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AMERICAN MUSLIM *TARBIYA*:  
PARENTS, EXPERTS, 'ULAMĀ', AND DEBATES ABOUT MOTHERING

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*To my parents*

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## ***Abstract***

This dissertation accounts for debates around correct American Muslim mothering in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It centers around the following underlying questions: What advice do Muslim modernists and Sunni ‘*ulamā*’ offer to mothers for raising Muslims in the limited, privatized spaces of their nurseries, homes, and mosque communities? How do Muslim mothers who desire to rear children communally, in harmony with their *fiṭra* (innate nature) and according to traditional notions of *tarbiya* (development, education) accomplish this as religious minorities in a hyper capitalist, secular modern context? What are the different ways that mothers negotiate the ideas of Muslim advice-givers, which sometimes clash both internally and with the diverse opinions of American pediatricians, psychologists, and neuroscientists?

This study considers the nuanced impact secular modernity, feminism, and the expanding authority of the medical and psy disciplines have had on American Muslim child-rearing practices, reconfigurations of gender roles in Muslim families and the intergenerational transmission of American Islam. To gauge this impact, this dissertation narrowly focuses on two highly contested decisions mothers make in early childhood: how to feed infants after birth and whether to corporally punish young children. The data for this project was collected from in-depth fieldwork interviews with a diverse sample of Muslim mothers conducted in 2017 in the city of Chicago and its surrounding suburbs. This data was analyzed by situating the types of religious and parenting education mothers had both received and sought out and by surveying the Islamic scriptural and jurisprudential texts, contemporary childrearing manuals, and social media sources that informed their child-rearing practices.

This dissertation found that most mothers were much more likely to formula feed or breastfeed their infants themselves than allow other mothers to nurse their children. None of my interlocutors engaged wet nurses or used donated human milk for infant feeding. Additionally, most mothers disapproved of using corporal punishment for children's discipline, either by themselves or others *in loco parentis*. Corporal punishment of children was increasingly viewed not as one method among many to cultivate children's embodiment of ritual practices, but as child abuse. However, a minority of mothers demonstrated an openness to sharing milk and employing constrained forms of physical discipline in specific circumstances. In investigating the ever-shifting child-rearing advice from religious scholars ( *'ulamā'* ), non-Muslim scientific experts, and a hybridized class of Muslim parent educators, this dissertation offers another avenue for understanding the fragmented nature of religious authority in American Muslim communities. It contributes to the growing body of scholarship that tracks the rising popularity of Sunnī rationalism and traditionalism by noting the way it attracts mothers who long for styles of parenting that are more shared and communal and less demanding and intensive. Finally, this dissertation affords insights into ongoing contestation over what constitutes correct, ethical *tarbiya* and how best to integrate and transmit American Islam.

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“...In [American] culture ... I think people feel a lot of anonymity. They feel a desire to assert themselves ... Personally, [I think] *the problems we have in our culture [emerge] when you don't have caregivers devoutly committed to children at an early age*, children lose a sense of self, so they spend the rest of their life trying to assert and establish that ... but when they are given a lot of care, attention, and love when they are young, they don't need to be attention seekers.<sup>1</sup>

—Hamza Yusuf, President, Zaytuna College [*italics mine*]

“Do not raise your children the way you were raised; they were born for a different time.”

—Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib

## ***Introduction***

### ***Becoming Devoutly Committed Caregivers***

Chicago, 2015. Hours after she gave birth, I visited Lana in the postpartum recovery ward at Prentice, Northwestern. Her husband Tariq was softly reciting the *Adhan* in the baby's ear just as the nurse barged back into the room. She looked amused as Tariq quickly wrapped up. “Has baby been named yet?” Tariq pointed to a list on the wall in Arabic and English with various spelling permutations. “We are deciding between Khansa' and Sarah.” “I vote for Sarah!” The nurse exclaimed. Despite their reverence for the great Arab poetess, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) had just named their women's brigade after her. Lana could not tolerate any additional implicit bias at school, so the newborn was named Sarah.

After her discharge, I visited Lana with lactation cookies only to find her increasingly sleep-deprived and stressed. She confided that Tariq had been pushing

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<sup>1</sup> “A Conversation with Miroslav Volf and Hamza Yusuf.” 2016. Sandala Publications. Accessed May 5. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xI\\_yrkmOLQc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xI_yrkmOLQc) .

formula for Sarah. “Lana needs to get back into a routine and rest,” Tariq explained to me earnestly. She would sneak away to my house to work on her latch and escape his overbearing presence. He worried that the pediatrician would disapprove of Sarah’s flagging weight gain and that Lana’s supervisors would frown upon the havoc that her new sleep schedule was doing to her performance.

Lana was amongst the younger American Muslim mothers I interviewed for this study. Like Lana, many of interlocutors were overwhelmed by the child-rearing decisions they needed to make. Starting with their first prenatal appointments, questions raced through their minds: Should I get extra prenatal screening test? How soon postpartum should I shave newborn hair? Do I let the hospital incinerate my placenta, or should we take it home for a makeshift burial? When should I ask my daughter to veil (if at all)? Should I let my son eat pepperoni pizza with the rest of the soccer team? Will we trick or treat? They defend their decisions with peers and colleagues, teachers and doctors, parents and in-laws. Debates surrounding these decisions caused mothers to question their instincts, prompting some to research what Islam says about a given childrearing decision. Whereas all my interlocutors would agree with Hamza Yusuf regarding the importance of devoutly committed caregiving, there is little consensus over what exactly “Islamic” caregiving entails.<sup>2</sup>

American Muslim mothers are hardly alone in feeling bewildered by the task of caregiving in a modern, postindustrial society. Like other American mothers, they

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<sup>2</sup> I deliberately refer to parenting (the social meaning of child-rearing) as a *practice* to invoke Alasdair MacIntyre’s use of the term. I am interested not only in how traditional Muslim child-rearing practices sought to move untutored children towards a particular *telos* (directed to otherworldly success) but also changes to these practices under the conditions of late modernity. See *MacIntyre, Alasdair. 2007. After Virtue. Third Edition. University of Notre Dame Press; 3rd edition, 63-65.*

struggle with balancing careers with care work, especially in the absence of state support for maternity leave and early childcare. Many nostalgically long for what they perceive were the strong extended families and supportive communal networks of the past when child-rearing knowledge was believed to have been passed down orally from mothers to daughters.<sup>3</sup> In place of these lost traditions, they embrace their role as agentive decision makers of their children's lives, carefully considering scientific and medical expertise on child-rearing.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, Muslim mothers are concerned with not just raising physically and mentally healthy children according to the dictates of scientific motherhood, but also with cultivating their piety (*tarbiyat l-awlād*).<sup>5</sup> To this end, they weigh medical and psychological expertise against the cautions of religious authorities who contribute to a growing field often coined "Islamic Parenting." Sometimes the prescriptions of secular experts and contemporary Muslim religious authorities conflict, resulting in confusion about childrearing and competing notions of the devoted "ideal" Muslim mother and her deviant, insufficiently committed counterpart.<sup>6</sup>

I argue that although each individual American Muslim mother negotiates these conflicts and disparities in her own unique way, some generalizations can be made. My

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<sup>3</sup> Apple, Rima D. 2006. *Perfect Motherhood: Science and Childrearing in America*. Rutgers University Press, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 141; Formichi, Chiara. 2022. "The Modernity of Tradition: Women and 'Healthy Progress' in Late Colonial Java and Sumatra." *Modern Asian Studies* 56 (6):1984.

<sup>5</sup> I discuss the Arabic term *tarbiya* in the section on "Before Mothercraft: Older definitions of Tarbiya." I render it in Arabic because the Arabic term encompasses both the development of young children and the ongoing spiritual development of adults.

<sup>6</sup> Shakry, Omnia. 1998. "Schooled Mothers and Structured Play: Child-Rearing in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt." In *Rethinking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, edited by Lila Abu-Lughod. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 126. Like Shakry, I attempt to "elaborate the changing conception of the 'good mother'" and proper mothering as situated within the contemporaneous discourses of domesticity." The term "deviant motherhood" is from Arendell, T. (2000). Conceiving and Investigating Motherhood: The Decade's Scholarship. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 62(4), 1192–1207.

interlocutors fall somewhere along a complex spectrum with two distinct poles, each representing a competing notion of the ‘good’ Muslim mother. On one side, some aspire to what I refer to as noble motherhood, a kind of feminized *futūwwa* or spiritual chivalry.<sup>7</sup> Although these mothers avidly read science and appreciate statistics, especially research aligned with the natural childbirth and attachment parenting movement, they also honor and defer to religious authorities.<sup>8</sup> They are skeptical of big pharmaceuticals and feel strongly about returning to what they regard as traditional child-rearing practices, which they see as more aligned with their maternal instincts or *fiṭra*.<sup>9</sup> These practices include breastfeeding and rigorous prayer training. They see themselves as their children’s primary spiritual guides, tasked with ensuring that American Muslim children are given an environment that fosters their piety. They regard American culture as characterized by a subjectivized, emotivist morality and will do whatever they can to help their children resist liberalism’s homogenizing impulse. They are troubled by society’s emphasis on ruthless individualism and individual autonomy, which they see as threatening to their children’s piety and understanding of revealed knowledge. Consequently, they limit their children’s autonomy by minimizing their interactions and exposure to mainstream media and non-Muslim peers. Furthermore, they stress the importance of cultivating child subjects to respect their

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<sup>7</sup> Bouhdiba also discusses the cult of the Muslim mother in his chapter “The Kingdom of Mothers.” See Bouhdiba, Abdelwahab. 2007. *Sexuality in Islam*. 29th ed. Routledge, 214.

<sup>8</sup> Apple, *Perfect Motherhood*, 129. Apple explains that natural parenting includes the natural childbirth movement in which mothers saw doctors and medical experts as partners in childrearing rather than superiors.

<sup>9</sup> Hays, Sharon. 1996. *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. Yale University Press. 30. Regarding the loss of maternal *fiṭra* in the modern period, Hamza Yusuf remarks, “We have several books [on childrearing], Imam al-Ghazālī has a section on raising children, ... early people wrote about raising children, partly they knew how to do it by *fiṭra*, but something went wrong at some point...” See Hanson, Hamza Yusuf. *Nurturing Children*. 2012. Vol. 1. 3 vols. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kk1vhUL8Wtk>.



hetero-patriarchal authority, which they view as part and parcel of a natural cosmology.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, there is a competing ideal of a self-determined Muslim mother. These mothers emphasize the importance of cultivating their children's spiritual autonomy over strict enforcement of sharia's boundaries. While they appreciate Islam and spirituality, they do not feel bound by the opinions of the *'ulamā*, especially when they see these opinions in conflict with scientific expertise. They incline towards scholars calling for rethinking and reforming the Muslim scholastic tradition and insist on the need to consider contemporary circumstances. They dismiss non-liberal elements of Muslim *tarbiya* such as milk-sharing and the use of corporal punishment on young children. They find breastfeeding on demand an impediment to their freedom and mobility. They worry that rigorous prayer training is coercive. They are anxious about their children's assimilation into American culture and dedicate themselves to making sure this process is as painless as possible. They believe that it is impractical and of limited value to try to revive traditional child-rearing practices. They seek out opportunities they think will help their children economically and relegate public displays of religion to the private sphere.<sup>11</sup> They strive to raise children in nuclear

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<sup>10</sup> Mian, Ali Altaf. 2015. "Surviving Modernity: Ashraf 'Ali Thānavī (1863-1943) and the Making of Muslim Orthodoxy in Colonial India." Duke Dissertations.

<https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/handle/10161/9815>. 229. Arendt links human hierarchy to natural cosmology: "Arendt explains that authoritarianism is predicated upon hierarchy, which gives coherence not just to a system of relations between people, but also, and more importantly, to an 'order of things,' a natural world, a cosmology. In Platonic and Aristotelian political philosophies, revelation of knowledge and freedom of action were distributed differently between men and women, children and adults, slaves and masters, students and teachers, and so on. As Arendt points out, Aristotle was the first philosopher who turned to the idea of 'nature' to justify this hierarchical cosmology. For Aristotle, it was *natural* for a child to rely on an adult, for a student to learn from a teacher, and for a woman to be subservient to a man. Authoritarianism, for Arendt, implies a naturalization of inequality, and presupposes an unchallenged notion of hierarchical relations and an uneven distribution of power."

<sup>11</sup> Mahmood, Saba. 2016. *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 12. Mahmood describes how secular regimes confine religion to the private sphere.

families governed in an egalitarian and democratic fashion. They hope that their children will continue to identify and be recognized as Muslims, practicing what they consider to be Islam's core values as a rational system of ethics and a source of character education.<sup>12</sup>

My interlocutors approached mothering as an all-encompassing, intense activity.<sup>13</sup> They assume caregiving tasks that might have once been delegated and shared with others. This includes serving as their children's first food source (with no recourse to wet nurses) and as their primary disciplinarians and religious teachers (with limited support from fathers and schoolteachers). The stakes for all Muslim mothers are high: given the relegation of religion to the private sphere, their successes or failures as shepherdesses of their children in delivery wards, nurseries, and family rooms largely determines American Islam's future.<sup>14</sup> Their ability to form healthy authoritative relationships with their children is as a bellwether for their children's relationships with the American Muslim community and the conservation of traditions.<sup>15</sup> Taking this to

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<sup>12</sup> Howe, Justine. 2018. *Suburban Islam*. Oxford University Press, 162; Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*, 14.

<sup>13</sup> Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, 29. Hays traces the roots of an ideology of what she refers to as intensive mothering back to the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century. According to this ideology, mothers must learn to adopt "labor-intensive techniques of ongoing psychological manipulation [of their children] intended to instill conscience which replaced the rod and externally imposed discipline." One of my interlocutors described her intensive style of mothering as "strikingly different" from her own mother's: "I know my kids' friends' names and their parents' names and their teachers' names. I'm more involved in their school day-t- day, their schoolwork, and their extracurricular stuff. My parents neverwere. I swear my dad never knew any of my teacher's names."

<sup>14</sup> Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*, 115. Mahmood writes, "Modern secularism has perniciously linked religious, sexual and domestic matters to the extent that the family has become the primal site for the reproduction of religious morality and identity, exacerbating earlier patterns of gender and religious hierarchy."

<sup>15</sup> Bouhdiba, Abdelwahab. 2007. *Sexuality in Islam*. 29th ed. Routledge, 200.

heart, some undertake the challenge of transforming their homes into bastions in which Islam reigns sovereign.<sup>16</sup>

The competing idealized images and realities of American Muslim motherhood reveal deeper anxieties and disagreements about the successful intergenerational transmission of Muslim tradition under the hyper capitalist conditions of secular modernity. American Muslim mothers' conflicting stances towards secular liberalism manifest in disagreements over what constitutes optimal early child-rearing, which scholars deserve reverence, and which parent educators should be consulted. My contention is that we cannot understand the crisis of American Muslim religious authority more broadly without first attending to the varying custodial roles mothers play when rearing young children. These differences bear consequences for children's connection (or lack thereof) to Islam and other Muslims. Mothers who raise their children as equal, "autonomous selves" may predispose their children to interpretations of Islam that are less mediated by religious authority. Conversely, mothers who raise children to respect familial hierarchies may prime their children's future receptivity to certain strands of reformism, neo-traditionalism, and juristic Sufism.

Through fieldwork, I investigated attitudes towards mothering held by ordinary believing Sunnī mothers in the city of Chicago and its surrounding suburbs. I selected interlocutors from Chicago's Muslim community because of its cultural and economic diversity, as well as rich history and considerable size.<sup>17</sup> Given these assets and the

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<sup>16</sup> Hashmi, *Parenting in Islam* | *MBH Summit 2016*. n.d. Accessed August 13, 2021. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uQVvm\\_OtT4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uQVvm_OtT4). Hashmi preaches that mothers are responsible for creating a tranquil Islamic atmosphere (Urdu: *māḥawl*) in the home where mothers teach children about *tawhīd* in tranquility and establish prayer.

<sup>17</sup> Some estimate that Chicago has 300,000-400,000 Muslims. Muslims are thought to be the second-largest religious group in Chicago after Christians (See Husain and Vogelaar, "Activities of the Immigrant

community's maturity, Chicago's Muslims have successfully built institutions that patronize contemporary 'ulamā' and host numerous national Muslim fundraisers and conferences. There are several works surveying the history and relevance of this community's contributions (e.g., Cankar 2005; Numeric 2005; Rana 2012; Schmidt 2004; Husain & Vogelaar 1994). Given that Chicago was home to proto-Islamic groups such as the Nation of Islam and the Moorish Science Temple of America, the history of African American Muslims in Chicago is particularly well documented.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, numerous immigrant communities have an established presence in Chicago. Consequently, Chicago is often chosen as the host city for national Muslim conferences such as ISNA and ICNA and serves as the headquarters for prominent Muslim organizations. Scholars recognize Chicago as a mecca for American Muslims, referring to it as "Chicago Sharīf" (Noble Chicago).<sup>19</sup>

I chose to narrow my study by recruiting study participants exclusively from Muslim weekend schools (as opposed to full-time Islamic schools or madrasas) because I suspected that most American Muslim parents supplement their children's

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Muslim Communities in Chicago" in *Muslim Communities in North America*. SUNY Press, 1994, 545; Numrich, Paul D. 2012. "Emergence of the Rhetoric of a Unified *Ummah* among American Muslims: The Case of Metropolitan Chicago." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 32 (4): 450–66; Bagby, Ihsan. 2012. "Report Number 1 from the US Mosque Study 2011: Basic Characteristics of the American Mosque Attitudes of Mosque Leaders." 1. The American Mosque 2011. CAIR. <https://faithcommunitiestoday.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/The-American-Mosque-2011-web.pdf>) This community includes Black American immigrants and refugee Muslims from the Middle East, Africa South, and Southeast Asia, and Southeastern Europe as well as White and Latino converts. Additionally, various schools of religio-legal thought are represented—all four Sunnī legal schools, the three main Shi'ī sects, and Salafi Muslims.

<sup>18</sup> Jackson, Sherman A. 2005. *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection*. Oxford University Press, 47.

<sup>19</sup> Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 24-5.

public or non-Muslim private schooling with Muslim weekend schools rather than opting for homeschooling, full-time Islamic schools, or full-time seminaries (madrasas). Additionally, American Muslims who enroll their children into Muslim weekend schools demonstrate that they have some baseline concern for their children's religious literacy and socialization. Thus, I considered this subpopulation of Chicago-based Muslim parents represents a "critical case" since what is true for them may be true for many other Muslim parents across the country. Furthermore, focusing on Muslim weekend schools allows me to understand how parents voluntarily create intentional Muslim environments for their children and in so doing, collectively negotiate prescriptions on child-rearing made by contemporary Muslim scholars and traditional texts as well as secular American parenting experts and government officials.

What I found while recruiting interlocutors was that the task of selecting mothers whose children were *only* in Muslim weekend schools proved more challenging than I had initially anticipated. Parents frequently changed their children's schooling and also pursued one set of schooling options for one child and a different set for another. Saba would home school her daughter while enrolling her sons into a nonaffiliated private school and a weekend Muslim children's program. Khadijeh sent her son to public school but eventually transferred all her younger children to a suburban Islamic school despite the long commute from the city. Tahira's younger children attended a Muslim preschool co-op, but her high school-aged daughter attended a selective Chicago public school. Parents switched schools based on various circumstances (e.g., cost of tuition,

distance from home, quality of education, child's personality).<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, all the mothers in this study had some connection to several Muslim weekend schools, half of which were in urban areas and the other half in the suburbs. Some of these schools were connected to mosque communities (e.g., Darul Quran, Muslim Community Center (MCC Chicago), Masjid Al Farooq, The Mecca Center, The Muslim Leadership Academy) while others were stand-alone programs (e.g., River Garden, Monarch Academy).

The ethnic makeup of the interlocutors I eventually selected through snowball sampling roughly mirrors proportions from the American Muslim population at-large. A fifth of the mothers were first-generation immigrants, many who moved to the United States after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 from South Asia. Many became naturalized citizens in the late sixties, seventies, and early eighties. At the time of my fieldwork, they were witnessing their grandchildren thrive as American Muslims of various hyphenated identities. One mother had more recently migrated from Somalia. Half of my interlocutors were American-born second-generation children of the South Asian and Arab diasporas (Pakistani-Americans, Indian-Americans, Palestinian-Americans, and Egyptian-Americans). A quarter of my interlocutors were African Americans who either converted to Sunnī Islam themselves or were the children of converts. Only one of my interlocutors was a white convert.

In addition to striving for an ethnically representative sample, I also wanted some degree of age diversity to account for generational differences in attitudes towards child-rearing. A sixth of my interlocutors were in my age cohort, millennials born

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<sup>20</sup> A fifth of my interlocutors had children in full-time non-Muslim private schools. Another fifth had children who had at various times attended both full-time Islamic school and public school. A sixth of my interlocutors had at one point enrolled their children exclusively in an Islamic full-time school. A tenth had at one point homeschooled their children. Roughly a third had children in the public school system. All families at one point or the other had a child enrolled in a Muslim weekend school.

between 1981 and 1996, who at the time of my field work were just beginning to have their first child or had young toddlers or elementary schoolers. However, sixty percent of my interlocutors were Gen X mothers (born between 1965 and 1980) whose children spanned the ages of elementary school and the later years of high school. These mothers could speak to parenting children of older ages. A quarter were women of my mother's age or older, boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), who were grandmothers or just becoming grandmothers and could reflect on the differences in the ways they remembered mothering compared to their daughters and daughter-in-law's parenting styles.

All my interlocutors were highly educated and came from middle to upper middle-class backgrounds: they all had at least a bachelor's degree from a four-year college. More than half resided in urban areas of Chicago whereas seven had settled in the bedroom communities of Chicagoland. Half of the mothers had master's degrees in various fields, and two held doctorates. More than half of my interlocutors were professionals either in a full- or part-time capacity. They included school administrators, five executive directors, nonprofit managers, school founders, education consultants, a chef, a mental health counselor, a lactation consultant, a chaplain, a professor, a Quran teacher, and a community activist. Only six were full-time homemakers. Most of my interlocutors (around eighty percent) were married, the rest were divorcees raising children as single parents. Three quarters of the mothers had three or more children (two had four children, one had six children, and one had nine children). The rest had two children and only one of my interlocutors mothered an only child.

In my interviews with these women, I focused on two key mother-child interactions crucial to early child development: infant feeding after birth and corporal punishment after the "age of discernment." I have chosen these two case studies from several other responsibilities the Muslim discursive tradition assigns to parents.<sup>21</sup> Both infant feeding and early childhood discipline form the foundations of mother-child relations. They are practices that may have undergone considerable historical discontinuity. These two case studies contribute to my overarching argument about contemporary American Muslim *tarbiya*: when it comes to caregiving, American Muslim mothers have less choice and less communal support but are expected to do more. Whereas most of my interlocutors coped by succumbing to what Sherman Jackson calls the "reigning liberal paradigm" and its accompanying parenting prescriptions, a minority (noble mothers or "trad wives") took pains to revive what they regard as traditional Muslim child-rearing practices.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> According to classical prescriptive child-rearing literature, among the other rights that a Muslim child has over his or her parents is that he/she be named with a good name, given a righteous mother, circumcised, provided for financially, educated, given vocational training, treated equitably with his or her siblings regardless of gender, and married off well.

<sup>22</sup> See Jackson, Sherman. 2015. "Liberalism and the American Muslim Predicament." *The Islamic Monthly*. Accessed July 7. <http://theislamicmonthly.com/liberalism-and-the-american-muslim-predicament/>. Jackson describes the "reigning liberal paradigm" as follows:

"And here we come to "the Muslim predicament," especially in the West. Because liberals have largely succeeded in monopolizing the meaning of the fundamental principles through which we negotiate modern life (freedom, equality, tolerance, rationality, etc.), Muslims find themselves only able to claim these when their claims comport with liberal definitions thereof. And when their scriptural sources or traditional authorities appear to be out of sync with these definitions, Muslims find themselves in the position of George Orwell's Winston: "How many fingers am I holding up, Winston?" From here they proceed, often on painfully tortuous logic, to try to reconcile every aspect of Islam with the reigning liberal paradigm. In this context, Muslims—and especially Muslim children—can never simply be themselves. Rather, they are condemned to a dark, musty, and lonely world of quiet, subjunctive, nervousness (W.E.B. Du Bois' 'double-consciousness' on steroids), as they try to vindicate their identity and commitments—both to themselves and to the world around them—through processes of rational justification over which others preside as owners, even as they themselves continue to be cast as the greatest threat to basic human welfare." [emphasis mine]

I borrow the term "trad wives" from the TikTok hashtag (#tradwife). See Froio, Nicole. 2022. "Trad Wives Are Using social media to Romanticize a Return to 'Traditional Values' as More and More Women Face Post-COVID Work/Life Balance Burnout." *Insider*. November 7, 2022. <https://www.insider.com/tiktoks-trad-wives-are-pushing-a-conservative-agenda-for-women-2022-11>.



This dissertation has broader relevance because of its concern for how mothers participate in not just transmitting Muslim tradition as they receive it but also contribute to religious change.<sup>23</sup> Following Talal Asad, I am interested in mothers' relations towards child-rearing guidance from the past, and how they modify their parenting in the present to deal with secularism's consequences on their children's futures.<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, I explore these questions: What do mothers consider to be traditional child-rearing practices? Can they sustain these practices in the present? Or do they alter these practices under the pressures of a neoliberal capitalist society? I conclude by drawing attention to a divide. Some of my interlocutors simply wanted their children to feel included in mainstream American society and wanted to pass on their family's culture and a general sense of Muslimness to their children. They had no desire to revive medieval Muslim child-rearing techniques. They were perfectly comfortable with adapting neoliberal sensibilities and modern mainstream medicine into the ways they raise children. Contrastingly, there is also a parallel trend in which some American Muslim mothers aspire to shelter their children and guard against what they perceive to be liberalism's excesses. These mothers adhere to altered forms of traditional child-rearing prescriptions that result from ongoing intra-Muslim debate, even as the possibility of sustaining some of these older practices may have already been foreclosed.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Howe, Justine. 2019. "Da'wa in the Neighborhood: Female-Authorled Muslim Students Association Publications, 1963–1980." *Religion and American Culture* 29 (3): 314. Howe calls for scholars to "foreground" the role of women in shaping the direction of American Islam.

<sup>24</sup> Asad, Talal. 2009. "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam." *Qui Parle* 17 (2): 14; Mahmood, *Religious Differences in a Secular Age*, 3-4. Mahmood defines secularity as the norms, sensibilities, and disposition which characterize secular society and the subjectivity it demands.

<sup>25</sup> Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*, 11; Iqbal, Basit Kareem. 2017. "Thinking about Method: A Conversation with Talal Asad." *Qui Parle* 26 (1): 195–218. Mahmood's writing helps me think

## ***A Precarious Landscape: American Islam in the Late 2010s***

From 2016-2017, I conducted interviews and made field observations. Some brief remarks are warranted here to describe the backdrop of my research. Fifteen years after the traumatic attacks on 9/11 and the onset of the Patriot Act, several institutions representing and defending American Muslim interests had become firmly established such as CAIR and Muslim Advocates, MPAC and ISNA, Zaytuna College and Ta'leef, MAS and ISPU. With the Black Lives Matter movement gaining ground, there was more awareness for the need to redress the marginalization of racial minorities even as the racialization of American Muslims appeared to intensify.<sup>26</sup> Whereas prior to 9/11, Islamic history was sidelined in American public-school curricula, it was becoming more common to see Muslims represented in preschool and elementary school library shelves. In some schools, workplaces, and corporate marketing, Muslim holidays were gaining recognition.

At the federal level, 2016 was President Obama's final year in office. His administration had been cautiously courting American Muslims by hiring senior-ranking Muslim officials and hosting White House *iftars*.<sup>27</sup> This growing acceptance of

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through practices American Muslim mothers foreclose “when they adopt secular concepts that transform their self-understanding.” In line with the theme of foreclosures, Basit Iqbal asserts that tradition in a vital sense has become almost impossible to sustain in advanced capitalism. Writing more specifically about foreclosures with regards to modern parenting, sociologist Petra Buskens asserts that the practices of “‘natural’ attachment parenting” have become impossible under the realities of modern capitalistic social structures. I surmise that just as attachment parents cannot actualize their ideals, so too do contemporary American Muslim parents struggle to practice childrearing techniques prescribed by medieval parenting manuals since the communities, family structures, and economic systems these texts had assumed would support these practices have disintegrated. See Buskens, Petra. 2001. “The Impossibility of “Natural Parenting for Modern Mothers.” *Journal for the Association for Research on Mothering* 3 (1): 75–86.

<sup>26</sup> On the racialization of American Muslims, see Husain, Atiya. 2017. “Beyond and Back to the Black-White Binary: Muslims and Race-Making in the United States.” UNC Digital Repository. <https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/concern/dissertations/t435gf06v?locale=en>.

<sup>27</sup> Elliott, Andrea. 2010. “White House Quietly Courts Muslims in U.S.” *The New York Times*, April 18, 2010. <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/19/us/politics/19muslim.html>; Elmenshawy, Mohamed. 2021.

Muslims in the mainstream and the arms-length embrace of American Muslim leadership came to an abrupt halt with Donald Trump's surprising arrival to the presidency. Upon inauguration, he signed an executive order (the "Muslim ban") prohibiting citizens from a list of mostly Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States. Roughly halfway into his first year in office, a young man named Omar Mateen opened fire and killed 49 people at a gay night club—one of the worse acts of domestic terror instigated by a Muslim since 9/11.<sup>28</sup> On Twitter, Trump used the tragedy to congratulate himself for being correct about the dangers of domestic terrorism.<sup>29</sup> He had based much of his campaign upon fear mongering about creeping sharia and birther conspiracies about Obama's crypto-Muslim status. He claimed that even second and third generation American Muslims failed to assimilate.<sup>30</sup> Trump's presidency sent a message to American Muslims about the precariousness of their citizenship during the ongoing War on Terror (with active military theaters in Afghanistan and the Syrian civil war).<sup>31</sup> Walking around campus that year, I saw sophisticated fliers posted to streetlights recruiting students to the white supremacist group Identity Evropa, which later participated in the infamous white nationalist Unite the Right rally in

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"Why It's Impossible to Imagine a White House Ramadan Celebration under President Trump." *Washington Post*, October 6, 2021.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/06/16/why-its-impossible-to-imagine-a-white-house-ramadan-celebration-under-president-trump/>.

<sup>28</sup> Bergen, Peter, and David Sterman. 2021. "Terrorism in America After 9/11." *New America*, September 10, 2021. <http://newamerica.org/international-security/reports/terrorism-in-america/>.

<sup>29</sup> Frizell, Sam. 2016. "Orlando Shooting: Donald Trump Faces Backlash for Tweets | Time." *Time*, June 12, 2016. <https://time.com/4365411/orlando-shooting-donald-trump-tweet-congrats/>.

<sup>30</sup> DelReal, Jose A. 2021. "Trump Claims Assimilation among American Muslims Is 'Close' to 'Non-Existent.'" *Washington Post*, November 26, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/06/15/trump-claims-assimilation-among-american-muslims-is-close-to-non-existent/>

<sup>31</sup> Simpson, Scott. 2018. "Muslim Advocates Sues for Transparency in Trump Administration's Campaign to Strip Citizenship from Americans." *Muslim Advocates*. August 23, 2018.

<https://muslimadvocates.org/2018/08/muslim-advocates-sues-for-transparency-in-trump-administrations-campaign-to-strip-citizenship-from-americans/>.

Charlottesville.<sup>32</sup> This heightened, bleak political climate may have accounted for the latent anxiety and a lack of a sense of national belonging many of my interlocutors expressed.<sup>33</sup> They were concerned about their children’s mental health, their susceptibility to bullying and racial discrimination, and the possibility of real danger if their children were seen praying in public or engaging in other devotional acts that might increase their chances of being profiled as Muslims.<sup>34</sup>

Apart from the political polarization, my interlocutors also grappled with the consequences of rising income inequality. Like their non-Muslim middle and upper middle-class counterparts, they worried about being able to provide for their children in the same way that their parents had provided for them. A decade after the global financial crisis of 2007-2008, many considered placing children in competitive primary and secondary schools to improve their chances of attending a prestigious four-year college and of landing a secure job to avoid the perils of an expanding gig economy. They worried about threats to Obamacare and bemoaned the colossal price tag of childcare.

The difficulty of balancing and affording paid work and childcare left many of my interlocutors feeling isolated and neglected with little support from extended family and friends. A Hyde Park resident, Saba attributed the weak social ties and atomism amongst Muslims to Chicago’s history of redlining: “There is something about Chicago—

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<sup>32</sup> Katz, Andrew. “Unrest in Virginia: Classes over a Show of White Nationalism in Charlottesville Turn Deadly.” *TIME.Com*. Accessed November 24, 2022. <https://time.com/charlottesville-white-nationalist-rally-clashes/>.

<sup>33</sup> Jubilee, dir. 2016. *Muslim Parents’ Open Letter to Their Children*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-TBPsFt7w0k>.

<sup>34</sup> American Muslims have twice the rate of suicide attempts compared to other surveyed faith groups. See Awaad, Rania. 2021. “Suicide Attempts of Muslims Compared with Other Religious Groups in the US | ISPU.” Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU). July 21, 2021. <https://www.ispu.org/suicide-attempts-of-muslims/>.

everybody has their own little calling card, their own small initiative. No one does anything together.” Irfana, a single mother from the West Loop, similarly quibbled,

What I don't like about the Muslim community is that there is no support amongst parents. Everyone wants to show their child is perfect when they are not, honey. I have only one friend who will never judge my children. The rest judge my kids, like oh my God.

The city's racial divisions were reflected in its mosques. A thirtysomething Egyptian American mother and teacher, Maryam struggled to find a suitable mosque community for her family to join. She grew up in a diverse community in Michigan. But in Chicago, she found different ethnically homogenous communities with balkanized leadership. “People are segregated. The Northside people only hang out with their Northside friends.” Similarly, Tahira found it difficult to find community in a city that felt transient. Students and professionals were coming and going, not staying long enough to form lasting friendships with her children. Everyone felt they had to bear the burdens of child-rearing on their own, worrying that their children would not have aunties and uncles who could serve as secondary attachment figures. With little time themselves for community building, my interlocutors were concerned that their children were at risk of becoming adult Muslims in name only. Rather than feeling anxious about their young people falling prey to youth radicalization as the US government feared, they feared that their children would join most of their fellow Americans in becoming spiritual but not religious “nones” progressively less observant over time.<sup>35</sup>

For their part, American Muslim scholars have also alerted parents to the potential

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<sup>35</sup> Mitchell, Travis. 2021. “About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated.” *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project* (blog). December 14, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/>.

for mass apostasy.<sup>36</sup> Lecturing American Muslim parents, psychiatrist Dr. Hooman Keshavarzi warned,

Religiosity in America is going down, [many Muslims] have deluded themselves into thinking that the religious practice, the state of Muslims has either not changed or is getting better, which is not in tune with reality. Numerous statistics suggest otherwise, religiosity [is] declining.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, at the MAS-ICNA convention held in Chicago, Howard University Professor Altaf Hussein led a session titled: “Will our grandchildren say “*La Ilaha Ila Allah?* [sic]”<sup>38</sup> Muslim scholars chide Muslim immigrants for migrating to America to safeguard their children’s economic futures at the expense of their grandchildren’s Islam.<sup>39</sup> My interlocutors felt ambivalent about raising American Muslims. On the one hand, they were proud of the growing maturity of American Muslim institutions and the increasing number of Muslim civic leaders. On the other hand, they were concerned with the persistent racial and economic inequality even inside Muslim circles. There was a gnawing sense that even as American Muslim institutions had gained in sophistication, Muslim communities had lost social cohesion and struggled to provide the infrastructure that is necessary for socializing Muslim children.

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<sup>36</sup> Brown, Jihad, and Fouad Elgohari. 2019. “Losing My Religion: Addressing the Modern Crisis of Faith.” Presented at the Community Night, Mecca Center, Willowbrook, Illinois, October 19.

<https://meccacenter.org/2019/09/20/community-night-losing-my-religion-addressing-the-modern-crisis-of-faith-october-19/>; Mohamed, Besheer, and Elizabeth Podrebarac Sciupac. 2018. “The Share of Americans Who Leave Islam Is Offset by Those Who Become Muslim.” Pew Research Center. January 26, 2018. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/26/the-share-of-americans-who-leave-islam-is-offset-by-those-who-become-muslim/>. A theologian, Brown spoke of a widespread “crisis of faith”, citing a Pew survey “which found that an estimated 24% of those raised Muslim in the US have left the religion entirely.”

<sup>37</sup> Keshavarzi, Hooman, dir. 2014. *Islamic Parenting: A Psychospiritual Approach*. Khalil Center. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=civ54aMy800>.

<sup>38</sup> Husain, Altaf. 2016. “Will Our Grandchildren Say “*La Ilaha Ila Allah.*” Presented at the 14th Annual MAS-ICNA Convention, McCormick Place, Chicago IL, January 4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjCoTBetwBk>.

<sup>39</sup> Bilal Philips, dir. 2006. *Seven Habits of Successfully Raising Muslim Children*. Abu Huraira Center, Toronto, Canada. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=at6bR5GlCnk>; Krasniqi, Besa (Umm Sahl). 2019. “Raising Muslim Children.” Public Download. Unto The One: The Sufi Path and Traditional Islam. November 8, 2019. <https://untotheone.com/public/raising-muslim-children/>, 23.1.

## ***Anthropology, History, Religious Studies, and Muslim Mothering***

To study American Muslim mothering, I relied on relevant secondary literature in the fields of anthropology and history, Near Eastern studies and religious studies that discuss child-rearing and motherhood in Islamicate contexts. While I am not a trained anthropologist, I benefit from anthropological writing on secular liberalism’s impact on Muslim societies. These readings help me think through the ways in which secular liberal governments and economic structures limit my interlocutor’s child-rearing choices while at the same time employing rhetoric that makes it seem as though they are in fact expanding mothers’ freedoms.<sup>40</sup>

Anthropologists have conducted rich studies analyzing differences in child-rearing across cultures. In 1966, John and Beatrice Whiting published their *Six Cultures Study of Socialization*, a cross-cultural study of child-rearing differences and their effects on personality.<sup>41</sup> Of the six cultures studied, only one included a significant Muslim population (Leigh Mintum’s study on *the Rājapūts of Khalapur*.) In the 1970s, the Tunisian sociologist Abdelwahab Bouhdiba (d. 2020) focused on mother-child relations in Arab-Muslim society. Perhaps assuming a linear model of history that marches inevitably towards progress, he contends that there was a “gigantic redistribution of roles and statuses” underway in Muslim societies, resulting in families that are less

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<sup>40</sup> For example, the 2010 Affordable Care Act provides nursing mothers “with reasonable break time and a place other than a bathroom ... to express breast milk at work, up until a child’s first birthday.” However, no provisions are given for paid maternity leave for women who choose to feed infants at the breast at home or for women who wish to pump into the second year of life. Similarly, mothers are readily given the option to medicate unruly children with psychiatric medication but invite the suspicion of state child protective services if they engage in physical discipline.

<sup>41</sup> Ghazi, Tasneema. Interview by Nadia Khan. Chicago, IL, August 15, 2017. Coincidentally, Dr. Ghazi studied under Professor Beatrice Blyth Whiting.

hierarchical “but not yet completely egalitarian.”<sup>42</sup> Given what he perceived as a distinctly Muslim tendency to over-sanctify mothers to the detriment of Muslim children and civilization, he characterized Muslim society as a “Kingdom of Mothers” (1985). He notes that after sacrificing their lives for their children and with no savings for old age, Arab and Muslim mothers become overly possessive of their children—not unlike what Carl Jung described as the “devouring mother.” This negative feminine archetype describes an exceptionally overprotective mother who thwarts her children from realizing their potential. Bouhdiba concludes that the Muslim mother “has no life of her own” and cannot, like the great Sufi Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī’s mother, forego her rights to filial piety and let children “Go and be God’s!”<sup>43</sup>

Apart from Bouhdiba’s comments on mothering in Arab societies from the 1970s, few ethnographic studies have been done on contemporary Muslim mothering or childhood, especially in America. However, several important ethnographies on Muslim communities in the United States have informed this dissertation, including Zareena Grewal’s *Islam as a Foreign Country* (2013) and Justine Howe’s *Suburban Islam* (2018) which was also based on interview data collected from Chicago’s Muslims.

Turning from anthropology to history, one finds that much of the groundwork of what early Muslim writing says about childhood has been laid by Avner Giladi. His influential monographs *Children of Islam* (1992) and *Infants, Parents, and Wet Nurses* (1999) examine classical texts on childhood from within the medieval Islamic tradition. He provides the necessary contrastive background for the modern child-rearing and

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<sup>42</sup> Bouhdiba, Abdelwahab. 1977. “The Child and the Mother in Arab-Muslim Society.” In *Psychological Dimensions of Near Eastern Studies*, edited by L. Carl Brown and Norman Itzkowitz. Darwin Press, 138.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadkhirat al-awliyā’*, vol. I, 136. I take the Bisṭāmī from Salamah-Qudsi, Arin Shawkat. 2019. *Sufism and Early Islamic Piety*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 93.



mothering trends I study.<sup>44</sup> Giladi’s work depicts early Muslim notions of child-rearing as a deliberate effort by parents and teachers to develop children’s morality. Historian Omnia Shakry continued this important historical work on Muslim child-rearing by sketching changes to parenting practices under the advent of modernity. She argues that beginning in the late 1800s, a fundamental shift occurred whereby mothers—rather than fathers, teachers, relatives, and servants— became responsible for supervising children’s physical, moral, and intellectual development.<sup>45</sup> Shakry notes that whereas in the past *tarbiya* was focused on children’s moral development, at the turn of the century it became directly linked to Egypt’s hopes for postcolonial development. Historian Afsaneh Najmabadi makes a similar point when she notes that medieval literature assumes that children are instructed by fathers whereas mothers are simply vessels for children. In contrast, modern Iranian mothers were not subjects of their husband’s management but rather active managers themselves.<sup>46</sup> Pakistani Studies scholar Shenila Khoja-Moolji’s work shows similar trends in postcolonial India and Pakistan, where the home has become the locus for Muslim identity formation and women have “transformed from being seen as causing *fitna* (chaos), embodying uncontrollable sexuality, and not being appropriate for raising children, to becoming the upholders of familial morality, domestic managers, and mothers of future citizens.”<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet’s work discussing the politics of maternalism in Iran demonstrates increasing concern of religious scholars, government officials, and

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<sup>44</sup> Giladi, Avner. 1992. *Children of Islam*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 159n3.

<sup>45</sup> Shakry, “Schooled Mothers and Structured Play,” *passim*; Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Traditions*, 155.

<sup>46</sup> Najmabadi, Afsaneh. 1998. “Crafting an Educated Housewife in Iran.” In *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, 91–125.

<sup>47</sup> Khoja-Moolji, Shenila. 2018. *Forging the Ideal Muslim Girl | Education and the Production of Desirable Subjects in Colonial India and Pakistan*. University of California Press, 42.

medical experts with regulating mothering practices.<sup>48</sup> A common thread running through these studies is the notion that the progress of Muslim states and/or the potential revival of the *ummah* is entangled with mothering.<sup>49</sup>

I strive to connect my synchronic study of American Muslim mothers to this body of historical work to deepen our understanding of the extent to which historical discontinuities in child-rearing practices have occurred. Like Shakry, Najmabadi, and Khoja-Moolji, I am interested in what my interlocutors consider to be ideal mothering and the solutions put forth for Muslim advancement.<sup>50</sup> Whereas some follow Muslim reformists and nationalists who argue that mothers need to abandon strict adherence to the traditional legal schools, American Muslim tradwives argue the opposite, that only by returning to traditional understandings of sharia (and for some, reintroducing *ṭarīqa*) can they hope to safeguard American Islam's future.<sup>51</sup>

With regards to religious studies, I found less secondary literature that treats contemporary Muslim motherhood from within Islamic studies. Islamicists who study Islam and gender may hesitate to examine Muslim motherhood to avoid furthering orientalist and misogynistic tropes by essentializing Muslim women and inadvertently glorifying their place as “creatures of their home.”<sup>52</sup> While several prominent Muslim academics have emerged calling for a rethinking of Islamic family law, they draw attention to gender inequality within Islamic Law's conception of an ideal Muslim family and critiquing Muslim scholars for reinforcing women's subjugated role as

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<sup>48</sup> Kashani-Sabet, Firoozeh. 2011. *Conceiving Citizens: Women and the Politics of Motherhood in Iran*. 1st edition. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>49</sup> Shakry, “Schooled Mothers,” 130.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 127.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 152.

<sup>52</sup> Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*, 214; Salamah-Qudsi, *Sufism and Early Islamic Piety*, 85.

wives.<sup>53</sup> Less attention is paid to women’s agentic capacity and needs as mothers. Whereas much ink has been spilled calling for gender justice within the Muslim religious-legal tradition—especially when it comes to marriage, sexuality, and divorce—few of these studies take motherhood and the social reproduction of Muslims seriously. This study attends to this gap by demonstrating the ways in which American Muslim mothers critically engage premodern child-rearing texts and the continued relevance of the Islamic discursive tradition to contemporary Muslim parenting.<sup>54</sup>

Note that one exception to this lacuna is Margaret Aziza Pappano and Dana M. Olwan’s edited volume titled *Muslim Mothering*. Seeking to de-essentialize notions of Muslim motherhood, this work features interdisciplinary case studies from around the world. The chapters are united by a common theme that calls for centering women’s diversity and exercise of agency in their maternal roles to face a host of contemporary challenges, such as anti-Muslim sentiment in minority contexts and increased militarization in Muslim majority contexts.

In addition to this edited volume on modern Muslim mothering, there are important comprehensive studies of premodern Muslim motherhood. Kathryn Kueney’s *Conceiving Identities* (2013) provides a thorough textual examination of pregnancy and the immediate postpartum period in the Quran, hadith, and early jurisprudential literature. Kueney contends that medieval Muslim theologians portrayed ideal Muslim

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<sup>53</sup> Here, I refer to an influential group of progressive Islamic Studies scholars with a diverse set of views. Nonetheless, they agree upon several arguments: First, they argue that the underlying logics of premodern Muslim legal traditions are inherently patriarchal since men served as the traditions’ custodians. Second, because they perceive gender equality as a self-evident universal good, they hold that ethical reading of Muslim scriptural sources requires that one either reinterpret sources that support gender hierarchy/gender discrimination or refute the relevance of those sources to contemporary Islam. Some progressive Islamicists go further to critique the idea that heterosexual marriage is the only family structure sanctioned by Muslim scriptural sources.

<sup>54</sup> Asad, “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,” 20.

mothers as those with peak fecundity. She argues that these authors formulated rulings that effectively led mothers to surrender their “procreative agency” to male authority and protection through Islamic postpartum rituals and practices.<sup>55</sup>

Like Kueney, Kathryn Lofton draws attention to the relationship between power, authority, and child-rearing practices, but in the context of American religions more broadly.<sup>56</sup> In “Religion and the Authority in American Parenting”, Lofton calls upon religious studies scholars to consider parenting “as a site of negotiation of authority and as “an archive of religion.”<sup>57</sup> She convincingly describes parenting as “a mode of religious expression” and characterizes contemporary American “parental orthodoxy” “as a submission of individuals to the work of parenting” and the central determining factor in its practitioners’ lives.<sup>58</sup> Lofton prompted me think about authority as it relates to major mothering decisions. For example, who decides what type of infant feeding a family will support? Who will undertake the task of a child’s prayer training? Evaluating mothering as a mode of religious expression, I suggest that American Muslims who adopt differing parenting styles also express conflicting interpretations of Islam.

Following Lofton, this dissertation offers an alternative vantage point with which to examine history of American Islam by exploring the social facts of parenting and its new

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<sup>55</sup> Kueney, Katherine. 2013. *Conceiving Identities: Maternity in Medieval Muslim Discourse and Practice*. State University of New York Press, 119. Kueney writes, "A woman's willing participation in the predominantly male rituals and practices pertaining to the care and socialization of her child postpartum, such as her acquiescence to male regulations regarding breastfeeding, creates a particular maternal disposition that interacts with the very dominant discourses through which her identity and status as a pious mother are formed, reinforced, and reevaluated."

<sup>56</sup> Zahra Ayubi has also focused on early childhood more specifically. Her 2019 article “Rearing Gendered Souls” asserts that medieval Muslims treatises on childrearing were written for boys at the exclusion of women and girls from ethics instruction. See Ayubi, Zahra. 2019. “Rearing Gendered Souls: Childhood and the Making of Muslim Manhood in Pre-Modern Islamic Ethics.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 87 (4): 1178–1208. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfz072>.

<sup>57</sup> Lofton, Kathryn. 2016. “Religion and the Authority in American Parenting.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 84 (3): 806. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfv124>

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 830.

(dis)embodied practices.<sup>59</sup>

Although I am indebted to all these scholars, my work departs from scholarship that centers women's agency or identifies patriarchal tendencies in medieval Muslim literature. I recognize that American Muslim mothers are a diverse group and deserve an intersectional lens with which to understand how some are more susceptible than others to the double victimhood of anti-Muslim sentiment from both the greater society and sometimes patriarchal exclusion from within mosque communities. Like academics who self-identify as Muslim feminists, I am also concerned with the question of female religious authority (or lack thereof) which some presume biases the applicability of male authored classical texts to women's lived experiences in the present. However, I bracket concerns to showcase women's agency and highlight impediments to their empowerment. Instead, I probe how newer styles of thinking regarding best practices for children's character development and spiritual growth deepen divisions within the American Muslim community. Moreover, I highlight the emergence of a new class of counselors and parent educators, psychiatrists and psychologists who cater to Muslim mothers and further complicate the already fragmented nature of American Muslim religious authority. Drawing on both Saba Mahmood and Samuli Schielke, I try to understand how my interlocutors inhabit agency in conflicting ways. Whereas some exercise their maternal agency and make liberal child-rearing decisions that resist the hegemony of (male) Muslim religious authority and power, others deliberately work to surrender themselves to the rigors of Muslim motherhood as outlined by the teachings of the '*ulamā*' and aspire to be agents transformed by service to their husbands and

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 830.

children, hoping for the reward of preparing chivalrous young warriors for their future (spiritual) battles.<sup>60</sup> I approached my interlocutors and my reading of prescriptive Muslim child-rearing literature from my own location and “situatedness” as an insider. As a mother of three and a second-generation American Muslim whose parents migrated from Pakistan in the late 1970s, I feel a strong sense of solidarity with my interlocutors. While my positionality facilitated my access to Muslim mothers’ circles, it also required more effort to deliberately adopt a critical distance towards them. Even though I consider myself a peer in relation to my research subjects, I acknowledge my ethical responsibility to steward their opinions and experiences. To protect the identity of my interlocutors, I use pseudonyms throughout the text and sometimes changed superficial details.

## ***Chapter Overview***

This dissertation is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on mothers and the various epistemological sources that inform their child-rearing practices. To stay true to the complexity of my data, some chapters begin with a vignette of one of my interviews followed by an analysis that draws from additional interview data and textual sources.

In chapter 1, I show how contemporary Muslim authors attempt to reconcile parenting practices prescribed by traditional Muslim sources with the advice of popular twenty-first century American parenting expertise. In the past few decades, several

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<sup>60</sup> This is in reference to the hadith which some scholars interpret to apply to Muslim mothers: *man jahaza ghāzī fī sabīl Allāh fa-qad ghaza* (Riyādh al-Ṣāliḥīn, 22:1306) Mahmood’s work is celebrated for offering an alternative conception of agency. Whereas liberals before her recognized agency only in someone who challenged hierarchical authority, Mahmood argued that pious Muslims recognize agents as those who work to transform themselves to attain perfect servanthood (*‘ubūdiyya*). See Jain, Andrea R. 2019. “Roundtable: After Saba Mahmood: Examining Sexual Difference, Secularism and the Study of Religion.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, November. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfz085>.

anglophone Muslim parenting experts have attempted to reconcile older *tarbiya* literature written by medieval Muslim authors with newer and Western scientific literature on child psychology and development. Whereas some are enthusiastic about the possibility of selectively grafting secular modern child-rearing expertise with classical *tarbiya* literature, other Muslim scholars and thought leaders warn about the incommensurability of these two sources. They argue that traditional Muslim *tarbiya* and Western parenting experts have conflicting notions of what constitutes a desirable child.<sup>61</sup> This chapter also traces how prominent Muslim scholars side with non-Muslim proponents of natural parenting and stay-at-home motherhood advocates—defying feminists who argue that the increasing popularity of “natural” early childhood practices causes women's status to regress.<sup>62</sup>

Chapter 2 takes a step back to examine my interlocutors' religious education. I explain the modes of Islamic education they were exposed to, their relationships to religious authorities, and how these experiences inform the way they seek to inculcate and model Islam for their own children. I present a classification for my interlocutor's varying attachment styles to contemporary Muslim scholars, preachers, mom-fluencers, and parent educators (whom I will hereafter refer to collectively as AMPE). By attending to my interlocutor's citations and their relation to religious authority and the Muslim discursive tradition, we arrive at a clearer picture of the fissures in the American Muslim

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<sup>61</sup> Shayegan, Daryush. 1997. *Cultural Schizophrenia: Islamic Societies Confronting the West*. Syracuse University Press, 76. I take the idea of a “desirable” child from Tom Weisner. See *What Is the Most Important Influence on Child Development*. 2016. TEDx Talks. UCLA. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIZ8PkLMMUo>.

<sup>62</sup> Hewitt, Heather. 2012. “Natural Mothering.” *Brain, Child: The Magazine for Thinking Mothers*, 56–61. This review article features Chris Bobel's and Elisabeth Badinter's work to explain that “natural mothering” involves extended breastfeeding, an emphasis on a home-centered approach to schooling, ideas that women are uniquely capable of nurturing children, the valuation of patriarchal family life organization, as well as a belief in gender differences.

religious landscape.

Chapter 3 examines the texts on child-rearing from within the Islamic discursive tradition that my interlocutors continue to cite and use as inspiration. I argue that mothers read Islam’s foundational texts and their later commentaries to recover the usable prescriptions within them for their own parenting. However, different mothers choose to follow two different corpora of Islamic child-rearing guidance—one restricted and the other expansive—when trying to arrive at conclusions about the normative content of “Islamic” or “Prophetic” parenting.

The second part of this dissertation turns to two case studies on early child-rearing practices. I attend to practices that some of my interlocutors consider to be strange or retrograde but that nonetheless receive widespread sanction from medieval Islamic child-rearing literature: the practice of employing wet nurses and the dispensation made for physical discipline of children. Chapter 4 delves into debates regarding infant feeding by unpacking why the invention of formula has been welcomed by American Muslims and religious scholars whereas wet-nursing is generally regarded as an archaic or unacceptable infant feeding choice. In Islamicate contexts past and present, wet-nursing and milk-sharing functioned to encourage exogamous relationships by creating kinships based on milk rather than blood. While some classical Muslim jurists did prefer maternal nursing, wet-nursing was universally accepted and allowed women to share infant caregiving responsibilities.<sup>63</sup> However, since the colonial period, Muslim reformers deemed wet-nursing and milk sharing to be unhygienic and backward. Much like their European contemporaries, they began encouraging women to nurse their own

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<sup>63</sup> Giladi, *Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses*, 120.



infants, thus contributing to the intensification and consolidation of mother's roles as their children's sole caregivers.

Chapter 5 concentrates on the increasing intolerance for the physical discipline of American Muslim children. Given the Prophet's permission to strike ten-year-olds who shirk prayer, Muslim jurists allowed parents to corporally punish children. Yet, because the Prophet never struck a child himself, Muslim discourse on corporal punishment appears ambivalent. Furthermore, premodern educators often deplored corporal punishment's (excessive) use and instead offered alternative disciplinary techniques.<sup>64</sup> Nonetheless the gravity of infractions such as prayer abandonment—and a belief that physical discipline sometimes benefits children—led some classical authors to sanction physical discipline. However, mothers may choose to adopt attachment parenting (which abhors physical discipline), especially under the watchful, sometimes panoptic gaze of social service agencies in a society which increasingly considers corporal punishment taboo. Consequently, most of my interlocutors considered even minor applications of physical discipline abusive. This chapter investigates changes in Muslim discourse on corporal punishment.

I conclude by reflecting on how the discipline of young children and nourishment of infants and toddlers were once communally shared tasks that have now been squarely placed on mothers' shoulders. My hope is to call attention to the challenges mothers face when trying to raise pious children differently in postnormal times.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> al-Ghazālī wrote “it is better for the beast that the whip is not absent [when taming it and driving it] and also for the child.” (Giladi, *Children of Islam*, 63).

<sup>65</sup> I borrow the term postnormal from Sardar, Ziauddin. n.d. “What Is Postnormal Times?” *Postnormal Times*. Accessed December 5, 2022.

## **Chapter 1: The Trouble with Western Tarbiya(s)**

*Maryam's masters in elementary education did not prepare her for her recalcitrant six-year-old daughter. Exasperated, she called her mother, who told her to relax. "Don't tell me to calm down!" she retorted. She decided to upskill her parenting. She recruited Facebook friends who seemed like competent mothers based on their profiles. They started a monthly jalsa (Arabic: social gathering) that discussed a different parenting book every sitting. They read New York Times bestsellers such as Bronson's Nurture Shock, Siegel's No Drama Discipline, and Sax's The Collapse of Parenting. They learned mnemonics for diffusing tantrums, and how to speak child. But the sheer volume of advice led to confusion: Bronson chastises parents who raise their voice whereas Sax chides parents for their impotence.*

*Since Maryam's book club was held on Chicago's north side, Tahira, a Southsider, had not heard of it. But she too read parenting self-help books, especially those authored by people of color. Whereas her mother's parenting was informed by sisters at the masjid, she found wisdom from celebrity gurus like Oprah and Iyanla Vanzant. They taught her to account for her emotional states (which she likened to Sufism's notion of muḥāsabah) to improve her mothering:*

So, I try to be more emotionally involved with my kids. I am trying to give them the tools they need to help them grow in a healthy way emotionally. It's not that my parents didn't give me those tools ... but that I am embodying them with my [tween] daughter. I am hypersensitive about the fact that she is a black [Muslim] girl and I am more aware of what she is exposed to in school. I am very explicit about what it means for her that her body is changing. I want to be very clear about how she should take care of her body, what it means to be married and have a sexual relationship. All the information she is getting in school, I want to offer the same conversation in our home, so she knows [our values]. I don't remember my parents having those conversations with me, but they were more involved in the community where different people offered [these lessons].

*Tahira could not find a mosque her family could belong too like her parents did. Nonetheless, she still benefited from befriending other parents at her toddler's small Muslim preschool co-op. In the few minutes they caught between rushed pick-ups and drop-offs, mothers exchanged tips on everything from best weaning strategies to behavior management. When Tahira confided in another mother about her infant's sleep problems, the latter invited her to a watch party of a free online course by Yale Sterling Professor of Child Psychiatry Alan Kadin on the ABCs of child-rearing.<sup>66</sup> When her two-year-old sons' meltdowns were driving her mad, another mother recommended 1-2-3 Magic, written by clinical psychologist, Dr. Thomas W. Phelan. She was thrilled that the method reminded her to take a meditative moment of pause instead of impulsively matching her toddler's petulance. Some months later another mother recommended that she read Dr. Gordon Neufeld's Hold onto Your Kids. She was shocked to learn that Neufeld found the 1-2-3 magic strategy that had given her much needed solace detrimental to parent-child attachment.*

*Like Maryam and Tahira, Saba had also read a lot of American parenting literature but to no avail:*

I read a bunch of [parenting] books, but either I disagreed with them, I didn't find anything particularly insightful, or they just confirmed what I already thought anyway. I felt from very early on that there is a reason that Allah is giving me this kid and not somebody else. He must think I know what I am doing ... not that I know what I'm doing, but I have something I can do that is right. Allah doesn't put someone in a situation where there will be detriment. There is something about these kids' *fiṭra* that I can steward. That gave me a lot of confidence. I think a lot of my philosophy about being a parent relates to the notion that these are beings in my care. They already they have a built-in ability to go heights beyond what I can imagine. My job is to make sure I can help them navigate any obstacles in their way, but I won't put anything in them that

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<sup>66</sup> Am, Maria Antonia Sendas 1:14, Sep 23, and 2020. 2020. "Yale Professor Teaches the 'ABCs' of Child Behavior in a Free Online Course." Yale Daily News. September 23, 2020. <https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2020/09/23/yale-professor-teaches-the-abcs-of-child-behavior-in-a-free-online-course/>.

Allah hasn't put in them already.

## ***Introduction***

Apart from Saba, most of my interlocutors echoed Tahira and Maryam's doubts about their maternal instincts. This spurred them onto a quest of active learning. Most longed for a proverbial village or mosque community for support. Many lived far from extended family members in other parts of the country or abroad. The high cost of larger homes with mother-in-law suites inhibited parents and other relatives from moving in long term. Even those like Sayeeda who had both her mother and mother-in law around still felt overwhelmed: "I felt like I was thrown into the deep end, and I had to just figure out how to do it myself." Like Maryam, some felt dissatisfied with the advice they did receive from their mothers, in-laws, and other female relatives. They felt that these female elders had lost the knack for mothering due to the seismic ruptures caused by scientific modernity, colonialism, and capitalism. They felt that their mothers had become unreliable transmitters of "indigenous" traditions regarding *tarbiya* or that which is concerned with the "proper upbringing, education, and cultivation of children."<sup>67</sup> To compensate for this perceived loss, they spent their pregnancies and early childhood years reading child-rearing self-help. This expert knowledge about mothercraft, (i.e., the scientific study of child-rearing) taught them to engage in "hyper-conscientious nurture" (Hulbert's phrase) and to mother "intensively" (Hays term).

Most of my interlocutors also turned to AMPE for child-rearing guidance. They encourage mothers to reflect on their practices and have created specialized content. They find non-Muslim psychosocial sciences useful for educating Muslim parents. They

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<sup>67</sup> El Shakry, Omnia S. 2007. *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt*. Stanford University Press, 51. 174n51.

do not believe that there is an insurmountable chasm between current (secular) trends in child development and “psy-knowledge,” that is, knowledge derived from psychological and psychiatric experts, and their understanding of child-rearing prescriptions found in Islam’s foundational texts and other classical Muslim sources.<sup>68</sup> To present the coherence between these two bodies of knowledge, some Muslim scholars and preachers ally with a new class of Muslim parenting experts (e.g., psychologists and educationists, pediatricians, and social workers, counselors, and life coaches) to advise mothers by cohering the best of child development sciences and traditional *tarbiya*. Some are especially enthusiastic about the resonance of attachment parenting (AP, sometimes referred to as natural parenting) with the ideals of Muslim family life.

Yet, other religious authorities decry the widespread enthusiasm for non-Muslim prescriptive literature and projects striving to integrate traditional *tarbiya* with modern parenting trends. They argue that this “Western *tarbiya*” has contributed to the miseducation of Muslim mothers and their children. They also caution that mothers who embrace AP mistakenly focus on their children’s needs at the expense of their duties to God and husband. They worry that in their enthusiasm for secular, scientific parenting strategies, mothers threaten the correct cultivation of their children’s pious subjectivities, raising snowflakes instead of resilient spiritual warriors. They call for mothers to abandon the “*taghrīb*” (westernization) of parenting and instead return to “common sense” parenting approaches which they believe are more grounded in the prophetic model and maternal instinct.

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<sup>68</sup> I take the term psy-knowledge and its definition from Valencia, L. 2015. “Being a Mother, Practicing Motherhood, Mothering Someone: The Impact of Psy-Knowledge and Processes of Subjectification.” *Journal of Family Issues* 36 (9): 1233–52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X14533542>.

This chapter examines debates around different epistemologies of *tarbiya*. To what degree should Muslim AMPE study and incorporate non-Muslim child-rearing psy-knowledge? How does psy-knowledge contribute to new forms of authority in American Muslim communities? How do Muslim parents reconcile the internal contradictions within this vast non-Muslim literature about mothercraft? These internal contradictions, in addition to some AMPE's ambivalence regarding non-Muslim child-rearing prescriptions have led to conflicting conceptions of ideal motherhood.

To elucidate the sides of these debates, I first survey the prescriptive parenting literature that my interlocutors read. I highlight which secular, non-Muslim child-rearing experts, Muslim mothers, and parent educators consider to be the best authorities on proper *tarbiya*. Second, I explore contemporary Muslim parenting courses and literature. These classes, workshops, and texts are often the result of collaboration between a new class of parenting educators (i.e., Muslim psychiatrists, psychologists, mental health professionals, and counselors) and individuals trained in traditional Muslim religious sciences. Together, they strive to integrate Western child-rearing prescriptions from disciplines such as psychology, education, and medicine with traditional Islamic sources.<sup>69</sup> I consider the special status many parent educators give to AP for affirming stay-at-home motherhood. Lastly, I consider the warnings some parent educators give against what they pejoratively refer to as “Western *tarbiya*.”

Like their non-Muslim counterparts, my interlocutors are part of a large, often anxious, readership of the expansive genre of contemporary self-help literature and scientific childrearing guidance authored by psychiatrists, pediatricians, and

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<sup>69</sup> Iqbal, Basit, and Joud Alkorani. 2021. “The Social Life of Islamic Texts and Concepts.” *Reading Muslims: Re-Examining the Place of Textuality in Islamic Studies*.

developmental psychologists.<sup>70</sup> Since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, historians have documented the rise of the “ideology of scientific motherhood” in which American mothers increasingly rely on experts for childrearing advice rather than their own intuition and the intergenerational transmission of childrearing knowledge. In *Raising America*, Ann Hulbert tracks the rise of famous parenting advisors over the last century. She describes an epistemic shift—childrearing advice used to be grounded in the Bible and embodied traditions of grandmothers, but it is now grounded in data and the scientific method. My interlocutors access these experts through paperbacks, Instagram stories, YouTube videos, as well as in person through workshops and mental health clinics.

### ***Before Mothercraft: Older Definitions of Tarbiya***

Does psy-knowledge count as a source of guidance for children’s *tarbiya*? To answer this question, consider older, classical definitions of *tarbiya*. According to Timothy Mitchell, prior to “the last third of the nineteenth century *tarbiya* had meant simply ‘to breed’ or ‘to cultivate,’ referring, as in English, to anything that should be helped to grow—crops, cattle, or children’s morals.”<sup>71</sup> To add to these definitions, lexicographers defined *tarbiya* as nurturing, supervising, caring for, maintaining, rearing, fostering, nourishing, and making right.<sup>72</sup> In this older conception, mothers who partake in their children’s *tarbiya* are engaged with natural processes that can be

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<sup>70</sup> Hulbert, Ann. 2003. *Raising America: Experts, Parents, and a Century of Advice about Children*. 1st ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 13. According to Hulbert, in the mid-1990s, American mothers in general purchased five times as many parenting books as they did in the mid-1970s. Muslim mothers are no exception and contribute to the demand for parenting literature.

<sup>71</sup> Mitchell, Timothy. 1991. *Colonising Egypt: With a New Preface*. University of California Press. 88.

<sup>72</sup> Hassim, Eeqbal. 2010. *Elementary Education and Motivation in Islam: Perspectives of Medieval Muslim Scholars, 750-1400 CE*. Cambria Press, 26n101; Al-Fārābī, *Taḥṣīl*, 71-82; Alshugairi, *Positive Parenting in the Muslim Home*, 15; "Tarbiya." *EI*<sup>2</sup>

likened to farming, gardening, and animal husbandry. The Persian polymath Avicenna (d. 1037) considered *tarbiya* to be women’s “special area” of expertise while men arranged for the necessary provision to facilitate *tarbiya*.<sup>73</sup> Child-rearing, like farming, was taught through the practical acquisition of skills and know-how or *habitus*, not seminars or book learning.<sup>74</sup> *Tarbiya* is often contrasted with *ta’līm*. Whereas the latter refers to formal transmission of knowledge through instruction and schooling, *tarbiya* is a term that encompasses the lifelong process of learning.<sup>75</sup> It is less about cerebrally instructing children and more about helping them inculcate embodied virtues through disciplining and thoughtful attention to their spaces and communities.<sup>76</sup>

According to Mitchell, nineteenth century Egyptian intellectuals began changing the way they employed the term *tarbiya*. It “came to mean ‘education,’ a new field of

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<sup>73</sup> Avicenna, and Michael E. Marmura. 2004. *The Metaphysics of The Healing: A Parallel English-Arabic Text = al-Ilahiyāt Min al-Shifā’*. Islamic Translation Series. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 374.

<sup>74</sup> For Saba Mahmood’s critique of Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*, see Mahmood, Saba. 2011. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton University Press. <https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691149806/politics-of-piety>, 138. Ian Hacking distinguishes between parenting and childrearing by pointing out that parenting is the social meaning of child-rearing, whereas child-rearing is shared between humankind and natural kinds. See Hacking, “The Looping Effect of Humankind,” 307.

<sup>75</sup> Roald, Anne Sofie. 1994. *Tarbiya: Education and Politics in Islamic Movements in Jordan and Malaysia*. Department of History of Religion, 14.

<sup>76</sup> Shakry, “Schooled Mothers” 145. Zachs observes the distinction between *ta’līm* and *tarbiya*. Unlike *ta’līm* (the transmission of knowledge, instruction), *tarbiya* refers to the training process by which a young child is taught to embody the knowledge she receives, through repetition and habit formation, until she becomes refined and civilized, disciplined, and cultured (See Zachs, Fruma. 2014. “Growing Consciousness of the Child in Ottoman Syria in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Modes of Parenting and Education in the Middle Class.” In *The Ottoman Middle East*, edited by Eyal Ginio and Elie Podeh, 121.) Muhammad Fadel has also commented on the distinction between the two terms, noting that “*Tarbiya* is the verbal noun from the verb *rabbā*, which means “to rear, nurture,” while *ta’līm* is the verbal noun from the verb *‘allama*, which means “to teach, instruct.” The object of what is taught is called *‘ilm*, which means “science” or “knowledge.” Knowledge is simply a product of propositional reasoning, and does not, on its own, lead to certain embodied virtues.” (See Fadel, Mohammad. 2016. “Islamic Law and Constitution-Making: The Authoritarian Temptation and the Arab Spring.” *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2711859>, 2n3.) Laury Silvers also notes that in the past there was no difference between a shaykh of *ta’līm* and a shaykh of *tarbiya*. She describes *tarbiya* as referring to spiritual direction more generally, and notes that the Prophet was both a teacher (*mu’allim*) and a spiritual guide (*murabbi*) See Silvers-Alario, Laury. 2003. “The Teaching Relationship in Early Sufism: A Reassessment of Fritz Meier’s Definition of the Shaykh al-Tarbiya and the Shaykh al-Ta’līm.” *The Muslim World* 93 (January): 69–97; 71.



practices that occurs in a specialized location, not in the mosque.”<sup>77</sup> Drawing upon Mitchell, Omnia El Shakry documents a concerted effort to reform Egyptian mothers by training them in the (European) sciences of child-rearing so that they could raise future-oriented and industrious children, well-groomed for modern economies and competitive with their Western peers.<sup>78</sup> Schooled mothers would pave the way for developing minds that would lead Egypt out of the yoke of imperialism.<sup>79</sup>

Brought up by mothers and grandmothers who themselves had been raised in post-colonies, most of my interlocutors also wanted their children not just to have good morals, but also to be equipped to compete in the modern economy. To this end, they dutifully read scientific writing about mothering and thus learned what could be referred to as a scientific *tarbiya*, that is a sense that mothering skills are acquired under expert guidance.

### ***Scientizing Tarbiya: The Hybridized Muslim Parenting Expert***

Whereas Anya’s South Asian parents would have felt embarrassed about taking her to see a psychologist, she had no such qualms about taking her daughter to a cognitive behavioral therapist. Ever since they arrived in the United States, her daughter’s extreme shyness prevented her from making friends. Like Anya, most of my interlocutors felt they were more attentive to their children’s mental health needs than their parents had been with them. They spoke fluent therapy-speak and felt proud about enlisting psychiatrists, psychologists, and other mental health professionals to help raise their children. Yet relying on this type of help from non-Muslim mental health

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<sup>77</sup> Mitchell, Timothy. 1988. *Colonising Egypt*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 88.

<sup>78</sup> Shakry, “Schooled Mothers,” 152.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

professions is not without complications. Anya worried that the therapist may misconstrue her insistence that her daughter does not wear shorts past the age of ten as oppressive. Furthermore, unlike her therapist, Anya still revered the power of supplication to assist in improving her daughter's social anxiety.

Perhaps due to this demand for mental health services that are cognizant of Islamicate cultures, a new class of parenting experts has emerged that caters to the specific needs of mothers like Anya. They search for therapists who understand the challenges of religious minorities and religious leaders who can teach a *tarbiya* grounded in data and science, not just Quran and hadith. This demand has been met by new university-trained professionals with degrees in psychology and psychiatry, chaplaincy, and social work. Given their credentials, these enterprising individuals recognize the need to “indigenize” universalist scientific discourses to meet the needs of American Muslim minorities. The demand for competent Muslim expertise has opened the doors for graduates with the right degrees to join the ranks of community leadership.<sup>80</sup> These new experts are aware that a full-fledged adoption of Western parenting psy-knowledge will not suit most American Muslim audiences. Similarly, American Muslim scholars and preachers are aware that despite their *ijāzas* and training at traditional Muslim institutes of learning, they are no longer regarded as having requisite knowledge for counseling. To secure patronage from American Muslims, their parenting advice requires some scientific credentials either in the form of citation or through partnering with Muslim professionals in psy-knowledge disciplines.

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<sup>80</sup> For more of the rise of psychology as a professional practice in the Muslim world, see Schayegh, Cyrus. 2009. *Who Is Knowledgeable Is Strong : Science, Class, and the Formation of Modern Iranian Society, 1900-1950*. University of California Press.

## ***A Tarbiya for Our Time: Precedents for Integration***

That Muslims strive to integrate non-Muslim child-rearing expertise is unsurprising, especially when modern scientific prescriptions comply with sharia. As I will discuss in Chapter 3, al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) had no qualms about “Islamizing” Greek child-rearing advice through his reading of Miskawayh and neither did later reformists.<sup>81</sup> Muslim reformists claimed that European child-rearing practices had precedents in Islamic heritage since it was medieval Muslims who preserved Greek thought regarding child-rearing.”<sup>82</sup>

Muslim scholars argue that *tarbiya* practices are not static but should change dynamically with the times. They maintain that modern parents require a modern *tarbiya*, one that can address the unique challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century children. Some quote an adage attributed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (the fourth Rightly Guided Caliph) which states, “Do not compel your children to follow your character, because they were created for a time that is not your time.” A neo-traditionalist, Walead Mossad interprets this to mean that parents should not raise children according to the way they had been raised. The “harsh *tarbiya*” of boomers and immigrants will fail. Rather, he calls on parents to be conscious and creative in how they cultivate their children’s character and learn their manners of speech.<sup>83</sup>

Advocates of modernizing *tarbiya* regard themselves as simply continuing Muslim traditions of integrating revealed and rational sciences. For example, the *Dars-i Nizāmī*

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<sup>81</sup> Shuraydi, *The Raven and the Falcon*, 202.

<sup>82</sup> Morrison, Heidi. 2015. “Reforming Childhood in the Context of Colonialism.” In *Childhood and Colonial Modernity in Egypt*, by Heidi Morrison, 23–42. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137432780\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137432780_2), 34-36.

<sup>83</sup> Mosaad, Walead. 2015. “Prophet Teachings on Parenting.” May 24, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tT1Sg5xqxH8&t=165s>.

curriculum was famous for its two-pronged approach that stressed both the revealed (*naqlī*) and the rational (*‘aqlī*) sciences. The Mustafa Institute draws from the spirit of this curriculum and applied this two-pronged approach to a parenting workshop it held in spring 2017 entitled “Coolness of Our Eyes, Raising Our Children.” This workshop taught the *fiqh* (jurisprudence) related to motherhood and discussed the Prophet’s example as a parent. Whereas the workshop featured *‘Ālima* Maha who was charged with addressing the *naqlī* aspect of Muslim parenting through citation of Islam’s foundational texts and their commentaries, her co-instructor, Dr. Sharifa, a postdoctoral clinical psychologist, represented the rational (*‘aqlī*) component. The latter addressed children’s physical development, such as when to introduce solids, fall prevention, and screen usage.<sup>84</sup> Perhaps justifying the format of the workshop, the *‘Ālima* opened her child-rearing workshop with a pericope from Surah Āl ‘Imrān, which retells Ḥannah’s birth to Mary after a period of infertility: “So her Lord ... (raised her) in a beautiful way” (Q3:37). The *‘Ālima* interpreted this to mean that God “allowed her a good upbringing from a holistic perspective” that included the “two key elements of upbringing,” which she explained were the physical and the spiritual elements. The dual nature of the workshop where a classically trained *‘Ālima* and a Western university trained psychologist reinforced each other's teaching gave tacit endorsement to the idea that *holistic* Muslim parents can and should draw from both the knowledge of the *‘ulamā’* (who can speak to children’s spirituality and morality) and the complementary knowledge offered by trained American Muslim psychologists (who are better suited to addressing children’s physical, social, and emotional growth.)<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

## ***Tarbiya & Child Psychology***

Due to its rising prominence and endorsement on several American Muslim platforms such as the Mustafa Institute, the discipline of psychology deserves special mention. Since the 1980s, with the published works of Malik Badri and the later founding of the International Association of Islamic Psychology (IAIP), there has been increasing interest in integrating Islam and psychology.<sup>86</sup> A growing number of Muslim psychologists have written cutting edge scholarship that aspires to cohere the best of Islamic scholarship and the latest psychological modalities. Muslim psychologists have contributed to medicalizing understandings of *tarbiya* since they draw parents' attention toward developmental benchmarks for their children according to psychiatric guidelines.<sup>87</sup>

Efforts to integrate Islamic child-rearing guidance with Western psychology are also evident in the structure of Muslim parenting education programs. For example, in addition to lacing her exegesis of Quranic verses with references to scientific knowledge, Farhat Hashmi's religious education organization, Al-Huda, runs a subsidiary program called *Hamaray Bachchay* (Our Children) which offers "affordable and high-quality Islamic Education based on the Quran and Sunnah" using "State of the Art teaching methodology derived from principles of child psychology."<sup>88</sup> In another example, in May of 2016, Sakina Wellness hosted their second Annual Community Wellness Conference,

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<sup>86</sup>The IAIP was founded by the late Professor Malik Badri (d. 2021). There are also diploma programs offered for Islamic psychology. See Alam, Fahim. 2021. "Online Diploma in Islamic Psychology." Cambridge Muslim College. April 1, 2021.

