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Official Islam in the Arab States of the Gulf: Local Establishments in a Regional and Global Context

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Introduction

In the Arab states of the Gulf, Islamic institutions have long existed at the intersection of local and regional space. Before the twentieth century, local rulers tended to rely on specific scholars who were part of regional religious networks for rudimentary needs in adjudication and education. The emergence of complex bureaucratic states in the middle of the twentieth century changed this picture in a way that renegotiated the terms between global and local Islam differently for each state.

The term "establishments" should be used in the plural domestically as well as internationally. Official Islam in the Gulf, as in other MENA (Middle East and North Africa) countries, is an assemblage of various spaces within which specialists of religion operate. This piece identifies and discusses three main areas through which religion became embedded into the modern state. The first two, education and the judiciary, are mostly nonreligious; they typically are populated by trained specialists who have at most a smattering of religious training, and they do not operate according to explicitly Islamic tenets. However, they both include "religious pockets" within the larger nonreligious apparatuses such as sharia courts, Islamic schools, and courses of religious education. The third area is that of unambiguously religious spaces and practices, particularly those involved in the operation of the mosques and the governance of religious charities. These typically are organized under a ministry of Islamic affairs and charities. Occasionally, the states also include a specialized body in charge of issuing religious opinions (*fatwas*).

As an outcome of this process, all Gulf states have established national religious bureaucracies that administer education, worship, charities, and some legal affairs. But sometimes there are sharp differences between national establishments and regional and global

structures and trends. Some countries still import personnel (and specific approaches) heavily and others seek to export. As official institutions emerged for education, adjudication, the administration of religious sites, and the distribution of charity in these countries throughout the twentieth century, they have continued to draw heavily on regional models and personnel, but some have developed far more robust internal structures, decreasing but not eliminating the need to import expertise. In the twenty-first century, the local-regional nexus began to change in another way, also unevenly. Some Gulf states, such as Kuwait and Oman, have built inward-looking structures. Others, such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), have sought to export or re-export as much as they import. Both sets of regimes also seem to have evolved from allowing autonomy to religious institutions (or a few senior trusted figures) to keeping a closer watch on religious spaces within the state apparatus.

This piece further examines the relationship of religion and political authorities in the three areas identified above—the education system, the courts, and governance of religious services and charities—in the region before the emergence of the independent states to explain how the foundations of the modern states altered these institutions. From these particulars, the focus shifts to twenty-first-century transformations, unpacking regional and national dynamics.

The Institutional Base: Informal but International

The rulers of what were to become Gulf states controlled small geographical areas, centered around cities and ports (Kuwait, Dubai), islands (Bahrain), and peninsulas (Qatar). A few were able to project their authority over larger territory (Oman). All of these rulers—and, in the modern era, almost all of their citizens—were Muslim.

Islam informed governance and public life in three main ways: adjudication of some disputes (courts), public assembly (mosques), and education (school). Both historical memory and historical reality indicates that institutions in such areas were informal until recently. In a sense, they were attached to the state, but until the later decades of the twentieth century the "state" consisted of the ruler and the small number of family members and offices supporting him. Those supporting individuals included judges for some cases (though rulers also heard some disputes directly), preachers, and teachers. Often, these positions were combined and indeed the use of the plural would be inappropriate: for smaller populations, a sole religiously trained individual might undertake one of these tasks singlehandedly—that is, there might be a "judge" rather than a "judiciary."

Yet this informal portrait, however accurate, can obscure the regional and even global context in which Gulf political systems and their associated religious institutions have operated. In particular, transnational trends and actors affected the nature and operation of Islamic institutions in five ways.

Islam informed governance and public life in three main ways: adjudication of some disputes (courts), public assembly (mosques), and education (school). Historical memory and historical reality indicate that institutions in such areas were informal until recently.

First, the Ottoman Empire was a direct presence in some locations and an influential regional presence in all countries. Even though Istanbul's direct administrative reach was limited, it still laid some claims to governance. In the north, Ottomans claimed suzerainty over an area encompassing today's Bahrain, Qatar, and parts of Saudi Arabia, particularly after an 1871 military campaign. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Ottoman Empire took major steps in bureaucratizing and expanding its educational, religious, and adjudicative agencies. It also bureaucratized the oversight and administration of endowments, which were a major source of support for religious and charitable institutions such as mosques and schools. The reach of Istanbul, and of these expanded institutions, was much less in the Gulf than in other parts of the Empire, so most Gulf societies saw little direct Ottoman activity in these realms. Yet even after Ottoman control was removed following the end of the world war in 1918, most regional states inherited some basic Ottoman frameworks which they modified and expanded. Any Gulf ruler considering constructing an educational system or drafting a law code had a ready set of Ottoman and post-Ottoman models on which to draw—if not their own, then those of nearby areas.

Second, the polities established by the Al Saud dynasty in the Arabian Peninsula and in Iran under the Qajar dynasty sought to expand their spheres of influence. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, local rulers threaded their way between the great powers based on their strategic interests to establish their own political authorities. Iran had some influence over regional Shia, and Saudi Arabia had a different set of scholars and institutional models to offer for Sunni.

Third, the British Empire expanded its presence, signing a series of formal agreements with Gulf rulers that left the latter largely in charge of internal affairs, except in matters affecting foreigners where the British posed as their protectors. British officials had little interest in Islamic institutions (or with much of internal society and politics), but their security umbrella protected the Gulf states and prevented their assimilation into any of the region's other ambitious empires.

Fourth, the region's porous borders enabled specialists to move about with relative freedom, so that informal regional networks of scholars operated even if most of those with official position had only a local focus. The limited needs of Gulf rulers for trained personnel, including in

religion, meant that they had to attract experts who had trained outside the country. In the religious field, formal training took place in only a small number of major cities.

Finally, small territory did not mean uniformity: the societies were both religiously and culturally plural. Qatar, Kuwait, and the UAE have a Sunni majority with Sunni rulers, but Shiism was present particularly in Kuwait. Bahrain has a Shia majority but has been ruled by a Sunni family. With this pluralism in mind, certain common historic trends can be traced across the Gulf in three spheres where religion entangled with political authority:

Education

During most of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, education in the Gulf was carried out in informal institutions.[1] The most common and basic form of education consisted of Quranic instruction and some reading, writing, and mathematics, provided for small children by an individual teacher—a community leader (a man for boys and a woman for girls) knowledgeable about religious studies. Generally, only the more affluent could support a dedicated space for such instruction, which was dependent on family and community support.

