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TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIAL CONTRACT IN SAUDI ARABIA

FROM RENTIERISM TO NATIONALISM

BY

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ABSTRACT

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Title: Transformation of Social Contract in Saudi Arabia: From Rentierism to Nationalism

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This thesis examines the transformation of the Saudi social contract from rentierism to progressive and popular nationalism. Traditional Saudi rentier social contract was constructed based on three main pillars. The first is the royal family as a unifying authority and ruler of the Peninsula. The second is the religious establishment as the motivational factor and ideological base of the Saudi state. The last one is oil as the locomotive of the rentier social contract by providing immense wealth. This research defines the rentier social contract as a hypothetical agreement between the state and society based on the distribution of rents by the state for welfare and prosperity in the exchange for political loyalty and support of the people. Saudi rentier social contract sustained for a century. However, it is no longer sustainable for future generations. Saudi Arabia witnessed a new era of national transformation and reforms together with the rise of Muhammed bin Salman. Muhammed bin Salman has reformist and visionary political aspirations to construct a new state and society relationship, diversify the economy, and create a new social model.

This thesis argues that the Saudi rentier social contract is not sustainable due to the unsustainability and instability of oil, subsidies and domestic consumption, rising population, youth unemployment, and public demand for social change. The state constructs a new state narrative based on progressive and popular nationalism. A cult of personality is constructed around the leadership of Muhammad bin Salman as the visionary face of the new era. National Vision 2030 aims to diversify the Saudi economy, modernize governmental bodies, and create

a new socioeconomic model based on social responsibility and contribution rather than a rentier mentality. The Saudi rentier social contract transforms from rentierism to a progressive and popular nationalism prioritizing Saudi identity and national interests.

DEDICATION

To my family

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia has a unique political, social, and economic structure. These structures are interrelated by forming and affecting themselves from the beginning years of the statehood process to recent years. Studying the interrelation of these structures enables to understand how the Saudi regime survived since the establishment of the modern Saudi state in 1932. It also makes it possible to reasonably analyze its sustainability and stability for the future (Rundell, 2020). Saudi Arabia has significant geopolitical importance making the country being at the center of many regional conflicts in the Middle East. Moreover, it has global importance with its huge natural sources. This position of Saudi Arabia caused the transformation of foreign and domestic policies of the country in different periods and turning points.

Saudi Arabia is not a country that has a historical state tradition and experience like Turkey and Iran. The state-building process has been conducted with a lack of state institutions and the autonomy of social actors (Kamrava et al., 2011). This made the statehood and nation branding processes more critical in Saudi Arabia. Saudi royal family had been in search of a tool that would give them the legitimacy to rule the country. Mohammad bin Abdul-Wahhab and his clergy class gained a reputation in the Arabic Peninsula concurrently with Al-Saud's political aspirations in the 18th century. Mohammad bin Al Saud and Abdul-Wahhab formed a holy political alliance in 1744 in Diriyah making the state and religion integral parts of each other (J. A. 1954-Kéchichian, 1986). The modern Saudi state has been established based on these two pillars of political structure. Oil has been discovered in 1938 in Saudi Arabia. It has changed the fate of the Saudi Arabian state and its people. Welfare and prosperity

coming with oil recreated the state narrative making oil the third pillar of the state and society relationship. Saudi royal family, Wahhabi clergy, and oil-related wealth have been three pillars of the Saudi Arabian statehood and modernization process. These three pillars created the traditional rentier social contract in Saudi Arabia.

This research aims to analyze the transformation of the rentier social contract in Saudi Arabia by examining historical turning points in state and society relationship and recent national vision reforms and transformation programs made by Muhammad bin Salman within the framework of National Vision 2030. This chapter introduces the study with research objectives, research questions, and methodology and gives a literature review of credible sources on the subject. The second chapter sheds light on the conceptual theoretical framework of the research. It examines the rentier social contract theory and the implications of the theory on state and society relations in Saudi Arabia and Saudi national identity. The third chapter focuses on historical turning points and transformation processes in the Saudi Arabian state and society. It periodizes the modern history of Saudi Arabia in accordance with major developments and transformations. The fourth chapter examines the traditional rentier social contract in Saudi Arabia with its main pillars and the role of the citizens in this social model. The fifth chapter focuses on the rise of Mohammad Bin Salman and his aspirations to transform the Saudi rentier social contract to create a new state and society relationship. The last chapter analyses National Vision 2030 as a national reform program transforming the rentier social contract to a model that prioritizes Saudi national identity and nationalism.

1.1 State of the Problem

Rentier social contract of Saudi Arabia has been formed based on three pillars which are the royal family Al-Saud, the Wahhabi clergy, and oil-related wealth(Krane, 2019a).

The regime provided wealth and prosperity to the people in exchange for political support and loyalty for a century. However, with the rise of Muhammad Bin Salman and his policies, there are concerns on whether the traditional Saudi rentier social contract has become obsolete.

This thesis explores how, if any, changes have been made to the Saudi rentier social contract and what are the potential outcomes of that. Relatedly, this paper will explore what policies the Saudi state is implementing, under the leadership of MBS, which aim to transform the rentier social contract for a secure and sustainable future. Saudi leadership promotes a Saudi nationalist narrative to justify economic and social reforms. However, this process eliminates the historical rentier social contract and creates the need for a new social contract.

1.2 Research Objectives

The research has five objectives:

- a. Examining the historical state and society relationship in Saudi Arabia
- b. Examining the transformation of Saudi Arabia's rentier social contract and its three main pillars: regime, religious establishment, and oil-related wealth
- c. Discussing Mohammed bin Salman's policies and aspirations to eliminate the rentier social contract, and create a new social contract by emphasizing Saudi national identity
- d. Discussing the wave of nationalism and national transformations programs and reforms within the frame of National Vision 2030
- e. Discussing sustainability of the country's sources, welfare, and capacity for the next generations

1.3 Research Questions and Working Hypothesis

The study argues that Saudi Arabia's historical rentier social contract is no longer

sustainable for the next generations. A state-driven nationalism and Saudi national identity have been promoted by the Saudi leadership to create a new social contract based on economic diversification, social responsibility, and contribution of citizens, and modernized open society. The research questions are:

1. What are the main pillars of the Saudi historical rentier social contract and how these pillars formed the state and society relationship?
2. What changed in the Saudi state and society with the wave of nationalism and national vision programs?
3. How did the historical rentier social contract transform with the reforms and national vision programs? What are the motivators of the new social contract?
4. Is the political, social, and economic sustainability of Saudi Arabia possible? Can the reforms and National Vision 2030 ensure sustainability for the next generations?

1.4 Literature Review

Saudi Arabia has a unique political, social, and economic structure. This structure faced some challenges during the century, meanwhile, Saudi Arabia managed to protect it by means of conservative social structure and institutions. There is a rich literature on the historical development of the Saudi state and society. A History of Saudi Arabia provides a background of internal and external developments of the country from a chronological and multidimensional perspective (Al-Rasheed, 2010). The book analyzes significant turning points from the state-making process to the modernization of institutions and periodizes political progress. Chapter 7 focuses on the established state narrative and political speech. This chapter is important to compare the transformation of the state narrative and state and society relationship. Chapters 8 and

9 discuss the reform debates and modernization attempts in the last decades. Madawi Al-Rasheed analyses the state and society's reformist agenda and the transformation of leadership policies from conserving the status quo to considering reforms and public demands.

Beblawi and Luciani's book is one of the prominent sources of the rentier theory in Arab states' literature (Beblawi & Luciani, 1987). They discuss the application and basic issues of the rentier theory in the Arab states. The book examines the economic structure made by rentierism and citizens' behaviors in this structure. It is an important source in the literature to analyze how oil and rentierism formed economic and social structures from the very beginning years of the statehood process in the Arab world and Gulf states. However, Beblawi and Luciani's theoretical framework and argumentations may be out of date for the current cases considering important changes, evolutions, and developments in rentier theory and states. There is a need to especially focus on the last decades when radical changes happened and the current case of Saudi Arabia in that context. The Paradoxical Kingdom especially focuses on the political economy of Saudi Arabia by emphasizing its functionality and future concerns which we face their results today (Champion, 2005). Champion raises questions about the rentier structure of the economy and state. He discusses the distribution of wealth in the country and possible problems of it in the future. We today face some of the problems he mentioned two decades ago, and they are still on the agenda waiting for reforms. He argues that the rentier state has become dysfunctional in 2003, meanwhile, we today aim to analyze how Saudi rentierism evolved not to be sustainable for the future. This is a valuable contribution to the literature to understand the historical development of concerns on rentierism in Saudi Arabia.

The political economy of Saudi Arabia by Tim Niblock and Monica Malik contributes to the literature by examining the theoretical approaches to the Saudi economy and economic development, and rentier structure (Niblock & Malik, 2007). They examine economic dynamics and patterns of development in Saudi Arabia by elaborating on the state involvement in the economy, the social dynamics, and the rentier mentality of the Saudi state. Niblock and Malik argue that “the state becomes the origin of all significant economic and social developments” thanks to the oil revenues and how these revenues are distributed in society. They problematize population growth, state capability of ensuring wealth, and unemployment rates and suggest a new social contract that abandons some of the social security and subsidies to ensure equality between the new generation and the economically prosperous part of the society. This study successfully signalizes the future problems of the Saudi state which it has begun to suffer in the last decades.

The Economy of the Gulf States by Mathew Gray comprehensively provides the recent discussions on the economic model and structure of the six Arab Gulf States (Gray, 2018). Gray discusses different aspects of oil energy richness in the Gulf from its social and political context to prospects for sustainability and risks. He frames the historical and social context while discussing the economic situation and uniqueness of the Gulf states. In this way, this book contributes to the literature by highlighting future concerns on rentierism, socio-economic structure, and diversification of Gulf economies. Gray connects the current concerns such as rising population, economic dependency on energy, security, etc. with the politics of the economy and the future of Gulf states and societies. It is an important source to understand the current economic and social concerns.

