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Salafism in Qatar

The roots of salafism and wahhabism in Qatar come from the western pressure and Saudi Arabian influences, resulting in a rather traditional practice of Islam. Stemming from the Islamization of Qatar after a long sequence of conflicts during the seventh century, there is now a resurgence of traditional Islam featuring some western influences. Qatar follows a more strict sect of salafism that is called wahhabism, named after Imam Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab from the 19th century, though have recently been making many 'civilized' adjustments.

Wahhabism is an extension of salafism that Qatar's government and culture supports. The Islamization during the 7th century is the main drive for the resurgence of wahhabism in Qatar in the nineteenth century. By naming the country's state mosque after Abdul Wahhab, they embrace the ideas of Wahhab despite being rather extremist in the eyes of the modernizing west. The civilians also agree as ninety percent of muslims in Qatar are Sunni, which aligns more with wahhabist ideals than Shia muslims. The western influence on the state however is creating a slightly more inviting country that remains a majority muslim. Such as the 2022 FIFA World Cup scheduled in Qatar, where they are making some accommodations for travellers such as making alcohol available. The country is still very conservative to their original beliefs, however they are willing to adjust for those who worship God in other ways, similarly to the first generations of Muslims.

Wahhabism is referred to as a puritan Islamic reform movement. Due to Qatar's close proximity and similar wahhabi beliefs, their structures are often compared very closely, however they are fundamentally separate while slowly coming toward a common ground. Qatar is a westernized version of wahhabism beliefs, as they allow for more freedoms than typically accepted. Since the 1990's even, Qatar continues to adapt by giving citizens more civil liberties such as allowing women to drive, vote, and hold government positions, which results in women being a majority of the workforce. Qatar is also slightly more accepting of non-muslims by allowing them permits to purchase alcohol or pork, although should a muslim be seen participating in either, it is punishable by either deportation or flogging. Thus punishable by law, the government of Qatar endorses following Sharia Law, also seen in their enforcement of the death penalty for homosexuality and apostasy. Previous head of Qatar's College of Sharia, Abdelhameed Al Ansari, said "I consider myself a good Wahhabi and can still be modern, understanding Islam in an open way. We take into account the changes in the world and do not have the closed-minded mentality as they do in Saudi Arabia." (Dorsey). Long afterwards Al Ansari has been fired for apostate, or going against a belief of a religion, as he supports women's rights movements.

While this westernized version of wahhabism seems like a step in the right direction to those who are used to a western society, Qatar often receives critique from their own citizens and other nearby states such as Saudi Arabia. Qatar has more relaxed gender separation compared to Saudi Arabia, though they still shut down a chance at having a co-ed lecture due to boycotts at a public university. The remaining culture of Qatar is very similar to its neighbor country despite having made changes to adapt to a westernized muslim population, while the citizens seem to not

want this change. It is advised for people travelling to Qatar to abide similarly to their attire, in that women should wear loose fitting, long pants and long sleeved shirts as well as men are advised not to wear shorts and sleeveless shirts in public due to public mistreatment.

Qatar's identity crisis leaves the government trying to please the western world with their steps towards a more liberal interpretation of Wahhabism while the citizens seem to be content with the way that things are now, and possibly even prefer a more traditional Muslim culture. There seems to be a divide between those who follow Wahhabism and those who do not, and either side is not willing to compromise for their country and religion.

Works Cited

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