Education after the elementary level also was available for a select few. In some cases, circles of students would gather around a scholar, especially one specialized in Islamic teachings and jurisprudence.[2] Prominent scholars would travel throughout the region, sometimes at the invitation of local rulers, to establish more permanent schools. Those who wanted advanced training beyond what was locally available would travel to one of the region's several centers of religious scholarship. Sunni educational centers were established in Istanbul, Cairo, and Mecca.[3] Shia would attend academies in Iran or the Iraqi city of Najaf, though some smaller institutions were available in the Gulf itself. The system thus was personalized, tied to individual rulers, scholars, and supporting families and communities. There was no bureaucratic structure or regulatory framework overseeing the system.

Courts

In the nineteenth century, four sets of courts operated. First, many disputes would be submitted to the ruler, or in some instances a near relative of the ruler. Second, tribal populations would submit disputes to tribal leaders. Third, groups of merchants and artisans had dedicated courts and arbitration committees for members. Finally, rulers often would appoint a scholar of the Islamic sharia, who would rule on cases brought before him.

Only this last structure was clearly religious in nature and depended on a figure—often imported—trained in Islamic jurisprudence. In Qatar, for instance, Shaykh Abdallah Al Thani asked King 'Abd al-Aziz of Saudi Arabia to nominate a *qadi* (judge) to serve in Qatar

in 1940. The nominee was Abdallah b. Zayd Al Mahmud, a scholar later who would reach fame as the reformer of Qatar's Islamic judicial system.[4] At this stage, the judicial system was not yet fully institutionalized; most judges held court in schools or mosques, rather than a specialized courthouse, and jurisdiction was loosely defined.

In the twentieth century, two important changes were introduced in the Gulf states. First, Great Britain successfully asserted jurisdiction over non-Muslim foreigners and authority to legislate for them. Most of the inhabitants of Gulf societies were Muslims, but the non-Muslim population grew with the expansion of long-distance trade, a much more slowly expanding diplomatic and security presence, and occasional missionaries offering medical services. Second, the British presence and its formalization led to clearer delineation of jurisdiction among the various systems, with the rulers' courts (and sometimes sharia judiciaries by their side) gradually eclipsing other structures (such as tribal and merchant courts) for all who did not fall under the British court system.

Mosques and Awqaf

Places of worship also typically were built and maintained through philanthropy, often through Islamic endowments known as a *waqf* (plural: *awqaf*). These endowments would be administered by endowers themselves or their representatives.[5] Sometimes, local rulers would establish additional religious endowments, particularly for the construction of mosques.[6]

Shia

The rulers of the city-states of the Gulf were Sunni, except for the Ibadi imamate in Oman. But there were significant concentrations of Shia in pockets along the Gulf, most notably in Bahrain and Kuwait, along with parts of what became Saudi Arabia in the twentieth century. Even with little local support from the rulers, Shia communities still were able to form their own institutions for assembly, education, and charitable affairs, and remained linked to wider regional networks to the north and east in Iraq and Iran. In Bahrain, both local and foreign scholars trained in Islamic jurisprudence served as judges in Shia and Sunni courts for the adherents of two sects, with the Sunni judiciary retaining the prerogative to rule on cases between Sunni and Shia subjects.[7]

State Building and Independence: The Slow Emergence of State Islam

In the Muslim world, as in other areas around the globe, religious services and authorities often became incorporated into the bodies of the emerging modern states.[8] The Ottoman state built state structures for general and specialized education, as Ottoman bureaucracies formalized stages of education, accredited degrees, and specified curricula. This process had little direct effect on the states of the Gulf as they were built, but it did provide a regional model. More significantly, perhaps, Gulf states brought in trained personnel from many post-Ottoman states to design and staff their developing structures, and some students traveled to these states for advanced training. As a result, Gulf states tended to follow Ottoman patterns, though other states also were influential. In clearly Islamic fields such as Islamic law and education, Saudi Arabia (which had a much more limited Ottoman inheritance) strongly influenced countries such as Qatar. In other fields that were not identifiably Islamic but still had some connection with education and law, such as the legal and teaching professions, some students traveled to Europe (especially the United Kingdom) and later North America for further education.

In the Muslim world, as in other areas around the globe, religious services and authorities often became incorporated into the bodies of the emerging modern states.

However, the construction of bureaucratic states came much later in the Gulf than elsewhere in the region. Even as late as the middle of the twentieth century, Gulf polities were still nascent states that lacked intricate bureaucratic bodies. The process moved slowly until their independence from British rule—1961 in Kuwait, 1971 elsewhere—and accelerated only in the last third of the twentieth century with the growth of oil industries. When they aimed to build more robust structures in education, law, and public worship, Gulf states typically lacked many locally trained personnel. They relied on scholars from outside their borders, most notably (but not exclusively) Egypt and Saudi Arabia, to run their schools, judicial systems, and religious services. Consequently, for the Gulf States the "statization" of the religious establishment has been dramatic but has not built a domestic religious sphere separate from the rest of the region or globe. The set of structures that they have developed resemble others in the region but have distinct shapes, reflecting the unique characteristics of each political system and society.

Starting in the 1960s, these states undertook several key reforms. A key institutional novelty around the Gulf was the creation of ministries in charge of religious affairs and religious endowments. The extant directorates in charge of awqaf and endowed institutions, often skeletal at best, were reorganized under the supervision of these ministries. The newly created bodies generally oversaw other religious functions as well, such as the distribution of charity. These new states also began establishing modern educational institutions that

included religious learning. Islamic education was often a key curriculum component from primary school level onward. Certain states chose to establish public schools that gave more extensive religious education. Postsecondary schools began to prepare students for higher learning in religious fields. Initially, students often went to universities abroad, but over time the Gulf states began building their own universities that offered higher-level specialization in Islamic sciences.

All of the Gulf states adopted their own law codes. These codes generally drew on Ottoman and Egyptian codes, sometimes with some British influence (especially before independence). More recently, legal codes have drawn on broader global norms, especially in finance, commerce, and technical fields. The Gulf states also developed hierarchical court systems, sometimes with specialized judicial structures for specific matters such as administrative disputes (that is, cases in which a state body is a party) and constitutional ones. All generally adjudicate family matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance on the basis of religious law, but they differ in whether there are distinct "sharia" courts and in how they handle cases involving non-Sunni participants—especially Shia.