<https://www.cambridgemuslimcollege.ac.uk/programmes/islamicpsychology/>.

<sup>87</sup>Starett, *Putting Islam to Work*, 55.

<sup>88</sup>Kaiser, Kanwal. n.d. "Hamaray Bachchay | Guiding, Inspiring, Nurturing." Hamaray Bachchay (Our Children). Accessed February 10, 2022. <https://www.hamaraybachchay.com/>; Sanyal, Usha. 2020. *Scholars of Faith: South Asian Muslim Women and the Embodiment of Religious Knowledge*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 289n79-291. On Hashmi's approach to science, see Musthaq, 'New Claimants to Religious Authority', pp. 140-141 and *passim*.

which was centered around the theme, “Keys to Successful Parenting of American Muslim Children.” The conference took place at an Islamic center located on the site of a repurposed church in Wheaton, Illinois. As was the case at the Mustafa Institute, this conference was also set up in a way that suggested the unproblematic coherence of the Muslim discursive tradition and modern Western scientific child-rearing expertise. The conference featured lectures on early childhood religious education by Deobandi trained *Ustādh*s and bearded *mawlānās*, female preachers who gave tips about nourishing children’s spiritual lives and traditionalist student-travelers like Rami Nsour, who delineated the fine lines between children’s rights and parental rights according to Islamic law. Speaking alongside these traditionalist religious authorities were licensed psychologists who addressed attachment and childhood psychological disorders, physicians who warned against technology’s negative impact on children’s health, and even a non-Muslim white lactation consultant who taught a breakout session on correct latch to a group of mothers. Similarly, the Rahmah Foundation, a formalist religious education program for Muslim women, held a parenting course which was co-taught by the Syrian Ansa Sawsan Imady (Ansa Tamara Gray’s teacher) and a prominent psychiatrist.<sup>89</sup> In all these examples, conference and program organizers designed these events and workshops to imply that teachings on child-rearing from within the Muslim discursive tradition seamlessly cohere with the prescriptions of Western-trained scientific experts.

Apart from the phenomena of Muslim psychologists and psychiatrists lending credibility to Muslim scholars and preachers (and vice versa), these conferences and

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<sup>89</sup> Sawsan, Anse. 2017. “Raising an Observant & Spiritual Muslim Child.” Muslim Community Center - East Bay, July 14. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivlzw9PCJ4>.

workshops and the audiences they attract suggest a demand for new types of authority: the hybridized, integrated scholar-cum-expert. There is a growing number of thought leaders on Muslim child-rearing who can burnish their credentials as both scholars of traditional Islamic sciences and their expertise and clinical expertise in secular psychology disciplines. For example, Dr. Noha Alshugairi holds both a license in Marriage & Family therapy *and* a doctorate in Islamic Studies. This allows her to make comments about religious texts while promoting an Adlerian model of positive discipline. Similarly, the founder of Sakina Wellness (which has an office near Chicago's Midway airport), Keshavarzi is a licensed psychotherapist who also receives specialized coursework in Islam and psychology under the tutelage of Shaykh Amin, the director of a Deobandi institution, Darul Qasim.<sup>90</sup> Sakina Wellness's Bay Area faculty includes Dr. Rania Awaad, a psychiatrist who is also on Zaytuna College's faculty.<sup>91</sup> Regarded as a leading Muslim parenting expert, she is both a clinical instructor at Stanford's Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences Department as well as a bearer of multiple teaching licenses from Syrian 'ulamā' in Quranic recitation and advanced texts of the Shāfi'ī and Mālikī schools. Her foundation hosts a course entitled "Raising a Spiritual Child" as well as prenatal workshops for women.<sup>92</sup> These female-only birthing classes integrate the fiqh of childbirth from the Ḥanafī perspective and the Sunnah related to birth with a scientific overview of labor, delivery, and postpartum recovery. Like Awaad and

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<sup>90</sup> For details on Darul Qasim, see Razavian, Christopher Pooya, and Nathan Spannaus. 2012. "New Deobandi Institutions in the West." In *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change*, 2:31, p. 180-191.

<sup>91</sup> She also runs the Rahmah Foundation. See Kashani, Maryam. 2014. "Seekers of Sacred Knowledge: Zaytuna College and The Education of American Muslims." The University of Texas at Austin, 254.

<sup>92</sup> Awaad, Rania. 2015. "Raising a Spiritual Child | The Rahmah Foundation." Featured Classes, Motherhood, Spiritual and Emotional Development. 2015. <http://therahmahfoundation.org/raising-a-spiritual-child/>; Samira Chothia. n.d. *Blessed Birthings*. Accessed February 7, 2022. <http://therahmahfoundation.org/blessed-birthings/>.

Keshavarzi, commentator and translator Abdul Aziz Ahmad stresses not only his expertise in the Arabic language and familiarity with classical texts, but also his background in modern psychology and pedagogy. Additionally, Nuriddeen Knight draws attention to both her status as a former student-traveler with licenses to teach (*ijāza*), and her master's degree in human development.<sup>93</sup>

### ***Tarbiya and Early Childhood Educators***

In addition to creating demand for psychological experts who are conversant with Muslim traditions, some of my interlocutors keenly followed the teachings of the Catholic education philosopher and Italian physician, Maria Montessori (d. 1952).<sup>94</sup> At the Mustafa Institute parenting workshop, Dr. Sharifa stressed the importance of early mother-child attachment for a child's healthy psychological development. One pregnant mother in the room reluctantly raised her hand and asked: "I have a baby on the way, and I am so exhausted from watching my toddler. Could I enroll him into a local Montessori just so I can have time to rest?" The psychologist sympathetically approved of her prioritizing self-care and praised Montessori as an optimal choice. Likewise, Zunera described herself as "100 percent Montessori in terms of the [child-rearing] Kool-Aid I drink." She offered me this summary of Montessori's *Absorbent Mind*:

[Montessori is] all about [how to foster the child's] creativity, confidence, and independence. We have been doing all of it except in bed since we are still co-sleeping.

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<sup>93</sup> In 2017, Knight offered a course entitled "Childhood and Society. She is a student of both Umm Sahl and Nuh Keller. She also studied with Umm Sahl's friend and colleague, Umm al-Khayr (née Hedaya Hartford), Umm Sahl and Shaykh Nuh in Amman, Jordan. In 2015, she launched a website entitled Noor Al Shādhilī (Shādhilī's Light), named after the founder of the Shādhilī order. See Amin, Farhat. n.d. "Gender & Islam: Conversation with Nurideen Knight." Smart Muslima Podcast. Accessed February 7, 2022. <https://smartmuslima.com/podcast/gender-islam-nuriddeen-knight>.

Amin, Farhat. n.d. "Gender & Islam: Conversation with Nuriddeen Knight." Smart Muslima Podcast. Accessed February 7, 2022. <https://smartmuslima.com/podcast/gender-islam-nuriddeen-knight>.

<sup>94</sup> Allender, Tim. 2016. "Better Mothers': Feminine and Feminist Educators and Thresholds of Indian Female Interaction, 1870–1932." In *Learning Femininity in Colonial India, 1820-1932*, 253-254.



Montessori teaches “exploring the natural world as much as possible, having everything at my daughter’s [eye] level, everything in our house is lowered for her. It is all about including her as a little person in my family.

Zunera was so passionate about Montessori that she refrained from enrolling her daughter into the neighborhood Muslim school since they lacked a certified Montessori teacher. Instead, she dreamed of earning enough to be able to send her daughter to an accredited Montessori, despite its secular orientation and costly tuition. Zunera explained her choice by stressing the “Islamic” parts of Montessori’s method:

When Maria Montessori was coming up with her philosophy, she knew back then that if she pushed a hard-core Catholic pedagogy, she would isolate a lot of people. Although she was a medical doctor, she was passionate about improving learning outcomes for all children. That’s why she wasn’t trying hard to push the Catholic *da’wah*. Two of her students wrote a specific curriculum for Catholic Montessoris. The Montessori method is all about how you cultivate the child’s spiritual side by including them in pious behavior. She involves children in church rituals such as cleaning the pews, putting the water out, setting the votive candles. Maria Montessori was straight up Catholic, so she really believed in cultivating childhood spirituality. She believed that the bulk of religious development was done by age five. The Montessori method [stresses] practical skills (like being able to clean something) from birth up until age six or seven, which she calls the first plane of development. This stage is all about practical skills. So, I don’t see any conflict at all [between raising my child as a Muslim and sending her to a Montessori]. We also emphasize cultivating pious behaviors like where to place your *tasbīh* (Arabic: rosary) after you are done using it. Whenever I pray, I put her *ja ĩ-e-namāz* (Urdu: prayer carpet) down and make it look exactly like mine. I teach my two-year-old how to pick it up and fold it. I situate these actions into a ritualized practice that she will grow into as an adult— there is no incongruence there at all.

Zunera firmly believed that even though technically Montessori methods originate outside of Islam, they belong inside of Muslim conceptions of *tarbiya*. For Zunera, even if Muslim schools were not currently structured according to Montessori principles, they ought to be. To this end, she strove to implement Montessori methods not just in her home, but also at her Muslim weekend school classroom. Every week, she brought in pinecones and stones, animal skeletons and flowers for her elementary age students.

She would place these natural objects into the children’s hands and ask them to reflect on God’s creation. Zunera’s enthusiasm for Montessori speaks to a larger trend of American Muslim parents turning to the Montessori method and other child-centered parenting philosophies. This turn is manifest in the formation of the American Islamic Montessori Association, the proliferation of Muslim Montessori materials on Etsy and the establishment of a handful of Islamic Montessoris in the United States, South and Southeast Asia, and the United Kingdom.<sup>95</sup>

### ***Modern Tarbiya and Pediatrics***

Along with reading psy-knowledge and Montessori philosophy, my interlocutors read child-rearing advice by celebrated pediatricians. Makayla reminisced about preparing for her children’s’ births in the 1970s: “The only book I can really remember is Dr. Spock’s *Baby and Childcare*, which everyone had at that time. It supposedly had all this information about how to raise kids.” Similarly, Maryam recalls that her mother, a Cairene elite, read Spock. Given that sales of *Baby and Childcare* rivaled the Bible, it is no surprise that amongst my interlocutors, Spock was a household name.

In the 1950s, Dr. Spock’s relatively laidback parenting approach was considered novel and progressive.<sup>96</sup> His advice offered an attractive alternative to the dominant, coldhearted recommendations promoted by behavioral scientists, most notably by the

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<sup>95</sup>The American Islamic Montessori Association lists two Islamic Montessoris in the US as member schools. They write about integrating Ahmed’s *Educating Children: Classical Advice for Modern Times* with Montessori philosophy. See Ahmed Husain, Nadia. 2021. “Tarbiyya & Montessori.” American Islamic Montessori Association. November 9, 2021. <https://theaima.org/featured-work/tarbiyya-montessori/>. In Malaysia, entire chains of Islamic Montessoris have emerged and are establishing branches in other Muslim majority countries. See “World Leader in Islamic Montessori.” n.d. Brainy Bunch International Montessori. Accessed February 9, 2022. <https://brainybunch.com/>. See also the Alamiyya school which blends Islamic scholasticism and Montessori methods: “Curriculum | Alamiyah School.” n.d. Accessed August 17, 2022. <https://www.alamiyahschool.org/content/curriculum>.

<sup>96</sup>Hulbert, *Raising America*, 6. Spock’s contemporaries complained that his child-centered approach led to permissive parenting and children who had been “Spock-ed instead of spanked.”

developmental psychologist Dr. John Watson (d. 1958).<sup>97</sup> When asked for advice by a mother complaining that she lacks time for devotion due to infant care, Hamza Yusuf warns her about using television as a babysitter and criticizes those who heed Watson’s advice to let an infant cry in order to rationally condition her emotions. He contends that practices such as letting children cry themselves to sleep are punitive methods that Nazi parents used and ultimately reared “a generation of people who really lost empathy.”<sup>98</sup> The wife of Shaykh Nuh Keller, Ustādha Umm Sahl (literally, mother of ease; Née Besa Krasniqi) provides a less impassioned view of behaviorism. She explains that prior to Spock, parents under the behaviorist spell engaged in stern discipline (which, she does not always consider to be blameworthy) .<sup>99</sup> Behaviorists maintained that children’s behavior could be systematically conditioned by consistently rewarding desirable acts and punishing undesirable ones.<sup>100</sup> They frowned upon spontaneous displays of maternal affection. Mothers who breastfed on demand or consoled crying children were chided for reinforcing undesirable behaviors.<sup>101</sup>

Traces of behaviorist thought can be seen in Ashraf Ali Thānavī’s (d. 1943) late nineteenth century writing from the same time. In *Bihishti Zewar*, his views against co-sleeping echoes Watson when he warned: “Do not show too much affection or a child

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, passim.

<sup>98</sup> Yusuf, Hamza, dir. 2022. *Session 1. The Jewels of the Qur’an*. Zaytuna College.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RARMSZe8axQ>. Hamza Yusuf responded by alluding to a notion that the Nazis were raised by parents who had read a “kind of Dr. Spock like book that was published in the 1880s on how to raise children.” I was not able to track down the specific book, but he may be referring to Johanna Haarer’s *The German Mother and Her First Child* (published 1934). In this work she discourages mothers from excessively comforting, pampering, and emotionally bonding with their children. According to Jensen, Haarer stood in the same behaviorist “tradition of supporting the rationalization of childcare” as Watson. (Jensen, Uffa. n.d. “Mrs. Gaskell’s Anxiety.” In *Learning How to Feel: Children’s Literature and Emotional Socialization, 1870-1970*, edited by Ute Frevert, 1st ed. Oxford University Press., 30-31)

<sup>99</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children,” 25.1.

<sup>100</sup> Keshavarzi, *Islamic Parenting: A Psychospiritual Approach*.

<sup>101</sup> Robert, Karen. 1990. “Becoming Attached - The Atlantic.” *The Atlantic*, February 21.

will be spoiled.”<sup>102</sup> He instructed mothers to refrain from holding their children in their lap too much “for fear of weakness developing.”<sup>103</sup> It is difficult to know whether Thānavī was reading behaviorist literature or whether he was influenced by the Ḥanbalī jurist Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350). In *Tuhfat al-Mawdūd bi Ahkām al-Mawlūd*, Ibn Qayyim similarly advised that newborns should not be picked up and carried around until they reached three months of age. Whereas behaviorists worried about positively reinforcing maternal dependence and physicians worry about SIDS deaths, Ibn Qayyim was concerned that newborns bodies were too weak to be handled, having only recently left the womb.

Although Watson’s recommendations have fallen out of fashion, his legacy was mentioned in Keshavarzi’s seminar on “psychospiritual” approaches to Islamic parenting. He explained that although behaviorism has become passé, the view that a child can be raised to be anything may have some warrant since it underscores the power of parental nurture. He warns parents that if they tell the child that they are a *Shaythān*, then the child will begin to demonstrate satanic behaviors.”<sup>104</sup> Umm Sahl similarly recognized the merits of 1950s parenting styles, which she nostalgically refers to as a time when children were taught manners, obedience, and loyalty to the church. Some of her counsel to mothers aligns with Watsonian prescriptions, such as her critique of those who carry their infants all day, which she sees as detrimentally habituating them to being carried. Yet even she concedes that the average parent in

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<sup>102</sup> Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, 13.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 348. Thānavī was also against co-sleeping: “Put the child to sleep alone, and, for safety, put two cots touching either side of the bedstead or put pillows on either side so that there is no danger of the child falling out of bed. If you put children to sleep near you in bed, you risk crushing them in their sleep when you turn over. Children’s limbs are very delicate, and it is not surprising that they may be hurt easily. In one place, a baby was crushed in this way. In the morning they found her dead.”

<sup>104</sup> Keshavarzi, *Islamic Parenting: A Psychospiritual Approach*.

behaviorism's heyday was "strict and did not express a lot of emotional love."<sup>105</sup> Contrary to the behaviorists, Dr. Spock reassured women that they could trust their maternal instincts when it came to displaying affection. He comforted mothers of the 1960s and 1970s by telling them "You know more than you think you do."<sup>106</sup> Dr. Spock's advice met with criticism in Umm Sahl's child-rearing course. She blames him for bringing about "rebellious hippie type parents." In her estimation, when Spock taught parents to let children "be free and express themselves," he gave children too much independence prematurely, allowing "the door for the child's *nafs* to take over."<sup>107</sup> Whereas Umm Sahl found Dr. Spock indulgent, Dr. Tasneem Ghazi found Spock unjustifiably harsh, especially with regards to sleep training: "Dr. Spock is crazy, he has not raised children. How can he tell us about how to raise these beautiful children? When the baby is so close to your body, they can feel your warmth."<sup>108</sup>

### ***Sanctifying Dr. Sears***

Frustration with Dr. Spock's paternalism (and not to mention Thānavī, Watson, and Ibn Qayyim's call for social distancing between mother and infant)—has given way to the popularity of Dr. Williams Sears (b. 1939). Lauded by *Time* magazine as the man who remade modern motherhood, he was enthusiastically received by many of my interlocutors.<sup>109</sup> On *SeekersGuidance*, Ustādha Shireen Ahmad responds to online queries about strategies for quelling tantrums by redirecting readers to Dr. Sears

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<sup>105</sup> Krasniqi, "Raising Muslim Children." Lecture 25.1; Twenge, *Narcissism Epidemic*, 163.

<sup>106</sup> Hulbert, *Raising America*, 4-5.

<sup>107</sup> Krasniqi, "Raising Muslim Children." Lecture 25.1 and 18.2.

<sup>108</sup> Ghazi, Tasneema. Interview by Nadia Khan. Chicago, IL, August 15, 2017.

<sup>109</sup> Pickert, Kate. 2012. "The Man Who Remade Motherhood." *Time*, May 21, 2012. <https://time.com/606/the-man-who-remade-motherhood/>.

website.<sup>110</sup> Ibtihaj dutifully read his books during her first pregnancy. She notes that in the early 2000s, “Dr. Sears was popular ... a lot of Muslims were really into him because he pushed the breastfeeding and that seemed to align with Islamic principles. His emphasis on keeping everything all natural really resonated with everyone—it was the gold standard.” Like Ibtihaj, Lana also read Dr. Sears: “I gave Sears’ *Baby Bible (sic: Book, published in 1992)* as a gift to all of my pregnant friends.” She was attracted to Sears’ central message: if parents meaningfully connect with their children, they become easier to discipline. “You are raising them without struggling; the connections are profound, so they want to please you and listen to you. They learn from your example.”

Lana drew from her experience as a teacher trainer at Muslim schools. She taught teachers to relate to children using this axiom: “If you give children your heart, they will give their hand.’ I try to do the same in my parenting.” She explained that by satiating children’s psychobiological need for connection (“mother hunger”), mothers and schoolteachers enhance their natural connection to their faith.<sup>111</sup> She explained:

Sunday school can be a meaningful, transformative [experience] when it comes from someone who they feel they have a relationship with. If you ask kids, “who is your favorite teacher?” They always say something like ‘she is nice,’ or they feel some heartfelt connection to her, and if that heart felt connection is not there, then learning does not happen.

Here, Lana asserts that learning happens when embedded in a genuine, attentive relationship. Her emphasis on connection repeats AP’s central message. Instead of Watsonian behavior modification, AP centers high quality adult-child relationships as

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<sup>110</sup> “Parenting in Islam: How to Raise Righteous Children.” 2015. On-Demand Course. Seekers Academy. 2015. <https://academy.seekersguidance.org/enrol/index.php?id=155>.

<sup>111</sup> The term mother hunger comes from this book on the subject: McDaniel, Kelly. 2021. *Mother Hunger: How Adult Daughters Can Understand and Heal from Lost Nurturance, Protection, and Guidance*. Carlsbad, California: Hay House.

the bedrock of child development. Sears explains that ideal adult-child relationships require the following: First, mothers should literally attach to their infants by baby-wearing, even to work if possible. Second, mothers should co-sleep. Dr. Ghazi said she was practicing this instinctively even before AP's prominence. In the 1970s, her neighbor complained to her that her child was still insisting on co-sleeping. Dr. Ghazi chuckled and told her that her five children referred to her king size bed as the "beach," a play on words since in Urdu the word *bīch* means "middle,"—all her children pled in Urdu to sleep wedged in the middle of both parents.<sup>112</sup> Lastly, Sears teaches that oxytocin fueled adult child relationships are built upon breastfeeding.

The origins of Dr. Sears' philosophy can be traced to attachment theory. In the 1950s, attachment theory resulted from the collaboration between psychologists Mary Ainsworth (d. 1999) and John Bowlby (d. 1990). Drawing from findings in ethnology that observed how ducklings imprinted themselves onto geese, Bowlby was convinced that children instinctively need to attach themselves to the nearest caregiver to thrive. He rallied for the necessity of healthy mother-child bonding for development. Mary Ainsworth supplied him with the necessary experimental data to justify his theory. In her famous Stranger Situation experiment, she proved that infants present three types of attachment with their primary caregivers. For the first time, she was able to measure and observe attachment in the laboratory, confirming Bowlby's theories and years of observation in residential settings.

At the Sakina Wellness's 2016 Community Wellness conference, Dr. Sharifa taught Ainsworth's findings to an American Muslim audience. Her PowerPoint listed

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<sup>112</sup> Ghazi, Tasneema. Interview by Nadia Khan. Chicago, IL, August 15, 2017.

signals a child gives when seeking to bond. In a separate lecture on psychospiritual parenting, Keshavarzi also taught Ainsworth's classification of the three attachment styles derived from her experiment: secure, anxious-avoidant, and anxious-resistant. Infants classified as securely attached were visibly distressed when mothers left the room but joyful when mothers returned. They trust that their caregivers are available and affectionately responsive. Confident that the caregiver is providing a stable base of protection they eagerly explore new environments, self-soothe, and skillfully communicate their emotions. Infants classified as insecure or anxious-resistant were agitated when the mother left but hesitated about reuniting with her when she returned. Because the primary caregiver responds to them inconsistently, these infants do not adapt well to new environments and struggle with separation anxiety. Unable to predict whether their attachment needs will be met or not they become aggressive and clingy. Lastly, infants were classified as anxious-avoidant if they did not show distress when mothers left the room. Although on the surface these infants appear to be precocious and independent, they do not explore new environments. Their disregard for a caregiver's presence indicates an attachment void.

### ***Endorsing Attachment Parenting***

Many of my interlocutors and AMPE tacitly endorse AP principles because they perceived it as cohering with the spirit of the Quran and Sunnah. In his video, "Seven Habits of Successfully Raising Muslim Children," Salafi scholar Bilal Philips lists AP as his fourth habit, stating from the very beginning, it is the children's right to be treated in a loving fashion.<sup>113</sup> Similarly, at the parenting conference, speakers repeatedly

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<sup>113</sup> Bilal Philips, *Seven Habits of Successfully Raising Muslim Children*.



encouraged parents to respond attentively to their children to pave the way for healthier families and communities. AP practices were presented as a solution to various intergenerational traumas, which they attributed to poor parent-child attachments. The subtext was often that poor attachments were epiphenomena of the long-lasting effects of colonialism (on some immigrants) and slavery (on some African Americans). They implied that the negative effects of these inherited traumatic legacies could be mitigated through strong parent-child attachments, which would in turn spur butterfly effects: more welcoming mosque communities and compassionate, effective Muslim leadership. Conversely, some of my interlocutors feared that if children fail to cultivate high quality attachment relationships with Muslim adults, they will lose emotional attachment to Islam and its messenger, thus threatening the viability of Islamic traditions.

AP also informed the ways my interlocutors attempted to instill Islamic practices in their children. Zunera abandoned her high-paying consulting work to co-sleep with her two-year-old and cultivate her early development. Her commitment to AP extended into her role as Islamic weekend schoolteacher:

The number one thing I try to do is develop a love for the Prophet—that is my goal in every class. Everything else that I do, looking at a *surah* (Quranic chapter), *farḍ ‘ayn* (obligatory religious knowledge), if its Ramadan or an annual event type of thing—whatever we are looking at—the underlying motivation for me as an educator is to inculcate and cultivate and amplify that love for the Prophet. If you have that love...then that is a better driver and indicator of future [adherence to Islam] than instilling fear or just *fiqh* for the sake of *fiqh*. From my 18 years of teaching, I have learned to develop a relationship with kids. This is what Vygotsky and Piaget taught—that learning is always based in relationships, learning never happens without a context...It is important to cultivate relationships with young people, so they see you as a role model, someone they want to learn from.

Zunera credits her focus on relationships to psychologists Jean Piaget and Soviet Lev Vygotsky. Through his studies of children’s cognitive development, Piaget laid the groundwork that John Bowlby later synthesized to father the attachment movement.<sup>114</sup>.

In addition to observing the attachment movement’s popularity amongst my interlocutors, it also emerged thematically in the lectures of AMPE like Hamza Yusuf. Although he does not mention AP explicitly, he restates AP principles:

Punitive child-rearing is probably the single most harmful thing that exists in the Muslim world today. I think that the Western laxity—which is often criticized by a lot of Muslims that I know—[this] idea of not disciplining children—is troubling. But what I have personally found is children need an immense amount of love and care. If they are given that at an early period, they will naturally harmonize—and this is an insight I gleaned from [reading] Ibn Khaldūn’s *Muqaddimah*. For a long time, I struggled to understand why the Muslim world was so incredibly dystopic and dysfunctional. I concluded that much of it [can be attributed to] child-rearing, simply how children are raised.

Bracketing the orientalist generalizations in this statement, his advice about showering children with love and care in their formative years aligns with AP. Elsewhere Hamza Yusuf diagnoses the root causes of modern dystopia by attributing it to Muslim parents’ failure to raise empathetic children. To rear empathetic children, he recommends the work of psychoanalyst Erik Erikson (d. 1994). Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development anticipated Bowlby and Ainsworth’s later elaborations on attachment.<sup>115</sup>

Erikson outlined a series of psychosocial developmental crises that individuals must face during their lifespan. The first and most important of these crises occurs before eighteen months. Infants can only overcome this crisis and learn to trust others if they learn to

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<sup>114</sup> Karen, Robert. 1990. “Becoming Attached.” *The Atlantic*. February 11, 1990. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1990/02/becoming-attached/308966/>. Drawing from Piaget’s work on cognitive development, Bowlby “built a bridge between Piaget and Freud,” linking Freud’s emphasis upon the centrality of early parent-child to the health of the adult psyche.

<sup>115</sup> Hoare, Carol Hren. 2002. *Erikson on Development in Adulthood: New Insights from the Unpublished Papers*. Oxford University Press, 205.

rely on a responsive caregiver.<sup>116</sup> Hamza Yusuf explains, “If the child knows that it is in a trustworthy family, it is going to resolve that [developmental] crisis, but if you are ignoring the child, it is going to really traumatize that child early on. I am more convinced that most of the problems in the world are direct results of childhood trauma.”<sup>117</sup> Another indication that Hamza Yusuf’s tacit endorsement of attachment parenting is his book recommendations. He advises mothers to read child development author Joseph Chilton Pearce’s (d. 2016) *Evolution’s End*. Pearce’s writing about the importance of maternal bonding and attachment was also inspired by John Bowlby.<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, Hamza Yusuf promotes AP practices when he urges fathers to take their children to Friday prayers and encourages families to celebrate childhood milestones such as finishing a reading of the Quran (*khatam-e Quran*) or memorizing the entire Quran (*dastar-bandi*).

AP is also promoted by more recent psychologists whose works are popular amongst English-speaking Muslim mothers. On a transnational WhatsApp group of English-speaking Sufi parents, Irfana received a message inviting her to sign up for Dr. Gordon Neufeld’s parenting courses. A developmental psychologist and attachment parenting advocate, Neufeld too regularly references John Bowlby when instructing parents to keep their children attached, lest they succumb to the toxic peer youth culture that corporate America allegedly exploits. Echoing Bryson’s classical Greek advice to

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<sup>116</sup> Scheck, Stephanie. 2014. *The Stages of Psychosocial Development According to Erik H. Erikson*. Bod Third Party Titles, 4.

<sup>117</sup> Yusuf, Hamza, dir. 2022. *Session 1*. The Jewels of the Qur’an. Zaytuna College. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RARMSZe8axQ>.

<sup>118</sup> Pearce, Joseph. *Evolution’s End: Claiming the Potential of Our Intelligence*. New York: Harper Collins, 1992, 112.

examine the boy “in all his affairs,” Neufeld prescribes surveilling children.<sup>119</sup> He critiques most contemporary pedagogical parenting literature for ignoring the fact that in today’s peer-oriented culture, children no longer regard parents and educators as authorities, thus Watsonian-like manuals aimed at modifying children’s behavior are based on erroneous premises.<sup>120</sup>

Furthermore, AMPE “Islamize” AP by portraying Quranic personae as moral exemplars of attachment. At a mothering workshop, ‘Ālimah Maha movingly retold the story of Moses’s mother’s heart wrenching decision to cast the infant Moses into a river. Ultimately, God safeguarded mother-child attachment when Asiya, Pharaoh’s wife, hired his mother as the royal wet nurse.<sup>121</sup> She also described Luqman’s loving, attuned communication when teaching his son to worship God:

Look at how Luqman addressed his son. He says, ‘Oh my dear beloved little son, — *yā bunayya* (Q31:16)—I am going to advise you. The scholars tell us that in approaching our children we must be very loving, and teach them in a very kind manner, not wagging [our] finger[s].<sup>122</sup>

Similarly, she explained that Jacob taught Joseph “emotional [intelligence]” when he warns him not to provoke his brothers’ jealousy by telling them about his auspicious dreams. Even when his sons came to him with news of Joseph’s death after their attempted fratricide, Jacob modeled parental forbearance.<sup>123</sup>

In addition to portraying Quranic personalities as attachment parents, AMPE teach that the Prophet and his companions also actively cultivated attachment. They

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<sup>119</sup> Swain, Simon. 2013. *Economy, Family, and Society from Rome to Islam*. Cambridge University Press, 389-96. (Passage 115 in Bryson, 389)

<sup>120</sup> Neufeld, Gordon, and Gabor Maté. 2008. *Hold on to Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More Than Peers*. Reprint edition. Ballantine Books, 258.

<sup>121</sup> Sadiq, “The Coolness of Our Eyes,” April 18, 2017.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. April 23, 2017

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

lament that the true spirit of prophetic parenting has been lost due to various historical forces that have obscured the Prophet's gentle connection with children. Hamza Yusuf lectured that even though both fear and love can be used to motivate children, the Prophet consistently preferred the path of love "engendering such a deep love and veneration for his way and teaching that people want to [follow him], even the children."<sup>124</sup> Ashraf Ali Thānavī reminds readers of a time when the Prophet saw a woman seated with her two children, one in her lap and another holding onto her finger. He remarked,

These women first keep babies in their womb, then they give birth to them, they shower them with love and kindness. If their behavior with their husbands is not evil, then any who adhere to the prayer will indeed go to paradise.<sup>125</sup>

Thānavī linked eternal rewards to mother love. AMPE note that the companions also did not shy away from physical affection. At Sakina Wellness's conference, Dr. Sharifa also encouraged physical affection by mentioning that the Caliph Umar, known for his tough demeanor, kissed children during his reign as *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (the Leader of the Believers). When a subordinate questioned him about this, he replied, "It is no fault of mine if God has removed mercy from your heart. If you do not show mercy to your child, how will you show mercy to the people?" Hamza Yusuf too reiterated the importance of physical touch: "The Prophet hugged and kissed his children. Children need tactile stimulation and physical affection. It is important to have a lot of love in the house. If you do not give them that, they suffer."<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Hanson, *Nurturing Children*.

<sup>125</sup> Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, 311.

<sup>126</sup> Islam Rewards. 2016. *Tarbiyah of Children - Shaykh Hamza Yusuf*.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGS16TZ8e9k>.

## ***Interlude: Attachment Parenting, Submission, and Staying Home***

Although at face value, creating a loving home seems simple enough, the reality is that providing an ideal atmosphere for attachment proved difficult for most of my interlocutors and their dual income, middle-class households. Sociologist Pamela Klassen has asked whether the supreme valuing of motherhood constrains women's lives or does it provide them with avenues that open new ways for women to exercise social and cultural resistance and power.<sup>127</sup> For Saba it was the latter: intentional dedication to being present as a mother was a way to resist careerism and consumerism so that children are given adequate attentive time:

Time is a big restraint. Life makes it difficult to pay attention to nurturing your children. Like [what is] *tarbiya* really? People just say the technical translation, means teaching, but *tarbiya* is more than that. You really must be a combination of a life coach, a teacher, a mentor. It is difficult to play all those roles if you are busy doing other things. I really appreciate the fact that I could stay at home and be with them and not have to worry about work and other things, I am very grateful for that big blessing. Honestly, I don't know how people do it otherwise. I know they do it, but I don't know how they keep focused. I felt like I had to really be there thinking about my role as their mom, and pick up on those little teaching moments, cues that happen throughout the day, these 15-20 second moments. If you are not aware of it, then it slips by. Even the fact that I've been with them, for tens of thousands of moments, [I often feel] that I did not capitalize on them.

Like Saba, Maryam felt privileged to be a stay-at-home mother. "Of course, I think it's important to have hobbies outside of your house, so you don't become depressed when they leave the nest and tell you to 'get a life.'" Maryam chuckled. She pitied her friend, a new mother who had to work to pay the bills while her husband went through law school. "I have other friends though who just want to be able to buy the latest Yves Saint

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<sup>127</sup> Klassen, Pamela E. 2001. *Blessed Events: Religion and Home Birth in America*. Princeton University Press, 4.

Laurent bag and that's what keeps them working and away from their babies, and I just don't understand that..."

*Who* is responsible for being their child's primary attachment figure? This is a key obstacle for many would-be attachment parents, struggling under the conditions of late capitalism. Indisputably, my interlocutors are charged with the lion's share of the emotional labor AP demands. Simultaneously, they have been told to lean into their careers by Sheryl Sandberg and the cheerleaders of the Girl Boss culture of the late 2010s. This tension is exacerbated for American Muslim mothers. On the one hand they are pressured by their parents and communities to be successful to defy stereotypes that Muslim women are voiceless, passive, and oppressed. On the other hand, they are still expected to be devoted homemakers protecting the last standing citadel of Islam, a rationally ordered, tranquil home.

AP has given American Muslim women who choose to mother-in-place scientific justification for their decision. Stay-at-home mothers are not lazily throwing away their education and their privilege or relenting to patriarchy, they are following the latest in child-rearing science and thus doing the best by their children. Stay-at-home enthusiasts can refer to both Bowlby and Ainsworth's warnings regarding mother-child separation. Bowlby was vehemently opposed to early childhood daycares. Although Ainsworth empathized with working mothers, she still emphasized children's need for consistent, responsive caregiving, which realistically only wealthy families can afford to outsource when mothers work. She argued that the quality of early mother-child relationship predicted an individual's future capacity for autonomy. At the Sakina Wellness Parenting Conference, Khan explained that secure attachments facilitate children's school readiness (they are better able to concentrate) and language skills.

Securely attached children have higher emotional intelligence and have less difficulty relying on others.

In contrast, working mothers with unstable childcare are more likely to raise insecurely attached anxious children at risk of depression and anxiety, ADHD, and oppositional defined disorder. Anxious-avoidant attachment in infancy constitutes a gloomy portent for a person's ability to cultivate healthy adult relationships.<sup>128</sup> As adults who struggle with intimacy, they have difficulty adjusting to marriages and parenthood, perpetuating a vicious cycle of trauma and dysfunction.

Although Islamic law allows women to work outside the home (with their husband's permission), caring for children is an encouraged Sunnah.<sup>129</sup> Ahmed Fekry Ibrahim notes that, in general, Islamic law does not oblige women to care for their own children.<sup>130</sup> Even as premodern jurists acknowledged that mothers were preferred over wet nurses and other female relatives for raising their own biological children, they did not "emphasize a unique psychological bond between mother and child." This stands in sharp contrast to nineteenth-century Euro-American ideas regarding a "cult of motherhood."<sup>131</sup> Ansa Tamara Gray echoes Ibrahim's observation about the indigenization of the "cult of motherhood" in Muslim societies. She reminded her audience that the Prophet would engage in domestic work, so those who think that only

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<sup>128</sup> Robert, Karen. 1990. "Becoming Attached - The Atlantic." *The Atlantic*, February 21.

<sup>129</sup> Ibn al-Naqīb and Keller. *The Reliance of the Traveler: A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law, in Arabic with Facing English Text, Commentary and Appendices*. Evanston, IL: Sunna Books, 1991, 45.1.

<sup>130</sup> Ibrahim, *Child Custody in Islamic Law*, 167.

<sup>131</sup> Welter, Barbara (1966). "[The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860](#)" (PDF). *American Quarterly*. 18 (2): 151-174. The historian Barbara Welter described a "cult of true womanhood" that became popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century among white middle-class Protestant women and discouraged women from working outside of the home. Ridgely describes it as a "canon of domesticity." See Ridgely, *Practicing What the Doctor Preached*, 70-72.



mothers are responsible for childcare are incorrectly adopting “a Western concept that we have taken from the colonialists.”<sup>132</sup>

Yet despite many AMPE’s recurring reminder that women are not solely responsible for household management (*tadbīr al-manzil*) and raising children (*tarbiyat al-awlād*), some contemporary Muslim thought leaders do frame (full-time) working motherhood as a cause for concern. When mothers work not out of dire necessity but out of a desire for a higher quality of life (or a designer bag), they court criticism for succumbing to a secular feminist trap that corrodes traditional Muslim families. They are charged with pursuing the *dunya* and competing with men to the detriment of their children’s upbringing. At the turn of the century, writing in *al-Manār*, Ottoman-Syrian Muslim reformer Rashīd Riḍā warned women not to neglect their households, criticizing families who hire foreign nannies and governesses who teach their children Western languages and customs.<sup>133</sup> Likewise, in the United States, Nation of Islam publications emphasized women’s ideal role as homemakers tasked with spiritually preparing the Nations’ future generation.<sup>134</sup> Maududi similarly taught that a mother’s “special field of work” was in her home, labor duly compensated by husbands who shoulder the family’s living expenses.<sup>135</sup> Maududi believed women’s roles as caregivers was a privilege to be appreciated and cherished.<sup>136</sup> Similarly, even though he

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<sup>132</sup> UmranTV English, dir. 2017. *Building Prophetic Families: Anse Tamara Gray*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AlJF564YtPs>.

<sup>133</sup> Shakry, “Schooled Mothers and Structured Play,” 155n124. Shakry writes that Egyptian reformists criticized both mothers “who left their children to do as they pleased according to their whims and caprices, and those “Westernized among us...who have taken on foreign nannies who teach children their language and raise them according to the customs of their lands (*‘adāt aqwāmihim*).”

<sup>134</sup> Karim, Jamillah, and Dawn-Marie Gibson. 2014. *Women of the Nation*. NYU Press. <http://nyupress.org/books/9780814737866/>, 29-30.

<sup>135</sup> De Sony, *The Crisis of Islamic Masculinities*, 48n171.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 48-49.

broke from Maududi, Israr Ahmed seems to have maintained the former's teachings regarding motherhood, stating that

The major responsibility entrusted to the mother is imparting purposeful education and moral values in her children. To seek other avenues at the cost of this major responsibility is certainly not permissible.<sup>137</sup>

He considered it to be mothers' religious obligation to shield children from Western secularism:

Our younger generation is at the receiving end of the most vicious onslaught of Western cultural influences. [They] are exposed to the pernicious effects of media like newspapers, magazines, television, and the Internet. In this scenario, if the responsibility of bringing up a child is set aside and women spend more time in preaching outside their homes, then this is an adulteration of the priorities of their responsibilities.<sup>138</sup>

Israr Ahmed's lectures offer a similar perspective on a mother's normative role. His talks assume that mothers are cooking hearty meals and dutifully awaiting their husbands return from work or *tablighi* missionizing. They all insist that mothers resist feminism and focus on propagating Islam to their children at home.

More recent reformists continue to criticize working mothers. Bilal Philips tweeted a meme of a Moroccan woman walking through a blue-walled casbah with the caption: "The expulsion of women from their natural roles within the family is part of the symptoms of a declining culture." In the accompanying tweet, @Dr. Bilal Philips: wrote, "If a husband works outside the home to earn an income and his wife follows suit, then who raises their children up the right way with Islamic ethics? No one!" Philips thus attributes a decline in Muslim ethics to working mothers.

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<sup>137</sup> Ahmed, Israr. 2003. *Religious Obligations of Muslim Women (Musulmān Khawātīn Ke Dīnī Farā'īd)*. 1st ed. Lahore, Pakistan: Markazi Anjuman Khuddam al-Qur'an. [www.tanzeem.org](http://www.tanzeem.org).

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

Although it is tempting to associate sentiment against working motherhood with socially conservative Islamists and Salafists, working motherhood also draws criticism within traditionalist circles. For example, Abdalqadir as-Sufi (née Ian Dallas, d. 2021), a Scottish convert who took many influential European and American Muslim converts as his disciples, advised his devotees to homeschool and teach children *adab* (*paidea*, virtues, manners) and *akhlāq* (good character), especially table manners. He encouraged mothers to devote themselves to vigilant child-rearing and thereby support nascent Western Muslim communities.<sup>139</sup> In their writings, Abdalqadir as-Sufi's devotees imply that working motherhood disrupts the natural "ebbs and flows of childbirth and aging." They portray stay-at-home mothers as agents who resist state capitalism, which they blame for turning women into neoliberal consumers who are only celebrated in their youth and then driven into the labor force, to their children's detriment. They praise industrious mothers who knit their children's clothing rather than crassly consuming.

In a similar vein, Dr. Abdul Hakim Murad praises stay at home mothers for courageously living in accordance with their *fiṭra* (human nature) and defying secular liberal demands:

Islam's awareness that when human nature (*fiṭra*) is cultivated rather than suppressed, men and women will tend towards different spheres of activity is of course one which provokes howls of protest from orthodox liberals: for them it is the paradigmatic blasphemy. But even in the primitive biological and utilitarian terms which are the liberals' usual frame of reference, the case for an absolute identity of vocation seems highly problematic. However heavily society may enculturate (sic) women into seeking absolute parity in all dimensions of life, it cannot ignore the reality that they still, as the likes of Vanessa Redgrave courageously assert, have babies, and report a tendency to enjoy looking after them. Those courageous enough to leave their careers while their

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<sup>139</sup> Ahmed, Ibtisaam, and Aisha Bewley. 2020. *Reweaving Our Social Fabric*. Diwan Press. <https://www.diwanpress.com/shop/books-and-ebooks/islam-today/reweaving-our-social-fabric/>, 19.

children are small often have to put up with charges of blasphemy and heresy from society; but they persist in their belief, outrageous to the secular mind, that mothers bring up children better than child-minders, that breastmilk is better than formula, and even – this as the most dangerous heresy of all—that bringing up a child can be more satisfying than trading bonds or driving buses.<sup>140</sup>

Other neo-traditionalists call on women to resist the idea that child-rearing is oppressive to women and not productive labor.<sup>141</sup> Umm Sahl recommends that mothers read *Fascinating Womanhood* by Helen Andelin. Writing in the 1960s just as the women's liberation movement was taking off, Andelin countered second-wave feminists by encouraging women to abandon careerism to save their marriages. Andelin argued that only good mothering could produce model citizens. In addition to citing Andelin, Umm Sahl also encourages mothers to read Krueger's *Raising Godly Tomatoes*. Krueger also discourages mothers from working outside of the home, reminding mothers that children should be their "top priority" above work, social lives, and immaculate homes.<sup>142</sup> She considers parenting highly demanding, and thus instructs women to "give up everything else if necessary to undertake the world's most important and fulfilling job to the best of your ability."<sup>143</sup> Krueger interprets the Bible to mean that wives must subject themselves to their husbands just as children must subject themselves to their parents, with each member of the family fulfilling their designated role in a clear hierarchy.<sup>144</sup> Reinforced by Adeline and Krueger, Umm Sahl glorifies a

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<sup>140</sup> Murad, Sheikh Abdal Hakim. 2021. "Fall of the Family." The Sila Initiative. July 12, 2021. <https://thesilainitiative.org/articles/fall-of-the-family/20210712/by-abdal-hakim/>.

<sup>141</sup> bell hooks critiques elite White feminism for promoting the idea that raising one's own children is oppressive. See hooks, bell. 2014. "Revolutionary Parenting." In *Feminist Theory*, 3rd ed., 15. Routledge, 133. She notes that only women with economic means have the luxury to stay at home and watch children and forego the wage work that poorer women have no other choice but to accept.

<sup>142</sup> Krueger, L. Elizabeth. 2007. *Raising Godly Tomatoes: Loving Parenting With Only Occasional Trips to the Woodshed*. Krueger Publishing, 25.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, *passim*; Ridgely, Susan B. 2017. *Practicing What the Doctor Preached: At Home with Focus on the Family*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 52, 2-3.

version of nineteen fifties Leave-it-to-Beaver style family life.<sup>145</sup> In this ideal family, major decisions are made according to the father’s “*istikhāra* or ‘prayer of guidance,’” to which the mother must humbly subject herself.<sup>146</sup>

Whereas some parent educators unequivocally condemn mothers who delegate child-rearing, some AMPEs are more delicate in prescribing stay-at-home motherhood. Perhaps aware that many of their listeners identify as feminists and/or are working mothers, they astutely employ gender neutral language when discussing caregiving. For example, Kanwal Kaiser, Farhat Hashmi’s student, explains why she believes children have replaced parents as family powerbrokers. She is careful to fault not just status-seeking, working mothers who do not see enough of their children, but also fathers who are allegedly working more hours than fathers in previous generations.<sup>147</sup> Hamza Yusuf similarly equivocates about his stance on working motherhood. Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos on a panel entitled “Can Women Have it all,” Hamza Yusuf applauds Swiss mothers, marveling at the high number who work part time:

I [have been] coming [to Switzerland] for the last 10 years. I am amazed at how wonderful the Swiss people are. The mothers are doing something right. There is the lowest crime rate on the planet, it says something about your mothering skills. [Also, it is] very dangerous to denigrate the work of mothers. One of the things that a lot of mothers now feel is that if they don’t have a career, then they are worthless. [This has an] incredibly negative impact. In the best scenarios, everyone would be able to do what they want. If they want to stay at home with children, they could do that. [I think] for the first five years someone should stay at home—either the mom or the dad— since children need care and concern.

Here, Hamza Yusuf echoes Dr. Sears’ concerns. Sears recommended that new parents take out loans for the first year of their children’s lives so that mothers can stay home

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<sup>145</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children,” 23.1.”

<sup>146</sup> Keller, Nuh. 1999. *The Shādhilī Tariqa*. <http://archive.org/details/ShadhiliTariqa>, 41.

<sup>147</sup> Kaiser, Kanwal, *Parenting in 21st Century*. 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QpOeVKDryM8>.

and demand feed.<sup>148</sup> In keeping with AP, Hamza Yusuf explains that the reason why so many Western young engage in attention-seeking behavior is because they were neglected by the “people they need it from” (their mothers?) and thus they spend the rest of their lives trying to satiate their attachment hunger.<sup>149</sup> Although Hamza Yusuf does not say that *mothers* should stay at home for the early years, he complimented Swiss mothers for their ability to balance career and family, ignoring the generous parental benefits the Swiss enjoy that Americans do not.<sup>150</sup>

Hamza Yusuf’s students perpetuate the preference for stay-at-home motherhood while carefully articulating their stance on the contentious issue of traditional gender roles. For example, Hosai Mojaddidi warns mothers not to outsource all their time away from their children since “your kids need you.”<sup>151</sup> At the parenting conference, Dr. Sharifa employs the gender-neutral term “caregiver” rather than mother when discussing the child’s need for close physical proximity to an adult (read: mother). Similarly, Keshavarzi mentioned that *parents* (rather than just mothers) need to attend to children. After telling mothers not to be “so caught up in your career that you forget how to be a mom and simply drop the kid off at daycare” he quickly pivots to remind fathers not to be “so engrossed in your own activities that you only do school drop-offs and don’t respond to the child’s needs.”<sup>152</sup> Nonetheless, Keshavarzi stresses the

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<sup>148</sup> Gritz, Jennie Rothenberg. 2012. “What Everyone’s Missing in the Attachment-Parenting Debate.” *The Atlantic*. May 31, 2012. <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2012/05/what-everyones-missing-in-the-attachment-parenting-debate/257918/>.

<sup>149</sup> Hamza Yusuf, dir. 2017. “Can Women Have It All? With Hamza Yusuf.” *World Economic Forum*. Davos, Switzerland. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrwB6EvV52U>.

<sup>150</sup> “Parental Benefit.” n.d. Försäkringskassan (Swedish Social Insurance System). Accessed August 18, 2022. <https://www.forsakringskassan.se/english/parents/when-the-child-is-born/parental-benefit>.

<sup>151</sup> Mojaddidi, Hosai. n.d. *Raising Children with Dignity, Devotion & Deen | Parenting Workshop with Ustādha Hosai*. Accessed July 18, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1b-JnBvypbs&list=PL9uyRQTMUugkpNBE8E9nwNeg72F5lrVAa&index=2&t=os>.

<sup>152</sup> Keshavarzi, *Islamic Parenting: A Psychospiritual Approach*.

importance of “quality mothering” implying that overworked mothers neglect their own self-care and thus risk insecurely attaching to their children: “If you have issues, get the help you need for yourself. If the child is seeing instability, they won’t be stable, they will [try to compensate for this instability]. If they cannot find love at home, they will try to find it elsewhere.”<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, he argues that women are better able to ascertain children’s needs than men, who often have no idea why the baby is crying and “just find it annoying.”<sup>154</sup> Thus even when Muslim psychologists try to use gender-neutral language while stressing the importance of early childhood attachment, they insinuate that “good” mothers stay home.

### ***Reclaiming Authority with Leonard Sax***

“Have you read his stuff?” Maryam asked me regarding Sax. “It is like he is preaching from hadith half the time!” Her book club spent multiple sessions reading *Why Gender Matters*, *Boys Adrift* and *Girls on the Edge*. Maryam first heard of Leonard Sax from Imam Masmari, who led her Michigan mosque community and had invited Sax to speak to his congregants.<sup>155</sup> Other mothers had heard of Sax’s works through the recommendation of Ḥabīb Quadri, the principal of a Chicago area Islamic school who held a parenting workshop at the Islamic Center of Wheaton.<sup>156</sup> Hamza Karamali, Basira Education’s founder, offers “Muslim reflections” on Sax’s work. Karamali endorses Sax’s thesis (which in turn quotes Neufeld) that parents need to matter more than peers,

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Dr. Leonard Sax for *Shajara Tayyiba School*. 2021. Canton, Michigan.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYGL8GFe2IA>.

<sup>156</sup> Qadri, Ḥabīb. n.d. “Our Children, Our Future: Parenting in the 21st Century.” Public Talk, Islamic Center of Wheaton. Qadri is the Principal at MCC. He is also the author of a *War within Our Hearts* which offers advice to Muslim adolescents.

insisting that peer influence threatens parents' efforts to transfer Islamic values to their children.<sup>157</sup> In addition to the call for mothers to return home, many AMPE also appeal to reassert their authority to set boundaries. To this end, they welcome Leonard Sax's work. Like AP advocates, Sax emphasizes strong parent-child relationships but stresses the need for parents to regain control of the family's helm. At a *ṣuḥba* gathering in Toronto, Nuh Keller commented upon passages from Sax's *Collapse of Parenting*.<sup>158</sup> (Keller's student, Nuriddeen Knight' also recommended it in her parenting course.)

Keller wrote:

It's essential to hang around like-minded parents. This doesn't mean retreating further into the Muslim ghetto. It doesn't mean looking only Eastwards. And it doesn't mean isolationism, nor anti-Americanism. It means finding people with shared, slightly old-fashioned virtues who value integrity, humility, conscientiousness, and the willingness to try, fail, then try again. These values were traditionally found throughout North America and Europe and are still there to be tapped into. It also means rules, politeness, chores, and discipline, but coupled with unconditional love and affection. It doesn't mean being an austere and aloof parent. You should still be loving and close to your children. But most of all it means pulling one's family out of the present **culture of disrespect** and nonsense that has sprung up over the last twenty years. Set the example. **You may not be the perfect example of integrity but don't be paralyzed by your inadequacies or those dark places in your soul.** You must try your best, and in the process, you must abstain from the current, popular tech-created culture of nothingness, consumption, and nihilism wherein a man named Trump can take over the asylum. [Bolded text indicates language quoted from Sax's *Collapse of Parenting*]

Keller endorses Sax's critique of American parent pushovers prone to overmedicating and overscheduling children. He paraphrases Sax's work to encourage parents to confidently reclaim their power, even if they feel unworthy. Citing Dr. Gordon Neufeld, Sax argues that this "culture of disrespect" gains footing when parents mistakenly yield

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<sup>157</sup> "Parents Matter More Than Peers - Shaykh Hamza Karamali." 2019. *SeekersGuidance* (blog). December 14, 2019. <https://seekersguidance.org/articles/featured-articles/parents-matter-more-than-peers-shaykh-hamza-karamali/>.

<sup>158</sup> The transcript of his lecture has since been uploaded on his website: Keller, Nuh Ha Mim. n.d. "The Collapse of Parenting." Articles, Epitomes Read at Suhbas. Accessed July 22, 2020. <https://untotheone.com/articles/the-collapse-of-parenting/>.



to children too soon by treating them as independent adults prematurely. Instead of learning to emulate their parents' virtues, they are taught to flout authority and thus remain emotionally underdeveloped. Both Sax and Keller call for parents to reclaim their authority and return to an imagined past of long marriages and recognized hierarchies rather than the current situation in which (they argue, much like the conservative Christian right) that marriage and family are "under assault from a wide variety of sources."<sup>159</sup>

### ***“Western Tarbiya” and the (Mis)education of Muslim Mothers***

Although many of my interlocutors and AMPE enthusiastically reference the harmony between leading psychological, psychiatric, and pedagogical literature and their interpretations of Islam's foundational texts, some caution Muslim mothers about uncritically adapting secular child-rearing guidance to their parenting practices.<sup>160</sup> For the purposes of this section I will inelegantly refer to this disparate and often conflicting body of psychological, psychiatric, and pedagogical literature as Western *tarbiya*. I adapt this catchall term from Umm Sahl, who rebukes guileless acceptance of non-Islamic prescriptive parenting literature.

Some Muslim parent educators identify several shortcomings of Western *tarbiya*. First, they worry that Western child-rearing practices do not adequately account for individual children's unique temperaments. Second, they argue that the proliferation of conflicting child-rearing advice contributes to the loss of common sense amongst Muslim mothers and alienates them from their maternal instincts. Third, some fault

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<sup>159</sup> Keller, Nuh Ha Mim. n.d. "The Collapse of Parenting." *Articles, Epitomes Read at Suhbas* (blog). Accessed July 22, 2020. <https://untotheone.com/articles/the-collapse-of-parenting/>; Sax, *Collapse of Parenting*, *passim*.

<sup>160</sup> Krasniqi, "Raising Muslim Children," 16.1 and 24.1.

attachment parenting for democratizing Muslim family life to the detriment of marriages. Fourth, critics question whether the rise of the Muslim parenting experts displaces the traditional authority of the *‘ulamā’*. Lastly, some worry that the wide scale adoption of Western child-rearing practices undermines indigenous epistemologies regarding child-rearing, which ultimately disrupts correct ethical self-formation.

What comprises Western *tarbiya*? In a sense, if by “Western” Umm Sahl implies the secular, then Western *tarbiya* is not *tarbiya* at all. This is because *tarbiya* is a decidedly “nonsecular conception of proper pedagogy.”<sup>161</sup> Umm Sahl pejoratively uses this neologism not to refer to *all* non-Muslim pedagogical child-rearing advice but rather to specific parenting styles (such as AP) and alternative educational philosophies (Waldorf/Steiner and Montessori).<sup>162</sup> These approaches all honor children’s nature and independence, emphasizing the parent/educator-child bond (styles Hulbert refers to as “child-centered” or “soft parenting”).<sup>163</sup>

Umm Sahl concedes that not all Western child-rearing knowledge is harmful. She reassures student-mothers that one can draw advice from non-Muslim prescriptive literature, since *al-ḥikma ḍālat al-Muslim*—wisdom is the believer’s lost property.<sup>164</sup> Furthermore, she reads secular psychology-based advice literature aloud in her classes and acknowledges its merits. However, she cautions against the “worldly parenting theories” written by psychologists and psychiatrists and instead promotes works written

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<sup>161</sup> Shakry, “Schooled Mothers and Structured Play,” 157. She refers to *tarbiya* using the phrase “nonsecular conception of proper pedagogy.”

<sup>162</sup> Umm Sahl doesn’t mention Montessori by name but refers to parents who engage in Montessori practices such as buying wooden toys and eating organic food. Another interlocutor similarly caution homeschooling mothers from uncritically following Waldorf and Montessori theories.

<sup>163</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children,” 16.1.

<sup>164</sup> *Al-Ḥikmatu ḍālat al-mu’min fa-ḥaythu wajadaha fa-huwa ‘aḥaqqu bi-hā*; Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī 2687 (41:43); Krasniqi “Raising Muslim Children,” 17.2.

by devout Christian authors who prescribe older, Biblical models of child-rearing that “downplay materialism and swim against the cultural tide that produces a child-centric society.”<sup>165</sup> In addition to Krueger’s manual Umm Sahl recommends Christian self-help authors and psychologists such as Henry Cloud’s *Boundaries with Kids* and Dan Kindlon’s *Too Much of a Good Thing: Raising Children of Character in an Indulgent Age* due to their emphasis on parental obedience and godliness.<sup>166</sup> They present what Hulbert has termed “hard” parenting or parent-centered child-rearing, which relies on strict discipline, and hold parents accountable for nurturing children’s behavior.<sup>167</sup> Umm Sahl may prefer the work of Christian social conservatives since both conservative Muslims and Christians idealize heterosexual two-parent families, frown upon divorce, and call for broader institutional support for marriages.<sup>168</sup> Furthermore, conservative Muslims and Christians tend to identify parents (not the state) as children’s optimal guides.

By urging parents to reclaim their role as children’s shepherds, skeptics of Western *tarbiya* also claim that it flattens children’s particular temperaments. A *SeekersGuidance* writer, Shireen Ahmad cautions parents that although non-Muslim child-rearing sources are beneficial for understanding developmental milestones, it is important to read them with “a grain of salt” since parenting trends change so often and secular parenting expertise does not adequately account for a child’s unique needs—

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 16.1 and 20.1.

<sup>166</sup> Keller, Nuh. *Sydney Suhba Women’s Question and Answer Session*. 2017. Question and Answer. Vol. 3.3. 10 vols. Disciplining Children. Sydney. <https://untotheone.com/index/disciplining-children/>.

<sup>167</sup> Hulbert, *Raising America*, passim.

<sup>168</sup> Muhammad Umar Mustafa, dir. 2022. *Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah on the Beauty of the Gender Binary*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3186fOZoGA>.

what benefits one child may fail another.<sup>169</sup> Like Shireen Ahmad, historian Ann Hulbert similarly questions twentieth century American parenting experts for failing to account for the particularities of individual children’s lived experience and parents’ diverse contexts.<sup>170</sup>

Critics of Western *tarbiya* argue that when parents turn towards pedagogical literature instead of observing their own children, they inevitably question their instincts. Hulbert argues that despite overwhelming amounts of child-rearing advice, maternal anxieties about child-rearing abound, and confusion about handling children like Maryam’s pouty daughter persist.<sup>171</sup> Farhat Hashmi’s students similarly complain that the proliferation of parenting experts has left many mothers bewildered:

[Our] mothers say, ‘We raised our children without psychologists, and we did such good *tarbiyat* (Urdu: *tarbiya*).’ But then you feel that you haven’t taken these parenting courses, so you are not a capable mother, and you worry.<sup>172</sup> Umm Sahl similarly laments the lack of confidence she observes amongst her husbands’ disciples. She denounces psychologists who encourage parents to act unnaturally by rationalizing every request. “We have to get back in contact with our basic common sense—something is not working properly.”<sup>173</sup> She describes the parental impotence that results from following Western *tarbiya* by recounting a story of a well-educated couple struggling with their unruly toddler. The toddler loved playing in toilet water and would not stay seated for meals. Overwhelmed, they sponsored a

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<sup>169</sup> “Parenting in Islam: How to Raise Righteous Children.” 2015. On-Demand Course. Seekers Academy. 2015. <https://academy.seekersguidance.org/enrol/index.php?id=155>.

<sup>170</sup> Scholnick, Ellin Kofsky. 2004. “Scientists as Sages: The Perils of Dispensing Advice in a Postmodern World.” *Human Development* 47 (2): 104. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000076252>.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Kaiser, Kanwal, *Parenting in 21st Century*. 2017.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QpOeVVKDryM8>. See also: Kaiser, Kanwal. n.d. “Hamaray Bachchay | Guiding, Inspiring, Nurturing.” Hamaray Bachchay (Our Children). Accessed February 10, 2022. <https://www.hamaraybachchay.com/>.

<sup>173</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children,” 25.1

Moroccan *au pair*. Although she was loving and affectionate, she would slap the toddler's hand every time she misbehaved. After just a few days, the couple was awestruck at the toddler's transformation into a loving and obedient child.<sup>174</sup> Umm Sahl contrasts this Moroccan nanny's untutored know-how to American-born mothers' bookish confusion. Perhaps recognizing that it is impractical for most American Muslim families to sponsor Muslim nannies, she advises mothers to keep the company (*ṣuḥba*) of other pious Muslims especially "ethnic Muslim friends" since they have "inherited Islamic 'adab and character."<sup>175</sup> In doing so, she implies that it is harder for European and American mothers to engage in a more Islamic, eastern *tarbiya*, and thus they inevitably struggle to raise upright children.<sup>176</sup>

Apart from eroding maternal confidence, Umm Sahl critiques mothers who follow AP for satisfying children's desires instead of their husbands, thereby inverting family hierarchies and harming marriages. Umm Sahl's view of *tarbiya* that supports vertical hierarchy contradicts that of the positive parenting advocate Alshugairi, who sees *tarbiya* as "relationship-based," thus implying that mother and child interact on an egalitarian, horizontal plane.<sup>177</sup> AP's stress on co-sleeping crystallizes the structural problem: mothers luxuriating in their newborns' scent alienate their husbands. Allowing preschoolers unfettered access to the marital bed causes marital breakdown.<sup>178</sup> She warns about the eventual erosion of the marital bond:

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 20.1.

<sup>175</sup> Krasniqi, "Raising Muslim Children," 24.1.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 16.2.

<sup>177</sup> Alshugairi, *Positive Parenting in the Muslim Home*, 17.

<sup>178</sup> Non-Muslim psychologists and physicians also take this position. See Morell, Sally Fallon. 2013. *The Nourishing Traditions Book of Baby & Child Care*. New Trends Publishing. 157-8. Neufeld also recommends co-sleeping unless it affects the parents' marriage. Some Muslim scholars explain that having sexual intercourse while an infant in the marital bed or chamber harms the child's spiritual state. See for example, Dingle, Farid. 2021. "Intimate Relations in Presence of Infants." *SeekersGuidance* (blog). April 4, 2021. <https://seekersguidance.org/answers/adab/intimate-relations-in-presence-of-infants/>.

After five to seven years, [your husband might think] “Well it is *ḥalāl* to have a second wife. He’ll put the idea out there and things start developing more and more because the need for fulfillment from a woman is very deep and he is not getting it. [Instead, the] woman has a lot of time and attention to give to her children—teaching them how to read, playing games. So, are you doing the *wājib* with [your children] or [are you] making a lopsided situation in home, causing a lot of misery?”<sup>179</sup>

Echoing Hannah Andelin, she reminds mothers that “husbands should come first and children second.”<sup>180</sup> As Kecia Ali explains, premodern Muslim legal writers conceived of marriage as an arrangement centered upon the husband and wife—parent-child relations were peripheral, and children were secondary.”<sup>181</sup>

Besides arguing that AP leads to familial chaos, Umm Sahl also interprets al-Ghazālī’s child-rearing treatise to rebuff AP. In the *Revival*, al-Ghazālī warns parents and educators not to speak to children at length about their misdeeds, for this diminishes the profundity of their words on children’s hearts. Perhaps taking aim at modern parenting experts who emphasize reasoning with children, she comments,

This is a major problem in Western *tarbiya*. Everything must be a big discussion [with children]. You can’t just say “no,” and then explain things later at an appropriate time. You don’t have to explain everything to children, they understand that you are the authority. [Sometimes you must simply say ‘No’] and it must be like that”<sup>182</sup>

In one class, Umm Sahl reads from a section in Jean Twenge’s *Narcissism Epidemic* that document trends in the traits that parents wished to see their children embody. Whereas in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century parents wanted their children to obey them, after the 2000s, fewer parents prioritized obedience. Appalled by American parents’ hesitancy to

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<sup>179</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children,” 14.2 and 24.1.

<sup>180</sup> Neuffer, *Helen Andelin*, 56; Ali, Kecia. 2010. *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*. First edition. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 6.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 6. Ahmed Fekry Ibrahim also discusses how jurist consults privilege marital relations over the best interests of the child. See Ibrahim, Ahmed Fekry. 2015. “The Best Interests of the Child in Pre-Modern Islamic Juristic Discourse and Practice.” *American Journal of Comparative Law* 63 (4): 859–91. <https://doi.org/10.5131/AJCL.2015.0026>.

<sup>182</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children,” 6.5

expect obedience, Umm Sahl warns that child-centered parenting philosophies produce selfish, narcissistic children and impotent parents.<sup>183</sup>

Apart from detracting from paternal rights and threatening Muslim families, critics of Western *tarbiya* may view its widespread reception as competing with the traditional authority of the ‘*ulamā*’ and their surrogates. Despite not holding traditional teaching licenses, a cottage industry has emerged of Muslim parenting experts, life coaches, and mental health specialists who teach about children’s spiritual pedagogy and *true tarbiya*. In doing so, they tread on the toes of murshids and Sunni ‘*ulamā*’ who are otherwise charged with pastorally caring for Muslim parents and guiding their spiritual growth (*tasawwuf, ihsān*).<sup>184</sup> Consequently, they compete for patronage with individuals who have studied sharia in depth at the feet of ‘*ulamā*’ and Sufi masters. Some have argued that this new class of Islamic psychologists, counselors, life coaches, and other experts partake in a half-baked Islamization that sells their manuals and draws social media followers.<sup>185</sup> For her part, Umm Sahl urges mothers to “reject the deception” of those who peddle in psychology-based parenting advice by reading this passage from *Raising Godly Tomatoes*:

Virtually every parenting book published in recent years ... was written by a psychologist, not experienced parents, or grandparents. This is deeply disturbing because the field of psychology does not have its foundation in Christian principles but in vain worldly philosophies .... Today, beginning as early as nursery school, children are being exposed to worldly methods and techniques originally invented in failed attempts to treat the mentally ill. By the time these students reach adulthood, their viewpoints have been so

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 18.1; Neufeld, *Hold onto your Kids*, 229. I borrow the phrase “impotent parents” from Gordon Neufeld.

<sup>184</sup> Asad, Talal. 2015. “Thinking about Tradition, Religion and Politics in Egypt Today.” *Critical Inquiry* 42. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/epdf/10.1086/683002>.

<sup>185</sup> Salman Younas [@salyounas]. 2022. “Recognize This Rapidly Expanding Grift: Many Trying to Present Islamic Psychology (and Attendant Discourses on ‘holistic living’ etc.) as the New Science of Ihsan & Psychologists/Life-Coaches/Counsellors as the New Guides. It Isn’t and They Aren’t.” Tweet. *Twitter*. <https://twitter.com/salyounas/status/1539367309973790721>.

shaped by secular psychology that they can scarcely think any other way.<sup>186</sup>

Elsewhere Krueger sounded the alarm that psychologists, posing as experts, are infiltrating church communities.<sup>187</sup> By quoting this passage, Umm Sahl implicitly questions the expanding role of psychologists and therapists in Muslim milieus. She explains that Muslims should understand the “vain, worldly philosophies” that Krueger derides constitute “an example of *‘urf fasād*—corrupt customary practices to be avoided at all costs.<sup>188</sup> Rooted in secular psychology, she discusses worldly Western *tarbiya* as part of a broader problem of Muslim minorities in European and American countries kowtowing to secular scientific authorities and thereby interrupting the successful transmission of Islamic traditions. Umm Sahl asserts that by following the dictates of child-centered parenting experts, mothers neglect not just their relationships to their husbands and *murshids*, but also correct comportment with God:

Women say they are slack in their *‘ibādah* (worship), in [gaining] *‘ilm* (religious knowledge) and in [attending] *majālis* (gatherings of remembrance), that they are busy with their children. But you have time: you make the best organic food for the kids. They get the best education. [They wear cotton clothes, they have the natural toys, a holistic environment, but some [mothers] are so engaged with that, that they didn’t teach children remembrance of Allah. If you don’t teach them [that this] is the priority in their life, then you have done them an injustice. But [these mothers] put their baby first, everything is always [about the child]. Devotion to Allah is the most essential thing for child, all those other things—organic whatever it is, cloth nappies—It’s all going to decompose, all that remains is their devotion to Allah and nothing else.<sup>189</sup>

This is her gloss of Sūrat al-Tawba 24, “Say, ... if your children ... are more beloved to you than God and His messenger and striving in His way, then wait till God comes with His Command. And God guides not iniquitous people.” For Umm Sahl, mothers who

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<sup>186</sup> Krueger, *Raising Godly Tomatoes*, 8-9.

<sup>187</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children,” 23.1

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.1 and 2.1.



center their lives around their child have no time left for devotional practices. The critique of AP then is not just about poor manners, spoiled children, and spurned husbands. Rather, the underlying fear is that parents who do not teach children to respect parental authority will lead them away from their parent's *shuyūkh*. Returning to the study of proper *tarbiya* then acts as a salve to the broader, pressing crisis of Muslim religious authority.

How should mothers resist Western *tarbiya*? Umm Sahl instructs them to swap Western *tarbiya* books with books about the *dīn*.<sup>190</sup> Like Umm Sahl, Dr. Rania Awaad warns mothers to carefully assess non-Muslim child-rearing advice—and even advice from “apologetic Muslims”—against the yardstick of “Islamic values.”<sup>191</sup> She cautions, “Don't try to Islamize these theories. Rather than try to get Islam to fit into [one of] these “cups,” these theories should only be taken if they fit into the ‘cup’ of Islam.” At a time when placenta encapsulation has become an acceptable norm while circumcising infant boys is becoming taboo, religious experts like Awaad caution that by uncritically reading secular child-rearing advice, Muslim mothers may violate Islamic law. Awaad models the way she reads child development theories through a sharia lens. When researching child development, she classifies various psychiatric theories as “garbage, garbage, garbage” until she finds something that is consistent with the Sunnah, “then I'll take it.”

AMPE redirect mothers to the superiority of al-Ghazālī's counsel (and its later commentaries) as well as new books and programming that center the importance of

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children,” 14.1, 18.2; Awaad, “Raising a Spiritual Child.”

teaching children chivalry (*futūwwa*).<sup>192</sup> For instance, while teaching a group of mothers about *Riyāḍat al-Şibyān*, Yahya Rhodus stressed that this text teaches children “principled thinking” that elevates the state of their hearts and their character by cultivating their God consciousness.<sup>193</sup> In contrast, he characterizes “Western” child-rearing methodologies as merely focused on developing children’s critical thinking skills. In a similar vein, in his 1990 preface to his translation of al-Ghazālī’s Revival’s section on child-rearing in the *Resuscitation*, Maulvi Sadr al-Din Ḥasan Şāhib Amritsarī criticizes parents for becoming detached from their own child-rearing traditions due to their collective ignorance, the unfortunate consequence of decades of subjection under colonialism. In his analysis, the colonizers’ tyrannical measures altered the social and economic organization of Indian Muslim society. Consequently, Muslims abandoned their own *tarbiya* practices and their educational environments (*māḥawl*) deteriorated. He presents his translation of al-Ghazālī’s works as a remedy.<sup>194</sup>

Another anxiety surrounding Western *tarbiya* is that it produces a liberal subject who lacks resilience and cannot surrender herself to the demands of Islamic practice. Some may read AP’s (and other parenting philosophies like Resources for Infant Education) emphasis on sincere connection and children’s authenticity as attempts to shape liberal subjects conditioned to prioritize their own freedom and authenticity

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<sup>192</sup> Regarding manuals that teach children about chivalry, see Walid, Dawud. 2022. *Futuwwah and Raising Males into Sacred Manhood*. Imam Ghazali Institute. <https://firdousbooks.ca/futuwwah-and-raising-males-into-sacred-manhood/>.

<sup>193</sup> Rhodus, Yahya. 2019. *Educating Children*. Vol. 8. 14 vols. Al-Maqasid, Allentown, PA.

[https://soundcloud.com/al-maqasid/sets/educating-children?utm\\_source=clipboard&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=social\\_sharing](https://soundcloud.com/al-maqasid/sets/educating-children?utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing); al-Ramlī and Ahmed. *Educating Children*, 61-64. I discuss *Riyāḍat al-Şibyān* in detail in chapter 3.

<sup>194</sup> Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-. 1990. *Majmu‘a Rasā‘il Imām Ghazālī*. Edited by Şadr al-Dīn Ḥasan Şāhib Amritsarī. 1st ed. Vol. 1. Karachi: Dār al-Ishā‘at Urdu Bazār, 193-4; Morrison, “Reforming Childhood in the Context of Colonialism,” 34.

rather than subjects who have trained themselves to submit to higher Divine order.<sup>195</sup>

Western *tarbiya*'s birth in the secular psychological tradition means that it rests upon a shaky epistemological foundation, one that is atheistic and emotivist. Internalizing ideas from [Western parenting] literature means accepting an alien *Weltanschauung*.<sup>196</sup>

Western *tarbiya* does not prepare children for a life of worship and sacrifice for others—essential preparation for the afterlife.<sup>197</sup>

Psychological Western *tarbiya* literature and its various manifestations on social media take on the qualities of a Trojan horse: a form of social engineering that hides the intent to unmoor individual children from familial and religious guidance all the while presenting itself as a legitimate method of improving Muslim families. As technologies of the self, secular parenting manuals promise to enlighten Muslim mothers so they can break the generational traumas that lead to familial dysfunction. But critics argue that these manuals only serve to cause Muslim parents to self-govern in conformity with the demands of Western security apparatuses and the medical-industrial complex.<sup>198</sup> If Islamic *tarbiya* produces Muslim subjects, Western *tarbiya* raises '*gharbīs*' (westerners). This stress on individual autonomy and authenticity limits their ability to function resiliently with others who infringe on their personal freedoms (e.g., members of extended families, elders) and inhibits the child's potential to reach higher spiritual states.

Western *tarbiya* is also criticized for deepening divisions in Muslim communities.

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<sup>195</sup> Asad, "Thinking about Tradition, Religion and Politics in Egypt Today." Asad remarks that a new psychology emerged in Europe in early modernity which focused "on such interior states as sincerity, authenticity, and the will—and claiming a clear-cut antithesis between freedom and authority."

<sup>196</sup> Krasniqi, "Raising Muslim Children," 18.1.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, 8.2. and 17.2

<sup>198</sup> Regarding parenting manuals and governmentality, see Valencia, "Being a Mother," 1233–52.