The call for reform in Saudi Arabia has been subject to discussions in the last decades as there is a public demand and academic interest in this issue. Kéchichian frames reforms about legal, political, social, and debated issues in Saudi Arabia (J. Kéchichian, 2012). It is an important reference to examine political demands and changes in the country. It includes political participation demands, reforms in parliament, public reforms regarding women, religious issues, etc. It is important to my research to analyze how reforms are made and discussed in Saudi Arabia. Al-Rasheed focuses on the rising power and reforms of crown prince Muhammad bin Salman in *Salman's Legacy* (Al-Rasheed, 2018). She examines King Salman and his powerful crown prince Mohammad bin Salman's era by focusing on the most discussed issues in the state and society. The book consists of quality articles. Part 1 is on state and society relations and challenges. Gause's article "Saudi Regime Stability and Challenges" examines the future of regime stability with its three important factors: oil, religious establishment, and ruling family. This trilogy also creates three pillars of the social contract. Hertog's article "Challenges to the Saudi Distributional State in the Age of Austerity" examines the sustainability of oil-based economic structure and distribution of wealth in society. *Salman's Legacy* is an important source to understand changing state and society relations in the era of King Salman and his son Mohammad bin Salman. *Vision or Mirage: Saudi Arabia at the Crossroads* frames the domestic conflicts of critical terms in the Saudi state such as successions to the throne and domestic balances between different actors such as the royal family members, tribes, and clerics (Rundell, 2020). Rundell discusses the modern history of Saudi Arabia from the nation-branding process in the first years to the social change discussions in the last decades. The book proves that transformation and changes have always been on the agenda in the country due to both conflicts and public demands.

The literature gives huge importance to the sustainability of the energy sector and wealth in the Gulf for the next generations. *Energy Kingdoms: Oil and Survival in the Persian Gulf* successfully covers the issues of energy, oil, and natural wealth of the Gulf and outlines the main discussions regarding the future of these sources and the Gulf people and regimes as well (Krane, 2019a). The book mainly focuses on the sustainability of wealth and regime security in the oil and gas-based Gulf economies. Jim Krane expertly explains the social and political changes coming with the oil and discusses their future considering energy consumption and policies of Gulf countries. Jim Krane argues that energy policies, subsidies, and consumption of Gulf countries do not provide a sustainable future for the next generations. Krane cites King Faisal of Saudi Arabia's words to describe his main thesis: "In one generation we went from riding camels to riding Cadillacs. The way we are wasting money, I fear the next generation will be riding camels again." Brzuszkiewicz's article examines socioeconomic motivators and basic pillars of the social contract and sustainability of the energy sector in the MENA region, especially Saudi Arabia and Egypt (Brzuszkiewicz, 2017). She compares Saudi Arabia and Egypt as oil exporting and importing countries. She touches on the economic and social effects of energy subsidies in relation to the social contract. Her study argues that rentier states cannot sustain energy subsidies which have been part of the social contract. This situation opens social contract and state and society relations into the debate. The article is a good reference to energy reforms and social contract discussions in rentier states.

There is an interest in the social contract and nationalism issues in the Gulf in the last decades as the Gulf states are under the impact of a nationalist wave and change in the social model. *Gulf Societies in Transition* contain academic evaluations of various academics from different perspectives (Diwan, 2016). They discuss new nationalism

in the Gulf and its effect on internal and regional dynamics. They argue that nationalism causes the decline of the welfare state structure in the Gulf. It also reflects the public demand for political and social participation and contribution. They argue that the new wave of nationalism paves the way for more participatory political outcomes in the Gulf. Therefore, state and society relations are open to change and transformation in the Gulf in the next years. Alhussein analyses the new wave of micro-nationalism in Saudi Arabia. She argues that Saudi leadership promotes Saudi identity and nationalism to justify domestic reforms and foreign policy actions (Alhussein, 2019). She also discusses the impact of nationalism on the future of the country and domestic conflicts.

Kinninmont's article directly focuses on the transformation of Saudi Arabia's social contract within the framework of National Vision 2030 (Kinninmont, 2017). She examines the basic elements of the social contract and what causes change and transformation in that. She argues that oil will play a less significant role in the economy. Vision 2030 is a package of transformation toward this objective. The Saudi government plans to reduce dependency on the economy. This situation will affect citizens and the distribution of wealth. Therefore, she argues that a renegotiation of the social contract is on the agenda in Saudi Arabia. This research goes further and examines the change and transformation in relation to state narrative, from rentierism to nationalism, social changes, and redefinition of citizenship. Thompson's article examines the transformation of traditional state and society relationship by focusing on Saudi male graduates (Thompson, 2018). The sample of the research is well selected as unemployment is one of the most important problems of Saudis, and particularly educated males are the most suffering class for this problem. The article includes interviews and quantitative data. The author argues that economic unsustainability and

concerns lead to a reexamination of the existing social contract, especially among young people.

The research will contribute to the literature by examining the change in the Saudi rentier social contract within the framework of rising nationalism in the region and policies made by crown prince Mohammad bin Salman. The research analyses the question of how Saudi society changed in terms of its social model and state and society relationship.

1.5 Methodology and Data Collection

This study comparatively discusses the political, social, and economic structure of the Saudi Arabian state and society. The study examines the impact of the rentier theory on Saudi Arabia's statehood process and establishment of state and society relationship. It also examines the impact of rentierism on social dynamics. As the study focuses on transformation and reforms, it compares different periods with current changes in the country, especially with the declaration of National Vision 2030 and the rising power of crown prince Mohammad bin Salman. In this sense, this study is a case study focusing on the social and political dynamics of Saudi Arabia.

Qualitative research methods will be employed to answer research questions and compare the country's different periods and reform processes. The study will examine reforms and changing state narratives toward the different focus groups such as women, religious clergy, and youth. The researcher will employ the textual analysis methodology. The required data will be collected by focusing on official press releases, leadership messages, and constitutional and governmental decisions. These data will be used to analyze the transformation of the state narrative and leadership decisions to create a new social model. Mohammed bin Salman is the most famous and powerful

figure in the new national transformation process. The researcher will analyze Mohammed bin Salman's interviews which are given to domestic and international media outlets from the declaration of National Vision 2030 in 2016 to 2023.

National Vision 2030 is a package of reforms to implement a new social and economic model and create a new social contract. The governmental orders and objectives for the implementation of National Vision 2030 will be collected to be subject to data analysis. The study will make the textual analysis of the official website of the National Vision 2030 (<https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/>) to understand what kind of discourse and narrative is being used by state officials to address society.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Rentier Social Contract Theory

Rentier theories have been employed to explain the political economy of the Gulf states since the early last century when oil has been the main source of government revenues. Rentier mentality can be seen in the Arabic Peninsula even in the pre-oil era (Lecha & Zaccara, 2012). The traditional perception of the state or ruler as a generous distributor of rewards, public goods, and favors to his people constructed different types of rentier mentality in the region. The practices of granting lands and providing public privileges to specific citizens such as relatives or ministers can be seen since the 1920s in Saudi Arabia (Beblawi & Luciani, 1987). The welfare boom coming with oil and the modernization of state institutions constructed new types of rentier relationships between state and society. It is very important to know state perceptions and the unique social structure of societies to be able to understand what kind of rentier relationship is constructed in that society and how rentier mentality shaped the state and society relationship. This situation creates various definitions of rentier theories accordingly with their implications in certain societies. In that sense, rentier theories created unique social contracts in the Gulf region which has sui generis social and political characteristics (Gray, 2018).

The concept of the rentier state is first used by Hossein Mahdavy in the case of Iran (Mahdavy, 1970). He examines problems of economic development in rentier states by focusing on the 1950s-60s which is the period after the second world war. He says that this period is a landmark in the economic history of the Middle East as oil-rich Middle Eastern countries started to extremely benefit from oil revenues with the oil boom and

need for oil afterward of the second world war. He defines “rentier states” as “those countries that receive on a regular basis substantial amounts of external rent. (Mahdavy, 1970)” This definition is not limited to oil or natural sources revenues. Many other sources paid by foreign audiences regularly can be considered external rents such as payments for canal or bridge passes. Mahdavy problematizes the relationship between the level of oil production and the production processes of domestic and local economies. He says that oil production has not a meaningful effect on the local production process. His problematization here raises the question of what the oil industry’s contribution to the economy of rentier states is. He argues that “the oil industry’s major contribution is that it enables the governments of the oil-producing countries to embark on large public expenditure programs without resorting to taxation and without running into drastic balance of payments or inflation problems that usually plague other developing nations... The government becomes an important or even the dominant factor in the economy (Mahdavy, 1970). “

Mahdavy emphasizes the dilemma of oil-rich rentier states why they have not been among the developed and fastest-growing countries. He says that the prosperity of oil-rich countries obtained with oil revenues “should not be taken as their performance as developing and industrializing nations” because this prosperity similarly may dissemble the problems of economic growth, development, and industrialization. This is an important concern raised by Mahdavy that will be discussed in this research in terms of the sustainability of the rentier system in Saudi Arabian social, economic, and political structure.

Beblawi and Luciani make various definitions of rentier states and economies especially focusing on the Arab world and oil-exporting countries (Beblawi & Luciani, 1987). They say the rentier state “derives a substantial part of its revenue from foreign

sources and under the form of rent”. Their broader definition emphasizes the total effect of rentierism on the domestic economy of the country. At that point, even the state is being a subsystem of the rentier economy by generating a huge amount of rents. Hazem Beblawi focuses on four main elements in his definition of a rentier economy (Beblawi, 1987). First of all, there is not a pure rentier economy. All economies have some elements of rent in some measure. What rentier economies make different is that rent dominates a large extent of the entire economic structure. Secondly, rentier economy has substantial external rents. Internal rents depend on the strong domestic productive sector. Internal rents can be considered domestic payment transfers from a group to a rentier class. The externality of rents is critical for being a rentier economy as external rents can sustain an economy without a productive domestic sector. Thirdly, a rentier economy is an economy that a small group of society is the center of wealth by generating it, meanwhile, the rest of the society is engaged in the distribution of this wealth. Lastly, the government is the recipient of the external rents. It gives a major role to the rentier state in society and in the distribution of wealth (Beblawi, 1987).