Even within these common elements of state formation; the "statization" of religion; and the construction of bureaucratic structures for education, law, and public worship, specific patterns vary.

Kuwait

Kuwait formally gained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1961, and its independence was a turning point for the creation of national religious institutions. However, the foundations of these institutions in Kuwait, as in other Gulf states, go back to the early twentieth century, when the seeds of modern state bureaucracies were planted before the declaration of independence. These institutions first were ad hoc entities without a clear centralized and organized bureaucracy. A notable point about Kuwait is its sectarian pluralism, as about a quarter of the population adhere to Shia Islam, rather than the Sunni branch followed by the majority of the people and the ruling family. The nature of religious institutions follows this duality, as duplicate and separate religious institutions have been established for the Shia and Sunni communities. The creation of the new state resulted in more clearly defined bureaucratic hierarchies and organizational structures, although tensions remain as to how the state should relate to religion in the context of sectarian pluralism.

Education

More formalized educational institutions arose in the early twentieth century, first with private and later with state-led initiatives. A notable private school, Mubarakiyya, was founded in Kuwait by Sunni merchants as early as 1911.[9] But political confrontations led the government to start establishing its own schools around 1940, providing the basis for a

public educational system that includes secular as well as religious education.[10] Since that time, religion has been an integral part of primary and secondary public instruction.

When Kuwait achieved independence in 1961, the construction of a bureaucratic state accelerated. Religion alone did not drive the construction of higher education in Kuwait, but it was one area, along with engineering, law, and public administration, where the country's leadership felt it needed trained personnel. It motivated the establishment of Kuwait University in 1966, with a sharia college added one year later.[11] The college, which prepares students for religious positions in the state bureaucracy, attracted other students interested in a legal career because its degrees were accepted as qualifications for such work. Its curriculum has shown both Saudi (and thus Salafi) and Egyptian influence.[12] More broadly, the university has been the site of political struggles, most notably over gender segregation but also over student union elections. Student voting patterns often center around contests among Islamist, leftist, and liberal student blocs, with Islamists often winning.

Courts

Until the formal organization of the court system in 1959, the influence of religious scholars (many of whom were non-Kuwaitis) on the Kuwaiti legal system was modest and ad hoc as sharia judges or experts.[13] Since independence, most of Kuwait's legal system has been a codified positive law, although provisions from sharia are applied in matters of personal status/family law, certain criminal matters, and Islamic banking provisions. The Constitutional Court retains the authority to determine the compliance laws with sharia, but its judges are trained in the secular legal tradition rather than the Islamic one.[14] Personal status law is the main area governed according to Islamic principles. However, Kuwait has two unique points in this regard. First, the courts apply both Sunni (*Maliki*) and Shii (*Jafari*) jurisprudence depending on the denomination of the persons involved. Second, Kuwait does not have courts called "sharia courts" but instead has legal chambers, including family courts, where sharia provisions apply. As such, judges do not need Islamic training to serve on these courts, though they can seek the advice of Islamic scholars.[15]

Mosques and Awqaf

In Kuwait, an early step was taken toward the bureaucratization of religion with the establishment of the Department of Waqf in 1921 to oversee development of religious endowments and put in place certain controls.[16] This fledgling body would assume more importance after its rebranding as the Waqf Affairs Board in 1940s. A decade before independence in 1961, Kuwait promulgated a law governing awqaf, further formalizing the legal status of this aspect of the bureaucracy.[17] A year after independence, a Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs was created, with the authority to oversee the management of waqf properties and other religious services offered by the state. This was the first institution of its kind to be created in the Gulf monarchies, although similar institutions had existed in post-Ottoman states for several decades. A separate Fatwa Department opened in 1995, as part of the restructuring after the

1990 Iraqi invasion.[18] However, state-run institutions are far from the only sources of authority in the religious sphere, as many social and political currents tend to turn to interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence provided by outside sources—including Saudi Salafism, the Muslim Brotherhood, or Shia *Marjaiyya*—rather than the Directorate of Ifta.[19]

Moreover, Shia Kuwaitis have separate religious institutions that enjoy relative autonomy from the state in terms of religious authority and daily practice. A key institution in this regard is the Husayniyyas, a type of ceremonial hall named after the prophet Muhammad's grandson Husayn ibn Ali, whom Shia Muslims venerate as a key religious figure and martyr. The most critical purpose for these buildings is their use as a venue for the Mourning of Muharram, a ceremony that commemorates the martyrdom of Husayn, but they also offer space for different religious rites and religious education as well as for community gatherings. The Husayniyyas typically are built with the benevolent contributions of affluent families, who commonly turn to a *marja'*—a leading Shia religious figure who serves as an example for believers on religious matters, not only for his blessings but also for appointing a prayer leader.[20] These institutions and Shia religious practices function autonomously and are tolerated, or at minimum acknowledged, by the state. However, their increased visibility, particularly during the Muharram mourning ceremonies, has led Kuwaiti authorities to impose strict guidelines on how religious commemorations should proceed, with measures intended to promote national unity, reduce Husayniyyas' visibility, and stop political mobilizations around them.[21]

Qatar

As in Kuwait, the creation of Qatar's bureaucratic state overlapped most deeply with religious life and teachings in education, adjudication, and public worship. Nevertheless, the Qatari state has not had to navigate the complexities of a pluri-sectarian society. Moreover, Qatar invested in building formal schools for religious training earlier than most Gulf states, although non-Qataris dominated both the instructional and student body of these institutions.

Education

Educational efforts in Qatar were simultaneously personal and transnational from the beginning. In 1916, Amir Abdullah b. Qasim Al Thani invited the Saudi scholar Muhammad b. Mani to establish a new school in the country to provide more advanced Islamic education.[22] This move can be understood as an extension of Qatar's growing alliance with the Saudis at the time and the acceptance of the Salafi/Wahabi creed by its rulers.

The creation of modern bureaucracy structures incorporating religious affairs (among others) came more slowly in Qatar than in Kuwait, owing to the former's smaller population, but efforts along these lines still predated the official independence from British rule in 1971.

