insisted that lay people always ask scholars to provide proof-texts (dalīls) for their legal opinions, which empowered lay Muslims to take the interpretation and reconciliation of scripture into their own hands.[87]

The internet and searchable online religious libraries make it easy for lay Muslims to perform this "ijtihād." The availability of sources is what led the Salafi Muḥammad Sulṭān al-Khujnadī (d. 1960) to declare the parochialism of the four legal schools. By this account, one needs only the Qurʾān and major ḥadīth collections to understand the religion.[88] Fachrizal Halim refers to this as the phenomenon of "instant experts." These are intellectuals

who may not be trained in Islamic legal knowledge in the same manner as traditional ʿulamāʾ, but who are nonetheless capable of accessing the substantive content of legal knowledge.[89] The internet positions ʿulamāʾ as being in constant competition with the algorithmic results of Google searches. Therefore, there exists an easy avenue to challenge established religious interpretation and share it with the public, who most likely would not have come into contact with such views without the internet.[90] Intellectual Muslim reformers, dāʿīs, lay preachers, as well as entertainers offer themselves as the alternative voices of religious authority.

Everyday Muslims do not need to rely on their local scholars as means of knowledge, because websites like Islamqa.info and Askimam.com allow them to ask a question comfortably without leaving their home or revealing their identity.[91] The removal of the human element from the educational process also provides a number of obstacles for traditionally-trained scholars. For instance, they worry that untrained persons are prepared to interpret Islam without proper education. Peter Mandaville correctly notes that one can never really be sure whether the advice received on the internet "is coming from a classically trained religious scholar or a hydraulic engineer moonlighting as an amateur ʿalim."[92]

The phenomenon of seeking religious insight from non-experts through new media can be seen in the rise of Muslim televangelists and YouTubers. For instance, the shows of Egyptian televangelist Amr Khaled (b. 1967) are watched by millions across the world. Khaled has over thirty million fans on Facebook and over three hundred thousand subscribers on YouTube. In 2007, he was named the thirteenth most influential person in the world by *Time* magazine. Khaled broadcasts his religious advice, admonishments, and opinions on scripture to young viewers throughout the world. Ironically, Khaled is not a trained scholar of religion. He never studied at al-Azhar or any clerical institution or seminary but is rather an accountant by training.[93] Despite this lack of training and Traditionalist criticism of his authority, Khaled's message appeals to a large number of Muslims who want an easy way to understand Islamic tradition. Khaled's set is similar to Oprah Winfrey's and his style and method models that of Billy Graham and Joel Osteen.[94] Khaled and other YouTube scholars appeal to modern sensibilities which are often consumed with a flagrant sense of certainty. The anti-hierarchical, individually empowering, and simplistic hermeneutics of their methods appeal to many Muslims, but they stand

in stark contrast to Traditionalism, which provides a more complex and comprehensive approach to Islamic scripture.

By the standards of traditionally trained scholars, Khaled is not qualified to express his opinions on Islam. Many ʿulamāʾ, including famously Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (b. 1926), have questioned whether Khaled possesses the appropriate qualifications for his work.[95] Yet he is far from the only one to take on this role in a new way. As Reza Aslan notes, "All over the world, a slew of self-styled preachers, spiritual gurus, academics, activists, and amateur intellectuals have begun redefining Islam by taking its interpretation out of the iron grip of the Ulama and seizing for themselves the power to dictate the future of this rapidly expanding and deeply fractured faith."[96]

The internet has reconfigured traditional structures of authority and new authorities are emerging. Opportunities to acquire knowledge about Islam have emerged through YouTube, online universities, social media, and search engines such as Google. Millions of people use the internet as their primary source of information about Islam. By asking questions to "Shaykh Google," students no longer have to spend money to travel in search of knowledge and experience the challenges and culture shock that accompanied it. Instead, they can simultaneously search themes and terms in the Qurʾān, ḥadīth corpus, and thousands of Islamic texts in an instant. The internet also allows laypeople to convey their own understanding of Islam. This has serious implications for the way in which Islam is learned, given the diverse material and perspectives available online, as well as the often random and non-systematic method in which this information is accessed.[97]

Traditionalists position themselves as master-mediators of an Islamic tradition that is complex. The internet and search engines create a culture of immediacy (all answers are within the press of a button or a quick search). Traditionalists are thus often viewed as out of touch because of the difficulty in communicating the complexity of Islamic legal tradition without diluting it or undermining their authority.[98] In addition, they are in constant competition with popular preachers who attract large followings with appealing (if simplistic) presentations of Islamic subjects.

Reservations Against Self-Learning Among Modern ʿUlamāʾ

Traditionally-trained scholars historically cautioned about the educational pitfalls of learning without a teacher, as traced above. They held that books on their own are a threat to the epistemological basis on which Islamic revelation and traditional educational methods stood.[99] Traditionally-trained

scholars found self-learning problematic because it threatens the entire educational and authoritative system of Islamic learning. Without particular expectations of qualifications through the teacher-student link, the untrained could effortlessly claim scholarly authority. Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī (d. 790/1388) argues that when this link is interrupted, heresy (*bidʿa*) occurs, because abandoning the adherence to a teacher is an indication of following an evil innovation in religion.[100] In other words, al-Shāṭibī considers knowledge acquired outside of this link to lack authority and validity.

