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**ABSTRACT ONLY – WORK IN PROGRESS**

“Pakistani Shi’a ‘Ulama’: Debating the Implementation of the Shari’a”

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This paper examines contemporary Pakistani Shi’a traditional scholars’ (*‘ulama*) attitudes towards the implementation of the Shari’a in their country. Drawing on six months of fieldwork among Pakistani Shi’a *‘ulama*, I contend that the marginalization and violence that they experience drives my Shi’a *‘ulama*’ interlocutors’ views on the implementation of the Sharia in Pakistan. The paper accomplishes the project detailed above by examining the following three distinct opinions on the Shari’a asserted as ideal for Pakistan by my Shi’a *‘ulama*’ interlocutors. (1) Eschewing the Sharia and implementing secularism – a view advocated by Qibla Sahib (a pseudonym, as per Qibla’s request), a renowned Pakistani Shi’a *‘alim* with decades of training in the Iranian seminaries of Qom and Mashhad; (2) Implementing a unanimously agreed upon Shari’a in a sectarianly-unaligned Islamic state – advocated by Ayatullah Najafi, the president of Jami’a al-Muntazar, one of the oldest and largest Shi’a seminaries in Pakistan; and (3) The implementation of the current Iranian legal and political model, the governance of a religious jurists (*wilayat al-faqih*) - advocated by Jawad Naqvi, founder of al-‘Urwah al-Wuthqa, a state-of-the-art Shi’a seminary in Lahore. My field-work and textual research among these *‘ulama*’ reveals that each advocate their legal-political theology as both a vital remedy for the sectarian violence devastating the country, as well as the theology on the basis of which Pakistan was envisioned. Consequently, I assert that the marginalization of, and violence against, Shi’as drives Pakistani Shi’a *‘ulama*’s attitudes towards the implementation of the Sharia and informs their renditions of Pakistani history. In highlighting the diversity of Pakistani Shi’a *‘ulama*’s approaches to the Shari’a, my research counters the understanding that most Pakistani Shi’a *‘ulama*’ simply mimic Iranian discourses. This study also fills the important lacuna of providing an ethnographic and textual account of a religious community (contemporary Pakistani Shi’a *‘ulama*) that has hitherto received very little attention in scholarly work.