Adherents of “Western *tarbiya*” may see themselves as enlightened and distance themselves from others whom they regard as harsh. They associated being conscious and deliberate about their parenting as a means of asserting their agency rather than as passive subjects unthinkingly mimicking their parents’ behaviors. In his 2004 forward of *Simṭ al-‘Iqyān*, the Yemeni scholar Muḥammad ‘Abū Bakr Bādhīb alludes to the communal discord non-Muslim parenting methods can foment when he wrote that al-Ramlī’s didactic poem on child-rearing “does not have an equal in the modern methods derived from Western schools, and the methods of the people of misguidance and disbelief (*kufr*) because those ideas are imported (*mustawrada*) from European countries and elsewhere, which some Muslims have used to wreak havoc (*fitna*).”<sup>199</sup> He calls upon Muslim thinkers and influencers to alert lay Muslims about the discord created by imported child-rearing methods and their failure to improve Muslim societies.<sup>200</sup>

To conclude, I have attempted to show that the epistemic source of children’s *tarbiya* are contested amongst mothers and within American Muslim pedagogical networks. Efforts to define and integrate *tarbiya* with modern educational and psychological sciences create a demand for new type of experts. While some applaud efforts to cohere the best of scientific child-rearing knowledge with prophetic practices, others caution that Western *tarbiya* practices are part and parcel of a larger epistemic assault to undermine traditional religion and thus to be avoided at all costs or at least

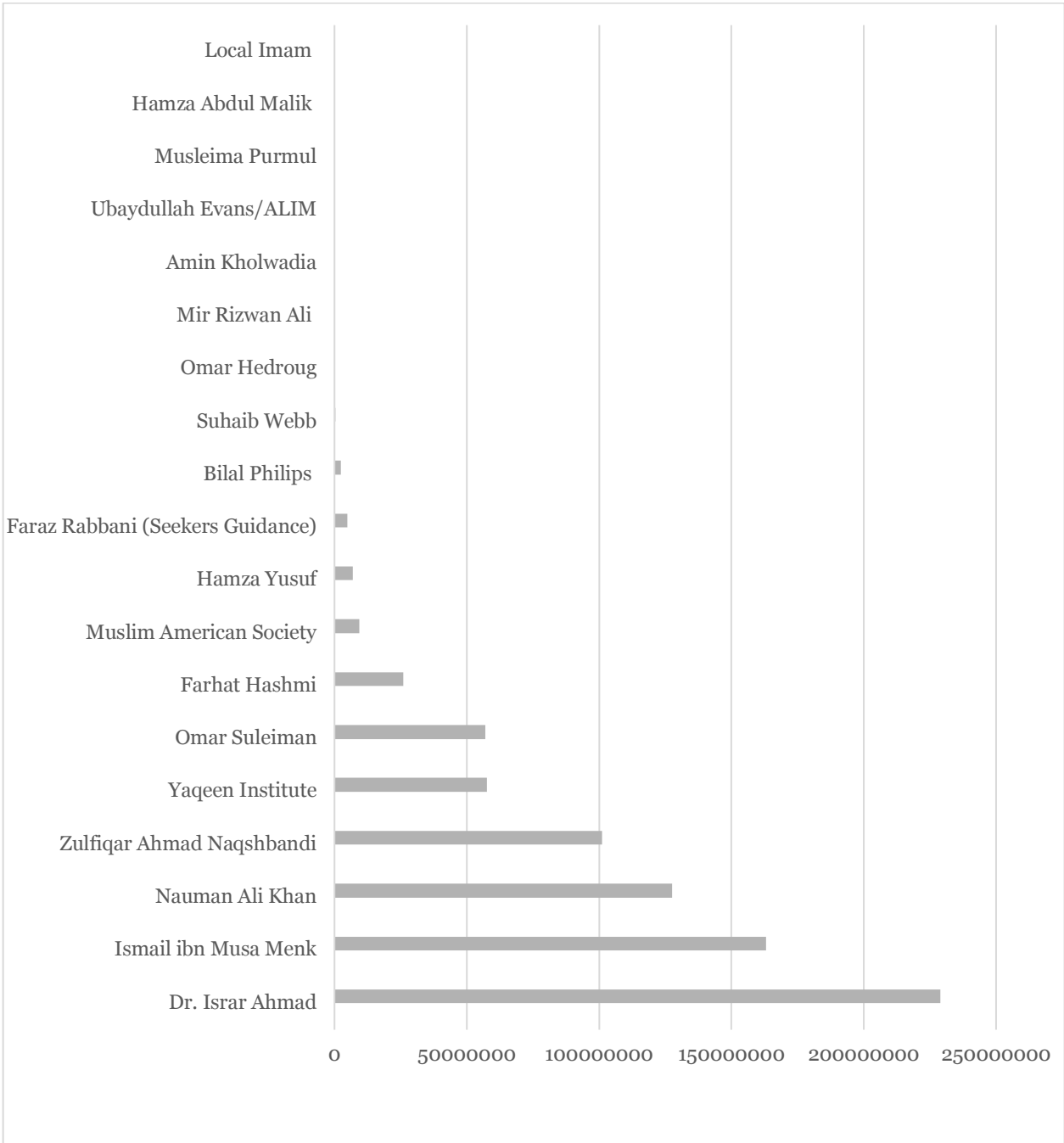
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<sup>199</sup> A graduate from Aligarh Muslim University, he also writes on *SeekersGuidance*. For a biography of Bādhīb, see Husain, Syeda. 2018. “Interview with Shaykh Mohammad Bādhīb, Scholar-in-Residence.” *SeekersGuidance*. December 24, 2018. <https://seekersguidance.org/articles/scholars/interview-with-shaykh-mohammad-ba-dhib/>.

<sup>200</sup> Bāsawdān (d. 1266/1850), ‘Abd-Allah ibn Aḥmad. 2008. *Simṭ Al-‘Iqyān [A Thread of Pure Gold]: Sharḥ Riyāḍat al-Ṣibyān*. Edited by Muḥammad ‘Abū Bakr ‘Abd Allāh Bādhīb. 2nd ed. Beach vols. Dār al-Minhāj, 30-34.

read with a healthy dose of skepticism. This contestation leaves many mothers bewildered by the task of adjudicating between contradictory child-rearing prescriptions when faced with paroxysmal children. Some turn to Muslim pedagogical networks to assist in identifying helpful parenting strategies. I examine the religious experts my interlocutors consult in the next chapter.

# Chapter 2: The Ta'lim and Tarbiya of Mothers



**Table 1:** YouTube Channel View Counts of Sunni Religious Educators Cited by Interlocutors as of June 2021.

Anthropologists and Islamicists employ various taxonomies to classify ordinary Muslims' stance on legitimate authority and epistemology in the Islamic tradition.<sup>201</sup> They present a tripartite classification of Muslim laypeople: Salafi (or reformists) refer only to the Quran and Sunnah. Islamic modernists (or pragmatists) are more skeptical about hadith literature and advocate for newer, less atomistic interpretations of the Quran.<sup>202</sup> Traditionalists (or Late Sunni traditionalists or formalists) call for continuing deference to the *'ulamā'* and limit sharia reforms to those that can be justified by the logics of the Sunnī legal schools.<sup>203</sup>

These classifications clarify the various divisions found amongst American Muslims and their ongoing debates regarding sharia's epistemological foundations, *ijtihād* versus *taqlīd*, and Sufism. Regardless of their position on these perennial debates, most Muslim religious authorities would agree that ideally mothers should be

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<sup>201</sup> Contemporary Muslims disagree over what qualifies as legitimate Islamic authority. Islamicists classify the different camps that have emerged using terms that mark sectarian differences (e.g., Deobandi/Barelwi, Salafis/traditionalists, Sunnī/Shi'ī). See Laher, Suheil. 2021. Review of *Salafism and Traditionalism: Scholarly Authority in Modern Islam*, by Emad Hamdeh. *American Journal of Islam and Society* 39 (1–2): 148–60. Religious studies scholars disagree amongst themselves over the appropriateness of these terms and often offer their own taxonomies. Peter Mandaville coined the term “Vanilla Muslims” to describe individuals whose Muslimness does not center on sectarian affiliation. (See Mandaville, Peter. 2015. “Last Word: On Vanilla Muslims – Peter Mandaville.” *Critical Muslim* (Beta). May 19, 2015. <https://www.criticalmuslim.io/last-word-on-vanilla-muslims/>.) Grewal argues for transcending liberal/conservative binaries by analyzing her ethnographic data using a tripartite categorization to describe American Muslim's differing orientations towards religious pedagogy. Her first category consists of formalists seeking to preserve the unbroken chain of transmitted knowledge from one generation of authorized scholars to the next. Her second category is composed of pragmatists who are not as beholden to the *ijāza* system of knowledge in which an older authority authorizes a younger one because they feel this system is inaccessible to modern students. Her last category is composed of reformists who seek to reform traditional Islamic educational systems which they regard as “morally compromised.” (Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country*, 185, *passim*).

<sup>202</sup> Kenney, Jeffrey T., and Ebrahim Moosa, eds. 2013. *Islam in the Modern World*. Religions in the Modern World. New York, NY: Routledge, 19–29.

<sup>203</sup> Grewal, Zareena. 2014. *Islam Is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority*. Nation of Newcomers: Immigrant History as American History. New York: New York University Press, 185; Laher, Suheil. 2021. Review of *Salafism and Traditionalism: Scholarly Authority in Modern Islam*, by Emad Hamdeh. *American Journal of Islam and Society* 39 (1–2): 148–60. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108756594>.

educated, lifelong students of a bona fide religious curriculum.<sup>204</sup> They maintain that mothers' continuing religious education strengthens Muslim communities. Conversely, they warn that mothers with deficiencies in their religious education and pious character compromise the next generation's *tarbiya*, if not their continued identification with Islam, even as they dispute the ideal content and pedagogy of their religious education.<sup>205</sup>

As secular citizens, American Muslim mothers are free to choose who to follow and the kind of relationship to religious authority they want to cultivate for themselves and their families. Although this chapter employs various labels to describe relationships my interlocutors maintain with religious authorities, I also acknowledge that these categories oversimplify the complex trajectories of their diverse experiences with religious education. Nor do I want readers to conclude that these labels represent groups that are hermetically sealed. Instead, I try to demonstrate that as my interlocutors grew into motherhood (and grand motherhood), they vacillated between Islamic revivalism and modernism, scholasticism, and formal Sufism. Some took from scholars of different persuasions eclectically or unknowingly. Mothers and children, spouses and friends sometimes belonged to different pedagogical networks.<sup>206</sup> Sometimes reformist and traditionalist scholars share platforms and in other gatherings these very same individuals vehemently stress their differences. By thinking of individuals as moving somewhere on a Salafi/Sufi/modernist grid rather than as

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<sup>204</sup> Khoja-Moolji, Shenila. 2018. *Forging the Ideal Muslim Girl | Education and the Production of Desirable Subjects in Colonial India and Pakistan*. University of California Press, 30.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, 30, 72.

<sup>206</sup> Pedagogical network is Grewal's term. By pedagogical networks here I mean networks of influence and student-teacher relationships.



statically classified, one can better account for the messiness of Muslim mothers' hazy coordinates within American Islam's pedagogical landscape.

Attending to the trajectories of individual mothers and the overlapping connections between Salafi, Sufi, and modernist pedagogical networks they subscribe to allows us to notice common trends within all these movements. Given the intense surveillance over American Islam in the 1990s and early 2000s, both American Salafis and Sufis have undergone processes of domestication. Generally, my interlocutors have turned inward. They tend to focus on developing themselves, their children, and their own local communities at the expense of entangling themselves in global statist politics with Muslims abroad. To this end, Salafi and Sufi scholars have focused on educating mothers and reforming what goes on in domestic spaces while acknowledging mothers' outsized custodial role as patrons and gatekeepers of their children's *tarbiya*.<sup>207</sup> In general, mothers claim to avoid sectarianism and focus on intra-American Muslim unity. They seek out scholars who can help their children embrace a hybrid identity and compete as ideal citizen-subjects.<sup>208</sup>

In this chapter, I analyze American Muslim mothers' relationships to religious authorities. I was interested in whether there was any correlation between a mother's sectarian affiliation or preference for specific forms of Islamic pedagogy and her preference for one parenting style over another. To begin exploring this question, I inquired about my interlocutors' religious education. While recognizing that mothers'

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<sup>207</sup> Salamah-Qudsi, Arin Shawkat. 2011. "A Lightning Trigger or a Stumbling Block: Mother Images and Roles in Classical Sufism." *Oriens*, no. 39: 221.

<sup>208</sup> Khoja-Moolji, *Forging the Ideal Muslim Girl*, 94.

specific religious education trajectories defy neat classification, I argue that mothers exhibit four relationship styles with religious scholars:<sup>209</sup>

1. **The Followers.** Followers do not seek out teachers of a specific *madhhab*. They regard religious teachers as expert readers of Islam’s foundational sources (the Quran and Sunnah). They refer to scholars as sources of education (*ta’līm*) rather than personalized spiritual guidance (*tarbiya*). They avoid enmeshment with religious authorities, preferring instead to pick eclectically from different scholars.

2. **The Modernists.** These mothers prefer scholars who engage with what they perceive to be the positive elements of modernity, such as human rights and gender justice, constitutional democracy, and humanism.<sup>210</sup> Like followers, they do not feel bound to traditional legal schools (*taqlīd*). They emphasize the need to revise rulings of Islamic law to meet what they see are the unique needs of modern children. However, unlike the followers they are not beholden by literal interpretations of the Quran and Sunnah and the example of the righteous predecessors (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*), and they reject Islamist political discourse.<sup>211</sup> Instead, they support scholars who argue for extracting the Quran’s universal meanings and revising Islamic law.

3. **The Independents.** Like followers and modernists, independents do not view *shuyūkh* (sing. *shaykh*) as parental figures. Although they respect the knowledge of their religious teachers, they do not enjoy a pastoral relationship with them. However, unlike followers and modernists, they believe that as laypeople, they should practice *taqlīd* and learn the Ash‘arī or Māturīdī creed. Although they view Sufism favorably,

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<sup>209</sup> Asad, “Thinking about Tradition, Religion and Politics in Egypt Today.”

<sup>210</sup> Safi, Omid. 2005. “Modernism: Islamic Modernism.” In *Encyclopedia of Religion, Second Edition*, 6095–6102. Emerald Publishing.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid*, 6096.

they have not undergone initiation (*bayʿa*) into a formal order (*ṭarīqa*). They also see themselves as their children’s primary religious teachers but may occasionally consult a trained expert in one of the four Sunnī legal schools.

3. ***The Pledged.*** Like Independents, they practice *taqlīd*. Unlike Independents, they have been initiated by a scholar with a spiritual lineage (*silsila*). They view modernity less favorably than modernists and try to reintroduce older traditions into their children’s lives. Their relationship with their shaykh is personal, with the shaykh pastorally caring for them through tailored advice and supplications. Some pledged mothers relate to their Shaykh(a) as they would to a parental figure.<sup>212</sup> They may defer to the Shaykh for child-rearing advice and recommendations for religious curricula. They carefully select religious education for their children that is rooted in *taqlīd*, Ghazalian ethics, and the Ashʿarī or Māturīdī creed.

### ***The Followers***

Punjab, 1930s. *When Zahra’s grandfather was only ten, his parents died. He mourned their deaths at Ahmad Sirhindī’s shrine, the second millennium revivalist (mujaddid ʿalf al-thānī, d. 1624). As the British and the Indians negotiated borderlines, his uncles sought to prepare him and his cousins to join an urban elite that would represent Indian Muslim interests. To this end, Zahra’s great-uncles were sent to Aligarh Muslim University. However, her newly orphaned grandfather could not afford the tuition. He was sent instead to fight for the British during World War II. After Partition and a tumultuous migration to Pakistan, his visits to Ahmad Sirhind’s shrine came to an abrupt halt. In Pakistan, some of his cousins would continue to hold a milād on ʿĪd day and gather for a chaleswan after a loved one’s death, hang golden-framed pictures of their spiritual masters in their drawing rooms and visit their Pīr-Şāhib weekly. Some of their children began to follow Shaykh Zulfiqar Naqshbandi, a Deobandi-Naqshbandi scholar based in Jhang, Pakistan.<sup>213</sup> Even though Zahra knew that her relatives sustained Sufī practices in their new homeland, her immediate family members were skeptical of what they considered to be their cousins’ slavish subservience to the Pīr. Due to her grandfather’s service to the British Armed Forces*

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<sup>212</sup> Joseph, Suad, ed. 1999. “Introduction.” In *Intimate Selving in Arab Families: Gender, Self, and Identity*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 13.

<sup>213</sup> He has also written a childrearing manual. See Naqshbandī, Zulfiqār Aḥmad. *Nurturing the Budding Rose: A Complete Guide to the Upbringing of Children*, 2015.

and later training in America, her parents were raised amidst the country's secularized elite and thus, "not that religious." This changed once the family moved to Saudi Arabia for her father's new job. As a child, she attended Manaret Riyadh, an English-language International Islamic school for Muslim expatriate children. There, she was taught by Dr. Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips's wife. She told Zahra about Philip's new online university and Zahra subsequently read all their published works extolling the Salafī manhaj. Zahra now lives in Naperville where her sons attend Islamic Foundation. Much to Zahra's chagrin, her son takes the name of mujaddid alf al-thānī, his great-grandfather's patron saint as part of his daily litany. What started as a quest to rediscover his heritage eventually led him to join the Naqshbandi order. As we hear his Amazon echo blaring qawwali music from upstairs, Zahra tells me about how he reads Rumi and *Shams-i Tabrīzī*, "He's just into it too much" she sighs. "He knows I am not into it, so he doesn't discuss it with me. I don't even know much about Sufism since it's such a broad topic, there are parts that you agree with and parts that you do not. Not every Sufi is the same. But still, I remind him "Allah Mian listens to you as much as he listens to what the Pīr Ṣāhib says ... It's the same, that is what my belief is...At least he prays..."

Once her children grew older, Zahra had more time to study Islam. While her younger children were in school, she joined friends and cousins for daily classes at the Islamic Center of Naperville. On Mondays they read tafsīr. On Tuesdays, the Sīra (the Prophet's biography), on Thursdays, accounts of the Prophet's wives. On Wednesday's they attend a dars (Urdu: lesson) at Sister Roohi's Naperville home.<sup>214</sup> Originally from Hyderabad, Pakistan, Sister Roohi taught them about the significance of the sacred lunar months or led informal child-rearing discussions. "She only uses authentic hadith and is getting her master's degree in Islamic Studies." Apart from these classes, Zahra listens to Nouman Ali Khan lectures while cooking dinner. She finds him easier to listen to than his predecessor, Dr. Israr Ahmed (d. 2010). Although her husband and in-laws prefer Dr. Israr, she finds him too dry. "Nouman Ali Khan speaks an easy language, he is really good."

Although Nouman Ali Khan is much younger, his plainspokenness also appeals to Makayla, an African American convert. Her journey to Islam began with the Honorable Elijah Muhammad's death (d. 1975). His motto, "Do for self" intrigued Makayla's brother and husband. They joined the Nation of Islam only to find it splintering. They chose to follow Elijah's son, Warith Deen Muhammad (d. 2008), who led them out of the Nation into "regular Islam." After birthing her first child, Makayla began reading the Quran, realized its truth, and took her shahada (attestation of faith). She began attending Imam Warith Din Muhammad's community events and eventually enrolled her daughter in the Clara Mohammed preschool, named after the Imam's wife.

Like Makayla, Charlotte Muhammad converted in the wake of the Nation's schism. Her husband befriended another former NOI member who had converted to Sunni Islam after befriending Shaykh Daoud (d. 1980) in Brooklyn, New York.<sup>215</sup> Charlotte recalls this gentleman's charisma and ability to galvanize converts, "young

<sup>214</sup> "Roohi Tahir." n.d. Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research. Accessed December 8, 2021. <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/team/roohi-tahir>.

<sup>215</sup> For a brief biography of Shaykh Daoud, see "A Tribute to Shaikh Daoud Fasial - Mancebomosaic." n.d. Accessed December 8, 2021. <https://sites.google.com/site/mancebomosaic/atributetoshaiikhdaoudfasial>.

*kids in their early twenties, mostly from the Altgeld Gardens, a housing project in Chicago's South Side." Together in the early 1960s, they built the Mosque of Omar, one of Chicago's first Muslim community centers:<sup>216</sup>*

It was the only masjid around; it was groundbreaking. It pulled everyone together with its strong leadership. It was a vibrant community, sisters and brothers met frequently and executed work programs. They took care of each other and the properties, they cleaned up the yards and ran food programs for the needy."

*She raised her children amidst this fledgling mosque community, which still maintained the Nation's discipline and decorum. This led her children to be raised in an environment that was "regimented, but in a good way."*

*Like Charlotte and Makayla, Khadijeh Williams was also part of Imam Warith Din's community. Imam Warith Din invited Khadijeh to join his delegation for Hajj. At his request, she wrote about family life for the Muslim Journal. She continues to write for recent iterations of the paper and maintains her friendships but does not consider herself as part of Imam Warith Din's community: "I didn't like the idea of being in somebody's group. We are all followers of the Rasūl (Arabic: messenger), and I want to be in his group. I don't want to be in another group." She prefers to join congregations that are not exclusively African American.*

*Makayla also grew distant from Imam Warith Din's community, especially after the Clara Mohammed school closed and she was forced to find an alternative for her daughter. After a brief stint in public school, she enrolled them into the all-girls al-Aqsa school in Bridgeview, which was predominantly Arab-American: "[Once we moved] away from Imam Muhammad's community, we didn't get into another community, we just started reading on our own and listening to podcasts of imams from different places .... Sometimes each Jumu'ah (Friday prayer) we attend a different [masjid]..." Makayla used to be a regular listener of Nouman Ali Khan's podcast. After Khan became engulfed in scandal, Makayla's daughters told her that he was canceled and deleted his podcasts from her phone. "I also was not pleased by the rumors I had heard so I started listening to Dr. Omar Suleiman instead."*

Despite their different pedagogical journeys and ethnicities, Zahra, Makayla, Charlotte, and Khadijeh all came to follow preachers from Islamist and Salafist pedagogical networks.<sup>217</sup> They shared a belief in what Muhammad Fadel has termed "Republican Islam," that is a notion that they can study Islam and attain piety

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<sup>216</sup> For a history of Chicago's early Muslim communities, see Chan-Malik, Sylvia. 2018. *Being Muslim: A Cultural History of Women of Color in American Islam*. NYU Press.

<sup>217</sup> Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country*, 185; Sedgwick, Mark. 2020. "The Modernity of Neo-Traditionalist Islam." In *Muslim Subjectivities in Global Modernity: Islamic Traditions and the Construction of Modern Muslim Identities*, edited by Dietrich Jung and Kirstine Sinclair, 26. Leiden, the Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 26. Grewal uses the term "reformist" rather than Salafi. I use the admittedly problematic term Salafist here to refer broadly to Salafis and Pan-Islamists such as members the Muslim brotherhood (*Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*).

independently, “without the need for authoritative teachers” who hold traditional teaching licenses (*ijāza*).<sup>218</sup> They follow preachers who did not study in traditional Muslim institutions of learning, but rather from newer, Western-styled universities whose structures suggest that traditional Muslim pedagogy requires serious reforms.<sup>219</sup>

Salafist mothers do not study *kalam* (speculative theology). Instead, they follow scholars who teach literalist readings of the Quran and Sunnah, circumventing centuries of scholarship on Muslim theology and law.<sup>220</sup> For instance, Sister Khadijeh adopts this direct approach in her family life column in the *Muslim Journal*, where she tries to find “the Islamic solution to people’s daily problems by directly referencing the Quran” (Yusuf Ali’s *tafsīr*) and Sunnah rather than scholars. This preference for unmediated scriptural readings might explain Khan’s popularity, since he offers non-Arabic speakers accessible language training to comprehend the Quran for themselves.

By referring exclusively to Islam’s foundational texts, followers do not believe that they need to adhere to a *madhhab* (*taqlīd*). They prefer scholars who adopt “a trans-*madhhab* approach” (Piscatori’s term) to meet their interests (*maṣlaḥa*).<sup>221</sup> In her ethnography about Muslims in Chicago, Howe commented on the decline of *madhhab*-based jurisprudence which led her interlocutors to engage in “mixing and matching of schools (*talfīq*).”<sup>222</sup> My interlocutors did this as well. When Zahra and her friends question their local imam about *fiqh*, he presents them with the *responsa* from all four legal schools, allowing them to practice *talfīq* by selecting the opinion that best suits

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<sup>218</sup> Fadel, “Islamic Law and Constitution-Making,” 2.

<sup>219</sup> Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country*, 185.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, 213; Laher, *Review of Salafism and Traditionalism*, 148–60.

<sup>221</sup> Piscatori, James. 2019. “Saudi ‘Guardianship’ of the Umma.” In *Islam Beyond Borders*, 85–134. Cambridge University Press, 103.

<sup>222</sup> Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 162.

their family's situation. According to Khaled Abou El Fadl, *talfiq* is the preferred strategy of those striving to reconcile Islamic law with modern values of efficiency and independent inquiry.<sup>223</sup> Maryam preferred imams who engaged in *talfiq* since she saw this as evidence of their flexibility and their empathy with their congregants' needs. She was dissatisfied with the Deobandi-trained imams she encountered and their fastidious adherence to the Ḥanafī *madhhab*. Instead, she preferred the imam from her Hadj trip because of his "pragmatic approach to religion," allowing yuppies to squeeze an express pilgrimage into their vacation allowance: "Some people don't tell you that the Prophet combined prayers just for the heck of it because they do not want you to think there is too much lenience." He also permitted the consumption of non-*dhabīḥa* meat, which meant she could use store-bought cold cuts for her children's packed lunch.<sup>224</sup>

Another aspect that unites followers is a distaste for Sufism. They avoid invocations for intercession (*tawassul*), collective supererogatory rituals like *ḥaḍras* and *dhikrs*, mawlid, shrine visitation, and other practices that they considered blameworthy innovations (*bid'ah*), if not drawing dangerously close to associating partners with God (*shirk*).<sup>225</sup> They view Sufi orders (*ṭuruq*, s. *ṭarīqah*) as "theologically deviant" and excise a large body of devotional literature from the boundaries of orthodox practice.<sup>226</sup> When I asked Zahra what her imam thought about her son's interest in Sufism, she said that he avoided the topic, adding,

No one else can do *du'ā'* [supplication] on your behalf. That way you connect [with Allah]. Someone else who is not going through [what you are going through], what can [he or she] say? The local imams are not pro-*bay'a*, they tell us to supplicate ourselves,

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<sup>223</sup> Fadl, Khaled. 2014. *Reasoning with God: Reclaiming Shari'ah in the Modern Age*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 252.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Sanyal, *Scholars of Faith*, 241; Piscatori, *Islam Beyond Borders*, 88.

<sup>226</sup> Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country*, 214.

People who ask others to pray for them don't even make *du'ā'*.

Perhaps aware that his congregants had Sufi-inclined family members, the imam adroitly emphasized supplicating to God directly, obviating the need to rely on saintly intermediaries.

Salafism enjoyed widespread popularity amongst most of my interlocutors, attracting both older African American boomers like Sisters Makayla and Khadijeh, younger members of Generation X and older millennial women of the South Asian and Middle Eastern diaspora like Zahra and Maryam. Salafism's appeal amongst both African American and immigrant Muslims becomes more intelligible when considering the longer, intertwined history of Pan-Islamist and Saudi-Salafi pedagogical networks. Scholars from these overlapping pedagogical networks trained young, charismatic, media-savvy preachers who came to dominate my interlocutors' soundscapes.<sup>227</sup>

What accounts for Salafism's appeal to older, urban African American and white convert mothers? According to scholars of American Salafism, in the early 1990s, the Nation's disintegration left a power vacuum within African American Muslim communities. Quietist Saudi Salafis stepped in to fill the void.<sup>228</sup> Using petrodollars, they funded sophisticated new educational websites and funded Arabic language training and higher "education." Their efforts supported the rise of a new generation of African American Muslim preachers.<sup>229</sup> Notably, Imam Warith Din Muhammad also

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<sup>227</sup> I borrow "soundscape" from Hirschkind, Charles. 2006. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. Columbia University Press.

<sup>228</sup> For an analysis of Saudi power's role in propagating Salafi ideas see Mandaville, Peter, ed. 2022. *Wahhabism and the World: Understanding Saudi Arabia's Global Influence on Islam*. 1st ed. Oxford University Press.

<sup>229</sup> There is a small body of literature on the history of Salafism in the United States during the 1990s. For a brief overview of the literature, see Meleagrou-Hitchens, Alexander. 2018. "Salafism in America." *The Program in Extremism | The George Washington University*, October, 148.



worked with the Muslim World League (MWL), a transnational institution extending the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's soft power abroad.<sup>230</sup> In 1978, he invited a University of Medina-trained imam to preach to the communities Sisters Makayla and Khadijeh belonged to in Chicago.<sup>231</sup> When both Khadijeh and Makayla distanced themselves from the Nation of Islam and, later, Warith Din Muhammad's community, they turned to organizations catering to broader Sunnī Muslim audiences for their continuing religious education. Yet these diasporic communities too were on the receiving end of Saudi-Salafist outreach. Through fostering a generation of reformist preachers and mosque leaders of both immigrant and African American backgrounds, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia influenced the religious trajectory of both converts and immigrants.

One of the main sources of Saudi-Salafist outreach was the University of Medina. Founded in 1961, the University's establishment was part of a larger strategy to export Saudi Salafism worldwide.<sup>232</sup> Political scientist James Piscatori argues that the University's curriculum fostered "a form of puritanical and conservative teaching of traditional Wahhabism."<sup>233</sup> By providing thousands of state scholarships, the well-funded, all-male University catalyzed an alumni network of men joined by a common Salafī ethos.<sup>234</sup> The University gathered various influential groups such as quietist Saudi

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<sup>230</sup> Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country*, 150-1. Grewal observes that Imam Warith Deen also asserted his own authority to interpret the Quran directly without the use of intermediaries—be they immigrant Muslims in his midst in Chicago or classical exegetical material.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid*, 147-8.

<sup>232</sup> Mandaville, Peter, ed. 2022. *Wahhabism and the World: Understanding Saudi Arabia's Global Influence on Islam*. Oxford University Press, 54.

<sup>233</sup> Piscatori, *Islam Beyond Borders*, 110.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid*, 102-104. Piscatori notes that eighty percent of student body are non-Saudis; he argues that university students were not simply indoctrinated by quietist Wahabi ideology but integrated what they learned with their own politics. He gives the example of Egyptian students who did not simply adhere to the *Ḥanbalī madhhab* but pursued lines of inquiry along the Muslim Brotherhood's *maṣlaḥa*-based understanding of jurisprudence. Piscatori notes that Saudi Wahhabism has been influenced by Islamist ideas despite their current positions against the Muslim Brotherhood; he argues that Saudis export

Wahhabis, activist political Islamists, asylum-seeking members of the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi-leaning American Muslims. One of these Medina trained alums was instrumental in converting Charlotte's African American husband. In the 1970s, Charlotte's husband followed his teachers' footsteps to attend another Mecca-based imam training program and taught classes on Islam to Charlotte and others in his predominantly African American congregation.

In addition to funding preachers of smaller cornerstone mosque congregations, some University of Medina graduates became famous by harnessing the Internet's powers. For example, Dr. Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips (b. 1946), a Jamaican Canadian convert boasts upwards of eight million social media followers.<sup>235</sup> He was the first North American student to enroll at the University and helped catalyze the American Salafi movement.<sup>236</sup> He warns auditioners to avoid following Sufi shaykhs and unabashedly engaged in intra-Sunni polemics.<sup>237</sup> In addition to his YouTube Channel, Philips offers American student-mothers tuition-free education through his intensive distance learning graduate program. He has hundreds of thousands of registered students in accredited English-medium courses. Recall that Roohi Tahir pursued her master's degree in Islamic Studies at the International Open University (IOU) and that Anya,

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"broadly conservative, even Salafist trends, rather than exclusively narrow Wahhabi ones." He mentions that Muhammad 'Abduh and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā's students helped establish the Saudi State in the 1900s.

<sup>235</sup> Philips, Abu Ameenah Bilal. n.d. "Dr Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips | The Muslim 500." *The Muslim 500: The World's Most Influential Muslims*. Accessed February 18, 2022. <https://themuslim500.com/profiles/dr-abu-ameenah-bilal-philips/>.

<sup>236</sup> Elmasry, "The Salafis in America: The Rise, Decline and Prospects for a Sunni Muslim Movement among African Americans." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 30, no. 2 (June 2010): 222. For scholarship on Bilal Philips, see Duderija, Adis, and Ghulam Rasool. 2019. "Bilal Philips as a Proponent of Neo-Traditional Salafism and His Significance for Understanding Salafism in the West." *Religions* 10 (6): 371. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10060371>.

<sup>237</sup> Philips attacks some of Keller's writing on intercession in the *Reliance of the Traveler*. See islamicearthquake. 2010. *A Message to Shaykh Nuh Ha Mim Keller*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLJRn7Wfgjc>.

Zahra, Dahlia, and Sayeeda all attended regular lessons at her Naperville home.

Founded in 2007, the IOU promises to benefit “not only individual students but also empower entire communities” like Naperville’s first and second generation South Asian community.<sup>238</sup>

Apart from Philips, another famous University of Medina alum is Mufti Muhammad Menk (b. 1975), the Grand Mufti of Zimbabwe. Bashira forbade her children from watching TV, barring only YouTube videos narrating Prophet’s stories, and Philips and Menk’s lectures. Zahra and Sister Makayla also listen to Mufti Menk’s YouTube videos online. Mufti Menk tours the world giving English-language lectures to commonwealth Muslims.<sup>239</sup> Zahra and Fatima loved listening to Imam Siraj Wahhaj (b. 1950) on road trips. He also received his training in Saudi Arabia at Umm al Qurra University. In 1968, Siraj Wahhaj joined the Nation of Islam as Jeffrey 12x in New York (the 12<sup>th</sup> Jeffrey to convert). He rose to become a nation minister, but after Elijah Muhammad’s death he too embraced Sunnī Islam. In 1978 he moved to Naperville and began studying Islamic sciences.<sup>240</sup> In the early through mid-1990s his sermon mix tapes were circulated not just amongst African American Muslim youth in the city but also the children of immigrants in the suburbs. He went on speaking tours to different MSAs and keynoted mosques fundraisers in small towns across the country, attracting large youthful audiences with his engaging, colloquial oration and broad smile.

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<sup>238</sup> Philips, Bilal. 2020. “Dr. Bilal Philips | International Open University.” International Open University. November 6, 2020. <https://iou.edu.gm/instructors/dr-bilal-philips-2/>.

<sup>239</sup> Mufti Menk’s student, Edris Khamissa, taught a class on Parenting in the 21st century. I saw recordings of this class sold in a Kuala Lumpur café. See Khamissa, Edris. 2022. “Parenting in the 21st Century.” Muslim Central. 2022. <https://muslimcentral.com/series/edris-khamissa-parenting-in-the-21st-century/>.

<sup>240</sup> Barrett, Paul M. 2003. “One Imam Traces the Path of Islam in Black America.” *Wall Street Journal*, October 24, 2003. Zahra Iqbal mentioned that she considered Siraj Wahhaj to be her teacher.

Apart from training preachers who could speak to both immigrant and African American audiences, the Saudi state also engaged in “religious diplomacy” in the South Asian subcontinent, thereby facilitating the exchange of ideas between African Americans in the inner cities and Urdu-speaking Islamists in Islamabad. Historian Cemil Aydin notes that King Faisal sought to win over Sunni Muslim hearts in Pakistan by courting prominent South Asian thinkers, including Mawdudi (d. 1979) and Abu’l Hasan ‘Ali Nadwi (d. 1999).<sup>241</sup> Mawdudi had encouraged King Faisal to establish the Islamic University of Medina, which Aydin refers to as a symbolic “transfer of leadership from South Asia to Saudi Arabia.”<sup>242</sup>

Mawdūdī’s legacy of South Asian Islamism impacted Israr Ahmed, Nouman Ali Khan, and Farhat Hashmi, three Muslim scholars followed by my interlocutors. Saba’s grandfather was part of Zia-ul-Haque’s administration when the latter sought Mawdūdī’s advice for restructuring Pakistan’s legal code along Islamist lines.<sup>243</sup> Mawdūdī’s top student, Dr. Israr eventually left Mawdūdī’s *Jamaat-e-Islami* after disagreeing with their decision to enter politics.<sup>244</sup> In 1975, he founded *Tanzeem-e-Islami*, a revolutionary, nonviolent Islamic organization dedicated to reviving caliphal order through grassroots outreach first in Pakistan, then beyond.<sup>245</sup> Both Zahra and Israa’s relatives in Pakistan gave *bay’a* to Dr. Israr.<sup>246</sup> Zahra’s husband would attend Dr.

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<sup>241</sup> Aydin, Cemil. 2017. *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 208; Piscatori, *Islam Beyond Borders*, 100-102.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, 204n56.

<sup>243</sup> Nasr, Seyyed Vali. 1996. *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism*. 1st ed. Oxford University Press. 46, 104.

<sup>244</sup> Pankhurst, Reza. 2013. *The Inevitable Caliphate?: A History of the Struggle for Global Islamic Union, 1924 to the Present*. 1st edition. Oxford University Press, 167.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>246</sup> Ahmad, Israr. 1998. *Baiy’ah: The Basis for Organization of a Revivalist Party in Islam*. Translated by Ahmed Afzaal. Lahore: Markazi Anjuman Khuddam ul-Qur’an. Dr. Israr distinguishes between *bay’a al-irshād* that a disciple takes at the hands of a *murshid* for spiritual guidance and *bay’a* by members of an organization to their leader (*Amīr*) to organize the efforts of an Islamist movement.

Israr’s gatherings in Lahore prior to moving to Chicago. He strove to persuade elite and middle classes about the flaws of modern democratic rule through *da’wah* and reconnection to the Quran.<sup>247</sup> He spread his teachings in the United States through the Islamic Organization of North America (IONA), which held conferences that were previously attended by two of my interlocutor’s husbands.<sup>248</sup> In the early 2000s, IONA’s meetings were relatively small, but they attracted both first and second generation Muslims.<sup>249</sup>

To sustain his movement to revive support for the caliphate, Dr. Israr eventually appointed Dr. Abdus-Samie as his student and successor (Urdu: *jānashīn*). In 1972, the latter led Dr. Israr’s Faisalabad-based organization, the *Markazi Anjuman Khuddam-ul-Quran*, or the Center for the Society of the Servants of the Quran.<sup>250</sup> In the 1990s, Nouman Ali Khan (b. 1978) studied Quranic Arabic there. He later turned into a global YouTube sensation, boasting a following that is larger than any other religious scholar cited by my interlocutors.<sup>251</sup> Regardless of whether I was in Kuala Lumpur, Islamabad, or Chicago, I always noticed observant, reform-minded English-speakers listening to his lectures, thanks to the hours of video content uploaded *gratis*.

Whereas Dr. Israr’s fiery Urdu rhetoric about rehabilitating the political condition of Muslims through the Quran energized their relatives back in Pakistan, Zahra and Anya preferred Nouman Ali Khan. Despite being born in Pakistan and a

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<sup>247</sup> Pankhurst, *The Inevitable Caliphate*, 174.

<sup>248</sup> “Background.” n.d. Islamic Organization of North America Online. Accessed February 16, 2022. [http://www.ionasonline.org/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=184&Itemid=113](http://www.ionasonline.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=184&Itemid=113).

<sup>249</sup> Pankhurst, *The Inevitable Caliphate*, 171n28. Pankhurst notes that the membership was less than 2,000, “of whom fewer than 300 were based outside of Pakistan.”

<sup>250</sup> “QuranAcademy - Website of Anjuman Khuddam Ul Quran (Founded by Dr. Israr Ahmed).” n.d. Accessed February 18, 2022. <http://QuranAcademy.com>. Note that the transliteration of *Markazi Anjuman Khuddam al-Quran* is the way the organization spells its name which I follow here.

<sup>251</sup> See Table 1.

native speaker of Urdu herself, Anya insisted that Khan’s English oration was far superior to Dr. Israr’s “dry language.” Although Khan considers himself a teacher of Quranic Arabic and not a parenting expert, he peppered his sermons with child-rearing advice. Drawing from his personal experience as a father, Khan councils parents after his lectures, which he gives across the world in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.<sup>252</sup> Zahra explained that she listened to him for his explanations of Quranic Arabic, not *fiqh*. Still, when she lesson-plans for her Sunday school classroom, she refers exclusively to Mufti Menk and Nouman Ali Khan’s YouTube channels. Perhaps reflective of the influence of Dr. Israr’s ideas on his own teaching, Khan derives child-rearing advice primarily from the Quran and rarely from hadith or other classical literature. Just as Dr. Israr saw a return to the Quran as a solution to the ummah’s divisiveness, Khan suggests that the etiology of modern Muslim malaise is the community’s disconnection with the Quran.<sup>253</sup> Yet, he has successfully depoliticized the revivalist rhetoric of his Islamist teachers and translated them into the idiom of his younger English-speaking listeners.

Like Nouman Ali Khan, Dr. Farhat Hashmi (b. 1957) helped bring South Asian reformism to American Muslims. As a child in Pakistan, Zahra’s mother learned to read the Quran, but no one taught her its meanings. After marriage, her husband moved her to the Midwest, where she swapped out her *shalwar kameez* for cropped pants and short sleeves and stopped praying. It was not until the 1990s when her mother-in-law brought over a suitcase filled with cassette tapes of Hashmi’s lessons that Zahra’s mother first heard about women’s rights enshrined in the Quran. Hashmi convinced her

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<sup>252</sup> Khan, Nauman Ali, dir. 2017. *Quranic Essence of Parenting - Khutbah*. Bayyinah Institute. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=alSMirH DUDE>.

<sup>253</sup> “Articles - IONA Masjid!” 2022. Iona Masjid: Your Place of Worship and Learning Center. 2022. [http://www.ionamasjid.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=43&Itemid=110](http://www.ionamasjid.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=43&Itemid=110).

to start practicing. A decade later, while briefly living in Lahore before settling in Chicagoland, Zahra attended Hashmi's signature program, *Dawrah-e-Quran*, in which she translated and commented on the Quran "from cover to cover."<sup>254</sup>

Like Zahra, Anya joined Al-Huda Institute and took years of courses with Farhat Hashmi's senior students. She could relate to Hashmi's urban, educated students more than her provincial relatives in Lahore who turned to their Sufi shaykh for even the most mundane decisions. Anya appreciated Al-Huda's approach to decision-making: "They say if your heart tells you that something is right then accept it, you have your own moral compass. If you have your basics right, then you know right from wrong..." Founded by Hashmi and her husband in 1994, Al-Huda democratizes access to the Quran so that it is "in every hand, in every heart."<sup>255</sup> The organization has spawned Quran study circles across the South Asian diaspora in the United States.<sup>256</sup> In 2007, they began offering English-language classes for North American women.<sup>257</sup>

Dr. Ghazi heard Hashmi's lessons by visiting the latter's sister, Sajida Hashmi who lived in Chicago. She preferred her instruction:

[Sajida] is not strict like her sister...I may not come from a Sufi tradition, but I believe more in love and forgiveness than punishment. When Allah speaks to you [in the Quran] He first mentions the word *al-Raḥmān* and *al-Raḥīm*—how many times does he repeat these names? The Most Beneficial, The Most Merciful...they are repeated, not *al-Qaḥḥār* (the Conqueror). Besides, why would God punish us when He has hundreds of thousands of other beautiful things to do?

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<sup>254</sup> "Dawrah e Quran." 2012. Al-Huda International Welfare Foundation. 2012. <https://www.alhudapk.com/dawrah-e-quran.html>

<sup>255</sup> "Al Huda International." 2012. Al-Huda International Welfare Foundation. 2012. <https://www.alhudapk.com/component/content/article/2-uncategorised/174-about-al-huda-international.html>.

<sup>256</sup> Ghodsee, Kristen. 2013. Review of *Transforming Faith: The Story of Al-Huda and Islamic Revivalism among Urban Pakistani Women.*, by Sadaf Ahmad. *American Ethnologist* 40 (1): 219-220.

<sup>257</sup> Sanyal, *Scholars of Faith*, 247.

Dr. Ghazi is not alone in finding Hashmi inflexible. While some like Zahra and Anya celebrated Hashmi for empowering women, others accuse her of contributing to the “Talibanization” of Pakistan’s urban elites.<sup>258</sup> Hashmi condemns those who engage in innovative syncretic practices, some of which she believed were borrowed by South Asian Muslims from their centuries of interaction with Hindus and by American Muslims in the diaspora from their non-Muslim compatriots. Like Mawdudi before her, Hashmi teaches women to cleanse their ritual practices of foreign polytheistic influences. Only when they purify their practice can they hope to unite and revitalize Muslim communities.<sup>259</sup> Like Dr. Israr, Hashmi claims that through serious Quran study, Muslims can transcend petty sectarian divisions and denominations (*firqā*).<sup>260</sup> She casts her stance against *taqlīd* as a way of promoting a “non-sectarian” approach to teaching Islam.<sup>261</sup>

Just as Mawdūdī targeted Pakistan’s elites in hopes that his message would trickle down through society, Hashmi has successfully revived Islam amongst affluent aunties in major metropolitan areas.<sup>262</sup> Even though she was wary of Hashmi, Dr. Ghazi acknowledged that Hashmi brought a “movement” to her peers. Although she may not have as much YouTube traction as Nouman Ali Khan or Israr Ahmed, her substantial

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<sup>258</sup> Raja, Raza Habib. 2019. “As a Muslim Husband, I Do Not Agree with Farhat Hashmi and Her View on Marital Rape.” *Tribune*, June 22, 2019, sec. Media Watchdog. <https://tribune.com.pk/article/84669/as-a-muslim-husband-i-do-not-agree-with-farhat-hashmi-and-her-view-on-marital-rape>.

<sup>259</sup> Howe, “Da’wah in the Neighborhood,” 298; Pankhurst, *The Inevitable Caliphate*, 166-177; Sanyal, *Scholars of Faith*, 268, 282. Like Hashmi, Mawdūdī spoke of the need to revitalize Muslim identity and unity. Hashmi’s father, Abdur Rahman Hashmi, was an ardent follower of the Jamaat and led the organization’s branch in Sargodha, Pakistan. However, the historian Usha Sanyal argues that Hashmi is more influenced by her husband’s affiliation with the *Ahl-i Hadith* and her own academic specialty than her father’s associations with Mawdūdī’s Jamaat. Sanyal explains that Ahl-i Hadith scholars consider *taqlīd* to be a reprehensible innovation (*bid’ a*).

<sup>260</sup> Sanyal, *Scholars of Faith*, 289.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid*, 243-289; Pankhurst, *Inevitable Caliphate*, 176. Mawdūdī’s *Jamaat -e-Islami* stood against *taqlīd* or adherence to a legal school.

<sup>262</sup> Pankhurst, *The Inevitable Caliphate*, 166.



online following outshines that of neo-traditionalist scholars. Hashmi's popularity may explain why some of my follower-interlocutors hesitated to say that they study the Ḥanafī school or disavow their connections to Sufi traditions despite being from the subcontinent, where Ḥanafī practice and Sufism flourished.<sup>263</sup>

In addition to attending private study circles such as those populated by the students of Philips or Hashmi, followers also deferred to the religious guidance offered by Salafist leadership at their neighborhood mosques. Even as followers downplayed the differences between themselves and other Muslim sub-communities and regarded themselves as just “regular Muslims,” they attended mosque programs that contained a clear Salafī bent. For example, Khadijeh explained that she does not belong to any mosque but if she were to identify with one it would be Masjid al-Farooq on 89<sup>th</sup> Street and Stony Island. She prefers this mosque since “the imam there doesn't impose himself as a leader, [rather] we are under the leadership of the Prophet.” The mosque's imam, Ousmane Drama, attended Dar ul Quran wal Hadith (House of the Quran and Hadith) in the village of Touba in Mali and immigrated to Chicago in 2000.<sup>264</sup> Like Hashmi, he exhorts Muslims to set aside their internal differences about religious differences, since “we are all in the fold of Islam.”<sup>265</sup> He warns that when Muslims emphasize differences in practices, they succumb to a ploy of the media to divide and conquer Muslims.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Sanyal, *Scholars of Faith*, 269.

<sup>264</sup> “Imam Ousmane Drame | Masjid Al Farooq.” n.d. Accessed February 5, 2022. <https://www.mafchicago.com/imam-ousmane-drame/>.

<sup>265</sup> Bradley, Clifton Raheem. n.d. “Al-Farooq Masjid Imam Ousmane Drame Views on Islam's View of "Same-Sex ... : Bradleyc7555.” Reddit. Accessed July 29, 2021. [https://www.reddit.com/user/bradleyc7555/comments/oqz116/alfarooq\\_masjid\\_imam\\_ousmane\\_drame\\_views\\_on/](https://www.reddit.com/user/bradleyc7555/comments/oqz116/alfarooq_masjid_imam_ousmane_drame_views_on/).

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

Like Khadijeh, Bashira also lived in the city, but on the North Side. There, she attended Darul Quran, where she taught young children Arabic.<sup>267</sup> The mosque's YouTube page features lectures by Shaykh Ibrahim Zidan, who taught Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī's (d. 1223) *Lum'at al-i'tiqād (The Luminance of Creed)*.<sup>268</sup> Darul Quran also hosted Shaykh Akram Riyadh, a former student of Shaykh Muhammad Nasr al-Din al-Albani (d. 1999), a key figure in the modern Salafī movement.<sup>269</sup> In addition to teaching the Quran, Arabic, and the Sunnah to both children and adults, Darul Quran held more specialized classes based on classical texts such as Ibn Qayyim's *Al-Risāla al-Tabūkiyya (The Tabūkī Epistle)* and Imam Aḥmed ibn Ḥanbal's *Uṣūl al-Sunnah*.<sup>270</sup> The teaching of these specific texts hints towards a curriculum remarkably similar to those offered by the Saudi universities, especially given the centrality of the Ḥanbalī *madhhab*, Atharī creed and the focus on Ibn Qayyim.<sup>271</sup>

In the suburbs, Anya, Zahra, Dahlia and Sayeeda all attended weekly classes at the Islamic Center of Naperville (ICN). Classes were taught by Shaykh Mir Rizwan Ali, the ICN's imam and religious director, and Shaykh Omar Hedrough, the youth director.<sup>272</sup> Whenever Sayeeda needed a *fatwa*, she would message a WhatsApp group

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<sup>267</sup> "Chicago Qur'an Academy." n.d. Home. Accessed February 5, 2022. <https://www.chicagoquran.com>.

<sup>268</sup> Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī, *Lum'at al-i'tiqād*. Ed. Muḥammad Zuhayr Sāwīs. Damascus 1383/1964. Also published by 'Ādil 'Abd al-Mun'im Abū l-'Abbās, *al-I'tiqād*. Cairo 1990.

<sup>269</sup> Haddad, Gibril Fuad. 2004. *Albani and His Friends: A Concise Guide to the Salafī Movement*. AQSA Publications; Meleagrou-Hitchens, "Salafism in America," 42. Muḥammad Nāsir al-Dīn al-Albani's (d. 1999) former student established the Quran and Sunnah Society (QSS), which was instrumental in promoting quietist Salafism in the United States amongst African Americans.

<sup>270</sup> Böttcher, Annabelle. "Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya as Changing Salafi Icons." In *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law*, edited by Birgit Krawietz and Georges Tamer. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110285406.461>.

<sup>271</sup> Followers of the Atharī creed oppose the speculative theologians (*mutakallimūn*).

<sup>272</sup> Ali, Rizwan. 2022. "Sheikh Rizwan Ali – CIOGC." The Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago. 2022. <https://www.ciogc.org/sheikh-rizwan-ali/>. Notably, he is also an instructor at Mishkah University and part of its Academic Committee." See "Mir Rizwan Ali." n.d. *Mishkah University - Islamic Education Online - Islamic Courses* (blog). Accessed January 3, 2023. <https://mishkahu.com/about/faculty/english-faculty/mir-rizwan-ali/>.

that included Shaykh Rizwan and his congregants. Although Sayeeda was not sure where he had studied, she trusted him since all his lessons “are from the Quran and Sunnah and he tells us if [the hadith] are authentic.” Similarly, when Zahra and her husband disputed a religious ruling regarding their son’s attendance at Friday prayers on *‘Īd*, they consulted Shaykh Rizwan, since he graduated from Al-Azhar.

Anya appreciated the younger Imam Omar’s classes because of his ability to “connect” with her and her children: “He grew up here, went there, and came back to teach.” A student-traveler raised in Chicago’s suburbs, he gave parents and their children “easy, day-to-day examples” from the Quran. She was impressed by his degree from the University of Medina. Sayeeda was similarly confident in him because “he studied in Saudi Arabia.” Hedrough is also listed as a *murabbī* (Arabic: spiritual guide) on Al-Maghrib Institute’s online platform where he lectures on Quranic stories and conducts online family events, reaching an audience broader than Naperville.

Local imams such as Shaykh Rizwan and Imam Omar demonstrate that Salafism is not simply an Internet phenomenon but rather “a complex transnational web” with a solid offline presence in suburbia.<sup>273</sup> Both Darul Quran and the Islamic Center of Naperville house leadership connected to a broader Salafist pedagogical network. ICN caters to a suburban, well-heeled South Asian and Arab population of immigrants and their children and grandchildren whereas Darul Quran appears to serve newer waves of first-generation Americans, many from the horn of Africa, who migrated in the 1990s and early 2000s. Despite their different demographics, both mosques feature preachers connected to Mishkah University, an unaccredited distant learning program. ICN’s

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<sup>273</sup> Howe, “Da‘wa in the Neighborhood,” 299

Shaykh Mir Rizwan Ali is listed as a Mishkah University faculty member. Formerly known as the Islamic University of North America and the Sharia Academy of America, it was founded in 2004 by Shaykh Salah Assawy and the Assembly of Muslim Jurists of America (AMJA), a Salafī organization that issues fatwas according to “the circumstances of Muslims in the American society.”<sup>274</sup> The chairman and president of the university, Dr. Salah Assawy graduated from and previously taught at Al-Azhar and at Umm Al Qura University.<sup>275</sup> In the mid-1980s, he worked with the Muslim World League.<sup>276</sup> Researcher Meleagrou-Hitchens considers Dr. Assawy an “activist” Salafī or a ‘Qutbist” since his rhetoric reflects Sayyid Quṭb’s Islamism as opposed to the political quietism the Kingdom prefers.<sup>277</sup>

Whereas followers may not be familiar with Mishkah University, a relatively obscure platform, nor with Shaykh Assawy, most immediately recognize other more popular platforms such as Al-Maghrib and Yaqeen Institute. Shaykh Assawy is credited as the teacher of several Al-Maghrib instructors. Founded in 2002, Al-Maghrib Institute brought Salafist curricula to American Muslim grassroots in weekend seminars and sophisticated, accessible remote learning platforms.<sup>278</sup> ElMasry adds that even though hardcore Salafī activism imploded in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, Salafī preachers remain active under the auspices of mainstream religious education efforts

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<sup>274</sup> Barazanji, Haitham. 2007. “Islamic University of North America Inc - GuideStar Profile.” Guidestar. 2007. <https://www.guidestar.org/profile/14-1948738>; Meleagrou Hitchens, “Salafism in America,” 79n252.

<sup>275</sup> “About Dr. Salah Assawy.” 2021. Mishkah University - Islamic Education Online. 2021. <https://mishkahu.com/about/dr-salah-Assawy/>.

<sup>276</sup> Piscatori, *Islam Beyond Borders*, 110. See also Meleagrou-Hitchens, “Salafism in America,” 14 and 68. See also “Sīra Dhātiyya | Faḍīlat al-Shaykh Al-Duktūr Ṣalāh al-Ṣāwī.” n.d. Fatāwa al-Sawy. Accessed February 14, 2022. <https://fatawaalsawy.com/>.

<sup>277</sup> Meleagrou-Hitchens, “Salafism in America,” 81-85.

<sup>278</sup> Haddad, Yvonne Y., Farid Senzai, and Jane I. Smith. 2009. *Educating the Muslims of America*. Oxford University Press, 129.

such as Al-Maghrib.<sup>279</sup> Grewal and Hitchens both note that Al-Maghrib sold Anwar al-Awlaki's CDs at their events.<sup>280</sup> Prior to being killed in Yemen in 2001 by a drone, Awlaki was widely regarded as a mainstream (Salafist) preacher, but his rhetoric grew increasingly anti-American.<sup>281</sup> Yet, Ibtihaj admitted her fondness for Awlaki:

I still have the Prophets of Allah series ... Anwar al-Awlaki is the best. It used to be in everyone's car before he allegedly went crazy. I don't want to know anything about that, he was such a good storyteller. He didn't talk about politics at all—but if the stuff they said about him is true, then he is not my man anymore, but those CDs I'll keep.

She credited his lectures documenting the Prophet's life and the history of his companions as being a major source of her own continuing religious education.

Al-Maghrib's reputation has been able to withstand problematic associations with figures like Awlaki because of their ability to showcase other speakers from Salafi pedagogical networks. Apart from their Saudi-trained instructors, al-Maghrib also includes Dr. Farhat Hashmi's daughter, Taimiyya Zubair, as the second of only two female instructors on their faculty page.<sup>282</sup> Al-Maghrib acts as an umbrella organization for traditional Salafists, Islamists, and post-Salafis and has attracted broad sections of the American Muslim community. Perhaps given Al-Maghrib's success with college and high school students, they have looked to expand to younger ages. Omar Hedrough (introduced earlier) fundraised alongside Omar Suleiman to create an Al-Maghrib

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<sup>279</sup> ElMasry, "The Salafis in America," 234.

<sup>280</sup> Both Grewal and Meleagrou-Hitchens document the sale of Awlaki's compact discs at mosques hosting al-Maghrib events.

<sup>281</sup> Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country*, 331. Obama ordered a drone strike to execute Awlaki due to his affiliations with AlQaeda and his influence on American Muslims who have been involved in high profile terrorism cases (e.g. Umar Farouk alMuttalib, Daniel Maldonado and Tarek Mehanna).

<sup>282</sup> "Ust. Taimiyyah Zubair." n.d. AlMaghrib Institute. Accessed February 5, 2022. <https://www.almaghrib.org/instructors/taimiyyah-zubair/>.

program to revolutionize Islamic education for children, which they refer to as the next frontier.<sup>283</sup>

Taking a different approach than Al-Maghrib’s weekend seminar model, the Yaqeen Institute focuses exclusively on providing quality online content. This strategy of creating easily shareable content benefited Khadijeh, who used their articles for her column. Their website caters to American Muslim parents by offering readings like “Keys to Prophetic Parenting” and “The Role of Parents in Instilling Faith.” Notably, the latter was written by my interlocutors’ teacher Roohi Tahir from Naperville, who writes as a Yaqeen fellow about the importance of conscious parenting in protecting children from atheism’s pitfalls. The Institute has also developed interactive child-friendly weekend school curriculum modules.

Yaqeen is Dr. Omar Suleiman’s brainchild. Recall that after Nouman Ali Khan’s scandal, Makayla started following Suleiman. Whereas Khan was taught by South Asian reformists, Suleiman, a Palestinian-American, received his training from the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM/UIA) in Kuala Lumpur. The two famous preachers once co-taught at the Bayyinah Institute in Texas. After teaching at Bayyinah and Al-Maghrib, Omar Suleiman founded the Yaqeen Institute to foster conviction about Islam in young Muslims by providing free “articles, infographics, animations, videos, and cutting-edge app technology.”

Although he avoids discussing global Islamist politics, Suleiman does comment on domestic American politics, denouncing Israeli apartheid and protesting in favor of

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<sup>283</sup> “The Next Frontier: AlMaghrib for Kids.” 2021. LaunchGood. February 1, 2021. [https://www.launchgood.com/campaign/the\\_next\\_frontier](https://www.launchgood.com/campaign/the_next_frontier). Grewal credits al-Maghrib with almost “single-handedly reviving the Salafi movement” in the United States, after the internal imbroglios of the mid-1990s (Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country*, 330).

DACA recipients. Meleagrou-Hitchens calls Suleiman’s pedagogical style “unique American Salafism” due to his outspokenness on social justice issues (as opposed to quietist Saudi Salafis). He notes that Omar Suleiman’s popularity skyrocketed ever since older American Salafi institutions such as the Quran and Sunnah Society (QSS) and the Islamic Assembly of North America (IANA) disbanded. He notes that up until early 2018, Suleiman had a Mishkah University faculty member page. Having studied under Assawy, Suleiman describes his teacher as the “faqih [jurist] of our times.” Like al-Maghrib, Yaqeen Institute aims to defend what they term as “orthopraxy.” Platform contributors come from a variety of pedagogical perspectives, including traditionalist and Sufi scholars, lending credibility to the website’s big-tent, ecumenical stance. However, there are signs that the core pedagogical mission remains Salafist. On a page that explains what constitutes orthodoxy, site visitors are referred to links featuring lectures on ‘*Uṣūl* and the “guidelines for Islamic apologetics” by “systematic theologians,” featuring scholars like Dr. Hatem al-Haj from Mishkah University and Dr. Tahir Wyatt who also received his PhD from the Islamic University of Madinah.

### ***The Modernists***

Like Zahra, Liyana attended a private high school in Saudi Arabia. Liyana’s parents did not pay much attention to the religious curriculum there. Unbeknownst to them, she felt traumatized by her teachers: “The burden of the world was placed on us....We were told to pray and fast as soon as we got our period or else, we are going to hell ... so it was like, good God!” Liyana envisions a different religious education for her daughter, one that is “developmentally appropriate” and does not teach that God’s wrath

will befall her postpubescence. In contrast to her own parents' laissez faire attitude, she interrogates her daughter weekly about what she learns at Sunday school.

I use the term “modernists” for mothers drawn to scholars and academics who argue for rethinking Islamic law for contemporary circumstances. Some stress a need to revise Islamic rulings in accordance with the overarching objectives of sharia (*maqāsid*). Recall that Zahra’s family members, along with Saba’s, trained at the Aligarh Muslim University. It was styled as a British university and founded by a modernist, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who criticized Sufi excesses.<sup>284</sup> Maryam’s family also read earlier modernists like Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905) and Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935).<sup>285</sup> Dr. Ghazi, an author of a widely circulated Muslim weekend school curriculum, considered Azizah al-Hibri, a trained lawyer, as a religious teacher out of appreciation for her writing “on the Quran’s gender egalitarian message.”<sup>286</sup> Al-Hibri attempts to reconcile Quranic teachings with the demands of Western human rights and equity feminism. Likewise, Liyana credits Khaled Abou El Fadel and Tariq Ramadan for shaping her thinking about Islam. El Fadel’s writing extrapolates upon ‘Abduh’s thought by centering rational thought over and above the “established corpus of Islamic law.”<sup>287</sup> Tariq Ramadan calls for reforming sharia by extracting “a global meaning” from Islam’s fundamentals, which can then be reconciled with European and American ideals of freedom and justice while leaving the “fixed” ritual matters of worship, (*‘ibadāt*), unchanged.<sup>288</sup> Liyana preferred

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<sup>284</sup> Hamid, Sadek. 2016. *Sufis, Salafis, and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism*. I.B. Tauris, 70.

<sup>285</sup> Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 162.

<sup>286</sup> For more on Aziza Al Hibri see “Dr Azizah Al-Hibri.” n.d. The Muslim 500. Accessed December 10, 2021. <https://themuslim500.com/profiles/dr-azizah-al-hibri/>. See also Hidyatullah’s *Feminist Edges of the Quran*.

<sup>287</sup> Reviewed Work: *Speaking in God's Name. Islamic Law, Authority and Women* by Khaled M. Abou El-Fadl Review by: Oussama Arabi; *Islamic Law and Society*; Vol. 10, No. 2, The Madhhab (2003), pp. 260-265 (6 pages) Published by: Brill.

<sup>288</sup> Hunter, *Reformist Voices of Islam*, 254.



Ramadan and El Fadel since their call for rethinking Islamic laws resonated with her desire to ease ritual expectations placed on her daughter.

### ***The Independents***

Whereas followers like Zahra consider themselves “just Muslims” and avoid any designation that might reek of sectarianism, those who I refer to as independents are more specific about their relation to Muslim tradition. They are more open to studying with Sufis and experts of the traditional Sunnī legal schools even if they do not feel completely bound by their rulings or compelled to pledge allegiance to a shaykh (*bay‘a*).

Consider how Tahira identified herself:

*When I was younger, I had no concept of the kind of Muslim I was. I thought, “I am orthodox, I am not part of the Nation,” and for me that also meant “I am not part of the Warith Din community.” But I have evolved since then in my understanding of what all those communities meant ... Looking back, we were probably all Salafī, but when I got to college [in the early 2000s], my mosque went through a period when some of the Black Muslims left the masjid to establish a Salafī community, since our community was not Salafī enough for them. The term Salafī only [started to mean] something to me when this group said that they couldn’t pray with us. I don’t have hard lines. I have only expanded the net of who I would take advice from. I am very much the same in practice [regarding] how I pray and think about Allah. It’s just [that I consult] someone who understands fiqh and tells me exactly how many days I must make up fasting for Ramadan, when I can combine or shorten my prayers, and what protocol I must follow [to manage] my menstrual blood. Since my husband has studied Mālikī jurisprudence, [I am a] default Mālikī. I might have my kids describe themselves like this: “I’m Muslim, my dad is Mālikī, so our fiqh is Mālikī.*

In Durham, North Carolina in the early nineties Tahira grew up amid a tight-knit mosque community. Founded in 1981, her mosque was established by a group of Black American converts to Sunnī Islam (including her parents) along with immigrant Muslims who came to the triangle to pursue the American dream. She married an African American convert and together they moved to Chicago. Her husband, an Azhar graduate, told her that her practice “looks more like Salafī light,” which he remedied by

teaching her the Mālikī rite. She notes that she did not need to make many lifestyle changes. “The only huge change in my daily practice was eating *dhabīḥah* meat.” Back in North Carolina, her reformist imam allowed his congregants to eat meat from any American butcher due to his opinion that the American South was fundamentally a Christian country.

Like Tahira, Charlotte and her husband have only recently begun studying a *madhhab* more intentionally in early retirement. They sent their daughter, Aya, to al-Aqsa Islamic school in Bridgeview.<sup>289</sup> Later, Aya attended Zaytuna college, where she was asked to choose a *madhhab* as a concentration.<sup>290</sup> “Aya has come home with all this newfangled stuff about the legal schools so it has been interesting with her telling her father ‘I am Ḥanafī, I don’t have to do this’ contrary to what he was taught.” These father-daughter dialogues are “all in good cheer, they are not contentious or anything” Charlotte assures me, but her father has yet to follow a *madhhab*.

Like Tahira and Charlotte, Israa found herself moving away from Salafī scholars and gravitating towards *taqlīd* when she took Dr. Sherman Jackson’s classes in college. “He had the largest influence on us in terms of our approach to our faith. He was open-minded but made sure that we stayed grounded. He was an amazing inspiration; someone we could turn to for religious guidance.” Israa eventually helped establish the American Learning Institute for Muslims (ALIM). Tahira’s cousin later became an instructor at ALIM as well. Founded in 1998 by Dr. Jackson and his colleagues, ALIM strives to promote religious literacy amongst American Muslims. As mentioned

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<sup>289</sup> Ewing, *Being and Belonging*, 133.

<sup>290</sup> For an ethnography of Zaytuna college’s formative years, see Kashani, Maryam. 2014. “Seekers of Sacred Knowledge: Zaytuna College and The Education of American Muslims.” The University of Texas at Austin.

previously, in the mid-1990s the Salafi movement was receding, but Salafism still dominated most mosques in the United States. Within this landscape, Dr. Jackson exposed young Muslims to the literature of classical Sunni legal schools and offered an alternative religious education. Muslim students felt comfortable in the monthlong program that was set up to resemble a college classroom. Yet students in their summer intensive were not asked to move through a traditional “curriculum or sequence of books that needed to be mastered” as more traditionalist institutions might require.<sup>291</sup>

Many of the ALIM faculty have also been heavily involved with the Islamic Society of North American (ISNA) and al-Azhar University.<sup>292</sup> Their scholar-in-residence, Ubaydullah Evans, graduated from Al-Azhar with a degree in Islamic Law. For this reason, she turns to him as a source of religious knowledge. Tahira also refers to his peers who went to Al-Azhar at the same time, a cohort that includes Imam Hamza Abdul Malik, and Shaykha Muslema Purmul.<sup>293</sup>

In addition to differing with followers about *taqlīd*, independents differ from the other typologies presented here due to their stance on Sufism (*tasawwuf*).<sup>294</sup> Although

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<sup>291</sup> Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country*, 208-9.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid, 213; Hermansen, *Varieties of American Sufism*, xxvi. ALIM’s annual summer program for college students includes guest scholars who my interlocutors cited as being influential to their own religious upbringing such as Imam Muhammad Magid, Dr. Ingrid Mattson, and Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah in addition to Salafist instructors such as Omar Suleiman. Fatima closely follow developments at Imam Magid’s mosque community, the All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS) center, which is the largest in the Washington DC metropolitan area because she saw them as a “little progressive” and thus worthy of emulation in Chicago. In 2010, Imam Magid and Dr. Mattson were the president and vice-president of ISNA. As religious studies scholar Dr. Marcia Hermansen notes, by the 2000s, ISNA had undergone a shift from an organization that was dominated by the “outlook of the global Islamist movement” which would reject Sufi practices such as mawlid, to an organization that slowly began to embrace preachers who began to speak of sober, Sufi concepts such as *Ihsan* and *tazkiyyat al-nafs* (purification of the lower self.)

<sup>293</sup> Hilliard, Ryan. n.d. “The Brutha Graduated from Azhar’: The Black Ḥāfiẓ in American Muslim Communities – Sapelo Square.” *Sapelo* (blog). Accessed February 5, 2022. <https://sapelosquare.com/2017/02/22/op-ed-the-brutha-graduated-from-azhar-the-black-%E1%B8%A5afi%E1%BA%93-in-american-muslim-communities/>.

<sup>294</sup> For a biography of Evans, see: “Ubaydullah Evans.” n.d. MAS-ICNA CONVENTION. Accessed February 5, 2022. <https://www.masconvention.org/ubaydullah-evans.html>.

they appreciate Sufism, they have not taken *bay‘a* (swearing allegiance to a Shaykh, which often formalizes one’s membership to a *ṭarīqa* or Sufi order). For example, Fatima attributes her devotional practices to her family’s close relationships with Dr. Umar and Shaykh Hamza. Although she listens to their lectures, she does not consider them to be her *shuyūkh*. Ibtihaj too opined that the idea of going to a shaykh for religious guidance “is something that is lost in our Muslim communities. Some have close relationships with [a Chicago-based Sufi shaykh], but I am not on that VIP list.” Echoing Ibtihaj, Tahira clarified her relationship shaykhs: I do not know if I would describe myself or what we do in this house as Sufism. I get advice from shaykhs, but I am not part of a *ṭarīqah* (Sufi order). I don’t have a shaykh, but I do have respect for the shaykh’s knowledge and balance.” Both Ibtihaj and Tahira recognized Sufi scholars as sources of religious guidance but did not feel compelled to pledge allegiance to one.



Figure 1: Poster for a gathering for children of pledged mothers

## *The Pledged*

A child of Pakistani professionals who immigrated to America in the 1970s, Irfana grew up on the East Coast before moving to Chicago. She recalls that her father’s family was made up of “crazy religious people, like into Wahhabi stuff” which led her to see things in “black and white.” This upbringing left her struggling with the concept of God’s mercy. “It took me a long time to accept that God is loving and that I will make mistakes, but I can still seek forgiveness.” A single mother, Irfana often felt she had nowhere to turn for help with raising her young children. Even with a supportive extended family, motherhood gave her anxiety. To help her cope, her close friends introduced her to a shaykh when she was in her late thirties, “It was just something that was meant to be, that is why that relationship happened.” Now she speaks to him

regularly and travels internationally to visit him. “It is like a learning process for me not to get worked up.” The shaykh reminds her, “Why would Allah not help your children and protect them?” He reminds her to shower her children with love and dialogue. He counsels mothers to constantly beseech God for assistance with full conviction that He answers prayers. Irfana reflected on how the shaykh’s advice transformed her parenting:

It alleviated something for me, I still get anxious about how my children will cope, but ... I view things differently than I did [before]. If I am a mother praying for my child, would Allah not do good by my child? This is a basic thing, but a lot of us forget that: doing *du‘ā’*.” I know I will make mistakes along the path, but the shaykh prays for me. Ultimately, you must work on your heart, that’s all there is.

In the early 2000s, Dr. Umar returned to Chicago from abroad and began teaching classes around the city. Saba enrolled in his classes and felt a subtle transformation occur: “I feel like ever since he came back here, [I have gained a] lot of clarity through listening to him. Nothing life-changing, like ‘Oh my God! I didn’t get it, but now I get it!’ But things came into focus and were clear.” She noticed that his lectures emphasized sober, juristic Sufism, which resonated with her. She saw Sufi practices as a natural continuation of her parents and grandparents’ practices. For her, there is no true return to orthodoxy without adhering to one of the four Sunnī legal schools (*taqlīd*). Like Saba, Lana regards Dr. Umar as her guide for her career in philanthropy and youth engagement. She describes Sufism as a way of healing a traumatic rupture that occurred during the postcolonial period of her mother’s Palestinian childhood. She believes that it was no coincidence that women began to abandon breastfeeding at roughly the same time that they abandoned Sufism:

This happened within similar historical and sociopolitical contexts. Both occurred in the context of modernity. Well, Sufis say it is the reaction to being colonized that made Muslims take a stance that was outward, a political identity type of Islam. Also, modernity [made women believe that] nursing was a primitive thing, [modern] women

need to work. There is no time to rock the baby to sleep.

Lana was pleased that the young mothers she mentors have begun reengaging with traditional child-rearing practices, such as breastfeeding. She sees a correlation between breastfeeding and young women's attempts at recultivating "relationships with *Shuyūkh*."

Lana may have learned to associate Sufism to breastfeeding's decline from listening to analogies her shaykh referred to in his gatherings. He would remind congregants that they needed to maintain their circles of remembrance (*dhikr*) even when he is not present, noting that a sign of healthy discipleship is when aspirants have successfully "weaned off" their shaykh so that they can practice in his physical absence. In this 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century analogy a child's relationship to her mother or wet nurse (*ẓīr*) is likened to the disciple's (*murīd*) relationship to his master (*murshid*), the shaykh acts as one's spiritual mother. Just as the child derives nourishment from suckling that immunizes her, the disciple acquires individualized spiritual education.<sup>295</sup> Healthy, securely attached children develop in part by the countless times they lie gazing at their mother, the pledged disciple grows spiritually through spending time with her master in face-to-face encounters. Pledged mothers believe that it is in the context of these parent-child/disciple-master relationships that *tarbiya* or spiritual education and gnosis (or arriving at the truth of God) of both mothers and children takes place. Afterall, *tarbiya*, or spiritual guidance has a double meaning referring to both a disciple's training by a shaykh and a child's training by her parent."<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Salamah-Qudsi, "Mother Images and Roles in Classical Sufism," 215-216.

<sup>296</sup> Keller, Nuh Ha Mim. *The Shadhili Tariqa*, 1999.

Anticipating that some American Muslims may be uncomfortable with breastfeeding and *ṭarīqa* Sufism alike, Lana warned me that I must carefully address writing about this, since “the shaykh thing is so foreign in our community, but this was once very normal...”<sup>297</sup> Like Lana, Irfana preferred to conceal her relationship with the shaykh:

I have a lot of Muslim friends who are very practicing, but they don’t know anything about Sufism. Even one of my best friends does not know I have a shaykh, and that I went to see him. She wouldn’t know what I am talking about. They are so far from that. It’s not that they are on the wrong path, it’s just not their path—they are not exposed to it. I don’t impose my own path. Everyone’s path to Allah is different, you can’t judge.

Saba, Lana, and Irfana all describe a longing for a nurturing tradition and a spiritual parent.<sup>298</sup> In the early 1980s, their parents left India, Pakistan, and Palestine. Saba, Lana, and Irfana are the grandchildren of a generation in South Asia and the Middle East that experienced forced migration due to the partitioning of their ancestral lands. As members of the upper middle class in their countries of origin, their first-generation parents did not attend traditional madrasas or Muslim institutions of learning but rather enrolled in Catholic convents, or English-medium Protestant grammar schools. According to Development Studies scholar Masooda Bano and religious studies scholar Rory Dickson, the stagnation of Islamic learning in Muslim countries occurred in part due to the abandonment of traditional Islamic schooling, the rise of universities and the

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> On tradition, Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote: “Tradition is not something a man can learn; not a thread he picks up when he feels like it; any more than a man can choose his own ancestors. Someone lacking a tradition who would like to have one is like a man unhappily in love.” Talal Asad interprets Wittgenstein’s passage: “...in other words, tradition represents for someone who doesn’t have it the object of an unattainable longing: the condition of belonging to another, being accepted as such by him or her, and of hoping to learn (and construct) through friendship who one is. Of course, the language and practice of tradition can and must be learnt (people do enter traditions they have not inherited) but Wittgenstein’s emphasis is on the fact that what is learnt is not a doctrine (rules) but a mode of being, not a thread one can pick up or drop whenever one feels like it but a capacity for experiencing another in a way that can’t be renounced.” See Asad, “Thinking about Tradition, Religion and Politics in Egypt Today.”; Iqbal, “Thinking about Method,” 213; Salamah-Qudsi, “Mother Images and Roles in Classical Sufism,” 207.



printing press that changed the way laypeople related to religious scholars. This led to the loss of patronage for traditionalist religious scholars during the postcolonial period.<sup>299</sup> Their grandparents read modernist and Islamist thinkers who blamed Sufis for contributing to Muslim civilization's modern malaise.<sup>300</sup>

As discussed, most of my interlocutors were raised in Salafist and Islamist mosque communities whose leadership deemed Sufism heretical. However, Saba, Lana, and Irfana represented a cohort of relatively affluent second-generation immigrant American Muslims (mothers of children born in the late 1990s and early 2000s). They had the disposable income to attend retreats, annual ISNA conferences, and later, visit shaykhs. At ISNA, they were captivated by Hamza Yusuf's blockbuster speeches and proceeded to fangirl him whenever possible, listening to him denounce Islamism's relevance for American Muslims and promote *taqlīd*, *tasawwuf* and formal study of classical Muslim texts. Religious studies scholar Marcia Hermansen writes that this cohort rebelled against the "'movement' or political Islam" of their parents' that dominated the late 1990s. She observes that during the mid-1990s, they became increasingly attracted to newly established Sufi-oriented organizations and even formal Sufi orders.<sup>301</sup> Similarly, Bano considers this cohort to be the eager public in what she terms a burgeoning "rationalist movement." This movement commenced with what she considers the first class of "revivers" who founded institutions that would eventually lead some of my interlocutors to become initiates. This group includes Hamza Yusuf,

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<sup>299</sup> Bano, *Revival of Islamic Rationalism*, xiii; Rory Dickinson, *Contemporary Sufism* Sharify-Funk, Meena, William Rory Dickson, and Shobana Xavier. 2018. *Contemporary Sufism: Piety, Politics, and Popular Culture*. Routledge.