In contemporary times, this critique has been heightened. One might graduate from the most prestigious western universities, but if one did not learn Islam from a qualified Muslim teacher through the *ijāza* system, his knowledge is not considered authentic by Muslims who cleave to the traditional system.[101] The production of a scholar in the traditional system would not be possible by self-learning, intensive weekend seminars, or online classes. Studying directly with a teacher for extended periods was vital because it allowed the teacher to vouch for the student at the scholarly, spiritual, and personal level. Those who do not follow the traditional method of learning tend to consider the Muslim community to have gone wrong and believe it their job to put it right. They attempt to retrieve the true teachings of Islam from what they regard as oppressive institutions which caused centuries of stagnant scholarship and blind imitation of scholarly authority. They believe that one will come to an authentic reading of scripture by putting tradition to the side and approaching Islamic texts with fresh eyes.[102] The emergence of reformers over the last few centuries who insisted the texts are easy to understand opened the floodgates of individuals who dismissed the importance of scholarly expertise in textual interpretation.

Muḥammad Saʿīd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī (d. 2013), the Syrian scholar and one of the most influential Traditionalists of the twentieth century, explains that there are certain unequivocal texts whose meanings are easy to understand for both scholars and non-scholars. However, there are also verses that common Muslims cannot properly understand, such as verses relating to divorce, inheritance, prayer, and charity. In this case, it is only the ʿulamāʾ who have the ability to interpret these texts. Traditionally-trained ʿulamāʾ often defend their expertise and exclusive ability to interpret scripture by comparing themselves to experts in other fields, and warn of the chaos that would ensue if common people bypassed those experts.[103] A common analogy is that of physicians being challenged by patients brandishing internet opinions about treatments and diagnoses. Physicians would point

out the dangers of people practicing medicine based only on their online research.[104] However, the analogies provided by Traditionalists are often dismissed by popularist preachers as appeals to authority.

ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (d. 1997), a Syrian-born Ḥanafī ḥadīth scholar, describes the phenomenon of interpreting religion without proper qualifications as "the affliction of modern times" (*muṣībat al-ʿaṣr*). He states that some people think they can surpass previous scholars using only books, the Qurʾān, Sunna, and their reason. Abū Ghudda notes that autodidacts argue that an unprecedented plethora of information is now widely available. Like other *ʿulamāʾ*, Abū Ghudda argues that there are things beyond the texts, such as the interpretation of the scholarly community, that are lost when one studies alone. In his view, it is dangerously misleading to approach texts and discuss them outside of their historical, cultural and linguistic contexts.[105] Ismāʿīl al-Anṣārī (d. 1997), a Saudi ḥadīth scholar, observes that there are other problems with studying only from texts. Texts commonly have typographical errors; without a teacher to identify these mistakes the person will follow them unknowingly. Self-taught individuals bypass teachers in hopes of not performing *taqlīd*, but instead they end up performing *taqlīd* of printed books. He states, "This is what blameworthy *taqlīd* produces from the one who blames praiseworthy *taqlīd*!"[106]

The internet often produces more confusion than knowledge. Although people may think they are learning when they search the internet, they are more likely to be immersed in data they do not understand. As Tom Nichols points out, "Seeing words on a screen is not the same as understanding them."[107] Put differently, what often happens online is an avoidance of reading in the traditional sense. It is not reading with the aim of learning but reading to win an argument or to confirm a pre-existing belief. Experts who insist on a systematic method of learning and logic cannot compete with a machine that gives readers their preferred answers.[108]

The late-Ottoman Ḥanafī jurist Ibn ʿĀbidīn (d. 1258/1842), the most distinguished scholar of his time, explains that the absence of a teacher to correct students' misunderstandings results in lay readers not fully grasping technical terminology. Superficiality is what often accompanies self-study and is perhaps amplified in today's era of immediate information and instant gratification.[109] Muḥammad Ḥasan Hitou (b. 1943), a Syrian Shāfiʿī jurist who studied at al-Azhar, gives an example of one of his own students who read a text that says *Yandub saddu furja fī al-ṣaff*, which means that one who is praying can fill in the gap. The dots on the last letter in the word *furja* were missing, as is common in many Arabic texts. The student

mistakenly read it as "*Yandub saddu farjihi fī al-ṣaff*," which means that one should cover their private part when standing in line for prayer. When asked to explain the text, the student said that during prayer one should place a tissue in their underwear to ensure no urine gets on their clothes. Hitou notes that this student should not be chastized because he was learning with a teacher and was happily corrected for his misunderstanding. However, autodidacts do not have anyone to correct their misunderstanding of texts. What is worse, Hitou explains, is that they also want to enforce their misunderstanding of texts on everyone else.[110]

Muṣṭafā al-Sibāʿī (d. 1964), a prominent Syrian politician and ḥadīth scholar, makes a similar point. He gives an example of a layperson who refrained from getting a haircut on Friday morning for several years because he had read a ḥadīth that prohibited *ḥalq* before the Friday prayers. Eventually, he learned that the ḥadīth was actually talking about having groups sit in circles in the mosques (*ḥilaq*) because they disrupt and inconvenience the congregants.[111]

Traditionalists lament a new generation who have a superficial understanding of Islam but are nevertheless in positions of leadership. Calls for *ijtihād* and reform include the non-trained layperson. Hitou notes that this call to *ijtihād* evolved into a dismissal of the *fiqh* that tens of thousands of the greatest scholars of the *umma* contributed to in order to build an Islamic system that governed the Islamic world for fourteen centuries. He says: "This call to *ijtihād* is actually an invitation to destroy this great structure." He goes on to say that self-learning results in thinking that the early scholars were mistaken and accusing them of not following scripture. "They tell people not to follow the great classical scholars, but to follow the Sunna of the Messenger of God, as though the classical scholars were enemies of the Sunna."[112] Traditionalists consider the call to return to the Qurʾān and Sunna instead of the *madhhab*s an implicit accusation that the *madhhab*s follow something other than the Qurʾān and Sunna. What is meant by calls to prefer scripture over scholarly opinions is that the *madhhab*s should not be followed when they contradict a text. While that directive was directed toward the scholars, lay Muslims are now often included in this invitation to evaluate legal opinions in light of scripture. Consequently, lay Muslims begin questioning scholarly opinions despite their lack of expertise.