As early as 1950s, the Department of Education started opening new public schools from primary to high school levels. Quranic and Islamic education occupied a large place in the curriculum at all levels of schooling under the oversight of the Ministry of Education, rather than the Ministry of Islamic Affairs.[23] A specific school designated to dispense religious education, called *madrasa al-ma'had al-dini*, was founded around the same time, and was first under the supervision of the Director of Religious Institutions then under the Ministry of Education.[24]

As Qatar's rulers expanded primary and secondary education, they relied on transnational networks. The country's leading school had a second founding as the Religious Institute and the Egyptian Azhari scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi was appointed as its principal shortly after his arrival in Qatar in 1961.[25] This school continues its educational activities with both preparatory (middle-school level) and secondary (high-school level) sections. It is a one-of-a-kind institution, as it is the only middle or high school in Qatar that is devoted to religious education and in that sense can be likened to the Turkish Imam Hatip or Egyptian Azhari schools—a track within the educational system that incorporates a far greater emphasis on religious subjects.[26] Even within the regular track, Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood figures have been influential on the foundation and development of the religious education system in Qatar.[27] Religious education is a mandatory subject in all state schools.

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Only in the 1970s did Qatar's religious establishment turn its attention to postsecondary education. Before that time, graduates of the religious institutes strived to pursue their higher education at renowned institutions abroad, particularly Al-Azhar University.[28] The first faculty of Islamic studies was established in 1974, which became the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies in 1977 under the Qatar University with Qaradawi as its founding dean.[29] To this day, this college offers higher-level education in a variety of Islamic disciplines, and functions with an institutional status no different from colleges offering education in secular subjects. However, both the teaching corps and the student body of the university have been overwhelmingly non-Qataris since its foundation, as is the case with the Religious Institute.[30]

Courts

Judicial affairs saw a similar slow but definite formalization in Qatar. Under the British protectorate, sharia courts were one among the several types of parallel judicial systems in country. Sharia courts were relatively strong and had oversight over many cases, though like much of the Qatari state they remained modest in terms of budget and personnel until the start of 1960s.[31] In 1957, renowned Saudi scholar Zayd Al Mahmud founded the Presidency of the Sharia Court. Another less powerful court was operated by the amir's sons. A dual

court system of "sharia courts" and "judicial courts" (*al-Mahakim al-Adliyya*, initially called National Courts) was institutionalized with the foundation of the independent state.[32] The Qatari judicial system granted autonomy to both systems.[33] The Islamic sharia courts dealt mainly with personal status/family law and some criminal cases.

Despite the lack of a clear boundary between the Adliyya and sharia court systems, the two exercised a so-called gentlemen's agreement, whereby each court would not consider cases previously submitted to the other court.[34] Yet the growth of the Adliyya system, especially through the codification of new positive laws, made the jurisdiction of the sharia courts weaken, dwindling the authority of religious scholars over legal matters.[35] However, wherever sharia courts retained competence, this also implied a domain over which men of religion operated with some degree of independence from executive control.[36] Finally, when the country adopted a new constitution and undertook serious institutional reforms, this dual legal system ended in 2003 with the creation of a single judicial hierarchy.[37]

That move, however, did not eliminate sharia legal influences. New codes established special circuits that would oversee criminal matters that are stipulated by Islamic jurisprudence as divinely ordained offenses (*hudud*) and *qisas*, or those offenses against individuals recognized as entitling victims or their families to receive compensation or exact retribution) as well as those specialized in family law. Subsequently, a new Penal Code (2004) and a new Family Code (2006) were adopted, incorporating sharia provisions into the reformed legal system. It is within these chambers that specialists in Islamic sharia continue to serve as judges.[38] Similar to other domains, most of these judges specialized in sharia have not been Qataris.[39]

Mosques and Awqaf

Although Qatari state officials had been involved in religious endowments both as benefactors and regulators mostly through sharia courts, it was not until 1978 that Qatar first founded a modern bureaucratic body in charge of governing these awqaf: the Department of Endowment Affairs.[40] This institution was restructured as the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs in 1992 and it oversees the provision of many religious services around the country.

Bahrain

A Shia majority country ruled by a Sunni family, the creation of the religious establishments in Bahrain has largely mirrored the sectarian duality with different institutions created for Shia and Sunni communities. Though the state has involved itself more with the provision of a Sunni religious discourse and religious services, it also has regulated the more autonomous Shia religious spaces in various ways.

Education

In Bahrain, the first modern schools were privately established by communities separately for Sunni and Shia children in 1910s and 1920s. but in 1933 the government chose to make all the schools public rather than sectarian.[41] These unified state schools offer several hours of religious education from primary school level onward; however, these classes are based on Maliki school of Sunni jurisprudence and do not include Jafari/Shia traditions in the curriculum.[42] Similar to the Qatari Religious Institute, Bahrain also established a distinct group of public schools that emphasize religious education.[43] Among these schools only one, the Jafari Institute, gives an education based on Shia creed. The others follow Sunni Islam.[44]

Though the graduates of the Sunni institutes typically strive to continue their education in the famous Islamic universities of the region such as Al-Azhar, the graduates of the Jafari institute can continue their higher learning at one of the unregistered though permitted *hawzas* (Shia seminaries) in the country or in neighboring prominent Shia hawzas in Iraq or Iran.

Courts

Historically, the creation of centralized civil judiciary started earlier in Bahrain and the influence of sharia court remained relatively weak.[45] Under the protectorate, British influence tended to be stronger in Bahrain than in its neighbors. Bahrain organized legal and religious policies together under the Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Waqf. Though this name suggests a strong religious influence, since the 1950s civil codes and courts have had authority on most matters, with sharia provisions being applied on certain criminal and personal status cases akin to other Gulf states. The sectarian dynamic has meant a duality of personal status/family codes with Shia (Jafari) jurisprudence applying to Shia citizens and Sunni (Maliki) jurisprudence applying to Sunni citizens. Thus, family law is one of the areas in which Bahrain's government recognizes the Shia scholars' authority. In the recent years, the government has attempted to end the Sunni/Shia duality, though without success (discussed in greater detail below).

Mosques and Awqaf

In the 1920s, Bahraini authorities formed two separate bodies to regulate Sunni and Shi`a (Jafari) awqaf in the country.[46] When Bahrain gained independence from British rule in 1971, it established a unified Ministry of Judiciary, Islamic Affairs and Endowments to oversee both the judicial system (religious in nature) and Islamic affairs in the country, including both the provision of religious services and the supervision of waqfs through the two mentioned directorates.[47]

However, in the case of Shi`a, the waqfs also help fund a particular religious institution, known as *matam* in the country or as Husayniyyas in other Shia societies (as seen in the Kuwait example above). The matam typically are established through the benevolence of

affluent families as places to gather and mourn the death of Husayn as well as loved ones. The hundreds of matams in the country play a large role in the society, providing a place for community gatherings, Shia religious education, religious commemorations, or even political organizing.[48] They also provide a venue for the Shia 'ulama (religious scholars) to engage with the community and have played a role in organizing the Shia opposition in Bahrain,[49] which led to stricter government control over them.