Beblawi argues that the rentier mentality breaks the work-reward causation of conventional economies. In the rentier mentality, wealth is not related to risks, hardworking, and entrepreneurship but chance and situation is the main determinant of wealth distribution. “Citizenship becomes a source of economic benefit” in rentier economies as “the economy is arranged as a hierarchy” in the distribution of the rentier wealth. In that sense, the Arab oil states represent the best example of rentier states and mentalities in terms of their economic and social structures.

It would be appropriate to mention the impacts of the rentier mentality on social structure and state and society relations in rentier states. Scholars explained the political economy of the Gulf states with the rentier state theory since the Gulf states receive a

huge amount of revenue from oil and distributed the wealth to the society in exchange for political support and loyalty (Champion, 2005). The slogan “no taxation no representation” explains the relationship between the rentier theory and social contract (Herb et al., 2019). The slogan, which emerged as “no taxation without representation” in Western democracies, emerged in a different way in Gulf monarchies which are not dependent on taxes and their revenues are mostly based on rents. Therefore, it can be argued that there is a ruler and ruled agreement and relationship in rentier states that we call it rentier social contract (Brzuskiewicz, 2017).

The social contract is defined as “a (hypothetical) agreement among individuals through which they form a state in order to escape from the disorder and chaos of the ‘state of nature’ (Heywood, 2021).” The concept of the social contract can be examined from the state and citizens’ perspectives. For the state, it is an agreement with citizens on how to legitimize its authority and power by public consent without applying coercion. On the other hand, the social contract is citizens’ perception of the state and the role they expect or assign to the state in the exchange of consent. Social contracts are important to understand “how state and society relations have developed in the past and may further evolve in the future and how state-society relations can be improved (Loewe et al., 2019).

This research argues that every society has its unique understanding of the state and society relationship. Therefore, limiting the social contract to certain conditions and political circumstances will not give correct results. Saudi Arabian social contract has been constructed in a unique way not similar to Western examples. Saudi social contract has not been constructed as a single deal. Royal family Al Saud has provided privileges, distributed the wealth, and made pacts and bargains with certain groups such as royal family members, religious clerics, tribes, and various social groups in the country. A

social contract has been constructed implicitly in Saudi Arabia through these political and social developments (Kinninmont, 2017).

The social contract of Saudi Arabia is a rentier social contract where the state distributes the wealth to the citizens and provides subsidies to gain their loyalty and political support for the regime stability (Herb et al., 2019). The rentier social contract in Saudi Arabia consolidated beginning with the domination of oil revenues in the entire economy and the economic boom coming with oil export. This situation created three pillars of the rentier social contract which will be discussed in the next chapter. The royal family Al Saud is the first pillar as a political authority managing the wealth and economy. The second is the religious establishment in Saudi Arabia. Religious clerics have been the ideological basis and motivational factor of the rentier social contract narrative by justifying political actions and the royal family's legitimacy. The third is oil and energy as a source of rent, economic welfare, and wealth for the country.

The question here what is the role of citizens in this narrative? Citizens' perception of the state is important to understand rentier state theory and how the rentier mentality forms the state and society relationship. Saudi citizens consider the state as the provider of wealth, security, healthcare, jobs, and various subsidies without taxation (Krane, 2019a). The rentier mentality constructed this perception in the exchange for loyalty and lack of political participation. Considering the rentier social contract is an agreement socially constructed, it may be subject to changes and transformations over time as political, social, and economic circumstances are in a state of flux (Herb et al., 2019). Saudi Arabia attempts a deep transformation and reform process under the leadership of crown prince Mohammad bin Salman. Concerns that are mentioned in the next chapters require such a socioeconomic transformation for a sustainable, stable, and secure future in the country. How this transformation will affect the state and society

relationship and the future of the rentier social contract is a matter of discussion in Saudi Arabia.

Rentier social contract must be examined for the specific cases in more detail. This research defines the rentier social contract as a hypothetical agreement between the state and society based on the distribution of rents by the state for welfare and prosperity in the exchange for political loyalty and support of the people. Saudi Arabia sustained this rentier narrative for a century. However, it is no longer sustainable for the next generations due to various reasons that are mentioned in the next chapter. This research examines the transformation of the Saudi social contract, its main pillars, and the new direction of state and society relationship in Saudi Arabia.

CHAPTER 3: MAKING SAUDI ARABIAN STATE AND SOCIETY

The story of the house of Saud started in a small town named Diriyyah located near to Riyadh. The founder of the dynasty Imam Mohammed Al Saud and religious leader Mohammed bin Abdul-Wahhab formed a holy political alliance in Diriyyah in 1744. This alliance made political and religious authorities serve at same purposes. Wahhabi religious ideology smoothed the way for the political aspirations of Al Saud. Wahhabism has been the ideological base and motivational factor of the first Saudi state (1744-1818) (Rundell, 2020). The first Saudi state captured most of the Nejd, Mecca, and Medina with the Wahhabis' aggressive motivations. Ottomans realized the rising influence of the Saudi-led Wahhabis in the Arabic Peninsula. The first Saudi state collapsed after seven years of wars against the Ottoman governor of Egypt Mohammad Ali Pasha.

It did not take so long that the Saudis recovered again. The second Saudi state (1824-1891) emerged after six years of the collapse. The second state also could not achieve uniting Arabic Peninsula under the leadership of Saudis. It also collapsed after facing challenges from local tribes and regional powers supported by Ottomans. The third Saudi state was established in 1902 with the capture of Riyadh by Abdulaziz Al Saud (1876-1953). Abdulaziz managed to unite various tribes, dynasties, and regional powers under his leadership to capture Riyadh. He also managed to establish strong relations with foreign powers against the Ottomans and other regional powers in the Peninsula. The weakening power of Ottomans in the region and support from Britain to Al Saud consolidated Abdulaziz's power to increase his influence in the Peninsula. Abdulaziz bin Saud declared the establishment of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

in 1932. The establishment of the modern state raised concerns about the dynamics of the state and society(Kostiner, 1993).

Al Saud's existence in the Peninsula was visible even before the establishment of the modern kingdom. The establishment of a modern kingdom and unifying the Peninsula under the leadership of Al Saud was a late development coming within the process (Al-Rasheed, 2010). Al Saud unified Arabic Peninsula and established a political authority after facing many challenges. The weakening influence of Ottomans in the region and the support of Britain to Al Saud made King Abdulaziz's plans successful (Rundell, 2020). King Abdulaziz filled the power vacuum in the Peninsula. However, external factors are not enough to explain the unification of Arabia under the leadership of a dynasty. The establishment of the Saudi state was a complex process that contains domestic social and religious factors and dynamics. King Abdulaziz instrumentalized ancestral claims and religious justifications to legitimize his rule.

The establishment of the modern kingdom raised different concerns. The Saudi state started to think about how to brand the nation and sustain political unity and authority. The discovery of oil in the 1930s created an urgent change and shaped the frame of the statehood process. The state searched for ways to "benefit from oil while remaining faithful to Islam and tradition"(Al-Rasheed, 2010).

I divided the modern history of Saudi Arabia into five periods for a better understanding of the turning points and transformation of the state and society relationship. Saudi Arabia experienced political, social, and economic challenges during the last century. These challenges shaped the Saudi social contract from various dimensions. The kingdom faced a concern of nation branding with the establishment of the modern state. The discovery of oil and oil wealth created a new direction to the social contract and modernized the country's institutions and infrastructure. The Iranian

revolution in 1979 raised the impact of political Islam in the country which is already a pillar of the state narrative. Globalization and Saudi engagement with the global economy paved the way for economic reforms and public demands for social change. The declaration of the National Vision 2030 national transformation program under the leadership of Mohammad bin Salman is a new era for Saudi's state and society relationship.

3.1 Establishment of the Kingdom and Statehood Process (1932-1953):

The establishment of the modern state witnessed the consolidation of Abdulaziz Ibn Saud's power in the country as the new state had no political mechanisms and institutions to sustain political stability. It is a process of forming state mechanisms and strengthening the political legitimacy of Abdulaziz Ibn Saud as the king and Al Saud as the ruling family. Ibn Saud did not only fight other regional powers in Arabia. He also made attempts to strengthen his power within the house of Saud. I argue that this first period of the statehood process can be understood as the consolidation of the royal family's position as a pillar of the social contract in Saudi Arabia. This process caused the house of Saud to be a unifying factor of politics and legitimate rulers of Arabia.

Abdulaziz Ibn Saud pursued traditional political strategies to strengthen his power and legitimize his political establishment (Lecha & Zaccara, 2012). He consolidated the Saud royal lineage by marginalizing other members of Al Saud and prioritizing his own line of descent. In this way, he created a distinct and privileged royal group within the House of Saud (J. Kechichian, 2001). This policy eliminated his rivals in the royal family and consolidated the power of his loyal sons. Abdulaziz Ibn Saud made polygamous marriages with daughters of tribal leaders and regional powers to establish close relations with local political powers. Ibn Saud's extraordinary number of

marriages provided him to extend his power over the region in traditional ways (Rundell, 2020). These marriages were politically strategic and had importance in the social structure of the traditional societies of Arabia. King Abdulaziz had 22 wives and produced 36 sons and many daughters. Maternal lineage shaped the political alliances and strategies in the establishment of the new state and the consolidation of Al Saud's power as the legitimate ruling family of Arabia (J. Kechichian, 2001).