Abū Ghudda notes that *ijtihād* cannot be accomplished by only reading texts. That is a challenging endeavor for which most people are unqualified. He responds to autodidacts who claim to bypass the legal schools and

follow the Qurʾān and Sunna, "So does that mean that Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik, Aḥmad, and Shāfiʿī follow the Bible?! Some people think if they read a few books on ḥadīth they become *muḥaddith*s!"[113] In other words, by claiming to use only their reason and scripture, autodidacts insinuate that ʿulamāʾ follow their personal opinions rather than scripture.

When autodidacts discard traditional learning methods it is more than just cutting corners but a rejection of scholarly institutions and their authority. For traditionally-trained ʿulamāʾ, education is not only the ability to cite scripture but also to understand it according to their principles of interpretation. The internet created a democratization of Islamic knowledge that breaks down the standard notions of religious authority. This democratization of knowledge was not viewed positively by everyone. Jonathan Brown explains that although there are frequent calls for a "Muslim Martin Luther," Traditionalist ʿulamāʾ would suggest that much of the turmoil and extremism in the Muslim world results precisely from unlearned Muslims deciding to break with tradition and approach their religion Luther-like, by scripture alone.[114] For example, while condemning ISIS, Hamza Yusuf Hanson (b. 1960), a famous American Muslim, complained how "stupid young boys" have dismissed scholarly tradition which requires years of training for the superficiality and errors of internet searches.[115]

Similarly, Hitou notes that self-learning leads lay intellectuals to think that they have mastered texts, and they give fatwas that contradict scholarly consensus.[116] This undermines traditional scholars because autodidacts use texts found on the internet to overshadow thousands of scholars trained within the traditional system. Abū Ghudda mockingly refers to the computer as *ḥāfiẓ al-ʿaṣr* ("the greatest scholar of modern times"), where people leave real-life teachers and resort to a machine for information.[117] Like Abū Ghudda, the American scholar Yasir Qadhi (b. 1975) describes the advent of online culture and its lack of appreciation for genuine knowledge as one "of the biggest tragedies of the modern era."[118]

Qadhi explains that most people cannot distinguish between a scholar, a student of sacred knowledge, an eloquent preacher who lacks knowledge, and a misguided individual. Although all of these categories of people exist offline, in the online world they are often indistinguishable. He cautions his Facebook followers that listening to lectures online in a haphazard manner, and from various disciplines, might give the false impression that one is grounded in Islamic sciences. However, he warns that most of these individuals have not even studied a single science of Islam from cover to cover. Why is it challenging for people to distinguish between a lay preacher and a

scholar? The internet allows people to mimic intellectual accomplishments by indulging in what Nichols calls an "illusion of expertise" supported by an unlimited amount of facts. Oftentimes, these facts are themselves dubious, given the internet's flood of misinformation. Even then, facts are not the same thing as knowledge and scholarship. Typing words into a search engine is not research; rather, it is asking programmable machines that do not actually understand human beings and the questioner.[119] Traditionalists propose that the best way to prevent misunderstanding is to have a real-life attachment to an actual scholar. Requesting that Muslims consult scholars in person is important from the Traditionalist perspective because it allows scholars to provide context beyond information found online. It also gives individuals the opportunity to ask questions rather than passively receive information.

The Pakistani *madrasa* teacher ʿAdnān Kaka Khel suggests that misguidance in religion is guaranteed when there is an absence of personal transmission. In his view, opinionated modern scholars claiming to reform Islam using new methods of learning are actually carrying axes and demolishing the knowledge that Muslims preserved for over a millennium. Kaka Khel claims that these individuals do nothing but sow doubt about Islam.[120] Online learning poses a threat to Traditionalist expertise because it creates a space where laity mistakenly equate a moving sermon or a post on social media with rigorous study of Islam under a genuine scholar. Qadhi echoes the concern of many Muslim scholars throughout the world when he states, "there is no substitute for going through the proper and professional training of scholarship that has been the hallmark of this religion from the earliest of times."[121]

A Transformation in Islamic Education

The internet is not the primary means of undermining the expertise of Traditionalists. Rather, the internet accelerated a collapse of communication between experts and laypeople. This miscommunication between experts and lay people started much earlier with the printing press. Tom Nichols accurately explains that "the internet is the printing press at the speed of fiber optics."[122] The printing press and the internet not only challenged the authority of the *ʿulamāʾ*, they also changed it. While laypeople become more literate than ever before, scholars who train under the traditional method are generally unprepared to deal with that phenomenon. They are threatened by the internet because they feel they are witnessing the "death

of expertise" in which experts must suddenly compete with non-experts over the proper interpretation of religious texts.