<sup>300</sup> Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis, and Islamists*, 70.

<sup>301</sup> Hermansen, *Varieties of American Sufism*, xxiv.

Umar F. Abd-Allah, and Timothy Winters.<sup>302</sup> The younger students of these pioneering student-travelers developed their own American Muslim institutions in the early 2000s (e.g. Faraz Rabbani, Yahya Rhodus, and Usama Canon) which have also been instrumental in my interlocutors' continuing religious education.<sup>303</sup> Sadek Hamid observed a parallel contemporaneous phenomenon in Great Britain and Europe in which a group of mostly white converts and their students began holding gatherings and forging scholarly networks that expanded Sufism's influence.<sup>304</sup> In particular, both Bano and Hamid discuss the significance of a 1999 Leicester meeting in which scholars discussed ways to revive what they referred to as traditional Islam amongst Western Muslims.<sup>305</sup>

Perhaps because of this traditionalist scholarly activism, Lana, Liyana, and Irfana developed a deep interest in juristic Sufism.<sup>306</sup> Hermansen, Bano, and Hamid are beginning to chronicle this growing trend amongst Western Muslim minorities.<sup>307</sup> They credit Dr. Umar Abd-Allah and Hamza Yusuf for Sufism's (re-)introduction. Islamicists, anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists refer to this phenomenon with different terminology. Jonathan Brown refers to scholars who remain committed to the

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<sup>302</sup> Bano, *Revival of Islamic Rationalism*, 14-15. Tim Winters is more active in the United Kingdom so was not cited by my interlocutors but has attended Deen intensive retreats in the United States. American Muslim scholars are also active with his institute, the Cambridge Muslim College.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid, xiii. Bano would consider them to be from the "third generation" of what she terms to be a "rationalist movement" that started in the 1990s and has continued to grow exponentially in the 2000s.

<sup>304</sup> Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists*, 75.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid, 81; Bano, *Revival of Islamic Rationalism*, 185. Both Bano and Hamid document a 1999 meeting in Leicester in which Nuh Keller and Hamza Yusuf debated whether contemporary Muslims should be asked to pledge allegiance to a Sufi order (*bay'ah*). Hamza Yusuf maintained that it was an individual choice.

<sup>306</sup> Kugle, *Rebel and the Saint*, 9. Kugle explains how "juridical Sufism" can be traced back to Aḥmad Zarrūq (d. 1442) who represented an ideal jurist-saint and married a deep commitment to Islamic jurisprudence with Sufi practices. Kugle explains that Hamza Yusuf has revived Ahmad Zarruq's legacy in encouraging Muslims to engage with Sufi practices without necessarily having to pledge to a formal order.

<sup>307</sup> Hermansen, *Varieties of American Sufism*, xxvii.

Sunni legal schools, dialectic theology, and Sufism "late Sunni traditionalists."<sup>308</sup> Kasper Mathiesen describes traditionalists as a denomination whose members oppose the "modern *Salafiyya* movement, critical historical or epistemological revisionists, secularists, declared modernists, liberals, most Islamist movements, and popular folkloric Islam."<sup>309</sup> Thomas Pierre prefers a broader description, the Anti-Salafi international."<sup>310</sup> Zareena Grewal employs the term formalists.<sup>311</sup> I refer to my interlocutors who have sworn allegiance (*bay' a*) to a shaykh as "pledged mothers." This allows me to differentiate between independents who merely prefer traditionalist scholarship and others who, in addition to practicing *taqlīd*, submit themselves to a *murshid* or spiritual master.

Pledged mothers' relationships with their religious teachers differs markedly from the detached styles of independents, modernists, and followers. There are four main characteristics that unite pledged mothers. First, a commitment to rationalist classical theology (*kalām*) that developed out of the 10<sup>th</sup> century writings of the great theologians al-Ash'ari (d. 935-6) and al-Māturīdī (d.944), (as opposed to *Atharī* and Mutazilite theology). They favor reading Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī's over Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) writings.<sup>312</sup> Second, they stress the importance of submitting themselves to scholars of

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<sup>308</sup> Brown in Kenney, Jeffrey T., and Ebrahim Moosa, eds. 2013. *Islam in the Modern World*. Religions in the Modern World. New York, NY: Routledge, 29. Kendall, Elisabeth, and Ahmad Khan, eds. 2016. *Reclaiming Islamic Tradition: Modern Interpretations of the Classical Heritage*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 57-58.

<sup>309</sup> Mathiesen, Kasper. 2013. "Anglo-American 'Traditional Islam' and Its Discourse of Orthodoxy," 29, 191. He defends the use of the term traditionalists by explaining that he follows Ron Geaves' (2006) in "using a term that is often used by adherents ... themselves."

<sup>310</sup> Sedgwick, Mark. 2020. "The Modernity of Neo-Traditionalist Islam." In *Muslim Subjectivities in Global Modernity: Islamic Traditions and the Construction of Modern Muslim Identities*, edited by Dietrich Jung and Kirstine Sinclair, 26. Leiden, the Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 120-123.

<sup>311</sup> Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country*, 185.

<sup>312</sup> See for example Islam Rewards. 2018. *Al Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiyyah on Logic & Knowledge - Shaykh Hamza Yusuf*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-iTIUhkLuo0>. See also El Masry, "The Salafis in America," 220.

orthopraxy (*taqlīd*).<sup>313</sup> Third, pledged mothers strive to imbibe pietistic modes of being that are not simply learned through instruction (*ta'lim*). To this end, they engage in practices such as celebrating the prophet's birthday (*mawlid*) and regularly gather for divine remembrance (*dhikr*) in the company of other Sufis (*ṣuḥba*), committing themselves to litanies prescribed by their shaykhs.<sup>314</sup> They also respect hierarchy and observe the etiquettes (*adab*) demanded by the *murīd/murshid* relationship. They see themselves in transformative relationships of mutual care of the self in which the shaykh and his/her *muqaddam* (deputy) call mothers to the good.

To trace Sufism's resurgence amongst my interlocutors, it is worth briefly mentioning a figure who popularized Sufism and the neo-traditionalist penchant for Ash'arī-Mālikī weltanschauung amongst Europeans and Americans in the 1980s.<sup>315</sup> Abdalqadir as-Sufi was a Scottish convert who became a student of the Darqawi Shaykh Muhammad ibn al-Ḥabīb (d. 1972) of Meknes and Shaykh Muhammad al-Fayturi of Libya and the Sudan (d. 2015).<sup>316</sup> He organized his followers into the Murabitūn World

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<sup>313</sup> Sadik Hamid, *British Activism*, 77; Bano, *Revival of Islamic Rationalism*, 85; Sedgwick, *Neo-Traditionalism*, 130-131). I take the term "jura-moral authority" from Moosa, Ebrahim. 2010. "Foreword." In *Shāh Walī Allah's Treatises on Juristic Disagreement and Taqlīd: Al-Inṣāf Fī Bayān Sabab al-Ikhtilāf and 'Iqd al-Jid Fī Ahkām Wa-l Taqlīd*, by Shāh Walī Allah, translated by Hermansen Marcia. Kentucky: Fons Vitae.

<sup>314</sup> Fadel, "Islamic Law and Constitution-Making," 2. Regarding spiritual *tarbiya*, Fadel writes, "This process of acculturation is distinct from, and transcends, intellectual cognition (*'ilm*) of religious truth. While religious truth may be a proper subject of instruction (*ta'lim*), mere instruction, without reliable teachers who properly embody Islamic teachings, cannot produce properly acculturated religious subjects. For this reason, what I am calling "traditionalist" Islam continues to place great emphasis on Sufism, sometimes called Islamic mysticism, because of the belief that the institutions and practices that Sufism cultivates, including the hierarchical relationship between the teacher (*al-shaykh*) and the student (*al-murīd*), are indispensable in the production of a properly embodied practice of Islam."

<sup>315</sup> I borrow the term Ashari-Maliki weltanschauung from El-Sharif, Farah. 2018. "The Problem of 'Political Sufism.'" *The Maydan* (blog). December 15, 2018. <https://themaydan.com/2018/12/problem-political-sufism/>.

<sup>316</sup> Several researchers have begun to document Ian Dallas's biography. See for example: Garvin, Natascha. 2005. "Conversion & Conflict Muslims in Mexico." *ISIM*, 2.; Pankhurst, *The Inevitable Caliphate*, 163; Gebauer, Matthias. 2021. "Indigenous Millennialism: Murabitun Sufism in the Black African Townships of South Africa." In *The End(s) of Time(s): Apocalypticism, Messianism, and*

Movement, which called people to the way of the righteous predecessors (*al-salaf*) which he defined as the “*Madhhab* of the ‘*Amal* of the Ahl al-Madinah.”<sup>317</sup> His devotee, Aisha Bewley, translated the *Muwaṭṭa’* of Imam Mālik (d. 795) and Qādī ‘Iyād’s *Ash-Shifā’* into English. He vocally opposed the Muslim Brotherhood and scholars involved in the Islamization of Knowledge project.<sup>318</sup> His students popularized Mālikī jurisprudence at centers he established in Berkeley, Capetown, London, and Spain. His disciples regularly gathered for *dhikr* and group Quran recitations in *warsh*, the performance of the *ḥaḍra*, and learned to sing the *Qaṣā’id* from Muhammad ibn al-Ḥabīb’s (1871-1972) *Diwan*.<sup>319</sup>

In the early 1970s, in Berkeley California, Abdul Qadir al-Sufi’s student Haroon (née Michael) Sugich (b. 1949) was introduced to Hamza Yusuf Hanson (née Mark Hanson, b. 1958), who was still a teenager at the time. Sugich introduced Hanson to Abdul Qadir’s followers and the latter converted in 1977.<sup>320</sup> In the early 1980s, both Umar F. Abd-Allah and Hamza Yusuf spent time amidst his community in Spain.<sup>321</sup>

Like Abdul Qadir’s devotees, Hamza Yusuf supports homeschooling and natural parenting and criticizes crass consumerism.<sup>322</sup> He has also popularized classical Muslim

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*Utopianism through the Ages. Ed. Hans-Christian Lehner, 328–57. Leiden: Brill. For a discussion of Abdalqadir as-Sufi’s influence on prominent white Muslim converts in the United States, see Chaudary, Amina. “White Shaykhs from the American Counterculture,” 2020.*

<https://open.bu.edu/handle/2144/39870>. Embargoed until: 2022-03-17. This documentary was made about the movement’s origins: Peerbux, Ahmed. 2016. *Blessed Are the Strangers | Documentary*. Documentary. Radical Middle Way. <https://www.thestrangers.co.uk>.

<sup>317</sup> As-Sufi, AbdalQadir. 2007. “Shaykh Dr. Abdalqadir as-Sufi Official Website.” Personal Website. Shaykh Dr. Abdalqadir As-Sufi. March 2, 2007.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20070302114911/http://www.shaykhabdalqadir.com/content/index.html>.

<sup>318</sup> Pankhurst, *The Inevitable Caliphate*, 184-185.

<sup>319</sup> Ibn al-Ḥabīb, Muhammad. 2017. *The Diwan of the Shaykh and Gnostic of Allah Sayyidi Muhammad Ibn Al-Ḥabīb al-Amghari al-Idrisi al-Hasani*. Edited by Murtada al-Boumas-houli and Abdassamad Clarke. Erasmia, South Africa: Iqra Agencies, Ltd.

<sup>320</sup> Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country*, 160. Grewal writes that Hanson eventually became a devotee of Abd AlQadir as-Sufi’s Darqawiyya-Shadhili order.

<sup>321</sup> Bano, *Revivers of Islamic Rationalism*, 101.

<sup>322</sup> Pankhurst, *Inevitable Caliphate*, 184.

texts and formal study of Islam amongst American Muslims. Academics and journalists have already begun documenting his impact on American Islam. Scott Kugle (2006), Hermansen (2020), and Bano (2020) all credit Hamza Yusuf with playing a pivotal role in reviving the “Islamic Humanities” and renewing interest in Sufism amongst American Muslims.<sup>323</sup>

From my interviews, I can attest to Hamza Yusuf’s enduring appeal. Prior to cofounding Zaytuna, he reached many American Muslims through countless speaking and teaching engagements. Many of my respondents had some interaction with him. Khadijeh collected his CD-ROMs. Liyana played his podcasts on morning commutes. Zara admitted that she enjoyed listening to him despite disagreeing with him on several issues. Apart from his considerable output, he frequently traveled to Chicago to meet with donors and keynote ISNA conferences and iHeartHalal forums.<sup>324</sup> In the late 1990s, Charlotte recalled managing ISNA’s childcare program. “Every time he would speak, he would go on till twelve o’clock at night and we were watching the babies. It went on too darn long. We never got to listen to him.”

Hamza Yusuf’s various initiatives provided American Muslim mothers with an alternative religious education to that provided by Salafist organizations such as Al-

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<sup>323</sup> Kugle, Scott. “Integral Islam.” In *Rebel Between Spirit and Law: Ahmad Zarruq, Sainthood and Authority in Islam*. Indiana University Press, 2006; Bano, *The Revival of Islamic Rationalism*, 132; Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists*, 76; Kashani, Maryam. 2014. “Seekers of Sacred Knowledge: Zaytuna College and The Education of American Muslims.” The University of Texas at Austin. Regarding Hamza Yusuf’s outsized influence on American Islam, Grewal (2013) has documented how he inspired student-travelers to follow in his footsteps as they studied with his teachers abroad. Sadek Hamid (2016) merits Hamza Yusuf (along with Nuh Keller and Tim Winters) for shaping the “Traditional Islam scene.” The journalist Scott Korb’s *Light without Fire* chronicled the founding years of Zaytuna College, which he cofounded. Maryam Kashani’s dissertation offers a more detailed ethnography of Zaytuna and the way it has animated American Islam.

<sup>324</sup> “Chicago Halal Lifestyle Event on Instagram: ‘Join Sheikh Hamza Yusuf, American Islamic Scholar and Cofounder of Zaytuna College and Mr. Adnan Durrani, Chief Halal Officer of Saffron....’” n.d. Instagram. Accessed February 7, 2022. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BwAhowMAlfJ/>.

Huda and Bayyinah, Yaqeen and al-Maghrib Institute. Through the Deen Intensive Foundation, he spearheaded the Rihla program. Since 1996, this summer retreat has been held annually in various locations including New Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Malaysia. Along with Keller and Umar F. Abd-Allah, he has convinced some of my interlocutors to practice *taqlid*. Students come to Rihla from small towns all over the United States and study classical jurisprudence. For many this is the first time that they had ever heard of a legal school or sang odes.

In addition to educating American Muslims about the Sunni legal tradition, Hamza Yusuf sparked widespread interest in Sufism amongst second-generation American Muslims.<sup>325</sup> He popularized the work of Ahmad Zarruq (b. 1443), a saint-jurist who sought to reign in popular Sufi practices by clarifying which practices are sharia-compliant.<sup>326</sup> Without assuming the role of a Sufi Shaykh himself, he encourages Sufi practices that do not involve initiation such as a daily reading practice of the Quran and a litany (he recommends the Bā‘alawī *wird*). Instead, he teaches that Sufism is a “discipline of Islamic learning independent of the traditional *Tariqa/zawiya* structure.”<sup>327</sup> He refrains from mentioning his own initiations publicly even as he refers to Abdullah bin Bayyah (b. 1935) as his shaykh.<sup>328</sup>

Regardless of his own position on *bay‘a*, many of his young American Muslim followers eventually did pledge to various orders, especially after hearing him argue for Sufism’s centrality in orthodox Islam and the need for spiritual mentorship. Even though he does not take formal devotees himself, some of his peers and associates have

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<sup>325</sup> Hermansen, *Varieties of American Sufism*, xxvi-xxvii.

<sup>326</sup> Kugle, *Rebel Between Spirit and Law*, 7-27

<sup>327</sup> Hermansen, *Varieties of American Sufism*, xxviii.

<sup>328</sup> Kugle, *Rebel Between Spirit and Law*, 9; Hamid, *Sufis, Salafis and Islamists*, 7; Bano, *The Revival of Islamic Rationalism*, 101.

introduced second-generation American Muslim to Sufi shaykhs, particularly of the Qadiriyya and Shadhiliyya orders. Consequently, Lana, Saba, and Irfana have quietly pledged to these *Shuyūkh* and seek their help for naming a child or performing *taḥnīk*.

A noteworthy reviver of juristic Sufism in Chicago is another convert, Umar Faruq Abd-Allah (née Wymann-Landgraf, b. 1942).<sup>329</sup> He wrote a dissertation on Imam Malik's *Muwatta'* under Fazlur Rahman. In 2000, at the behest of Hamza Yusuf, he returned to the United States to teach American Muslims, leaving his teaching career abroad.<sup>330</sup> Upon his return, he has frequently been invited to speak at Zaytuna College and has taught alongside Hamza Yusuf at Rihla.<sup>331</sup> In 2004, inspired by his work on an early American Muslim convert, Muhammad Alexander Russell Webb (d. 1916), some of his students started the Mohammed Webb Foundation, a community space catering to “university educated, culturally American, ‘un-mosqued’ Muslims” who were seeking an alternative to Chicago’s Salafi-oriented mosques.<sup>332</sup> He also served as the scholar in residence at the Nawawi Foundation, an organization that published his works and facilitated educational tours catering to American Muslims which some of my interlocutors attended. When the Nawawi Foundation disbanded in 2011, Dr. Umar presided over *majālis* in suburban homes and venues around Chicago.<sup>333</sup>

Each year, Dr. Umar divides his time between Chicago and The Gambia, where he participates in African Sufi networks.<sup>334</sup> His Chicago-based devotees also organize

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<sup>329</sup> Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 37; Bano, *The Revival of Islamic Rationalism*, 105-131; Bano provides a brief biography of Dr. Umar and his conversion story.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid. See also Bano, *The Revival of Islamic Rationalism*, 1.

<sup>331</sup> Shinde, dir. 2013. *Shaykh Hamza Yusuf Witnesses Miracle of Dr Umar Farooq Abdul*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MerHNZjn6xg>.

<sup>332</sup> This space is Justine Howe field site in *Suburban Islam*.

<sup>333</sup> Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 37.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid, 84.



retreats through the Zawiyah program, which has been held in Cairo, Southern Spain, and The Gambia. Tahira and Irfana both attended these programs.<sup>335</sup> It was there that Irfana sought counsel from a Qādirī Shaykh who helped quell her parenting anxieties.<sup>336</sup> Similarly, Saba and Lana were gradually exposed to formal Sufism after years of attending Dr. Umar’s classes. In 2014, Dr. Umar taught a series entitled “Bringing Worship to Life, Lessons from al Ghazālī” in Hyde Park as well as classes on Muslim theology which some of my interlocutors attended. Dr. Umar’s student, Omar Muzaffar, was also hired by Saba to tutor her children in their *farḍ ‘ayn* (individual religio-legal responsibility).<sup>337</sup>

Just as Modernists, followers, and independents look up to religious teachers who are situated within a broader, transnational network of scholars and institutions, initiated mothers too have access to several interlinked Sufi-oriented institutions for their family’s religious education. Mothers who follow one Sufi shaykh or Islamic rationalist are inclined to listen to the others since they cite each other’s works and share platforms. According to Bano and Sedgwick, contemporary Sufi and Islamic scholastic networks span the Middle East, Europe, Southeast Asia, and North America. Communities of pledged mothers and their families converge around institutions that host internationally recognized scholars. In the Middle East, there is Qasid Institute (Amman) and Dar al-Mustafa (Tarim). In Southeast Asia there is CASSIS (Kuala Lumpur) and the Ihsan Institute (Singapore). In Europe, there is Alqueria de Rosales

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<sup>335</sup> “Zawiyah North America.” n.d. The Zawiyah North America. Accessed February 7, 2022. <https://www.thezawiyah.org>;

<sup>336</sup> “The Qādiriyya Ṭarīqa”, in: Arabic Literature of Africa Online, General Editor John O. Hunwick, R.S. O’Fahey. Consulted online on 01 October 2021 [http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/2405-4453\\_alao\\_COM\\_ALA\\_10011\\_3](http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/2405-4453_alao_COM_ALA_10011_3) First published online: 2016

<sup>337</sup> Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 135.

(Spain), Cambridge Muslim College and Rumi's Cave (London), and the Greenville Trust (Liverpool).<sup>338</sup> In metropolitan areas in the United States, there is Wasat (Seattle), Zaytuna College and Ta'leef (the Bay Area), and al-Maqasid (Allentown). Closer to my fieldwork in Chicago, there is Ta'leef, American Islamic College, and the Oasis Initiative.

Whereas Independents may have come across Sufi teachings at one of these institutions in Chicago or elsewhere around the country without *bay'a*, pledged mothers enjoy gatherings with special access to a shaykh and his representatives (*muqaddims*). There are a number of formal orders represented in Chicago. The Shādhilī order itself has many branches, two of which I encountered during my fieldwork. The first is led by Muhammad al-Yaqoubi, who traces his *silsila* (lineage) to the eponymous founder of the order, Imam Abul-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī al-Ḥasanī (d. 656, Egypt). In November of 2014, he visited Chicago and addressed Muslim mothers.<sup>339</sup> He also has YouTube lectures detailing child-rearing advice. He views child-rearing in the older sense as a type of management (*tadbīr*) in which the parents must be savvy politicians winning over their children's hearts and carefully managing the states of their homes (*siyāsat al-ṣibyān*). In November of 2019, his devotees hosted children's Mawlid in different locales across Chicago.<sup>340</sup>

The second Shādhilī line popular in Chicago is led by Shaykh Nuh Ha Mim Keller (b. 1954). After converting in 1977, he became a disciple of the Shādhilī master Shaykh

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<sup>338</sup> Bano, *Revival of Islamic Rationalism*, 14-15.

<sup>339</sup> Sacred Knowledge. 2014. *Purification of the Heart | Shaykh Muhammad Al-Yaqoubi | Chicago Nov 2014*. Bristol Palace Banquets, 828 E Rand Road Mt. Prospect, IL 60056. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFY7L7CJOqE>.

<sup>340</sup> Flowers, Blossoming. n.d. "Children's Mawlid 2019." Accessed February 7, 2022. <https://blossomingflowers.com/>.

‘Abd al-Rahman al-Shaghouri (d. 2004) of Damascus.<sup>341</sup> In 1996, Keller became the Shaykh of the Shaghuri Shadhiliyya brotherhood, accepting oaths of allegiance (*bay‘a*) from his followers.<sup>342</sup> Prior to motherhood, Zunera became his devotee and studied at his *Zawiya* (Sufi lodge) one summer in Amman’s outskirts.<sup>343</sup> Anya had taken classes with Keller’s female devotees in Lahore, Pakistan. Even though he is based in Jordan, he teaches disciples all over the world through retreats (*ṣuḥbas*) held in major cities, including one in Chicago in the past.<sup>344</sup> At these *Ṣuḥba* gatherings, he mentors his devotees and sometimes addresses child-rearing issues. Recordings of these gatherings are uploaded onto his website for his worldwide audience and supplemented with related reading material.

Keller’s female devotees frequently encounter Umm Sahl, who gives lectures as a scholar in her own right and assists in administering her husband’s *Zawiya*. Born and raised in New Zealand and of Albanian descent, she was also Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Shaghouri’s disciple since 1992 but was formerly a devotee of a Turkish Naqshbandi Shaykh, Ihsan Effendi (d. 1991) of Zeytinburnu, Istanbul, whom she refers to as Sultan Baba.<sup>345</sup> Umm Sahl taught a course entitled “Raising Muslim Children” which was later uploaded online.

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<sup>341</sup> Hermansen, Marcia. n.d. “Beyond West Meets East: Space and Simultaneity in Post-Millennial Western Sufi Auto-Biographical Writings.” In *Sufism East and West: Mystical Islam and Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Modern World*, edited by Jamal Malik and Saeed Zarrabi-Zadeh. Leiden | Boston: Brill.

<sup>342</sup> Keller, Nuh. 2011. *Sea Without Shore: A Manual of the Sufi Path*. 1st edition. Amman, Jordan: Amana Publications.

<sup>343</sup> Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country*, 42.

<sup>344</sup> “Noble Road | Worldwide Suhbas of Sheikh Nuh Keller.” n.d. Accessed February 7, 2022. <https://nobleroad.org/>.

<sup>345</sup> For an obituary of Sultan Baba see admin. n.d. “Sultan Baba (k.s.) | Evliyalar.net - Evliya, Sahabe, Peygamber Kabirleri.” Accessed February 7, 2022. <http://www.evliyalar.net/sultan-baba-k-s/>. For a biography, see Gökta, Vahit. 2013. “LIFE AND SUFI PERSONALITY OF IHSAN TAMGUNEY.” *Aranan Institute of Social Sciences* Bishkek 15-16: 7.

Keller and Umm Sahl’s students have become teachers of my interlocutors themselves and offer their own parent education programs in various formats. For example, their student Dr. Fareeha Khan teaches online courses through her organization, the Sila Initiative.<sup>346</sup> In November of 2015 they offered a course entitled “Believing Women and Family.”<sup>347</sup> The webinar gave women the opportunity to ask Umm Sahl questions about motherhood.<sup>348</sup> Another influential student is Shaykh Faraz Rabbani (b. 1974).<sup>349</sup> A Canada-based Ḥanafī scholar of Pakistani descent, he directs the online Muslim seminary, *SeekersGuidance*.<sup>350</sup> This sophisticated website has become a reliable source of *fatāwa* (responsa) and continuing religious education for the English-speaking Muslim laity. The platform offers countless classes at no charge in both English and Arabic. Even though Makayla generally enjoyed following reformist preachers’ podcasts, she decided to enroll into a class on Ḥanafī through *SeekersGuidance* after her daughters began challenging her Salafī-styled prayer. Her daughters had become heavily involved with Ta’leef, which focused on teaching converts and lapsed Muslims the basics of prayer according to the Shāfi‘ī rite. By offering easy, free online synopses of traditional Sunnī rulings to retirees like Sister Makayla, *SeekersGuidance* counterbalances reformist publications and social medias. Rabbani’s wife, Umm Umar (née Shireen Ahmed) also teaches an online course entitled *Islamic Parenting: Raising Upright Children*. When I took the course, which is offered

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<sup>346</sup> Khan, Fareeha. 2020. “Reconnecting with Our Scholars Upon the Plain of Taqwa.” *SeekersGuidance* (blog). January 14, 2020. <https://seekersguidance.org/articles/events/reconnecting-with-our-scholars-upon-the-plain-of-taqwa-dr-fareeha-khan/>.

<sup>347</sup> The Sila Initiative. 2015. *Believing Women & the Family*. Soundcloud. Believing Women Series. <https://soundcloud.com/user-578020121/believing-women-and-the-family>.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> Sedgwick, Modernity of Neo-traditionalist Islam, 126. Sedgwick refers to Rabbani as a Neo-traditionalist. According to Bano, he took *bay’ah* with Keller at a 1996 gathering (Bano, *Revivers of Islamic Rationalism*, 14-15).

<sup>350</sup> Hermansen, *Varieties of American Sufism*, xln70.

repeatedly, it had 324 participants from all over the world. It included coloring pages for children and links to lectures by other traditionalists such as Tim Winters.

*SeekersGuidance* also hosts a blog where guests post about various parenting issues such as briefing children about the dangers of pornography, speaking to them about death, prophetic parenting habits, listicles of scholar-approved children's books, and a series on teaching prophetic stories to children.

In addition to the Shādhilī order, the Bā' Alawī order also has a significant presence in Chicago.<sup>351</sup> Both Umar Faruq Abd-Allah and Hamza Yusuf had studied with Ḥabīb Ahmad Mashhūr al-Haddad (d. 1995) who “was the senior figure amongst the Bā' alawīyya during his lifetime.”<sup>352</sup> Hamza Yusuf considered al-Haddad a *Ḥujjat al-Islam* (proof of Islam).<sup>353</sup> After his death, he was succeeded by al-Ḥabīb 'Umar bin Ḥāfiz al-Jifri (b. 1963), the founder of Dar al-Mustafa, a seminary in Tarim, Yemen.<sup>354</sup> Bā' Alawī leaders have their articles published on *SeekersGuidance* and collaborate with American Muslim leaders. Remarkably, Hamza Yusuf had a child breastfed by Ḥabīb Ali Jifri's wife, perhaps as a way for him to honor the *Ḥabā'ib*'s prophetic lineage. Hanson stated that he considered Ḥabīb Ali to have unique spiritual gifts and emphasized his

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<sup>351</sup> There is a growing body of secondary scholarship on the Bā' alawī order. See, for example: Knysh, Alexander. 2021. “The ‘Tariqa’ on a Landcruiser: The Resurgence of Sufism in Yemen,” 17.; Husein, Fatimah. 2021. “Preserving and Transmitting the Teachings of the Tariqah 'Alawiyyah: Diasporic Ba 'Alawi Female Preachers in Contemporary Indonesia.” *The Journal of Indian Ocean World Studies* 4 (2): 165–87; Piraino, Francesco, and Mark Sedgwick, eds. 2019. *Global Sufism: Boundaries, Narratives and Practices*; Mathiesen, Kasper. 2022. “Ambiguous Sufi Lives: An Autoethnographic Account of Lived Religious Experience, Subjectivity and Contemporary Traditional Islam.” Department of Culture and Society, Aarhus University.

<sup>352</sup> For a biography of Ahmad Mashhur al-Haddad, see: Admin. 2015. “Ḥabīb Ahmad Mashhur Al-Haddad – Muwasala.” Biographies. Muwasala. May 1, 2015. <https://muwasala.org/2015/05/01/Habib-ahmad-mashhur-al-haddad/>; Hermansen, *Varieties of American Sufism*, xxvii. Hamza Yusuf mentions that Ḥabīb Ahmad Mashhūr Al-Ḥaddād (d. 1995) was his teacher here: Islam Rewards. 2016. *Shaykh Hamza Yusuf on Who Is Ḥabīb Ali Jifri*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftoACuF8qZo>.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Sedgwick, “Modernity of Neo-Traditionalist Islam,” 125.

affiliation with the Bā ‘Alawī clan of the Hadramawt valley whose prophetic lineage is traced back to the *Ahl-al-bayt* through Fatima, the Prophet Muhammad’s daughter.<sup>355</sup> The link between Hamza Yusuf and the *Ḥabā’ib* can also be seen in the fact that their affiliates co-teach parenting workshops. Zaytuna College lecturer Tahir Anwar co-taught a two-day course called “Parenting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” with Ḥabīb Tahir Anwar al-Attas from Tarim.<sup>356</sup>

The Ḥabā’ib of Tarim also have a significant online presence through their English-language website, *Muwasala*. The site publishes Ḥabīb Umar bin Hafiz’s child-rearing advice. Like Hanson, he endorses homeschooling and encourages parents to teach children about the Prophet’s biography, thereby instilling a love for him in their children.<sup>357</sup> The website also provides a list of traditional methods of raising children used by the Bā ‘Alawī ancestors which were compiled by Ḥabīb Muhammad al-Haddad’s (d. 1997) grandson.<sup>358</sup> Furthermore, Ḥabīb Umar bin Hafiz authored a poem in praise of the Prophet which is recited in Mawlid gatherings at the Ta’leef Collective’s Chicago space.<sup>359</sup> Founded in 2005 in Fremont, California, Ta’leef rented space in Pilsen, which was frequently attended by my interlocutors and their children.<sup>360</sup> It was founded by Usama Canon (d. 2021), Hamza Yusuf’s and later a devotee of Ḥabīb

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<sup>355</sup> Islam Rewards. 2016. *Shaykh Hamza Yusuf on Who Is Ḥabīb Ali Jifri*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftoACuF8qZO>.

<sup>356</sup> *Living By Example: Prophetic Parenting*. 2021. United Kingdom.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2YAoyFJHCA>.

<sup>357</sup> admin. n.d. “Advice on Homeschooling –.” *Muwasala*. Accessed September 29, 2021.

<https://muwasala.org/2017/01/20/advice-on-homeschooling/>.

<sup>358</sup> “Traditional Methods of Raising Children.” 2015. *Muwasala* (blog). August 16, 2015.

<https://muwasala.org/2015/08/16/traditional-methods-of-raising-children/>.

<sup>359</sup> Hermansen, *Varieties of American Sufism*, xxviiiin75.

<sup>360</sup> Hammer and Safi, *The Cambridge Companion to American Islam*, 94; Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 38.

Ta’leef was just beginning a new chapter in Chicago and was using a prayer space provided in the dormitory hall of the American Islamic College. Later, the classes moved to Ta’leef’s new rented space in Pilsen, Chicago. Howe rightly observes that the Webb Foundation, an organization started by students of Dr. Umar has followers who also attend the Ta’leef collective in the city of Chicago.

Umar.<sup>361</sup> Usama Canon would frequently give lectures to a packed hall. Like Sister Makayla, he too was first exposed to Islam through family members formerly affiliated with the Nation.<sup>362</sup> Canon strove to create a “third space” in which young adults could learn the basic tenets of Islam, apart from the mosque and the home. The space was intentionally designed to welcome converts, non-Muslims, and “un-mosqued” children of immigrants—three groups who often felt judged or restricted in Salafī and Islamist mosques. During my fieldwork, Dr. Umar taught a popular series of classes on al-Ghazālī’s work entitled *Marvels of the Heart* at Ta’leef.<sup>363</sup> Whereas a nearby mosque actively discouraged children’s attendance, Ta’leef purposely designed their space to be child-centered, providing a toy shelf and devoted play area and nursing mother’s room.<sup>364</sup>

Along with the Bā‘alawī, Qādirī and Shādhilī orders, some of my interlocutors also learn from individuals associated with other Sufi brotherhoods. For instance, Tahira had recently discovered the contemporary Jakhanke scholar, Imam Fode Drame.<sup>365</sup> According to the anthropologist Rudolph Ware, Drame’s teachings continue the Jhakenke scholarly tradition, which introduced the Quran to West Africans. Tahira was drawn to Drame since he represents a distinctly *African* Sufi tradition. Fode Drame

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<sup>361</sup> Bano, *Revival of Islamic Rationalism*, 14-15 and 133; Hermansen, *Varieties of American Sufism*, xxviii74.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid*, 134.

<sup>363</sup> Hermansen, *Varieties of American Sufism*, xxviii; Bano, *The Revival of Islamic Rationalism*, 23, 133. In addition to their influence on Ta’leef, the Bā‘alawī order also informs the vision of the al-Maqasid Institute in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Founded in 2016, al-Maqasid hosts retreats for traditionalist students and has been frequented by some of my interlocutors and their families. Saba follows Yahya Rhodus’s YouTube lectures. Like Canon, Yahya Rhodus was Hamza Yusuf’s student and a student-traveler to Mauritania and Yemen. He studied for more than a decade under Ḥabīb Umar and Ḥabīb Ali. Rhodus is also an instructor on *SeekersGuidance*.

<sup>364</sup> Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 166.

<sup>365</sup> *Dr. Rudolph Bilal Ware on Imam Fode Drame*. 2019. Black American Muslim Conference 2018. Lamppost Education Initiative. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHVIKEFWm-g>.

lectured on educating children in accordance with Quranic principles. Drawing from the commentary of *Al-‘Alaq* (The Blood Clot), he asserts that children should be raised close to nature and taught orally through memorization and poetry. Echoing Rudolph Steiner’s (d. 1925) anthroposophical approaches to children’s pedagogy, he argues that the teaching of writing and arithmetic should be delayed to preserve their *fiṭra* and keep children in the angelic (*malakūti*) realm where they perceive themselves as unified with the heavenly, natural dream world around them rather than the analytic differentiated worldly (*mulki*) realm of adults.<sup>366</sup>

Chicago is also home to female devotees of the Naqshbandi Qubaysiyyat.<sup>367</sup> Saba would attend the gatherings of the Qubaysiyyat in wealthy McMansions of Syrians associated with the Qubaysiyyat, especially when they hosted their *shaykha*, Dr. Tamara Gray. Gray founded the Rabata program which seeks to foster piety amongst American Muslim women, but also has chapters for women abroad.<sup>368</sup> Referred to by the Syrian title *Ansa*, Gray frequently offers her female devotees tips for nurturing children’s spiritual growth and writes for *SeekersGuidance*. She caters to women who prefer a female religious authority who better understands the struggles mothers and wives experience in their spiritual wayfaring.

### ***Domesticating Sufism & Salafism***

Regardless of whether they have a shaykh(a) or join an order, initiated mothers are often drawn to Sufism out of a belief that they must first reform themselves and

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<sup>366</sup> Tarbiyah Academy. 2018. *Educating Children in Light of the Qur’an*. Tarbiyah Academy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qdu3VIgyqKk>.

<sup>367</sup> Omar, Sara. “Al-Qubaysiyyāt: Negotiating Female Religious Authority in Damascus: Negotiating Female Religious Authority in Damascus.” *The Muslim World* 103, no. 3 (July 2013): 347–62.

<sup>368</sup> Gray, Tamara. n.d. “Online Islamic Knowledge for Muslim Women.” Rabata. Accessed February 8, 2022. <https://www.rabata.org/>; Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country*, 237; Gray, Tamara. 2019. “Teaching from the Tent: Muslim Women’s Leadership in Digital Religion,” 333.



their families before attempting to reform societies.<sup>369</sup> Key figures in the Sufi revival such as Hamza Yusuf and Habib Ali promote political quietism while condemning popular uprisings and Islamism. They urge Muslims to respect rulers due to the peace and stability they provide for practicing Islam and warn against the chaos that would ensue if and when oppressive governments are forcibly removed through violent rebellion.<sup>370</sup> Although their tacit support for despotic regimes and their stance against pro-democracy movements abroad has lost them popularity in some circles, it has also allowed Muslim mothers to justify concentrating their energies on developing themselves and their own domestic communities instead of remitting money and fighting for the plight of Muslims in the Global South.<sup>371</sup>

This inward turn to self-examination and stance against Islamist politics is not limited to pledged mothers but extends to followers, independents, and modernists also. Since 9/11's aftermath, my respondents all felt an unwanted panoptic gaze of the government. They have been exposed directly or indirectly to government countering violent extremism programs and can no longer be certain which American Muslim organizations are covertly partnering with various state agencies.<sup>372</sup> Given this charged context, mothers gravitate towards scholars who support political engagement in local

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<sup>369</sup> Sedgewick, *Neo-Traditionalists*, 123.

<sup>370</sup> Quisay, Walaa, and Thomas Parker. 2019. "On the Theology of Obedience: An Analysis of Shaykh Bin Bayyah and Shaykh Hamza Yusuf's Political Thought." *Maydan* (blog). January 8, 2019. <https://themaydan.com/2019/01/theology-obedience-analysis-shaykh-bin-bayyah-shaykh-hamza-yusufs-political-thought/>.

<sup>371</sup> Regarding Hamza Yusuf's tacit support for Egyptian military dictatorships and the UAE government see "Essa, Azad. 2019. "Hamza Yusuf and the Struggle for the Soul of Western Islam." *Middle East Eye*. August 8, 2019. <http://www.middleeasteye.net/big-story/hamza-yusuf-and-struggle-soul-western-islam>; Asad "Thinking about Tradition, Religion and Politics in Egypt Today," El-Sharif, Farah. 2018. "The Problem of 'Political Sufism.'"

<sup>372</sup> Barkun, Michael. 2017. "The FBI and American Muslims after September 11." In *The FBI and Religion: Faith and National Security before and after 9/11*, edited by Sylvester A Johnson and Steven Weizman. University of California Press.

politics but are relatively apolitical regarding foreign affairs and unequivocal in their stance against violent extremism.

This newer consensus on the need to engage in domestic politics represents a marked difference from a recent past when the idea of Muslims voting in American elections was disputed. Ibtihaj recalls that her husband, a second-generation South Asian used to attend IONA gatherings. However, in the early 2000s he moved to Bridgeview where he befriended a group of Palestinians and subsequently pivoted away from *Tanzeem-e-Islami* and towards the Hizb-ul-Tahrir (HT). HT was notorious for their stance against participating in American electoral politics. As an African American who celebrated her community's struggles to attain voting rights, Ibtihaj was disappointed about her husband's new anti-voting stance: "I was allergic to Hizb ul-Tahrir's game," Ibtihaj recalled. She was relieved when her husband eventually distanced himself from his HT circle.

Her husband's journey from *Tanzeem* to the HT followed the relationships between the two organizations' leaders. In 1991, Dr. Israr met with Arab American members of the HT in the United States before starting another organization called *Tehreek-e-khilafat*. This new organization's mission was explicitly dedicated to cultivating popular support amongst Muslims around the world for the revival of Islamic governance.<sup>373</sup> HT's founder, Taqiudeen an-Nabahani (d. 1977) similarly sought

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<sup>373</sup> Pankhurst, *The Inevitable Caliphate*, 171. See also "Background." n.d. Islamic Organization of North America Online. Accessed February 16, 2022. [http://www.ionaonline.org/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=184&Itemid=113](http://www.ionaonline.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=184&Itemid=113). Pankhurst explains that Dr. Israr was against military coups to create an Islamic state. Whereas *Hizb al-Tahrir* sought to create a global caliphate, *Tanzeem* promoted a structure that could be a democratic republic in a country with a multi-party system, maintaining that an Islamic state could come about through popular support rather than military takeover.

to reestablish the caliphate, arguing that the only way individuals could live according to sharia was to be governed by an Islamic system, not liberal democracy.

According to historian Reza Pankhurst, by 2009, HT's message had spread across the world, including the United States.<sup>374</sup> In the mid-1990s, HT had a presence not just in neighborhoods with large Arab populations like Bridgeview but also on Zahra's midwestern campus.<sup>375</sup> In the pre-9/11 prelapsarian period in the 1990s, Zahra and Israa became friends in the MSA. Both were children of immigrants from Pakistan and Egypt respectively.<sup>376</sup> They followed preachers who Hitchens calls "activist" Salafis. These "*ḥaraki*" or activist Salafis were vocally critical of American foreign intervention in Muslim majority countries. Some immigrated to the United States in search of better economic opportunities but also to avoid government crackdowns on Islamists in their home countries. HT members gave fiery sermons about the failures of Muslim governments and international bodies like the Organization of the Islamic Conference to defend the rights of beleaguered Muslims, be they Palestinian or Chechens, Rohingya or Kashmiri.<sup>377</sup> Yet they never attracted significant numbers of Muslim students, perhaps due to their disengagement from American politics, which no longer became tenable after the rise of anti-Muslim rhetoric post-9/11 and young Muslim women became even more visible and vulnerable in American public spaces.

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<sup>374</sup> Pankhurst, *The Inevitable Caliphate*, 108.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid, 109 and 163. According to Pankhurst, *Hizb al-Tahrir* has "a presence in majority non-Muslim countries, such as the United States, although though they do not seek to undertake any political struggle against the governments of these countries owing to the belief that the natural turning point for the caliphate is the Muslim world."

<sup>376</sup> Howe, *Da'wa in the Neighborhood*, 294. At the end of the Cold War, economic demand for specialized workers was high, leading to the passage of the 1965 Hart Cellar Act. This brought many Muslim students to campuses. Some banded together to establish the Muslim Students Association (MSA, est. 1963) in Chicago at the UIUC (as well as ICNA, MAS and other nation-wide American Muslim organizations).

<sup>377</sup> Pankhurst, *The Inevitable Caliphate*, 163.

Zahra and Israa recall speakers encouraging them to work towards installing Islamic governments in Muslim-majority countries and thereby liberate oppressed peoples worldwide. This confused and frustrated them. They were more worried about student loans and saving up for an Islamic mortgage, not the myth of return.<sup>378</sup> African American converts and their children also struggled to relate to Islamist preachers who spoke more about the problems in their home countries while ignoring the racism and redlining in their own backyards.

Like Islamist groups, Salafi groups were failing to attract new African American converts in the inner cities even prior to the crackdowns following 9/11. This resulted in smaller, more isolated Salafi congregations.<sup>379</sup> This trend only intensified after 9/11, when under unrelenting government surveillance, activist Salafi groups greatly diminished. Grewal observed that after 9/11, American Salafis were forced “reinvent their movement.”<sup>380</sup> Preachers became increasingly careful about what they said at the pulpit. American Muslims became increasingly aware that the FBI and CIA were entrapping community members and eavesdropping on their conversations. “We are living in a foreign country; we must follow the law of the land. We can’t stand up and overhaul [the system]” Zahra explained, noting how preachers have drastically changed their rhetoric. Despite having been born in the United States and giving birth to American children, she still regarded herself as a guest.

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<sup>378</sup> Anwar, Muhammad. 1979. *The Myth of Return: Pakistanis in Britain*. First Edition. London: Heinemann.

<sup>379</sup> Elmasry, “The Salafis in America,” 233-237.

<sup>380</sup> Grewal observes that “American Salafis reinvented their movement post-9/11” (Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country*, 53). El-Masry adds that 9/11 increased the amount of unwanted scrutiny and surveillance over reformist activities. See Elmasry, “The Salafis in America,” 217–36.

Islamicists have documented changes in Salafi and Islamist rhetoric, carefully documenting nuances and rivalries between various groups. Religious studies scholars have also begun to classify changes within these groups as they adapt to a post-War on Terror era. However, they employ different terminology to define the inward turn that various Salafist and Islamist movements are taking towards focusing on personal piety and distancing themselves from foreign political engagement. Olivier Roy and Peter Mandeville described this early 1990s phenomenon as “post-Islamism.” For Roy, this inward turn indicated the failure of reformist and Islamist movements to address young Muslims’ spiritual needs.<sup>381</sup> Meleagrou-Hitchens refers to it as “post-Salafism.” He sees al-Maghrib Institute as providing American Muslims with a “post-Salafi” education since the Institute superseded the activist Salafist organization, the Islamic Assembly of North America.<sup>382</sup> Sedgwick contrasts pacifist Post-Salafis with Jihadis (i.e., those who wish to bring about an Islamic State through violent means) and the Ikhwan (i.e., those who believe in reestablishing an Islamic state through the electoral process). Post-Salafist thought leaders have been effective in adapting their Saudi training for American Muslim audiences.<sup>383</sup> Even though post-Salafis do not talk of regime change or caliphal return, they remain ambivalent about Sufism and do not engage with classical Muslim legal schools (*madhāhib*).<sup>384</sup> However, they have been more muted in their criticisms of other American Muslim groups in the interests of attracting wider audiences and genuine concern for intra-community harmony. Peter Mandeville notes a similar trend amongst the children of immigrants to Western countries referring to

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<sup>381</sup> Sinanovic, Ermin. 2005. Review of *Post-Islamism: The Failure of Islamic Activism?*, by Olivier Roy. *International Studies Review* 7 (3): 434.

<sup>382</sup> Meleagrou-Hitchens, “Salafism in America,” 2; Piscatori, *Islam Beyond Borders*, 110.

<sup>383</sup> Piscatori, *Islam Beyond Borders*, 114.

<sup>384</sup> Hitchens, *Salafism in America*, 284.

themselves as “just Muslims” or what he terms “vanilla Muslims” who avoid sect-talk in the hopes of strengthening a generalized American Muslim identity.<sup>385</sup>

Given the well-documented rise in anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States, Zahra has come to appreciate the need for American Muslims to vote and participate in democratic politics. She now rejects the notion that she can only justify living in the United States if she is engaged in perpetual *da'wa*.<sup>386</sup> She does not teach her children to treat the surrounding society as *jāhiliyyah*. Similarly, Maryam clarified that although her Egyptian American family prefers to attend a mosque that is “levelheaded rather than progressive,” they steer clear of Islamist preachers: “We were not a MAS family, we did not have any political affiliations,” she explains, using the acronym for the Muslim American Society whose members were once loosely affiliated with Egypt’s Muslim Brothers. Zahra and Mariam consider any talk of caliphal return as taboo and ridiculous. “Now there are other opinions from major scholars who say that [establishing an Islamic state is] not necessary.”

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I suggest that there is no clear correlation between a mother’s preference for Islamic pedagogical style and her approach to child-rearing. I found that my interlocutors’ religious orientation does not correspond to whether they are inclined towards a parent-centered or child-centered approach to child-rearing. Although one might be tempted to assume that Sufi preachers and their initiates would naturally advocate softer child-rearing strategies, I found that some Sufi shaykhs are wary of the popularity of attachment parenting and advocate for sterner, parent-centered child-

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<sup>385</sup> I borrow the term “Vanilla Muslims” from Peter Mandaville. See Mandaville, “On Vanilla Muslims.”

<sup>386</sup> Pankhurst, *The Inevitable Caliphate*, 175.

rearing approaches. Conversely, we find that some Salafist preachers enthusiastically endorse attachment parenting despite their rigid positions regarding innovation in matters of religion. Modernist mothers in this study do show an inclination towards self-determined motherhood, but even this would require further study to confirm. Whether a mother is a Salafi, an independent *madhhabi*, or a pledged Sufi initiate gives us little indication as to whether she is committed to noble motherhood.

Although demarcating my interlocutors' various pedagogical styles suggests broader dominant trends in the American Muslim community, I recognize that the mothers of this study evade simple classification. Although Israa did not like Muslim American Society's Salafist stance against trick or treating, she still enrolled her children into their Quran Blossoms program so that they could learn Arabic. At the popular Revival of the Islamic Spirit Conference in Canada, the reformist Tariq Ramadan shared the stage with Sufi traditionalists from around the world. Hamza Yusuf praised the lifetime achievements of Siraj Wahaj.<sup>387</sup> Although the Yaqeen Institute was started by Omar Suleiman, Yaqeen fellows include many Sufi traditionalists and authors who write in favor of *taqlid*.<sup>388</sup>

In this chapter, I have tried to account for the different pedagogical networks my interlocutors are a part of and the type of religious content they seek out (e.g., Sufi [initiated or noninitiated], Salafi, Modernist) in order to shed light on their various orientations towards religious authority. Although I would agree with Peter Mandeville

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<sup>387</sup> Yusuf, Hamza, dir. 2014. *An Evening of Gratitude : A Tribute to Imam Siraj Wahhaj with Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, Imam Siraj Wahhaj, Imam Zaid Shakir, Imam Suhaib Webb, Others*. Audio CD. Rumi Productions. <https://www.islamicbookstore.com/a4397.html>.

<sup>388</sup> For example, Nuriddin Knight is a Yaqeen fellow even though she studied with Shādhilī teachers. See "Nuriddeen Knight | Fellow." n.d. Fellows, Researchers. Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research. Accessed September 15, 2022. <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/team/nuriddeen-knight>.

that sectarian differences are becoming less salient amongst minority religious communities in the West, there is also an important trend amongst pledged mothers to opt for even finer grades of distinction between themselves and other Muslims when they specify their *ṭarīqa* and *madhhab*, even as they strive towards a polite Convivencia with members of other sects in their communities.

I agree with Muhammad Fadel who notes that differences between Muslims rests not just on the content of the religious education they seek out but also the “proper mode by which religious knowledge is to be acquired and their affective dispositions to the tradition itself.” Pledged mothers maintain that religious knowledge is most effectively attained through a personal relationship with a shaykh and in fellowship with his or her other devotees. They are more likely to show him or her deference as a spiritual parent. For initiates, one can only become virtuous by subjecting herself to teachers who embody Islamic *adab*. As Muhammad Fadel notes, pledged mothers and other traditionalists believe that “individuals lack the independent capacity to achieve virtue” and thus require the shaykh’s guidance to “enable them to live virtuous lives.”

In contrast, Followers, Independents, and Modernists gravitate towards religious teachers who can offer advice about how to live righteously as a self-help author might. However, they do not consider it necessary to develop a personal relationship with a religious teacher as a prerequisite for living virtuously.<sup>389</sup> They do not regard religious teachers as spiritual parents to whom obedience is owed. They regard this as dysfunctional enmeshment, choosing instead to preserve their autonomy to pick and

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<sup>389</sup> Fadel, “Islamic Law and Constitution-Making,” 3.



choose from the opinions of those they follow.<sup>390</sup> They show less deference to religious authority and the shaykh's opinion is given less importance over their child-rearing choices. Whereas Independents, Followers, and Modernists felt comfortable picking up texts to read on their own, pledged mothers insist that their meanings can only be embodied when they are read with the right teachers. It is to the texts they read that I turn to next.

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<sup>390</sup> admin. n.d. "Season 2. Episode 1: Tamara Gray & Zaynab Ansari: Teacher-Student Relationships, Part One." Accessed August 30, 2022. <https://hurmaproject.com/tamara-gray-zaynab-ansari-teacher-student-relationships-part-1/>.

### **Chapter 3: Mothering by the Book**

*To diversify their selection of American developmental psychology bestsellers, Maryam’s mommy book club decided to include a short treatise on “spiritual childrearing”—translated passages from al-Ghazālī’s writing. Although she was initially curious to read classical Muslim child-rearing advice, she balked at al-Ghazālī’s prescriptions: “I took it as very extreme. I was very dismissive of it, like, what the heck ... but other moms pulled out tidbits for today’s time.”*

Maryam could not swallow al-Ghazālī’s metaphysical notions regarding children’s nourishment. If her child ate chicken nuggets at her friend’s heavily mortgaged home, she did not believe that their family’s food lacked *baraka* (grace), which would result in her daughter morphing into a promiscuous, tattooed teenager. Maryam may have dismissed the connection between food purchased from ill-gotten wealth and children’s behavior because it could not be proved scientifically. Although Maryam was initially interested in older Arab Muslim wisdom about child-rearing, she ultimately concluded that al-Ghazālī’s prescriptions were false and unsuited to the progress of educated, upwardly mobile American Muslims like herself.<sup>391</sup>

As we saw in Chapter 1, my interlocutors were voracious readers of non-Muslim parenting literature. However, some still sought out “Islamic” parenting manuals. They resisted the total laicization of parenting advice and did not believe that there is an epistemic rupture that prevents one from applying classical Muslim texts to contemporary family life. They gravitated toward texts recommended as “correct and

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<sup>391</sup> Schayegh, *Who Is Knowledgeable Is Strong*, 33-37. Maryam’s views on al-Ghazālī’s writing mirror the ways Iranian modernists described older Arabic-Islamic disciplines as “useless knowledge.” See also Valencia, “Being a Mother, Practicing Motherhood, Mothering Someone,” 1249.

orthodox” according to the Islamic tradition.<sup>392</sup> Some were receptive to classical and medieval texts indigenous to Muslim societies, searching for what Islam says about X or Y parenting matter.<sup>393</sup> For independents and pledged mothers, al-Ghazālī’s short snippets of child-rearing prescriptions were a lifeboat for parenting in uncharted waters. They believed that these texts are not simply dead letters but timeless guidance that modern Muslims must retrieve and implement. They see these texts as complementing the truths that could be extracted from the popular Euro-American secular parenting literature discussed in Chapter 1. Later in this chapter, I demonstrate my interlocutors’ ability to access premodern texts through English translations and modern commentaries that suggest ways to apply older child-rearing prescriptions to contemporary conditions.

When examining which texts mothers and scholars refer to when discussing “Islamic” child-rearing, I found that different social circles reference different archives. These variant reading practices may indicate divergent parenting styles and contribute to differences regarding ideal mothering. In this chapter, I demarcate two archives of child-rearing prescriptive literature circulating within Muslim communities. I refer to the first as the “essential archive.” It includes references relevant to child-rearing in the Quran and the Sunnah that offer the raw material for what some call an “Islamic” parenting philosophy. The essential archive is grist for Salafist and modernist parenting lectures. I refer to the second archive as the extended archive since it builds upon the first and includes later commentaries of the Prophetic Sunnah as well as integrating earlier Greek ideas about child management. The extended archive crystallizes around

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<sup>392</sup> Asad, “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,” 15.

<sup>393</sup> Elias, *Alefi is for Allah*, 81; El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory*, 174n52.

al-Ghazālī's short child-rearing treatise. Later Muslim authors expanded this treatise to construct a small canon read by mothers inclined towards Islamic rationalism and Sufism. Both archives have inspired later writing that explicitly adopts the formal rules and style of the modern parenting manuals. Modern commentaries teach mothers how to navigate religious and "scientific" discourses on parenting. These later manuals cater to different readerships with varying methods for fashioning pious children.<sup>394</sup>

### ***The Essential Archive***

The Quran is the primary source of the essential archive and the first reference most AMPE and mothers cite for child-rearing guidance. Whenever Tahira's husband pens a Friday sermon, he consults the Quran for inspiration. Khadijeh regularly reads the Quran in translation, disregarding editions that fail to mention *salawāt* after the Prophet's name. Her daughter, Ibtihaj, preferred Abū l-A'ālā Mawdudi's English commentary. In translation, a few verses address parents, such as Q 66:6. This verse commands parents to shield themselves and their children from a fire fueled by humans and stones by safeguarding their children's upbringing. According to Arabist Hasan Shuraydi, this verse holds parents responsible for teaching children good manners.<sup>395</sup> In a more explicit instance of parental guidance, Q 24:59 instructs parents to teach pubescent children to seek permission before entering marital bedrooms at the age of puberty (*bulūgh*).

In addition to verses explicitly addressing parents, there are several Quranic vignettes depicting parent-child relationships. Nouman Ali Khan urges Muslim parents to look for answers to their parenting woes by reflecting on these Quranic "case studies"

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<sup>394</sup> Kueney, *Conceiving Identities*, 17.

<sup>395</sup> Shuraydi, Hasan. 2014. *The Raven and the Falcon*. Brill, 202.

of parent-child relations. These include Abraham's relationship with his disbelieving father, Azar; Jacob with Joseph and Benjamin, the pious parents of children killed by Khidr in the chapter of the Cave and Luqman's counsel to his son. Apart from Nouman Ali Khan's list, we can also add Mary's single mothering of Jesus and Moses's mother acting as Asiya's wet nurse in the Pharaoh's palace. Khan also mentions extra-Quranic material such as accounts of Muḥammad and his daughter, Fatima.

Through Quranic case studies, Nouman Ali Khan makes an overarching argument that parental nurture can only go so far in yielding children with pious subjectivities. Since nurture has its limitations, parents should not despair if their children go astray. With Abraham's example, he reassures Muslims living in "bad corrupting environments" (such as the United States?) that they can still raise pious offspring. After all, Abraham's father was an idolator and yet he still raised a prophet. Thus, even though his parents did nothing to cultivate Abraham's piety, "the product is amazing." Despite Joseph's prophethood, "the product is mixed." Although he successfully raised two prophets, his other sons lied, schemed, and almost murdered their half brother. By referring to children as "products" he employs vocabulary that helps him relate to the technocrats and engineers who make up significant portions of the South Asian diaspora. Khan tells overbearing, nagging mothers to stop insisting that their children pray and instead look to Jacob's example in Sūrat Yusuf 12:18 of "beautiful patience" (*ṣabrun jamīl*) with their teenage children, focusing on emotionally connecting with them instead of futile attempts at behavior modification. He argues that overbearing mothers will counterproductively increase their adult children's susceptibility to Satan's

whispering that the Quran is ancient history or “*asatīr al-awwalīn*.”<sup>396</sup>

By limiting himself to the Quran, Khan successfully appeals to modernist and reformist readers alike. To this end, they emphasize teaching children the meanings of the Quran rather than focusing exclusively on Arabic reading and memorization. In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, Dr. Ghazi and her husband devoted themselves to this mission when they wrote the *Iqraa'* curriculum for fledgling American Muslim weekend schools. The couple's vision was to write age appropriate textbooks that would transcend mere memorization or “decoding” the Quran (*nazara*) to helping children understand the Quran's core principles.<sup>397</sup>

Like Dr. Ghazi, Maryam did not want her children to simply be able to read and memorize the Quran. Rather she wanted to teach them Quranic character values over and above what she saw as unnecessarily constrictive jurisprudential rules. She expressed contempt for those who emphasized legal rulings over “Quranic values:”

I read my children the Quran [to] teach them values and character development. Things like *Fiqh* and fatwas—that's not for me. I know a lot of extracurricular programs do that a lot. When we were growing up, [they taught that] if you lied, then you must slaughter seven camels ... that's not applicable to us at all. I don't care for that, [and I am] weary of schools that teach that or like when you take a shower you must wear long underwear. I don't want to unteach my child what is right and wrong, that everything you say is *harām*. I am careful with that.

Maryam described what she considered to be the peculiar demands that premodern jurists required for expiation (*kaffāra*) for violating vows. An opinion ascribed to Imam Mālik states that if a person breaks a vow (e.g., to walk to the Kaaba), then she would

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<sup>396</sup> Khan, Nouman Ali. 2017. *Quranic Essence of Parenting*. Bayyinah Institute.

<sup>397</sup> In contrast to modernist's emphasis on teaching children's Quranic meanings, in *The Walking Quran*, Rudolph Ware argues for the transformative role that Quran memorization plays in children's embodied capacities.

need to sacrifice an animal, such as a camel.<sup>398</sup> Maryam rightfully notes that the practice of vow-making (*nudhūr*) is not part of American Muslim culture and thus her children do not need to learn it. She did not understand why American Muslim girls are sometimes taught to cover their nakedness (*‘awrah*) in the privacy of their own bathrooms.<sup>399</sup> Despite there being hadith reports supporting this recommendation out of an abundance of modesty, Maryam considers this a prudish degree of piety which places unreasonable expectations on young women raised in a media environment that glorifies bodily choice and autonomy.<sup>400</sup> Maryam thus reads animal sacrifice and scrupulous modesty as outmoded teachings that distract American children from what she perceives as more essential Quranic principles.<sup>401</sup>

Whereas modernist mothers stress the importance of a values-based interpretation of the Quran, others were exposed to Pan-Islamist exegesis surfacing in American mosque communities in the 1990s. Isra and Zahra attended study circles on campus called PeaceNet Halaqas.<sup>402</sup> “It was like a book club where we discussed texts,” Israa recalls. Zahra added:

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<sup>398</sup> Fadel, Mohammad, and Connell Monette, eds. 2019. *Al-Muwaṭṭa by Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795 [The Recension of Yaḥyā b. Yaḥyā al-Laythī (d. 234/848)]*. A translation of the Royal Moroccan Edition. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Program in Islamic Law, Harvard Law School, Harvard University Press. 394-395n569

<sup>399</sup> “Covering One’s Nakedness While Showering.” 2012. IslamQA. September 15, 2012.

<https://islamqa.org/Hanafī/qibla-Hanafī/43753/covering-ones-nakedness-while-showering-2/>.

<sup>400</sup> They read, “Verily Allah is modest and discreet, and He likes modesty and discretion. When one of you takes a bath, one should cover oneself.” (*Sunan Abū Dawūd* 4012; *al-Nasā’ī* 1:200; *Musnad Aḥmad* 4:224).

<sup>401</sup> Dr. Ghazi and Maryam’s emphasis on Quranic teachings rather than *Fiqh* reflect the views of some of Justine Howe’s interlocutors at the Webb Foundation. They adopted an understanding of Islamic ethics that considers sharia norms to be “not rigid guidelines, [but] flexible, adaptive framework[s], not scholarly rules and regulations, [but rather] guided by their family’s own ethical deliberations.”<sup>401</sup> I agree with Howe’s analysis that Chicago Muslims are tasked with demonstrating their middle class respectability and in so doing adopt a view of religion that is voluntary, individualistic, inclusive” and determined by their own choices regarding what is within the bounds of “character” and what is outside of it. See Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 163.

<sup>402</sup> For a brief history of PeaceNet halaqas in the Midwest, see Schmidt, *Islam in Urban America: Sunni Muslims in Chicago*, 125.

I remember we [read] a lot of Sayyid Qutb's *Milestones*. We were taught things at that time that made us think, like, wow ... how are we living [in America]? Are we going to be held accountable? Why are we not standing up? [Back then] I was learning that an Islamic state is necessary.

*Milestones* was the famous 1964 translation of Sayyid Qutb's (d.1966) manifesto *Ma' ālim fi l-Ṭarīq*. Qutb urged Muslims in Muslim-majority nations to resist subjecting themselves to governments that were not run according to sharia. Reading his texts as religious minorities created a psychic dilemma for young American Muslims like Zahra who struggled to make sense of the text's applicability to their own lives as law-abiding citizens.

Apart from the Quran and its later Islamist interpretations, another component of the essential archive are oft-cited hadith pertaining to child-rearing. The Prophet is regarded as an exemplary parent. Several hadith depict his actions and sayings as a father and *in locus parentis* for his younger companions and wives. Ustādha Shireen Ahmad characterizes the *Shamā' il* literature, which details the Prophet's qualities, the *sine qua non* Muslim parenting manual:

I am a firm believer that the best books on parenting are not actually parenting books. They are the books about the Prophet's character. What we are striving to inculcate in our children is that Islam is more than a series of rote actions to be performed at certain times. It is a state of being. A state of closeness to Allah, the Highest as our Creator, such that we think of Him and make much remembrance of Him (without being told). We are seeking to create a great love of the Prophet in their hearts, such that they yearn to be like him and desire to be in his company more than anything else in this world."<sup>403</sup>

In their course *Raising Upright Children*, Shireen Ahmad and her husband, Shaykh Faraz Rabbani, draw lessons from *Riyādh al-Sāliḥīn* (Gardens of the Righteous).

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<sup>403</sup> "Parenting in Islam: How to Raise Righteous Children." 2015. On-Demand Course. Seekers Academy. 2015. <https://academy.seekersguidance.org/enrol/index.php?id=155>.



Additionally, Rabbani offers a course entitled the “Forty hadith related to Parenting” continuing with the practice of compiling forty subject-specific prophetic traditions.

Hadith literature generally portrays the Prophet as a balanced caregiver—extremely affectionate toward children but stopping short of indulgence. He doted over his daughter, Fatima, stood for her when she entered a room, offering her his seat. He told his followers, “Fatima is a piece of my flesh, whoever hurts her hurts me.”<sup>404</sup> Yet when Fatima asked him for a domestic servant, the Prophet did not grant her request, but gave her a litany to recite instead.

AMPE also point to the Prophet’s treatment of his younger companions and the way in which he acted as their surrogate father. This is detailed in Dr. Hesham al-Awadi’s book *Children around the Prophet*, which also informed Saba’s outlook on mothering.<sup>405</sup> In this book, Awadi describes the Prophet’s fatherlike relationship with Anas ibn Mālik is often invoked to shed light on his parenting style. At her workshop, ‘Ālimah Maha explained how the Prophet taught Anas independence:

The Prophet told Anas: “I want to fast today. Before *Fajr*, give me something to eat.” Anas gave him dates and water. Scholars explain that the Prophet could have prepared his breakfast himself, but he wanted to give Anas an opportunity to serve and boost his self-confidence. This shows us the child’s capability. It is equivalent to us asking them “get me glass of water” or “get the table ready for dinner.” So, we should teach them how to do small chores at home.”

In addition to hadith literature about the Prophet’s rearing of his daughters and younger companions, some scholars cite his playfulness with his child bride ‘Ā’isha as instructive for parents. When she was still a young girl in his household, he would run races with her and allowed her to climb on his back to watch Abyssinian warriors dance. These

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<sup>404</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari 3714

<sup>405</sup> Al-Awadi, Hesham. 2018. *Children Around the Prophet: How Muhammad Raised the Young Companions*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

examples are given to remind parents to balance their focus on fashioning pious children with allowing them to enjoy wholesome play and licit entertainment.

A recurring theme in various hadith about prophetic parenting is the great mercy and tenderness he showed them.<sup>406</sup> He would shorten his prayer when he heard children crying so as to allow mothers to quickly soothe their infants.<sup>407</sup> When he first arrived in Medina, he allowed a young girl to take him by the hand and show him around Medina.<sup>408</sup> He admonished those who beat young children.<sup>409</sup> He instructed parents, “If you have a [young] child (*ṣabī*), make yourself childlike.”<sup>410</sup> He instructed parents to kiss children and be liberal with their affection.<sup>411</sup> He modeled how to affectionately express love to children by imploring God to love his grandchildren.<sup>412</sup>

In addition to vivid accounts of the Prophet’s relationships with children, there are also traditions that narrate Muḥammad’s explicit prescriptions to shape children’s minds and bodies. One hadith attributed to the Prophet instructs parents to teach children to love him, his family and Quranic recitation.<sup>413</sup> He is also thought to have encouraged training children in martial sports such as swimming, archery, horseback riding, and wrestling.<sup>414</sup> These examples are just a cursory survey of the content on

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<sup>406</sup> Lana referred to the Hadith, “He who does not show mercy to our young or recognize the rights of our elders is not one of us.” (*Musnad Aḥmad* 12:29, #7033).

<sup>407</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 710; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* 470.

<sup>408</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 6072.

<sup>409</sup> Giladi, *Children of Islam*, op. Cit., Vol. II, 337n4. According to Rosenthal, Khatib al-Baghdadi reported a Prophetic narration regarding caring for the young: “Do not beat your children when they cry, for the crying of a child is, for four months, the confession that There is no God but God; for another four months, a prayer for Muhammad; and four months, a prayer for his parents.” Prophetic views on Corporal punishment are discussed extensively in Chapter 5.

<sup>410</sup> Suyūṭī, *Jāmi‘ al Kabīr*, 10:17, 22890/4394; al-Daylamī, *Musnad al-Firdaws*, 5597.

<sup>411</sup> Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn: 225-226; Philips, *Seven Habits of Successfully Raising Muslim Children*.

<sup>412</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* 5884

<sup>413</sup> This is based on a weak hadith attributed to ‘Alī b. ‘Abī Ṭālib, See *Al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*: 310 or 5588.

<sup>414</sup> Munāwī, ‘Abd al-Ra‘ūf ibn Tāj al-‘Ārifīn. n.d. *Fayḍ Al-Qadīr, Sharḥ al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. 2nd ed. Vol. 4. 6 vols. Beirut-Lebanon: Dār al-Ma‘rifa. Hadith #5477, 5478

Prophetic parenting from the essential archive.

### ***Accessing the Essential Archive***

How do mothers access this content? When Anya’s children start questioning her about points of Islamic law, she turns to the Internet. “*Bahut hard hai* [It is very hard] I use Google.” Zahra too admits to looking up Muslim child-rearing advice online and going “with what the majority says.” More often than not, search results conflicted. Most of my interlocutors googled their questions about Islam and child-rearing. Hamza Yusuf bemoaned this tendency:

We are living in the age of ‘Shaykh Google’ and YouTube, and far too many [people] are trying to go it alone, online, cherry-picking information and remedies from an indiscriminate deluge of blogs, vlogs, videos, and Facebook screeds....<sup>415</sup>

My interlocutors had different ways of making sense of the deluge. Some adopted a democratic approach by looking for the “majority” opinion as determined not by how the majority opinion (*mashhūr*) was technically understood by traditional Muslim jurisconsults (i.e., the opinion of most scholars within one of the four legal schools) but rather by what they believed most people followed. Dahlia explained “If you see something that is repeated, then you think, OK, there is something there...” When she and her husband fought over whether to shave their newborn’s head, they googled:

We try to look at cross-references to make sure that [all the scholars] are saying the same thing. But unfortunately, we do not have a scholar that we go to. Perhaps that is something we should be doing, and we discussed this. But for now, we’ll ask our friends and people we trust who know the answer, people in our social circles might say we’ll find out by asking their own shaykh.... Things are usually very black and white once we read about it [online].

Whereas Dahlia filtered search results by asking friends with scholarly connections offline, Anya relied on her own schooling from Pakistan’s government *Islamiyyat*

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<sup>415</sup> “Story Time: Finding a Shaykh.” E-mail to Nadia Khan. 2022, September 21, 2022.

curriculum. She makes sure that the websites she reads follow her “*maslak*”—steering clear of any Shi‘ī writing. Anya refers to “*hamara maslak*” (Urdu: our standards) as being obvious (*zāhiri bahth hai!*)—we are to use websites that refer to Bukhari and Muslim, and if the teachers are Ḥanafī, then that is an added (if unnecessary) bonus.<sup>416</sup>

Whereas at first glance relying upon search engine optimization to represent majority opinions may appear to be a neutral approach, upon further questioning, it became clear that Salafist and modernist mothers turn to the Internet instead of a religious scholar because they did not believe in the necessity of following a specialist of a *madhhab* or traditional Sunni legal school. South Asian immigrants and children of immigrants acknowledged that they defaulted to the Ḥanafī school since it is widespread in South Asia. However, they did not limit themselves to following only Ḥanafī authorities (*taqlīd*).<sup>417</sup> Dahlia explained, “To be honest, we do not know a lot about [the Ḥanafī school], we just go with the flow. When there is conflict, then we look to see what the Ḥanafī *madhhab* says about it, and then maybe do some research.” Similarly, Zahra described her ethnically Memon family as “loosely Ḥanafī ... because culturally that is how we are raised, but we wouldn’t call ourselves Ḥanafī.” When it came to Islamic law, Zahra followed her mother’s opinion, since she was the matriarch known for her extensive sermon-listening:

My mom isn’t into *madhhabs*. It’s not that she won’t follow them, but for her if most *madhhabs* are saying something, but enough hadith are there supporting an opposing view, she won’t discount [the opposing view]...She won’t follow a *madhhab* strictly or blindly. She will look at all of them and see what the majority says. Personally, I feel like I don’t have enough knowledge. If there is a majority, then I’ll follow the majority.<sup>418</sup>

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<sup>416</sup> Moosa explains that the word *maslak* is derived “from the term “virtuous conduct” (*sulūk*) or a “compelling narrative justifying the religious practices adopted.” See Moosa, *What is a Madrasa?*, 65

<sup>417</sup> Howe’s respondents also claimed to follow a cultural Ḥanafism. See Howe, *Suburban Islam*, 176.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

Even my interlocutors who were not South Asian acknowledged the Ḥanafī school’s influence. An elderly white woman, Charlotte Muhammad recalls that when she married a Fruit of Islam member in the late 1970s amid the Nation’s dissolution, “there were no *madhhabs*. It was assumed you were Ḥanafī, I guess. Looking back on it now, [the books we were reading, and from what I know about Ḥanafī *[fiqh]*, most of [what we learned] was *Ḥanafī*.” She was reading *Elementary Teachings of Islam*, written by the South Asian scholar and missionary, Muhammad Abdul Aleem Siddiqi (d. 1954) who himself was a student of the famed Indian Ḥanafī, Ahmad Raza Khan Bareilvi (d. 1921).

Whereas Charlotte, Zahra, and Dahlia all suggested that their families were “default Ḥanafīs” who showed some deference to the Ḥanafī legal schools, Maryam denounced them altogether: “We don’t believe in *madhhabs* (sic). My parents will get mad at me if I ask about that.... Both my family and my in-laws just tell us to go pray and fast.” Like Maryam, Bashira insisted that Muslims only need what is taught by *Ahl al-Sunnah wa l-Jamā‘ah* (the People of the Sunnah and the Group). Even though mothers whom I classify here as Salafist followers seemed to read and learn about Islamic jurisprudence from Ḥanafī sources in addition to the essential archive, they insisted that adherence (*taqlīd*) to one of the four Sunnī legal schools (*madhāhib*) was not necessary or desirable.<sup>419</sup> Rather they stressed the importance of teaching children the Quran and hadith, without mediation.

### ***The Extended Archive: A Scholastic Child-rearing Canon***

In sharp contrast to Salafists and modernists who prefer to consult the Quran and Sunnah exclusively, pledged, and independent mothers turned to translation and

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<sup>419</sup> Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country*, 214.

commentaries of a small canon of premodern writing on child-rearing. Afsaneh Najmabadi explains that prior to Muhammad Tahir ibn Iskandar ibn ‘Abbas’ publication of *Tarbiat-i atfal* (n.p., 1891), “advice on child rearing had been passed orally among women, from mothers to daughters, wet nurses to nannies, sisters to female friends, and neighbors.” She asserts that “the entry of male-authored texts into this female domain began to regularize mothering practices toward the upbringing of new men...”<sup>420</sup> To Najmabadi’s point, prior to the modern period, Muslim child-rearing advice literature does indeed seem sparse. There are only a handful of medieval Muslim child-rearing texts. Eeqbal Hassim suggests that there was not much scholarly attention to child-rearing from 750-1400 because of scholarly “ambivalence towards children” and a general sense that children should not be indulged.<sup>421</sup> I found no classical literature that explicitly addresses Muslim “parenting”—perhaps because “to parent” is an English verb that only emerged in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. However, classical authors did address the management (*tadbīr*) of children.<sup>422</sup> Neo-traditionalists have been instrumental in reviving an interest in this small set of medieval texts on child management.<sup>423</sup> Religious studies scholar Jamal Elias argues for the importance of this “loosely defined canon” which he asserts shapes societal attitudes towards children in Muslim majority countries, especially given their circulation online.<sup>424</sup>

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<sup>420</sup> Najmabadi, “Crafting an Educated Housewife in Iran,” 105-106. Najmabadi writes that Muhammad Tahir ibn Iskandar ibn ‘Abbas’s *Tarbiat-i atfal* (n.p., 1891) “marked an important moment: the moment of entry of the printed words of male authors (a European author mediated through the Iranian translator) and modernist reformers into a domain that had been largely oral and female.”

<sup>421</sup> Eeqbal, *Elementary Education and Motivation in Islam*, 171.

<sup>422</sup> Sajjid Rizvi notes the rationalism in both the rationalist and traditionalist divisions of Islamic theology in Winter, Tim, ed. 2008. *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*. 1st edition. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 79.