United Arab Emirates

As a federal state, formed when the British protectorate over the separate "Trucial States" was terminated in 1971, the UAE has patterns for education, courts, religious affairs, and awqaf that vary from one emirate to another but share some common features.

Education

In the UAE, the growth of the pearl industry led to economic enrichment, which in turn triggered the founding of more institutionalized schools around the first half of the twentieth century.[50] Although the wealthy founders of these institutions, some from the ruling families, were influenced by Western-style schools, they borrowed extensively from other Arab countries such as Egypt in the creation of the curricula, which included religious subjects such as the Quran, sunna (the practice of the prophet Muhammad and the early Muslim community), and sharia along with secular subjects.[51] The collapse of the pearl industry in the region around the 1940s also led to a decay in these in these early educational ventures, even though Dubai launched a short-lived education department.[52]

As Dubai continued to face the effects of the decline of the pearl industry and had not yet experienced the quick economic growth that would come with the building of the oil economy, many foreign regional powers were key in establishing educational institutions—including religious schools—shortly before the UAE's independence. The most prominent example was the creation of four Islamic education institutions throughout the emirates by a rich Saudi benefactor.[53] However, a modern-style university education in Islamic fields would not be established in the emirates until the foundation of University of Sharjah's College of Sharia and Islamic Studies in 1997. Since then, several other universities have been founded in different parts of the UAE. Religious education in the UAE appears to be increasing as part of a larger trend of the UAE's emergence as a new transnational node.

Courts

The various emirates that were assembled into the UAE in 1971 each had judges and had taken limited steps to formalize their judiciaries and codify their laws, but they were small and not yet the major hubs of economic activity they would later become. Even British

officials showed limited interest in legal and judicial matters, though their influence was greatest in Dubai.

With the formation of the federation in 1971, a Federal Supreme Court and some lower-level federal courts were constructed though some emirates retained courts with jurisdiction over cases not assigned to the federal courts. As the role of the federal judiciary expanded, the UAE initially engaged in efforts to Islamize its legislation, which included enacting penal codes that to some extent codify sharia criminal rulings.[54] The jurisdiction of sharia courts over certain criminal matters was further certified through federal legislation.[55] Similarly, personal status courts continue to be run according to sharia principles as codified in 2005.[56] That said, the code has been modified considerably as part of the most recent reform efforts (discussed below).

Mosques and Awqaf

Dubai was the first emirate to create a ministry-like institution to govern religious affairs, the Islamic Affairs and Charitable Activities Department, in 1969, two years before independence.[57] It would take thirty more years for a federal body overseeing mosques, religious affairs, and endowments to be created: the General Authority of Islamic Affairs and Endowments.[58] This body currently has authority over all the emirates except Dubai and Sharjah, as the latter also created its own department in 2008. The right to issue fatwas was not accorded to the religious affairs departments but was carried on by collection of governmental (including Ministry of Justice) and private actors until the creation of a Fatwa Center in 2008, later renamed the Fatwa Council.[59] These bureaucratic bodies cater mostly to the Sunni majority population, though both Dubai and Sharjah have had separate bodies regulating Jafari (Shia) awqaf since early 1970s.[60] Moreover, in the UAE the state is far from the sole provider of religious spaces. It is more common to see mosques constructed with community or waqf funding rather than state funding.[61] Nevertheless, the state still involves itself to a great extent in the regulation of the religious sphere, particularly the Muslim one, by monitoring state-employed as well as private religious actors.[62] This stance extends to non-Muslim religious groups, as they are also required to register any places of worship, religious schools, and conferences/events in advance with the government.[63]

Oman

Oman—the only Gulf polity that is not anchored in a city-state—is religiously more complex than many of its neighbors. The Ibadi monarchy—following an offshoot that traced itself back to disputes about succession and leadership in early Muslim history—gradually gained dominance by vanquishing Shia rulers and expanding along the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula (known as Muscat), establishing Ibadi Islam as something of a state doctrine. Simultaneously, the inner regions, known as Oman, came under the control of a religious leader, an Ibadi imam. In the 1950s, the coastal Sultanate of Muscat took control

of the interior regions after a series of military skirmishes and founded the Sultanate of Oman and Muscat. Oman's unique demography and history thus created a relatively differentiated pathway for its religious establishment.

Oman is the only country where the head of state and the ruling political class come from the Ibadi sect of Islam; however, the sultan does not claim a religious title (unlike the king of Morocco, for instance). The Ibadi Islam branch is typically associated with Oman, but Oman's society is religiously plural. Official accounts suggest that Ibadi adherents are the overwhelming majority, but non-Omani sources estimate Sunni and Ibadi proportions each at around 45 percent of the population, with a smaller (around 5 percent) Shia communie ty.[64] Given the diverse Muslim religious landscape, the official public discourse emphasizes avoiding sectarianism and promoting religious commonalities and national unity.[65]

The beginnings of Oman's current state apparatus and its involvement with religious affairs date back to first half of the twentieth century, the foundation of the modern Omani bureaucratic state often is attributed to Sultan Qaboos b. Said, who overthrew his father Said b. Taimur in 1970. Therefore, the development of public religious bureaucracy in Oman follows a parallel timeline to other studied Gulf states, even with the country's sectarian and historic particularities.

Education

The traditional education system in Oman was similar to those in the predominantly Sunni societies. Children would receive some basic training in mosques, and the lucky and successful few would continue to receive further private instruction by scholars. This educational system was supported by private endowments managed by local authorities.[66] With Sultan Qaboos's ascent to power in 1970, the transformation of the Omani state had significant consequences on the education system. The new Ministry of Education, established in 1971, made Islamic studies compulsory for all levels of primary and secondary education, though it crafted a curriculum that focused on common Islamic tenets rather than only on the Ibadi creed to avoid sectarianism.[67]

Despite bureaucratization, vestiges of traditional Islamic training survived until 1996, as select mosques in several Omani towns continued to offer religious training under the supervision of the Ministry of Education.[68] Several madrasah-style schools also have been established to offer a more traditional education, but typically operate as summer schools rather than as part of the formal education system. The special case of Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosques can also be mentioned as a separate body. These were built in different cities on the order of the sultan and are managed by a department within the Ministry of the Royal Court, currently called the Sultan Qaboos Centre of Islamic Culture (established in 2001). They not only operate Quranic schools within them but also have established Sultan Qaboos Institutes for Islamic Studies in several cities, offering secondary-school level degrees. [69] The Sultan Qaboos Centre today occupies a central role in the religious landscape of Oman.