The internet also changed how scholars present themselves.[123] The ʿulamāʾ were prompted to adopt technology in their teachings in order to attract wider audiences. Instead of students flocking to the classes of prestigious scholars, scholars now have fan pages, thousands of followers, personal logos, and even professionally-edited videos with music and visual effects to attract viewers. In the space of the internet, traditionally-trained scholars, autodidacts, activists, as well as popular preachers are now considered celebrities with hundreds of thousands of social media followers.

This technological revolution transformed the nature of the student-teacher relationship and its etiquette. The internet strips away the social contracts by which Traditionalists sought to maintain scholarly etiquette and reduce extreme interactions. With instant messaging and private forms of communication, scholars can be contacted by men and women at any time of the day or night.[124] The online relationship often conflicts with traditional pedagogical etiquette. Using their computers and smartphones, students can communicate with their teacher in real time. The distance between the teacher and the student grows shorter and the student-teacher etiquette that circumscribed their interactions changes. In the traditional scheme, students were required to leave their home, sit at the feet of a teacher, mingle with other students, pray in congregation, and live the lifestyle of a student of religious knowledge. Online learning lacks this human interaction which is an essential element of traditional learning.

Conclusion

Print and the internet changed the way modern Muslims learn and interact with Islamic knowledge. Many teaching institutions and individuals are adopting new modes of learning, remaking the dynamics of authority that historically structured traditional learning. Whereas previously it was the ʿulamāʾ who spoke for Islam, the internet allows everyone to share their views about Islam through videos, blogs, and social media outlets. Traditionalists are sometimes critical of learning solely from the internet because it creates a space where laity can also participate in teaching Islam and reshaping scholarly authority. Yet Traditionalists have ultimately embraced print and the internet in order to remain relevant and to compete with others who claim to speak on behalf of Islam.

This new mode of learning causes a shift away from the integral status of the teacher in Islamic education. The internet produces a new form

of Islamic learning, one in which the teacher is a distant, unpersonalized, and customizable figure in the hands of the consumers of information. This technological transformation creates competition over religious authority between the *ʿulamāʾ*, who are trained in Islamic sciences, and religious activists, whose authority is based upon persuasion, charisma, and the interpretation of texts they access primarily through print and the internet. Although traditional learning is alive in many Muslim communities, traditional education and authority are increasingly displaced and reshaped by individuals whose primary method of studying Islam is through text.

Endnotes

1. Gary Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments* (London: Pluto Press, 2003); idem, *Virtually Islamic: Computer-Mediated Communication and Cyber Islamic Environments* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000); Göran Larsson, *Muslims and the New Media: Historical and Contemporary Debates* (Vermont: Ashgate, 2011); Jon Anderson, "The Internet and Islamʾs New Interpreters," in *New Media in the Muslim World,* ed. Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999); Francis Robinson, "Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print," *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 1 (1993): 229-251.

2. Tom Nichols, "The Death of Expertise," *The Federalist*, January 17, 2014, http://thefederalist.com/2014/01/17/the-death-of-expertise/. Nichols later published a book with the same title (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). Citations of *The Death of Expertise* throughout this article are from the book unless not accompanied by a page number. On the internet and religious authority see Heidi Campbell, "Whoʾs Got the Power? Religious Authority and the Internet," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12, no. 3 (2007): 1043-1062.

3. Nichols, "Death of Expertise."

4. Nabil Echchaibi notes that unlike the political arena, the religious one allowed for more individual autonomy and maneuvering of structures. Individual Muslims feel summoned to use the internet as a place of mediated *daʿwa* to contribute to the reconstruction of their communities as well as the broader Muslim umma. See Echchaibi, "From Audiotapes to Videoblogs: The Delocalization of Authority in Islam," *Nations and Nationalism* 17 (2009): 20.

5. Popular preachers were prominent in Islam since medieval times but only recently acquired technological outlets (like the internet) to promote themselves. In many medieval texts, popular preachers are viewed as a threat to

Islamic religious authority and to public morality. Some could attract huge crowds of followers (through their personal charisma, emotional performances, personal appearance, impressive clothing, and so on); the jurists viewed them with suspicion because they were often not trained or educated in law and theology. See Jonathan Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001). Also see ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Quṣṣāṣ wa-l-Mudhakkirīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1971).

6.   Several other scholars have similarly defined this group. See Jonathan Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy* (London: Oneworld, 2014). Suheil Laher correctly notes that Traditionalism is composed of a "three-fold knot": adherence to a juridical school, theology, and Sufism. See Laher, "Re-Forming the Knot: ʿAbdullāh al-Ghumārī's Iconoclastic Sunnī Neo-Traditionalism," *Journal of College of Sharia and Islamic Studies* 1 (2018): 202.

7.   On modernity, see Emin Poljarevic, "Islamic Tradition and Meanings of Modernity," *International Journal for History, Culture, and Modernity* 3 (2015): 29-57.

8.   William Graham, "Traditionalism in Islam: As Essay in Interpretation," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23, no. 3 (1993): 522. On 'tradition' rather than 'traditionalism', see Muhammad Q. Zaman, "The ʿUlamāʾ: Scholarly Tradition and New Public Commentary," in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 6, ed. Robert W. Hefner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 3-16; Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam" (Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986); Kasper Mathiesen, "Anglo-American 'Traditional Islam' and its Discourse of Orthodoxy," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 13 (2013): 191-195.