<sup>423</sup> The Malaysian philosopher Sayyid Naquib al Attas (b. 1931) and Hamza Yusuf have renewed an interest in these texts. See Daiber, Hans. 2021. *From the Greeks to the Arabs and Beyond: Volume 2: Islamic Philosophy*. Brill.

<sup>424</sup> Elias, *Alef is for Allah*, 80.

This amorphous canon consists mostly of medieval medical and legal writing. Child-rearing is also addressed indirectly in consolation treatises which describe the correct affect for grieving a child's death.<sup>425</sup> Children are also mentioned in essays on manners (*ta' dīb*) and morals, comportment (*akhlāq*) and hygiene.<sup>426</sup> Muslim physicians and philosophers prescribed remedies for childhood ailments and detailed best practices for infant care.<sup>427</sup>

Muslim jurists addressed moral and legal issues pertaining to child-rearing in their manuals. They advised educators (*mu' addibūn*) regarding best administrative practices for the elementary school (sing. *maktab/kuttāb*) and gave husbands detailed criteria for selecting prospective mothers and wet nurses. Implied in their advice is a sketch of ideal Muslim motherhood. Jurists' assumptions about optimal child-rearing are also gleaned when examining their rulings on marriage and its dissolution. Legal chapters on *ḥadāna* (child custody) dealt with who should care for children when marriages fail or parents pass away.<sup>428</sup> Muslim jurists defined childhood by outlining when children reach majority, thus delineating where parental responsibilities begin and end.

I first noticed that there was an increasing interest in these classical texts regarding Muslim child-rearing in 2015 when I attended a speech by Shaykh Muhammad Yaqoubi at a suburban banquet hall. There, at a small book bazaar in the

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<sup>425</sup> Gopnik, Alison. 2016. "A Manifesto Against 'Parenting.'" *Wall Street Journal*, July 8, 2016, sec. Life. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-manifesto-against-parenting-1467991745>.

<sup>426</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 9; Morrison, "Reforming Childhood," 39.

<sup>427</sup> Avner Giladi's monographs detail the jurisprudential chapters on marriage that include passages on infant care and guidance for fathers on hiring wet nurses. See *Muslim Midwives* (2014) and *Children of Islam* (1992).

<sup>428</sup> Dr. Jackson reviews jurists' understanding of child custody in this article: Jackson, Sherman. 2001. "Kramer versus Kramer in a Tenth/Sixteenth Century Egyptian Court: Post-formative Jurisprudence between Exigency and Law." *Islamic Law and Society* 8 (1): 27–51. On child custody, see Ibrahim, Ahmed Fekry. 2018. *Child Custody in Islamic Law: Theory and Practice in Egypt since the Sixteenth Century*. Cambridge University Press.

venue’s corridor, I struck up a conversation with the bookseller (a devotee of the Shaykh) about my research. He referred me to *Educating Children: Classical Advice for Modern Times*.<sup>429</sup> It translates and comments upon *Riyāḍat al-Şibyān* (Raising Children), a didactic treatise or *manẓūma* of 110 verses addressing the cultivation of virtues and good character in children. It was written by a leading Egyptian Shāfi‘ī authority, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad ibn Ḥamza al-Ramlī al-Anṣārī (d. 1004/1596). A scholar’s scholar, al-Ramlī was considered a luminary in the tenth century Shāfi‘ī school.<sup>430</sup> His biography places him squarely within the postclassical tradition that contemporary neo-traditionalists revere due to their strict commitment to *taqlīd* and *tariqa* Sufism.

Al-Ramlī’s child-rearing poem was translated by a former student-traveler and British scholar, Shaykh Abdul Aziz Ahmed (Fredericks).<sup>431</sup> Originally from the United Kingdom, Fredericks studied with the Ḥaḍramī Bā‘Alawī scholar Ḥabīb Ahmad Mashhūr al-Haddad (d. 1995) in Jeddah.<sup>432</sup> Fredericks’ translation has been widely circulated amongst English-speaking Muslims. For example, at al-Maqasid Institute in Allentown, Pennsylvania, Shaykh Yahya Rhodus taught a women’s only course on child-rearing based on this translation.<sup>433</sup> Like Abdul Aziz Ahmed, Yahya Rhodus also studied with Bā‘Alawī scholars. Lana read the poem with her husband when she was pregnant

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<sup>429</sup> Muḥammad bin Aḥmad Ramlī, and Abdul Aziz Ahmed. 2013. *Educating Children: Classical Advice for Modern Times: Riyāḍatul Şibyān*. Kitaba, Islamic Texts for the Blind.

<sup>430</sup> Bāsawdān. *Simṭ Al-‘Iqyān*, 8-10; Zysow, A., “al-Ramlī”, in *EI2*.

<sup>431</sup> “Profile of Shaykh Abdul Aziz Ahmed Fredericks.” 2015. Instructor Biographies. Al Madina Institute and Seminary. 2015. <http://www.madinainstitute.org/instructors/shaykh-abdul-aziz-ahmed-fredericks/>.

<sup>432</sup> “Habib Ahmad Mashhur Al-Haddad – Muwasala.” 2015. Biographies. Muwasala. May 1, 2015. <https://muwasala.org/2015/05/01/habib-ahmad-mashhur-al-haddad/>.

<sup>433</sup> For more on Yahya Rhodus see Hermansen 2020, Bano 2019, Kashani 2014.



with their first child. I later saw the book being sold in a cafe frequented by Sufis in Kuala Lumpur.

This translation has also been used as a basis for the syllabi of neo-traditionalist parenting courses. For example, the *SeekersGuidance* course “*Raising Upright Children*” is based upon on a 19<sup>th</sup> century Arabic commentary of al-Ramlī’s poem entitled *Simṭ al-‘Iqyān* (A Thread of Pure Gold). This commentary (*sharḥ*) was written by a Yemeni scholar, Shaykh ‘Abdullah ibn Ahmad Bā Sawdān (d.1178-1266/1850).<sup>434</sup> Bā Sawdān himself was also a Shāfi‘ī, Ḥaḍramī scholar who belonged to the Bā ‘Alawī Sufi order. In *Simṭ al-‘Iqyān*, Bā Sawdān explains that he wrote the commentary at the request of his teacher, Ahmad ibn ‘Umar ibn Sumayt (d. 1257/1976), who was from a Ḥaḍramī town called Shibām. Ibn Sumayt wanted to make al-Ramlī’s poem easier to study and teach.<sup>435</sup> Sumayt was regarded as Hadramawt’s Imam, guiding his community through a period of great political upheaval and insecurity.<sup>436</sup> Working within a colonial context, Umar ibn Sumayt may have been motivated to encourage commentaries on this treatise by a desire to popularize classical Shāfi‘ī authored texts, such as *Riyāḍat al-Ṣibyān* amongst twentieth century readers and students.

*Riyāḍat al-Ṣibyān*’s content is based upon al-Ramlī’s reading of Abū Ḥamid Al-Ghazālī. Specifically, al-Ramlī adapted a section of the second half of al-Ghazālī’s magnum opus, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, (*The Revivification of the Religious Sciences*). This

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<sup>434</sup> Bāsawdān, *Simṭ Al-‘Iqyān*, 33-35. Ustadha Shireen is writing a translation and supercommentary of this commentary, although her work has not yet been published. The foreword of the book mentions that another important child-rearing book that has been published many times is by ‘Abd Allah Nāsih ‘Ulwan called *Tarbiyat al-Awlad*. (See Ulwan, ‘Abd Allah Nasih, and Muhammad Ḥabībullah Mukhtar. 2003. *Bringing up Children in Islam*. New Delhi: Adam Publishers).

<sup>435</sup> Bā Sawdān, *Simṭ Al-‘Iqyān*, 31-34.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid. According to the foreword, al-Ramlī’s poem is written in accordance with the *rajaz* meter to facilitate memorization, the poem was taught in Quran schools in Hadramawt.

section is in Book XXII, which is in the third quarter of the work. Whereas the first half of *The Revivification* treats matters related to worship and customs, this third quarter instructs readers on training (*riyāḍa*) their souls, warning against the mortal vices (*muhlikāt*).<sup>437</sup> Within a broader section titled “The Disciplining of the Soul and the Refinement of Character and Remedies for the Maladies of the Heart” (*Kitāb riyāḍāt al-nafs...*), Al-Ghazālī included a subsection detailing his austere prescriptions for ideal child-rearing entitled “On the Matter of Training Children at the Beginning of their Development and the Manner of Making Them Cultured and Beautifying Their Character”<sup>438</sup> Al-Ghazālī recommends guiding children towards semimonastic practices, such as accustoming them to eat simple foods and dress humbly, eschewing luxury and vigilantly quashing character flaws. Elsewhere in *The Revivification*, al-Ghazālī instructs (male) readers to marry women of prestigious lineages so that their offspring will be of high birth. Unlike Nouman Ali Khan, he stresses the critical role of maternal nurture and paternal guidance in sustaining good character from one generation to the next.<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>437</sup> Swain, *Economy, Family, and Society*, 409; Giladi, “Sex, Marriage and the Family in al-Ghazālī’s Thought.” In *Islam and Rationality*, edited by Georges Tamer, 169.”

<sup>438</sup> Bā Sawdān, *Simṭ al-Iqyān*, 31-34; Elias, *Alef is for Allah*, 85. Tim Winters has translated this section in Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-. 1111. “Kitāb Riyādat Al-Nafs [Book of Training of the Soul].” In *Al-Ghazālī on Disciplining the Soul Kitāb Riyāḍat al-Nafs & On Breaking the Two Desires Kitāb Kasr al-Shahwatayn Books XXII and XXIII of the Revival of the Religious Sciences Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-Dīn Translated with an Introduction and Notes by T.J. Winter*. Giladi also translates the section in Giladi, Avner. “Islam.” In *Children and Childhood in World Religions: Primary Sources and Texts*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge and Don S. Browning, 412. Rutgers University Press, 2009.

<sup>439</sup> Kueney, *Conceiving Identities*, 82. According to Kueney, Ghazālī instructs men to marry women of noble lineage to ensure pious offspring. She paraphrases Ghazālī: “If a potential bride is not well-bred, she will be unable to raise her children well. [Ghazālī] recalls the prophet as saying, “Beware of the green dung [*khaḍra al-diman*].’ It was asked, ‘What is the green dung?’ He said, ‘The beautiful woman with an evil origin.’ The prophet continued ‘Exercise care in choosing wives for your sperm, for a [bad] hereditary quality is wont to return.”

Al-Ghazālī’s child-rearing advice in *The Revivification* drew from his reading of a passage devoted to child-rearing in Ibn Miskawayh’s (d. 1030) *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* [*The Refinement of Character*].<sup>440</sup> The latter includes a section titled “educating the young, and of boys in particular.” Tim Winters notes that al-Ghazālī lifted many phrases from Ibn Miskawayh verbatim, so much so that *The Revivification*’s child-rearing section disrupts the text’s overall flow.<sup>441</sup> Ibn Miskawayh’s child-rearing prescriptions were inspired by the *Oikonomikos*, or the *Economics*, which, in ancient Greek, referred to the art of living, a genre that guided elites on estate management. The *Oikonomikos* is ascribed to the Neo-Pythagorean Bryson (first or second century CE).<sup>442</sup> According to Avner Giladi, Bryson’s *Oikonomikos* treatise was translated into Arabic around the tenth century as *Tadbīr al-rajul li-manzilihi* and was well-known by Muslim intelligentsia.<sup>443</sup>

Scholars of Islamic education have emphasized the relevance of these texts for modern Muslims educational thought.<sup>444</sup> For example, Swain considers *The*

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<sup>440</sup> Giladi, *Children of Islam*, 127. According to Giladi, “Al-Ghazālī elaborated Ibn Miskawayh’s chapter, Islamicized it, as it were, by changing its spirit and framework, and then included it in *Kitāb Riyāḍat al-Nafs*, the second book in the third part of *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*.” Giladi asserts that Al-Ghazālī’s child-rearing advice is “based to a great extent on Greek ethical, psychological, and pedagogical notions. Al-Ghazālī’s instructions concerning training the child with regards to, for example, eating sleeping, dressing, and behavior in the company of other people, all are directed by the Aristotelian ideal of balanced traits.” Giladi writes that Martin Plessner demonstrated that parts of the translation were used by Muslim writers. The chapter on bringing up children in Bryson’s treatise was interwoven into Ibn Miskawayh’s *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* (see n17— Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq wa Tathīr al-A’rāq* (ed. K. Zurayk) Beirut, 1966, p. 55: *Fī Ta’ dīb al-Aḥdāth wa’ l-Ṣibyān Khaṣalan*; Elias, *Alif is for Allah*, 80-82. Prior to Ibn Miskawayh’s writing, there is the Abū Bakr ibn Abī al-Dunayā’s *Kitāb al-Tyāl* which also contains material regarding child management. The author was from Baghdad and served as a tutor for Abbasid princes. I did not include a discussion of this work since it was not mentioned by any of the parent educators my interlocutors cite.

<sup>441</sup> Swain, *Economy, Family, and Society*, 409; Winters, *Breaking the Two Desires*, 22.10, 76-80. Winters marks borrowings from Miskawayh in his translation.

<sup>442</sup> The passage in Ibn Miskawayh is translated by Constantine K. Zurayk. See Cook, Bradley J., ed. 2010. “Miskawayh: From the Second Discourse of The Refinement of Character.” In *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought*, translated by Constantine K. Zurayk. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press; Jamal Elias, *Alif is for Allah*, 80-82.

<sup>443</sup> Giladi, *Children of Islam*, 127; Elias, *Alef is for Allah*, 80-82; Bryson. 900. *Oikonomikos - Tadbīr al-Rajul Li-Manzilihi* [A Guide for Domestic Economy].

<sup>444</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 180.

*Revivification* to be the “most widely read book in Islam after the Koran.”<sup>445</sup> He argues that Muslim elites’ familiarity with Bryson may have led al-Ghazālī to incorporate Greek material regarding the child into his text, thus ensuring that “Bryson’s legacy became part of Islam as faith in the sense that correct behavior was proof of good religion.”<sup>446</sup>

Al-Ghazālī’s child-rearing section influenced later medieval Muslim scholarship on child-rearing, such as the work of the North African Mālikī jurist Ibn Al Ḥājī al-‘Abdarī (d. 1336). In *al-Madkhal*, an *Introduction to Religious Law*, he identifies blameworthy innovations rampant during his time. With regards to child management, he outlines correct conduct for school teachers.<sup>447</sup> He could be regarded as an early advocate for free-range parenting when he recommends that parents allow trustworthy seven-year-olds to walk to school unaccompanied if they appear mature enough to handle independence.<sup>448</sup> He reasoned that the righteous predecessors (*salaḥ*) began schooling their children when they reached seven years, since this is the age when guardians are commanded to call them to practice sharia. It appears that he lifted a section entitled *Faṣl fī Tarbiyat al-Awlād* (a section on Rearing Children) directly from Al-Ghazālī’s passage on the same topic in *The Revivification*.<sup>449</sup>

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<sup>445</sup> Swain, *Economy, Family, and Society*, 409.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid; Giladi, *Children of Islam*, 127; Winters, *Breaking the Two Desires*, xlv-lviii; Swain, *Economy, Family, and Society*, 402n47. Swain laments that that the “groundwork on Islamic education and the social ‘construction’ of the child is yet to be done.” However, he cites “pioneering studies by Gil’adi 1989; esp. 126-36 and 1992; Essid 1995: 211-16, and Motzki 1986 for a detailed treatment of infants and children in Islamic law with welcome but brief remarks on Hellenizing influences.”

<sup>447</sup> ‘Abdarī, Abu ‘Abd Allah Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Fasi (Ibn al-Hājī). *Al-Madkhal Al-Shar‘ al-Sharīf ‘ala l-Madhahib al-Arba‘a [Introduction to the Noble Law (Based upon the Four Schools)]*. Vol. 4. 4 vols. Cairo: Maktaba Dār al-Turāth, 305-11.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid, 4: 295-299.

<sup>449</sup> Ibn al-Ḥājī attributes the passage to Qāḍī Abu Bakr ibn al-‘Arabī’s (d. 1148, Fez)

Ibn al-‘Arabī’s father was a student of Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064). Ibn Ḥazm was a contemporary of Qādī Ayyad (d. 1149). Parts of his book “Murāqī al-Zulfi” It has been translated by an English language website on Maliki jurisprudence (See: Ibn al-‘Arabī al-Ma‘āfirī, ‘Abī Bakr. 2011. “Child Rearing and Their Adherence to the Canon of Sacred Law | IlmGate.” Ilm Gate: A Digital Archive of Islamic Knowledge. May 15, 2011. <https://www.ilmgate.org/child-rearing-and-their-adherence-to-the-canon-of-sacred-law/>. Note that I

Al-Ghazālī’s child-rearing advice was a major source of guidance for my interlocutors. Hamza Yusuf frequently peppers his lectures with references to it and has even listed the tenth century scholar as a “member of Zaytuna’s ‘perennial faculty.’”<sup>450</sup> Furthermore, Ibn Al-Ḥājj’s commentary on school-aged children (which copies al-Ghazālī) has been read and translated by Hamza Yusuf for English-speaking audiences.<sup>451</sup> Maryam’s book club was reading an English translation of an Urdu compilation of al-Ghazālī’s writings.<sup>452</sup> The compilation was published by a Deobandi publishing house in Karachi.<sup>453</sup> Writer Nour Merza interprets al-Ghazālī’s austere counsel to steer children clear from dressing in finery and consuming too many condiments with their bread for a *SeekersGuidance* blogpost.<sup>454</sup> She encourages American Muslims that they too can heed his advice by feeding their children plain toast with the crust left uncut and dress them in secondhand clothing. Additionally, Umm Sahl’s description of “Islamic Tarbiya” relies on Al-Ghazālī’s treatise from *Riyāḍat al-Nafs*.<sup>455</sup>

Al-Ghazālī’s work has also become popular amongst parents of the South Asian diaspora through Ashraf ‘Ali Thānavī’s work. For example, Liyana remarked that even

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was unable to find a manuscript or the book itself. The work is mentioned in Walad Karīm, Muḥammad ‘Abd-Allah. 1992. *Kitāb al-Qabas fī Sharḥ Muwaṭṭa’ Mālik ibn ‘Anas li ‘Abī Bakr ibn al-‘Arabī al-Ma’āfirī*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Beirut-Lebanon: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 64.

<sup>450</sup> Bano, *The Revival of Islamic Rationalism*, 51n65.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

<sup>452</sup> Ghazālī, Abu Hamid Muhammad al-. n.d. “Golden Principles of Raising Children.” Translated by Irfan Hasan and Sadruddin Hasan Amritsari. This English translation is based on an Urdu Translation of al-Ghazālī’s writing which was done by Sadruddin Hasan Amritsari: See Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-. 1990. *Majmu‘a Rasā’il Imām Ghazālī Urdu*. Edited by Ṣadr al-Dīn Ḥasan Ṣāhib Amritsari. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Vol. 1. Karachi: Dār al-Ishā‘at Urdu Bazār.

<sup>453</sup> Darul Ishaat in Karachi publishes books by Deobandi scholars. I was unable to find more information about Maulvi Sadr al-Din Ḥasan Ṣāhib Amritsari.

<sup>454</sup> Merza, Nour. 2016. “A Ragged Shirt and Toast Crust: Raising Successful Children – SeekersGuidance.” *SeekersGuidance* (blog). February 24, 2016. <https://seekersguidance.org/articles/general-artices/successful-children/>.

<sup>455</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children.” 14.1.

though she could not read or write Urdu, her parents taught her about Thānavī's *Bihishti Zewar*. My mother recalls that this tome was often given to Pakistani brides as part of their trousseaus, along with the Quran. Written in North India in the early 1900s, Thānavī instructs women and girls on proper comportment and household management, including child-rearing advice.<sup>456</sup> Thānavī stated that “no self-respecting Islamic scholar (‘*Ālim*) was worthy of the name without having studied al-Ghazālī's *Revivification*. Thānavī had personally commissioned a condensed Urdu version of this text for study by lay Muslims.<sup>457</sup>

During my fieldwork, I saw al-Ghazālī's influence on children's playgroups. Saba had hired a Muslim college student to organize a weekly arts and crafts session around Al-Ghazālī's text. This children's version of *The Revivification* was the result of efforts by Virginia Gray Henry Blakemore, the director of Fons Vitae Publishing House. She received a John Templeton Foundation grant to translate *The Revivification* into the reading level of English-speaking elementary school children.<sup>458</sup> The project is endorsed by leading neo-traditionalists such as Hamza Yusuf and Tim Winters. When promoting the books, they lament the sad state of Muslim weekend schools and thus celebrate the Ghazālī children's book series for filling a curricular void.<sup>459</sup> The renewed emphasis on Al-Ghazālī's advice appears to be part of an effort to counter Salafist and Islamist

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<sup>456</sup> Barbara Metcalf translated the work: Metcalf, Barbara Daly. 1992. *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thānavī's Bihishti Zewar: A Partial Translation with Commentary*. University of California Press. According to Brannon Ingram, Ashraf 'Ali Thānavī (d. 1943) was “the most influential scholar in the history of the Deobandi Movement (See Ingram, *Revival from Below*, 14).

<sup>457</sup> Ingram, *Revival from Below*, 14n36.

<sup>458</sup> “Ghazālī Children's Project.” N.d. Ghazālī Children's Project. Accessed February 9, 2022. <https://Ghazālīchildren.org/books/>.

<sup>459</sup> Hanson, Hamza Yusuf. 2020. “A Crisis in Muslim Children's Education – YouTube.” The Fons Vitae Ghazālī Children's Project. April 15, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6XiAvE5OiX4>.

teachings in Muslim weekend schools by providing an alternative that emphasizes character development, introspection, and the spiritual dimensions of Muslim rituals.

In addition to a renewed interest in al-Ghazālī's short child-rearing treatise and its adaptations, there are other medieval Muslim texts on children's education that AMPE sometimes mention. Some of these authors precede al-Ghazālī, such as Muhammad ibn Saḥnūn (d. 256/870), a Qayrawānī Mālikī jurist who Hamza Yusuf mentions when discussing children's discipline.<sup>460</sup> Ibn Saḥnūn authored *Ādāb al-Mu'allimīn (Manners of Conduct for Teachers)*, a technical manual that advises teachers about classroom management.<sup>461</sup> A second work is by al-Zarnūjī (d. 620/1223), entitled the *Instruction of the Student: The Method of Learning*. Hamza Yusuf wrote the foreword to the English translation.<sup>462</sup> According to Swain, al-Zarnūjī details appropriate relations between teachers and students and best transforming one's body into a successful receptacle for instruction.<sup>463</sup>

Another important classical child-rearing text is Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah's (d. 1350) *Tuḥfat Al-Mawdūd Fī Aḥkām al-Mawlūd (A Present for the Beloved in the Rules Concerning Infants)*.<sup>464</sup> Ibn Qayyim was famous for being Ibn Taymiyya's student. Excerpts of his manual have been translated into English and uploaded for free onto the

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<sup>460</sup> Hanson, Hamza Yusuf, dir. 2011. *Being Kind to Women and Children*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMsZTHloikk>.

<sup>461</sup> Cook, Bradley J., ed. 2010. *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought*. Brigham Young University Press. According to Swain, this text was expanded in the next century in the *Detailed Treatise* of al-Qābisī, a work on elementary education. See also Sebastian Günther, *Be masters in that you teach and continue to learn*. Medieval Muslim thinkers on educational theory, *Comparative Education Review* 50.3 (2006), 367–88.

<sup>462</sup> al-Zarnūjī (Author), and Hamza Yusuf (Foreword) Hanson. 2003. *Instruction of the Student*. Translated by G.E. Von Grunebaum. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Starlatch Press. The translation is also included in Cook's 2010 edited volume, *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought*.

<sup>463</sup> Swain, *Economy, Family, and Society*, 405. He observes that this a method with roots in Clement's (d. 215?) Christian teachings

<sup>464</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 180. This manual has been translated into English by Dār al-Sunnah Publishers, Birmingham.

Internet.<sup>465</sup> Once again, Hamza Yusuf cites this medieval work for parents. The manual contains jurisprudential rules related to newborn care and training young children in ethics (*tarbiya*), as well as best practices for supporting children’s development.<sup>466</sup>

Lastly, Ibn Ḥajar al-Haythamī (d. 909/1567) wrote *Taḥrīr al-Maqāl fī ‘Adāb wa ‘Aḥkām wa fawā'id yaḥtāj ‘ilayha mu'addibu l-aṭfāl* [Liberating the Teaching Regarding the Etiquette and Rules and Benefits that the Teacher of Children Requires].<sup>467</sup> Ibn Ḥajar al-Haythamī was a leading Shāfi‘ī jurist and Shihāb al-Din al-Ramlī’s (d. 957/1550) student.<sup>468</sup> Shihāb al-Din al-Ramlī’s son was Muhammad al-Ramli (d. 1004/1596) who, as noted previously, authored *Riyāḍat al-Ṣibyān*.<sup>469</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I proposed that mothers are generally inclined towards one of two archives of “Islamic” parenting advice: an essential archive that consists exclusively of revelation and prophetic traditions and an extended archive which encompasses the Quran and hadith corpus but also includes later commentaries (*shurūḥ*) and supercommentaries (sg. *hashiya*) that may have mediated Muslims’ reading and understanding of the source texts and their understanding of the source texts in the classical period. This extended archive came to include a small scholastic canon on child

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<sup>465</sup> Ibn Shahid, Talha. 2011. “Advice on Raising Children.” *The Way of the Salaf Us-Saalih* (blog). June 6, 2011. <https://theclearsunnah.wordpress.com/2011/06/06/advice-on-raising-children/>.

<sup>466</sup> Giladi, *History of Childhood in Islam*, 11; Swain, *Economy, Family, and Society*, 402-5).

<sup>467</sup> Bouhdiba provides a brief account of Ibn al-Haythamī’s views on children’s discipline, which he contrasts with Ibn Khaldun’s writing. See Bouhdiba, Abdelwahab, and Muḥammad Ma’rūf Dawālībī. 1998. *The Individual and Society in Islam*. UNESCO, 176.

<sup>468</sup> Bāsawdān, *Simṭ Al-‘Iqyān*, 8

<sup>469</sup> Zysow, A., “al-Ramlī”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 03 November 2021 <[http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_6216](http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_6216)>



management, continuing lines of ancient pre-Islamic thinking.<sup>470</sup> These two archives have inspired different contemporary parenting manuals for English-speaking readers. Consider two popular parenting manuals that both came out in 2017 and addressed English-speaking Muslim readerships: *Positive Parenting in the Muslim Home* and *Educating Children*. The author of the first manual takes a parenting philosophy from outside of the tradition (Adlerian psychology) and “Islamizes” it by buttressing it with proof texts from the essential archive. In contrast, in the second manual, the commentator translates a work from the extended archive and glosses it to demonstrate its contemporary relevance, highlighting areas of overlap with non-Muslim authors. These two approaches reflect different attempts to cohere Anglo-American parenting literature with traditional sources. Whereas some of my interlocutors strove to align their mothering practices with a discursive tradition that they revere, others like Maryam struggled to see their continued application to their everyday experiences. In the next chapter, I examine my interlocutors’ reception of one subject classical authors treated extensively: infant feeding.

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<sup>470</sup> Opwis, Felicitas. 2022. “The Discursive Tradition of Commentaries (Shurūḥ) – Lessons from Matn Abī Shujā’.” Islamic Law Blog. September 8, 2022. <https://islamiclaw.blog/2022/09/08/the-discursive-tradition-of-commentaries-shuruh%cc%a3-lessons-from-matn-abi-shuja%ca%bf/>.

## Chapter 4: Nursing Alone



Figure 2: Ilkhanate Prince being breastfed<sup>471</sup>

“Every mother is nothing but a nurse”

— Plato, Aristotle, the Greek philosophers<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> Rashid al-Din – Rashid al-Din, “Djami al-Tawarikh”, early 14<sup>th</sup> century. Reproduction in *Genghis Khan et l’Empire Mongol* by Jean-Paul Roux, collection “Découvertes Gallimard” (n<sup>o</sup> 422), série Histoire.

<sup>472</sup> Sperling, *Medieval Lactations*, 1.

- Asma: I often had to work late. Sometimes I didn't make it home in time to be with my child before she sleeps. I would not see her again the following evening. We went through the week barely connecting ... that was hard. I remember sitting in my car early on [postpartum] and I just felt like there was no way out of this and I just started crying, like squeezing my steering wheel and repeatedly saying "no, no, no this can't be how I have a child... this is not what I want for her, this wasn't how it was supposed to be," I didn't have a child just to leave her, you know?
- Kari: When Asma called to ask me to hang out with Safiyya, I really felt for you guys, like where you were, what kind of test Allah had put in front of you. I know there's this challenge with femininity and women trying to "have it all" and it is really big demands ... I mean I am married with no children and I feel it, and it's like ... it's just so much. I don't know, I feel like it is a really amazing honor to be able to support your family like that, and I want you to be successful, I want your whole family to be successful. And I think that Safiyya (Asma's daughter) and her brother are lucky kids, *Safiyya—she's like fulfilling a Sunnah, she gets to go hang out with this caregiver who is showing her the outdoors in the way the Prophet went with his nurse to the wilderness ... (21:47) [emphasis mine]*
- Asma: ...I always will be her mom, that doesn't change if I'm working or not. What I learned incidentally is that Safiyya also needs other people to be more complete, to see more examples, to funnel in all these different people and experiences down into herself and be a culmination of all that...all that good that is in other people who are taking care of her. Again, it takes a village to raise a child. And so when I leave the house and I see Kari (the nanny) and Safiyya (the child) waving from the window I don't cry or tear up anymore, I know they are going to be doing something great and I get to do something great too. I don't feel emotionally tethered to the home in a way that stops me from doing what I have to do.

## ***Introduction***

In his podcast, *American Submitters*, Imran Ali Malik dedicated one episode to highlight the challenges his wife, Asma, faces as an American Muslim working mother.<sup>473</sup> Their nanny, Kari, lets Asma have it all as a mother (or close to it): the ability to continue her medical residence while still providing her daughter with a tender, full-time caregiver. Kari assuages Asma's separation anxieties by likening her role in the family to that of a modern-day Ḥalīma Bint Abī Dhu'ayb. Just as Ḥalīma took infant

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<sup>473</sup> Malik, Imran Ali. 2019. "Hidden Treasures (They Want to Be Known) from American Submitter." American Submitter. Accessed September 25, 2019. <https://www.stitcher.com/s?eid=62095849>.

Muḥammad out of disease-ridden urban Mecca, so too does Kari immerse Safiyya into nature.<sup>474</sup>

The podcast does not mention whether Kari prepared Asma’s expressed breastmilk for Safiyya or gave her formula or goat’s milk. Because she is childless, listeners can safely assume that Kari was not actually Safiyya’s wet nurse. Kari, and countless delegated caregivers like her, are not exactly like Ḥalīma. American Muslim working mothers long for committed familial caregivers while at the same time remain largely uninterested in reviving the ancient tradition of wet-nursing for a variety of reasons (e.g. hygiene, future marital prospects, mistrust). This scenario leaves American Muslim mothers with only two realistic infant feeding choices—breastfeeding themselves or bottle feeding.

Given that Muslim jurists generally permit formula, my formula-feeding interlocutors felt confident about their decision. In general, Islamic law does not require

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<sup>474</sup> Ḥalīma bint Abi Dhu’ayb al-Sa’dīya (d. 8AH/630CE?) was from the Sa’d ibn Bakr tribe. She would go with her clansmen to Mecca to find infants to nurse and rear in the desert as a means of income. Infants would be sent to the desert to avoid illnesses and become hardier. The Prophet’s mother, Āmina entrusted Ḥalīma to look after her son after all the other nursemaids rejected him due to his status as an orphan and their fear that they would not be adequately remunerated. Ḥalīma agreed to take the infant because she did not want to return from Mecca empty handed. According to Ibn Ishāq, the infant Prophet brought many miraculous bounties, so her family asked Āmina if they could continue to raise him along with their children even past infancy. However, one day when the Prophet was roughly around six, he appeared distressed and told her and her husband that two men in white garments had come to him and split open his belly looking for something, an early portent of his prophecy. Fearing that something nefarious may have afflicted him, Ḥalīma and her husband decided to return the boy to his mother. My interlocutors would have a sense of Ḥalīma’s story and her significance because the miraculous nature of the story is well circulated in Sunday School classrooms, lectures, and recited in poetry at Mawlid ceremonies and in songs. See Al-Tūnjī, Muḥammad. 2001. “Mu’jam A’lām al-Nisā’.” In , 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Beirut-Lebanon: Dār al-‘Ilm al-Malāyīn, 75. See also Katz, Marion Holmes. 2007. *The Birth of The Prophet Muhammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam*. Routledge, 43; Buhl, Fr., “Ḥalīma”, in *EP* Note that the Prophet’s uncle Ḥamza b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib was also nursed by Ḥalīma al-Ṣa’dīya, along with her son ‘Abd Allah. Ḥalīma also had two other biological daughters named Judāma (known as Shaymā’) and ‘Unaysa. The Prophet had other wet nurses besides Ḥalīma, such as Thuwayba, the slave-client of Abī Lahab. She nursed Muḥammad for a few days along with his companion Abu Salama ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Abd al-‘Asad al-Makhzumī (also the former husband of one of Muḥammad’s wives). Thuwayba used the milk she produced due to the birth of her child Masrūh.

mothers to breastfeed their own infants.<sup>475</sup> Moreover, many jurists authorized formula by drawing an analogy between wet-nursing and formula-feeding. Like wet-nursing, formula allows mothers to separate from their infants soon after birth. However, since the latter half of the twentieth century, there has been growing awareness in medicine and psychology that formula is inferior to human milk. Moreover, attachment parenting's popularity and its purported alignment with Islamic ideals left my younger respondents uncomfortable with formula feeding. Consequently, many of my interlocutors, especially those inclined to noble motherhood, faced a zero-sum scenario: they must choose between pursuing intensive "natural motherhood" by breastfeeding at their own expense (harming their careers due to prolonged maternity leaves or enduring the hardship of pumping) *or* formula-feeding at the expense of their child's optimal well-being.<sup>476</sup> Although a minority experimented with sharing milk, milk-sharing and

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<sup>475</sup> Al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273) summarized the various classical positions regarding whether mothers are required to breastfeed. In contrast to mainstream Mālikī and Ḥanafī positions, the Shāfi'ī, Ḥanbalī, and Imāmī legal schools do not expect mothers to breastfeed unless wet nurses are unavailable or if infants refuse to latch onto available wet nurses. For Shāfi'ī's in particular, the obligation to arrange for an infant's nursing fall upon the father, or in the event that the child has no father, on the grandfather and the other patrilineal heirs. Al-Qurṭubī states that jurists differed over whether breastfeeding is a mother's right or responsibility. The Ḥanafī and Mālikī schools hold that mothers are morally obliged to breastfeed. They consider it a devotional act for which wives should not expect payment above and beyond their maintenance. Mālikī scholars go so far as to oblige mothers to breastfeed in the event that the child's father dies and the child has no wealth out of which to pay a wet nurse. If these widowed mothers have wealth but cannot or choose not to breastfeed, then one opinion attributed to Imām Mālik is that the mother must use her own wealth to hire a wet nurse. Although Mālikī jurists held that Muslim mothers should breastfeed their own children, they felt that the breastfeeding verse (Q 2:233) was specifically for non-elite women, thus they exempted noble mothers from breastfeeding since high born Medinese women did not breastfeed. Ultimately aligning himself with his own school, al-Qurṭubī asserts that the default position (*ʿaṣl*) is that every mother should breastfeed as God has advised, so He has ordered wives to nurse their children, and obliged husbands to pay for his wife's maintenance and clothing. See Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 4:108.

<sup>476</sup> None of my interlocutors considered donated human milk to be a viable infant feeding option. It was regarded as spurious and religiously questionable given that the current human milk bank protocols for pasteurization make it impossible to trace milk back to the donor, obfuscating milk kinships. In the Ḥanafī school, even one drop of breastmilk that an infant under two drinks creates kinship.<sup>476</sup> Thus, donated human milk creates kinship bonds between the infant and all the untraceable donors. (HMBNA for example does not trace donor milk batches back to donors). I avoid discussing sharia debates regarding the legality of donated human milk since it was not used by any of my interlocutors. For a

wet-nursing were not seen as viable, long-term options. Whereas in the past, elite women like Asma could forego breastfeeding and their child could still be breastfed by a caregiver that has become kin, at present, contemporary delegated caregiving is disembodied and disconnected from milk kinships.

In this chapter, I suggest reasons why many American Muslim mothers feel pressured to breastfeed their infants themselves, rejecting both the possibility of using someone else's milk *and* formula feeding. I analyze the evolving stances Muslim jurisconsults and parenting experts have taken on infant feeding which culminate in the exclusive preference for maternal nursing. In part one, I examine wet-nursing's obsolescence. Many of my interlocutors would not consider wet nurses even if they were available to them (despite the Quranic sanction for their employment). Although milk-sharing is still regarded favorably by some to facilitate adoption and fosterage, most avoid non-maternal milk due to fears around hygiene and lactational heredity. Early modern scholars may have contributed to this situation by interpreting medieval anecdotes about the need to be scrupulous about children's consumption to argue against the use of ignorant, neglectful wet nurses. Their writing campaigns against wet-nursing have perhaps been so successful that none of my interlocutors considered wet-nursing or milk-sharing seriously. Contemporary parent educators repurpose premodern discussions of wet nurse selection and infant feeding not to promote a revival in milk-sharing or even provide practical guidance about infant feeding, but rather to remind parents to be mindful about the sources of their incomes. In part two, I

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synopsis of these various positions, I refer readers to Ghaly, Mohammed. 2012. "Milk Banks through the Lens of Muslim Scholars: One Text in Two Contexts." *Bioethics*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8519.2010.01844.x>; Khatib-Chahidi, Jane. 1992. "Milk Kinship in Shi'ite Islamic Iran." In *Anthropology of Breast-Feeding: Natural Law or Social Construct*. Routledge, 128.

attend to evolving attitudes about formula in American Muslim communities. Whereas my older interlocutors did not think twice about formula because they associated it as a safe, hygienic, and halal substitute for maternal nursing, my younger interlocutors eschew formula due to current pediatric and psychological recommendations which are endorsed by AMPE.<sup>477</sup>

## ***Part One: The Legacy of Wet-Nursing***

### ***The Persistence of Milk-Sharing***

Even though none of my interlocutors hired a wet nurse, it is worth noting that some still engaged in casual milk-sharing. A fifth of my interlocutors engaged in cross-nursing. Milk kinship thus remains a socially relevant institution amongst American Muslims.<sup>478</sup> My interlocutors shared milk for various reasons: to facilitate fosterage and adoption, to cement friendships, to see whether their infants latch to others, and to ensure that their children can enjoy veil-free platonic relationships amongst first cousins, stepsiblings, or the children of co-wives.<sup>479</sup> Thus, milk kinships continue to create semiprivate spaces in which rules regarding veiling and gender-segregation are lifted and genders allowed to mix freely.

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<sup>477</sup> I acknowledge that religion is not the only factor in a family's infant feeding decision. Nonetheless, Muslim parent advisors' prescriptions regarding formula has had some effect on how much effort Muslim mothers may take to avoid (or partake in) its use.

<sup>478</sup> Other anthropologists have documented milk kinship's continued social relevance in Muslim communities: Altorki (1980) documents its continued practice in Saudi Arabia. Corinne Fortier (2007) in Mauritania, Jane Khatib Chahidi amongst Shi'ite Muslims in Iran, and Morgan Clarke in Lebanon and Syria. (Ghaly, *Milk Banks*, 5). A fifth of my interlocutors intimated that they had shared their breastmilk with someone else's child: three had directly breastfed someone else's child, and a fourth mother had given her expressed milk to another child in a bottle. One child had received expressed milk from an interlocutor's sister. Two mothers told me that their child had been nursed by someone else, one directly at the breast and the other indirectly from expressed milk. In six out of twenty families involved in this study, aunts nursed their nieces and nephews.

<sup>479</sup> For more on nurse fosterage and adoption, see Willoughby, Jay. 2017. "IIIT-FCNA Fiqh Forum on Adoption and Orphan Care." *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 34 (2): 123.

Furthermore, the practice of milk-sharing remains relevant to American Muslim child-rearing discussions.<sup>480</sup> AMPE continue to field questions about milk-sharing, suggesting that it is practiced in circles beyond those of my interlocutors. For example, Imam Suhaib Webb discussed sharing milk as a way to care for orphans. He offered this in a Youtube “snapwa,” in which he drew on Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:233:

So, I received a question from a woman whose sister recently passed away (*Allah yarḥamha*) and left a child. She wanted to know if she could breastfeed this child so that the child could become a *maḥram* to her children, even though [the child] was over two years...because we know that in the Quran, verse 2:233, Allah says “Mothers who want to complete the time of breastfeeding should do so within the two-year limit”—that is the limit. It is important that we understand that one of the foundations of Islam is what is called *taḥṣīl al-maṣāliḥ wa dafʿ al-ḍarar*—achieving benefit and preventing harm ... For that reason, if we go into the books that deal with the Fiqh of *Tafsīr* of the *Qurʿan*, it’s called *Tafsīr al-Aḥkām*—We find Imam al-Qurtubī says something very powerful: “*wa-l ziyādata ʿala al-ḥawlayn aw nuqṣān...*” He said increasing [the] two years or decreasing [the] two years is allowed “*...bi-wujūd ʿadm al-ḍarar li l-mawlūd,*” if it will not harm the child. Contemporary ‘*ulamā*’ explained the statement of Al-Qurtubī and said it is allowed for the mother to continue breastfeeding beyond the two years if there is a benefit for the child and protection of harm. So, in this situation this woman can definitely breastfeed [in order to] ease and facilitate the relationships this child is going to need...and that is something the sharia takes seriously so the answer is yes...<sup>481</sup>

Here, Webb endorses extended breastfeeding and wet-nursing even beyond the commonly assumed period of nursing (*ḥawlayn* or two years) for the child’s benefit (*maṣlaḥa*).<sup>482</sup> This transforms the orphan child from a cousin into a milk-sibling of the other children in his maternal aunt’s household, lifting veiling restrictions and turning

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<sup>480</sup> Wet-nursing continued well after the advent of Islam and was practiced by pious Muslim predecessors and founders of Islamic law. For example, Imam Shāfiʿī had an Andalusian wet nurse who nursed the child born to his slave concubine. (Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*, 22).

<sup>481</sup> Al-Qurtubī, *Al-Jāmiʿ Li-Aḥkām al-Qurʿān*, 4:109.

<sup>482</sup> There is a widespread assumption that sharia does not permit Muslim mothers to nurse beyond two years. However, Al-Qurtubī is not the only medieval scholar to permit a nursing period that is longer than two years. In *Tuḥfat al-Mawlūd*, Ibn Qayyim approved of a nursing period that is longer than two years as well. He writes, “The father, if he wants to have his child be nursed by another nurse that is not his mother, then he has this option, even if the mother does not like it, except if she or her child is harmed by this ... and it is permitted for the mother to continue [nursing] after two years into half of the third year or more. (Ibn Qayyim, *Tuḥfat al-Mawlūd*, 343.) Similarly, in *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwa*, Ibn Taymiyya also mentions that mothers breastfed children as old as five. (See Giladi, *Infants, Parents, Wet Nurses*, 65; Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-Fatāwa*, 4:147).



the foster father's relatives into close kin. In this way, Webb endorses the modern-day utility of sharing milk. The orphan's kinship needs could not be addressed by formula alone, a child over two would have no nutritional need for formula (or breastmilk), so the sole function would be to facilitate fosterage. This case is not merely hypothetical. Sumayya, a naturalized immigrant mother of six, told me that even though back in Somalia her relatives would not commonly employ wet nurses, it is still customary for the maternal aunt to breastfeed her sister's children. This allows for the aunt's custodial position to be fortified in the event a child's mother or grandmother passes away. Sumayya's account and Webb's exposition highlight the way in which milk-sharing remains relevant to safeguard children's best interest (*maṣlaḥa*).

### ***Wet Nurse Wariness***

Despite the benefits of sharing milk for distributing childcare responsibilities, adoption and fosterage, half of my interlocutors who were otherwise pro-breastfeeding, said they would hesitate or outright refuse to allow another woman to nurse their child.<sup>483</sup> Had I not asked them about wet nurses explicitly, they most likely would not have considered wet-nursing a serious infant-feeding option. Some defended their aversion by explaining that it is hard enough for American Muslims to marry, so why limit their children's future pool of prospective spouses? Others worried about hygiene and nutrition. An African American grandmother, Sister Shanice laughed when I asked her if her and her friends cross-nursed when they were younger, "Why would I have my baby get germs from somebody else?" Similarly, Humaira was not about to let "someone else's boob" into her daughter's mouth. Maryam would not allow

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<sup>483</sup> Nine out of twenty of my interlocutors all said they would hesitate or refuse to let another woman nurse their child. Leila Muhammad said that when she was a young mother, she would not be inclined to share milk but would be fine with it now that she recognizes it as a Sunnah.

another mother to nurse her child if she “eats badly” (e.g., an unhealthy diet). She would completely forbid nonfamily members from nursing. Nonetheless, she would happily nurse someone else’s child because she knows her own milk is “clean and all organic.”<sup>484</sup> Manal, a calm, crunchy Palestinian-American in her late thirties said she may have let someone nurse her children but with the condition that the nurse be “someone who has a grounded spiritual disposition and eats wholesome foods.”

A stately elderly African American convert and a lactation consultant, Sister Khadijah explained her theory for why young Muslim mothers were averse to sharing milk: mistrust. She opined that suburban mothers probably trusted each other more than us in the city, since they gathered more frequently and enjoy a more intimate understanding of each other’s lifestyles. She would be more willing to cross-nurse in "Bridgeview or Villa Park" where all the mothers are friends. As she put it, "To let someone put your baby to her breast you have to really know what they eat, what they drink, what they think almost."

### ***Lactational Heredity***

Like Khadijah, some mothers worried not just about milk-sharing’s medical ramifications, but also about endangering their child’s spiritual and mental well-being.<sup>485</sup> This idea that breastmilk transfers negative character traits and psychospiritual states from nurse to nursling is known as lactational heredity. My interlocutor’s anxiety about lactational heredity surfaced as a central theme for rejecting

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<sup>484</sup> Maryam attributes her openness attitude to cross-nursing to her being “more hippy, it’s a natural thing—I know my milk is clean, all organic; I never took any medication.”

<sup>485</sup> Hrdy mentions that in Europe, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, many believed that giving your child to a wet nurse was giving your child to a professional killer since wet nurses were thought to mishandle and neglect their charges even as they were used in great numbers (Hrdy, *Fitness Tradeoffs*, 415).

non-maternal breastmilk. For example, Imaani, an African American mother of three in her mid-thirties, seemed especially torn over milk-sharing. As we sat in her elegant Southside home, she expressed how she felt it was vital that children receive human milk for at least the first six months of their lives. If for some reason she could not nurse immediately after birth “say if I broke my ankle,” then she would be open to hiring a wet nurse, but only if her child was under a year old. Even then, wet nurse candidates would be extensively interviewed to vet their lifestyle and character. She justified this scrutiny because of a tradition her husband, a prominent Muslim preacher, taught her, “Be careful of the wet nurse, because the child gets more than milk.”

I heard similar anxieties over lactational heredity from AMPE. They took classical texts that assumed that families would employ wet nurses and reinterpreted them for a modern Western context in which wet nurses were not realistic options at all. At a women’s only child-rearing workshop at a Muslim seminary, I listened to a PowerPoint by a petite, ‘Ālimah donned in a brown *jilbāb*. She offered this commentary on Q 2:233: “So you can opt for a wet nurse, there is no *junāh* [blame] as long as you give payment according to what is *ma ‘rūf*, meaning what is accepted on both ends, and her wages are the father’s responsibility.” She explained that anyone can breastfeed: “There is no condition [on who can serve as a wet nurse] from a strictly *fiqh* perspective.”<sup>486</sup> But, she cautioned, “the female companions—the *’umahāt* (mothers)—they chose *righteous* people for its effect on the child.” One student-mother’s hand shot up:

On the same topic, you said you need to choose righteous people—right? So, is it better to go to a liquid gold bank? I mean, that could be [breastmilk] from anybody... Is it better to do breastmilk or make sure it’s a righteous person...You don’t know the status of the people

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<sup>486</sup> Giladi mentions that most Muslim jurists permitted Muslim families to employ infidel wet nurses. Only Ibn Ḥazm—whose legal school did not survive—deemed a “polytheistic wet nurses’ milk” impure and thus off limits for Muslim nurslings. (Giladi, *Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses*, 109).

who you are getting milk from [in the liquid gold banks], right? Do you have any recommendation?

The ‘Ālimah replied:

There is no recommendation [for the donor/wet nurse to be righteous], it’s just that the scholars would choose righteous people. They didn’t have [milk banks] back then, [maybe] they would look at the supplier?

The ‘Ālimah recognized that the Quran simply instructs parents to pay wet nurses fairly, making no specific prescriptions about wet nurse selection or donated human milk. However, she provides her own additional commentary that *righteous* folk look for righteous wet nurses. This led audience members to conclude that an unvirtuous wet nurse may harm children.

A more direct reference to lactational heredity was made at a class on al-Ghazālī’s *Revivification* at Ta’leef. While stressing the need to purify one’s heart by purifying one’s diet, the teacher remarked that medieval Muslims were cautious about what they eat because they knew that a depressed wet nurse may pass her mental illness to her nursling.

Metaphysical ideas around lactational heredity from Imam al-Ghazālī’s *magnum opus* resurfaced multiple times in literature my interlocutors read.<sup>487</sup> For example, in Thānavī’s popular handbook, *Adab-i zindagi (Etiquette of Life)*, he includes a section on children’s rights:

The first of these is to have their father marry a virtuous woman so that the children are good, and others include the right to a loving upbringing in childhood (especially for girls), *to a pious and upstanding nursemaid*, to be taught about religion, to have children’s marriages taken care of, to arranging a second marriage for a daughter if she is widowed, and to sheltering her in the marital home until that happens while paying for her expenses” [emphasis mine].<sup>488</sup>

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<sup>487</sup> Ingram, *Revival from Below*, 14n36.

<sup>488</sup> Elias, *Alif is for Allah*, 87n36. Notably, Thānavī implies that the nursemaid that fathers enlists is a different woman than the wife. In his other major work, *Bihisti Zewar* (Heavenly Ornaments), Thānavī

Maryam’s Book club also discussed al-Ghazali in translation. She was perplexed by the causal relationship between a child’s diet and her inclination to evil:

For upbringing of the child and for nursing, [in the absence of the mother] a woman of good character and religiosity should be appointed, who eats lawful (*halal*) food because the milk that comes from unlawful food has no betterment or blessing in it. Instead, if the child is brought up with milk that comes from unlawful (*haram*) sources, then evil gets permeated into the very fiber of the child, and because of that, the temperament of the child inclines towards Satanic (evil) deeds.”<sup>489</sup>

Possibly following al-Ghazālī here, Thānavī instructs parents to choose a wet nurse carefully, preferably one who is young, good natured, and pious, “not stupid, immodest, ill-behaved, miserly, or greedy.”<sup>490</sup> However, Thānavī does not explicitly state that an ill-mannered wet nurse’s traits transfer to the nursling. Al-Ghazālī’s passage reappears once again in Umm Sahl’s child-rearing course, but her commentary differs. She reads the passage “and permit none but a woman of virtue and religion to nurse and raise him” as another reason why it is so important to marry carefully.<sup>491</sup> Umm Sahl adds that this righteous man must make sure that “he nourishes [his wife] with *halal* food since that food nourishes the child and kneads his disposition and future temperament.” She cautions that if the child eats *haram*, then it will be very difficult for that child to do the *halal*. Unlike the version of al-Ghazālī that Maryam read in her book club which suggested that a nurse be carefully selected in the wife’s absence, Umm Sahl omits any reference of a wet nurse altogether and speaks only of the “righteous mother.” Wet-

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stresses the wet nurse’s rights over the child immediately after he lists the parent’s rights. The wet nurse receives pride of place even before the rights of the child’s stepmother, elder brother, relatives, and in-laws. Thānavī tells the child to meet his or her wet nurse with respect: “If she is in need of money and you are able to help her, then help her.” See Thānavī, *Bahishti Zewar*, 444.

<sup>489</sup> Ghazali, “Golden Principles of Raising Children,” 3; Giladi, *Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses*, 44. Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, Cairo, 1967, 3: 92. Note how the translator interpolates the clause [in the absence of the mother] which was not in the original Arabic. This may reveal the translator’s assumption that wet nurses are only for situations of necessity rather simply a family’s choice. Similarly, al-Ghazālī’s original text does not specify whether the woman nursing and raising the child is the mother or not, she must simply be righteous (*imra’a ṣaliha*).

<sup>490</sup> Thānavī, *Bahishti Zewar*, 527.

<sup>491</sup> Here, she quotes Al-Ghazālī in translation: Winters, *Breaking the Two Desires*, 76.

nursing is not featured in her course, she shows her students the contemporary relevance of this passage by encouraging them to download food code breakers to determine whether food additives in their meals contain *haram* ingredients.<sup>492</sup>

Al-Ghazālī's advice on wet nurse selection reappears once more in al-Ramlī's poem. Ahmed translates the verses in question as follows:

The first of things is the nursery (*ḥaḍāna*) period. It is desirable that the suckling (*radā'uhu*) of every child should be from one righteous in her words and deeds. She must eat from the permitted (*halal*) and not from the illicit (*haram*), for they have said one's habit will reflect what he eats. If the suckling is filthy, he inclines towards filthy actions, firstly and lastly.<sup>493</sup>

Ahmed's commentary presumes the legitimacy of lactational heredity. Quoting al-Ramlī, he observes how the filthy (*khabiṭh*) suckling inclines children towards filth of two types:

to both a psychic filth in which the child's soul can become 'heavy' or that his stomach falls ill/on the verge of vomiting...these images are appropriate to [describing the] filthy suckling leading to both a 'heavy ego' and causing the child to be 'sick from the stomach upwards.'<sup>494</sup>

Ahmed draws on the Genevan Enlightenment philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau to demonstrate how al-Ghazālī and al-Ramlī's notions regarding breastmilk "are common to most traditional cultures" hinting at the shared Greco-Islamic origins of lactational heredity. He quotes Rousseau's advice for nurse selection from the latter's pedagogical treatise, *Emile*:

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<sup>492</sup> Krasniqi, "Raising Muslim Children," 6.5. The legal status of food in Islam is complex. Jurists differentiate between food that is haram due to its essential substance (e.g. pork, gelatin), or the way it is prepared (i.e. the way that meat is slaughtered, non-*dhabīḥah* meat), or due to its source (i.e. meat procured through ill-gotten wealth).

<sup>493</sup> Again, the classical poem does not indicate that the mothers must nurse. In his commentary, Fredericks, like Umm Sahl, stresses the importance of husbands' careful spouse selection. He also assumes that wives double as nurses. He states, ... if the mother of your child does not eat from the permitted, the child will be brought up on the illicit. It flows in her milk and corrupts the child's nature. However, he does acknowledge the possibility of modern-day wet-nursing: "If the child is to be wet-nursed, as was the tradition in many cultures, one should be just as careful about choosing a wet nurse." (See Fredericks, *Educating Children*, 32-35).

<sup>494</sup> Ahmed, *Educating Children* 33.

The nurse must be healthy alike in disposition and in body. The violence of the passions as well as the humors spoil her milk... The milk may be good and the nurse bad; a good character is as good as constitution. If you choose a vicious person, *I do not say her foster child will acquire her vices*, but he will suffer for them. Ought she not to bestow on him day by day, along with her milk, a care which calls for zeal, patience, gentleness, and cleanliness? If she is intemperate and greedy, her milk will soon be spoilt; if she is careless and hasty, what will become of a poor little wretch left to her mercy and unable to protect himself of complaint. The wicked are never good for anything.<sup>495</sup> [emphasis mine]

Although Rousseau stops short of endorsing a metaphysical theory of milk character transfer, he nonetheless disparages wet nurses as neglectful, careless caregivers.

Rousseau persuaded elite women to nurse their own. Ahmed does not mention Rousseau's anti-wet-nursing sentiment but instead pivots to write about the relevance of al-Ghazālī's wet nurse selection advice. Like Umm Sahl, he takes it to mean that parents must be careful about ensuring that their children eat *halal*, even while they are making play date arrangements. However, he warns parents against allowing their vigilance about their children's diets cause them to forbid playdates at their non-Muslim friends' homes. He suggests that having playdates at your child's observant Jewish friend's home since observant Jews may be *more* mindful of Kosher laws than halal-insouciant Muslims. Thus, Ahmed worries that a parent's (mis)reading of al-Ghazālī's advice can potentially hinder their child's successful integration in Western societies.

Another white convert and former student-traveler, Shaykh Bilal Lakeman uses Ahmed's translation in his parenting classes for mothers who frequent his East Coast mosque cum full-time Muslim seminary. In his livestreamed classes, he offers his own supercommentary of Ahmed's book. He quotes the wife of a Bā' alawī teachers who explained that an infant is like dough (a metaphor that can be gleaned by al-Ghazālī's who wrote that a child's temperament is kneaded, *ta 'ajanna*). He explains:

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<sup>495</sup> Ibid, 33n24. Ahmed cites Rousseau, *Emile*, 28.

The caregiver can mix in whatever product and then once the dough has risen it becomes clear what the outcome is, based on what has been put into the dough. If there was too much food coloring, too much salt. Thus, the caregiver sees the repercussions of how he or she made the dough when the child is older.

Lakeman’s extended analogy here elucidates why most Sunnī legal scholars hold that milk kinship only results from breastfeeding that occurs in the first two years of life since this is the period in which the milk is thought to contribute to the child’s physical constitution and thus connects the infant to the nurse in the same way that blood connects her to her biological parents.<sup>496</sup>

Lakeman’s teacher, Hamza Yusuf, similarly dwells upon al-Ghazālī’s classical advice regarding wet nurse selection. Hamza Yusuf reads and comments on *al-Madkhal*, offering this gloss:

He [Ibn al-Ḥājj, copying al-Ghazālī?] begins by telling us that you must be aware of where your child’s sustenance is coming from. Where are the child’s cells being nurtured from? He warns about the woman who is giving milk—the milk must be *halal*, if not, then there is no *baraka* in it...If you are wondering why children become sick, they are eating all this *haram*, so that their cells are becoming *haram*, so they are behaving like *shayaṭīn*, because they have got *shayaṭīn* flowing in their blood. *Shayṭān* (Satan) flows in the blood of Banī Adam with the flowing of the blood, ‘*Inna l-shayṭān yajrī min al-insān majrā ‘al-dam*.<sup>497</sup> Shayṭān’s quickest route is through the mouth. The quickest way Shayṭān gets into the human being is through *haram* food...So the whole idea of guarding the food that children eat, I mean really, *we should have our own sources of food*. We should know where it is coming from. And, really worrying about where our income is coming from—Is it *halal* income? If you want your children to be Muslim, you should be concerned about what is going into their stomach. If you want to fill them with garbage and junk, then like they say in the computer industry, garbage in, garbage out.<sup>498</sup> [emphasis mine]

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<sup>496</sup> There are actual scientific studies conducted by Muslims to probe whether genetic information is passed through human breastmilk. See Ozkan, Hasan, Funda Tuzun, Abdullah Kumral, and Nuray Duman. 2012. “Milk Kinship Hypothesis in Light of Epigenetic Knowledge.” *Clinical Epigenetics* 4 (1): 14. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1868-7083-4-14>. I thank Dr. El Shamsy for alerting me to the fact that milk kinship in Islam is not merely fictive given that we now know that genetic material passes through breastmilk.

<sup>497</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *ṣaḥīḥ*, 4:150; Muslim *Al-Jāmi‘ aṣ-ṣaḥīḥ*, 7:8-9 (two *ḥadīth*); *Ibn Māja*, Sunan, 1:565-566 #1770; Wensinck, *Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition—As near to man as his blood*. Bu. 33, 8, 11, 12, 93, 21; Dā, 20, 66; A. b. H. III, 156, 285, 309 sq.; VI, 337.

<sup>498</sup> Hanson, *Nurturing Children*; Ibn al-Ḥājj, *al-Madkhal*, 4:295. In chapter 3, I suggest that this section was lifted almost verbatim from al-Ghazālī’s work in *The Revivification*. Hamza Yusuf recited the text in Arabic: *fa (bal) yanbaghī ‘an yurāqibu min ‘awwal ‘amrihi fa-lā yashgul fī ḥaḍānatuhu wa irḍā ‘ahu ‘illa ‘imra ‘a ṣāliḥa mutadayyina ta ‘kul al-ḥalāl. Fa- ‘inna l-labn l-ḥāṣil min al-ḥarām lā baraka fī-ḥī. I*



Frequently lecturing to South Asian American doctors and Silicon Valley technocrats, Hanson skillfully splices hadith with jargon from biomedical science. He warns mothers about the dangers of eating illicitly at the cellular level. Speaking of cells may resonate with my interlocuters, who admitted that their infant feeding decision often came down to the latest science, not Islam. Like Ahmed, Hamza Yusuf moves from the topic of the infant milk to a discussion of children's food sources and food security more broadly. He urges parents to be cautious about the income sources they use to purchase food for their children. This too he may glean from Ibn al-Ḥājj. Elsewhere, when Ibn al-Ḥājj advises the Quran teacher (the *mu'addib*) about *Kuttāb* (Quran school) administration, he instructs teachers to prevent pupils from sharing food. He reasoned that the class might include the son of a criminal or an oppressive tax collector, so if he shared his ill-gotten food then this corrupts other children's diets unfairly.<sup>499</sup>

To recap, there are two significant shifts between medieval authors who provide infant feeding advice and their contemporary commentators. Al-Ghazālī (and his subsequent commentators) do not assume that mothers will nurse their child, but rather they recommend a generic "righteous woman" (*imra'a ṣāliha*). However, contemporary commentators of al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Ḥājj do not elaborate on who should do the work of infant feeding. Rather they repurpose older wet nurse selection advice to caution parents not about the ideal source of human milk but rather to a generalized scrupulousness about what enters their older children's mouths, eyes, and ears. Except

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have translated the passage as follows:

So do not engage in his ḥaḍāna (early child-care and nursing) anyone other than a righteous, religious woman, who eats the halal, because milk that is obtained by the ḥaram has no blessing (baraka) in it and if [ḥaram milk] befalls the upbringing of a child, his disposition will be kneaded in it, and it will incline his disposition to wicked and conceited characteristics.”

499. Ibn al-Ḥājj, *al-Madkhal*, vol. 4, 295.

for Umm Sahl, they avoid offering infant feeding prescriptions altogether. Thus, perhaps intentionally, they avoid the ever-contentious breast versus bottle debate with its social and economic implications more broadly.

As we have seen, al-Ghazālī's is the source of some of the most popular infant feeding advice promoted by AMPE and their cautions against lactational heredity. Despite the absence of any wet-nursing industry in the United States, modern commentators use these warnings to remind their auditors about careful spouse selection and surveillance of their children's consumption habits for optimal child spiritual conditioning. We have also seen how some American Muslim mothers consider it risky to allow someone else to nurse one's child not just because of the possibility of physical danger to the infant's health, but also because of the potential for metaphysical harms due to lactational heredity. Theories of lactation heredity are commonplace in other religious traditions, as well as in other Muslim contexts. In her ethnography of contemporary Iranian women in the diaspora, Khatib-Chahidi observed that Iranians are cautious about lactation heredity from animal milks in addition to impious human milk: "although donkey milk is considered to be the next best thing to human milk, it is not given to babies because donkeys are stupid and obstinate; goat milk is given because goats are thought to be intelligent."<sup>500</sup> Similarly, a Sunnī commentator of al-Ramlī's child-rearing poem declares, "Whoever eats from the meat of sheep will inherit tranquility, and whoever eats from the meat of a camel will inherit roughness, and similarly this influences their actions. So food from filth will cause actions that are filthy."<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>500</sup> Khatib-Chahidi, "Milk Kinship," 130n10.

<sup>501</sup> Ṭālib ibn 'Umar ibn Ḥaydara, al-Kathīrī. 3:41:00 PM. "Al-Sharḥ al-Mukhtaṣar li-Manzūma Riyādat al-Şibyān." <http://www.alukah.net/web/alkathiri/o/120195/>.

Theories regarding lactational heredity circulated amongst medieval Muslim physicians. They believed that a connection between the breast and the uterus extends the nurse's body and mind, "thus any of the wet nurse's unpleasant or problematic traits or defects would be imprinted on the child through her breastmilk."<sup>502</sup> In his encyclopedic work, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* ("the Book of Animals"), the Basran polymath al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868-9) "advises wise men to choose wet nurses free from any physical or mental illness."<sup>503</sup> Giladi contends that Ibn Sīnā's *dicta* that "the milk transmits [her physical, mental and moral characteristics]," contributed to disseminating lactational heredity theory as a medical "scientific truth."<sup>504</sup> An older contemporary of al-Ghazālī, the Abbasid exegete, Al-Raghib al-Isfahani (D. 1108) would later copy this *dicta*.<sup>505</sup> Notions of lactational heredity ideas persisted beyond al-Ghazālī. Ibn al-Ḥājj (d. 1336) and reiterate an alternative version: "And it is said that nurse fosterage changes one's character" (*qad qīla al-riḍā ' yughayyir l-ṭibā '* ), while copying al-Ghazālī's imagery of likening the child to pliable wax highly susceptible to the nurse's (or the teacher's) impressions.<sup>506</sup>

Notwithstanding lactational heredity tropes found in medieval Muslim literature, there does not seem to be anything in Muslim jurisprudential literature that lends

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<sup>502</sup> Kueney, *Conceiving Identities*, 139n65

<sup>503</sup> Ibid, 140; Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, vol. 5, pp. 366-67. (As quoted in Giladi, *Infants, Parents, Wet-Nurses*, 43-44).

<sup>504</sup> Abū 'Ali al-Husayn b. 'AbdAllāh Ibn Sīnā, "Kitāb al-Siyāsa" (ed. Lewis Ma'lūf), *al-Mashriq* (1906), p. 1073; cf. Idem *al-Qanūn fi 'l-ṭibb*, Būlāq, 1877, p. 152, (cited in Giladi, *Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses*, 44).

<sup>505</sup> Giladi, *Muslim Midwives*, 40-50n76: Al-Isfahānī: The mother's milk (or that of the wet nurse) transmits her physical and mental disposition to her nurslings (*al-laban yu' dī*); Husayn b. Muḥammad al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī, *Muḥādarāt al-udabā' wa-muḥāwarāth al-shu'arā' wa-al-bulaghā'* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ḥayat, 1961) I:329.

<sup>506</sup> Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Madkhal*, 2: 326.

credibility to it. The concept of lactation heredity is not found in the Quran nor the Sunnah. As Peter Parkes observes,

Notions of milk's conveyance of maternal substance or character influence are quite widely reported in the Islamic Worl...where breastmilk is often considered a refinement of maternal blood (as in Aristotelian and Galenic physiology). But such somatic notions do *not* appear to be invoked in any Islamic juristic traditions concerning milk kinship (Khatib-Chahidi 1992:130n13).<sup>507</sup> [emphasis mine]

Along with Parkes, Kueney (2013) and Giladi (1999) both suggest that ideas about lactational heredity stem from ancient notions theorizing breastmilk's origins from uterine blood, an idea found interwoven in Islamic medical writings.<sup>508</sup> Giladi notes the Persian Ḥanafī scholar Al-Sarakhsī (d. 1090) stated that even infidels and adulteresses can be hired as wet nurses. He did not believe in lactational heredity but, like Rousseau, cautioned that “this may lead her to neglect the nursling, not because it will harm the child's disposition.”<sup>509</sup> While theories of lactational heredity may have pre-Islamic origins, they may have been made normative through citation by the likes of al-Ghazālī.<sup>510</sup> Despite Sarakhsī's legal permission to hire almost any type of wet nurse, the hagiographies of famed Muslim legal jurists seem to contradict more permissive jurisprudential attitudes towards wet nurse selection.

In her child-rearing course, Umm Sahl recounts a story told by the Damascene scholar, Shaykh Ḥassān al-Hindī (b. 1966).<sup>511</sup> The slave concubine of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), the eponymous founder of the Ḥanbalī school, gave birth to their son (*umm walad*). He forbade any other nurse. One day he caught a family member breastfeeding

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<sup>507</sup> Peter Parkes. 2001. “Alternative Social Structures and Foster Relations in the Hindu Kush: Milk Kinship Allegiance in Former Mountain Kingdoms of Northern Pakistan.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43 (1): 5n1; Khatib-Chahidi, “Milk Kinship,” 130n13.

<sup>508</sup> Giladi, *Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses*, 43-44.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid*, 109-110, 127.

<sup>510</sup> Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:95.

<sup>511</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children,” November 8, 2019.

his infant. He quickly put his finger down the infant's throat to eject the non-maternal breastmilk. Umm Sahl related this account not to convince Muslims to avoid milk-sharing, but rather to remind students to dutifully eat and earn in a *halal* manner.

According to her commentary, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal induced his son to vomit because

He did not know the source of the breast milk, whether the nursemaid was fed with *halal* income or not, but he knew that he could ascertain that he fed his son's mother from his own *halal* income. The moral of the story is that if children are nourished with the *halal* they will do good—despite themselves—and vice versa.

Drawing contemporary relevance from this hagiographical account, she asserted that the spiritual malaise of our time stems from the general Muslim layperson's laxity over their food's licitness or their income's ethicality. She does not take a stance on wet-nursing versus maternal nursing. She is less concerned with the wet nurse's suspect character than she is with whether the wet nurse's food is ethically obtained. This may mean more circumspection regarding the men in the nurse's life and the sources of their livelihood rather than the wet nurse's character.

In their commentary of Q 2:233, Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā offer an uncannily similar account of a pious father rescuing his infant from a questionable wet nurse's milk.<sup>512</sup> This time the pious father is not Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal but the father of the

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<sup>512</sup> *Tafsīr al-Manār* was based on a series of lectures on the Quran given by Muhammad 'Abduh. He put them to writing but died before completion of the Quran. Rashid Riḍā completed the commentary after 'Abduh's death. Elsewhere Rashid Riḍā acknowledges that in certain cases a wet nurse can be employed. See for example:

"As to God saying: "and mothers shall suckle their children," it appears that the command implies an absolute binding order, because originally the mother must suckle her child. This is the view chosen by the professor and Imam 'Abduh. But he recognizes an exception when the mother has a valid reason not to suckle, such as illness. However, this order does not forbid appointing a wet nurse for the purpose of breast-feeding the child if that is not harmful for the child. The rationale for this argument is that the command in this verse is for the benefit (*maslahah*) of the child and is not a religious duty.... By the same token, while it was made a duty upon the mother to suckle her child, she also has a right to do so. This means that the father cannot prevent her. It is indeed more likely that the father prevents his divorcée from suckling her child, if he is allowed to do so, than for the mother to abstain from suckling her child...."

11<sup>th</sup> century Persian Shāfi'ī scholar Imam al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085). His father took pains to nourish his mother with *halal* food from money earned through lawful employment. After birth, the father prohibited her from allowing anyone else to nurse his son. But one day his mother fell ill, so her neighbor nursed al-Juwaynī instead, only to be caught by the father. He immediately induced his son to vomit and exclaimed that he would rather have died than witness this woman ruin his son's nature. As an adult, al-Juwaynī would attribute his stutter to the neighbor's milk.

As Islamic legal reformers, Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Riḍa deployed this hagiographical account to persuade elite mothers to reject wet nurses and breastfeed their children as their better educated Western counterparts did.<sup>513</sup> Although they do not say that wet-nursing is un-Islamic, they might have considered mother's milk to be scientifically superior to a wet nurse's milk. They laud the Russian Tsarina and other educated women from the "nations advanced in education" who breastfed their own children as examples for Muslim women.<sup>514</sup> Furthermore, they criticize mothers who rely on wet nurses for corrupting their progeny (*nasl*). They presume that these mothers obsequiously mimic what he considers to be haughty rich women who detest breastfeeding since they are too greedy to lose weight or quickly become pregnant again

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See Riḍa, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, 2:408–410. Professor El Shamsy has alerted me to the fact that this story can be traced back to the entry for Imam al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī' in al-Subkī's *Ṭabaqāt*. There, al-Subkī notes a slightly different version of the story in which al-Juwaynī nursed one or two times from his neighbor's wet nurse when his mother was busy preparing a meal. His father was keen on making sure al-Juwaynī and his mother eat only from what is undoubtedly lawful and halal. His father was concerned that he did not own this wet nurse, so he did not have the right to have his child suckled from her, therefore, he tried to extract any remnants of breastmilk from the infant. See Al-Subkī, *Tāj al-Dīn 'Abd al-Wahhāb ibn 'Abd al-Kāfi*. n.d. "Ṭabaqāt Al-Shāfi'īya al-Kubrā", edited by Muḥammad Ḥilw 'Abd al-Fattāh and Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭināhī. Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 5:167–8.

<sup>513</sup> Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, 224–234.

<sup>514</sup> Riḍa, Muḥammad Rashīd. 1930. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm al-mushtahar bi-Tafsīr al-Manār*. Dār al-Manār. 2:408–417.

(since exclusive breastfeeding causes lactational amenorrhea).<sup>515</sup> They claim that breastfeeding should be something mothers delight in, describing it as a natural, universal God-given desire:

Aren't we more deserving in these ways of behavior (*adab*) than others (*min ghayrina* - referring back to the Tsarina and countries with developed systems of education). If human nature (*fiṭra*) commands mothers to nurse their own children) and if our religion is the religion of human nature (*fiṭra*), and if science supports this, then God has taught us this in His book and by His prophet's tongue.<sup>516</sup>

By Riḍā's reasoning, milk-sharing violates human instinct, or *fiṭra*, and since Islam is the religion of *fiṭra*, then it follows that milk-sharing is an unnatural, inferior choice.

Riḍā's criticisms of wet-nursing as being contrary to *fiṭra* strongly resemble Rousseau's. He similarly urged mothers to breastfeed, arguing that this would reform their children's morals, stating "nature's sentiments will be awakened in every heart, the state will be re-peopled." In eighteenth-century France, he counseled women to 'look to the animals' as evidence against the naturalness of wet-nursing. Riḍā, like Rousseau,

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<sup>515</sup> Note that Rousseau also leveled his criticisms against aristocratic women. Rousseau "criticized the familial distance of aristocratic institutions like convent schools for girls and wet nurses for infants" (Locke, *Democracy and the Death of Shame*, 87). He criticized "the artificiality of a culture that limited their "natural" powers, most specifically the power to care for their children through breastfeeding (Rousseau, *Emile*, 33). Nothing epitomized Rousseau's understanding of women's nature, essential role in the republic and the degree to which the aristocracy squandered breastfeeding. So preoccupied with the practice, he wove sashes for his female friends as wedding presents "to be worn on condition that they breastfeed their babies" (Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment*, 27). *Emile* did more than any public healthy campaign could have to increase breastfeeding in France. (Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment*, 26: Trouille elaborates that "Rousseau's breastfeeding campaign was addressed above all to aristocratic women..." in Locke, *Democracy and the Death of Shame*, 61).

<sup>516</sup> Riḍā, Muḥammad Rashīd. 1930. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm al-mushtahar bi-Tafsīr al-Manār*. Dār al-Manār. 2:408-417 Interestingly, the historian Avner Giladi opens his monograph, *Infants Parents and Wet Nurses: Medieval Islamic Views on Breastfeeding and Their Social Implications* by describing breastfeeding as an "instinctive, life-giving act humans share with all other mammals." He goes on to say: "That a mother could refuse to breastfeed her own child was viewed as going against nature." He cites the Biblical Lamentations 4/3, the English translation of the *New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, which reads "Even the jackals give the breast and suckle the young, but the daughter of my people has become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness" he comments that cruel here refers to the mothers "withholding vital sustenance from a powerless, helpless creatures, denying it maternal love. Here too Giladi seems to elide maternal breastfeeding with maternal love (1). See Giladi, Avner. 1999. *Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses: Medieval Islamic Views on Breastfeeding and Their Social Implications*. Brill.

implicitly criticizes those women who do not want to breastfeed despite their supposed biological, *fiṭra* instinct to do so. Rousseau's anti-wet-nursing sentiments are part of a longer history of early modern political theorists who believed that wet nurses contaminated "the children of elites with 'vulgar' speech and 'bad habits.'"<sup>517</sup> This anti-wet-nursing sentiment was adopted by Enlightenment philosophers and Protestant reformers who polemicized against "non-maternal childcare."<sup>518</sup>

Although Riḍā, 'Abduh, and Umm Sahl describe a similar traditional account about non-maternal breastmilk, they deploy it for completely different contexts. Umm Sahl addresses women for whom wet nurses are a historical curiosity by reminding mothers of the pains pious forbearers took to making sure their income was uncompromisingly lawful and that their food was pure. In contrast, Riḍā and 'Abduh were successful in convincing (elite) Muslim mothers to fire their wet nurses and instead engage in scientific motherhood. In what follows, I turn to the fact that mothers often did not breastfeed their infants themselves as hoped but instead replaced wet nurses with formula.

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<sup>517</sup> Sperling, *Medieval Lactations*, 3.