Although the creation of the modern bureaucratic educational institutions first gave rise to new venues for university-level Islamic training and education, these options have thinned in the past few decades. The main venue for higher-level religious instruction is the College of Sharia Sciences, established in 1976 under the supervision of the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs. Today, it offers religious education in four main areas, one of which is also open to women.[70] In parallel, the Sultan Qaboos University also initially offered university degrees in Islamic Law (Sharia), Religion Foundations, and Islamic Education, and its law school was named the College of Sharia and Law. However, the first two programs were discontinued, and the name of the college was changed to College of Law. Today, the university has only one program in Islamic Education under the College of Education.[71] Similarly, the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosques offered university-level degrees for a brief period.

Courts

Prior to Sultan Qaboos's reign, the state had a limited bureaucratic structure, but there were developments in religious domains. Interestingly, Sultan Qaboos' father, Sultan Said b. Taimur, recruited Ibadi scholars trained in inner Oman to serve as judges in his administration as early as 1930s.[72] When Sultan Qaboos assumed power, he gradually introduced secular codes in different areas, limiting the jurisdiction of the traditional religious legal system to family matters, before fully adopting one unified legal system in 1997.[73] As such, religious scholars trained in sharia can pursue a legal career, but they need to be competent in all areas of Omani law to be able to serve as judges.[74] The overall impact of religious scholars in the Omani legal landscape seems rather limited.

Mosques and Awqaf

Historically, awqaf in Oman were created and run as private entities through the philanthropy of the donors. Often, a religious scholar and/or judge would oversee their administration as an appointed agent. The state's bureaucratic involvement first occurred with the creation of the Department of Endowments in 1950, under the direction of Omani intellectual, statesman, and poet Hilal b. Badr al-Busaidi.[75] Shortly after Sultan Qaboos's ascension to power, the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (established 1971) was created as a centralized government entity that administers endowments; offers religious services; and runs the country's mosques, which claim to be nonsectarian.[76]

In parallel, the Office of the Grand Mufti was created in 1973 to issue fatwas, and it has representatives from various other state institutions, including the ministries of education, higher education, endowments and religious affairs, as well as Sultan Qaboos University. Its current head, Grand Mufti Ahmed b. Hamad al-Khalili, has been in office since 1975, serving not only as a key figure of stability in Omani religious landscape but also of relative autonomy. Notably, he has contradicted the Ministry of Religious Affairs and criticized government policies on several occasions.[77]

Shia

Non-Ibadi Muslims of Oman tend to follow alternative sources for religious knowledge. This is particularly observable in the case of the Shia, who make up about 5 percent of the national population. There are multiple Shia groups, the most visible of which is the Lawatiyya. The Shia of Oman, as in other parts of the Shia Gulf, often follow non-national religious figures. Iraqi Ayatollah Ali Sistani of Najaf is particularly popular; in contrast, Iranian Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's influence remains marginal. There is no hawza in Oman, and Shia religious training does not go beyond Quranic courses for children at the mosques. Those interested in proper higher-level religious training travel to famous Shia seminaries such as Qum or Najaf. However, several local religious figures, often trained abroad in Iraq or Iran, act as recognized bridges between the regime, Shia citizens, and regional religious authorities.[78] Non-Omani Shia scholars also occupy key functions, in a pattern that resembles practices seen in other states in the Gulf. Shia Omanis enjoy a relatively large freedom of worship, practice in their own mosques, and follow their own authorities. State authorities provide them with the land, but local communities finance the building and operation of their mosques.

Gulf States as Nation-Builders and Transnational Nodes in the Twenty-First Century

State religious institutions in the Gulf have emerged over time as extensive bureaucratic presences, especially in the realms of education, law, and public worship, but have extended to charity, media, and many other areas. Moreover, they increasingly have been built on a national basis. Islam has become "statified" in some extensive and impressive ways; the transnationalism and informality of the past has given way to a far more nationalized, formalized set of structures within existing states.

Today, when the inhabitants of Gulf states encounter Islam, they do so frequently (and sometimes intensively) on state turf. For ordinary citizens, most forms of educating, adjudicating, praying, and even acting piously take place through channels regulated and overseen by the state. The general path largely mirrors that taken with religious institutions in other Muslim-majority countries, especially those in the region. State building in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, or Türkiye involved the founding of departments or ministries to regulate religious life and religious endowments, educate students in religion, offer credentials to religious scholars, and codify authoritative interpretations of religious law in some areas, especially those involving family life.

As in those other places, the states of the Gulf are governed by nondemocratic regimes. Curricula, charity, and sermons can be monitored, policed, and patrolled in order to protect the regime and police dissent. Yet it would be a mistake to reduce all state structures to the simple goal of regime maintenance; the developments are long term in nature and often involve mundane areas of governance significant to people's lives but far from spheres of political controversy. In fact, experiences elsewhere suggest that even regime change or democratization do not lead to much change in the organizational structures of religious establishments.[79] Sometimes, such structures offer areas where regimes can effectively negotiate with social groups, as seen in the case of Salafis and conservative Muslims in Kuwait or Shia in Bahrain.

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Similarly, the creation of strong bureaucracies has been connected with an effort to promote a national brand of Islam, related to their relatively recent nation-building efforts. A key component in this regard was the creation of new religious institutions to provide further religious education, regulate religious discourse and practices, or redefine the religious legal sphere. In these efforts, the states were confronted with the rise of regional countervailing movements and discourses as well as their own internal diversity, whether old or new. One illustration of religious institutions' role in nation building is the construction of monumental mosques, which expanded around the region since 1979 but became more pronounced in the Gulf only in the twenty-first century with major mosques built in Oman, Qatar, and the UAE.[80] Similarly, some states invested in the creation of their own religious discourse, sometimes by building a fatwa institution (as in the UAE in 2008) or a center for Islamic culture and education (as in the Sultan Qaboos Centre of Islamic Culture in Oman in 2001 or the Zayed House for Islamic Culture in the UAE in 2005).