9.   Scientific truth is based on empirically reproducible data, whereas religious truth (for scriptural religions such as normative Islam) is based on authority of sacred texts and precedent within the religious community.

10.   For instance, approximately 55 of ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda's 73 publications are commentaries on the works of previous scholars. See Muḥammad Āl Rashīd, *Imdād al-Fattāḥ bi-Asānīd wa-Marwīyāt al-Shaykh ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī, 1999), 180-215. On Abū Ghudda, see Emad Hamdeh, "The Role of the ʿUlamāʾ in the Thoughts of ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda," *The Muslim World* 107, no. 3 (2017): 359-374.

11.   Zaman, "The ʿUlamāʾ," 10. In this sense, 'traditional' scholarship consisted of a rethinking, adaptation, and expansion of the legal tradition, while 'modern' scholarship often portrays the pre-modern Islamic tradition as rigid and stagnant. Recent works on the history of pre-modern Islamic law have demonstrated that the door to *ijtihād* was never closed, but the schools of

law were continuously evolving. See Zaman, "The ʿUlamāʾ," 18-21; Sherman Jackson, *Islamic Law and the State: The Constitutional Jurisprudence of Shihab al-Din al-Qarafi* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996); Wael Hallaq, "Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16 (1984): 3-41.

12. Mohammad Fadel, "Islamic Law and Constitution-Making: The Authoritarian Temptation and the Arab Spring," *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 53, no. 2 (2016): 474-75.

13. The term Traditional Islam or Traditionalism incorporates the essential antithesis and antidote to many manifestations and versions of reformist, modernist, and even revivalist Islam in the modern period in its very name. See Mathiesen, "Anglo-American ʿTraditional Islam,'" 193-194.

14. Ibid.

15. Zaman, "The ʿUlamāʾ," 10.

16. See https://qibla.com/about/how-we-teach/, accessed September 10, 2015. There are other efforts and websites, such as shafiifiqh.com, which are less popular but nevertheless seek to respond to contemporary legal challenges while preserving the legacy of Sunni traditional knowledge. See Fachrizal Halim, "Reformulating the *Madhhab* in Cyberspace: Legal Authority, Doctrines, and *Ijtihād* Among Contemporary Shāfiʿī ʿUlamā," *Islamic Law and Society* 22 (2015): 425.

17. The *isnād* is a record of transmission and is not the instrument of pedagogy. However, the record of transmission could be used to establish a relationship. In other words, the word *isnād* here refers to the student-teacher relationship.

18. Robinson, "Technology and Religious Change," 231.

19. Jonathan Brown, *Ḥadīth: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 273-274. Despite going through this system, some Traditionalists still arrive at conclusions that are condemned by the vast majority of Muslim scholars. For instance, the Egyptian scholar ʿIzzat ʿAṭiyya gave a controversial fatwa if a woman can breastfeed her male coworker, they would establish a family bond that would make their seclusion in the workplace permissible. This caused a great deal of backlash and he eventually withdrew his fatwa.

20. Muḥammad ʿAwwāma, *Adab al-Ikhtilāf fī Masāʾil al-ʿIlm waʾl-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 1997), 159.

21. On curricula and the *ijāza* system, see Jan Witkam, "The Human Element between Text and Reader: The *Ijāza* in Arabic Manuscripts," in *Education and Learning in the Early Islamic World,* ed. Claude Gilliot (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012); G. Vajda, "*Idjaza*," in *EI2*, 3:1020-21. On *ijāza*s, see Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid, "Ijāzāt al-Samāʿ fī-l-Makhṭūṭāt al-Qadīma", *Majallat Maʿhad al-Makhṭūṭāt al-ʿArabīya/Revue de l'institut des manuscrits arabes* (Cairo) 1 (1955): 232-251; Qāsim Aḥmad al-Sāmarrāʾī,

"al-Ijāzāt wa-Taṭawwuruhā al-Taʾrīkhīya", *ʿĀlam al-Kutub* 2 (1981): 278-285; Yūnus al-Khārūf, "al-Samāʿāt wa-l-Ijāzāt fī-l-Makhṭūṭāt al-ʿArabīya," *Risālat al-Maktaba* (Jordanien) 10 (1975): 16-22; Devin J. Stewart, "The Doctorate of Islamic Law in Mamluk Egypt and Syria." in *Law and Education in Medieval Islam,* ed. Joseph Lowry, Devin Stewart, and Shawkat Toorawa (Cambridge: EJW Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004), 45-90.

22.   Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 18-20. Also see George Makdisi, *Institutionalized Learning as a Self-Image of Islam, Islam's Understanding of Itself,* ed. Speros Vryonis, Jr. (UCLA Press, 1983); Dale Eickelman, "The Art of Memory: Islamic Education and its Social Reproduction," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20, no. 4 (1978): 485-516.

23.   Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 23.

24.   Yusuf Talal DeLorenzo, *Imam Bukhari's Book of Muslim Morals and Manners* (Alexandria: Al-Saadawi Publications, 1997), i-iii.

25.   Ibid., ii.

26.   Ibid., ii-iii.

27.   Muḥammad ʿAwwāma, "Ḥadīth al-Dhikrayāt maʿ al-Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAwwāma," http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6cgbKunEEQY. ʿAwwāma was one of ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda's main students. Abū Ghudda was strong critic of self-learning and also the student of Muṣṭafā Ṣabrī (d. 1954) the last Shaykh al-Islam of the Ottoman Empire. He experienced first-hand the frustration and decline of Traditionalist authority and spent his life trying to revive it.