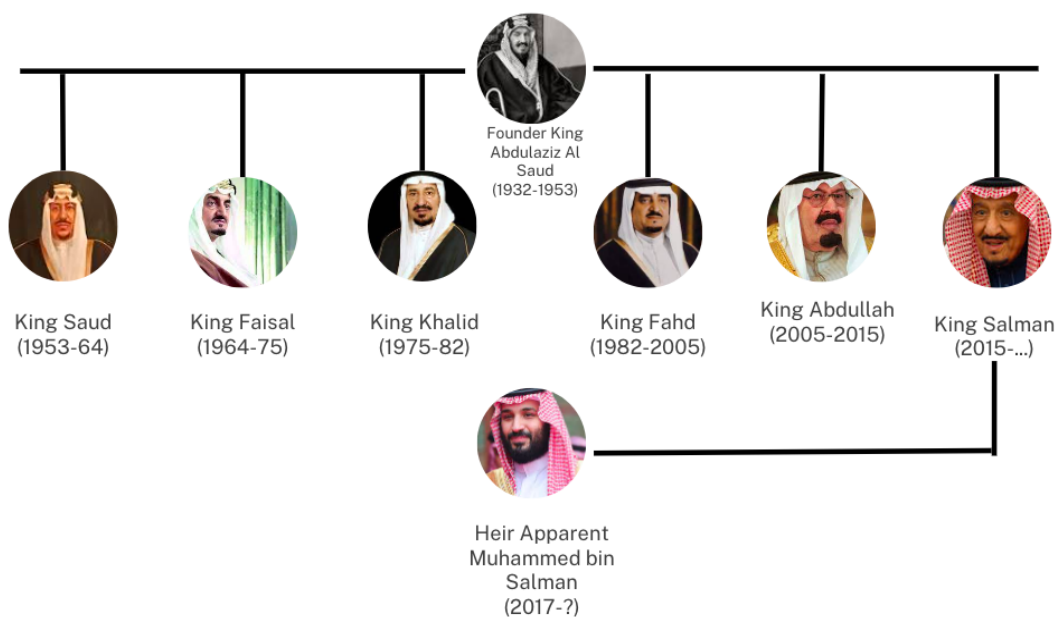


Figure 1: Kings of Saudi Arabia, Privileged Lineage of Royal Family

Ibn Saud used traditional ways to consolidate his power. This shows the importance of local dynamics and social structure in state and society relationship in Saudi Arabia. The royal family is a pillar of the social contract unifying the local political center under the leadership of the modern Saudi state. The Oil Concession in 1932 indicates a new dimension to the statehood process. The oil revenues fastened the establishment of state institutions. Saudi Arabia did not have an organized army even in the 1930s. Wahhabi ideology motivated military groups of Ikhwan and a limited number of Royal Guard forces was the military establishment of the state (Al-Rasheed, 2010). The oil revenues

started to increase Saudi economic capacity after the oil concession in 1932. The first oil tankers were presented to the market in 1938. The time was to enjoy oil revenues and wealth for King Abdulaziz after struggling for the realm for thirty years. He built a new royal palace for himself in 1936 and enjoyed welfare and prosperity.

Oil revenues gave a new shape to Saudi statehood and the nation-branding process. The establishment of the kingdom and consolidation of Al Saud's authority was completed by King Abdulaziz's political aspirations (Rundell, 2020). The oil revenues made it possible to develop the country's infrastructure and public services. King Abdulaziz lived in peace and prosperity in the last years of his life and died in 1953. However, there were many challenges waiting for his kingdom. Oil revenues gradually increased from 1932 to 1946. Oil began to dominate the Saudi economy in the 1950s (Peterson, 2018). The next period will be a period of modernization and transformation in state and society relations for Saudi Arabia.

3.2 Oil Boom and Modernization (1953-1979):

This period witnessed the developing impact of oil on the country's domestic dynamics, state institutions, public services, and social contract as well. The death of the founder King Abdulaziz ibn Saud caused a power struggle between his sons Sa'ud and Faisal. This struggle has been a challenge for the future of the Saudi state in this period. The regional developments and conflicts in the Arab world had been on the agenda of Saudi Arabia as the country was not close to the external developments as it was before. King Faisal established political ties with the rest of the Arab world (Vassiliev, 2016). Saudi relations with the United States, Britain, and Europe were restricted to oil trade until the aftermath of the Second World War. The relations with the United States and the rest of the world developed in other areas after the Second

World War (Al-Rasheed, 2010). This period also came into prominence with the modernization of state institutions. The wealth coming from oil revenues made it possible to establish organized state institutions, ministries, and public services.

The post-World War II period and King Faisal's accession to the throne coincided with the time when Saudi Arabian oil revenues increased, and a welfare society was almost formed. Oil revenues consolidated the regime and royal family's power and authority over the tribes, local political centers, and religious establishments. The royal family did not need to apply traditional ways of political alliances like marriages and giving governmental privileges as it did in the 1920s and 1930s. Even though the importance of these social institutions was sustained, oil existed as a revolutionary factor under the control of the government.

The King Faisal era witnessed important development affecting the state and society relationship. It is an era of confronting external ideologies like Arab nationalism and political Islam which were rising and motivated political movements in the Arab world. King Faisal had political aspirations of being a leading country for Arabs and Muslims. He consolidated the effectiveness of the League of Arab which is established in 1945 and led to the establishment of the Islamic Cooperation Organization in 1969. King Faisal's era has important attempts at shaping Saudi national identity. He pursued pro-Islamic rhetoric and supported Islamist political trends against the political agenda of Arab nationalism led by charismatic political leaders of Arab nationalists like Gamal Abd al-Nasser (Mann, 2012).

The period between the death of founder King Abdulaziz ibn Saud and the Iranian Revolution witnessed the modernization of state institutions and the formation of a welfare society. The period can be seen as the foundation of the oil-based rentier mentality in state and society relations in Saudi Arabia as the oil revenues dominated

the economy and the majority of governmental revenues. The royal family consolidated its power by gaining a huge amount of energy revenue to develop a wealthy kingdom. However, the struggle for the throne and the assassination of King Faisal by a royal family member raised concerns for the political stability of the regime in the future. The most distinguished effect of the period on the social contract is the instrumentalization of the oil revenues to consolidate regimes authority and gain society's support. This formed the state and society relationship on a rentier mentality. The following years came with challenges that brought many political and social changes. The most important one was the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

3.3 Rise of Political Islam and Regional Polarization (1979-1990s):

The wealth of the state has been a security concern since the 1970s. Saudi Arabia had not enough military capacity to defend the immense wealth inside. This situation increased the vulnerability of the regime. The state was not able to protect the large territory and the immense wealth with a small population and lack of military experience. A security guarantor was urgent for Saudi Arabia. The regime consolidated relations with the United States for this purpose (Al-Rasheed, 2010). There were two major regional developments threatening the security of Saudi Arabia. The first is the Iranian revolution in 1979. The revolution had many effects on Saudi Arabia which are not limited to foreign policy and security concerns. The idea of exporting revolution affected the state narrative of Saudi Arabia for decades to confront the Iranian threat. The second is the Iraq-Iran war in the very near borders of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia preferred to support the nationalist Baathist ideology of Iraq instead of Iran. Saudi regime considered that Iran has more potential danger to its security and stability. The Gulf monarchies shared the same security concerns in this period. Gulf Cooperation

Council was established in 1981 in Riyadh to unify Gulf monarchies around common purposes against common threats.

The regional developments caused the partnership between Saudi Arabia and the United States to be more stronger. Saudi Arabia opened Saudi lands to American troops in the Iraq and Iran war to protect Saudi borders and support Iraq against Iran. This situation provoked neo-Ikhwan existence and Islamic opposition in the country. Juhayman ibn Mohammad Al-Utaybi and his followers attempted an uprising in 1979 claiming the degeneration and corruption of Saudi rulers. Saudi rulers were shocked by the uprising directly attacking the royal family. This development raised concerns about the religious establishment and thoughts in the country. The regime mobilized religious leaders and 'ulama' to support the government and oppose the uprising groups. Due to this attempt and the discontent of some Wahhabi clerics, the regime had to consider how to reconcile modernization, wealth, and royal politics with Islamic values or at least religious beliefs in the country (Al-Rasheed, 2010). The Shia riots among the Shia minorities in the country are important to show the challenges of domestic dynamics in this era. The Shia population was uncomfortable with the unequal distribution of wealth and strict religious identity of the state. The Iranian revolution revived Shia opposition against the Saudi regime and it sustained its existence up to the present (Matthiesen, 2012).

Oil prices sharply decreased in the 1980s. This meant a great depression for the economy, which became dependent on oil revenues. The affluence years of the 1960s and 1970s were a grant for development and modernization, meanwhile, Saudi Arabia experienced the vulnerability of economic structure which is to a large extent dependent on the global oil market. Saudi state and society experienced another important point as well. The welfare provided to society by the state is not sustainable as it depends on

a single economic source and does not support the production industry and capacity of the country. The important point about the state and society relationship over these years is that “the government was reluctant to cut spending on public services and benefits among the population (Al-Rasheed, 2010)”. A reduction in public benefits, taxation, and the elimination of subsidies were not the first solutions the government thought of for fear of the political consequences and regime stability.

This period demonstrated two important things the government had to consider for the future. The first is the dependency of the economy on the global oil market. The first time Saudis realized the unsustainability and instability of an oil-rich rentier economy. The second is the religious establishment in the country. Concerns have been raised about the responses of clerics and the religious establishment to the politics of the royal family and the role of religion in state and society relations (Dekmejian, 1994).