Another effort in this regard has been to provide a unified legal framework, typically to further regulate Shia religious spaces wherever present and integrate them into the existing structures. In practice, however, such efforts typically ended up reifying the Sunni/Shia divide by giving it a more defined legal status. As part of its reform series, the Bahraini government sought to end the sectarian duality with a new civil family law in 2004 but received substantial backlash from Shia clerics and their followers.[81] After years of contention, the government first backpedaled in 2009 to require the application of the family law only in Sunni courts. When a new unified code passed in 2017, it mostly codified a duality whereby Sunni and Shia sharia courts retained separate jurisdictions, although it did omit certain Shia practices such as *mut'a* marriage.[82] Similarly, Kuwait ended up promulgating a new Jafari Personal Status Law in 2019 and opening separate family courts for Sunni and Shia Muslims.[83]

The UAE and Qatar, however, also had to deal with the novel and ever-growing diversity in their societies with the influx of immigrants from around the world. In these cases, the

change in the legal system was less concerned with codifying the Shia/Sunni duality and more concerned with determining what was practiced as religious law and providing a unified framework. Qatar ended its dual sharia vs. adliyya (religious vs. civil) court system only in 2003; the UAE codified its sharia-based family law as late as 2005. At times, the reforms to cope with the new diversity meant limiting the space accorded to religion. In the 2020s, the UAE federal government undertook efforts to further transform its legal system into one governed by positive law principles and to restrict the role of religion in the legal system. The application of sharia provisions in the criminal sphere were restricted to only retribution (*qisas*) and blood money/financial compensation (*diya*) cases in 2021, thus removing *hudud* punishments such as public flogging or stoning to death.[84] In 2024, a new personal status code was enacted, bringing together sharia-based provisions for Muslim citizens and secular ones for non-Muslim citizens and residents.[85]

These reforms do retain a place for the specialists of Islamic sharia in the legal sphere but further incorporate them into a positive law framework and circumscribe their jurisdiction. In Qatar, as part of Amir Al Thani's reform efforts in the early 2000s, a new education policy was put in place—based on a recommendation from the U.S.-based RAND Corporation—reducing the time dedicated to religious education and increasing time allocated to secular matters, particularly the study of the English language.[86] To further accommodate the growing social diversity within a national framework, in 2017 the UAE established a Ministry of Tolerance and Coexistence, a one-of-a-kind institution. It also began building more mosques and delivering more sermons in English in response to changing demographic demands.[87]

In the past two decades, some Gulf states also invested in training for religious scholars and officials who are citizens, and established schools and universities to train them. In Qatar, for instance, initiatives have been launched to Qatarize the judicial sector within which sharia experts also operate.[88] But higher education is an area where national and transnational dynamics are woven together. If the regional circulation of scholars—on which Gulf rulers relied a century ago—does not operate as it did, transnationalism has not disappeared. The current structures often were built by importing models and personnel from other countries. And now, for some but not for all, the direction of movement has changed.

There are sharp differences in this regard among the Gulf states. Some clearly seek to be players in transnational Islam (UAE, Qatar) and some do not (Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman). The UAE and Qatar have invested significant resources to rebrand themselves as "transnational nodes" in the religious sphere akin to their place in regional economics. This investment included the creation of new public institutions that presented themselves as "national" alternatives to prominent regional institutions. But what they often succeeded in doing was creating "nodes" for Islamic scholars around to world to come, work, and teach to some nationals but mostly non-national students with the support of the state. In doing so, both countries managed to emerge as new soft powers and created a new domain of competition between them. However, these investments have not yet led to the emergence of distinctly *Qatari* or *Emirati* voices in Islam, nor has it ensured national "self-sufficiency" in the religious sphere.

Perhaps the most visible tool for the UAE and Qatar have been government-supported clerical associations and their globally renowned founders: the Doha-based International Union for Muslim Scholars (IUMS) and two Abu Dhabi–based institutions, the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies and the Muslim Council of Elders (MCE).[89] Interestingly, all three associations were founded and led by nonlocal scholars. The chair of the IUMS was the Al-Azhar–trained Egyptian Youssef al-Qaradawi, the Forum was headed by the Mauritanian Abdullah b. Bayyah, and the MCE was a joint initiative between Bayyah and the Grand Sheikh of the Egyptian Al-Azhar, Ahmad al-Tayeb. Qaradawi and Bayyah have been particularly influential in the development of two Gulf states' religious institutions, as well as in the institutions' rebranding as transnational centers of Islamic learning and production. Both scholars come from the Maliki school in Islamic jurisprudence and not the Hanbali/Salafi tradition of the Gulf emirates, making them well-positioned to reach out to Muslims beyond the Gulf.

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The transnational nature of these efforts can be accentuated by the alliances they form. The UAE has been using its affinity with Egyptian government and preexisting investments in Al-Azhar to build on Al-Azhar's religious capital to increase the UAE's religious and political influence transnationally.[90] Al-Azhar's Grand Sheikh al-Tayeb currently serves as the chairman of the UAE-based MCE and many of its key members and affiliates are Azhari 'ulama. The emirates also have been influential in the founding of the Observatory for Combating Extremism within Al-Azhar to counter the Muslim Brotherhood and affiliated religious discourses.[91] This partnership has been influential in reaching out not only to Muslims in the region but also to non-Muslim audiences to provide a countervailing discourse to that of competing states or groups.

The transnational efforts seem to operate at some distance from the domestic structures. To be sure, they are hardly isolated from internal influence. Qaradawi was first appointed as the principal of the high-school-level religious institute and then as the founding dean of the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies in Qatar. He launched several local and global networks and initiatives, and remained the most prominent religious scholar in Qatar until his recent death. Bayyah continues to play a similar role by leading alternative international religious networks, though his affiliation with the state became even more direct in the UAE as he became the founding head of the country's Fatwa Council in 2018.

Nevertheless, the focus of these efforts seems to be more regional and global than local. This process is most visible in the creation of new institutions of religious education and their instructional corps. In 2010, Hamad bin Khalifa University was founded in Qatar as

the second university that has a College of Islamic Studies. Both this newer college and the College of Sharia founded by Qaradawi at Qatar University have a high number of international faculty who have trained in Islamic sciences at prestigious universities around the region. Many regionally renowned scholars, such as former Tunisian Minister of Religious Affairs Noureddine Khademi, now teach in these two institutions.[92] Yet these universities have notable differences: the website of Qatar University's college is available only in Arabic, whereas the Hamad bin Khalifa University's college also has a well-developed English website. The former seems to be catering more to traditional regional religious networks; the latter is more implanted in global networks in Islamic studies. Hamad bin Khalifa University has a Columbia-educated Turkish dean, and it brings together scholars with degrees from Western universities as well as more traditionally educated Islamic scholars.