28.   ʿAwwāma, *Adab al-Ikhtilāf,* 149.

29.   Robinson, "Technology and Religious Change," 236.

30.   Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 133. On active learning, see Annie Murphy Paul, "Are College Lectures Unfair?" *The New York Times*, September 12, 2015.

31.   Muhammad Mustafa al-Azami, *Studies in Ḥadīth Methodology and Literature* (Indianapolis: Islamic Teaching Center, 1977), 30. Azami notes that this is similar to modern copyright laws in which one could buy a thousand copies of a book but may not print even one copy without permission. Similarly, Muslim scholars would not allow someone to use the material in a book by simply obtaining it. Also see ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, *al-Isnād min al-Dīn* (Aleppo: Maktabat al-Maṭbūʿāt al-Islāmiyya, 1996), 146.

32.   Brown, *Ḥadīth*, 273.

33.   Muhammad Mustafa al-Azami, *The History of the Qurʾanic Text from Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments* (UK: Islamic Academy, 2003), 147-148.

34. Muhammad Ibn Adam, "Learning from a Teacher & the Importance of Isnad," Daruliftaa, September 3, 2004, http://www.daruliftaa.com/node/5795?txt_QuestionID.

35. See Daniel Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

36. ʿAwwāma, "*Ḥadīth al-Dhikrayāt.*"

37. On the history of the status of the Companions, especially in ḥadīth literature, see Scott C. Lucas, *Constructive Critics, Hadith Literature, and the Articulation of Sunni Islam: The Legacy of Ibn Saʿd, Ibn Maʿīn, and Ibn Ḥanbal* (Boston: Brill, 2004), 221-282.

38. ʿAlī b. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal fi-l-Milal wa-l-Ahwāʾ wa-l-Niḥal* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1996), 4:185-188.

39. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda, "Lecture in Turkey," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dobft16fNe8.

40. Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, *Al-Jāmiʾ al-Kabīr Sunan al-Tirmidhī* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1996), *Bāb Al-ʿIlm,* 4:414 no. 2682. Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī has a treatise on this ḥadīth where he defines who a scholar is and how one is to properly attain the level of scholarship. See Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, *Majmūʿ Rasāʾil Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī* (Cairo: al-Fārūq al-Ḥadītha li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr, 2001), 1:5-60.

41. George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 7.

42. Laury Silvers, "The Teaching Relationship in Early Sufism: A Reassessment of Fritz Meier's Definition of the Shaykh al-Tarbiya and the Shaykh al-Taʿlīm," *The Muslim World* 93:1 (2003): 72.

43. Mathiesen, "Anglo-American 'Traditional Islam' and its Discourse of Orthodoxy," 204.

44. Ibid.

45. For example, see Muḥammad b. Jamāʿa, *Tadhkirat al-Sāmiʿ wa-l-Mutakallim fī Adab al-ʿĀlim wa-l-Mutaʿalim* (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 2012); Burhān al-Islām al-Zarnūjī, *Taʿlīm al-Muttaʿallim Ṭarīq al-Taʿallum* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1981); Yūsuf b. ʿAbd Allāh Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Jāmiʿ Bayān al-ʿIlm wa Faḍlihi wa mā Yanbaghī fī Riwāyatihi wa Ḥamlihi* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1975); Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Jāmiʿ li Akhlāq al-Rāwī wa Ādāb al-Sāmiʿ* (al-Dammām: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 2011).

46. Yedullah Kazmi, "The Notion of Murabbī in Islam: An Islamic Critique of Trends in Contemporary Education," *Islamic Studies,* no. 2 (1999): 231.

47. See Anderson, "The Internet and Islam's New Interpreters," 42.

48. Silvers, "The Teaching Relationship in Early Sufism," 73.

49. Zahra Sabri, "Why 'Sufism' Is Not What It Is Made out to Be," *Herald Magazine*, May 28, 2018, https://herald.dawn.com/news/1398514.

50. For instance, Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī composed his *Taʾrīkh al-Kabīr* while sitting next to the Prophet's grave. He organized the names in alphabetical order, but began with the Prophet and then those named Muḥammad, out of love and reverence for him. See his *Kitāb al-Taʾrīkh al-Kabīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1986), 1:6-11.

51. Brown, *Ḥadīth,* 273.

52. Kazmi, "The Notion of Murabbī in Islam," 213.

53. Ibid.

54. Mathiesen, "Anglo-American 'Traditional Islam' and its Discourse of Orthodoxy," 204.

55. Eickelman, "The Art of Memory," 487-488.

56. Mona Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate: A Transregional History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 10.

57. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival,* 18-20.

58. Suha Farouki & Nafi Basheer, eds., *Islamic Thought in the Twentieth Century* (London: IB Tauris, 2004), 6.

59. See Yvonne Haddad, "Muhammad Abduh: Pioneer of Islamic Reform," in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival,* ed. Ali Rahnema (London: Zed Books, 1994), 31. Also see Uthmān Amīn, *Rāʾid al-Fikr al-Miṣrī: al-Imām Muḥammad Abduh* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anjlū al-Miṣrīyah, 1965), 25.

60. Eickelman, "The Art of Memory," 488-489.

61. Basheer Nafi, "Ṭāhir Ibn ʿĀshūr: The Career and Thought of a Modern Reformist *ʿālim*, with Special Reference to His Work of Tafsīr," *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 7, no. 1 (2005): 13.