3.4 Gulf War and Globalization (1990s-2000s):

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait at the beginning of this period came as a shock. For Saudi Arabia, this invasion had to be fiercely resisted in order to push the Iraqi military existence from its near borders and protect the Kuwaiti ruling family and other monarchies of the Gulf. However, the Saudi regime had no sufficient military power to resist Iraqi military power in the Gulf. This made the assistance of America necessary to end Iraq’s aggressive invasion policies. America supported Saudi Arabia by sending troops to its land and forming an international coalition fighting against the invasion. Domestic debates emerged by the presence of American troops in the Saudi borders. Saudi leadership had to consider how to justify this necessary assistance to protect its regime stability. Moreover, the legitimacy of the royal family in ruling the country

began to be questioned by some religious and secular groups and intellectuals (Conge & Okruhlik, 2009). Another important international development of this period is the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war. Changes and discussions have also occurred in Saudi Arabia as a result of the growing American impact worldwide and the spread of globalization.

The Gulf war encouraged opposition sides and the public to raise their voices for reforms. The early years of the 1990s were known as “the age of petitions” to the government regarding many issues related to debates on Islam, modernity, liberalization, and relations with the West (Al-Rasheed, 2010). The development of information technologies and tools of globalization created a more conscious society to public and political issues. There were two sides to the criticisms. Islamists and a few young religious preachers were on the first side, arguing about royal politics and the degeneration of Saudi society as a result of engagement with the west. The opposing group, which was predominantly liberal and secular, was led by Saudis who had received their education in the west and called for liberal reforms to social norms such removing travel and driving restrictions for women. 47 Saudi women first time drove their cars in Riyadh on November 6, 1990, in opposition to the driving ban. Although some groups harshly criticized this demonstration, it had an impact on the future of women rights movement in Saudi Arabia (Vassiliev, 2000).

Regarding these demands and criticisms to confront potential dangers, the Saudi leadership announced certain reform packages on the Basic Law of Government, the Law of the Consultative Council, and the Law of the Provinces in March 1992 (Al-Rasheed, 2010). However, it was strictly emphasized that the Saudi royal family is the legitimate ruler of Saudi Arabia and obedience and adherence to them is a religious duty. The state also marginalized religious extremism and arrested some famous figures

of opposition such as Salman al-Awda. Pro-state Wahhabi clerics started to promote obedience to rulers and religious modernization. Pro-state Wahhabi clerics began to advocate for obedience to authorities and religious modernity. The oppositional movements and criticisms that were present during this time can be understood as the foundations of future issues. Due to issues like population increase, unemployment, demographic issues, social modernization, and the sustainability of the economy that will arise in the new millennium, new expectations will be added to these reform demands. The dynamics of the state and society relations in this circumstance make transformation unavoidable.

3.5 Economic Reforms and Social Changes (2000s-Present):

The new millennium brought many challenges to the Saudi state. It had been almost a century since oil revenues provided immense wealth to the country and a rentier state and society relationship was established. However, there were many changes since the first decades of the establishment of the modern state. In the early years of the 2000s, Saudi Arabia had a population that was ten times more than in the country's founding decades. The large percentage of the youth population and unemployment began to cause problems for the state (Niblock & Malik, 2007). Even though oil was generating vast revenues, the economy was still highly dependent on oil, an unsustainable energy source. These problems have been on the agenda in the last decades, waiting for reforms.

The 9/11 attacks that happened in the United States were one of the most significant developments for Saudi Arabia in the last decades. Saudi Arabia has been charged with being the origin of the radical thoughts that have made religious terrorism visible to the globe (Kaufer & Al-Malki, 2009). Due to its government policies, educational

programs, and even social structure, the Saudi government has been blamed for promoting extremism. To counteract these charges, Saudi Arabia undertook a number of social and religious reforms. It cannot be argued that international pressure was the only driver in the reforms. The public has been calling for reforms for many years. On the other hand, these reforms against religious extremism also caused some religious groups to take an opposing stance. Increasing reform efforts in the new millennium and especially during the reign of King Abdullah have not produced sustainable solutions. The reforms were aimed more at preserving the status quo and eliminating the potential dangers of opposition rather than bringing about fundamental changes.

The Arab Spring in 2011 had a significant impact on Saudi state and society relations. The Arab spring caused many radical changes in the Middle East. These changes had the potential to endanger the stability of the Saudi regime. For this reason, Saudi Arabia carried out large expenditures, political reforms, and also policies of repression in order to satisfy the public and suppress the impact of the Arab Spring in the country (Colombo, 2012). The Arab uprisings have evoked Saudi leadership to that there is economic and social discomfort in the society. Regional developments may trigger domestic discomfort and endanger the regime stability.

King Salman came to the throne on 23 January 2015. Mohammed bin Salman started to show his impact on the government with his father's accession to the throne. The Saudi military intervention in Yemen just three months after King Salman ascended to the throne demonstrated the new leadership's aggressive political aspirations (Darwich, 2018). Mohammed bin Salman presented National Vision 2030 on 25 April 2016. It has been presented as a national transformation program that aims to make multidimensional reforms in many areas for a sustainable Saudi Arabia. Mohammed bin Salman's aspirations opened a new era of state and society relations in Saudi Arabia.

The next chapters examine the main pillars of this relationship. The research also investigates how the Saudi rentier social contract transforms with the new leadership's political direction and national transformation programs.

CHAPTER 4: TRADITIONAL RENTIER SOCIAL CONTRACT IN SAUDI ARABIA: MAIN PILLARS AND THE ROLE OF SOCIETY

The Saudi rentier social contract has been shaped and developed as a result of the turning points and major developments in the last century. The social contract is not a stable phenomenon, but a hypothetical agreement that has been transformed and renewed as a result of events affecting state-society relations (Herb et al., 2019). Three pillars have been prominent in the formation of the Saudi rentier social contract in the last century's statehood and modernization processes. These are the ruling family, religious elites "ulama", and oil-related wealth. These pillars shaped the rentier social contract in the country from the establishment of the modern states to recent years. According to changing state-society relations and historical circumstances, the significance of each pillar in the social contract increased and decreased over time. However, a rentier social contract is sustained with the interrelation of these pillars in the state and society relationship.

4.1 Ruling family

Arabia has not united under an absolute authority after the Islamization of the region. States and empires that established supremacy in the region after the Islamization of the region preferred to rule the territory through local emirates due to the extreme environmental conditions of the region and the complex sociopolitical structure centered on tribes (Al-Semmari, 2010). Saudis managed to unify the regional powers and local political centers under their authority after struggling for many years. The founding king Abdulaziz Al Saud used traditional ways to consolidate his power. He had good relations with the leading merchants of the peninsula to build good foreign

relations and benefit their social and economic prestigious. The polygamic marriages of King Abdulaziz were one of the important consolidators of Al Saud's authority in the unification and state formation process. Marriage was considered a significant social institution in the peninsula to establish mutual relations. He made marriages with daughters of the local political leaders and religious authorities to build alliances and good relations(Abir, 1987). There was the existence of a rentier mentality before the oil era in Arabia with various types of distribution of rents (Lecha & Zaccara, 2012). The ruler was generously granting governmental benefits, lands, tax deductions, etc. to certain individuals or groups in to gain their allegiance and support. King Abdulaziz strengthened his authority in the peninsula by applying these kinds of traditional institutions.

Once the Saudis consolidated their authority in the country, the contemporary Saudi kingdom was established in 1932. The role of Al Saud in the unification of the peninsula made the Saudi royal family an important element of the political structure of the state. The unification and mobilization of a ruling class and elites within the state can be seen as the Saudi royal family's role as a pillar of the social contract. The privileged Saudi lineage of the founder King Abdulaziz symbolized a small number of ruling elites who are mostly associated with the royal family, dynasties, religious groups, and famous merchants (Abir, 1987). This situation enables the Saudi regime's stability to be integrated with the state's stability and the unity of local power centers.

The discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia changed the dynamics between the state and society. Oil revenues started to have a significant impact on the economy shortly after the 1933 oil concession was made. As of the early 1940s, oil has been the main driver of the economy, and Saudi Arabia's economy started to depend on it. This gave the Saudis a great alternative power to strengthen their control. The Royal family began to

develop a rentier system in the kingdom with the benefit of oil revenues rather than strengthening its position by building alliances with tribe leaders and merchants. This does not mean that the importance of traditional methods is obsolete. However, oil has become a real game changer.

As mentioned before, Beblawi focuses on some main elements of the rentier economy. One of the elements is that a rentier economy is an economy in which a small group of society is the center of wealth by generating it, meanwhile, the rest of the society is engaged in the distribution of this wealth. Also, he argues, the government is the recipient of the external rents in a rentier economy (Beblawi, 1987). Together with immense wealth coming with oil, the royal family has been at the center of the wealth by generating it to consolidate the regime and its stability. The distribution of the oil wealth provided a high-quality life standard to society. Oil has been a tool for the regime elites to gain political support and the loyalty of local political centers and religious elites. Having such a source of prosperity did not leave the need for the regime to consolidate its power by granting privileges to local power centers. In this case, the royal family was no longer in a position to satisfy the tribes and religious establishment in the decision-making processes. Oil allowed the regime to carry out royal policies independent of domestic sociopolitical balances, even though they were still important.

This narrative of the oil-based rentier economy sustained for a century. Saudi state provided wealth and prosperity to the society in the exchange for political support and loyalty. Saudi Arabia had many social and political transformation processes over time as mentioned in Chapter 3. There are various reasons that threaten the rentier economic system of Saudi Arabia such as the rising population, youth unemployment, and economic diversification (Champion, 2005). Oil as a hydrocarbon energy source is not sustainable, also the prices are not stable. However, the Saudi economy is mostly

dependent on the global oil market. These concerns raise questions about the future of oil-related wealth in the country. In these conditions, the government is unable to provide wealth and subsidies to the growing population without imposing taxes, fees, and governmental responsibilities (Niblock & Malik, 2007). This makes the role of the regime and the royal family in the rentier social contract the subject of discussion.