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*



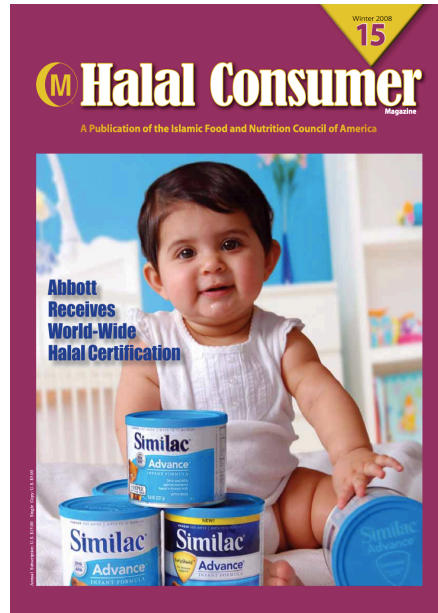


Figure 3: IFNCA Advertisement for Similac<sup>519</sup>

## ***Part II: Ambivalence over Infant Formula***

Apart from employing wet nurses, hand feeding infants and offering animal milk substitutes are age-old infant feeding options but were not encouraged by premodern Muslim religious and medical authorities given their clear dangers. Furthermore, as discussed in part one, fears about lactational heredity from impious wet nurses and the anti-wet nurse sentiment may have contributed to successfully sidelining wet nurses. Only with improved infant feeding technologies at the beginning of the twentieth century did formula become a viable alternative to human milk, perhaps irreparably disrupting wet-nursing markets in Muslim societies. Formula has been falsely marketed for being nutritionally superior to breastmilk. Even though many Muslim mothers may have succumbed to this marketing rather than heed Islamic prescriptions in favor of

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<sup>519</sup> The Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America is based in Illinois. Abbott is a health care company that also has its headquarters in Illinois. Abbot manufactures Similac, which owns considerable market share in infant formulas worldwide.

breastfeeding, Muslim religious authorities may also contribute to wet-nursing's obsolescence by authorizing and halal-stamping breastmilk substitutes largely produced by Western pharmaceuticals.<sup>520</sup> In keeping with the logic of choice feminism, formula continues to be presented to Muslim mothers as just another infant feeding option, an individual preference.<sup>521</sup>

Curiously, there is a marked absence of early modern Muslim exegetes discussing breast milk substitutes in relation to Q 2:233. For example, even though Rashid Riḍā's *Tafsīr al-Manār* was written when America and Europe had already begun exporting prepared infant foods and artificial milks into Muslim countries, Riḍā neglects to address them in his exegesis. I could not find anything indicating what Riḍā thought about artificial formulas, his general belief that "Islam's law presents few barriers to consumption" and his admiration for "modern inventions" may have inclined him and his followers to sanction formula.<sup>522</sup> Like Riḍā, Mawdūdī does not mention formula in his exegesis even though he was writing at a time when formula was widespread. However, he felt strongly that mothers should stay home and breastfeed since "to deprive the child of this natural food is to be inhuman and callous."<sup>523</sup> Similarly, I failed to find any influential American Muslim preachers address bottle-feeding explicitly.

### ***Authorizing Formula***

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<sup>520</sup> For more regarding the laissez-faire attitude of some Muslim scholars regarding new inventions, see Leor Halevi's *Modern Things on Trial: Islam's Global and Material Reformation in the Age of Rida, 1865–1935*. (2019).

<sup>521</sup> Giladi, *Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses*, 45.

<sup>522</sup> Halevi, *Modern Things on Trial*, 12. Halevi observes that Riḍā generally thought that "Islam's law presents few barriers to consumption," what Halevi terms "laissez-faire Salafism." Further research would need to be done to see whether Muslim reformers during Riḍā's time were open to formula, given that they generally "admired modern inventions."

<sup>523</sup> De Sony, *The Crisis of Islamic Masculinities*, 41.

Traditionalist and Salafist jurist-consults alike permit formula because they analogize formula feeding to wet-nursing.<sup>524</sup> This authorization of formula allowed the Chicago-based Islamic Food and Nutrition Council (IFANCA) to certify Similac with a lucrative halal label.<sup>525</sup> Formula authorization may have also prevented the establishment of any American Muslim equivalent to the La Leche League (which was founded by Chicago-based Catholic housewives to promote maternal nursing) nor does there seem to be any sign of “militant lactivism” amongst American Muslims.<sup>526</sup> In practice, the majority of my interlocutors gave their infants formula without thinking twice about its permissibility.<sup>527</sup>

The general acceptance of formula in Muslim communities led my interlocutors to take for granted that formula use has simply superseded wet-nursing. They recall that their mothers and grandmothers were bombarded with marketing that portrayed formula as a hygienic, healthy, and convenient option for modern educated mothers. However, in 2022, the AAP updated their guidelines to recommend breastfeeding not just for infants’ first six months of life but rather for the first two years of life and

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<sup>524</sup> See for example Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Munajjid’s (b. 1960) fatwa (a student of Bin Baaz), authorizing infant formula: Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-. 2016. “Ḥukm Mana‘a al-’umm waladihā al-riḍā‘ wa l-iktifā’ bi l-ḥalīb al-ṣinā’ī.” Fatwa Website. al-Islām Su’āl wa Jawāb. January 11, 2016. <https://islamqa.info>.

<sup>525</sup> *Halal Consumer*. 2008. “Halal Consumer: A Publication of the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America,” Winter 2008. [https://www.ifanca.org/HCM/Halal%20Consumer%20Issue%2015/hc\\_15.pdf](https://www.ifanca.org/HCM/Halal%20Consumer%20Issue%2015/hc_15.pdf).

<sup>526</sup> For an ethnography of La Leche League’s efforts in Europe and an account of “militant lactivism” see Faircloth, Charlotte. 2013. *Militant Lactivism?: Attachment Parenting and Intensive Motherhood in the UK and France*. New York, NY: Berghahn Press; For more on La Leche League, see Ward, Jule DeJager. 1999. “La Leche League: At the Crossroads of Medicine, Feminism, and Religion,” xi, 227.

<sup>527</sup> My interview data confirm that families no longer employ wet nurses. Many mothers say they have never even contemplated the possibility of hiring one. Wet-nursing was unheard of, and cross-nursing too is rare. Out of the 20 mothers, the majority (16/20) nursed their own children for some duration of time even if they later supplemented or switched to formula. Roughly half (11/20) exclusively breastfed one or more of their children for six months (that is, they refrained from supplementing their own milk with formula, although some of these mothers would later give formula to some of their other children or to the same child after six months). Only half (10/20) were able to breastfeed at least one of their children for the full two years mentioned in the Quran.

beyond, in congruence with Q 2:223.<sup>528</sup> Perhaps considering the extended breastfeeding trend in American medical guidelines, many AMPE now authorize formula, but with various degrees of reservation.<sup>529</sup>

The different stances regarding formula may stem from an inherent indeterminacy found within Muslim scripture. Arguably, the Quran presents a central tension: on the one hand, it recognizes that breastfeeding unequally burdens [some] mothers (especially divorcees); on the other hand, it implies that it is the child's right to receive *human* milk at least for the specified *ḥawlayn* (two lunar years). The Quran resolves this tension by permitting wet nurse employment in cases where the (divorced) mother cannot or chooses not to breastfeed. In this solution, the wet nurse receives a fair wage, the child receives breastmilk, and mother's can sometimes opt out of breastfeeding. It is less clear whether formula achieves the same functions: although mothers are not as burdened with breastfeeding there is no wet nurse to be paid fairly and the question remains, does the child have a right to *human* milk *at the breast*, or does *artificial* milk *in a bottle* suffice? Likening formula to wet-nursing obscures the harms and benefits of various infant feeding practices for all parties involved.

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<sup>528</sup>“Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk.” 2012. *Pediatrics* 129 (3): e827–41.

<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2011-3552>.

<sup>529</sup> Less than a quarter of my interlocutors (4/20) did not breastfeed their children at all, opting to exclusively formula feed. Roughly a third of the mothers (8/20) reported using infant formula to supplement their breastfeeding or eventually using formula. The four women who exclusively formula-fed cited several reasons for this decision. Notably, one of these four mothers, Fiza, had adopted a child. Although she had taken medication to induce lactation and tried to pump to stimulate milk production, she was unable to produce more than a few drops of milk. In the end it proved too difficult for her to lactate, so she resorted to formula. For the three remaining biological mothers, two cited medical complications as the main obstacle to breastfeeding. These included difficult pregnancies that inhibited breastfeeding initiation or breast infections. Notably, all the mothers who did not breastfeed are South Asian (recall that 10/19 women in this study are South Asian). Historically there have been racial disparities when it comes to infant feeding: for example, Hispanic and white women initiate breastfeeding at higher rates than African American women, but I have not seen data for breastfeeding rates amongst South Asian American women (See Martucci, *Back to the Breast* 215).

At the time of this writing, it is easy to find authoritative online *fatāwa* permitting formula use. For example, on *SeekersGuidance*, contemporary Ḥanafī scholars permit formula just like their Salafī and Wahhābī counterparts: Ustādha Shaista Maqbool, states that whether one breastfeeds or bottle feeds is a “decision made between the parents.” While Maqbool does cite unnamed “experts” (assumedly, medical ones) who “agree upon the benefits of breast milk and that it is a superior form of nutrition than formula,” she ultimately concludes that parents are not required “to give their child breast milk, though it would be preferable to do so under normal circumstances for the interests of the child.” Her fatwa reluctantly permits formula. She avoids specifying what constitutes “normal circumstances” and whether it is *preferable in Islamic law* as something that is *mustahabb* (a recommended virtuous act) or simply her medically informed opinion.<sup>530</sup>

Contemporary Ḥanafīs are not alone in authorizing formula. A Chicago-based Mālīkī scholar fields *fiqh* questions over WhatsApp. I asked:

**Nadia:** Since it is not practical to hire a wet nurse in America today, does a mother have to breastfeed her child? If so, for how long? Or is it permissible for her to use formula? Or donated human milk?

**Answer:** It is permissible as long as it will not harm the child. As for donated milk, it will be permissible as long as the donor is known.<sup>531</sup>

Seemingly disturbed by the *carte blanche* to use formula, someone replied with this riposte:

[8:03 PM, 4/17/2019] ~John Doe: (I will note that no formula can ever possibly replace human milk. There's many things in it which cannot be replicated. Plus, you release oxytocin when breastfeeding which helps you fall asleep easier and creates strong bonds.)

[8:08 PM, 4/17/2019] ~John Doe : Thus, by replacing human milk with formula you're indeed going to harm the baby's health and put them at risk for many issues. Ear infections

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<sup>530</sup> Maqbool, Shaista. 2011. “Should I Use Breast Milk or Formula?” SeekersHub Answers. December 17, 2011. <http://seekershub.org/ans-blog/2011/12/17/should-i-use-breast-milk-or-formula/>.

<sup>531</sup> Murad, Qasim. 2019. “Question #491, Murad Fatwa on Formula,” April 17, 2019.

for example, gut health since they're not getting the mother's probiotics which may be a different strain from anything you can culture in a lab, and they're not getting immunoglobulins which fight off disease. Many things. Human milk is vastly superior to formula and it takes a whole lecture to cover it all.

The shaykh did not reply and the WhatsApp group moved onto other minutiae of Mālikī law. His silence may be interpreted as a tacit endorsement of the caution for Muslim lay people to consider assessing formula's harms for themselves and deliberate whether their own individual circumstances merit its use.

Apart from contemporary Muslim responsa, we find some more reluctant formula authorization in a recent American Muslim parenting manual. In *Positive Parenting in the Muslim Home*, coauthors Al-Shugairi and Ezzeldine systematically address child-rearing issues from birth through young adulthood. Yet they do not offer any infant-feeding advice. This represents a change in the genre itself: The likes of al-Ghazālī and Ibn Qayyim began their child-rearing prescriptions by discussing the qualities of an ideal nursemaid. Contrastingly, in a section on handling children in the early years, Ezzeldine and al-Shugairi provide an overview of rival sleep training methods (Dr. Sears vs. Dr Ferber). While *Positive Parenting* refrains from endorsing one method over the other (an endorsement of Sears would be an implicit endorsement of extended maternal breastfeeding), the authors betray a leaning towards Dr. Ferber when they reference studies claiming that parents do not cause long term harm when they let children “cry it out.”<sup>532</sup> Given that contemporary parenting authors like Ezzeldine and al-Shugairi do not address wet-nursing in their manuals, one may assume that like the contemporary Muslim *fatāwā* authors discussed above they might

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<sup>532</sup> Al-Shugairi and Ezzeldine, *Positive Parenting in the Muslim Home*, 158.

encourage maternal breastfeeding but condone formula feeding for mothers with extenuating circumstances.

### ***Forgoing Formula: Good Muslim Mothers Breastfeed***

At weekly *dhikr* circles in Chicago I often saw young mothers don discreetly patterned nursing covers from designer diaper bags. Maryam beamed at one mother wrestling with her toddler while trying to get into a discreet nursing position and keep her hijab on. “You’re going to miss this phase! I am forever thankful to *Allah* for giving me the opportunity to nurse my children for two full years!” Maryam recounted the difficulty she had with breastfeeding. Her own mother was of little assistance since she had exclusively formula-fed her. She recalled paying hundreds of dollars to a lactation consultant out of pocket, at a time when her family was struggling to make ends meet. Commenting on the resolve to breastfeed amongst millennial mothers like Maryam, Leila Muhammad, Elijah Muhammad’s granddaughter, remarked proudly that finally, after years of formula’s reign, mothers relearned the importance of breastfeeding so that it has “come back to a space where it should be” now that “society is more health conscious.”<sup>533</sup>

While we have seen that some Muslim scholars have reluctantly permitted formula, others insist that Muslim women should make their best effort at breastfeeding based upon both their reading of revelation and the latest science. Rather than explicitly prohibiting formula, contemporary scholars focus on encouraging Muslim mothers to fulfil their moral duty to their children and recast maternal nursing as a means for fulfilling infant attachment needs.

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<sup>533</sup> According to Sax, “the United States has the lowest rate of breastfeeding in the developed world.” (Sax, *Girls on the Edge*, 38).

Take for example Dr. Bilal Philips.<sup>534</sup> Although he does not prohibit formula outright, he implies that ideal mothers breastfed. I submitted a question to the “Ask the Shaykh!” button on his Facebook page, asking whether women can formula feed. He responded:

Breastfeeding is the best for the baby. So, a Muslim woman should not leave what is the best and be engaged in something of lower value. The World Health Organization (WHO) states: “Breastfeeding is an unequalled way of providing ideal food for the healthy growth and development of infants.”

He also stresses the need for strong mother-infant attachments:

Allah prescribed two years of breastfeeding. Western culture went away from breastfeeding for a variety of different reasons, and at the end it came back. Now [they are] trying to promote [breastfeeding] on a large scale, but Islam stressed in the Quran, as long as the woman is capable, breastfeeding them [children] for those two years, [breastfeeding] provides a warm beginning for the child, the child is in direct contact with the mother and that exchange, that contact is important in the psychological development of the child. [It is] scientifically proven that the first five years of the child’s life are the most crucial in forming the future personality of the child. Most problems of teenagers come from the early period of childhood. So, children need love to help stabilize their characters.<sup>535</sup>

At her parenting seminar, the ‘Ālimah also took a pro-breastfeeding position. Although she too does not condemn formula, she references Sūrat Al-Hajj 22:1-2 to justify the child’s right to be breastfed:

The nursing mother and her nursing child enjoy one of the strongest bonds. When Allah talks to people, He says “*yā ‘ayyuha l-nās*” *Fear your Lord in the manner of the final hour, it is a terrible thing,*” and He says all relationships will come to an end. The nursing mother will be negligent and abandon her nursling. So right after the severity of the Day of *Qiyāmah* (resurrection), Allah talks about [...] how the strongest relationship will come to an end. In Islam the breastmilk is right of the child, the *rizq* (provision) of the child through the mother; the mother provides the milk and the father provides the material support.

Q 22:1-2 mentions the *murḍi‘a*, that is the lactating nurse, yet the ‘Ālimah translates this as if it were the *mother* alone who “forgets what she nurses” (*‘āmmā’ ḍa‘at*). Assuming that the verse only refers to the mother/child dyad rather than the wet nurse/nursling dyad is her own interpretive flourish. In addition to presenting Quranic evidence about

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<sup>534</sup> His background is discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>535</sup> Philips, *Seven Habits of Successfully Raising Muslim Children*.



breastfeeding, the Ālimah also noted that the Prophet was breastfed not just by his mother but also three other wet nurses: Thuwaybah, 'Umm 'Ayman, and Ḥalīmah al-Sa'diyah. Furthermore, she mentions that the Prophet arranged for his own children to be breastfed, and when his son, Ibrahīm passed away in infancy, the Prophet said a wet nurse awaits him in Paradise.<sup>536</sup>

She continued to marshal evidence in favor of maternal breastfeeding by describing the Prophet's encounter with a confessing adulteress. The adulteress repeatedly asked the Prophet to stone her to death to atone herself, but the Prophet refused. He relented to her request to be stoned when the woman came to him carrying her toddler who held a piece of bread—evidence that the child had been weaned onto solid foods.<sup>537</sup> The Ālimah comments that in addition to this account showing the Prophet's mercy and tendency to avoid implementing corporal punishment, it also teaches that the child's rights to his *mother's* milk trumps the *hadd* punishment's implementation.<sup>538</sup> The Ālimah explains what it means for breastfeeding to be the child's right: "It means that the mother should make an effort not to deny the child without any valid reason." She mentions several health reasons that would excuse a mother from breastfeeding.<sup>539</sup> For mothers who have trouble with latch, she approves of pumping but also says that if the mother finds pumping too uncomfortable, then "it is okay if she does not pump." She does not elaborate or mention formula as an alternative

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<sup>536</sup> Sadiq, Maha. 2017. "Essentials for a Muslim Civilization: Raising Our Children | 5-Week Intensive Course Covering the Upbringing of Children from Conception to Age 7, All through an Islamic Lens." Intensive Course, Western Suburbs, Illinois, April 16.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.

<sup>538</sup> Kueney, *Conceiving Identities*, 133n111.

<sup>539</sup> Sadiq, "Essentials for a Muslim Civilization: Raising Our Children." Examples include if the mother is too unhealthy, if the baby must receive intravenous fluids, if the mother becomes pregnant and worries about the new fetus).

to situations where a woman cannot breastfeed or what to do in lieu of pumping. Furthermore, she explains that women should not formula feed just so that they can fast Ramadan. Instead, if mothers struggle to produce milk, then she advises breaking the fast—the child’s right to breastfeed suspends fasting obligations.

Perhaps recognizing that American Muslim mothers make infant feeding decisions based not solely upon religious texts but also according to the latest medical and psychological trends, AMPE often cite physicians’ associations (e.g., WHO, AAP, APA) to encourage maternal breastfeeding. For example, the ‘Ālimah employs attachment parenting jargon when describing the importance of mother’s milk. She retold the riveting Quranic account of Moses’ mother leaving her son in a floating basket in the Nile to escape Pharaoh.<sup>540</sup>

Allah acknowledges that she is a new mom primed to be close to her child. Allah comforts her: Don’t be sad, and Allah (*ṣubḥāna wa ta ‘ālā*) tries to make her more optimistic: "*wa jā ‘ilūhu min al-mursalīn*" (Q 28:7). We are going to return him back to you, he will come back, and he will be an amazing prophet. At the end of the day though she was a mother,—[even though she] complied with Allah’s orders, she experienced a clash of emotions, [she was] overpowered with [motherhood’s] sentiments, ...her heart was *fāriḡha*—empty—even though Allah gave her all these glad tidings. He said don’t worry, don’t lament the separation... So breastfeeding plays a critical role in the early attachment phase, it is a very important right of the child. [It] develops trust between the mother and the child.<sup>541</sup>

She uses this story to align Quranic principles with AP’s emphasis on how breastfeeding facilitates early childhood attachment. The ‘Ālimah’s presentation was reinforced by Dr. Sharifa, a psychologist, who advised mothers to nurse through the child’s first year to foster healthy attachments between caregivers and infant.<sup>542</sup> (Interestingly, she sometimes referred to the object of attachment being the mother and at other times, a

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<sup>540</sup> Kueney, *Conceiving Identities*, 97.

<sup>541</sup> Sadiq, Maha. “Essentials for a Muslim Civilization: Raising Our Children.”

<sup>542</sup> This is in line with the American Academy of Pediatrics’ guidelines from 2012.

generic caregiver, perhaps suggesting the possibility of multiple attachments or to use gender-neutral terminology). At a separate 2016 Muslim parenting conference, she lectured about early childhood attachment. Invoking Bowlby's attachment theory, she explained that to raise less anxious adults, infants must be comforted by a readily accessible breast.

The pro-breastfeeding stance implicit in the parenting conference presentations was also embedded in the daylong program's structure. There was time set aside for a "special sisters-only break out session" for mothers to meet with a lactation specialist. The white, non-Muslim consultant shared information about breastfeeding support groups and breastfeeding-friendly pediatrics offices in greater Chicago. As they sat in a circle on the play mat of a repurposed Islamic school classroom, she taught them about nursing positions and avoiding colic. Instead of being asked to turn to each other or veteran mothers for support, she referred them to doctors and certified specialists, perhaps furthering the medicalization of breastfeeding support. The conference's take-home message was that good mothers breastfeed.

As discussed in Chapter 1, most of my interlocutors read parenting books by Drs. Sears, Pearce, and Leonard Sax. Dr. Sears is clear in encouraging prolonged breastfeeding. Although in his book, *Girls on the Edge* (2010) Sax does not explicitly encourage breastfeeding, he does explain formula's dangers. Much like al-Ghazālī centuries before him, he sees strong parallels between human sexuality and diet.<sup>543</sup> Sax warns that formula contributes to precocious puberty in girls, imperiling their future health and sexuality. He explains that plastic (in bottles and pumping bags) disrupts

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<sup>543</sup> Giladi, *Sex Marriage and the Family*, 170.

girls' endocrine systems.<sup>544</sup> Like Sax and Sears, Pearce believes formula attenuates parent-child attachment. In contrast to touch-deprived, verbally impaired formula-fed infants, Pearce argues that breastfeeding benefits infants due to the “stabilizing influence” of the mother’s electromagnetic field, as well as her heart’s sound waves and other heart signals which are “critical to the infant’s development.”<sup>545</sup> He claims, “infants held at arm’s length for bottle-feeding or kept too much in cribs, carriages, strollers, or playpens are at a biological risk of stunted physical and emotional development.”<sup>546</sup> Pearce decries the post-WWII trend in which breastfeeding became a cultural embarrassment and attributes what he calls the “collapse of childhood” to the rise of mother-child separation in the form of hospital births, television, daycare, premature schooling, and bottle-feeding—all factors that he claims leads to drugs and violence, increased stress and alcoholism.<sup>547</sup>

### ***Too much motherlove? Resistance to Demand-Feeding***

Umm Sahl’s infant feeding advice curbs other AMPE’s breastfeeding enthusiasm. To be clear, she also believes Muslim women should breastfeed.<sup>548</sup> To justify her pro-breastfeeding stance, she translates an Arabic lecture by her Damascene teacher, Shaykh Hassān al-Hindi (b. 1966). He outlines ten points on successful child-rearing, the second of which is that children be breastfed. Al-Hindi's third point requires raising children in a calm and tranquil home. Commenting on this, Umm Sahl explains that in addition to nourishing the child, breastfeeding also emotionally secures them. She

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<sup>544</sup> Sax, *Girls on the Edge*, 37-38.

<sup>545</sup> *Lilipoh*. 2004. “Unfolding Childhood’s Magic: An Interview with Joseph Chilton Pearce,” December 1, 2004.

<sup>546</sup> Pearce, *Evolution’s End*, 118. Pearce also laments that African Americans do not breastfeed even though, during slavery, African Americans were the wet nurses to their slave owners’ infants.

<sup>547</sup> *Ibid*, 128.

<sup>548</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children,” 16.1.

explains that tranquil homes are those run by righteous (*ṣālih*) women who understand their responsibility to breastfeed. She adds that perhaps the *hikmah* or divine wisdom behind the fact Islamic law allows women to be topless around close relatives (including her father, father-in-law, and brothers) is to facilitate breastfeeding.

Despite her pro-breastfeeding stance and unlike AP advocates, Umm Sahl condemns breastfeeding on demand.<sup>549</sup> She insists that after the first three months of life babies be breastfed on a schedule. She chides mothers for spoiling children and argues that demand feeding interferes with the mother's devotional practices and impairs her sexual relationship.<sup>550</sup>

Umm Sahl continues the prescriptions of early twentieth century doctors who condemned demand feeding mothers for giving into "infants' immediate pleasure."<sup>551</sup> A New Zealander, Umm Sahl may have been influenced by Dr. Fredrick Truby King (d. 1938), who famously promoted clocked infant feeding and admonished mothers for breastfeeding to quell crying. King's derided prolonged lactation as "over suckling" "constant breastfeeding" and ultimately detrimental to infant's health. These ideas circulated amongst British colonizers who criticized Indian mothers for overindulgent "motherlove."<sup>552</sup> To rein in mother love, Umm Sahl read excerpts from the *Narcissism Epidemic* in which the authors criticize parents who co-sleep and demand feed as being "railroaded" by their children.<sup>553</sup> Like Umm Sahl, Twenge is not against breastfeeding but cautions that demand feeding fosters narcissism.<sup>554</sup> Eventually Anglophone child-

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<sup>549</sup> Ibid, 14.1.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid, 24.1.

<sup>551</sup> Cassidy and El Tom, *Ethnographies of Breastfeeding: Cultural Contexts and Confrontations*, 90.

<sup>552</sup> Saha, Ranjana. 2017. "Milk, Mothering & Meanings" 103.

<sup>553</sup> Twenge, *The Narcissism Epidemic*, 78.

<sup>554</sup> Twenge, Jean M. n.d. "It's Not the Breastfeeding That's Wrong; It's the Indulgence." Psychology Today.

rearing experts revived enthusiasm for mother love. For example, Dr. Maria Montessori (d. 1952), did not just encourage breastfeeding but noted admiringly how mothers in other cultures breastfed for several years and wore their babies. Having spent time in India, Montessori was impressed by the fact that Indian mothers rarely separated from their infants who could then learn by observing their mother's mundane activities and rarely cried.<sup>555</sup>

## ***Conclusion***

When I told her about my research, Alisha wondered aloud about how Amina could leave the infant Muḥammad with Ḥalīma. Didn't that traumatize the Prophet? In this chapter, I have tried to show how wet-nursing and milk-sharing has been regarded with suspicion and scrutiny whereas formula has been accepted as a necessary, if inferior infant feeding option. Given that wet-nursing is not an available service in the modern economy, AMPE repurpose classical references to it to warn mothers about their children's food sources. My field work preceded the 2022 infant formula crisis in the United States that exposed the myth that formula milk can be trusted as a safer, more hygienic milk substitute. As more scientific research is published in favor of human milk, AMPE promote the idea that good noble mothers nurse their own children because this is what both attachment parenting and Islam demands. This new ideal excludes the possibility of reviving wet-nursing or milk-sharing networks—networks

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Accessed November 11, 2019. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-narcissism-epidemic/201205/it-s-not-the-breastfeeding-s-wrong-it-s-the-indulgence>.

<sup>555</sup> Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, 154-55. In chapter 1, I discuss how her education philosophy was popular amongst Chicago Muslim mothers.

that may have once provided mother with much-needed communal support—and guilts women who formula-feed. For couples that desire to see their infants receive human milk, the absence of wet nurses as an available (or even an imaginable) option places the burdens of breastfeeding squarely on mothers' shoulders. Wary about both wet nurses and formula, many American Muslim mothers may have little choice but to breastfeed alone. In the next chapter, I contend that just as mothers are not looking to others for infant feeding, children's discipline is also a task born by the nuclear family.

## ***Chapter 5: Proscribing Corporal Punishment***

Do not go out of your way for your children to tolerate their antics. If you do not discipline them, their flaws and imperfections will cause you sorrow for the rest of your life.<sup>556</sup>

— Ashraf ‘Alī Thānavī

### ***Introduction***

How should Muslim parents discipline children? A well-documented prophetic report orders parents and those *in loco parentis* to corporally punish (older) children for neglecting prayer: “Command your children to pray at seven, and (physically) admonish them at ten.”<sup>557</sup> Henceforth, I refer to this report as the “discipline hadith.” Premodern jurists interpreted this hadith—and others like it—as sanctioning children’s chastisement. They viewed corporally punishing children not simply as a parental right but, in some cases, a responsibility. Physical discipline was one strategy of establishing parental authority. Premodern Muslim jurists differentiated between permissible forms of physical correction that benefit children and deviant, impermissible methods that harm them.<sup>558</sup> Some AMPE maintain that prophetic traditions sanctioning corporally punishment children remain relevant. They assert that in some cases, parents who eschew physically discipline act immorally for failing to safeguard their child’s otherworldly interests. They continue drawing upon classical distinctions between permissible chastisement and forbidden cruelty.

However, proponents of older, corporal views on children’s discipline now compete with advocates of newer, disembodied strategies.<sup>559</sup> Drawing upon the

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<sup>556</sup> Thānavī, *Bihishtī Zevar*, 23n46.

<sup>557</sup> *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 2:105.

<sup>558</sup> Hacking, “The Looping Effect of Humankind,” 313-314.

<sup>559</sup> Hacking, Ian. 2006. “Making Up People.” *London Review of Books*, August 17, 2006. <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v28/n16/ian-hacking/making-up-people>.



prophet's kindness and new scientific knowledge about child development, most AMPE condemn all forms of corporal punishment, collapsing the premodern distinction between normal physical discipline and abuse. From their perspective, corporal punishment has ceased to serve pedagogic purpose as a form of *ta'dīb* (discipline, education). In a historicist turn, some argue that while physical discipline may have been appropriate for children in earlier times and foreign places, it does more harm than good for American Muslim children.<sup>560</sup> Others go so far as to reclassify physical discipline as child abuse.<sup>561</sup>

The reclassification of physical discipline as child abuse has several consequences for American Muslim communities. First and most obviously, it demonizes parents and teachers who still resort to it. Parents who physically discipline are thought to have bungled the bonding process with their child, resulting in a lifetime of negative ramifications.<sup>562</sup> Furthermore, the reclassification exculpates parents whose children do not pray. These parents are no longer perceived as failing to train their children properly. Rather, in some circles they may be viewed as more enlightened, demonstrating their superior insights into child development.

Secondly, the reclassification has given rise to institutions that seek to reform parents who might engage in physical discipline and prevent others from joining their ranks.<sup>563</sup> They intervene by calling upon parents and teachers and mosque board members to be vigilant about child abuse. They offer their own reading of the discipline

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<sup>560</sup> Hacking, "The Looping Effect of Humankind," 313. See also Ringer, Monica. 2020. *Islamic Modernism and the Re-Enchantment of the Sacred in the Age of History*. 1st ed. Edinburgh University Press, 20.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid, 317-321.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid, 310.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid.

hadith, which they share in remedial parenting workshops, online platforms and prescriptive child-rearing literature. Their approach, which integrates child-rearing science with religious texts promises to help American Muslims raise *spiritual* children rather than children who simply coerced into sharia adherence.

Third, the reclassification creates new knowledge about children's discipline. This new knowledge contains a central, causal hypothesis: parents who physically discipline traumatize children.<sup>564</sup> Because of this trauma Muslim children detach from Muslim authority figures and instead attach themselves to atheistic peers.<sup>565</sup> This in turn contributes to the overall enervation of American Muslim communities. This new knowledge allows experts and institutions to differentiate between a positive, noncorporal discipline and child abuse.

Lastly, new knowledge identifies a problem (child abuse) that demands intervention from a class of professional AMPE. AMPE address child abuse by teaching kinder, gentler new disciplinary strategies, assessing older classical prescriptive child-rearing literature, and legitimizing new institutions dedicated to improving Muslim families (and schools). Collectively, they emphasize the Prophet's exemplary mercy towards children over other traditions that condone physical punishment. Additionally, they underemphasize the polysemous meanings of *ta'dīb*, which means not only the cultivation of good manners and education, but also discipline and chastisement. AMPE teach lay Muslims that the ideal mother disciplines noncorporally. These gentler practices bond children to their parents and to the broader ummah.<sup>566</sup> Some even teach

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<sup>564</sup> Ibid.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid, 320.

<sup>566</sup> Ibid, 311.

children to report abusive parents to authorities and teach school staff to prefer children's testimony over that of adults.<sup>567</sup>

This chapter tracks the evolving definition of deviant discipline of children in American Muslim discourse.<sup>568</sup> Part I examines older legal commentaries of the discipline hadith and others like it. I explore how classical works envisioned the subjection of children to their elders (parents and teachers.) I explain how classical jurists demarcated boundaries between normal physical discipline and deviant cruelty. In Part II, I investigate how most AMPE seek to reeducate parents who physically chastise by reinterpreting classical texts and prescribing new strategies of subjection.<sup>569</sup> I conclude by offering some preliminary remarks about why this reclassification occurred and what changes in disciplinary practices imply for power and authority in American Muslim communities.

## ***Part 1: Classical Definitions of Cruelty to Children***

### ***Source Texts Regarding Children's Discipline***

To ascertain what classical Muslim authors thought about subjecting children, we must first turn to their sources in the Quran and Sunnah. The Quran does not discuss children's physical discipline explicitly, making prophetic reports like the discipline hadith even more salient. Nonetheless, standard hadith commentaries such as *Riyāḍh al-Ṣāliḥīn* often contextualize the discipline hadith by citing two Quranic verses. The first, from Sūrat Ṭa ha 31 instructs patriarchs to call their families to prayer. The second,

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<sup>567</sup> "Hurma Project Podcast: Imam Mohamed Magid and Magda Saleh: Protecting Children" n.d. Apple Podcasts. Accessed March 18, 2022. <https://hurmaproject.com/imam-mohamed-magid-and-magda-saleh-protecting-children/>.

<sup>568</sup> Hacking, "The Looping Effect of Human Kinds," 311.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid.

Sūrat Al-Taḥrīm 6, asks readers to shield themselves and their families “from a fire whose fuel is men and stones.” These verses are interpreted as calling upon (male) elders to protect children from hell with the armor of devotion. Additionally, parent-child relations are addressed in Sūrat Luqmān, which revolves around the sage’s counsel to his son. In his commentary, al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) transmits this extra-Quranic advice that Luqmān had given: “[When] a father beats his son, it is like watering his crops.”<sup>570</sup> This classical adage views corporal punishment as a means of helping children flourish, likening it to the cultivation that promotes optimal growth.

Children’s discipline is dealt with more explicitly in hadith literature, most famously in the discipline hadith. Found in the canonical hadith collections, its chain of transmission (*isnād*) is rigorously authenticated, and the narration is of intermediate quality (*hasan ṣaḥīḥ*):<sup>571</sup>

Abī Dāwūd reports that ‘Amr ibn Shu‘ayb narrates from his father, from his grandfather, who said that the Prophet said, “Order your children to prayer when they are seven, strike them for it when they are ten, and have them sleep in separate beds.”<sup>572</sup>

This hadith is repeated in parenting lectures and child-rearing manuals. For example, Thānavī advises young brides: “You should insist that children seven years of age recite the prayer; you should beat children of ten years if they do not perform it.”<sup>573</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn al-. 2011. “Al-Juz’ al-Sādis.” In *Tafsīr Al-Durr al-Manthūr Fī al-Tafsīr Bi l-Mā’ thūr*, 6:5954. Beirut-Lebanon: Dār al-Fikr, 519. It has also been translated as “A father’s beatings his son is like fertilizing his field.” See Giladi, Avner. 2009. “Islam.” In *Children and Childhood in World Religions: Primary Sources and Texts*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge and Don S. Browning, 412. Rutgers University Press, 190.

<sup>571</sup> Ḥaṭṭāb, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-. 2010. *Mawahib Al-Jalīl Fī Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar al-Shaykh Khalīl*, 6 Vols (3d Ed, Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1412/1992), Dār al-Riḍwān. *Kitāb al-Ṣalāt*, 2:54-58; Jami’ al-Tirmidhī, *Kitāb al-Ṣalāt*, 12:259 (#407). Al-Tirmidhī considers this hadith to be *Hasan ṣaḥīḥ*, that is admissible as a legal proof.

<sup>572</sup> Al-Bukhārī, *Tarīkh al-Kabir*, 4: 168; *Sunan Abī Dāwūd: kitāb al-ṣalāt*, 1: 367 (Hadith #494-495); *Sunan Abī Dāwūd: kitāb al-ṣalāt*, (Hadith #495); *Jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī: kitāb al-ṣalāt, bāb mā jā’ a matā yu’mar al-ṣabī bi l-ṣalāt*, 1: 432.

<sup>573</sup> Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, 178.

Like Thānavī, many classical authors took this tradition’s command to “beat them for (prayer) at ten” literally. The Mālikī commentators ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Ḥabīb al-Sulamī (d. 38/852) and al-Ḥaṭṭāb (d. 954/1547) interpreted it to mean that ten-year-old children are punished for not praying.<sup>574</sup> Likewise, Shāfi‘ī scholars Imam al-Nawawī (d. 1277) and al-Shirbīnī (d. 1570) agreed that to discipline (*ta’dīb*) in some variations of the tradition meant to hit (*ḍarb*).<sup>575</sup> Nuh Keller translates the passage as “when the child reaches the age of ten, then beat him for neglecting the prayer.”<sup>576</sup> Shāfi‘ī jurists Abū Muḥammad Sharaf al-Din ibn al-Maḳarī (d. 837/1434) and al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122) explain that ten-year-olds neglecting prayer are physically punished for two reasons: first, they may have already reached puberty (*bulūgh*) and thus should be treated as adults.<sup>577</sup> Instead of waiting for signs of pubescence to manifest at different ages in different children, they expect all ten-year-olds to pray. Second, the likes of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Tusī (d. 1274) and al-Ghazālī argue that physical punishment instills prayer as a deeply rooted embodied habit.<sup>578</sup> Ware writes that in Senegambian Quran schools, boys continue to be taught to “treat prayers as second nature, on pain of corporal punishment.”<sup>579</sup> Ware’s interlocutors defend corporal punishment by invoking the

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<sup>574</sup> Al-Ḥaṭṭāb, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad. 2010. *Mawahib Al-Jalīl Fī Sharḥ Mukhtaṣar al-Shaykh Khalīl*, 6 Vols (3d Ed, Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1412/1992), Dār al-Riḍwān. Kitāb al-Ṣalāt, 2: 54-58.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid.

<sup>576</sup> Ibn al-Naqīb, and Keller. *The Reliance of the Traveler*, 109.

<sup>577</sup> Al-Shirbīnī, Shams al-dīn Muḥammad al-Khaṭīb. 1997. *Mughnī al-Muḥtāj Ilā Ma’rifat Ma’anī Alfaz al-Minhāj*. 1st ed. 4 vols. Beirut-Lebanon: Dār al-Ma’rifā, 1:131; al-Baghawī, Al-Ḥusayn ibn Mas’ūd. *Sharḥ Al-Sunnah*. Edited by Shu‘ayb Al-Arnā’ū. 1st ed. 16 vols. al-Maktab al-Islamī, 1983, 2:306. Al-Baghawī writes, “...and when he turns ten, strike him for leaving it, because he expects the beating at this age. He is expected to reach maturity by then either by wet-dreams (or menstruation with respect to women).”

<sup>578</sup> Ayubi, *Rearing Gendered Souls*, 15.

<sup>579</sup> Ware III, Rudolph T. 2016. *The Walking Qur’an*. The University of North Carolina Press, 50n38.

discipline hadith, which they learn from Ibn Abī Zayd’s (d. 386/966) *Risālah*, a Mālikī treatise.<sup>580</sup>

In addition to the discipline hadith, another sound narration implying corporal punishment’s permissibility is found in in al-Ṭabarānī’s *Grand Lexicon*. The hadith was narrated by the Prophet’s cousin and companion, Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 668/686-8) and reads “Hang your whip so that the family can see it, for that will discipline them.”<sup>581</sup>

In a less authentic hadith, we find more metonymic use of the rod to refer to patriarchal discipline. The Prophet’s companion Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal (d. 18/639) asked how could earn Paradise. The Prophet listed ten things he should refrain from, the last three concerned children:

Spend generously on your children within your means (#8); do not refrain from using pressure (of the stick for punishment) for training them (#9); and teach them to fear Allah (#10).<sup>582</sup>

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<sup>580</sup> Ibid; Najīm Zayn al-Dīn, 2013. *Al-Baḥr al-Rā’iq Sharḥ Kanz al-Daqā’iq*. Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah. 5:86. The Cairene Ḥanafī jurist Ibn Najīm (d. 969 or 970/1562) mentioned that there are differences of opinion as to whether a prepubescent child is liable to discretionary punishment (*ta’zīr*), especially if the child has violated another person’s rights. He claims that certain scholars held that “if discretionary punishment (*ta’zīr*) is obligatory, then the child must be subjected to it.” In the Illinois criminal justice system, a prepubescent child that commits a crime must be ten years old before he is sent to a detention center, while only “youths 13 or older can be sent to the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice” where they are subject to a justice system that is different for juveniles than it is for adults with full legal capacity. The Illinois system also considers age ten as a turning point for when a child’s crimes are recognized by the state and puberty (which often occurs at 13) to mark when those crimes are seriously adjudicated. (See “The Juvenile Justice System: A Guide for Families in Illinois.” Models for Change: System Reform in Juvenile Justice, n.d.<https://www.law.northwestern.edu/legalclinic/cfjc/documents/ParentHandbook.pdf>.)

<sup>581</sup> Al-Manāwī, ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf. *Fayḍ Al-Qadīr: Sharḥ al-Jāmi’ al-Ṣaghīr Min ‘aḥādīth al-Bashīr al-Nadhīr Li-l Ḥāfidh Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī*. 2nd ed. Beirut-Lebanon: Dār al-Ma’rifa, 2001, 4:429 (#5468-9); al-Ṭabarānī, Sulayman ibn Aḥmad n.d. *Al-Mu’jam Al-Kabīr*. Cairo: Maktaba ibn Taymiyya, 10: 344-345 (Hadith # 10670-10672); Bukhārī, ‘Abī ‘Abd Allah Muḥammad ibn ‘Ismā’īl al-. *Al-‘Adab al-Mufrad*. Edited by Muḥammad Fu’ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī. Cairo: al-Maṭba‘a al-Salafiyya, 1955, 317. Narrated Iṣḥāq ibn ‘Abī ‘Isrā’īl who said: Narrated Al-Naḍr ibn ‘Alqama ‘Abū from his father from Ibn ‘Abbās that the Prophet commanded the hanging of a whip in the house.

<sup>582</sup> Imam Aḥmad, *al-Musnad*, 5:238; Al-Mundhiri, *al-Targhib*, 1:196; Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Kabīr*, 20/82; #156; Ibn al-Mulaqqin (d. 804AH). n.d. *Mukhtaṣar ‘Istidrāk al-Dhahabī ‘alā Mustadrak al-Ḥākim*. Edited by Sa’d b. ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Abd al-Azīz ‘Al Ḥamayyid. Vol. 5. 8 vols. Riyādh: Dār al-‘Aṣimah. 5: 2406-2407.

In another report, the Prophet threatens to chastise a child. The Prophet's wife, Umm Salama stated:

The Prophet was in her house when he called for her servant girl. When the servant girl (*waṣīfa*) was delayed, the Prophet's displeasure could be seen on his face. Umm Salama arose and looked through the curtain to see the girl playing. The Prophet had a tooth stick (*siwāk*) in his hand, and he said, "If I did not fear retribution (*al-qawd*) on the Day of Resurrection, I would have hurt you with this tooth stick!"<sup>583</sup>

Other narrations do not explicitly mention corporal punishment but rather can be read to support children's subjection, implying that discipline is a parental duty. An oft-cited narration reads:

Every one of you is like a shepherd and every one of you is accountable for your flock. The Imām is a shepherd responsible for [subjects] under his care. The man is a shepherd of his subjects and responsible for them. And the woman is responsible for her husband's home, and she will be asked about whoever she is given charge of. And the servant shepherds his master's wealth and is responsible for his charge. So, each of you is a shepherd responsible for his [or her] charge.<sup>584</sup>

In her writing on authority, Hannah Arendt explains Plato's "attempts to find a legitimate principle of coercion." One model that he looked to was the relationship between the shepherd and his flock. A shepherd's expert knowledge "commands confidence so that neither force nor persuasion are necessary to obtain compliance" since the shepherd and the sheep "belong to altogether different categories of beings, one of which is already by implication subject to the other."<sup>585</sup> In this view, like sheep, a child's subjection to the parent is already assumed given the natural and unequal terms

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<sup>583</sup> Bukhārī, 'Abī 'Abd Allah Muḥammad b. 'Ismā'īl al-. 1955. *Al-'Adab al-Mufrad*. Edited by Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī. Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Salafiyya, 56, 94, #184. Salahi, Adil. 2018. *Al-Adab al-Mufrad with Full Commentary: A Perfect Code of Manners and Morality*. The Islamic Foundation, 306. The Saudi translator Adil Salahi reads this as a call to avoid physical punishment rather than as a sanction for making use of threats. He comments, "In Islam we find the Prophet expressing his own fear of punishment on the Day of Judgement for hitting a [servant girl] who had not responded to his call, with a toothbrush. It is enough to be aware of this hadith to have a genuine fear of wronging servants (or young girls?)."

<sup>584</sup> Hilālī, 'Abī 'Usāma Salīm ibn 'Ubayd al-. n.d. *Bahjah Al-Nādhirīn Sharḥ Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn*. 3 vols. Dār ibn al-Jawzī, 1: 380-385, #300; Bukhari, *Kitab al-Jumua'a*, Bāb of *Jumua'a*, 1:304, #853; Muslim, *Kitāb al-'Imara*, 3:1459.

<sup>585</sup> Arendt, "What is Authority?", 10.

of their relationship.<sup>586</sup> Other traditions found in Shi‘ī collections reinforce ideas about children’s subjection after age seven. According to these collections, the Prophet said, “A child is a master for seven years, a slave for the next seven years, and a minister for another seven years. By the age of twenty-one, you must either approve of his manners or cut him loose, for [by then] you would have fulfilled your obligation toward Allah.”<sup>587</sup>

### ***What warrants Corporal Punishment?***

Some of my interlocutors read the discipline hadith as restricting corporal punishment to instances of prayer refusal. Alisha noted that developing a child’s prayer habit is stressed even above habituating the child to fasting. For example, Ibn Abī Zayd observes that prayer differs from fasting since children are not asked to fast before puberty.<sup>588</sup> Unlike with fasting, children are commanded to pray before being responsible for it (*taklīf*).

Given that the discipline hadith only mentions physical discipline for children who abandon prayer, it begs the question, are parents only allowed hit children for prayer? If not, what infractions warrant corporal punishment?<sup>589</sup> Medieval Muslim juridical writing implies that children *can* be corporally punished for infractions apart from prayer abandonment.<sup>590</sup> Sunnī legal scholars held one can physically discipline

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<sup>586</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>587</sup> Rayshahri, M. Muhammadi. 2008. *The Scale of Wisdom*. ICAS Press. 24, #152n7709

<sup>588</sup> Ibn ‘Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī. *Al-Risālah*. Edited by Abdalhaqq Bewley. Translated by Aisha Bewley. United Kingdom: Diwan Press Ltd., 2018, 497.

<sup>589</sup> Fay, “Decolonizing the Child Protection Apparatus, 7. In her ethnography of *Save the Children’s* operation in Zanzibar, she encountered local teachers who were hesitant to implement Save the Children’s child protection programs. They noted that “parents now come to school and complain. They say: “Our tradition says we have to smack our children if they lack manners.” Immediately eliminating the cane destroys students’ discipline. They even demand that we hit their children. When we explain to them, they disagree, and refer to the Prophet.”

<sup>590</sup> Jackson, Sherman. 2001. “Discipline and Duty in a Medieval Muslim Elementary School: Ibn Hajar al-Haytami’s Taqrir al-Maqal.” In *Law and Education In Medieval Islam: Studies in Memory of Professor George Makdisi*, edited by Joseph E. Lowry, Devin J. Stewart, and Shawkat M. Toorawa, 2:18–33. E.J.W Gibb Memorial Trust, 26-27. Jackson mentions that according to Ibn Ḥajar, if fathers/guardians grant



whenever it benefits them. In his analysis of classical texts, Hassim argues that medieval educationists used hitting as the primary means of “motivating children to behave or focus on their lessons.”<sup>591</sup> For example, Ibn Saḥnūn stipulated corporal punishment for children’s edification, based on a prophetic tradition which states that a man who disciplines his child is better than one who gives charity.<sup>592</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya viewed corporally punishing children who leave prayer as simply the parents fulfilling children’s interest (*maṣlaḥa*) since it safeguards their afterlife. He likens punishing a child for prayer to punishing an insane person for attempts to self-injure. Self-injuring individuals are punished, and he considered abandoning prayer a form of self-injury.<sup>593</sup> He reasons that the punishment benefits the punished, just as giving medicine to the ill deters harms that are greater than medicinal bitterness.<sup>594</sup> He considered corporal punishment appropriate for children who violate the rights of others. For example, if one child oppresses another, then he maintained that the oppressed party should be recompensed. He suggests that if a child steals, then it is permissible to take something from her wealth to compensate the owner (*qiṣās* or retaliation) but that the child’s theft is not considered a prohibited act since she is not

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teachers the permission to physically discipline their child, then teachers can use corporal punishment to encourage children to undertake any activity deemed consistent with proper upbringing (*‘alā kulli mā fihi iṣlahun li’l-walad*). They can also punish the child for laziness, failure to memorize assigned material, or failure to retain previously mastered material. Furthermore, they can be corporally punished for rudeness, disruptive behavior, insulting others, absenteeism, cursing, and stealing property. Teachers with permission to discipline act as surrogate parents.

<sup>591</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 172.

<sup>592</sup> Ibn Saḥnūn, Muḥammad. 1972. *Kitāb Ādāb Al-Mu‘allimīn (Rules of Conduct for Teachers)*. Edited by Ḥasan Ḥusnī ‘Abd al-Wahhāibn 1st ed. Tunisia, 93. This work has been translated by Michael Fishbein. See Ibn Sahnun, “*Kitāb Adab al-Mu‘allimīn*” (“Rules of Conduct for Teachers”), in *Classical Foundations of Islamic Educational Thought*, ed. Bradley J. Cook, Islamic Translation Series, Brigham Young University Press, 2011; Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 119n201-202-205.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid.

<sup>594</sup> Ibn Taymiyya. *Mukhtaṣar al-Fatāwā al-Misriyya*. Edited by Badr al-Dīn ‘Abī ‘Abd Allah Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Ḥanbalī al-Ba‘lī. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1985, 644.

yet liable. Ibn Taymiyya suggests that this teaches children about justice and civility. Later, Ibn Taymiyya implied that even though a *mummayiz* child lacks full rational capacity (*ghayr mukallaf*, a category that includes the mentally insane and animals), a child can still be hit for doing whatever is ugly or unethical (*qabīḥ*), obscene (*fāhish*), or morally reprehensible, such as hitting another child.

Furthermore, when discussing various circumstances for which a man is allowed to discipline his wife, the Shāfi‘ī jurist, Zakariyyā al-Ansārī (d. 926/1520) also implies that children can be physically disciplined for other than prayer abandonment. He contrasts motives for hitting one’s wife versus one’s children. He argues that whereas it is more appropriate for a husband to forgive his wife rather than striking her, it is more appropriate for the father or male guardian (*walī al-ṣabī*) to punish the child for the sake of discipline and refinement (*ta’dīb* and *tahdhīb*).<sup>595</sup> Al-Ansārī explains that when a man strikes his wife, he does so out of selfishness (*maṣlaḥa li-nafsih*), whereas when striking a child, he acts benevolently in the child’s interest (*maṣlaḥa lahu*).<sup>596</sup>

Muslim jurists also authorized corporal punishment for teaching etiquette and decorum. Classified as a form of *ta’zīr*, or discretionary punishment, they considered corporal punishment an effective means for restraining children from engaging in discretions that fall short of the thresholds for *hadd* punishment (e.g., cursing the prophets’ companions) and expiation requirements (*kaffara*).<sup>597</sup> Jurists distinguished

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<sup>595</sup> Al-Anṣārī, ‘Abū Yaḥyā ibn Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā, Zayn al-Dīn al-Sunaykī ibn Muḥammad. *Asnā al-Muṭṭālib Sharḥ Rawḍ al-Ṭālīb* 4 vols. Cairo: al-Maṭba‘a al-Maymaniyya, 1313, 3:239.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid.; Chaudhry, Ayesha S. 2013. *Domestic Violence and the Islamic Tradition: Ethics, Law and the Muslim Discourse on Gender*. First edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 121, 121n88.

<sup>597</sup> Al-Raḥībānī, Muṣṭafā al-Suyūṭī. 1961. *Muṭālib ‘Ulā An-Nuhā Fī Sharḥ Ghāyat al-Muntahā*. Edited by Ḥasan al-Shaṭī. 1st ed. Vol. 6. 6 vols. Manshūrāt al-Maktab al-Islāmī bi-Damashq: 220-222. According to Ibn Taymiyah, if a ten-year-old boy commits adultery with a nine-year-old, even though they are juveniles, they are subject to *ta’zīr* rather than the *hadd* punishment. The Ḥanafī jurist Ḥāfiz al-Dīn ‘Abd Allāh al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310) held that if an adolescent curses a scholar, then he is liable to *ta’zīr*. (See Ibn Najīm, *Sharḥ Kanz al-Daqā’iq*, 5:86).

between *ta'zīr* administered by the imam at the father's request and *ta'dīb* administered by the father himself.<sup>598</sup> The Ḥanafī jurist Ḥāfiz al-Dīn 'Abd Allāh al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310) held that if an adolescent curses a scholar, then he is liable to *ta'zīr*. Comparably, Aḥmad ibn Naqīb al-Misrī writes that “a father or grandfather can hit a child when they commit an act that is unbecoming (*irtikābuhu mā lā yalīq*).”<sup>599</sup> Likewise, Ibn al-Ḥājj wrote that hitting children may be necessary to maintain order in Quran schools.

### **“Normal” Physical Discipline: Diachronic Considerations**

Despite the legitimacy of parental authority implied in classical reports, medieval jurists did not give parents *carte blanche* to strike children at will. Rather, they meticulously distinguished between normative physical discipline and cruelty. Jurists and parent educators differentiate normal and deviant corporal punishment based on diachronic and synchronic considerations. With regards to diachronic considerations, they held that rules pertaining to physical punishment vary according to biological age and the manifestation of various developmental milestones.

What milestones indicate when a child can be physically disciplined? *Prima facie* reading of the discipline hadith suggests that only ten-year-old children can be struck. However, there is a second report that provides a slightly different timeline. “Play with your child for seven (years), discipline him for seven (years) [*addibhu sab'an*], and befriend him for seven (years), then leave him thereafter.”<sup>600</sup> I refer to this report as the

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<sup>598</sup> Ibid.

<sup>599</sup> Ibn al-Naqīb and Keller. *The Reliance of the Traveller*, 619.

<sup>600</sup> “Ḥadīth: Lā 'ib 'ibnak sab'an. Lā 'Aṣl lahu.” 2002. Qatar Ministry of Awqāf and Islamic Affairs. Islamweb.net. May 26, 2002. <https://www.islamweb.net/ar/fatwa/16862/> The Qatari Ministry for Religious Affairs' Fatwa says that this hadith is not prophetic, but rather a statement attributed to 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and found in books on children's *tarbiya*.

“heptad report.” Some attribute this tradition to the Prophet.<sup>601</sup> Others attribute it to ‘Umar ibn Al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23 or 24/644) or ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661).<sup>602</sup> Still others ascribe it to ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān (d. 705) or the jurist Sufyan al-Thawrī (d. 778).<sup>603</sup> Despite its disputed origin, it is often repeated by parent educators when they explain Islam’s tripartite conception of childhood development in three heptads. Some argue that there are specific disciplinary methods appropriate to each of the three heptads.

The first heptad begins at birth and continues until the child reaches *tamyīz* (the age of discernment, which occurs at roughly age seven). The second heptad spans ages seven to fourteen. The third heptad marks a companionate stage, which begins at fourteen and ends at twenty-one. According to the heptad report, the most crucial stage for discipline is the second heptad, which includes the beginning of *tamyīz* as well as early adolescence (*murāhaqa*) and the advent of moral culpability (*taklīf*). This is when parents must seriously undertake *ta’dīb*,

Does *ta’dīb* as prescribed in the heptad report imply that a child should be physically disciplined during the second heptad? As we shall see, the precise beginning and ends of these heptads and developmental planes are fluid and lack consensus.

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<sup>601</sup> UNICEF. “Children in Islam: Their Care, Upbringing and Protection.” Handbook. Cairo: Al-Azhar University in Cooperation with the United Nation’s Children Fund (UNICEF), 2017, 179.

<sup>602</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 42n38, 33n80; Amīn ‘Abū Lāwī. ‘*Uṣūl Al-Tarbiya al-Islāmiyya*. Damām, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī: al-Damām. 237.

<sup>603</sup> The Saudi Salafi scholar Muhammad Saalih Al-Munajjid (b. 1960) attributes this statement to the Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān. See Al-Munajjid, Muhammad. “Ḥadīth: [‘Adibhu sab’an] Lā ‘asl lahu fi kuttub al-sitta.” Fatwa Website. Islamqa.info, February 2, 2010.

<https://islamqa.info/ar/answers/145946/حديث-اديب-سبع-لا-اصل-له-في-كتب-السنة>The Saudi author Dr. Aaidh al-Qarni (b. 1959) attributes the report to Sufyan al-Thawrī. See Qarni, Aaidh ibn Abdullah al-. “Lessons of Aaid al-Qari: al-Muṣāḥiba.” al-Mawsū‘a al-Shāmila. Accessed September 17, 2020. <http://islampost.com/w/amm/Web/1539/9922.htm>.

Scholars differ regarding both the span of each heptad and what constitutes normative discipline in each stage.

### ***Disciplining the Pre-Tamyīz Child***

Broadly speaking, from birth (*wilāda*) until the child can determine right from wrong, children are thought to lack discernment (*tamyīz*). Some scholars refer to this period, roughly before age seven, as *ḥaḍāna*, or when the child is primarily in the mother's custody—literally at her side.<sup>604</sup> In her parenting workshop, Anse Sawsan defines the pre-*tamyīz* period more narrowly—beginning in late infancy (one and a half years) through age four. She characterizes children in this phase as possessing limited cognition.<sup>605</sup> In this first heptad, children were typically not formally educated, leading some scholars to worry that parents neglect children's early *tarbiya* (education, upbringing). They remind parents that education begins from the cradle, if not before.<sup>606</sup> For example, the Syrian professor Dr. Muḥammed Rātīb al-Nabulsi (b. 1939) reminds parents to begin teaching from the child's birth day, warning that parental influence weakens after seven as habits solidify.<sup>607</sup> His sentiments resonate with Rashīd Riḍā who rebuked grandmothers who offered their empty breasts to wailing infants, since he believed this was an example of bad *tarbiya* in infancy and inclines children toward lying and deception.<sup>608</sup>

Like Riḍā and Nabulsi, AMPE in Chicago also suggested ways to prepare children for religious education. For example, 'Ālimah Maha likens parents to farmers. In this

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<sup>604</sup> Y. Linant de Bellefonds, "Ḥaḍāna", *EI2*.

<sup>605</sup> Sawsan, Anse. "Raising an Observant & Spiritual Muslim Child."

<sup>606</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 47.

<sup>607</sup> *Naṣīḥa Fī Daqīqatayn "Ahm Qā'ida Fī Tarbiyat l-'abnā'*, 2018.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tsMhi7vEt4&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>608</sup> Riḍā, Rashīd. 1899 "Tarbiyah Al-Aṭfāl." *Al-Manār* 2, no. 2 (9):155.

agrarian analogy, parents carefully till the land of their children’s imagination, removing weeds for cultivation. She explains that playing with young children facilitates strong attachment, a prerequisite for effective discipline. During this heptad, she encourages parents to create fond memories around Muslim rituals by capitalizing on children’s inclination to “play prayer.”<sup>609</sup> She echoes the advice of her Deobandi forebearer Thānavī, who advised parents to teach “prattling” children the *kalimatayn* (attestation of faith) “as soon as they begin to talk.” He instructs parents to teach babbling toddlers the Divine name, “Allah, Allah!” rather than “mama” and “baba” so that it becomes their first words.<sup>610</sup> Dr. Rania Awaad stresses that at this time, parents should instill prophetic habits (e.g., eating with the right hand, clothing one’s right side first, and learning the appropriate supplications for mundane acts).

Should a child under seven (pre-*tamyīz*) be disciplined? Umm Sahl encourages mothers to smack a two-year-old’s hand if she eats with her left.<sup>611</sup> In contrast, other contemporary Muslim scholars categorically prohibit corporal punishment at this age. For example, Hamza Yusuf interprets the heptad report as instructing parents to exclusively play with children under seven. For children under three, he finds physical discipline especially abhorrent: “Before age three, the child does not understand cause and effect. If you are hitting [a child under three] then that is a criminal act—a horrific thing to do. There are other ways of dealing with children, don’t break their will.”<sup>612</sup> He criticizes those who maintain that children under seven willfully disobey:

[A] brother asked me to distinguish whether, in the sharia, before [the age of] seven [a child should be disciplined]. You should not be beating or laying a hand on a child. Before seven they have no *taklif* [moral liability] whatsoever. Before

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<sup>609</sup> Sadiq, “The Coolness of Our Eyes,” April 3, 2017.

<sup>610</sup> Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, 107.

<sup>611</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children,” 3.2.

<sup>612</sup> Hanson, *Nurturing Children*.

seven there is no *tamyīz*. The *sinn al-tamyīz* (age of *tamyīz*) is seven. Some people say ‘No, I think the child understands me.’ I guarantee you, if you study neurophysiology, they don’t. You can tell them something and, two minutes later, they forget completely. Before seven, [there is] no *taḳlīf*. Be nice to your children!<sup>613</sup>

Arguing both based on the discipline hadith and neurophysiology, Hamza Yusuf asserts that prepubescent children do not incur sin since, according to tradition, the “pen has been lifted.”<sup>614</sup> In his view, children under seven should not be subjected to any physical discipline because they cannot comprehend causality. His wife, Nabila Hanson, clarifies this further:

According to the Islamic understanding of child psychology, punishing a child prior to the age of seven for doing wrong serves no purpose because the child does not have the intellectual capability to understand right from wrong. Until the age of seven, a child sees any punishment as an injustice, and no matter how slight or severe the punishment, it is likely to leave emotional wounds.<sup>615</sup>

Like the Hansons, ‘Ālimah Maha instructs mothers not to hit during the first heptad for two reasons. First, she argues that "Allah is al-Wadūd, He is loving and more loving than a mother to her child." Secondly, she cites the heptad report to justify the position against discipline before seven. She warns that punishing children under seven for matters of worship is "un-Islamic."<sup>616</sup>

Premodern ‘*ulamā*’ also denounced physical discipline in the first heptad. Most reasoned that parents cannot physically discipline children under seven since, like

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<sup>613</sup> Hanson, *Being Kind To Women And Children*.

<sup>614</sup> *Sunan ‘Abū Da‘ūd*, 4:560; *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī*, 1796, #1423; *Sunan al-Nasā‘ī*, #3432; *Sunan Ibn Majah* 3599, #2041; and *al-Ḥākim* 2:59.

<sup>615</sup> Nabila Hanson and Hamza Yusuf, *Educating Children in Modern Times*, 88.

<sup>616</sup> ‘Ālimah Maha, “The Coolness of Our Eyes: Raising Our Children,” Workshop #2. Awaad clarifies that just because parents should not physically discipline young children for ritual matters, it does not mean that there is no discipline at all. Rather, they should be weaned, potty trained, and subjected to "gentle restriction." Awaad, Rania. “Raising a Spiritual Child.” Presented at The Rahmah Foundation. Accessed February 21, 2020. <https://soundcloud.com/the-rahmah-foundation/sets/raising-a-spiritual-child/s-Y41mF>.

irrational animals, their immature cognition makes it unjust to hold them morally accountable.<sup>617</sup> For example, Muḥammad al-Khurshī (d. 1190/1690), a Mālikī jurist, forbade physically disciplining a child before *tamyīz*, even if the child committed a crime.<sup>618</sup> Likewise, al-Ḥaṭṭāb wrote that children cannot be hit before *tamyīz* because they lack reason. Reiterating his predecessors' position, the Mālikī Cairene jurist Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī (d. 1285) likens a child before *tamyīz* to a beast; for both it is improper to discuss permissibility since the ability to rationally discern is a precondition for legal rulings.<sup>619</sup> Therefore, he forbade chastising both animals and children.<sup>620</sup> Similarly, the Ḥanafī commentator Ibn Najīm (d. 969-970/1562) prohibited mothers from hitting small children. While writing about *nushūz* (spousal disobedience), he permits husbands to discipline their wives for striking their children. He likens striking small children to striking riding animals, reasoning that if striking a riding animal is forbidden, then *a fortiori*, mothers cannot hit their children.<sup>621</sup> In *Jāmi' Aḥkām al-Ṣiḡhār*, a collection of legal opinions about minors, al-Ustrūshanī al-Samarqandī (d.632/1234) notes that according to Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), when a mother beats her small son, she is undoubtedly liable.

### ***The Threshold of Tamyīz***

Whereas, broadly speaking, jurists outlawed physically disciplining children before seven, after *tamyīz* a more complicated picture of normative discipline emerges. If maternal attachment and play characterize the first heptad, then discipline (*ta'dīb*)

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<sup>617</sup> Mian, Ali Altaf. "Surviving Modernity" 144-45.

<sup>618</sup> Khalīl, 'Abī 'Abd Allah Muḥammad al-Khurshī. 1900. *Al-Khurshī 'alā Khalīl*. 2nd ed. Vol. 6. Egypt: Amiri Press/Bulaq Press, 6:130.

<sup>619</sup> Al-Ḥaṭṭāb, *Mawahib Al-Jalīl Fī Sharḥ Kitāb al-Ṣalāt*, 2:54-58.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid, 1:413; al-Imām al-Buḥtī (Maṣṣūr ibn Yunus ibn Idrīs al-Buḥtī), *Sharḥ Muntahī al-irādāth al-musammā 'iq 'ulā al-nahī lī sharḥ al-muntahī*, Beirut, 'Ālim al-Kutub, 1996, 3:299.

<sup>621</sup> Ibn Najīm, *Sharḥ Kanz al-Daqā'iq*, 5:53.



and formal instruction characterize the second one.<sup>622</sup> For Riḍā, even infants are capable of a rudimentary form of *tamyīz* which is partially developed before seven. At seven, the child begins to enjoy partial moral capacity.<sup>623</sup> Even though Muslim jurists acknowledge that this stage marks the “budding” of children’s intellect, they still do not consider them accountable.<sup>624</sup> Nonetheless, the discipline hadith instructs parents to begin ordering the child to pray.”<sup>625</sup>

At *tamyīz*, a child’s *ta’līm* (education) should begin. This includes inter alia, formal instruction in basic jurisprudence (fiqh) about ritual purity (*ṭahāra*) and prayer.<sup>626</sup> In premodern societies, once a child reaches *tamyīz*, the (male?) child would begin elementary education, a rite of passage.<sup>627</sup> Thus at age seven, some children pass from the private female-dominated domestic space into the public male-dominated *kuttāb*. Hierarchy is reversed as parents are no longer servants to their children but rather children should be trained to serve and defer to elders. To borrow from Arnold van Gennep, the period between age seven and ten constitutes a critical “liminal” phase, where physical discipline can be viewed as part of a transitional rite. Child “initiations” might be asked to endure “acts of pain” that destroy their intractability, giving way to formative experiences in preparation for full adulthood (*bulūgh*).<sup>628</sup>

Alongside learning their sharia responsibilities, AMPE insist that children should also learn *why* they practice, requiring an education in *‘aqīda* or creed. Awaad instructs

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<sup>622</sup> Arabi, Oussama. 2011. “Capacity, Legal.” EI3; Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 24.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid.

<sup>624</sup> Hanson, Hamza Yusuf, *Educating Children in Modern Times*, 88.

<sup>625</sup> Ahmed, *Educating Children*, 76.

<sup>626</sup> Hilālī, *Sharḥ Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn*, 1:380-385.

<sup>627</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 42.

<sup>628</sup> Thomassen, B. (2006) “Liminality”, in A. Harrington, B. Marshall and H.-P. Müller (eds.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, London: Routledge, 322–323.

parents to teach children about eschatology, God's oneness, and the messengers. Emphasizing the intensity of this period, she emphasizes that ages seven through nine provide parents with a crucial window to "get it right" with the child's" daily Islamic program."<sup>629</sup> Similarly, Hamza Yusuf teaches that between seven and ten, children move into "cognitive awareness" and should be nurtured into adulthood.<sup>630</sup> Like Awaad, Hamza Yusuf asserts that by seven, children can be taught metaphysics since their brains having already undergone a "transformation" with "all their neurons being myelinated." He explains that this is why 'Ā'isha was sent to live as a young bride in the Prophet's house at seven.<sup>631</sup>

Muslim educationists differ as to when children begin to discern. Some held that children reached *tamyīz* simply based upon calendar age. For example, Hamza Yusuf maintains that *tamyīz* occurs at seven. He notes that Al-Ghazālī instructed teachers "to introduce [seven-year-old children to] the concept of time in a real way [because they] understand things like that—that they are creatures in time [and therefore responsible for their] actions, although not fully responsible because of a lack of hard wiring."<sup>632</sup> He draws from Pearce who maintained that around six or seven, the child's "limbic and R systems" are fully developed. Although six-year-old brains are about two-thirds the size of adult brains they possess five to seven times more neural connections."<sup>633</sup> Pearce

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<sup>629</sup> Awaad, "Raising a Spiritual Child."

<sup>630</sup> Hanson, *Nurturing Children*.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid; 'Abdari, Abu 'Abd Allah Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Fasi (Ibn al-Hajj). (d. 737H). *Madkhal Al-Shar' al-Sharīf 'ala l-Madhahib al-Arba'a* [Introduction to the Noble Law (Based upon the Four Schools)]. Vol. 4. 4 vols. Cairo: Maktaba Dār al-Turāth, 4:295. In Europe, children of this age six to seven were once treated as adults-in-training as well. At this age, they began apprenticeships before modern child labor laws were introduced to block this practice. See Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, 23.

<sup>632</sup> Ibid; Hanson, Hamza Yusuf. N.d. *The Age of Discrimination*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPfSoxDYYac>.

<sup>633</sup> Pearce, *Evolution's End*, 174.

quotes the Swiss psychologist John Piaget who believed that children under seven are “prelogical.” At seven, they can grasp the law of conservation.<sup>634</sup> Like Hamza Yusuf, Dr. Umar lectures that the "Prophet taught us to enjoin children to pray when they are seven, because seven is the magic age when the child begins to have the rudiments of intellect.”<sup>635</sup> Although he does not elaborate on why seven is magical, others have elaborated on its mystical qualities. The German orientalist Annemarie Schimmel observed that seven is the number of times Muslims must circumambulate the Ka‘ba and the hills of Safa and Marwa, as well as the number of words in the attestation of faith (*shahāda*) and the number of verses in the *Fātiḥa*.<sup>636</sup>

Other scholars imply that some children begin to discern even before seven.

Although Riḍā acknowledges an earlier form of *tamyīz* beginning in infancy, he clarifies that de jure *tamyīz* occurs later :

God took you out from the stomachs of your mothers. You did not know anything. And He enabled you to hear and see and gave you hearts so that you may be thankful. The first thing the child feels is the pain of hunger and the pain of being cold. The first thing that he is inspired to do is to latch onto the nipples of the breast, then he increases in his aptitudes and hears and sees without being able to discriminate between one concept and the other. Then he begins to discern between his nurse and other people, to the extent that some children accustomed to being nursed from one woman, will begin to refuse the breast of another and is repulsed by her. And this type of *tamyīz* [when the child is nursing] is apparent. But discerning between the beneficial and the harmful (*al-ḍār*), awareness of speech and expression, the ‘*ulamā*’ say that this happens at age seven, the *sinn al-tamyīz*. This is when you order them to pray and fast because he is capable at this age.<sup>637</sup>

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<sup>634</sup> Ibid. The law of conservation can be demonstrated when the child is presented with two flasks: one thin and tall and one fat and short. Yet both flasks are holding the same amount of liquid despite the appearance of more liquid in the tall thin flask.

<sup>635</sup> Abd-Allah, Umar. *Master Classes on Essential Islamic Aqida (Class #4)*. Al-Ghazālī Week 2013. Rosales, Spain, 2013. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htpVdS4qKL4&list=PLj-pgC28vorcZKiGIMsZ3Jy5\\_p5wSPqyh](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htpVdS4qKL4&list=PLj-pgC28vorcZKiGIMsZ3Jy5_p5wSPqyh).

<sup>636</sup> Schimmel, Annemarie. *The Mystery of Numbers*. Reprint Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, U.S.A., 1994, 146-147.

<sup>637</sup> Riḍā, Rashīd. 1899. “Tarbiyah Al-Aṭfāl.” *Al-Manār* 2 (9): 90–92.

Similarly, Ibn Qayyim wrote that children can discern as early as three and as late as ten.<sup>638</sup> The Ḥanbalī jurists, Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1201) and later, Ibn Qayyim both implied that *tamyīz* can occur at five and that this is the best time for learning.<sup>639</sup> Al-Shirbīnī implies that children can reach *tamyīz* before seven. He notes that the Shāfi‘ī school’s majority opinion holds that children should be invited to pray only when turning seven, since “*tamyīz* itself is not enough, but the child has to be seven.”<sup>640</sup> Al-Shirbīnī thus unlinks *tamyīz* from calendar age.

Differences of opinion regarding when *tamyīz* commences may result from the fact there are other prophetic traditions that suggest different mental and physical developmental milestones that indicate children’s cognition. Some mark the beginning of *tamyīz* as when children show evidence of conscientiousness and morality. According to Ibn Miskawayh (d.1030) children obtain the “aptitude for education” if they become bashful and modest when they are caught misbehaving and learn to exercise self-restraint.<sup>641</sup> The hadith compiler Abū Dāwūd (d. 928/929) narrates: “The Prophet was asked, ‘When should a child begin to pray?’ He replied, ‘When he knows his left [hand] from his right [hand].’”<sup>642</sup>

At the time of this writing, my five-year-old knows her right hand from her left and therefore may be considered discerning already. While a literal reading of this tradition implies a physical developmental milestone for ascertaining *tamyīz*, al-Shirbīnī comments on this report by citing Al-Damīrī (d. 1405, Cairo) who interprets it

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<sup>638</sup> al-Ḥulaybī, *Thaqāfat al-Ṭīflal-Muslim Maḥmūhā wa Usus Binā‘ihā*, 29.

<sup>639</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 90.

<sup>640</sup> Al-Shirbīnī, *Mughnī al-Muḥtāj*, 1:131.

<sup>641</sup> Ahmed, *Educating Children*, 76; Shuraydi, Hasan. *The Raven and the Falcon*. Brill, 2014. 20-27, 56.

<sup>642</sup> al-Shirbīnī, *Mughnī Al-Muḥtāj*, 1:131; al-Ḥaṭṭāb, *Mawahib Al-Jalīl*, 2: 54-58.

figuratively by stating that it is when the child knows harms from benefits.<sup>643</sup> Awaad hints at these medieval opinions by teaching parents that the age range of five to seven is when children will begin answering questions in "a logical fashion" with "adult" answers, and will know right from wrong.<sup>644</sup> Acknowledging the fluidity around discernment and age, Awaad encourages parents to call five and six-year-olds to pray, but not to admonish them if they refuse.<sup>645</sup>

Some scholars relied on other physical milestones to determine *tamyīz* such as losing milk teeth. Milk teeth usually fall around age five or six. Milk teeth eruption was regarded as an indicator of developed intellect (‘*aql*).<sup>646</sup> The Qayrawānī scholar Ibn Nājī (d. 837/1433) wrote, “Command the child to pray when the child’s milk teeth are emerging.”<sup>647</sup> Similarly, the Tunisian Mālikī jurist Al-Lakhmī (d. 478/1085) believed children should be ordered to pray when their milk teeth fall out.”<sup>648</sup> Ibn Abī Zayd (d. 386/996) indicated that the emphasized verb *‘ithagarū* refers to the child’s new teeth that emerge after the milk teeth fall.<sup>649</sup> These reports trace back to Imām Mālik who said that one should command the child to pray when milk teeth are removed.<sup>650</sup> In addition to the ability to tell the left hand from the right hand, and milk teeth eruption, medieval Muslim jurists also mention that *tamyīz* manifests when the child can eat, drink, and toilet independently.<sup>651</sup>

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<sup>643</sup> Ibid.

<sup>644</sup> Awaad, “Raising a Spiritual Child.”

<sup>645</sup> Ibid.

<sup>646</sup> Ḥashya ibn ‘Abidīn, 5:369; Jawāhir al-Aklīl, 2:267; *Mughnī al-Muḥtāj*, 4:68; *al-Mughnī li Ibn Qudāmah* 8:37; *Kashshāf al-Qinā’* 6:50.

<sup>647</sup> al-Ḥaṭṭāb, *Mawahib Al-Jalīl*, 2:54-58.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid.

<sup>649</sup> Ibid.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid.

<sup>651</sup> Ibn al-Naqīb and Keller, *Reliance of the Traveler*, f1.1.; Shirbīnī, *Mughnī al-Muḥtāj*, 1:131.