62. ʿAwwāma, *Adab al-Ikhtilāf,* 161-162.

63. Ibid. Also see "Ṭāhā Ḥusayn," *Encyclopædia Britannica,* November 10, 2018, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Taha-Husayn.

64. Farouki and Basheer, *Islamic Thought,* 6.

65. See Rudolph Peters, "Religious Attitudes towards Modernization in the Ottoman Empire: A Nineteenth Century Pious Text on Steamships, Factories and the Telegraph," *Die Welt des Islams* 1, no. 4 (1986): 76-105.

66. Cardinal Monique, "Islamic Legal Theory Curriculum: Are the Classics Taught Today?," *Islamic Law and Society* 12, no. 2 (2005): 268-269.

67. David Waines, "Islam," in *Religion in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformations*, ed. Linda Woodhead (New York: Routledge, 2002), 194.

68. Brannon Ingram, *Revival from Below: The Deoband Movement and Global Islam* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 40-44.

69. Abū Ghudda, "Lecture in Turkey."

70. Larsson, *Muslims and the New Media,* 41.

71. Dale Eickelman, "Mass Higher Education and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary Arab Societies," *American Ethnologist* 19, no. 4 (1992): 646.

72. ʿAwwāma, *Adab al-Ikhtilāf,* 164.

73.   Eickelman, "Mass Higher Education," 650.

74.   Larsson, *Muslims and the New Media,* 37.

75.   Halim, "Reformulating the *Madhhab* in Cyberspace," 433.

76.   On cassette tapes and Islamic revival, see Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press 2009). Also see Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, "New Media in the Muslim World," in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Politics* (Oxford, 2014).

77.   Anderson, "The Internet and Islam's New Interpreters," 49.

78.   Jan Scholz, Are Selge, Max Stille, and Johannes Zimmermann, "Listening Communities? Some Remarks on the Construction of Religious Authority in Islamic Podcasts," *Die Welt Des Islams* 3, no. 4 (2008): 460. Also see Anderson, "The Internet and Islam's New Interpreters," 48.

79.   Jawad Qureshi, "Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh (1925-2013) and al-Maktab al-Islāmī: Print, Hadith Verification, and Authenticated Islam," presentation of an unpublished paper at the American Academy of Religion, November 21, 2016. ʿAlī Jumʿa also attributes al-Albānī's popularity to Shāwīsh: see "Wallāhu Aʿlam: al-Duktur ʿAlī Jumʿa Yataḥaddath ʿan Adawāt al-Albānī fī Taḍʿīf al-Aḥādīth," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhiYnXx2d9Q.

80.   Qureshi, "Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh (1925-2013) and al-Maktab al-Islāmī."

81.   On the rise and impact of print in the Muslim world, see Larsson, *Muslims and the New Media,* 21-45.

82.   For example, there were a total of four English translations in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. Conversely, there were approximately forty translations in the twentieth century, and thirty in the twenty-first century. Charles Hirschkind argues that the authority and transmission of the Qurʾān were based on both hearing and listening. It is not possible to obtain religious authority through a single medium because it interconnects the ear, heart, and voice. See Charles Hirschkind, "Media and the Qurʾān," in *The Encyclopedia of the Quran,* ed. Jane McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 342. On the Qurʾān and new media, also see Larsson, *Muslims and the New Media,* 167-193.

83.   Hirschkind, "Media and the Qurʾān," 343.

84.   Reinhard Schulze, "The Birth of Tradition and Modernity in the 18th and 19th Century Islamic Culture: The Case of Printing," *Culture and History* 16 (1997): 48.

85.   Larsson, *Muslims and the New Media,* 44.

86.   On al-Albānī's encouragement of laity to challenge scholars, see Emad Hamdeh, "Qurʾān and Sunna or the Madhhabs? A Salafi Polemic Against Islamic Legal Tradition," *Islamic Law and Society* 24, no. 3 (June 2017): 1-43. On al-Albānī's life and autodidactic education, see Emad Hamdeh, "The

Formative Years of an Iconoclastic Salafi Scholar," *The Muslim World* 106, no. 3 (2016): 411-432.

87.   See Jonathan Brown, "Is Islam Easy to Understand or Not? Salafis, the De-mocratization of Interpretation and the Need for the Ulema," *Journal of Islamic Studies* (2014): 1-28. On al-Albānī encouraging laity to challenge scholars, see Hamdeh, "Qurʾān and Sunna or the Madhhabs?"

88.   Muḥammad Sulṭān al-Khujnadī (d. 1380/1960), *Hal al-Muslim Mulzam bi-Ittibāʿ Madhhab Muʿayyan min al-Madhāhib al-Arbaʿa?*, ed. Salīm Hilālī (Amman: al-Maktaba al-Islāmīya, 1984).