A similar story could be said for the UAE, which has seen several new colleges in religious studies established in the past thirty years even though it lacks an older school such as the college established by Qaradawi in Qatar. The Emirate of Sharjah has led the efforts of higher religious education, with two public universities offering training in religious sciences. The University of Sharjah's College of Sharia and Islamic Studies, founded in 1997, is the oldest among them and has a Moroccan dean with a PhD from Complutense University of Madrid.[93] The newer Al-Qasimia University was established in 2013 and has two schools of religious education: the College of the Holy Quran and the College of Sharia and Islamic Studies. The dean of the former is a Sudanese scholar.[94] The latter has an Azhar-trained Egyptian dean.[95] Overall, all three colleges have a highly international faculty, almost all of whom trained outside the emirates. Apart from Sharjah, Mohamed bin Zayed University for Humanities in Abu Dhabi also has a college for Islamic studies, and some other private universities offer Islamic studies degrees.[96]

Beyond the university and associational contexts, the desire for the Gulf countries to become transnational nodes is also visible in new state-led religious initiatives. For instance, the UAE created a Fatwa Center as recently as 2008, and founded the Zayed House for Islamic Culture in 2005 to promote Islamic culture and educate the public on religion. The UAE also strives to present its version of Islam, which it defines as "moderate," at home and abroad. With this perspective, the country has restructured its International Center for Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism as Hedayah in 2013 and created another center called Sawab in 2015. Both these bodies try to counter the religiously inspired organizations that they define as extremist, from al-Qaeda to the Muslim Brotherhood. They are highly active in the international arena with partnerships not only in the region but around the world, particularly with Western institutions and experts. The UAE's desire to promote its own branding of Islam to more global non-Muslim audiences in Qatar also can be seen in the creation of a large and prestigious Museum of Islamic Art in Doha in 2008.

Transnational involvement has also been carried to the digital space. For instance, Qatar hosts two important digital platforms for religious information that provide believers with easy-to-access fatwas. The first one is *islamonline*, founded in 1997 with the support of Qaradawi himself.[97] The second is *Islamweb*, established by the Ministry of Awqaf and

Islamic Affairs in 1998.[98] Even the latter website founded by the ministry is run mostly by non-Qatari clerics and its visitors are mostly non-Qataris, reflecting the extent to which the Qatari state serves as a "hub" for online religious traffic.[99]

Yet if they focus far less on soft power through educational initiatives, media, and alliances, the remaining Gulf states also operate transnationally, even while having "statified" Islam and enhanced its national context. The Shia populations of Kuwait and Bahrain retain links with transnational Shia structures—they are often careful to do so in a manner that does not challenge the policies of the regimes, but instead seek to build networks for education and sometimes charity that allow Shiism to operate transnationally in religious spheres while Shia citizens operate politically in a wholly national sphere.

Only Oman has carved out a different kind of relationship with transnational Islam. It does not seek to promote Ibadism so much as present its teachings as a distinctly tolerant approach not only to Muslim but also Western audiences. In doing so, it appears to have enhanced the boundaries between domestic religious structures and transnational Islam. Authorities in Oman have sought to preserve a self-sufficient religious landscape—one that escapes increasingly influential and accessible religious messages emanated by regional source—to contain the risks of sectarian upheaval and religious radicalization.

Conclusion

The story of religious institutions and the state in the Gulf exemplifies four main points: the "institutional isomorphism" in the region, the place of religion in the nation- and state-building processes, the importance of historic legacy, and the particularities emerging in a novel geopolitical context. Since the first half of the twentieth century, the formation of religious bureaucracies has been a key component of the state formation process in the Gulf. What is of interest in this regard, though perhaps not surprising for the scholars of political institutions, is the institutional isomorphism or the diffusion of similar types of religious institutions around the region, mirroring the post-Ottoman MENA states. After their independence in the 1960s and 1970s, various Gulf states formed similar religious institutions—including ministries or directorates of religious affairs and endowments, sharia courts, fatwa offices, and modern universities with Islamic studies programs—codified religious laws, and established religious public-school curricula. Even though most of the Gulf was either only briefly or not at all under Ottoman suzerainty, institutions that emerged in post-Ottoman and postcolonial contexts can now be found all around the Gulf states. These institutions have been a crucial part of a nation-building process, particularly in the twenty-first century when the small Gulf states invested in (for some) the creation of a national identity and institutions in the context of inherited religious diversity or (for others) a novel, immigration-driven multicultural society.

However, the nation-state form of institutions can obscure the transnational reality of the religious sphere in the Gulf region, a historic legacy that in some states has taken a particular shape over the past two decades. As the first part of this piece explains, the smaller Gulf sheikhdoms historically lacked a strong domestic corps of religious scholars ('ulama) or complex institutions of religious training. There was no equivalent of prestigious religious schools such as the Egyptian Al-Azhar or Tunisian Zaytuna in the history of these polities. Nor did they establish institutions such as the University of Medina, which formed the basis of novel yet prestigious religious training programs throughout the twentieth century. Apart from Oman with its self-sufficient Ibadi identity, the Gulf states typically relied on "imported" scholars to run the religious parts of the judiciary and educational system, lead religious services, and administer endowments. These were first ad hoc and highly personalized arrangements and evolved into formal bureaucracies typically in the last third of the century. The twenty-first-century transformations do not fully escape the logic of transnationalism but rather give a new shape. The Shia communities continue to follow marjas, none of whom live in the region, and there are few and minor hawzas in the states studied. The Sunni communities activated religious spheres in places like the UAE and Qatar not by creating sui generis religious models but by becoming "nodes" in a transnational network. These states have invested heavily in creation of state-run or state-sponsored institutions that bring together scholars from the region and beyond to help promote competing religious discourses. The concentration of religious personnel in these two Gulf states seems to be playing a role in the religious training of local population. Perhaps more crucially, it helps establish these states as key players in the regional and global Muslim networks. Whereas Egypt, Türkiye, or Saudi Arabia rely on their extensive domestic religious institutions to produce and export their own religious models and discourses, the Qatari and UAE model can be described as "import, host, and re-export." It remains to be seen whether these new nodes can become the source of domestically produced and sui generis religious models for these countries.

The nation-state form of institutions can obscure the transnational reality of the religious sphere in the Gulf region, a historic legacy that in some states has taken a particular shape over the past two decades.

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