Saudi leadership led by crown prince Mohammad bin Salman seeks for new ways to consolidate the regime's power and authority in the country (Al-Rasheed, 2018). Domestic unrest and future expectations of the people especially young Saudis raise concerns about the future of regime security (Thompson, 2019). The state is unable to provide wealth and prosperity to the people as it did for a century. This means the elimination of the traditional social contract which is based on the distribution of wealth in exchange for political support (Gray, 2018). Saudi leadership promotes Saudi micro nationalism and identity to consolidate its power (Alhoussein, 2019). Mohammed bin Salman's political aspirations aim to gain the support of Saudi youths and make reforms within the frame of National Vision 2030 to diversify the economy and build an open society. This political direction transforms the role of the state from a rentier to a modernized Saudi nation-state. This requires a new social contract as well as new social and political challenges for the future.

4.2 Religious establishment and elites "ulama":

Mohammed bin Abdul Wahhab al-Tamimi was born in 1703 in the town of Uyaynah, seventy kilometers north of Riyadh. He was interested in religious sciences since his childhood and took education in some intellectual centers of the Middle East at that time such as Hejaz, Basra, and Baghdad. He had theo-political aspirations to spread an "uncorrupted" version of Islam in the Peninsula even by applying coercion and violence

(Büyükkara, 2018). The turning point of his political career was meeting with Mohammed bin Saud in the town of Diriyah in 1744. Ibn Abdul Wahhab and Ibn Saud established an agreement to support and cooperate with each other. Ibn Saud promised Ibn Abdul Wahhab to govern according to Islamic rules “Shariah” and support him in spreading his thoughts. Ibn Abdul Wahhab owed allegiance to Ibn Saud to remain loyal to him and support his policies. In this way, the two leaders have formed a holy and political agreement based on alliance and cooperation. The religious charisma of Ibn Abdul Wahhab made the Diriyah an intellectual and political center at that time (J. A. Kechichian, 1986).

Wahhabism has been the ideological basis and motivation factor of Al Saud’s political aspirations in the Peninsula (Büyükkara, 2018). Al Saud maintained his military involvement and actions in the region with religious justifications from Wahhabi clerics. Wahhabi ‘ulama’ had important political roles in the establishment of the state-making process (J. A. Kechichian, 1986). Religion has been an important element of regime consolidation and unification of the peninsula. Al Saud promoted religion, particularly Wahhabi religious understanding, as a foundational element of Saudi national identity and a key driver of the process of nation branding (Nevo, 1998).

It can be argued that the Wahhabi religious understanding had an important impact on the dynamics of state and society relations in Saudi Arabia. The question is whether this role of religion will continue or not considering the national transformation reforms in the country led by Mohammad bin Salman. National Vision 2030 aims to modernize societal institutions avoiding them from extreme thoughts and ideologies. Wahhabi religious understanding has had an extreme ideological impact on the Saudi social structure from the very beginning years of the agreement between Ibn Abdul Wahhab and Al Saud. The national transformation agenda of Mohammad bin Salman does not

give credit to this interpretation of the state, society, and religion relationship. It considers a modernized interpretation of religion that prioritizes Saudi national identity away from extreme ideological concerns and adherence to the regime (Alhussein, 2019).

4.3 Oil-related wealth

Oil concession has been made in 1933 with Standard Oil Company of California (SOCAL) which was renamed Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) in 1944 (Peterson, 2003). The first commercial oil deposit was discovered on 16 October 1938 in Saudi Arabia. The state started to benefit from oil revenues immediately after the discovery of oil (Vassiliev, 2000). King Abdulaziz was capable of building royal palaces for himself thanks to the oil revenue, which also helped him strengthen his authority among the tribes and local political powers. As mentioned in Chapter 3, he used traditional ways to consolidate his power such as governmental privileges to certain groups and merchants and polygamic marriages. The oil gave him external power and immense wealth to create a Saudi nation and shape the modern Saudi state. The oil has fastened the modernization of the state, particularly during the King Faisal era when the country witnessed an economic boom and improvements in public services, infrastructure, etc. (Al-Rasheed, 2010).

Saudi leadership created an oil-based rentier economic system when oil revenues started dominating the economy. The royal family consolidated its power and modernized the state and institutions, meanwhile, it shaped the state and society relationship by instrumentalizing oil revenues. The unification of Saudi Arabia was not achieved by oil revenues. Regime authority was established with different kinds of rents, privileges, and traditional ways of alliances (Abir, 1987). Oil had an after-effect

on the state and society relationship. It was a game changer and had a huge impact on the Saudi regime, state, and society.

The role of oil in the social contract is that it enabled the state to provide wealth and various subsidies to the citizens in the exchange for political support and loyalty to the regime. This relationship makes the nature of the hypothetical agreement between the state and society based on a rentier mentality. Saudi rentier social contract imposes the regime to distribute oil wealth and guarantee a quality life to the people, on the other hand, people obey the regime and its ruling legitimacy without demanding for political participation and accountability (Brzuszkiewicz, 2017).

The oil and energy-related revenues are the basis of the Saudi rentier social contract. However, it has been a matter of discussion from the very beginning years of the development oil dominated economy that oil is not a sustainable source of energy (Gray, 2018). Beblawi and Luciani discussed the sustainability of the oil economy in rentier states in the 1970s and 1980s (Beblawi & Luciani, 1987). It has been a more critical issue for the oil-exporting rentier states in recent years together with domestic, regional, and global changes. Saudi leadership sustained this kind of relationship for a century. However, there are various reasons that prevent the sustainability of the rentier economy and social contract such as the instability of oil global oil market, rising population, unemployment, a high percentage of domestic consumption, and high cost of domestic subsidies (Champion, 2005).

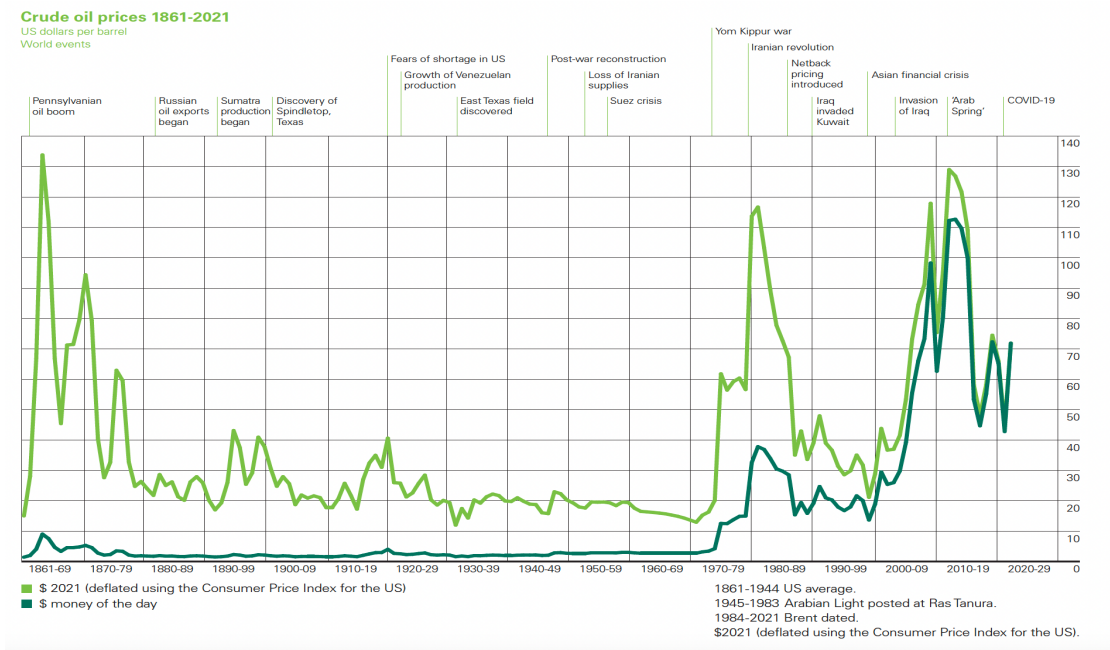


Figure 2: Stability of oil prices 1861-2021 (BP, 2022)

The unsustainability of oil and the instability of the global oil market endanger the future of the Saudi rentier social contract (Krane, 2019a). The global oil market has been very unstable, especially in the last few decades. This situation can be linked to global political developments and supply-demand imbalances. Furthermore, energy transmission is a challenge for economies dependent on oil revenues (Fattouh, 2021). There are concerns that oil will not be sufficient to meet public demands in the future (Luciani & Moerenhout, 2021). In other words, the regime breaks the agreement by no longer providing prosperity. Therefore, the political effects of the post-oil era and state reforms and transformation attempts became prominent on the agenda of Saudi Arabia (Gray, 2018).

The importance of oil is not only related to the economic sphere. Oil and energy sources have importance in the socioeconomic structure and regime stability of the country. There will be political effects of the post-oil era. What Saudi leadership plans to do to sustain regime stability and security in the lack of oil rents is key in this situation. There are social and economic reform attempts to confront the potential

effects of this concern from the very beginning year of the new millennium. However, Saudi leadership's tendency was to protect the status quo instead of implementing radical reforms and transformation programs (Krane, 2019a). The rise of Mohammad bin Salman changed the political direction of the country. He introduced National Vision 2030 on 25 April 2016 after a year of his father King Salman's accession to the throne. It is a national transformation program that constructs a new era of state and society relationship (Kinninmont, 2017).

4.4 The role of society: How is it to be a Saudi Arabian citizen?

It is important to discuss the state and society relations' perception of Saudi Arabian citizens. Saudi state provides wealth, public services, governmental jobs, energy subsidies, etc. without taxation or with a negligible amount of taxes to citizens. This role of the state creates a state perception in society. Since people waive political participation and accountability, they think that the oil revenues should be distributed in a way that can provide social welfare (Krane, 2019a). The rentier agreement in this situation puts the state in the role of a welfare and social security provider (Thompson, 2018).

