In the 1970s, Saudi Arabia, flush with the wealth generated by large increases in the
price of oil, launched a project to expand its influence by funding the global spread of
Wahhabism, its brand of Islam. Over the years this has become a vast project—it’s the
Saudi version of China’s infrastructure-building campaign, or the United States’s
projection of military power.

The problem is that the Saudi religious mission matches a great deal of money to a very
low degree of central control. That means the Saudi government has wound up funding
religious organizations that have turned extreme and violent, even if that wasn’t its
intention. In The Call, Krithika Varagur, a brilliant young reporter, has doggedly pieced
together the entire picture of Saudi religious funding and its effects, more thoroughly
than any other journalist has done. Reporting from three widely dispersed sites—
Indonesia, Nigeria, and Kosovo—Varagur shows us an elaborate machine that has spun
out of control.

One of the virtues of The Call is that Varagur is so well versed in the complexities of
Islam. She does not traffic in stereotypes, and she carefully distinguishes among a large
number of religious traditions that often are unfairly lumped together. That only makes
the overall message of The Call more alarming—it’s earned, not automatic.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Lemann