### ***Chastising a Discerning (mummyiz) Child***

Some premodern jurists ruled that one cannot strike discerning children under ten. For example, the Shāfi‘ī al-Baghawī prohibited striking seven-year-olds when he said, “And order (not strike!) the child to pray when he is seven so he becomes accustomed to it.”<sup>652</sup> Transmitting from al-Shāfi‘ī, al-Rāzī maintained that a child is not subject to any discretionary punishment (*ta‘zīr*) for any crime but must simply be reprimanded until pubescence.<sup>653</sup> Similarly, the Shāfi‘ī jurist Aḥmad ibn Lu‘lu’ ibn al-Naqīb (d. 769/1368) writes that the *mummyiz* child must simply be commanded to pray—but not hit—until ten.<sup>654</sup> Like these Shāfi‘ī jurists, some Mālikī scholars also opined that a discerning child could not be physically disciplined. For example, Mālik’s student, the Egyptian jurist Ashhab ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-‘Āmirī (d. 204/820), interpreted the discipline hadith to mean that one disciplines (*yu‘addib*) the child without hitting before ten.<sup>655</sup> Ibn al-Ḥājī added, “Whoever is not ten should be treated better, with *rifq* (kindness) because you cannot beat him at this early age.”<sup>656</sup> Likewise, Ibn Nājī recommends nothing beyond calling seven-year-olds to pray.<sup>657</sup>

In contrast to opinions against corporal punishing those under ten, some classical jurisconsults explicitly authorize it.<sup>658</sup> Ibn Saḥnūn wrote that his contemporary believed that children should not be corporally punished at all. To this, he retorted that this jurist was clearly someone who had never taught children the Quran because otherwise he would have quickly realized the need for physical discipline. Recalling this

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<sup>652</sup> al-Baghawī, *Sharḥ Al-Sunnah*, 2:306.

<sup>653</sup> Ibn Najīm, *Zayn al-Dīn, Sharḥ Kanz al-Daqā‘iq*, 5:86.

<sup>654</sup> Ibn al-Naqīb, and Keller. *The Reliance of the Traveler*, f1.1.

<sup>655</sup> Al-Ḥaṭṭāb, *Mūwahib al-Jalīl*, 2: 54-58.

<sup>656</sup> ‘Abdarī, *al-Madkhal*, 316-317.

<sup>657</sup> Al-Ḥaṭṭāb, *Mūwahib al-Jalīl*, 2: 54-58.

<sup>658</sup> Ibid.

account, Hamza Yusuf concludes that “you need some [discipline] with [some children] after seven...”<sup>659</sup>

Mālikī commentators justified physically disciplining seven-year-olds by likening them to animals in need of domestication. Recall that al-Khurshī likened children under seven to beasts to explain their inability to reason, and thus their lack of culpability. On the other hand, for children over seven, al-Khurshī explains that like riding animals, children sometimes require physically correction as part of their training. Thus, the analogy between children and animals allows classical jurists to argue *both* in favor of corporal punishment and against it. A report attributed to Imam Mālik states that they used to hit children at age seven.<sup>660</sup> Similarly, Al-Khurshī’s comments that a discerning (*mummayiz*) child should be disciplined not just for neglecting prayer but also for theft—even if the rightful owner forgives the child—because the child has violated God’s right by spreading corruption. He reasons that the *mummayiz* child is disciplined not because he morally liable but rather for his reform (*istiṣlah*) and character refinement (*tahdīb al-akhlāq*).<sup>661</sup> Jurists from other schools also authorized disciplining before ten. For example, Ibn Najīm implies that if someone has custody over his sister-in-law and she is still under ten, she can be physically disciplined. He clarifies that “it is not permissible to hit the younger sister of your wife who has no *walī* (guardian) for leaving prayer if she reaches ten years of age.”<sup>662</sup>

### ***On Adolescence (Murāhaqa)***

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<sup>659</sup> Hanson, *Being Kind to Women And Children*.

<sup>660</sup> Ibid.

<sup>661</sup> al-Khurshī, *Al-Khurshi ‘alā Khalīl*, 6:130.

<sup>662</sup> Ibn Najīm, *Sharḥ Kanz al-Daqā’iq*, 5:86; al-Baghawī, *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, 2:306; Hillālī, *Bahjah al-Nādhirīn Sharḥ Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn*, 1:384.

Whereas jurists hotly contested the matter of physically disciplining children under ten, there appears to be more consensus over the permissibility of corporally punishing children once they turn ten. This may be because the discipline hadith can be read to allow physical discipline of ten-year-olds. Some scholars authorized corporal punishing for children between age ten and puberty to their edification (*ta`dīb*).<sup>663</sup> Nuh Keller warns that “by the time the child is ten or eleven, the pudding is set.”<sup>664</sup> By ten or eleven, the child should have already been prepared for adulthood. Linguistically, the closest counterpart to adolescence in Arabic would be *murāhaqa*, which commentators define as the period that begins when a child turns ten up until pubescence (*bulūgh*).<sup>665</sup> The medieval lexicographer, Fayrūzabādī (d. 1329/1415) considered *murāhaqa* to be “between the age of ten and the attainment of puberty.”<sup>666</sup> Awaad explains that ten-year-olds are at the “cusp intellectually between a child and an adult.”<sup>667</sup>

### ***Corporally Punishing the Bāligh***

Is it permissible to chastise pubescent children who shirk prayer? Upon reaching puberty (*bulūgh*), a *murāhiq* (adolescent) officially transitions to adulthood with full legal capacity. A pubescent child is considered a *mukallaf* or moral agent.<sup>668</sup> Once a child becomes a *bāligh* and qualifies as a *mukallaf*, scholars agree that they must pray. The polymath Averroes (d. 1198) affirms this, “The person for whom (prayer) is

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<sup>663</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 23n85-86; al-Jawziyya, *Tuḥfat al-Mawdūd bi Ahkām al-mawlūd*, 250. Ibn Qayyim expected the ten-year-old to pray and understand the testimony of faith.

<sup>664</sup> Keller, *Sydney Suhba*, 3.3.

<sup>665</sup> Hilālī, *Sharḥ Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn*, 1: 380-385; Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 24-26.

<sup>666</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 25n92.

<sup>667</sup> Awaad, “Raising a Spiritual Child.”

<sup>668</sup> Arabi, Oussama, “Capacity, Legal,” EI3, ; Sunan Abī Dāwūd, 4401, 4403; Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 21n74. Premodern jurists differed as to when a child becomes a *mukallaf*, especially in the absence of biological markers of puberty.<sup>668</sup> Ḥanafīs and Shāfi‘īs assumed that all children reached pubescence by fifteen whereas Mālikīs set the age at seventeen.



obligatory is every pubescent Muslim, and there is no dispute about this.”<sup>669</sup> The Ḥanafī commentator Muḥammad al-Tarjumānī (d. 645/1247) opined that a child who has reached pubescence (*bāligh*) is also liable for discretionary punishment (*ta'zīr*) for committing crimes such as drinking, fornicating, or stealing.<sup>670</sup> Thus, premodern Muslim jurists considered pubescent children to be adults and corporally punished accordingly (*ta'zīr*).

### **“Normal” Physical Discipline: Synchronic Considerations**

Apart from age related considerations for corporal punishment, jurists also specified *how* to administer physical discipline. Classical jurists recognized that children could be harmed under the guise of discipline. In what follows, I summarize the etiquette classical jurists outlined for chastisement of minors.

#### **Rule #1 | Do not strike out of anger**

Classical authors warned parents and teachers against physical disciplining out of anger. For example, Ibn Saḥnūn denounced harshness with children. He mentions this tradition: At a gathering, Sa'd al-Khaffāf's son came to him wailing that his teacher struck him. Sa'd replied with this narration attributed to the Prophet, “The worst (*sharār*) of you are the teachers of your children [because of their harshness]...”<sup>671</sup> According to Saḥnūn, this report condemns teachers who strike children out of anger. However, he adds that if corporal punishment benefits children, then this is not an issue (*lā ba's*).<sup>672</sup>

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<sup>669</sup> Ibn Rushd, *Distinguished Jurist's Primer*, 98.

<sup>670</sup> Ibn Najīm, *Sharḥ Kanz al-Daqā'iq*, 5:86.

<sup>671</sup> Ibn Saḥnūn, *Kitāb Ādāb Al-Mu'allimīn*, 310; Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 113.

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid*, 88-89.

The Qayrawānī jurist al-Qābisī (d. 403/1012) similarly warned teachers against losing composure:

The teacher of children should take care of them until their mannerisms are refined for their own benefit. It is not for the teacher to use discipline as a means of curing his anger, or to relieve the rage in his heart. If the teacher is afflicted by that, then his striking of Muslim children is for the purpose of leisure, and that is unjust.<sup>673</sup>

In a similar fashion, Avicenna considered “that excessive beating includes an element of revenge and does not achieve the desired educational effect.”<sup>674</sup> Additionally, Ibn al-Ḥājj advised teachers against verbally abusing children, which he considered forbidden. He implores wrathful teachers to return to disciplining children only when their anger subsides.<sup>675</sup> He referenced a prophetic tradition, “Let the judge (Qāḍī) not pass a judgment [between two parties] when he is angry.”<sup>676</sup> He sees no difference between the judge ruling over a court and an adult overseeing a child except that Qāḍīs govern elders and parents and teachers govern children.

### **Rule #2 | Do not humiliate**

Classical authors denounced physical discipline that humiliates children. Given prophetic traditions describing Adam as created in the *imago dei*, premodern authors considered the human face defiled by hitting.<sup>677</sup> Rather than the face, Al-Qābisī's recommended hitting the soles of the feet, since this is a safer method that still causes painful discomfort.<sup>678</sup> Premodern scholars also advised physically disciplining in private

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<sup>673</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 116n178.

<sup>674</sup> Naqīb, ‘Abd al-Rahman al. “Avicenna.” *Prospects: The Quarterly Review of Comparative Education (Paris, UNESCO: International Bureau of Education)* XXIII, no. 1/2 (1993): 53–69, 12.

<sup>675</sup> ‘Abdarī, *al-Madkhal*, 324.

<sup>676</sup> *Sunan Ibn Mājah, Kitāb al-‘Aḥkām, bāb lā yaḥkum al-ḥākim wa huya ghaḍbān* (#2316, p. 776).

<sup>677</sup> Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ramli, Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Abū al-‘Abbā Aḥmad ibn Hamzah. *Nihāya Al-Muḥtāj ‘ilā Sharḥ al-Minhāj Fī al-Fiqh ‘ala Madhhab al-‘imām al-Shāfi‘ī*. 3rd ed. Vol. 8. 8 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2003, 8: 17-20.

<sup>678</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 117.

to avoid embarrassing children. Al-Ramlī warned against public punishment, arguing that it counterproductively increases children’s obstinance, Al-Qābisī wrote that punishment should never be in front of peers. He adds that teachers should not laugh or smile while executing the punishment lest it appear as *schadenfreude*.<sup>679</sup>

### **Rule #3 | Corporal Punishment should be mild**

The third condition reiterated by classical Muslim scholars is that children's corporal punishment should be restrained. Averroes explains an earlier text attributed to Imām Mālik: “Do not hit consecutively which is [what] a lot of people do [and in doing] so they overstep. [Mālik] intends that you do not hit except for a light strike.”<sup>680</sup> Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406) also warns fathers and teachers against severity and excess.<sup>681</sup> Like the Mālikīs, Shāfi‘ī is also cautioned against severe physical discipline. For example, the Egyptian scholar Zakariyyā al-Anṣārī (d. 1520) warned that physical discipline should be bloodless.<sup>682</sup> Similarly, Ahmad ibn Naqīb wrote that strikes must not be *mubbariḥ*, which Nuh Keller translates as “not *shadīd* (intense, extreme).”<sup>683</sup> Commenting on this same text, the former Mufti of Jordan, Nuh ‘Ali Salman (d. 2010) remarks that *ghayr mubbariḥ* means not severely, but just enough to discipline children.<sup>684</sup>

Apart from breaking the skin, classical jurists also specified the number of strikes considered excessive. However, they differed regarding the exact number. Ibn Saḥnūn

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<sup>679</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 115n172; Hanson, *Nurturing Children*; Ahmad, *Educating Children* 103.

<sup>680</sup> al-Ḥaṭṭāb, *Mūwahib al-Jalīl*, 2:54-58.

<sup>681</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 171n92; Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqadimma*, 539.

<sup>682</sup> Al-Anṣārī, *Asnā al-Muṭṭālib*, 3:239.

<sup>683</sup> Ibn al-Naqīb and Keller, *The Reliance of the Traveller*, 109.

<sup>684</sup> Ibid; Jackson, “Discipline and Duty,” 27, 27n31. Ibn Ḥajar specified that when administering punishment, a teacher should not “raise his hand from the shoulder (such that the armpit shows) but only from the elbow, to limit the severity of the strike.”

limited it to three based on this tradition: “Discipline the child three strikes for whoever exceeds this will owe retribution (*qiṣāṣ*) on the Day of Judgement...”<sup>685</sup> Citing a similar hadith, the Damascene Ḥanafī jurist Ibn ‘Ābidīn (d. 1836) comments that God will take retribution from those who hit children more than three times.<sup>686</sup> Similarly, the Mālīkī jurist Ibn Abī Zayd repeats this ruling, “If children must be beaten, their educator must not strike them more than three times.”<sup>687</sup> A Shafī‘ī jurist, Muḥammad ibn Daqīq al-‘Īd (d. 1302) mentions Mālīkī opinions that teachers should not exceed three [strikes], and if (the father) exceeds this, then he owes retribution.” However, he considered this a weak opinion.<sup>688</sup> Later, Ahmad ibn Naqīb writes that one should not exceed three strikes.”<sup>689</sup>

In contrast to proponents of a three strikes limit, some jurists acknowledged circumstances that warrant *more* than three strikes. For example, even as Ibn Saḥnūn supported the three strikes rule, he allowed teachers to discipline students (*yu’addibuhum*) for playing during lessons (*al-la’b*) and idleness (*biṭāla*), drawing the line at *ten* strikes.<sup>690</sup> Likewise, Ibn al-Ḥājj wrote that “if you have to do more than this [three strikes], then hit no more than ten times.”<sup>691</sup> Similarly, Ibn Qayyim permitted a maximum of ten lashes (*aswāṭ*) for children’s discipline (*ta’dīb*).<sup>692</sup>

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<sup>685</sup> Ibn Saḥnūn, *Kitāb Ādāb Al- Mu’ allimīn*, 88, 91-92.

<sup>686</sup> “*Ḍarb*” In *al-Mawsū‘ah al-Fiqhiyya*. Kuwaiti Ministry of Awqāf and Islamic Affairs, 1987, 1:235.

<sup>687</sup> Ibn Khaldūn. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Edited by N.J. Dawood. Translated by Franz Rosenthal. Princeton University Press, 2020, 425; Ibn al-Ḥājj, *al-Madkhal*, 316-317. Ibn al-Ḥājj also warns against hitting children more than three times.

<sup>688</sup> Ibn Daqīq, *al-Udda—Ḥashiya al-ulāma al-sayyid Muḥammad ibn ismā‘īl al-‘amīr al-Ṣan‘ānī ‘alā ‘Iḥkām al-‘iḥkām al-alāma ibn Daqīq al-‘īd*, 4:384.

<sup>689</sup> Ibn al-Naqīb and Keller, *The Reliance of the Traveler*, 109.

<sup>690</sup> Ibn Saḥnūn, *Kitāb Ādāb Al- Mu’ allimīn*, 89; Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 114.

<sup>691</sup> Ibn al-Ḥājj, *al-Madkhal*, 316-317.

<sup>692</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *I lām al-muwaqqi’īn*, 3:242-243.

Premodern scholars justify ten strikes due to this tradition, “Do not hit above ten lashes except for a *ḥadd* (punishment) from the *ḥudūd* of God.”<sup>693</sup> Some jurists considered disciplining children a type of *ta‘zīr* or discretionary punishment applicable to minors, whereas *ḥadd* punishments are reserved for full legal subjects.<sup>694</sup> For example, Zakariyyā al Anṣārī defends the three strikes restriction by considering it to be *ḍarb al-ta‘zīr* or discretionary strikes.<sup>695</sup>

Whereas most premodern scholars agreed that children could not be hit more than ten times, Ibn Ṣaḥnūn cites one exception.<sup>696</sup> He mentions a tradition attributed to Sa‘īd ibn Al-Musayyib (d. 94/712), an early Mālikī authority, which states: “*Adab* is according to the extent of the sin, so perhaps discipline would exceed the *ḥadd* punishment.”<sup>697</sup> Likewise, Ibn Najīm argued that restrictions on the number of disciplinary strikes apply exclusively to husband’s disciplining wives, not fathers and teachers disciplining children.<sup>698</sup>

Just as the quantity of discipline a parent can administer is disputed; there is also disagreement over *how* to discipline. For example, Al-Shughairi writes that “[Many classical Muslim scholars]...restrict spanking to be done by the hand or light objects such as the *miswāk* (a thin flexible twig used for brushing teeth). Objects prone to cause injury are prohibited (e.g., belts, thick sticks, heavy shoes, etc.).”<sup>699</sup> Yet, some classical Muslim authors did allow for instruments more threatening than a tooth stick. For

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<sup>693</sup> Ibn Ṣaḥnūn, *Kitāb Ādāb Al- Mu‘ allimīn*, 90.

<sup>694</sup> Dien, M.Y. Izzī, “Ta‘zīr,” *EL2*.

<sup>695</sup> Al-Anṣārī, *Asnā Al-Muṭṭālib*, 3:239.

<sup>696</sup> Jackson, “Discipline and Duty,” 27n32.

<sup>697</sup> Ibn Ṣaḥnūn, *Kitāb Ādāb Al- Mu‘ allimīn*, 94.

<sup>698</sup> Ibn Najīm, *Sharḥ Kanz al-Daqā’iq. Kitāb al-Hudūd, Faṣl fī al-ta‘zīr*, 5:86.

<sup>699</sup> AlShughairi, *Positive Parenting in the Muslim Home*, 381-2.

example, Ibn Saḥnūn wrote that one can hit with “a lash or whip (*sawf*).”<sup>700</sup> Similarly, al-Ramlī implies that the same instruments can be used for both *ḥadd* punishments (on adults) and discretionary (*taʿzīr*) punishments (on minors):

...and the whip for *ḥudūd* and *taʿzīr* is between a stick (*qaḍīb*) that is [made from] a branch, or very delicate limb (*ghuṣn*) and a stick (*ʿaṣān*) that is not straight; between one that is damp/moist (*ruṭb*) and one that is desiccated (*yābis*).<sup>701</sup> Here, he describes the stick the Prophet used. On balance, he forbids using a belt that mutilates.<sup>702</sup> In contrast, Ibn al-Ḥājj argued against using the same instrument for disciplining children and implementing *ḥadd* punishments, just as one does not strike children the same number of times as for *ḥadd* punishments.<sup>703</sup>

Ibn al-Ḥājj also warns readers to avoid a common practice amongst teachers of his time—using dense sticks made from desiccated branches and cracking whips upon children. Specifically, he chides Quran teachers who engage in this practice since children carrying the great Book “are elevated above uncouth discipline, so teachers must honor them, refrain from cursing their fathers, and discipline them ‘just as the father would, with mercy and pity.’”<sup>704</sup>

#### **Rule #4 | Liability for Extreme Physical Discipline**

Are parents liable for deviant discipline? According to Ibn Najīm, fathers and teachers are not liable (*la yuḍman*) for any harm resulting from corporal punishment. Correspondingly, Ḥanafī authorities Abu Yusuf and Muḥammad [al-Shaybānī] maintained that fathers are not liable for physically disciplining their sons even if it

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<sup>700</sup> Ibn Saḥnūn, *Kitāb Ādāb Al-Muʿallimīn*, 310-312; Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 113.

<sup>701</sup> Jackson, “Discipline and Duty,” 27.

<sup>702</sup> al-Ramlī, *Nihāya Al-Muḥtāj*, 8:17-20.

<sup>703</sup> Ibn al-Ḥājj, *al-Madkhal*, 317.

<sup>704</sup> *Ibid*, 324.

results in injury.<sup>705</sup> Abū Ḥanīfa himself distinguished between normal and deviant physical discipline:

A father hit his son as part of a disciplinary punishment and ended up injuring him. One should examine [the circumstances]: if he hit him for something one does not normally punish for, or if he hit him for something one does usually punish for but exceeded the norm—in both cases he is liable for indemnity for bodily injury as well as repentance.<sup>706</sup> This passage implies that a father would not be liable for hitting his son without injuring him or exceeding “the norm”, hitting him for something one “normally” punishes for. Despite Ibn Najīm’s own position against liability, he still includes the Egyptian Ḥanafī jurist al-Shummanī’s (d. 872 AH/1467) opinion, that if the teacher beats the child in a way that is *fāḥish* (monstrous/obscene), and consequently the child dies, then he is liable.<sup>707</sup>

### **Rule #5 | Corporal Punishment as a Last Resort**

Some medieval Muslim commentators only supported corporal punishment when gentler methods fail. For example, the Persian hadith transmitter, al-Fuḍayl ibn ‘Iyād (d. 187/803) and the Kufan hadith scholar Sufyān ibn Uyaynah (d. 814) both loathed hitting children.<sup>708</sup> Instead, they preferred bribery. Nonetheless, they conceded that not everyone can afford to bribe their child nor is every child receptive to bribery. In these cases, they condone corporal punishment.<sup>709</sup> The Persian exegete Al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) similarly cautioned fathers from immediately escalating to hitting, recommending that they threaten first, just as one does not impulsively strike a recalcitrant spouse

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<sup>705</sup> Muhammad Ibn Mahmud al-Asrushani, *Jami‘ ahkam al-sighar* (Cairo: Dar al-Fadila, n.d.). English translation by Yaron Klein. [A collection of the laws relating to minors; foll. 1-132.] Brockelmann i. 380, Suppl. I. 653.

<sup>706</sup> Ibid.

<sup>707</sup> Ibn Najīm, *Sharḥ Kanz al-Daqā’ iq. Kitāb al-Hudūd, Faṣl fī al-ta’zīr*, 5:86.

<sup>708</sup> This reference may possibly also be referring to Sufyan al-Thawrī (d. 778).

<sup>709</sup> Al-Ḥaṭṭāb, *Mūwahib al-Jalīl*, 2:54-58.

before warning her.<sup>710</sup> Likewise, Al-Ghazālī recommended that teachers employ “hinting” and “gentle advice” instead of shouting and “direct censure and reprimand.” Although he allowed for occasional restrained corporal punishment, he “preferred threat and intimidation (*rahba*).”<sup>711</sup>

Rather than recommending corporal punishment as a last resort, Ibn al-Ḥājj contends that different disciplinary strategies are necessary to address children’s different temperaments:

Whoever violates [school time allocated for slate writing, presenting, reviewing, and perfecting recitation for some unnecessary reason, then meet him as he deserves. For some children a frown may suffice. And others are prevented by crude words and threats, but some *can only be restrained by beating*. And discourage each based on his ability.<sup>712</sup> [Translation and emphasis mine]

Similarly, al-Qarāfi implies that disciplinary strategies must be tailored to individual temperaments. Whereas physical discipline may benefit one child, it may harm another, and “if it is not beneficial, then it is corrupt....”<sup>713</sup> Al-Qarāfi held that if threatening a child was more effective than physical punishment, then “*ta’ dīb* is prohibited absolutely.”<sup>714</sup> Therefore, both Al-Qarāfi and Ibn al-Ḥājj had a nuanced approach to corporal punishment that called for discipline.

### **Rule #6 | Frighten with the Father**

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<sup>710</sup> Al-Shirbīnī, *Mughnī al-Muḥtāj*, 1:131. In contrast to these medieval Muslim opinions encouraging gradual escalation in corporal punishment, Krueger writes against spanking children as a last resort, since she feels it makes parents more inclined to hit out of anger or desperation. Instead, she advises a systematic method of swatting small children’s clothed bottoms when they fail to disobey.

<sup>711</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 119. See also al-Ghazālī, *Al-Adab fī l-Dīn*, 134-135.

<sup>712</sup> Ibn al-Ḥājj, *al-Madkhal*, 2:305-334. Here, Ibn al-Ḥājj sanctions corporally punishing for children engaged in a supererogatory act of Quran learning and memorization. He describes the various punishments available to the Quran school teacher and notably authorizes corporal punishment for circumstances beyond prayer abandonment.

<sup>713</sup> al-Ramli, *Nihāya Al-Muḥtāj*, 8:21.

<sup>714</sup> Qarāfi, Shihāb al-Dīn al-. *Al-Dakhīrah (The Stored Treasures)*. Edited by Muḥammad Bū Khubza. 1st ed. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1994, 12:119-120; al-Ramli, *Nihāya Al-Muḥtāj*, 8:21.



Although mothers are tasked with disciplining before *tamyīz*, fathers are called to reinforce them. Once the feminized period of *ḥaḍāna*, and *riḍā‘a* were over, the father and the *mu‘allim* (or *mu‘addib*) *in locus parentis* undertook discipline and education.<sup>715</sup> For instance, al-Shirbīnī reports that the male guardian (*walī*, that is, the father, grandfather, the child’s legal guardian or the qāḍī’s deputy) must command children to pray and chastise them for leaving it.<sup>716</sup> Al-Ramlī elaborates that fathers, grandfathers, and rulers (*Hākīm*) bear the responsibility of disciplining children. Ibn al-Ḥājj’s advised that “the mother, when reproofing children, should frighten him by [threatening to mention the matter] to their father.”<sup>717</sup> Fathers are to channel God’s wrath (*tarhīb*).<sup>718</sup>

Ideally, fathers do not shoulder the burden of disciplining children alone. Just as, in the past, Muslim women could rely on the help of wet nurses to assist in rearing children during *ḥaḍāna*, fathers could rely on the figure of the *mu‘addib* or *murabbī* to assist in disciplining the child after *tamyīz*.<sup>719</sup> In this manner, parents outsourced discipline—including physical discipline—to teachers.<sup>720</sup> For example, the Caliph Harun al-Rashīd (d. 193/809) told his son’s teacher, Khalaf ibn Aḥmar, “Let no hour pass in which you do not seize the opportunity to teach him something useful... As much as possible, correct him kindly and gently. If he does not want it that way, you must then use severity and harshness.”<sup>721</sup> Similarly, Al-Qābīsī allowed pupils to monitor one

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<sup>715</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 51, 124 and 148.

<sup>716</sup> al-Shirbīnī, *Mughnī al-Muḥtāj*, 1:131.

<sup>717</sup> Ibn al-Ḥājj, *al-Madkhal*, 4:297; This is later turned into a line of verse in al-Ramlī’s *Riyāḍat al-Sibyān*; Ahmed, *Educating Children*, 23-25n18.

<sup>718</sup> Keller, *Sydney Suhba*, 3.3

<sup>719</sup> Zachs, “Growing Consciousness of the Child,” 119. Zachs notes that for Muslims and Arabs, “the marital relationship was complementary and not one of equality. In fact, mothering and fathering were constructed along clearly gendered lines defining the mother as the nurturer best equipped to tend babies and young children, and the father as the provider best suited to support his children and protect the older ones.”

<sup>720</sup> Jackson, “Discipline and Duty,” 25-6.

<sup>721</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, 425.

another and even administer physical discipline.<sup>722</sup> The historian Fruma Zachs explains that in premodern Arab societies, fathers cooperated with their sons' educators and teachers were regarded as an essential part of holistic *tarbiya*.<sup>723</sup> Correspondingly, Ibn Ṣaḥnūn likens teachers to parents, implying the same rights to corporally punish.<sup>724</sup> Ibn Najīm suggested the communal responsibility to discipline children when he said that orphan's guardians should hit them for that which one hits one's own son.<sup>725</sup> Similarly, Al-Ghazālī called for teachers to treat students as if they were their own children. For medieval Muslim educationists, perfecting children's comportment was a public, communal project in which fathers enlisted other *mu'addib* "alloparents" to instill pious practices.<sup>726</sup>

That corporal punishment would occur in schools was taken for granted.<sup>727</sup> While advising schoolmasters, al-Qābisi implies that some teachers went too far when requiring students to provide the instruments of their own discipline. He writes, "It is the teacher's responsibility to buy the whip and the *falaqa* (bastinado), not the students."<sup>728</sup> Later, Imam al-Nawawī also allowed parents to delegate the task of teaching basic jurisprudence and literature to other teachers who are to be paid out of the child's wealth. These teachers are explicitly allowed to corporally punish.<sup>729</sup> Additionally, Ibn Najīm wrote that the *mu'allim* (teacher) enjoys a derivative right to

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<sup>722</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 117n183.

<sup>723</sup> Zachs, "Growing Consciousness of the Child," 119. Zachs explains that just as it was customary for Arab fathers to punish children as "part of their patriarchal role," the role of *kuttāb* teachers encompassed corporally punishing their pupils.

<sup>724</sup> Ibn Ṣaḥnūn, *Kitāb Ādāb Al- Mu'allimīn*, 88-93.

<sup>725</sup> Ibn Najīm, *Sharḥ Kanz al-Daqā'iq*, 5:86.

<sup>726</sup> Sarah Blaffer Hrdy. *Mothers and Others*. Vol. First Harvard University Press pbk. edition, Harvard University Press, 2011, 22. An evolutionary anthropologist, Hrdy defines an alloparent "(from the Greek 'allo' for 'other than') as "any group member other than the parents who helps them rear their young."

<sup>727</sup> Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 294.

<sup>728</sup> Fishbein, "Al-Qābisi," 64.

<sup>729</sup> Al-Shirbīnī, *Mughnī al-Muḥtāj*, 1;131; Ayoubi, *Rearing Gendered Souls*, 19.

corporally punish because "he is like a slave owner who is made the owner of the child (*tamlīk*)."<sup>730</sup> He contends that teachers can hit children because they have been deputized by fathers in the child's interest (*maṣlaḥa*).<sup>731</sup> These ideas around delegating corporal punishment persisted into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thānavī implied that moderate corporal punishment was acceptable when he advised parents, teachers, and tutors: "If you have to punish someone else's children, do not beat them with a heavy stick or kick them or hit them with your fist."<sup>732</sup> The Shāfi'ī Damascene scholar Shaykh 'Abd al-Wakīl Durubī (d. 1993) similarly allowed teachers to strike students with the guardian's permission.<sup>733</sup>

## ***Part II: Reclassifying Children's Discipline as Child Abuse***

As we have seen, the *'ulamā'* viewed some forms of corporal punishment as lawful and sometimes even beneficial. If rules were followed, classical Muslim authors did not view corporally punishing children as deviant. In contrast, AMPE either downplay physical discipline's permissibility or condemn it outright. These shifts may be due to concerns about the new classification of child abuse—a classification which, according to Ian Hacking, emerged in the early 1960s when physicians first began referring to potential signs of abuse in pediatric x-rays.<sup>734</sup> I argue that most AMPE seek to reform parents who physically discipline. AMPE accomplish this by either reinterpreting classical texts in ways that remove authorization of physical pain or remain silent on

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<sup>730</sup> Ibn Najīm, *Sharḥ Kanz al-Daqā'iq*, 5:53.

<sup>731</sup> Ibid, 5:86.

<sup>732</sup> Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, 346.

<sup>733</sup> Ibn al-Naqīb and Keller, *The Reliance of the Traveler*, 619 (017.4).

<sup>734</sup> Hacking, "The Looping Effect of Humankind," 308-309.

aspects of those texts that take physical discipline for granted. Meanwhile, AMPE prescribe new disembodied modes of subjecting children.

### ***Apologists for Normative Discipline***

Before exploring examples of the reclassification of physical discipline as child abuse, it is important to note that some contemporary Muslim parent educators continue to defend corporal punishment that is in line with the aforementioned rules. For example, ‘Ālimah Umm Ihsan, a *SeekersGuidance* writer, explains that parents are allowed “to lightly smack their children in certain circumstances and with restrictive conditions.”<sup>735</sup> Perhaps inspired by the psychologist Dianne Baumrind’s typology, Umm Ihsan contends that Islam guides parents towards the golden mean of authoritative parenting. This mean lies between two extreme parenting styles: permissive parenting that proscribes all corporal punishment and authoritarian parenting that harms children.<sup>736</sup> Similarly, Bilal Phillips supports the “systematic method of disciplining our children” since it is “the right of children to be disciplined properly.”<sup>737</sup> Philips does not elaborate on what proper discipline entails, but his contemporary Salafist colleagues have said that after guiding children towards right action and issuing warnings, “hitting (*al-ḍarb*) is a method of *tarbiya*” especially when it benefits or protects children.<sup>738</sup>

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<sup>735</sup> ‘Ālimah Umm Ihsan. “Explaining a Hadith on Disciplining Children.” *SeekersGuidance* (blog), August 17, 2010. <https://seekersguidance.org/answers/general-counsel/explaining-a-hadith-on-disciplining-children/>. She states “There are various opinions of how to discipline one’s children. Some groups advocate physical forms of disciplinary action, while other groups completely oppose of it. The Islamic way is a middle ground between these two ideologies.”

<sup>736</sup> Baumrind, Diana. “Authoritative Parenting Revisited: History and Current Status.” In *Authoritative Parenting: Synthesizing Nurturance and Discipline for Optimal Child Development.*, edited by Robert E. Larzelere, Amanda Sheffield Morris, and Amanda W. Harrist, 11–34. Washington: American Psychological Association, 2013. Notably, Baumrind did not consider corporal punishment harmful if administered in a controlled manner.

<sup>737</sup> Philips, *Seven Habits of Successfully Raising Muslim Children*.

<sup>738</sup> Hilālī, *Sharḥ Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn*, 1: 380-385.

One of the most sustained apologies for classical views on physical discipline comes from Umm Sahl and Nuh Keller. The former reminds mothers not to confuse their own anger and frustration with their child-rearing. In response to this, one mother shared that when she hit, it made her child more “*aṣabī*” or aggressive and less cooperative. In response, Umm Sahl differentiates between true discipline and ego-driven anger wherein the parent’s “monster *nafs*” becomes “mixed” into their parenting and ultimately “disturbs” the child.<sup>739</sup> She says that this ersatz discipline violates children’s dignity and self-respect. Instead, she teaches that correct discipline involves frequently reassuring children that they are loved but that wrong actions will be consistently (and physically) punished. She clarifies that children whose parents have raised them well from the start, (by carefully selecting spouses and monitoring toddler behavior) do not need to strike their children.

Given the prevalence of working motherhood and what she considers poor child-rearing choices, Umm Sahl maintains that most parents have inevitably erred and thus most children require “a little spank here and there.”<sup>740</sup>

Based on their observations of their Anglophone disciples, they consider today’s mothers to be unprecedentedly inept and lacking common sense around discipline. They identify the root of this ineptitude in sociological reasons, such as the smaller family size of modern Muslims living in Western countries and the rise of parenting philosophies that denounce stern discipline. Given the fact that American women are delaying childbearing, and families are having fewer children (averaging 1.9 children), they claim that mothers have become slavishly devoted to the few children they have. Similarly,

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<sup>739</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children,” 23.1 and 2.1.

<sup>740</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children,” 24.1.

Keller defends the need for discipline by noting that Muslim families traditionally raised between four and six children and thus modern Western parenting philosophies tailored for one or two children do not work for larger families. Keller advises his disciples, “You can be a helicopter parent for one child, but you can’t raise more than that in this fashion.”<sup>741</sup> He considers parenting prescriptions that rely on consensus building and conversation rather than physical discipline as simply unfeasible for larger families, which function only when parents “rule with an iron fist.”<sup>742</sup> Thus, a mother’s “wack” is the most economical, efficient way to raising a gaggle of children.<sup>743</sup> Umm Sahl explains that ideal households with strong authoritative parents yield children who know their place and how to act accordingly, thus allowing mothers to have more children. Mothering in this way ceases to require the emotional labor involved in micromanagement, exhausting discussions over chores and elaborate, costly rewards. She recasts corporal punishment to liberate mothers from the demands of modern intensive mothering.

As I will explain later, Nuh Keller and Umm Sahl consider physical discipline as one necessary method to help children master their lower selves, keep the company of saints (*awliyā*), and attain felicity. With this goal in mind, Umm Sahl takes the more conservative classical opinions on children’s physical chastisement. These include encouraging parents to physically correct children even before they have reached *tamyīz* and striking them more than three times for certain offenses.<sup>744</sup> For example, she

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<sup>741</sup> Keller, Noah Ha Mim. *India Women’s Session*. Question and Answer. Vol. 3.3. 10 vols. India Suhba, 2013. <https://untotheone.com/index/disciplining-children/>.

<sup>742</sup> Keller, *Sydney Suhba Women’s Session*. 3.3.

<sup>743</sup> Ibid. He cautions that the mother is the one who should execute punishments since “the father’s hand is too strong.”

<sup>744</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children,” 6.5.

recommends corporally punishing children who harm others by giving “them an aggression they wouldn’t forget...—[a] good slap with a spatula that hurt. They need to know that they can’t hit other children!”<sup>745</sup> She encourages mothers to physically correct children as young as two so that they eat while sitting, say the *basimala*, and eat with their right hand. She reasons that physical discipline helps children internalize prophetic manners so that they develop aptitudes necessary to understand “bigger, deeper things.”<sup>746</sup> Whereas she encourages discipline to commence at age two, age four is prime time:

If [your four-year-old] spits [at] someone, then reprimand him harshly. Tell him he cannot play with his toys for a week. If he spits at somebody again, he gets a smack on the hand [and he is told harshly,] “Don’t spit at people! That is very bad manners!” A four-year old who is spitting at someone knows exactly what he’s doing...<sup>747</sup>

She warns that if mothers do not discipline during these malleable years, they will face more difficulty later.

### ***Emphasizing the Prophet’s Tender, Loving Tarbiya***

Although, like Umm Sahl some scholars and parent educators continue to reiterate the occasional need for (nondeviant) physical discipline, most AMPE and my interlocutors categorically denounce corporally punishing children. Perhaps in their attempt to present Islam as a modern, noncoercive religion, they partake in the stigmatization of physically disciplining children. Parent educators contribute to reclassifying physical discipline as child abuse by reinterpreting traditional source texts on children’s discipline.

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<sup>745</sup> Keller, *Sydney Suhba Women’s Session*. 3.3 and 4.3.

<sup>746</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children,” 3.2.

<sup>747</sup> Ibid, 31.2.

When discussing children’s discipline, AMPE emphasize the Prophet’s gentle, tender, and loving example. They mention a tradition narrated by ‘Ā’ishah bt. Abī Bakr (d. 58/678) which states, "the Prophet of God never hit anyone with his hand, neither a woman nor a servant, except when struggling in the path of God."<sup>748</sup> Alluding to this tradition, Hamza Yusuf mentioned another hadith, “the Prophet never raised his hand to any man, child, servant.... never...”

In their lectures Farhat Hashmi and Hamza Yusuf offer further evidence of prophetic mercy towards children by retelling the experience of Anas ibn Mālik (d. 93/712), whose mother sent him to serve the Prophet as a young child. Anas reports that the Prophet never once struck him, interrogate him, nor show any anger or displeasure, even when he defied him.<sup>749</sup> In Hashmi’s version, the Prophet simply asked him if he had completed tasks, teaching the importance of gentle follow up with children. In ‘Ālimah Maha’s retelling, when the Prophet asked Anas why he ignored his chores, Anas replied that he saw some other children playing and so decided to join them, the Prophet simply dismissed the matter and did not say, “I told you to do that, so how come you didn’t do it?”<sup>750</sup> Hamza Yusuf and Keshavarzi repeat this hadith to remind parents that their efforts to discipline should be balanced with gentleness and forbearance. Keshavarzi explains that had the Prophet asked the child “why did you not do this?” no child would have a good response, thus there is no purpose to this line of questioning.

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<sup>748</sup> Muḥammad ibn ‘Isā at-Tirmidhī. *A Portrait of the Prophet as Seen by His Contemporaries: Ash-shamā’ il al-Muḥammadiyya*, trans. Muhtar Holland (Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2017), 263; *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 7: 165; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:1447; See Hanson, *Nurturing Children*.

<sup>749</sup> Hanson, Hamza Yusuf, “How the Prophet Treated Children,” YouTube video, 4:45, Jun 7, 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLzjOmYe5c8&list=PLbkglHO7AWNxXFE8aqpBFEOQt-5\\_OqjTY&index=4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLzjOmYe5c8&list=PLbkglHO7AWNxXFE8aqpBFEOQt-5_OqjTY&index=4); Bukhārī, *Adab al-Mufrad*, Hadith #134.

<sup>750</sup> Sadiq, Maha. “Essentials for a Muslim Civilization: Raising Our Children.”



In another example, both Farhat Hashmi and Hamza Yusuf describe the Prophet's affection towards children by recounting a story of a pet's death. When Anas ibn Mālik's younger brother Abu 'Umayr ibn Abī Ṭalḥa was mourning the death of his sparrow, Nughayr. The Prophet consoled him by asking, "*Yā abā 'Umayr mā fa'ala al-Nughayr?*"— "Oh Abu Umayr, what has befallen Nughayr?"<sup>751</sup> Hashmi adds that the Prophet showed children exceptional affection, saluting them on the street and taking an interest in their interests. He would stick his tongue out at children and engage them in water play.<sup>752</sup> Lightheartedness, not sternness, was his hallmark.

When the Prophet did discipline, he would do it with the utmost tenderness. Hashmi advises mothers to heed the Prophet's treatment of Abu Maḥdhūra. As an adolescent, he imitated and mocked Bilāl's call to prayer (*adhān*). When the Prophet overheard him, he did not rebuke him but rather placed his hand on his head and supplicated for him. Abu Maḥdhūra eventually became Makkah's muezzin.<sup>753</sup> Like Hamza Yusuf and Hashmi, Keshavarzi also remind parents about the Prophet's gentleness towards children.<sup>754</sup> He explained that the Prophet was ridiculed by the Quraysh for showing affection towards his grandsons (a radical departure from the standards of pre-Islamic Arab masculinity). When interrogated about his affection, the Prophet famously retorted, "He is not of us who does not have mercy on our young children..."<sup>755</sup> Hashmi recounts a similar tradition, but with the Prophet replying, "What can I do if Allah has taken away mercy from you?"<sup>756</sup> She notes that the Prophet showed

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<sup>751</sup> Hanson, "How the Prophet Treated Children;" al-Asqalānī, *Fath al-Barī*, 10:5850.

<sup>752</sup> Hashmi, *Parenting in Islam | MBH Summit 2016*.

<sup>753</sup> Ibid.

<sup>754</sup> I discuss other examples of the Prophet's affection toward the young in chapter 3.

<sup>755</sup> *al-Jāmi' al-Kabīr (Sunan al-Tirmidhī)*, 3:1920. *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 43:171; Musnad Ahmad 2:175, 207, Bukhārī, *Adab al-Mufrad*, 355-57, 363, *Musnad al-Jāmi'*, 11:192-193.

<sup>756</sup> *Sunan Ibn Mājah*: 33: 3665; Hashmi, *Parenting in Islam | MBH Summit 2016*.

utmost respect and affection for his daughter Fatima, as well, standing to honor her when she entered a room and kissing her.

These stories about the honor and gentle deference shown to children of both genders are used by parent educators to balance other narrations that call for sterner treatment. An example of the latter is the Prophetic injunction, “Hang a whip where members of the household can see it.” AMPE use the examples of prophetic mercy to contextualize this hadith.<sup>757</sup> They cite the medieval philologist Ibn al-Anbārī’s (d. 577/1181) commentary, which explains that it “is not about beating (children) with the whip because the Prophet never ordered that. Rather Ibn al-Anbārī maintains that the Prophet simply instructs parents to be vigilant in teaching children *adab*.”<sup>758</sup> During her parenting workshop, the ‘Ālimah disassociated the “hang the whip” report from corporal punishment:

The Prophet said [to hang the whip because] this is more effective than disciplining them. The theory behind this hadith is that if [a child] has bad intentions, just reminding them [with] the whip will help them refrain from bad behavior. Instead of waiting for an evil act to be committed, it is making sure children understand that there will be consequences for evil acts and then being consistent with that...”<sup>759</sup>

Perplexed by this explanation, one mother asked the ‘Ālimah, “Does this mean we should literally hang a whip in the house?” ‘Ālimah Maha clarified that parents could show their children anything symbolic of power, such as pulling out a stick or a rolling pin. She explained that this threatening gesture might deter rule breaking. Umm Ihsan echoes this reading of the hang-your-whip hadith, which she interprets as justifying “maltreating children” but rather emphasizing “the dire need for parents to actively

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<sup>757</sup> Ibid.

<sup>758</sup> Ibid.

<sup>759</sup> Sadiq, Maha. “Essentials for a Muslim Civilization: Raising Our Children.”

engage in their children’s lives.” Although the hadith may imply that the whip is sometimes used—these contemporary commentaries disavow the possibility of actual physical punishment.<sup>760</sup>

In contrast to commentators who interpret this hadith pacifistically, Umm Sahl explains that whip-hanging only serves as an effective deterrent if the whip has been used, at least once. She credits her father’s effective child-rearing to a stick that he would point to whenever there was too much rowdiness. Her shaykh established household order simply by placing his hand on his belt, and when that happens “everything calms down, all it takes is that symbolic gesture....”<sup>761</sup> Similarly, anthropologist Rudolph Ware cautions that corporal punishment’s role in *tarbiya* should not be exaggerated since in Senegambian Quran schools the lash was “often enough...there as a formality, a symbol of the school, and mostly as an idle threat.”<sup>762</sup>

In addition to the hang-a-whip report, recall that the hadith likening parents to shepherds implies children’s subjection.<sup>763</sup> In his modern commentary, Saleem al-Hilālī (b. 1957) explains that the report enjoins parents to discipline (*ta’ dīb*) and develop their children (*tarbiya*) through reprimands and rebukes, thereby preventing them from prohibited acts.<sup>764</sup> The hadith’s central metaphor warrants a parent’s right to discipline as a shepherd disciplines the flock. Shepherds need crooks to retrieve and protect wayward sheep, underscoring the association between physical discipline and care work.<sup>765</sup> The report thus implies both hierarchy (the shepherd’s vertical relationship to

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<sup>760</sup> Umm Ihsan. “Explaining a Hadith on Disciplining Children.”

<sup>761</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children,” 25.1.

<sup>762</sup> Ware, *The Walking Quran*, 43.

<sup>763</sup> This hadith is mentioned on page 212.

<sup>764</sup> Hilālī, *Sharḥ Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn*, 1:380-385.

<sup>765</sup> Hays, *Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, 23-25.

his flock) and the potential for pain (ensnaring the wayward sheep’s neck)—out of guidance. While addressing parents, Ustādha Hosai Mojaddedi lectures that this report implies that mothers (and fathers) must learn how to wield a staff as shepherds of their subordinates. She asks the audience, “How is a parent supposed to be accountable for the flock?” On Facebook, she posts that parents need to “STOP giving up” their power, but she stops short of prescribing corporal punishment.

### ***Defanging the Discipline Hadith***

Detractors of corporal punishment reinterpret the discipline hadith through interpretive gymnastics.<sup>766</sup> They adopt several strategies to interpret the hadith nonviolently. The first is to stress that the hadith does not require striking children but merely permits it. This resolves the tension between the prophet’s gentle demeanor and his sterner statements. Abdullah Bin Hamid Ali explains:

As for the hadith..., “Order [children] to make *ṣalāt* at seven and hit them for it at ten,” this order does not indicate an obligation to hit them for not praying starting at age ten. This command indicates the ‘permissibility’ of ‘hitting’ them for not doing so.

Hamid Ali further notes that “Even if [ten-year-olds] refuse [to pray] there would be no sin on him or her unless they have become pubescent.” His analysis raises an important question about the objective of corporal punishment. Is it used for prayer training or for punishment? Hamid Ali insists that because children are not accountable, physical punishment is not warranted. He may draw from the Shāfi‘ī preacher al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī’s (d. 1071) opinion that “the command to pray and striking for it is for *riyāḍa*, not obligation.” Lane’s Lexicon defines *riyāḍa* as training and subjecting (a colt

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<sup>766</sup>In her 2011 article, Ayesha Chaudhry discusses a similar tension between the Prophet’s nonviolent example towards his wife and the Qur’anic Injunction on Wife-Beating. See Chaudhry, “I Wanted One Thing and God Wanted Another,” 421.

or a beast) or a child. Thus, he views corporal punishment as a permissible but not obligatory method of subjection. Hamid Ali clarifies that even if the discipline hadith should be interpreted as a command to hit, “it would merely mean that one is to hit the child ‘one time’ since that would suffice to fulfill the Prophet’s command and remove guilt from a person.”<sup>767</sup> Like Hamid Ali, Farhat Hashmi tells women not to hit their prepubescent children.<sup>768</sup> Alshugairi also subscribes to the same interpretation:

While some scholars extrapolated [the discipline hadith] as mandating parents to spank their children at the age of ten if they neglect their prayers, others posited that the hadith merely allowed for the action if necessary. *One view mandates, the other merely permits* [emphasis mine]<sup>769</sup>

Aside from curtailing the discipline hadith’s application, another way contemporary AMPE reinterpret the hadith is retranslation. Perhaps following feminist exegetes who argue for alternative meanings of “*ḍarb*” in Q4:34, al-Shugairi highlights the verbs polysemous nature, noting that it is not only defined as spanking or hitting but also “guidance or separation.”<sup>770</sup> Like al-Shugairi, rather than use the verb “strike” to translate “*ḍarb*,” El-Haddad prefers the more ambiguous term “punish.” On PowerPoint, she translates the discipline hadith as follows: “Teach a boy/[girl] *ṣalāt* (the prayer) when he attains the age of seven years and punish him (if he does not offer it) at ten.”<sup>771</sup> She asked the audience: “What does “to punish” mean here? To teach or discipline out of a place of security and confidence, not out of a place of desperation.” By

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<sup>767</sup> Hamid Ali, Abdullah. “Nursing and Child Discipline– Maliki Fiqh QA,” June 11, 2019. <http://www.lamppostproductions.com/nursing-and-child-discipline/>.

<sup>768</sup> Hashmi, *Parenting in Islam* | MBH Summit 2016.

<sup>769</sup> Al-Shugairi, *Positive Parenting the Muslim Home*, 380-381.

<sup>770</sup> Ibid, 380-383.

<sup>771</sup> El-Haddad, Heba. “Spiritual Development in Children.” Presented at the Keys to Successful Parenting of Muslim Children, Chicago, Illinois, May 24, 2017. <https://khalilcenter.com/course/keys-to-successful-parenting-of-muslim-children/>. She provided this translation: Play with your children for seven (years), discipline him [her] for seven (years), and be his[her] companion for seven (years), then leave him after that.”

translating *wa-ḍribūhum* here as “to punish them” rather than “to hit them”, El-Haddad bypasses the corporal punishment debate and implies that parents who corporally punish are insecure and desperate. She further contextualizes the discipline hadith by mentioning the heptad report:

For the first seven years the child learns Islamic values through guided and non-guided play. From ages eight to fourteen, the child learns Islamic concepts, beliefs and values through more formal instruction, teaching, and discipline. From ages fifteen through twenty-one, the parents befriend child[ren] after having built a solid foundation.<sup>772</sup>

El-Haddad avoids discussing corporal punishment or specifying precisely what discipline entails.

Although *ḍarb* is used in some versions of the discipline hadith, the word *ta'dīb* is used in others. Parent educators also discuss *ta'dīb* (education) in ways that remove physical discipline from the term's semantic field. The verbal noun of the root 'dā-bā', *ta'dīb* denotes the cultivation of a child's intellect, morality, and spiritual development. It also refers to discipline and punishment.<sup>773</sup> In hadith literature, the Prophet also used the verbal noun *ta'dīb* to refer to taming horses.<sup>774</sup> According to Naquib al-Attas, when the term is extended to human beings, it refers to taming and disciplining the irascible soul.<sup>775</sup> Lane's Lexicon defines *ta'dīb* as teaching someone *adab*, that is politeness and manners. Lane explains that it is “... the discipline of the mind and the acquisition of good qualities and attributes of the mind or soul” and also signifies chastising,

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<sup>772</sup> Ibid.

<sup>773</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 26-28.

<sup>774</sup> *Al-Nasa'i, Sunan*, 4: 6.

<sup>775</sup> “Al-Attas' Concept of Ta'dib as True and Comprehensive Education in Islam - Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud.” 2009. SeekersGuidance (blog). December 19, 2009, note 40.

<https://seekersguidance.org/articles/general-articles/al-attas-concept-of-tadib-as-true-and-comprehensive-education-in-islam-wan-mohd-nor-wan-daud/>.

correcting, and punishing the recipient of *ta'dīb* when he is engaged in evil conduct “because discipline, or chastisement, is a means of inviting a person to what is properly termed *al-adab*.”<sup>776</sup> Accordingly, *ta'dīb* implies the process of socializing a Muslim child into a prophetic adult.<sup>777</sup> The term is used in relation to both children and wives. Jurists allowed for husbands to chastise (*ta'dīb*) their wives if they infringed upon God's rights (e.g., by leaving the prayer or the major purificatory bath (*ghusl l-janāba*), just as fathers were allowed to chastise (*ta'dīb*) children.<sup>778</sup>

Medieval Muslim educationists may have assumed that a child's socialization occasionally required corporal punishment, that moderate, sharia-compliant physical chastisement was an inseparable and effective part of *ta'dīb*.<sup>779</sup> Hassim writes that “hitting children as a means of discipline” was a recurrent theme in medieval Muslim writings on *ta'dīb*.<sup>780</sup> He states:

...the idea of hitting children within limits remained...no medieval Islamic texts or historical records suggest that this form of discipline ever became socially unacceptable. The idea of hitting as a last resort was always consistent, with educationists recommending the use of other forms of discipline first. This high level of consistency...shows there was no need to change the style of motivating and disciplining children that was possibly effective in its time.<sup>781</sup>

The term *ta'dīb* implies that good manners can be reinforced through chastisement, and that chastisement can be physical. However, when addressing Americans, some Muslim parenting experts discuss *ta'dīb* in ways that ignore its corporal meanings. They describe *ta'dīb* as a mental process in which parents and teachers appeal to children's

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<sup>776</sup> Lane, *Lexicon*, 1:34; Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 27n103.

<sup>777</sup> Prout, *Constructing Childhood*, 9-12.

<sup>778</sup> 'Ilayish, ed. 1984. “Sharḥ Manḥ al-Jalīl 'alā Mukhtaṣar al-'Allāma Khalīl.” In , 1st ed. Vol. 3. Beirut-Lebanon: Dār al-Fikr, 111. See also 3: 550.

<sup>779</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 198; Fredericks, *Educating Children*, 65-67.

<sup>780</sup> Ibid.

<sup>781</sup> Ibid; Aries, *Centuries of Childhood*, 258-9.”

reason. For example, Afeefa Syeed, the cofounder of a well-renowned American Muslim full-time school, wrote this regarding the heptad report:

The second seven years of the child’s life are the years of discipline and learning. At around the age of seven, children reach what is called the “age of discretion” roughly equivalent to what others have called the “age of reason,” when children can discern between right and wrong and begin to make ethical decisions. From age seven to fourteen, or the “age of sponsorship,” the child learns Islamic manners, the consequences of behavior, and how each of us is connected to the other. Parents and community leaders coach children in how to perform the pillars of Islam. During this time, children start to be disciplined for not performing the Islamic prayer, *ṣalāt*.<sup>782</sup>

Syeed translates *ta’ dīb* here as learning and teaching Islamic manners as well as behavioral consequences. She does not elaborate practical steps for inculcating manners, nor does she specify what consequences children should face for noncompliance. In this way she too avoids discussing corporal punishment.

Like El-Haddad and Syeed, Fredericks defines *ta’ dīb* as “putting a thing in the right place.” He also defines it as “teaching the child to have good *adab*, which can refer to manners and to possessing good ethics and character.” He also defines *riyāḍā*, an umbrella term under which *ta’ dīb* falls:

*Riyāḍā* is something you practice over and over till [sic] you master it. [It] is also about teaching the child discipline. Disciplining children is not about beating them as punishment. It is about teaching them to keep certain routines, e.g., washing your hands before you eat, enter[ing] the toilet with your left foot, and leaving it with your right foot.<sup>783</sup>

Fredericks dissociates *riyāḍā* (training) from corporal punishment. He preserves the meaning of training with embodied practices and habits such as beginning virtuous

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<sup>782</sup> Afeefa Syeed, “Children and the Five Pillars of Islam,” in *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality*, 299.

<sup>783</sup> Fredericks, Abdul Aziz Ahmed. “Educating Children: Riyadatul Sibyan.” Facebook, February 18, 2017. <https://www.facebook.com/475326712673192/photos/a.475564875982709/586026594936536>.



actions with the right side of the body but omits physical discipline from this process.

Like Fredericks, Faraz Rabbani similarly defines *ta'dīb* by decoupling the term from corporal punishment:

The *ta'dīb*—[it is] not a type of parental imprisonment, [*Ta'dīb* is] understood to be purposeful...The way you discipline a child is to instill *adab* within the child. What is *adab*? It is an inward attitude, an inclination towards what is good and [true]...that is expressed in having the right conduct, attitude, and response in any given circumstances. [This] good attitude results in good action. *Ta'dīb* [is the process by which we] want to instill in [the] child [the] capacity to act and respond right in any circumstance—that is the purpose of discipline. The means can be many, but discipline is not punitive, it is meant to be transformative.... That's how one nurtures prayer.<sup>784</sup>

Rabbani distinguishes between the meaning of *ta'dīb* and punitive discipline. Once again, he does not detail ways to foster an inward disposition towards good in children.

In a similar fashion, Hamid Ali translates '*yu'addibuhum* in the heptad report, which he attributes to 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab as "to teach them manners." He too removed any trace of physical discipline from his translation.<sup>785</sup>

In addition to stressing the prophetic example and highlighting alternative definitions for *ta'dīb*, some parent educators warn American Muslims that corporal punishment can amount to child abuse in certain jurisdictions, or, at the least, invite suspicion from Departments of Children and Family Services.<sup>786</sup> Hamza Yusuf warns his audience that they "have to be careful in this country."<sup>787</sup> Similarly, Bilal Phillips also

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<sup>784</sup> Rabbani, Faraz. *How Do We Encourage Our Children to Pray, and at What Age?* Toronto, Canada, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHtE2oOGYqI>.

<sup>785</sup> Hamid Ali, "Nursing and Child Discipline" He translates the heptad report as follows: "Play with them for seven [years], teach them manners for seven [years], and let them enjoy your companionship for seven [years]."

<sup>786</sup> For example, in Illinois, it is legal for parents to discipline their children by using corporal punishment. However, the statute considers a child to be abused if the parents inflict "excessive corporal punishment." "Illinois General Assembly - Illinois Compiled Statutes." n.d. Accessed February 21, 2020. <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/fulltext.asp?DocName=070504050K2-3>.

<sup>787</sup> Hanson, *Being Kind to Women And Children*.

cautions parents about corporally punishing children while living as religious minorities:

Parents who raise good righteous kids may have to hit them before they are ten, but the point is that it should be properly done... [You need to] be consistent in how you deal with them, ...and of course where children can be taken away from you if it is found they are hit...you have to be very prudent in how you apply this.<sup>788</sup>

Like Hamza Yusuf and Bilal Philips, Fredericks also warns parents about the gaze of social workers, public school teachers, doctors, and the broader secular publics. He writes:

A growing number of countries, including Denmark, Israel, and Germany have passed laws prohibiting parents from hitting their children. When delivering training on this book in Denmark, the politicization of the issue was clear. If I were to quote any Islamic source permitting or appearing to encourage hitting children, I would be in conflict with the law of the land and would 'prove Islam is an alien culture that is incompatible with the West.' The discussion is no longer about effective parenting, but about where we stand in the 'clash of cultures'.

For the first time in his commentary on *Riyāḍat al-Sibyān*, Fredericks openly disagrees with the text:

I fear that this is the area where my upbringing and training as a teacher may bring me into conflict with Muslim cultural norms more than any other topic in this book... I never hit my children. I was never hit by my parents or by my sheikhs. In fact, the only corporal punishment I received was at my English Grammar School. My experience of *tarbiya* from my parents and sheikhs was built on love and mercy. These early personal experiences undoubtedly shaped my interpretation of these principles. I later learned that the experience of most Muslims attending traditional madrasas, mosques, and supplementary schools may have been very different to mine. Many early migrant communities tried to replicate the education of their homelands. As a consequence, many young British Muslim children saw the mosque as a backward, dirty place where sitting on the floor was the norm and being hit was standard punishment for not

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<sup>788</sup> Philips, *Seven Habits of Successfully Raising Muslim Children*.

meeting the expectations of the teacher. This would be in direct contrast to the warm, friendly, and stimulating environment of the secular state schools. As Muslim communities became stronger in Britain, these two worlds came closer as the community began to establish their own schools that would adopt secular approaches, including a new perspective on child protection. Debate about the use of corporal punishment intensified and I, as a newly qualified Muslim teacher, had to consider the best way of disciplining children. My natural inclination was against hitting children.<sup>789</sup>

Some may protest that Fredericks seems to assume the White Man's burden to civilize immigrant Muslim parents. Fredericks' fears may tell us more about his own ethnic and class background since he associates child education in Muslim majority countries with cruelty, backwardness, and a lack of hygiene. In contrast to the hostile and unwelcoming atmosphere of the immigrant mosque, he describes secular schools innocently and sentimentally as warm, friendly, enlightened places capable of attracting young people. Later, Fredericks repeats his stance against corporal punishment unequivocally:

I do not feel apologetic about my interpretation. The foundation of discipline and the value on which our education is based, in my view, is the Prophetic statement that: 'He who does not respect our elders or show mercy to our young is not one of us.'<sup>790</sup>

In his commentary, Fredericks both laments the politicization of the issue of corporal punishment while simultaneously arguing against corporal punishment despite the discipline hadith's *prima facie* meaning.<sup>791</sup> He goes one step further than Rabbani and Hamid Ali to denounce physical discipline altogether:

I understand the statement 'hit them' to emphasize the importance of prayer in a child's development and not a 'command', or even permission to abuse or hurt children. I accept that my interpretation is one of a non-scholar. It is personal and made under the influence of my own Western upbringing within a wider

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<sup>789</sup> Ramli, Muḥammad bin Aḥmad, and Abdul Aziz Ahmed. *Educating Children*, 65-67.

<sup>790</sup> Ibid, 67n63.

<sup>791</sup> Ibid, 65-67.

debate about values.<sup>792</sup>

Unlike Fredericks, other contemporary AMPE are less inclined to dispute standard translations of the discipline hadith but still unequivocally condemn physical discipline. For example, Hamza Yusuf cautions against physical punishments: “Personally [it is] very hard for me to find any compassion or respect for males who resort to physical abuse when dealing with children or women.”<sup>793</sup> He does not distinguish here between sanctioned physical punishment and physical abuse. Likewise, in a lecture on Islamic law’s priorities (*maqāṣid*), Dr. Umar teaches that children must be disciplined in a nice way and that protecting children from abuse is part of *nasl* or the protection of lineage.<sup>794</sup> He too avoids identifying what “nice discipline” entails and how it differs from physical abuse.

Whereas some contemporary AMPE do not clearly define discipline, others make a more explicit, historicist argument against the implementation of the discipline hadith. For example, in her parenting manual, Alshugairi draws attention to the dramatic shift in public opinion against spanking, writing that the “global trend” leans towards abolishing spanking, thus American Muslims should also reconsider the practice. Al-Shugairi’s move here is as an example of what Muhammad Fadel terms, “progressive historicism” since it uses “history to relativize the moral significance of a particular legal text found in the Islamic revelatory sources.”<sup>795</sup>

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<sup>792</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>793</sup> Hanson, *Nurturing Children*.

<sup>794</sup> Umar Faruq Abd-Allah—Priorities of Islamic Law - Part 2; [http://www.greenvilletrust.org/video.php?video\\_id=8](http://www.greenvilletrust.org/video.php?video_id=8).

<sup>795</sup> Fadel, Mohammad. “Is Historicism a Viable Strategy for Islamic Law Reform? The Case of ‘Never Shall a Folk Prosper Who Have Appointed a Woman to Rule Them.’” *Islamic Law and Society* 18, no. 2 (2011): 131–76.

Another way AMPE collapse the distinction between normal and deviant discipline is by narrowing the times in childhood when corporal punishment can be applied. They point to the discipline hadith to argue that children ages seven to ten are simply commanded to join the prayer but are not hit for abandoning it to make an argument against *all* physical discipline of children ages seven to ten. Although contemporary formalist teachers like Awaad and ‘Ālimah Maha instruct mothers to discipline seven- to ten-year-olds systematically and proactively, they state that there should be “no force whatsoever” for children ages seven to ten. Awaad explains that if these children *do* pray, some scholars say they are rewarded for it. Both Awaad and ‘Ālimah Maha emphasize that before ten, parents must gradually and purposefully prayer train.<sup>796</sup>

If the child does not pray, Awaad advises parents to pretend like they did not notice, in line with al-Ghazālī’s advice to pretend not to notice when children first blunder and to conceal their faults.<sup>797</sup> Awaad recommends awakening seven-year-old children for the dawn (*fajr*) prayer, asking girls to leave their veils on after leaving the mosque and heading for the mall, and to wear only loose clothing.<sup>798</sup> She even recommends that Islamic schools require *hijāb* as part of seven-year-old girls’ school uniform. Neo-traditionalists like Awaad and ‘Ālimah Maha encourage parents to regulate their children’s prayer practice even as they condemn physical discipline at seven.<sup>799</sup>

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<sup>796</sup> Sadiq, “The Coolness of Our Eyes,” April 3, 2017.

<sup>797</sup> Ghazālī, ‘Abī Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-. ‘*Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*. 1st ed. Beirut-Lebanon: Dār ibn Ḥazm, 2005, *Rub’ al-Muḥlakāt; Kitāb Riyāḍat al-Nafs*, 3:956.

<sup>798</sup> Awaad, “Raising a Spiritual Child.”

<sup>799</sup> Sherman Jackson defines traditionalism (or neo-traditionalism) as one of three orientations found in American Sunnism. He defines this orientation as valuing the Muslim tradition “as a repository of

With regards to ten-year-olds, it becomes harder for contemporary AMPE to interpret away the command to hit them outright. Instead, they limit the scope of physical discipline by stressing that children younger than ten and past puberty cannot be hit. They avoid addressing the liminal period from age ten till puberty when the hadith sanctions corporal punishment. One strategy they use is emphasizing, as Umm Sahl did, that if parents took the proper precautions to establish children’s prayer early on, then this obviates the need for corporal punishment at age ten. Awaad translates the discipline hadith as, “strike them at age ten.” Although she implies that one would strike a non-praying ten-year-old, Awaad immediately follows with the caveat that parents should have been disciplining their children between seven and ten so that by the time they turn ten, physical discipline is unnecessary. She wants parents to avoid the scenario in which “a mother hands her daughter a menstrual pad along with a *hijab*” and then expects her to begin praying overnight.<sup>800</sup> Rather, she urges mothers to rebuke (but not strike) their daughters early on.<sup>801</sup> Like Awaad and El-Haddad, Faraz Rabbani emphasizes the need for gradual prayer training. He demurs from telling his listeners to hit children. Rather, he emphasizes that a ten-year-old child is technically not obligated to pray until puberty. He reminds parents that “Allah creates the world in stages, [so] religion [is also] meant to be implemented in stages.”<sup>802</sup> ‘Ālimah Maha taught the discipline hadith euphemistically:

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intellectual capital” which “can greatly assist modern Muslims in avoiding the trap of prostituting their religion to the latest secular fads, by forcing them to vindicate their conclusions in conversation with their premodern forbears.” See Jackson, Sherman A. “Ch. 10 | Liberal/Progressive, Modern, and Modernized Islam: Muslim Americans and the American State.” In *Innovations in Islam: Traditions and Contributions*, edited by Mehran Kamrava. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011, 170.

<sup>800</sup> Awaad, “Raising a Spiritual Child.”

<sup>801</sup> Ibid. For children who have successfully been prayer trained, she encourages parents to “get them to pray *nawāfil* (supererogatory) and *sunnah* prayers.” Umar F. Abd-Allah translates *taklīf* as “moral liability.”

<sup>802</sup> Rabbani, *How Do We Encourage Our Children to Pray, and at What Age?*.

The Prophet said discipline, *not to beat*, but to instill an inward attitude toward *ṣalāt*. [That is if you] discipline in such a way that [the] child hates *ṣalāt*, [then you have] defeated the purpose, you are turning the child away.<sup>803</sup>

Both ‘Ālimah Maha and Rabbani condemn harsh prayer training and instead encourage parents to create positive associations with prayer. Rabbani explains:

*Waḍribūhum ‘alayha...* hit them for it when they are ten, but disciplining is not an act of worship. [It is not as if] all you have to do is slap and you get a reward for it...The Prophet never hit a child, spouse, servant, or animal... Abu Ḥanīfa [said that] even if you ride your animal normally and it dies, you owe full compensation...The Prophet rode his mule. He would nudge the mule [along, but he would] never [even strike it]. “And discipline them for the prayer when they are ten,” but it is over three years, not just at ten you [tell your child you] must pray. Children don’t hit puberty at ten, but get them ready for [the] responsibility well before they are responsible...<sup>804</sup>

In addition to emphasizing the non-obligation of physical discipline, Abdullah Bin Hamid Ali offers his own argument:

A child at the age of ten who is closer to being a teenager than not is usually one who can be reasoned with, since their brains are more developed. Always resorting to physical discipline confuses a child, since many times [a child] may not understand the severity of what he [or] she did wrong.<sup>805</sup>

Here, he argues that because of the ten-year-old’s cognitive ability, she should be reasoned with rather than corporally punished. There is some incoherence to his rationale: the ten-year-old child has a rational capacity and yet will be unable to understand the severity “of what he or she did wrong.” Furthermore, Ali’s opinion seems to contradict al-Baghawī’s earlier Shāfi‘ī opinion that corporal punishment is warranted precisely *because* a ten-year-old is almost pubescent and thus considered more rational and mature.<sup>806</sup>

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<sup>803</sup> Sadiq, Maha. “Raising Our Children.”

<sup>804</sup> Rabbani, *Prophetic Parenting: 40 Hadiths on Raising Righteous Muslim Children*. Mississauga, Ontario, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vnF7WJSxNU>.

<sup>805</sup> Hamid Ali, “Nursing and Child Discipline.”

<sup>806</sup> Al-Shirbīnī, *Mughnī al-Muḥtāj*, 1:131; al-Baghawī, *Sharḥ Al-Sunnah*, 2:306.

AMPE also consider it abusive to corporally punish pubescent children who do not pray, despite their culpability for missing prayer. Although the *bāligh* child is obliged to pray, some preachers imply that parents seem to eventually lose their right to corporally punish them. For example, Ustadh Ubaydullah Evans invokes the heptad report and observes that if the first heptad is for play, the second for instruction, then in the third parents must pivot from “a unidirectional model of authority to a collective” one.<sup>807</sup> Similarly, Awaad teaches that parents can no longer discipline *bāligh* children, since “one cannot nag or yell at or scream at one’s children.” Rather, she hopes that by pubescence parents have prepared their children to “choose Islam for themselves” and must shift their efforts to mentorship. Both Awaad and Evans stress that at puberty, children develop their own relationship to God. Like Awaad and Evans, Dr. Muneer Fareed finds it inappropriate for parents to physically discipline pubescent children. Yet, he suggests another noncorporal method:

What you impose on your kids is [the] five *ṣalāt*, fasting in Ramadan, and you can only impose that until they attain puberty or maturity. Thereafter, they are on their own. One can inform them that the [parents’] financial obligations end when they attain puberty. [Therefore, the] cost to send them to college also ends when they attain puberty. If they refuse to get up for Fajr, by all means. Islam doesn’t obligate me to compel you to pray *fajr*...nor to spend one more dime on you. Not one dime!<sup>808</sup>

Fareed cautions that parents should only expect children to complete obligatory acts of worship, excluding supererogatory litanies, prayers, or spiritual seclusion (*i`tikāf*).

Awaad, Evans, and Fareed assume the position that pubescent children are full-fledged adults and call on American Muslim parents to do the same.

### ***Bad Mothers Physically Discipline***

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<sup>807</sup> Evans, Ubaydullah. “Coming of Age at 13: Taklif and Adolescence in America.” Blog. Alim Program, Chicago 2019. <https://www.alimprogram.org/articles/coming-of-age-at-13/>.

<sup>808</sup> Fareed, Muneer. “Imam al-Ghazālī’s Etiquette of Seclusion.” Zoom Virtual Lectures presented at the Alim Program Virtual Series, Islamic Association of Greater Detroit, April 11, 2020. <https://www.alimprogram.org/seclusion.html>.



By reclassifying physical discipline as an extreme strategy, AMPE may inadvertently also classify parents who choose to physically discipline as ignorant deviants. Conversely, those who engage in gentle, positive parenting strategies are praised for emulating the Prophet. Children who do not pray are no longer seen as willfully indulging their lower selves. Their parents are not seen as neglecting their child's *tarbiya*. In her child-rearing classes, Umm Sahl laments this state of affairs and nostalgically recalls the stern, powerful patriarch of traditionalist Muslim households, like the one epitomized by her Syrian shaykh:

No one in the house eats until the shaykh eats first. There is order in the house, the kids are not screaming around the house. This is not a child centered home, but a home centered on memorization of the Quran and *dhikr*.<sup>809</sup>

What Umm Sahl describes here is a patriarchal household. According to the American psychologist Jean Twenge, a similar type of household structure prevailed in the United States as recently as the 1950s when parents threatened their children with the patriarch's power, exclaiming, "Just wait until your father gets home!"<sup>810</sup> However, in his parenting lecture, Hamza Yusuf appears less comfortable with threatening children with their father's wrath. He mentioned that Ibn al-Ḥājj supports a gendered division of disciplinary labor quoting al-Ghazālī "and let the father rarely punish the child." Hamza Yusuf elaborates,

The mother can scare him with the father. [Imitating a mother] "I'm going to let your father know," [imitating child] "don't let dad know, I'll do whatever you say!" [But] if you see [fathers] as terrifying all the time, [that's a] horrible thing. You want [the child to listen] out of love and respect [for his parents] more than fear.<sup>811</sup>

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<sup>809</sup> Krasniqi, "Raising Muslim Children."

<sup>810</sup> Twenge, *The Narcissism Epidemic*, 78-79; Hays, *Cultural Contradictions*, 28.

<sup>811</sup> Hanson, *Nurturing Children*.

Hamza Yusuf hesitates to reinforce a mother/mercy and father/wrath binary, which may hinder children's relationship with their father. Perhaps he is aware of the pressures upon American Muslim fathers to distance themselves from stereotypes of the harsh, tyrannical Muslim patriarch. In addition to viewing Muslim fathers who may discipline harshly in a negative light, Muslim teachers who engage in physical discipline are virtually unheard of and would be condemned by both my interlocutors and the parent educators they turn to. Whereas classical Muslim jurists and commentators saw little issue with corporally punishing children or delegating the task to others, I did not find any interlocutor or contemporary AMPE who discussed teachers being permitted to physically discipline children under their charge.

The need to reform Muslim parents and remove teachers and leaders who might corporally punish children has received a small amount of new institutional attention. In 2019, Dr. Ingrid Mattson started the Hurma Project to educate North American Muslims on best practices for bringing abusers from Muslim leadership to account. Notably, two of my interlocutors mentioned Mattson as an inspiration for their outlook on child-rearing. Taking *ḥurma*, or the inviolability of the human body as a guiding concept, their mission is to

reinforce the inviolability of our children, youth, students, women, men, and all community members who are seeking education, counseling, safety and fellowship in mosques and Islamic centers, Islamic schools, seminaries and institutes, Islamic conferences, camps and 'third-spaces,' and other Muslim settings.<sup>812</sup>

One of their podcasts invited guests to discuss child abuse, including Magda Saleh who discussed her experience hiring Islamic school teachers. Following other American organizations, she encourages training children early on to report abusive parents and

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<sup>812</sup> "About Us." n.d. The Hurma Project. Accessed May 17, 2022. <https://hurmaproject.com/about-us/>.

teachers.<sup>813</sup> When hiring teachers for her school, she looks beyond their academic credentials and job history for a special “*Rūh*” or spiritual factor, flagging applicants who do not appear to be “peaceful” despite a glowing curriculum vitae. Her Islamic school is characterized by nonviolence and exceptionalism. The podcast effectively puts those who continue to see physical discipline as an acceptable option on notice.

### ***Old Knowledge: Willful, Depraved Children Require Discipline***

Ian Hacking theorizes that “creating new names and assessments and apparent truths is enough” to create new classes of people or what he coins “humankinds. New names or classifications emerge with new, uncertain knowledge that changes the way people regard themselves and others. AMPE are also beginning to refer to a new body of scientific knowledge that hypothesizes that physically disciplining children traumatizes them.

Before turning to this new body of knowledge that links physical discipline to trauma and community disintegration, it is important to inquire as to why physical discipline was (and continues to be by some) regarded less harmfully. Even Dr. Spock (d. 1998) who initially approved of spanking, arguing that it was “less poisonous than lengthy disapproval because it clears the air for parents and child” later reversed his stance.<sup>814</sup> Physical discipline was thought to be one method—inter alia—to teach children how to gain mastery over their lower, capricious selves (*nufūs*). In this older view, mentioned by the likes of al-Ghazālī, children were to be raised austerely. Umm Sahl and Nuh Keller continue to teach this older view of child-rearing. Umm Sahl argues

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<sup>813</sup> Hacking, “The Looping Effect of Humankinds,” 310.