There are some domestic problems related to concerns about the sustainability of the Saudi Arabian rentier social contract (Brzuszkiewicz, 2017). Saudi Arabia's domestic energy consumption is quite high compared with the world average. In 2021, Saudi Arabia used 32% of its oil production. This places the country as the fourth-largest oil consumer in the world despite its relatively small population (BP, 2022). The rising population increases the cost of domestic energy consumption. This puts Saudi leadership in a dilemma of whether they continue to provide subsidies for a short-term

political stability or cut energy subsidies by taking risk of public unrest and regime stability (Krane, 2019b).

Changes in the Saudi rentier system also affect the political behavior of citizens (Thompson, 2018). The Saudi rentier social contract does not give citizens the right to claim political participation and the accountability of the regime. However, where the state is not able to provide social welfare, there will be demands for more political participation, liberal policies, and freedoms. It is more probable considering the authoritarian structure of the regime. In this case, there is a need for consolidation of regime power and authority. The new political direction of Saudi leadership suggests Saudi nationalism and adherence to national interests over any other affiliation (Alhussein, 2019).

Saudi rentier social contract faced challenges and transformation with the rising power of Muhammad bin Salman in the Saudi government. Muhammad bin Salman has been a charismatic national figure in society, particularly among young Saudis. A cult of the leader has been constructed with Muhammad bin Salman domestically and even internationally (Al-Rasheed, 2021). He introduced the National Vision 2030 as a national transformation program that aims to open a new era in Saudi Arabia. Muhammad bin Salman's policies have found support in some parts of society, especially among unsatisfied young people, meanwhile, they have also triggered opposition to the crown prince in some religious and liberal Saudi intellectuals.

CHAPTER 5: RISE OF MUHAMMAD BIN SALMAN AND CHALLENGES TO THE SAUDI RENTIER SOCIAL CONTRACT

Saudi rentier social contract experienced radical and critical challenges with the rising power of Muhammed bin Salman. His father King Salman bin Abdulaziz altered the traditional succession plan in which the throne was transferred among the sons of the founder King Abdulaziz (J. A. Kechichian, 2019). As mentioned in Chapter 3, King Abdulaziz constructed a privileged lineage of the royal family consisting of his sons and some loyal relatives. This tradition continued until King Salman granted his nephew Muhammed bin Nayef the heirship by dismissing his brother Muqrin bin Abdulaziz on 29 April 2015.

Muhammed bin Nayef was replaced by Muhammed bin Salman on 21 June 2017. The rising power of Muhammed bin Salman brought many challenges to Saudi Arabia. King Salman proved his visionary political understanding by altering succession and initiating reforms in the country. However, it is argued that Muhammed bin Salman's political aspirations have been the motivational factor of the new era in Saudi Arabia. There were even discussions about a "palace coup" in which Muhammed bin Salman took ultimate authority over royal policies (Anthony, 2017).

Mohammad bin Salman is the face of the new era in Saudi Arabia. A cult of personality and leader was created in the person of Mohammed bin Salman and it is presented as the dynamic and visionary face of the regime in the new era (J. A. Kechichian, 2019). Muhammed bin Salman presented himself as the representative of the new generation and youth in government and the problems of countries. He was aware of the public unrest and dissatisfaction among the new generation who has not much hope for their future (Fadaak & Roberts, 2019). His policies and positive discourse targeting the youth

consolidated his leadership and regime authority. The rise of Muhammed bin Salman as a charismatic leader in the domestic and international affairs of the country can also be seen as a result of the regime's populist and nationalist agenda. Saudi rentier social contract is in a state of flux. The Saudi state needs strong and charismatic leadership to consolidate regime authority in public. As the new social contract is constructed on popular nationalist discourse and policies, leadership is an important motivator to mobilize people (Al-Rasheed, 2021).

Saudi Arabia aims to construct a new national narrative to create a Saudi nation. Saudi nation-branding has been different from other examples of nation-states in the Arab world. Al-Rasheed identifies the nation-branding of Saudi Arabia in three phases. The first is the religious characteristic of nationalism which consists of a Wahhabi understanding of Islam. The second is the pan-Islamic transnational identity of religious activism in the country's social and political history. The last one is local Saudi identity which is what the new leadership promotes and encourages for the last decade (Al-Rasheed, 2021). The new narrative prioritizes Saudi national identity and adherence to Saudi interests over any other affiliation (Alhoussein, 2019). This state-driven Saudi nationalism contains religious and traditional motives, meanwhile, it transforms the previous understandings accordingly with the new reformation of state and society relations.

This research argues that the traditional Saudi rentier social contract is no longer sustainable for the next generations. The Saudi leadership attempts to implement reforms and national transformation programs to create a new social agreement based on Saudi nationalist popularism. What are the reasons that make the Saudi rentier social contract obsolete? Saudi Arabia had social and economic problems for decades. There have been attempts to overcome these problems, but they have always been prevented

by the status quo and political stability concerns. The regime has been in a dilemma of whether preserve the status quo to maintain stability or make radical reforms to ensure sustainability by taking the risk of regime security (Krane, 2019b). Muhammed bin Salman's political aspirations started an era of radical changes and transformations.

There may be many global and regional reasons for the unsustainability of the Saudi rentier social contract. This research discusses internal dynamics and the most prominent and important ones on the transformation of the rentier social contract. These are the unsustainability and instability of oil, subsidies and domestic consumption, rising population, youth unemployment, and public demand for social change.

Oil has been the main source of the socio-economic structure of Saudi Arabia for a century. It could be argued that a rentier social contract between the state and society would not be established in Saudi Arabia if the country were not rich in energy and oil. Oil provided immense wealth to the state and society and sustained the socio-political structure of the country for a century. However, oil is eventually hydrocarbon energy and not sustainable. Moreover, technological developments and energy transmission in the world threaten the popularity of oil as an energy source in the world (Fattouh, 2021). The Saudi economy is dependent on the global oil market to large extent. This makes the oil prices crucial for state revenues and expenditures. The instability of oil prices makes it necessary to diversify the economy which is dominated by oil-related revenues (Ajili & HasaniChenar, 2022). The Saudi state is not able to sustain social welfare by depending on the unstable oil market and unsustainable future of oil.

Saudi regime provided generous subsidies, cheap energy, and free services to the citizens together with benefiting from the huge amount of oil revenues. The oil was a significant tool in the hands of regime elites to consolidate regime authority in the country and buy the political support of the people (Abir, 1987). The state was not in

need of taxation for the governmental expenditures and modernization of the country. This situation enabled the formation of a rentier mentality in state and society relationship. However, social transformation over time made the state incapable to provide generous subsidies as it did for a century. Since the founding of the modern state, the population of Saudi Arabia has been steadily growing. This makes the cost of domestic energy consumption very high compared with the world average. Saudi Arabia is the world's fourth-highest oil consumer country. Russia is the fifth high consumer with a population of 143 million and a developed production industry. Saudi Arabia consumes more than Russia with a population of 36 million (BP, 2022).

Table 1: The most oil consumer countries, consumption in thousands of barrels per day ((BP, 2022)

Thousand Barrels Daily	2011	2015	2020	2021	Population 2021
US	17993	18499	17183	18684	331 million
China	9630	11890	14408	15542	1.4 billion
India	3475	4147	4701	4878	1.4 billion
Saudi Arabia	3285	3901	3552	3595	36 million
Russian Federation	3094	3197	3210	3407	143 million

Saudi state plans to gradually decrease domestic oil consumption to increase oil export. Considering the country consumes %32 percent of its production, it will affect the oil export revenues positively. The government also plans to charge taxes and eliminate subsidies due to modernize economic institutions and diversify economic sources. These reforms are being implemented within the frame of the National Vision 2030 transformation program. However, they also eliminate the rentier social contract and its main benefits in society (Krane, 2019a).

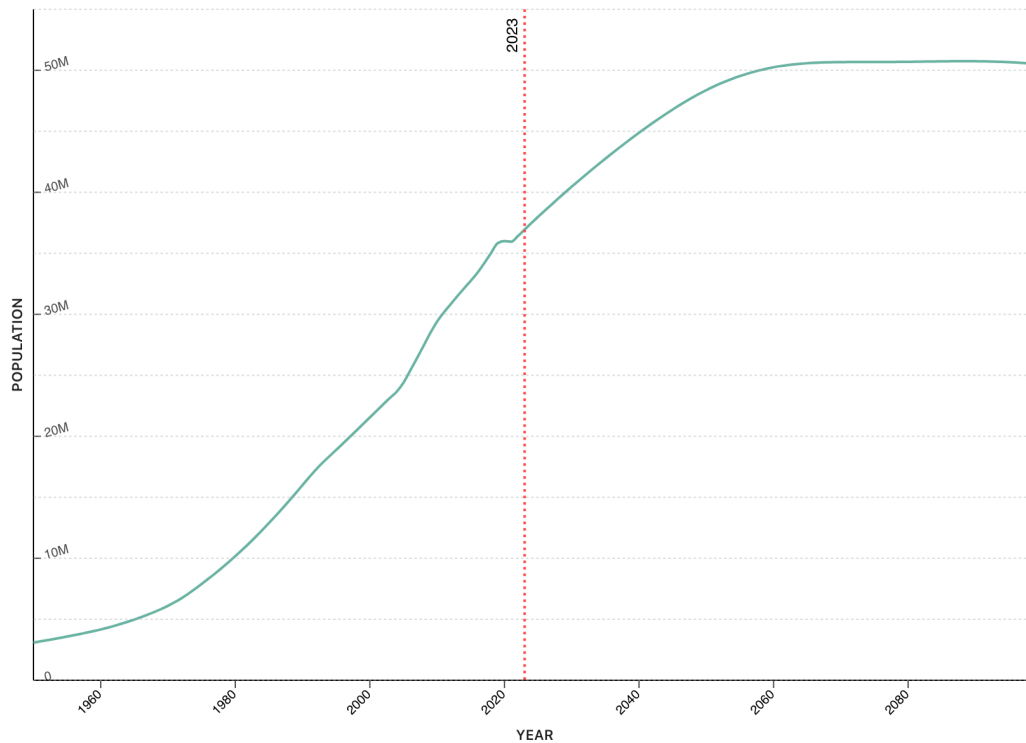


Figure 3: Expected population growth of Saudi Arabia from the 1960s to 1980s (*World Population Review, 2023*)