89.   Halim, "Reformulating the *Madhhab* in Cyberspace," 425.

90.   Scholz et al., "Listening Communities," 462.

91.   The importance of knowing the identity of the questioner is more import-ant in a fatwa than it is in transmitting knowledge. Fatwas are often geared toward the specific questioner and not meant to be general. However, these fatwas are available online for others to access and adopt for their particular case, even if the mufti may not have intended it for them. This poses a prob-lem to scholars because it sometimes results in people choosing fatwas that best suit their personal interests or what they find easiest (the process glibly referred to as "fatwa shopping"). In the past, this would have required travel-ing or directly communicating via phone or mail with numerous scholars to obtain a variety of opinions. In some cases, scholars refused to give fatwas if the question was tied to a local cultural issue that they did not have knowl-edge of. The internet removes the time, locality, and particularity of the fatwa. Internet search engines provide a large database of information that supplies common people with a wide array of fatwas and religious teachings, but not the tools to properly deal with it. On the internet and the process of decision-making and construction of Islamic knowledge, see Vít Šisler, "The Internet and the Construction of Islamic Knowledge in Europe," *Masaryk University Journal of Law and Technology* 1, no. 2 (2007): 205-217.

92.   Peter Mandaville, "Reimagining Islam in Diaspora: The Politics of Mediated Community," *International Communication Gazette* 63, nos. 2-3 (2001): 183.

93.   Reza Aslan, *No God but God* (New York: Random House, 2011), 281.

94.   Peter Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 394. Khaled has also been dismissed by activist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood for being out of touch with the reality and struggles of every-day Egyptians. They dismiss him as being representative of what Haenni and Tammam have called "air-conditioned Islam." See Patrick Haenni and Husam Tammam, "Egypt's Air-Conditioned Islam," *Le Monde Diplomatique,* September 2003.

95.   Mandaville, *Islam and Politics,* 395.

96.   Aslan, *No God but God,* 281.

97.   Bunt, *Virtually Islamic,* 3.

98.   Ingram, *Revival from Below,* 213.

99.   Paul Heck, "The Epistemological Problem of Writing in Islamic Civilization: al-Ḫaṭīb al-Baġdādī's (d. 463/1071) 'Taqyid al-ʿilm'," *Studia Islamica*, no. 94 (2002): 86.

100. Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt* (al-Khubar: Dār Ibn ʿAffān, 1997), 1:145.

101. On a separate but related issue, ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda explains that while some Orientalists who study Islam are objective and well-intentioned, their knowledge is still not considered authentic because it lacks the methodology and spirituality that is passed down in Traditionalist circles. He explains that Orientalists often err, because "they acquire knowledge from other than its people, they acquire it from books, and they study it in a language other than their own. They are studying sciences without having a spiritual connection to them and base their study on faulty methodologies established by their predecessors. On top of that, there is still the influence of their upbringing and beliefs which overcomes them, and they end up diverging from genuine knowledge." See Aḥmad Shākir, *Taṣḥīḥ al-Kutub wa Ṣunʿu al-Fahāris wa Kayfiyat Ḍabṭ al-Kitāb wa Sabq al-Muslimīn al-Afranj fī Dhālik,* ed. ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (Cairo: Maktabat al-Sunna, 1994), 13.

102. See Brown, "Is Islam Easy to Understand?" 1-28. Zaman, "The ʿUlamāʾ," 8.

103. Muḥammad Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, *Al-Lā Madhhabiyya Akhṭar Bidʿa Tuhaddid al-Sharīʿa al-Islāmiyya* (Damascus: Dār al-Farābī, 2005), 146.

104. Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age,* 3.

105. Abū Ghudda, "Lecture in Turkey."

106. Ismāʿīl al-Anṣārī, *Ibāḥat al-Taḥallī bi l-Dhahab al-Muḥallaq wa-l-Radd ʿAlā al-Albānī fī Taḥrīmi-hi* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Imam al-Shāfiʿī, 1988), 106.

107. Nichols, *Death of Expertise,* 119.

108. Ibid., 115-120.

109. Muḥammad Amīn Ibn ʿĀbidīn, *Radd al-Muḥtār ʿalā al-Durra al-Mukhtār Sharḥ Tanwīr al-Abṣār* (Riyadh: Dār ʿĀlim al-Kutub, 2003), 139.

110. Muḥammad Ḥasan Hitou, *al-Mutafayhiqūn* (Syria: Dār al-Farābī, 2009), 26-27.

111. Muṣṭafā al-Sibaaʿī, *al-Sunna wa Makānatuhā fī al-Tashrīʿ al-Islāmī* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī; Cairo: Darussalam, 2006), 367.

112. Hitou, *al-Mutafayhiqūn,* 2-3.

113. Abū Ghudda, "Lecture in Turkey."

114. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad,* 7.

115. See Hamza Yusuf Hanson, "The Crisis of ISIS: A Prophetic Prediction," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJo4B-yaxfk. Also see Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate,* 254-255.

116. Hitou, *al-Mutafayhiqūn,* 17.

117. Abū Ghudda, "Lecture in Turkey."

118. Yasir Qadhi, "One of the Biggest Tragedies…" Facebook, accessed 16 August 2015, https://www.facebook.com/yasir.qadhi/posts/10153261512888300.

119. Nichols, *Death of Expertise,* 106-110.

120. Ebrahim Moosa, *What is a Madrasa?* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 59.

121. Qadhi, "One of the Biggest Tragedies."

122. Nichols, *Death of Expertise,* 106-109.

123. Echchaibi, "From Audiotapes to Videoblogs," 27.

124. Easy access to the teacher and private online communications has sometimes resulted in cases of sexual abuse. See Zaynab Ansari, "Blurred Lines: Women, 'Celebrity' Shaykhs, and Spiritual Abuse," MuslimMatters.org, May 27, 2015, https://muslimmatters.org/2015/05/27/blurred-lines-women-celebrity-shaykhs-spiritual-abuse/.