<sup>814</sup> Fass, Paula. “There Used to Be Consensus on How to Raise Kids.” *The Atlantic*, March 20, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/03/america-new-dr-spock/555311/>

that although loving children is from parents' *fiṭra* when excessive, it leads to parents condoning children's misbehavior and thereby deprives them of *khāyir* and *baraka* (goodness and grace) in the long-term.<sup>815</sup> She argues that without discipline and *adab*, children deprive themselves of certain types of experiential knowledge. In her view, well-mannered children attract the blessing of righteous company (*awliyā*). For Umm Sahl, the harms associated with depriving children from the good favor and supplications of the *ahl-Allah* (people of God) and the '*ulamā*' (scholars) outweigh the pain of carefully administered corporal punishment. She views ideal parents as those who swiftly and consistently thwart bad habits (e.g., lying, backtalk, and disobedience.) Umm Sahl portrays sternness as mercy for children since parents vigilant about eradicating children's negative traits remove "qualities that are [dis]pleasing to Allah" and enable the child to peacefully coexist and thus enjoy the good life or "*ḥayāt al-tayyibah*."<sup>816</sup>

In an older view on physical discipline, as explained by Umm Sahl, physical discipline then is necessary to maintain the child's horizontal relationships with the righteous and their vertical relationship with the Divine. She reminds her student mothers that a child's *nafs* may not be inclined towards prayer:

Many kids don't accomplish things in life because they [do not] have discipline [and] perseverance. [I am not saying make a] soldier out of [your] kids, but [they need to] learn order, discipline, and limits. Children who do not learn those things never accomplish great things in life. People think children will be great if they can read a lot, so they make them read [and] read [and] read. Then [they are impressed that] "Oh! My kids can read, big books" because it is like TV, entertainment. They enjoy doing it. Greatness [does not come] by reading a lot, [it comes] by discipline. [Reading] big books is like entertainment. [But] ask your

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<sup>815</sup> *Raising Children - Umm Sahl/Shaykh Nuh Keller*, 2016.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nx1A6nOt80Y&list=PLkeswUfE24HEnENSrobMpON2g5JILNr> v.

<sup>816</sup> Krasniqi, "Raising Muslim Children," 12.1.

kid to pray five times a day and see if they can do it with enthusiasm, with discipline—they won't be able to if discipline and willpower are not learned. If you really love your children. If you want *khāyir* [goodness] for them, give them skills [that are] helpful [for them] to be successful in life. Success in life means good *adab*, *akhlāq* [good character], willpower and perseverance.<sup>817</sup>

In her view, prayer teaches willpower, self-control, and submission necessary to attain knowledge of God.<sup>818</sup> She advises mothers to busy themselves with instilling *adab* and reinforcing good habits until it becomes part of children's habitus. This can only happen by disciplining their "little *nafses*" while they are still impressionable.<sup>819</sup> Like the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, Umm Sahl posits that in order for a child to be socialized into society he must abandon taking himself as an object of desire and move towards "orienting himself" to other people.<sup>820</sup> Accordingly, children must sacrifice "self-love" in order to perfect themselves.<sup>821</sup> Umm Sahl's defense of stern discipline mirrors Talal Asad's insights on the role that pain plays in sharia law. In an essay on agency and pain, Asad presents the problem of human infliction of pain on others, especially in the working of the law. He questions the modern liberal tendency to extoll the role of agency and individual conscience rather than examining how different traditions can teach us about tolerating pain and thereby withstanding the insanity of the world. He explains,

The problem [of law in general as an institution premised on the existence of people who directly or indirectly inflict pain on others] ... lies not in the lack of autonomy or conscience but elsewhere—in the very existence of the Law that, by endowing the agent with responsibility for conquering the desire for transgression, his own and that of others, and with the assumption that this desire is always present in the human subject, inevitably builds on pain.<sup>822</sup>

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<sup>817</sup> Ibid, 13.1, 31.2.

<sup>818</sup> Kelly, Mark G. E. 2013. "Foucault, Subjectivity, and Technologies of the Self." In *A Companion to Foucault*, edited by Christopher Falzon, Timothy O'Leary, and Jana Sawicki, 510–25. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118324905.ch26>

<sup>819</sup> Asad, Talal. "Agency and Pain: An Exploration." *Culture and Religion* 1, no. 1 (May 2000): 30-35.

<sup>820</sup> Elias, *Alif is for Allah*, 7n13.

<sup>821</sup> Krasniqi, "Raising Muslim Children," 16.1; Elias, *Elif is for Allah*, 7.

<sup>822</sup> Asad, *Agency and Pain*, 45.

Since the child's *nafs* is disinclined towards prayer, and because the continuity of sharia traditions within the Muslim community requires that some children uphold prayer then, as Asad observes, the Law and pain are intertwined. A mother's coaxing of her child to pray is an essential step in the process of a child becoming a virtuous agent for whom praying and Quran memorization are "easier, less intentional" and will facilitate her "ability to act sanely" in the face of life's tribulations.<sup>823</sup> In this view, a parent who physically disciplines helps the child become the "kind of an agent" who possesses the fortitude to deal with life's challenges as a *al-nafs al-muṭma'inna*, "the self at peace."<sup>824</sup>

Umm Sahl's advice rests on Muslim ideas regarding human nature.<sup>825</sup> According to traditionalists, children's nature can be inclined towards good or evil since the seeds for both are found within them.<sup>826</sup> Dr. Umar explains that humans are born with both a *nafs* and a *rūḥ*. He defines the irascible *nafs* as the "locus of anger and appetite in its lowest form" in contrast to the *rūḥ* (the soul) which informs the human heart and intellect. Both anger and appetite (*shahwa*) stem from the *nafs* and are intuitions that humans need to deter harms and attract benefits. However, he explains that although anger and appetite are not intrinsically evil, they can be "misused."<sup>827</sup> Even though they are not yet moral agents, Muslim children are thought to be susceptible to demonic suggestions because they are born with a heart susceptible to the inherent conflict between the pulls of their transcendent *rūḥ* and the lower *nafs* which they must be

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<sup>823</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>824</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>825</sup> Cook, *The Moral Project of Childhood*, 47m105; Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 90; Coward, *The Perfectibility of Human Nature*, 81- 85.

<sup>826</sup> Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, 254.

<sup>827</sup> Abd-Allah, Umar Faruq. "The Fitra." Presented at the Rihla Deen Intensive, Malacca, Malaysia, 2017. <https://deenstream.vhx.tv/the-fitra-dr-umar-faruq-abdallah>, Class #2.

taught to combat, control, and restrain (*jihād al-nafs*).<sup>828</sup> Drawing from al-Ghazālī, he teaches that the unreformed, undisciplined human soul remains arrested developmentally at the level of the *nafs-al-ammārah* and dominated by its lower impulses (Q 12:53).<sup>829</sup> Parents are tasked with teaching children to manage their frustrations and cultivate patience (*ṣabr*) by strengthening their *‘aql* (intellect) so that they can exercise their free will to master their *nafs*.<sup>830</sup> The hope is that with instruction and refinement, the child’s *nafs* transcend the animalistic level and successively attains the level of a reproaching self (*al-nafs al-lawwāma*) (Q75:2). Thus a child eventually perfects herself to become a tranquil self (*al-nafs al-muṭma’inna*) (Q89:27) that has succeeded in aligning with the dictates of her higher spirit (*rūḥ*) and has successfully returned the *fiṭra* (innate nature) to its original state.<sup>831</sup>

Advocates of (sharia-compliant) physical discipline argue that reliance on alternative disciplinary strategies such as natural consequences will not always suffice in disciplining children’s lower selves.<sup>832</sup> Apologists for physical discipline call attention to the fact that conservative Christians also share in their concern regarding the decline of authoritative discipline amongst American parents and parenting experts. For example, Keller, a convert to Islam, shared that he was successfully raised according to traditional Christian principles, especially the oft-cited Biblical dicta, “Spare the rod and spoil the child.”<sup>833</sup> One work that both Nuh Keller and Umm Sahl recommend to their followers is

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<sup>828</sup> Murad, *Travelling Home*, 83; Cook, *The Moral Project of Childhood*, 39-46; Rothman, “An Islamic Theoretical Orientation to Psychotherapy,” 32-44; Sheikh, “Marrying Islamic Principles, 212-213.

<sup>829</sup> Rothman, “An Islamic Theoretical Orientation to Psychotherapy,” 34.

<sup>830</sup> Murata, *Tao of Islam*, 278.

<sup>831</sup> Rothman, “An Islamic Theoretical Orientation to Psychotherapy, 34; Coward, *The Perfectibility of Human Nature*, 86; Abd-Allah, “The Fiṭra,” Class #7.”

<sup>832</sup> Murata, *Tao of Islam*, 280-98.

<sup>833</sup> Miller, *Discourses of Discipline*, 192; Krueger, *Raising Godly Tomatoes*, 109.

Elizabeth Krueger's *Raising Godly Tomatoes*. Keller's anecdotes about his mother taking him to his childhood home's back-office echoes Krueger's advice for mothers to take their children for "occasional trips to the woodshed."<sup>834</sup> In her child-rearing class, Umm Sahl reads excerpts from Krueger's book. A conservative Protestant author, Krueger makes several references to Biblical passages.<sup>835</sup> On her website, Krueger links to several Methodist groups. She writes,

As a Christian, I believe that we all are born with a tendency to do the wrong thing at times. So, it is "normal" for a child to do the wrong things at times. That's why God gave children parents. We parents have the job of stopping the "normal" bad things a child does and replacing them with good habits. Any time your child displays attitudes and behaviors that are wrong, ...then you can and should correct them.<sup>836</sup>

She terms the vigilant correction of children "tomato staking"—a technique that involves showering the child with abundant love and attention while constantly monitoring for misbehavior and disobedience. If disobedience persists, it is to be quickly "staked" by spanking before the tomato plant (or child) grows wayward. Maternal affection and surveillance ultimately bear fruit in the creation of docile, disciplined children. She considers tomato staking appropriate for older infants and young toddlers, beginning late in the first year of life or very in early in the second year.

Krueger warns readers that "modern time outs" will not "miraculously return children to saintliness." She condemns common behavior modification strategies such as removing privileges, persuasion, offering choices, and reliance on routines. Rather, she staunchly defends spanking's effectiveness:

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<sup>834</sup> Keller, *Sydney Suhba Women's Session*. 7.7; Krueger, *Raising Godly Tomatoes*, 21.

<sup>835</sup> Krueger, *Raising Godly Tomatoes*, 186.

<sup>836</sup> Ibid.



For thousands of years, wisely applied spanking has been considered a mandatory part of good parenting. But suddenly, in the last generation, permissive parenting gurus have sprung up everywhere, denouncing the practice as teaching violence to our children. Millions of parents have fallen blindly under the spell of these alleged experts, accepting their assertions as fact, and ceasing to use this essential tool...The purpose of tomato-staking is to habituate toddlers into obeying the mother. This serves to inculcate a subjectivity that later prepares them to obey other authorities and God.<sup>837</sup>

Figure 4: Chart taken From Rigby's *Raising Respectful Children* (2013)<sup>838</sup>

| THE SCHOOL OF RESPECT   |              |   |
|---|--------------|---|
| Stage   | Goal         | Training  |
| <b>Tots:</b> <i>Birth to two</i><br>Can I trust you?<br>Who's in charge?          | Trust        | Establish Routines<br>Set a schedule<br>Be the parent                   |
| <b>Tykes:</b> <i>Three to five</i><br>Are you watching me?<br>Who do I belong to? | Security     | Offer Recognition<br>Pay attention<br>Show ownership                    |
| <b>Tweens:</b> <i>Six to twelve</i><br>Do you really love me?<br>Are you real?    | Obedience    | Build Relationship<br>Be a good listener<br>Be authentic                |
| <b>Teens:</b> <i>Thirteen to nineteen</i><br>Who am I?<br>Can I be in charge?     | Self-Respect | Give Responsibility<br>Enable self-discovery<br>Transfer accountability |

The idea that children are naturally willful and must be trained to obey aligns with some AMPE's views on children's discipline. For instance, Omar Suleiman refers to a child-rearing book by Jill Rigby Garner who was a contributor to Dr. James Dobson's (b. 1936) *Focus on the Family*, an Evangelical organization.<sup>839</sup> On Facebook, Suleiman marvels upon Rigby's advice about training your six- to twelve-year-old with the goal of obedience in mind reflects the heptad report.<sup>840</sup> In Dobson's best-selling American

<sup>837</sup> Krueger, *Raising Godly Tomatoes*, 21.

<sup>838</sup> Suleiman, Omar. 2013. "Omar Suleiman on Ali's Discipline Theory." Facebook Post. *Facebook*. <https://www.facebook.com/profile/100044188371462/search/?q=AMAZING%3A%20secular%20educational>.

<sup>839</sup> "Jill Rigby Garner." 2022. Focus on the Family. May 17, 2022. <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/contributors/jill-rigby-garner/>.

<sup>840</sup> Suleiman, Omar. 2013. "Omar Suleiman on Ali's Discipline Theory." Facebook Post. *Facebook*. <https://www.facebook.com/profile/100044188371462/search/?q=AMAZING%3A%20secular%20educational>. On Facebook, Suleiman wrote this about a passage in Rigby's book, "AMAZING secular educational,

classic, *Dare to Discipline*, he defends corporal punishment’s virtues and calls on American parents to use it upon willful children.<sup>841</sup> The religious studies scholar Kathryn Lofton credits Dr. James Dobson for popularizing an older, parent-centered approach that has roots in Protestant Christianity and embraces spanking.<sup>842</sup> Dobson warns that American culture’s decadence needs to be countered by parents who take disciplining children seriously.<sup>843</sup> Lofton writes that conservative parenting specialists emphasize the importance of establishing parental authority and “staunchly defend parents’ rights to physically ‘chastise’ their children as they carry out the kind of discipline modeled and recommended by the God they identify as Biblical.”<sup>844</sup>

Children’s willfulness—an idea that justifies occasional corporal punishment—may be rooted in an assumption that both conservative Christians and Muslims share that humans are born somewhat fallen. In a 2020 address, Hamza Yusuf explains that Muslim exegetes recognized humans as fallen and “wounded in sin” citing the hadith “All children of Adam are sinful, and the best of the sinful are the repentant.”<sup>845</sup> Some identify the root of this sinfulness as the black blemish that all humans are born with. In Ibn Hishām’s *Sīrah al-nabawīyya*, he wrote that the Prophet was also born with a black spot on his heart that angels later removed by washing in ice.<sup>846</sup> Brannon Wheeler explains that early commentators interpreted this cleansing process as part of

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parenting, psychology books use many Islamic concepts, obviously without attributing them to Islam. Check out this book’s explanation on how to raise your child and consider the oft quoted saying of Ali ibn Abi Talib (ra):” Play with your child the first seven years. Discipline your child the next seven years and then befriend your child the following seven years. He attributes it to Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib.

<sup>841</sup> Ridgely, *Practicing What the Doctor Preached*, 3, 57-59; Krueger, *Raising Godly Tomatoes*, 19.

<sup>842</sup> Lofton is careful to point out that just because Protestant Christian childcare manuals recommended (and some continue to recommend) spanking, does not mean Christian parents engage in the practice. (See Lofton, “Religion and the Authority in Parenting, 826-27).

<sup>843</sup> Hulbert, *Raising America*, 3; “Religion and the Authority in Parenting,” 826.

<sup>844</sup> Lofton, *Religion and the Authority in Parenting*, 827.

<sup>845</sup> *Jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī: Bāb fī isti’zām al-mu`min dhunūbihi* (#2499).

<sup>846</sup> Wheeler, Brannon M. *Moses in the Qur’an and Islamic Exegesis*. Routledge, 2013, 118n1.

Muhammad's initiation into prophecy, since the "black blemish" was "said to be the lot of Satan."<sup>847</sup> Whereas the Prophet had the blemish removed, some Muslim scholars speak as though it is still within the average Muslim layperson and their children.<sup>848</sup>

Prior to the Enlightenment in the 1600s to 1750s, similar Christian ideas about children's natural inclination towards evil were commonplace.<sup>849</sup> In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, John Calvin's (d. 1574) followers believed that children were born depraved, sinful, and inclined to resist God.<sup>850</sup> The Puritan child could only hope to overcome the effects of being born with original sin by breaking her will through "rigid discipline, hard work, and corporal punishment."<sup>851</sup> Cooke explains that later Protestants gradually shifted away from a notion of infant damnation. Instead, they began emphasizing the importance of a mother's nurturing as a means to curtail children's depravity. Maternal nurture then gave children some hope for redemption, even if mothers could not completely guarantee membership to the elect due to Calvinist doctrines of predestination.<sup>852</sup> Historians see these early pre-independence Calvinist and Puritan ideas as exercising an enduring influence upon American child-rearing trends more broadly.<sup>853</sup>

While some Muslims and Christians might agree that humans are born fallen to varying degrees, Muslim theologians do not consider newborns depraved.<sup>854</sup> Although there is some agreement amongst Muslims over the fallenness of humans (*fujūr*),

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<sup>847</sup> Ibid, 119n6.

<sup>848</sup> Rothman, "An Islamic Theoretical Orientation to Psychotherapy," 34-38.

<sup>849</sup> Cook, *The Moral Project of Childhood*, 50; Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, 27.

<sup>850</sup> Ibid; Miller, *Discourses of Discipline*, 191.

<sup>851</sup> Ibid, 29; Fitz-Gibbon, Jane Hall. 2017. *Corporal Punishment, Religion, and United States Public Schools*. Palgrave Macmillan, 40 and 123.

<sup>852</sup> Cook, *The Moral Project of Childhood*, 38-39.

<sup>853</sup> Piele 1979, 93 as cited in Miller, *Discourses of Discipline*, 191.

<sup>854</sup> Cook, *The Moral Project of Childhood*, 46.

Muslim theologians reject the doctrine of original sin.<sup>855</sup> Hamza Yusuf explains that while Islamic and Christian belief may agree that every child “is born with a black seed in the heart” he contends that this is not the same concept as original sin, nor the notion that humans are fallen because of Adam’s transgression in Eden, which requires his descendants to regenerate themselves through “the salvific grace of God through a sacrifice...”<sup>856</sup>

Classical Muslim theologians held that every infant’s soul is born pure and sinless and with an inherently good primordial nature.<sup>857</sup> The *fiṭra* of children gives them the potential to perfect themselves through sharia observance. Dr. Umar cautions parents about preserving the child’s *fiṭra* against corruption and diversions from the straight path.<sup>858</sup> He notes that simply being in the world can alter a child’s *fiṭra* since it is impossible for parents to block all corrupting influences. These influences threaten to invade the child’s five senses: corrupting their vision, through glass screens, corporate marketing, movies, and television; debasing their hearing through ambient music; spoiling their taste and their olfactory senses when they eat toxins and inorganic foods, or food procured through ill-gotten wealth; and demeaning their sense of touch through childhood traumas and abuse.<sup>859</sup> He posits that certain neurological illnesses and sexual deviancy may be attributed to alterations in one’s *fiṭra*. Although he asserts that parents

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<sup>855</sup> Coward, *The Perfectibility of Human Nature*, 81.

<sup>856</sup> Hanson, Hamza Yusuf. *Fiṭra: The Inherent Nature*, 2013.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wVVMFZ2hoq8>; Yusuf, Hamza. “Gateway to God’s Book.” Zaytuna College, May 2020. <https://zaytuna.edu/ramadan-2020/book-of-god>; Coward, *The Perfectibility of Human Nature*, 83.

<sup>857</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 170; Coward, *The Perfectibility of Human Nature*, 84 and 84n12); For more on *Fiṭra*, see Dr. Tawfiq’s monograph on the topic: Abd-Allah, Umar Faruq. *al-Imān Fiṭra: Dirāsah lil-imān al-fiṭrī fi al-qur’ān wa al-sunna wa kathīr min al-malal wa al-naḥl*. 1st ed. Abu Dhabi: Dar al-Faqih, 2014.

<sup>858</sup> Abd-Allah, “The Fitra.”

<sup>859</sup> Ibid, Class #3.

cannot alter their children's *fiṭra* completely, they have the power to control children's early environments, thus inadvertently tasking parents with protecting against the malleability of children's *fiṭra* through carefully monitoring what children are exposed to.

### ***New Knowledge: Children's Radical Innocence***

Whereas it was once taken for granted that some children would act willfully due to the erosion of their *fiṭra* and this would warrant corporal punishment, new ideas about children's nature began to be disseminated after the Enlightenment. New views of children's nature brought about changing attitudes towards corporal punishment, which some AMPE have embraced. Morrison, Hayes, and Cooke identify a shift wherein children—formerly viewed as satanic hosts—became innocent. By the end of the nineteenth century, “the devil became sequestered from American life.”<sup>860</sup> American Historian Myra Glenn similarly observes that beginning in the latter half of the eighteenth century Anglo-American beliefs regarding children's innate depravity were already in decline.<sup>861</sup> Similarly, Aries notes that by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, public opinion “was turning against the use of the birch for school children.”<sup>862</sup> By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, “the old scholastic discipline” was relaxed.<sup>863</sup> In the first half of the nineteenth century, reformers began agitating against child flogging, which they argued failed to reform children's character.<sup>864</sup> By the middle of the nineteenth century, conservative

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<sup>860</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>861</sup> Glenn, Myra C. *Campaigns against Corporal Punishment: Prisoners, Sailors, Women, and Children in Antebellum America*. SUNY Series in American Social History. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984, 50.

<sup>862</sup> Aries, *Centuries of Childhood*, 263.

<sup>863</sup> Ibid, 264.

<sup>864</sup> Glenn, *Campaigns Against Corporal Punishment*, 41; Hays, *Cultural Contradictions*, 25: Hays notes that in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. The flogging of children was increasingly opposed, and more women began breastfeeding their own infants.

Christian child-rearing practices relying on physical punishment fell out of fashion. They were replaced by newer attempts to extract children’s “inner goodness” through affectionate persuasion and “the withdrawal of love to instill self-control.”<sup>865</sup>

A childhood historian, Heidi Morrison notes that since the start of the eighteenth century, “liberal European social science ideas about the child’s self-actualization were disarticulated from religious instruction and based on the individual as a sovereign and autonomous subject.”<sup>866</sup> Morrison and Ridgely both identify the work of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau as contributing to this disarticulation.<sup>867</sup> During the latter half of the nineteenth century these two philosophers precipitated an increasing focus on cultivating every child’s unique individuality and moved away from older efforts to mold children towards shared, desirable forms of comportment—prerequisites for life as members of spiritual communities.<sup>868</sup> Instead of teaching children self-denial, as Calvinists called for, these romantic thinkers championed children’s need for free play and pleasure.<sup>869</sup>

John Locke (d. 1704) viewed children’s nature as malleable instead of predestined. He viewed education as instrumental in safeguarding children from evil.<sup>870</sup> Locke’s belief in education’s ability to overcome depravity departed from Calvinist views of children’s damnation.<sup>871</sup> Now that the child was capable of being influenced and molded rather than predestined, mothers were tasked with cultivating the child’s

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<sup>865</sup> Hays, *Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, 31n22.

<sup>866</sup> Morrison, *Childhood and Colonial Modernity in Egypt*, 41n84.

<sup>867</sup> Ridgely, *Practice what the Doctor Preaches*, 85; Ayoubi, *Rearing Gendered Souls*, 5.

<sup>868</sup> Morrison, *Childhood and Colonial Modernity in Egypt*, 41n85.

<sup>869</sup> Cook, *The Moral Project of Childhood*, 27.

<sup>870</sup> Cook, *The Commodification of Childhood*, 24-29.

<sup>871</sup> Cook, *The Moral Project of Childhood*, 23 and 29n30.

character and held responsible if they fell short.<sup>872</sup> Similarly, Ridgely observes that mothers became more responsible for training, nurturing, and disciplining children because of Locke's influence. She notes that men began being measured by society according to their "economic success" rather than older measures of status which scrutinized their ability to manage children's discipline.<sup>873</sup> Locke is also famous for invoking the *tabula rasa* to argue that children's minds are blank slates that possess "no innate capacities" except for basic reasoning.<sup>874</sup> As children's innate reasoning abilities became better appreciated, parents and pedagogues became increasingly asked to reason with children rather than resort to the rod.<sup>875</sup>

Locke's views were expanded by Rousseau. Like Locke, Rousseau subscribed to the idea that children were blank slates who "do not know what it is to do wrong."<sup>876</sup> He also emphasized the importance of reasoning with children.<sup>877</sup> Whereas Locke still maintained that evil was potentially present within children, Rousseau went farther to argue that children were born pure, completely innocent, without original sin.<sup>878</sup> In Rousseau's model, the child was a "noble savage" with a radically angelic nature, one untarnished by societal ills. Given children's innocence, it was unjust to mistreat them.<sup>879</sup> Consequently, Rousseau opposed corporally punishing children. Instead, he called for teaching children through natural consequences:

Your ill-tempered child destroys everything he touches. Do not vex yourself. Put

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<sup>872</sup> Ibid, 29, 42 and 48.

<sup>873</sup> Ridgely, *What the Doctor Preaches*, 86.

<sup>874</sup> Cook, *The Moral Project of Childhood*, 28-29.

<sup>875</sup> Ayubi, "Rearing Gendered Souls," 1183.

<sup>876</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Émile, Or, On Education*. Translated by Barbara Foxley. First published in 1762. The Floating Press, 2009, 123; Neufeld, *Hold onto your Kids*, 917.

<sup>877</sup> Zachs, "Growing Consciousness of the Child," 122.

<sup>878</sup> Rousseau, *Émile, Or, On Education*, 124.

<sup>879</sup> James et al., *Theorizing Childhood*, 14-15; Huberman, "Innocent Children or Little Adults?" In *Ambivalent Encounters : Childhood, Tourism, and Social Change in Banaras, India*, Rutgers University Press, 2012, 69; Cook, *The Moral Project of Childhood*, 47n104.

everything he can spoil out of reach. He breaks the things he is using; do not be in a hurry to give him more; let him feel the want of them. He breaks the windows of his room; let the wind blow upon him night and day, and do not be afraid of his catching cold; it is better to catch cold than be reckless. Never complain of the inconvenience he causes you but let him feel it first. At last, you will have the windows mended without saying anything.<sup>880</sup>

Rather than expecting conformity from children, parents are instructed to allow children to behave freely and trust in children's innate reasoning abilities to eventually help them see the error of their ways.

Rousseau's influence extends to middle class American parenting.<sup>881</sup> He shifted sentiment against corporal punishment not only in Europe and America during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also in Muslim-majority societies. The fact that Rousseau did not believe in a child's innate, inherited depravity may have resonated with his Muslim readers.<sup>882</sup> Some might even agree with Rousseau's assertion that children are "the only true noncorrupt example of man's innate virtue."<sup>883</sup> His beliefs that with proper nurturing, children will naturally incline towards good since they have an innate capacity to recognize good, may resonate with Muslim readers.<sup>884</sup> Furthermore, he called for protecting children's nature from corruption by bad

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<sup>880</sup> Rousseau, *Émile, Or, On Education*, 143.

<sup>881</sup> Cook, *The Commodification of Childhood*, 29. For example, a champion of public education and the founder of American public schools, Horace Mann (d. 1853) followed Rousseau in condemning corporal punishment. He felt that children could be reformed through "moral suasion" rather than corporally punished.<sup>881</sup> Like Rousseau, the utilitarian philosopher John Stuart Mill (d. 1868) also held that natural consequences "such as the lack of esteem of peers" was more effective in preventing individuals from wrongdoing than punishment. He too became "a strong advocate" for the "total abolition of corporal punishment" in society at large.<sup>881</sup> Later, Spock and others would follow Rousseau in assuming children's innocence and encouraging parents to tolerate disobedience and rebellion and nurture children's individuality.<sup>881</sup> Similarly, Alfred Adler (Dr. Jane Nelsen's teacher) drew upon Rousseau's ideas when promoting natural consequences as an ideal disciplinary strategy.

<sup>882</sup> Cook, *The Moral Project of Childhood*, 29.

<sup>883</sup> Cook, *The Commodification of Childhood*, 30-35.

<sup>884</sup> Cook, *The Moral Project of Childhood*, 49.



actors.<sup>885</sup> Due to these alignments between Rousseau’s writing and Muslim conceptions of *fiṭra*, his child-rearing views may have been well received by Muslim readers and thought leaders. Historian of Ottoman Syria, Fruma Zachs notes how at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Rousseau’s writing on children’s education influenced Arab societies. These attitudes included “a gradual but marked shift away from beating as routine punishment.”<sup>886</sup> Zachs mentions Istir Wakid, a female columnist in the 1890s. Her series offered child-rearing advice such as recommending that mothers “punish their children only after gently explaining *why* in a rational and didactic way.”<sup>887</sup> Echoing Rousseau, Wakid wrote that children would learn morals through natural consequences, not physical punishment. Moreover, Zachs explains that a growing number of Arab authors began to caution teachers to avoid disciplining in a way that infringes upon “children’s free will.”<sup>888</sup> Similar trends can be seen in India during the same time period. There, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) wrote about his dream for the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College, which later became Aligarh Muslim University. Significantly, he wrote, “No corporal punishment or any such punishment as is likely to injure a student’s self-respect will be permissible...”<sup>889</sup> In Egypt, Rousseau was read by Qasim Amin (d. 1980) who called for women to liberate themselves from gender-segregated harems and become educated in order to raise their children more hygienically and effectively.<sup>890</sup> He

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<sup>885</sup> Cook, *The Commodification of Childhood*, 29; Bertram, Christopher. “Jean Jacques Rousseau.” In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2020. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2020.

<sup>886</sup> Zachs, “Growing Consciousness of the Child,” 122.

<sup>887</sup> Ibid, 124n47; Istir Wakid, “al-umm fi al-Bayt,” *Lisan al-Hal*, issue 1375 (18 January 1891), 2–3; issue 1376 (21 January 1891), 1; Giladi, “Concepts of Childhood,” 125–6.

<sup>888</sup> Ibid, 125-125.

<sup>889</sup> Singh, *Encyclopaedia of Indian War of Independence, 1857-1947: Muslims and Other Freedom Fighters*, 202. However, accounts of life at Aligarh reveal that only Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, “in his role as surrogate father” in the dorms “could strike the students.”

<sup>890</sup> Elshakry, Marwa. 2013. *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 197.

chided women for disciplining inconsistently, failing to follow through on promises of threats and rewards.”<sup>891</sup> He similarly faults the Arab father for indiscriminately punishing children “like a wild animal.” Like Rousseau, he prescribes natural consequences:

If the father understood that his behavior toward his child has a lasting effect on him, he would not accustom him to behavior of which he does not approve. If he knew that the intent of raising a child is not to force him to obey his every order but rather to accustom him to develop self-control, he would avoid ordering, threatening, or striking him. Such actions do not assist the child in learning self-control, which develops through parental efforts to explain the significance of self-control and point out the consequences of the child’s actions, until he realizes that whatever good or evil befalls him is his own responsibility ... *Allowing a child to experience the consequences of his behavior is one of the best methods of teaching him the meaning of self-control. Interference in a child’s life should occur only when advice, guidance, or explanations of the consequences of his actions are necessary. [If and when] a child goes against the advice he receives he will have to live with the consequences.*<sup>892</sup> [emphasis mine]

The historian Samira Haj explains that both Amin and his contemporary Muhammad ‘Abduh sought to rectify society by reforming Muslim families. She maintains that both reformers were frustrated with “the older form of household” which they viewed as an impediment to the cultivation of a disciplined future citizenry because these older structures relied “on external coercive authority rather than on self-discipline.”<sup>893</sup>

Writing for the Egyptian Islamist press during the same era, feminist Malak Hifni Nassif (d. 1918) also called to reform child-rearing practices and *tarbiya* more broadly. She faults Egyptian parents for either being too harsh in their discipline or too lax and inconsistent. She compares the sorry state of Egyptian girls to their Western counterparts who are “less filthy, please their parents, and are never beaten.”<sup>894</sup>

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<sup>891</sup> Amin, *The New Woman*, 163.

<sup>892</sup> Ibid. Translated by the author.

<sup>893</sup> Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition*, 157.

<sup>894</sup> Shakry, “*Schooled Mothers and Structured Play*” 147; Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Traditions*, 160.

Rousseau’s legacy can also be observed in ‘Abduh and Riḍā’s 1898 Islamist journal *al-Manar* in which they published translations of Alphonse Esquiros’s *L’Émile du dix-neuvième siècle* [or *Emile of the 19<sup>th</sup> century*], a work which drew on Rousseau’s new theories of childhood.<sup>895</sup> Additionally, Riḍā wrote several columns on children’s *tarbiya* in which he insists that parents should avoid “punishment and coercive methods” since they “did little to teach children the true principles of right and wrong.”<sup>896</sup> Like Rousseau, Riḍā asserts that humans are good by nature but evil befalls them due to corrupt *tarbiya* and *ta’līm* at the hands of bad educators (*murabbīs*).<sup>897</sup> Riḍā faults parents, grandparents, and educators for leading children astray, lamenting that the “people of manners (*tahadhdhub*) and refinement (*tahadhab* and *tahdhīb*) are few.”<sup>898</sup> Restating Locke and Rousseau, Riḍā instructs caregivers to discipline children through reasoning rather than physical punishment. He laments that children raised with harsh discipline lack the ability to reason freely and are instead “raised to blindly follow authority (*taqlīd*), a habit of mind that becomes incorrigible in adulthood.”<sup>899</sup>

### ***Muslim Reception of Locke and Rousseau***

The popularity of Rousseau’s natural consequences approach is not universally embraced. Dr. Gordon Neufeld (a favorite in a circle of Silicon Valley Muslim mothers) criticizes the natural consequences strategy for being just another euphemism for a parent or teacher exerting power over their charge.<sup>900</sup> Similarly Umm Sahl protests

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<sup>895</sup> Esquiros, Alphonse. *L’Émile du dix-neuvième siècle*. Paris: Librairie internationale, 1869.

<sup>896</sup> Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic*, 26.

<sup>897</sup> Riḍā, Muḥammad Rashīd, ed. *al-Manār : majallah shahrīyah tabḥathu fī falsafat al-dīn wa-shu’ūn al-ijtimā’ wa-al-‘umrān*. Harvard University. Vol. 2. Miṣr [Egypt: s.n.], March 11, 1899. Number 1, Year 2, *Tarbiya al-Nafsiya*. 155.

<sup>898</sup> Ibid.

<sup>899</sup> Riḍā, Rashīd. “Tarbiyah Al-Aṭfāl.” *Al-Manār* 2, no. 9 (1899): 90–92. See also Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Traditions*, 160.

<sup>900</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children,” 16.1 and 18.2; Neufeld, *Hold onto your Kids*, 211.

against natural consequences for what she regards as its cruelty towards children. She disagrees with teaching about the importance of wearing a coat by letting them freeze outside, arguing that parents are responsible for protecting children against bad weather.<sup>901</sup>

Muslim parent educators who seek to integrate the pedagogical ideas of Locke and Rousseau in their own child-rearing prescriptions may run into several obstacles. While at first, the concept of *fiṭra* may resemble Locke's *tabula rasa* the latter concept envisions a radically different view of children's nature than the one offered by Muslim theologians.<sup>902</sup> Locke wrote that the child's mind is susceptible to education much like wax is susceptible to the imprint of a seal.<sup>903</sup> Locke's imagery resonates with this passage in al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā'*:

When a child is entrusted to his parents, he has a pure heart and is *as precious as a jewel clear and un-engraved*. This child, however, *is receptive to every etching* and will be influenced by every experience to which he is exposed. Should his experience include that which is desirable, he will learn it, internalize it, and become accustomed to it. He will grow up in that positive environment and be happy during this life and through eternity. His parents and all his teachers will share the credit for this achievement. If on the other hand, a child's experience is characterized by an evil environment, and if he is neglected as animals are neglected, he will grow up to be miserable and perish. The burden for this condition will be on the neck of his guardians. [emphasis mine]

Qasim Amin quoted this passage in his *Liberation of Women*.<sup>904</sup> Similarly, Rashīd Riḍā too frequently alluded to al-Ghazālī's masterpiece and references the etching-in-stone imagery:

We have from the souls of these children *slates that are smooth and can receive every engraving*. And from their minds, sheets of clean, white paper prepared for every etching. So, *it is upon us to engrave onto them signs of wisdom* and virtue and to etch

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<sup>901</sup> Ibid, 16.1, 18.2.

<sup>902</sup> Huberman, "Innocent Children or Little Adults?" 77.

<sup>903</sup> Cook, *The Moral Project of Childhood*, 31n43.

<sup>904</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 87 and 202; Amin, *Liberation of Women*, 26.

upon them the education of the principles which lead to venerable objectives. It is upon us to habituate them to the truth in speech and action, to the highest ambition, and to the repudiation of carelessness and laziness in order to impress onto their souls honorable faculties (*malakāt*)...<sup>905</sup> [emphasis mine]

Both Riḍā and Amin employ al-Ghazālī's classical imagery, which aligns with Locke's blank, impressionable tablet and make their case about children's malleability and the importance of sound maternal nurture.

The purity of the child's heart implies her innocence and the ability to receive etchings implies her malleability. Locke himself paradoxically held that though the child's slate was blank, children have latent, innate reasoning abilities similar to Muslim conceptions of the latent inborn tendencies that constitute the *fiṭra*.<sup>906</sup> Hassim writes that "children were seen as pristine and unadulterated pieces of slate the are receptive to anything and everything..."<sup>907</sup> Perhaps for this reason, some Muslim authors have explicitly used *tabula rasa* to describe children's nature:

The notion of Original Sin is one which Islam emphatically denies, affirming that every human being comes into the world innocent and sinless. Accordingly, he will be held accountable only for what he himself inscribes upon the unblemished *tabula rasa* of his nature, not what his ancestor Adam (or anyone else whomsoever) did or did not do.<sup>908</sup>

However, the ways some scholars describe *fiṭra* diverges drastically from Locke's blank slate. Umar F. Abd-Allah emphatically explains that children are not taught "from scratch" with a blank knowledge base. Rather, children are born inspired (*ilhām*) with potential, untapped knowledge that allows them to readily identify God and the moral good and to remember their primordial covenant. He deems Locke's *tabula rasa* theory

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<sup>905</sup> Riḍā, *al-Manār*, 1:470–74. Translation by the author.

<sup>906</sup> Cook, *The Commodification of Childhood*, 28.

<sup>907</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 198.

<sup>908</sup> Haneef 1995, 182. Cited in Yust, Karen-Marie, Aostre N. Johnson, and Sandy Eisenberg Sasso. *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2006, 341; Yust, *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality*, 132-136.

absurd and in contradiction with sound metaphysical understandings of *fiṭra*.<sup>909</sup> Whereas Locke's slate is blank, al-Ghazālī's tablet comes preprogrammed with *fiṭrī* knowledge stamped onto the child's soul, inclining her towards God's oneness (*tawḥīd*), worship, and other natural proclivities. Whereas anything can be inscribed upon the *tabula rasa*, the *fiṭra* is permanent and "cannot be wholly substituted by something else" even if it suffers alterations due to poor nurture. Thus, in this reading, al-Ghazālī's analogy of a child's nature being like a pure stone receptive to engravings (*al-naqsh 'alā l-ḥajr*) has less to do with the stone's blankness and more with the etching's permanence, which is likened to children's sharp memories.

Just as the concept of *fiṭra* is incongruent with Locke's *tabula rasa*, Muslim views of children's nature also diverge from Rousseau's notion of childhood innocence. Although *fiṭra* encompasses the belief that children naturally incline towards the good and are not held accountable, they are not wholly innocent.<sup>910</sup> Sunni theologians in particular contend that children are born with knowledge of evil since this is what gives them their capacity for free will and the ability to recognize good."<sup>911</sup> They can thus choose to misuse free will and follow their lower, carnal desires.<sup>912</sup> Unlike Rousseau, *Ash 'arī* theologians believed that knowledge of evil remains a "latent, necessary component of human/child nature."<sup>913</sup> A Muslim child's *fiṭra* does not resemble either Calvinism's depraved child who—barring her membership to the elect—is predestined towards sinfulness, nor Rousseau's romantic child who is marked by moral primitivism

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<sup>909</sup> Abd-Allah, "The Fitra."

<sup>910</sup> Coward, *The Perfectibility of Human Nature*, 84-86; Abd-Allah, "The Fitra."

<sup>911</sup> Ibid.

<sup>912</sup> Coward, *The Perfectibility of Human Nature*, 84-86, 85n19.

<sup>913</sup> Cook, *The Moral Project of Childhood*, 51.

and innocence, which is only edified through education.<sup>914</sup> Since children are not born wholly innocent and are tarnished, corporal punishment advocates argue that they sometimes discipline (in addition to revelatory guidance).<sup>915</sup>

### ***New Knowledge: Traumatizing Children, Enervating the Ummah***

Reformists at the turn of the century wrote at a time when trauma still meant “a physical wound or lesion caused by malice or accident.” Ian Hacking explains that the new meaning of trauma has come to denote “a spiritual wound working secretly in the soul.”<sup>916</sup> In the late aughts, both expert and popular knowledge on the persistent harm done by childhood trauma abound. The pervasiveness of “trauma talk” may have led some AMPE to question whether corporal punishment permanently deteriorates children’s mental health. They worry that physical discipline traumatizes children, ultimately causing them to apostate.<sup>917</sup> As Ian Hacking points out, the disciplined child has been psychologized. As a result of an adverse childhood experience, she is now considered to be someone whose insecure childhood attachments make her susceptible to a lifetime of physical and mental disadvantage.<sup>918</sup> Lecturing parents, Bilal Phillips predicts that children who are physically disciplined grow to hate their parents, and eventually their parent’s religion.<sup>919</sup> Likewise, Fredericks warns that only when Muslim immigrants abandon corporal punishment can they hope to stop the faith pandemic. Alshugairi similarly warns readers that spanking disconnects children from their parents, especially at a time “when individuality and autonomy are privileged.”

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<sup>914</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>915</sup> Coward, *The Perfectibility of Human Nature*, 98.

<sup>916</sup> Hacking, “Memoro-politics,” 34.

<sup>917</sup> Asad, “Agency and Pain,” 43.

<sup>918</sup> Hacking “Making Up People”

<sup>919</sup> Phillips, *Seven Habits of Successfully Raising Muslim Children*.

Corporally punishing may push “them out of the family unit and the community.”<sup>920</sup> Alshugairi writes that according to the “Islamic rules governing the use of physical discipline” “scholars agree that, if at any time, spanking leads to graver consequences, it must be abandoned.”<sup>921</sup> She implies that spanking Muslim children today only alienates them further from Muslim communities, asserting that “spanking does not achieve the *maqāṣid* (aims and objectives of the sharia) today.”<sup>922</sup> Muslim psychologists, therapists and counsellors routinely warn parents about corporal punishment’s psychological ramifications.<sup>923</sup> Whereas classical jurists sanctioned physical discipline when it benefits the child, some contemporary AMPE argue that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the harms of corporal punishment always outweigh the disciplinary benefits it may have achieved in the past.

In addition to causing long term damage to children and communities, some correlate punitive child-rearing to the overall geopolitical problems afflicting Muslims and fostering an inclination for authoritarianism. Rashīd Rīdā drew causal links between children’s corporal punishment and their susceptibility to tyrannical rule, associating harsh discipline with a child’s antipathy for his father, country, and ultimately the Ummah at large. In doing so, he foreshadowed later concerns that children dealt with sternly will abandon the fold altogether.<sup>924</sup> Hamza Yusuf implies that children’s discipline impacts the Ummah’s vitality: breaking children’s will eviscerate adult political will, dooming the revival of the Muslim tradition he champions. He insists that to improve the Ummah’s condition, parents must not hit children, implying

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<sup>920</sup> Al-Alshugairi, *Positive Parenting in the Muslim Home*, 379-383.

<sup>921</sup> Ibid, 381.

<sup>922</sup> Ibid.

<sup>923</sup> Keshavarzi, Hooman. *Islamic Parenting: A Psychospiritual Approach*; Alshugairi, *Positive Parenting in the Muslim Home*, 382.

<sup>924</sup> Riḍā, Rashīd. 1899. “Tarbiyah Al-Aṭfāl.” *Al-Manār* 2 (9): 90–92; 140-143.



that those who continue to do so contribute to Muslim post-colonies' dismal state.

Likewise, Hamza Yusuf asserts that children's maltreatment is a major problem:

I believe [that] at the root of human crisis is the way children are treated...I believe in many Muslim countries, there is so much child abuse—we are abusive in the way we raise our children. In America, [parents are] also abusive, I am not saying the way children are raised here is better, [there] is another extreme here—another way of being abusive.<sup>925</sup>

Hamza Yusuf identifies a clash of civilizational differences. He reiterates that “punitive child-rearing is probably the single most harmful thing that exists in the Muslim world today.” He contrasts punitive child-rearing in Muslim societies with Western laxity which he concedes is also “troubling” but insists that young children need love and care, justifying himself by citing Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddimah*.<sup>926</sup> Ibn Khaldūn had previously identified faulty child-rearing as the root cause of Muslim societal dysfunction.<sup>927</sup>

Although Ibn Khaldun acknowledged physical punishment's permissibility, he cautioned against severity:

Severe punishment in the course of instruction does harm to the student, especially to little children. It harms little children because it [creates] bad habit[s]. Students, slaves and servants who are brought up with injustice and (tyrannical) force are overcome by it. It makes them feel oppressed and causes them to lose energy. It makes them lazy and induces them to lie and be insincere. That is, their outward behavior differs from what they are thinking because they are afraid that they will suffer tyrannical treatment (if they tell the truth.) Thus, they are taught deceit and trickery. This becomes their custom and character. They lose [qualities] that [facilitate] social and political organization and make people human, namely, (the desire to) protect and defend [one's self and one's property]. Indeed, their souls become too indolent to acquire virtues and good character. Thus, they fall short of their potentialities and do not reach the [potential] of their humanity. As a result, they revert to the stage of 'the lowest of the low.' This is what happened to every nation that fell under the yoke of tyranny...<sup>928</sup>

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<sup>925</sup> Hanson, Hamza Yusuf. n.d. *2 Main Issues with the World Today*.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8r03ANltRc8&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>926</sup> Ibn Khaldūn. *The Muqaddimah*, 424-5.

<sup>927</sup> Hanson, Hamza Yusuf. n.d. *Bringing up a Child in This World*.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9ksUZMLqUg&list=PLbkgIHO7AWNxxFE8aqpBFEoQt-5\\_OqjTY&index=3](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9ksUZMLqUg&list=PLbkgIHO7AWNxxFE8aqpBFEoQt-5_OqjTY&index=3); Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 172.

<sup>928</sup> Ibn Khaldūn. *The Muqaddimah*, 424-5.

Ibn Khaldun explains that people severely punished as children become susceptible to tyrannical despotism. Hamza Yusuf links Ibn Khaldun's insights to the failure of the Arab spring of the 2010s, implying that the triumph of dictatorships may lie in the overly severe child-rearing practices which are supposedly predominant in contemporary Muslim majority countries.

### ***New Experts***

Along with new knowledge that associates all forms of physical disciplining with debilitating trauma for both individuals and societies, the shift of perceiving *all* forms of physical discipline as abusive creates space for new forms of authority. Ian Hacking explains that in the 1960s, new public consciousness about child abuse gave rise to new experts. This demand for new expertise is also apparent in American Muslim communities. For quite some time, medical professionals and American psychologists have shifted public opinion against corporal punishment.<sup>929</sup> In February of 2019, the American Psychological Association (APA) released a resolution recommending that caregivers refrain from physically disciplining children due to its negative effects.<sup>930</sup> Famous individual psychologists have also denounced corporal punishment. For example, the cofounder of the organization to End the Physical Punishment of Children, Penelope Leach (b. 1937) claims that spanking is the result of parental weakness and frustration.<sup>931</sup> Similarly, Leonard Sax decries corporal punishment, which he associates with unloving, old-fashioned, authoritarian parenting.<sup>932</sup> Likewise, psychologist Jane

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<sup>929</sup> Cook, *The Commodification of Childhood*, 35-6; Apple, Rima D. 1995. "Constructing Mothers: Scientific Motherhood in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries." *Social History of Medicine* 8 (2): 178; Wolfe, *Alfred Adler: The Pattern of Life*, 88.

<sup>930</sup> "Resolution on Physical Discipline of Children By Parents." n.d. American Psychological Association. Accessed February 21, 2020. <https://www.apa.org/about/policy/physical-discipline.pdf>.

<sup>931</sup> Hulbert, *Raising America*, 331; Ridgely, *Practicing What the Doctor Preached*, 62.

<sup>932</sup> LeFebvre, Roibn "The Writer's Life | Leonard Sax: Being a Good Parent." Shelf Awareness. Accessed November 16, 2020. <https://www.shelf-awareness.com/readers-issue.html?issue=469>.

Nelsen unequivocally states that she does not believe spanking is effective long-term.<sup>933</sup> Additionally, psychologist Jean Twenge denounces spanking and argues that “children who are spanked comply with immediate requests, but are actually less likely to behave on their own in the future.”<sup>934</sup>

Like most of the North American psychological establishment, most American physicians also condemn physical discipline. In 2018 the American Academy of Pediatrics announced a new policy recommending that parents and caregivers “use effective discipline strategies for children that do not involve spanking, other forms of corporal punishment or verbal shaming.”<sup>935</sup> In Chapter 1, I mentioned the popularity of Dr. Sears amongst my interlocutors. He also warns that corporal punishment will cause emotional issues for the child later in life and perpetuates violence.<sup>936</sup> Similarly, some of my interlocutors mentioned that they glean disciplinary strategies from physician and trauma expert Gabor Mate, an AP advocate, attends to the etymology of the word discipline, which “shares the same root as disciple” suggesting that parents should strive to treat their children like their disciples (rather than subordinates).<sup>937</sup> Likewise, in her viral Ted Talk, Surgeon General Nadine Burke Harris classifies parents who “really believe that if you spare the rod, you spoil the child” as contributing to their children’s adverse childhood experience score (ACES) which foretells a lifetime of chronic health

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<sup>933</sup> Nelsen, Jane. “Spanking Your Child.” *Positive Discipline: Creating Respectful Relationships in Homes and Schools*, January 26, 2014. <https://www.positivediscipline.com/articles/spanking-your-child>.

<sup>934</sup> Twenge, *The Narcissism Epidemic*, 79.

<sup>935</sup> Sege, Robert D. “AAP Policy Opposes Corporal Punishment, Draws on Recent Evidence.” *AAP News*, November 5, 2018. <https://www.aappublications.org/news/2018/11/05/discipline110518>.

<sup>936</sup> Sears, William. “Spanking | Ask Dr. Sears.” *Ask Dr Sears | The Trusted Resource for Parents*. Accessed November 16, 2020. <https://www.askdrsears.com/topics/parenting/discipline-behavior/spanking/>.

<sup>937</sup> In *A Spacious Place: Reflections on the Journey in Christ* by Christopher Page. “Gabor Maté #4 – Discipline,” August 17, 2012. <https://inaspaciousplace.wordpress.com/2012/08/17/gabor-mate-4-discipline/>.

issues.<sup>938</sup> Academics and Historians have also denounced the longstanding practice of physical discipline in Judeo-Christian communities.<sup>939</sup> For example, historian Philip Greven laments that “Christian rationales for physical discipline...of children” have cast a “shadow of pain and suffering over the lives of vast numbers of people for more than two millennia.”<sup>940</sup> On the therapist’s couch, in the doctor’s office, and as consumers of podcasts, bestsellers, and newsprint, American Muslim mothers encounter a steady stream of condemnation for parents who corporally punish.<sup>941</sup>

This expert knowledge condemning physical discipline has spilled into popular sources of Muslim child-rearing knowledge.<sup>942</sup> Instead of prescribing physical discipline, AMPE offer their own alternatives for dealing with willful children, in addition to Locke’s recommendation to reason with children and Rousseau’s natural consequences strategy. It is worth mentioning that one strategy that AMPE generally do not advise is medicating children into docility.<sup>943</sup> Several AMPE have cited Leonard Sax who condemns the overuse of pharmaceuticals to address children’s behavior. Elsewhere, he writes against the widespread use of psychotropic drugs on misbehaving children and laments the reluctance of parents to establish themselves as disciplinary authorities.<sup>944</sup> Rather than resort to pharmaceuticals, AMPE advocate a range of gentle disciplinary techniques. Shireen Ahmad encourages her English-speaking readers to avail themselves of “child-driven” parenting books that do not advocate punishment.

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<sup>938</sup> Harris, Nadine Burke. 2015. “How Childhood Trauma Affects Health across a Lifetime.” TED, February 17. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=950vIJ3dsNk&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>939</sup> Miller, *Discourses of Discipline*, 199.

<sup>940</sup> Fitz-Gibbon, *Corporal Punishment, Religion, and United States Public Schools*, 40.

<sup>941</sup> Lofton, *Religion and the Authority in Parenting*, 827.

<sup>942</sup> Hacking, “Making Up People.”

<sup>943</sup> Umm Sahl and Nuh Keller, *Raising Children*. 2016.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nx1A6nOt8oY&list=PLkeswUfE24HEnENSrobMpON2g5JILNr> v.

<sup>944</sup> Sax, Leonard. 2016. *Boys Adrift: The Five Factors Driving the Growing Epidemic of Unmotivated Boys and Underachieving Young Men*. Hachette UK, *passim*.

Instead of physical discipline AMPE urge parents to be role models. Farhat Hashmi encourages mothers to cry when listening to the Quran in front of their children to teach reverence for the Book.<sup>945</sup> ‘Ālimah Maha instructs mothers to consider their own relationship to prayer: is prayer their coping mechanism? Is it what they turn to during times of calamity and times of great blessing?<sup>946</sup> Like Hashmi, she advises mothers to act as though they lost their family and all their wealth if they miss a prayer and thus perform the right kind of affect in front of their children.<sup>947</sup> When asked about raising pious Muslim children in the West, a prominent Sufi Shaykh tells mothers to not worry about them but to work on their own self-rectification, since “your children will do what you do.” Similarly, Umm Sahl instructs mothers to show their children that they will suspend all their worldly engagements in order to pray on time.<sup>948</sup> Earlier Muslim scholars also stressed the importance of parental affect. For instance, Riḍā wrote that “the most important thing...is that *tarbiya* does not occur by speech but by one’s treatment [of children].<sup>949</sup> All of these educators repeat Al-Ghazālī’s earlier advice to *kuttāb* teachers to begin teaching by rectifying themselves first.

In addition to modeling correct behavior, contemporary AMPE also encourage behavior modification.<sup>950</sup> Hamza Yusuf reminds parents that the Prophet’s method was to tell children what to do rather than what not to do:

Look at alternatives to the negative! Instead of “Don’t touch!” Say: “Keep your hands by your side.” Instead of saying “Don’t run!” Say: “Walk slowly.” Instead of saying “Don’t shout!” Say, “Talk quietly.” That is called *al-amr bi-l ma ‘rūf wa-l nahī ‘an al-munkar*.

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<sup>945</sup> Hashmi, *Parenting in Islam | MBH Summit 2016*.

<sup>946</sup> Sadiq, Maha. “Raising Our Children,” Lecture 4.

<sup>947</sup> Ibid.

<sup>948</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children,” 18.1.

<sup>949</sup> Riḍā, Muḥammad Rashīd. “2nd Part of Our Speech Regarding Tarbiya.” In *al-Manār : majallah shahrīyah tabḥathu fī falsafat al-dīn wa-shu’ūn al-ijtimā’ wa-al-‘umrān*, 1:470–74. Egypt: HathiTrust Digital Library (Miṣr [Egypt :s.n.,1898?]), 1897.

<sup>950</sup> Hays, *Cultural Contradictions*, 39-40; Fitz-Gibbon, *Corporal Punishment*, 48.

*Al-amr bi-l ma'rūf* precedes *nahī 'an al-munkar*, the command to enjoin good goes before prohibiting evil. But we just say *lā taf'al, lā taf'al!* (Don't do this! Don't do this!)<sup>951</sup>

El-Haddad and Ustādha Sulma Badrudduja of the Sila Initiative instruct parents to host prayer parties. In parallel, Awaad instructs parents to “make a big fuss” when children pray. Based on the Prophet’s race with his young wife ‘Ā’isha, Farhat Hashmi calls for fostering healthy competition by keeping track of children’s prayers in sticker charts and asking them how many flowerpots they have planted that day for their garden in the afterlife.<sup>952</sup> Similarly, Philips prescribes “positive reinforcement, meaning if you find them doing good things reward them for it, [teach them that] there is good in being good.” Similarly, Faraz Rabbani advises parents to create a “loving merciful environment in the household [and] in the social gatherings in which one takes the children, so that prayer is normalized, made positive, memorable, and beautiful to the child.”<sup>953</sup>

Commenting on Ibn al-Ḥājj, who repeats this advice from al-Ghazālī, Hamza Yusuf highlights how the text instructs parents and educators to honor children and to strengthen their self-esteem.<sup>954</sup> He marvels at the fact that Muslims were discussing children’s self-esteem, a concept only popularized in America in the 1980s, “1400 years ago.”<sup>955</sup> Elsewhere in the *Madkhal*, Ibn al-Ḥājj approves of decorating the *alwāḥ* (pl. *lawḥ*) or pupils’ writing tablets used for Quranic memorization when

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<sup>951</sup> Hanson, *Nurturing Children*.

<sup>952</sup> Noor ul Huda. 2018. *Bachon Ko Aahista Bolna Kese Sikhayen* || Dr.Farhat Hashmi. Youtube. Islamabad. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTJWMSFSXK4>.

<sup>953</sup> Rabbani, Faraz. *How Do We Encourage Our Children to Pray, and at What Age?*

<sup>954</sup> Ibn al-Ḥājj, *al-Madkhal*, 4:295-6.

<sup>955</sup> Hanson, *Nurturing Children*.

children graduate or on *ʿĪd* festivities “because this delights the children and makes them happy for the reward of what they have learned” and encourages diligence.<sup>956</sup>

Although Ibn al-Ḥājj allowed for praising and rewarding students, it may have been reserved for memorizing Quran, a supererogatory act of ritual, not merely the obligatory five daily prayers. In contrast, American Muslims praise actions that in other times and places were simply expected of children. Hassim notes that although “prizes and accolades were handed out to high achieving students” in the *kuttāb*, “praise was carried out with much caution” and discouraged perhaps due to the Prophet's dislike of flattery and over-praising.<sup>957</sup> Hassim concludes that from 750-1400 CE, medieval Muslim educationists did not emphasize rewarding children as a motivational strategy, but rather relied on corporal punishment instead.<sup>958</sup> Furthermore, some scholars warned that rewarding children excessively creates undue social expectations on working class parents. For example, Thānavī may have frowned upon the contemporary suggestions to throw festive *ṣalāt* parties since this introduces costly innovative customs. He wrote:

Another custom is observed when a child first keeps the fast. No matter how poor the family is, no matter if they have to take a loan or go begging, they consider the vexatious custom of ‘breaking the fast’ a necessity. It is a sin to consider necessary what is not deemed necessary by the *shariʿat* [sic]. Therefore, you must give up this unnecessary requirement!<sup>959</sup>

He similarly lamented that children’s Quran completion ceremonies impose unnecessary requirements on parents “such as inviting guests and distributing outfits of clothing

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<sup>956</sup> Ibn al-Ḥājj, *al-Madkhal, fāḍl fī tazwīq al-ʿalwāḥ*, 2: 305-335.

<sup>957</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 126 and 198.

<sup>958</sup> *Ibid*, 198.

<sup>959</sup> Metcalf, *Perfecting Women*, 156.

done only to achieve recognition.”<sup>960</sup> He was concerned that celebrating children’s spiritual accomplishments risks promoting crass consumerism and alienating the poor.

Perhaps to balance out the excesses of positive reinforcement, some AMPE condone negative behavior modification, such as ignoring the child, withdrawing affection, or removing privileges.<sup>961</sup> Umm Sahl advises mothers to cultivate a stern look, which may be effective on occasions when corporal punishment is inappropriate or unwarranted.<sup>962</sup> The disciplinary look was endorsed by al-Ghazālī who advised *kuttāb* teachers to “sit quietly and glance sideways” [at his misbehaving students]—the modern-day equivalent of the “side-eye.”<sup>963</sup> When a look is insufficient, ‘Ālimah Maha explains that the Prophet would escalate to the cold shoulder:

‘Ā’isha *raḍī Allahu ‘anha* said that if the Messenger of Allah came home and learned that someone in his household had told a lie, he would try to ignore them until they repented—the cold shoulder method. [This was] compassionate [and] merciful. [Once the offender] asked the Prophet for forgiveness, and repented, then the Prophet acted like everything was back to normal.<sup>964</sup>

This method was emphasized later by Ibn al-Ḥājj, who also advised parents and educators to condone children’s faults, especially upon their first occurrence. He writes:

And if [the child] violates [the demands of good character] sometimes then you must pretend not to notice his actions. Do not uncover [his fault]. Do not reveal it and make it apparent. Rather pretend as though he is one who avoids this type of thing, especially if the child is trying to hide his fault and struggles to conceal it. If he is attempting to conceal his fault, then exposing it might encourage him to be more audacious [in the future] and he will no longer bother [trying] to conceal his faults afterwards. However, if he [errs] a second time, then you must chasten him secretly and impress upon him the gravity of the matter.<sup>965</sup>

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<sup>960</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>961</sup> Bellack, Alan S., Michel Hersen, and Alan E. Kazdin. *International Handbook of Behavior Modification and Therapy*. Springer Science & Business Media, 2012, 10.

<sup>962</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children,” 20.1.

<sup>963</sup> Hassim, *Elementary Education*, 156n63. He cites Al-Ghazālī, *Al-’Adab fī al-Dīn*, 134.

<sup>964</sup> Sadiq, Maha. “Raising Our Children.”

<sup>965</sup> Ibn al-Ḥājj, *al-Madkhal*, 4:295-296. Translation by the author.



Hamza Yusuf quotes this in his lectures. Although he reiterates the Prophet's nonviolence, he says he may have given his wives the silent treatment as a form of *ta'dīb* (discipline).<sup>966</sup>

AMPE also endorse behavior modification. Keshavarzi endorses the removal of privileges but encourages parents to allow children opportunities to make amends. In so doing, parents teach children both fear (of God) and hope (of His forgiveness):

Do not kill the hope of your child. Give them the opportunity to redeem themselves. Tell them 'ok ... this necessitates a week off of this, but if you are on your best behavior ... then you get it back in three days.' Allah does *targhīb*, [He] motivates us by reward and consequences... We [as parents] have to do the same thing. [There is] always an opportunity for return—*tawba* (repentance).<sup>967</sup>

Keshavarzi advises parents to explain why they are removing privileges and avoid acting in an arbitrary, authoritarian fashion. Similarly, Umm Sahl advocates removing privileges when children resist routines, since this refusal represents a lesser “breach of *adab*” that does not warrant corporal punishment.<sup>968</sup> Likewise, Yahya Rhodus instructs mothers that removing privileges is wise, since he finds American children “over-privileged.”<sup>969</sup>

Some AMPE also advocate the use of shame (making children conscious of what others think about them) and guilt (inculcating a feeling within themselves that they have done something wrong). Umm Sahl recommends that the first time a child misbehaves parents should simply tell the child that their action is *'ayb* (shameful)<sup>970</sup> She finds this more effective than telling younger children that God will not be pleased

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<sup>966</sup> Hanson, *Nurturing Children*.

<sup>967</sup> Keshavarzi, Hooman. *Islamic Parenting: A Psychospiritual Approach*.

<sup>968</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children.”

<sup>969</sup> Rhodus, Yahya. *Educating Children*. Al-Maqasid. Accessed December 17, 2018.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bgd\\_w98MxKU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bgd_w98MxKU).

<sup>970</sup> Krasniqi, “Raising Muslim Children,” 31.2.

with their action, since they may struggle to conceptualize Allah. She mentions that al-Ghazālī advised parents to discipline younger children by telling them that “people don’t like this” rather than saying “God does not like this” since the child may be more sensitive to collective disliked action.<sup>971</sup> Like Umm Sahl, Hamza Yusuf explains that the “Arabs have a beautiful way” of dealing with children’s misbehavior by labelling it as ‘*ayb* (disgraceful, shameful). Parents can thus point out a blemish in the child’s behavior and define the action as an ‘*ayb*, rather than cursing the child as an “ ‘*ā`ib qabīh* or *shayṭān*,” (a shameful, ugly, or satanic person) that way “they don’t feel that there is something wrong with them but rather something is wrong with their action.”<sup>972</sup>

Hamza Yusuf quotes Ibn al-Ḥājj on humiliation:

And you could show how immense the matter is by telling the child that you have come to know of the bad action or something like it which has come to light publicly amongst people. Do not speak a lot about it by way of censure...because then it will become easier for him to hear how blameworthy he is, and it will make it easy for him to perpetuate ugly acts, and the gravity of your speech will no longer hold weight in his heart...<sup>973</sup>

Here, Ibn al-Ḥājj foreshadows the advice of the popular American shame resilience researcher Brené Brown by instructing parents and educators to avoid shaming a child to the point that she begins to identify with the behavior.<sup>974</sup> Hamza Yusuf considers revealing children’s faults to others destructive parenting. Conversely, by telling the children that their actions will eventually be exposed to other people, parents assist in cultivating a sense of both shame (in front of others) *and* guilt (before God) that encourages children to hold themselves internally accountable.<sup>975</sup> Hamza Yusuf explains

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<sup>971</sup> Ibid, 6.5.

<sup>972</sup> Hanson, *Nurturing Children*.

<sup>973</sup> Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Al-Madkhal*, 4:297. Translation by the author.

<sup>974</sup> Brown, Brené. *I Thought It Was Just Me (but It Isn't): Making the Journey from “What Will People Think?” To “I Am Enough.”* 1st edition. Avery, 2007.

<sup>975</sup> For an analysis of the shifts in the meaning of the notions of shame and guilt with the advent of Islam, see El Shamsy, Ahmed. 2015. “11. Shame, Sin, and Virtue: Islamic Notions of Privacy.” In *Public and*

that the cultivation of shame is praiseworthy since the characteristic feature of Islam according to the Prophet is *ḥayā* ‘ (shame, modesty, or bashfulness).<sup>976</sup> This complicates American Muslims’ lives since at times, what is considered shameful within the family differs from the broader society’s metrics of shame.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has argued for the collapse of the classical distinction between normal and deviant child discipline. With noteworthy exceptions, most AMPE have begun equating physical discipline of children with child abuse. Instead of corporal punishment, they prescribe an array of alternative strategies for children’s moral instruction (*tarbiya*). Most AMPE have adopted the language of secular psychologists, psychiatrists, and physicians to caution parents about the dangers of physical correction at the expense of connection. I am not recommending corporally punishing children. Rather, following Ware, I am curious about the changing quotidian child-rearing practices that may indicate larger transformations in Muslim children’s religious education and their “postures of submissiveness” (or lack thereof).<sup>977</sup>

To conclude, I reflect on potential changes to children’s religious education when physical discipline becomes off-limits. Families who denounce corporal punishment may not view fathers and teachers as the default sovereigns and disciplinarians as the Greeks and classical Muslim authors regarded them. Prevailing maternal attitudes that remove fathers’ and teachers’ right to corporally punish may signal larger changes to the

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*Private in Ancient Mediterranean Law and Religion*, edited by Clifford Ando and Jörg Rüpke, 237–50. De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110367034.237>.

<sup>976</sup> Sunan Ibn Mājah, *Kitāb al-Zuhūd*, #4182. Brene Brown would define shame here as (beneficial) guilt rather than shame.

<sup>977</sup> Ware, *The Walking Quran*, 78. "Postures of submissiveness" is a phrase used by Ware, who in turn attributes it to Sanneh, *Crown and the Turban* (1997).

structure of American Muslim families. Whereas children’s discipline may have once been a communal project undertaken by both biological parents and non-consanguineous alloparents, local *kuttāb* teachers, and village elders, it is now an individualized responsibility that falls upon biological parents—especially mothers. Consequently, the task of perfecting children’s comportment is primarily attributed to “noble motherhood” and self-determined mothers. When children’s etiquette is lacking, mothers are at fault. Most of my interlocutors assumed the task of primary disciplinarian as natural and were less likely to rely on fathers, teachers, and other fictive kin as supplemental parents who can reinforce mothers’ disciplinary efforts. The contraction of networks that would otherwise support children’s discipline suggests yet another way in which modern motherhood has become more intensified and child-rearing has become less cooperative.

Changes in the ways parents govern children may also alter children’s subjectivity. Gentler disciplinary strategies coincide with the democratic values of American Muslims mothers aspiring to middle class acceptance. Influenced by psychologists such as Adler and Mate, Sears and Spock they privilege children’s autonomy and seek to cooperate with them democratically.<sup>978</sup> These mothers may not find relevance in older *tarbiya* methods aimed at teaching children to overcome their egoistic desires. In contrast, women aspiring to noble motherhood are unsatisfied with nuclear family life and long for larger, extended family structures, which may require younger children to know their (subordinate) place in a hierarchically ordered household. For them, corporal punishment instills not just obedience to parents and

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<sup>978</sup> Golden, Deborah, Lauren Erdreich, and Sveta Roberman. *Mothering, Education and Culture: Russian, Palestinian and Jewish Middle-Class Mothers in Israeli Society*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2018, 170-171.

superiors—but also can be one tool to instill salvific obedience to God. Some worry that when the hierarchal familial order—which they perceive as natural—is inverted, then this is just one more indication of a sorrowful prophecy, that, at the end of times, societal order inverts as slave-mothers birth disobedient child-masters.<sup>979</sup>

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<sup>979</sup> al-Baghā, Muṣṭafā Dīb. 2007. *Al-Wāfi Fī Sharḥ al-Arbaʿīn al-Nawawī*. Damascus: Dār al-Kalim al-Ṭayyib, 17.

## ***Concluding Remarks***

I was inspired to write this dissertation while sitting in a breastfeeding class. At an upscale yoga studio on the north side, I joined other pregnant women along with some reluctantly supportive husbands. We listened to the teacher meticulously explain the difference between old-school postures and modern laid-back “biological” nursing, the mysteries of latching and the complexity of milk storage. At question time, a fellow expectant mother nervously raised her hand, “What if I simply cannot breastfeed?” The teacher reassured her that she could source human milk online. But she challenged us to consider an alternative future: “We should normalize milk-sharing. If you are blessed with oversupply, relieve your engorgement by offering your neighbor’s child some milk, it’s a win-win!”

I was struck by this lactation consultant’s enthusiasm for this brave “new frontier” in breastfeeding activism—direct milk-sharing. It was of course not new at all. Al-Juwaynī’s neighbor shared her milk with him freely just as one might lend a neighbor a cup of sugar. Like many of my interlocutors, after giving birth and struggling to find adequate childcare, I longed for this neighborliness and was curious about collective modes of child-rearing. I wondered why a mother’s body lets down milk without differentiating whether it is her infant crying or someone else’s. What is it that prevents most American Muslim women from collecting other people’s children without hesitation and helping to fulfill their attachment needs? What makes my peer group hypervigilant about friends and grandparents, in-laws, and Sunday school teachers correcting their children? Without supplemental parents in the forms of wet nurses and *Kuttāb* teachers, extremely limited state support and weak communal bonds, my

interlocutors felt all the pressure of rearing children on their own but also hesitated to accept the assistance of others.

What accounts for this reluctance towards collective infant feeding, cooperative children's discipline, and ultimately more communal childrearing? I suggest that the embrace of Western medical science, its standards of hygiene and a modern emphasis on individual authenticity, has convinced many of my interlocutors to become extra cautious about guarding their children's physical boundaries and prioritizing their autonomy and their Muslimness. These mothers are concerned with making sure their children feel included in America's pluralistic social fabric even when this inclusion comes at the expense of downplaying their practice and outspokenness on certain aspects of sharia that do not seamlessly align with liberalism. These mothers are reluctant to constrain their children's free expression by the Muslim tradition's standards of virtue. This trend occurs in a context of fear of rigid Muslim social actors—real and imagined—in retrograde mosque communities that might act in ways that corroborate anti-Muslim stereotyping and thus alienate American Muslim children away from Islam. All these factors may incline some of my interlocutors to practices that I associate with self-determined American Muslim mothering.

Simultaneously, there is a fear that American Islam is undergoing a process of erosion, wherein one generation becomes less likely to identify as Muslim than the previous one and less reverent towards Muslim clerisy. This has led some mothers to be more receptive to traditionalists who question whether Muslim identity can be transmitted without an emphasis on embodied practices. Mothers inclined to noble motherhood are concerned with protecting their own parental rights and religious freedoms. They are inclined to revisit ways of embodying tradition as a matter of

communal survival. Along with (re-)learning breastfeeding mechanics, they feel the need to (re-)learn the classical trivium and correct comportment at a *dhikr*, how to give birth naturally and recite *qasā'id*, how to engender love for the Prophet and what to do when visiting a shrine. They observe a correlation between lost nursing relationships—not just with other women but often also with their boomer mothers—and other critical pedagogical relationships that aid in Muslim self-fashioning.

With these reflections in mind, I read Ibn al-Ḥājj who describes breastfeeding as the first of three critical pedagogical relationships a child needs. In this dissertation I have limited myself to the first two types of nurse-fosterage Ibn al-Ḥājj discusses that serve as prerequisites for the larger task of educating Muslim children. The first is the child's relationship with her wet nurse who he calls the first *murabbī*, recognizing the role she has in children's *tarbiya*. Ibn al-Ḥājj implies that the breastfeeding relationship primes children's future receptivity to the Quran and higher religious sciences. Seen in this light, human milk becomes the vehicle for imparting knowledge from the nurse to the nursling through a traceable genealogical chain. The breastfeeding relationship then prepares the child to receive knowledge and develop competencies to benefit from the secondary and tertiary pedagogical relationships she will enter such as that between student and teacher (*mu'addib*). In this second fosterage, *Riḍā' a l-thāni*, the *mu'addib*, often a Quran teacher, continues to train the child in manners and etiquettes. This polishing is necessary to prepare children for spiritual mastery.

This dissertation does not treat the third relationship, a child's relationship with her *shaykh* or the type of schooling she should receive. Ibn al-Ḥājj was concerned with parents enrolling their children into Christian schools. He cautioned that they were learning more than just arithmetic and accounting. Rather, their cognition was being



shaped in ways that threatened the integrity of their Islam. He encouraged children to sit at the feet of pious Muslim teachers instead.<sup>980</sup>

Ibn al-Ḥājj's anxieties around non-Muslim schooling and peer attachments for children remain relevant amongst my interlocutors. These anxieties are addressed by Muslim parent educators who offer this solution: Islamize attachment research. Abdullah Rothman explains how attachment parenting serves Muslim parents' interests:

[Attachment parenting] is a very good model, but we need to add the notion of why it is important—the end point is not just about the attachment to parent, but wanting them to be attached, surrendered, and submitted to Allah. This attachment between child and parent arranges the parent and child's hierarchy not in that we are dominating children but we have to be the guide for them, they don't have what they need, they need guidance just like we need the Quran and the Sunnah, it creates the safety of them taking guidance from you because you've built sense of attachment and reliance, it creates a natural order, you don't need to learn parenting techniques or go to take a course, its naturally in you, but all these other things have to be naturally situated for our *fiṭra* to come out.<sup>981</sup>

As I discussed in Chapter 1, American Muslim mothers and parent educators like Rothman enthusiastically endorse attachment parenting and what they perceive as its alignment with *fiṭra*. They effectively graft the latest child development science with traditional *tarbiya* literature, integrating the old traditional Sunnī content with new neuroscience.<sup>982</sup> By embracing attachment, American Muslim mothers will also be model citizens focused intensively on their own intimate relationships within the private spheres of their nuclear families. Parent educators reassure them of attachment parenting's general commensurability with *tarbiya*. They stress the ways in which an

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<sup>980</sup> Ibn al-Ḥājj, *al-Madkhal*, 4:324-327. Translation by the author.

<sup>981</sup> Rothman, Abdallah, dir. 2022. *God Conscious Parenting*. Cambridge Muslim College. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LoHSIsczn2Q>.

<sup>982</sup> Shayeghan, *Cultural Schizophrenia*, 76.

emphasis on mother-child attachment resonates with prophetic mercy and that attachment parenting's emphasis on physical mother-child closeness aligns with the Quran's endorsement of breastfeeding and maternal custody for the young.

However, by telling the story of my interlocutors' enthusiasm for attachment parenting, I seek to reflect not just on areas of coherence but also on what this enthusiasm obscures. I have demonstrated that some scholars warn of becoming *overly* attached to their children, that in indulging in this relationship they create small narcissists and neglect other relationships children could benefit from. Parent educators are *not* encouraging mothers to share milk or to hire wet nurses. Similarly, there is less emphasis on hiring *murabbis* for one's children who could be trusted with disciplining their minds *and* bodies. The emphasis on *connection* instead of *direction* signals changes in the ways American Muslims educate the young. Parents may downplay the majestic and powerful (*jalālī*) attributes of God and Quranic imagery of hellfire and physical punishments.

This dissertation also seeks to examine the pressures and hopes placed on American Muslim mothers, namely the notion that communal reform can and should begin with reforming and disciplining mothers, that the ummah's well-being (*'afiya*) hinges on mother-child attachment and her ability to create an Islamic home environment with little external support. The underbelly of this argument is that when some children do leave Islam, mothers are implicated for being insufficiently self-aware or inflicting their own unresolved trauma onto their child. Instead of asking what social, political, and economic solutions mothers (and fathers) need to maintain sound connections with their children, parent educators run the risk of implying that the solutions to familial ills are largely psychological and individual. The task of refining

children's behavior is also left to them with little institutional reinforcement. Both nursing and disciplining have become individualized, disembodied tasks.

Furthermore, examining parenting attitudes also tells us about my interlocutors competing conceptions of what constitutes an ideal, desirable child. Whereas some seek to cultivate pious self-disciplining subjects, others desire children who can navigate secular spaces with grace while continuing to self-identify as Muslim even when they no longer practice sharia. These competing visions suggest possible avenues for further study into debates regarding *tarbiya* that deepen fault lines within American Muslim communities.

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