Saudi demographic structure is one of the important reasons for the country's new reformist political direction. The population of Saudi Arabia has increased tenfold since the 1960s and it still continues to rise. Young people make up the majority of the population of the country. Seventy percent of the overall population consists of people under the age of 35 (United Nations, 2022). This demographic raises concerns for the future. Young people do not look at the future with hope (Fadaak & Roberts, 2019). The state also is not capable to provide subsidies, public jobs, and financial allowances to the youth as it did for the last generations with the benefits of immense oil revenues. Niblock and Malik problematize the Saudi state's capability of producing jobs for the next generations and signalize future threats of growing unemployment (Niblock & Malik, 2007). A high percentage of youth citizens creates an unemployment problem in the market. The unemployment rate of Saudi citizens was %9 in 2022. The unemployment rate of Saudi youths between the age of 15-24 is %29 (General

Authority for Statistics, 2022). Saudi citizens expect to work in public jobs rather than in the private sector (Fadaak & Roberts, 2019). However, the government cannot provide jobs to all unemployed youths. Also, there is no developed private sector to provide jobs to the youth with the same conditions as public jobs. This situation reveals public unrest particularly among young people against the current economic conditions (Thompson, 2018). The new socioeconomic model encourages entrepreneurship, social contribution, responsibility, etc. as a solution to the unemployment problem. Muhammed bin Salman represents himself as a representative of the youth and solution maker of the last decade's problems. However, the socioeconomic problems of young people remain a challenge for the future and endanger the regime security of Saudi Arabia.

The unsustainability of the Saudi rentier social contract is not only related to economic factors. There is public demand for a change in Saudi Arabia (Potter, 2017). As mentioned in Chapter 3, there have been demonstrations for freedoms, social rights, and political accountability particularly beginning in the 1990s since the country entered the era of globalization and closer relations with the United States. The impact of the religious establishment on the state policies and decision-making processes caused strict social restrictions, particularly on some parts of society such as women and youths (Thompson, 2018). Public unrest accumulated for many years against the strict social norms and restrictions. Therefore, the new generation supported the new reformist political agenda of Muhammed bin Salman.

Saudi leadership consolidates its authority by pursuing reformist social policies which are opposite to the traditional social norms mostly shaped by the religious establishment in the country. The social reforms are part of a new state narrative that prioritizes Saudi nationalism with a popular discourse over sectarian and dynastic belongings. Saudi

leadership wants to recreate the narrative of state formation (Diwan, 2016). King Salman issued a royal decree on 27 January 2022 to change the founding date of the state from 1744 to 22 February 1727 (Saudi Gazette, 2023). 1727 is the date when Muhammed bin Al Saud took control of Diriyyah and established the first Saudi state there. Later, the political alliance between Muhammed bin Abdul Wahhab and Al Saud took place in Diriyyah in 1744. The change of foundation date indicates that Saudi leadership creates a new state narrative and political myth. The new narrative does not give credit to Wahhabism as a pillar of the state narrative. It is a Saudi narrative featuring the authority of the royal family.

These reasons and developments made the Saudi rentier social contract obsolete at the end of the day. The construction of a new state and society relationship and state narrative is on the agenda of the next potential King of the Kingdom Muhammed bin Salman. He introduced his package of reforms and transformation plans with the National Vision 2030 on 25 April 2016. What he thinks to do shape the political direction of Saudi Arabia and the future of Al Saud as well.

5.1 How does Muhammed bin Salman frame the new era of Saudi Arabia?: An analysis of Muhammed bin Salman's media appearances

In this section, I examine Muhammed bin Salman's political aspirations, his leadership, and his framing of the reforms and the national transformation program National Vision 2030. The Saudi rentier social contract inherited some problematic issues that must be solved to create a new social contract. This section analyses Muhammed bin Salman's nine interviews conducted by different media outlets from his first on-record interview in 2016 to 2023 to understand the new state narrative and policies regarding the reforms and construction of a new social contract.

Muhammed bin Salman has been the face of the new reformist era and national transformation program. He shaped the state approach and policies to the reforms by his political aspirations. Therefore, it is important to analyze his media appearances and how he represents reforms. Although he is often on the agenda of media outlets, he is not much visible personally. I analyzed transcripts of nine interviews conducted with Muhammed bin Salman, emphasizing important issues under five sections. These sections are the most discussed issues regarding the Saudi national transformation process and Muhammed bin Salman's political aspirations. With the exception of two interviews conducted by local media outlets, all interviews were made in English, but Muhammed bin Salman answered the questions in Arabic. The analyzed interviews are:

- 4 January 2016, The Economist (his first on-record interview) (The Economist, 2016)
- 04 April 2016, Bloomberg (Bloomberg, 2016)
- 03 May 2017, Al Arabiya (Al Arabiya, 2017)
- 19 March 2018, CBS News (CBS News, 2018)
- 05 April 2018, TIME (Time, 2018)
- 05 October 2018, Bloomberg (Bloomberg, 2018)
- 29 September 2019, CBS News (CBS News, 2019)
- 21 April 2021, Arab News- Saudi TV (Arab News, 2021)
- 03 March 2022, The Atlantic (The Atlantic, 2022)
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5.1.1 Economic Diversification and Sustainability

The main reason makes the Saudi rentier social contract obsolete is that it is unsustainability because of the socioeconomic structure of the country. The economy

is to large extent dependent on oil revenues. However, oil revenues are not stable due to the inconstant global oil market. The reform agenda of Muhammed bin Salman focuses on the diversification of the economy to decrease oil dependency of the economy. He mentions the importance of the Public Investment Fund in the diversification of state incomes in his interview with Bloomberg on 4 April 2016 (Bloomberg, 2016). He says the privatization of Aramco by transferring its shares to the Public Investment Fund will increase the efficiency of oil revenues and provide necessary sources to diversify the entire economy. The main objective of economic diversification is increasing non-oil revenues to avoid the negative impact of unstable oil prices on the economy. He thinks to achieve it by creating one of the biggest public fund to increase the profitability of the investments.

Another important dilemma of the Saudi economy is the rentier mentality which makes the state a wealth provider without taxation. The rentier state sustained for a century with the benefit of oil revenues, meanwhile, there have been many challenges making this system inapplicable. Muhammad bin Salman clearly indicates that taxes will be charged to increase state revenues. He says that there will be no taxes on incomes, meanwhile, the VAT will be increased from %5 percent to %15 percent. Also, he plans to eliminate subsidies that cause high costs. He thinks that it is necessary to charge value add taxes to prevent the leakage of subsidies. He gives importance to this issue as the country has a huge expat population and tourists benefitting from subsidies (Arab News, 2021).

The crown prince often encourages entrepreneurship and social contribution as triggers of the new economic system. Mohammed bin Salman attaches great importance to the diversification of the economy by making Saudi Arabia a global economic hub and the focus of attention of foreign investors and tourists. This aim is quite related to his

societal vision to create an open society. He identifies one of the pillars of Saudi vision as “transforming our unique strategic location into a global hub connecting three continents, Asia, Europe and Africa (Bin Salman, 2016)”. The main objective of creating an entrepreneurship environment is improving different sectors to diversify revenues rather than oil. However, it is a matter of discussion in the country how this environment will emerge without modernized institutions, a strong production industry, and political accountability.

5.1.2 Political Participation and Accountability

Saudi leadership attempts to create a new state narrative and visionary transformation. However, the authoritarian structure of the regime is subject to criticism. Muhammed bin Salman has a populist discourse that targets the nationalist emotions of the people, particularly the youth (Al-Rasheed, 2021). He imagines “a Saudi Arabia that guarantees the participation of everyone in decision-making (The Economist, 2016)” in the words of his first on-record interview. He often mentions improving state institutions' functions and effectiveness, but it is not clear how it will be possible with the relatively not modernized and organized governmental structures. Muhammed bin Salman's vision is to improve governmental bodies by keeping the authority and dominance of the leadership over them.

As the national transformation program eliminates rentier social contract, subsidies, free services, etc., there are more public demands for political participation and accountability compared to last years. Muhammed bin Salman consolidates his power by instrumentalizing nationalist and Saudi national identity. He also represents himself as a part of unsatisfied people who are willing to change the situation. This creates a cult of personality increasing his charisma and social trust among the Saudis. He says

“my dream as a young man in Saudi Arabia, and the dreams of men in Saudi Arabia are so many, and I try to compete with them and their dreams, and they compete with mine, to create a better Saudi Arabia” (The Economist, 2016).

5.1.3 National Identity and Saudization

Saudi national Identity is the main motivator of the new era and state narrative. Muhammed bin Salman often emphasizes Saudi identity and being a Saudi citizen while addressing the people in his media appearances and interviews. He rejects the last century’s negative approaches to nationalism as the nationalist discourses were not usually emphasized by state officials due to religious understandings. However, he considers them as extreme thoughts that must be ignored. Muhammed bin Salman’s approach to nationalism is quite popular and it turns around the leadership of Al Saud (Al-Rasheed, 2021).

Wahhabi's understanding of Islam formed the narrative of national identity in Saudi Arabia as a pillar of the social contract (Nevo, 1998). Muhammed bin Salman’s approach to this legacy eliminates the role of religion in nation branding. He clearly defines religious norms which dominated the state narrative as extreme thoughts that are not compatible with ‘real’ Islam. He marginalizes the religious practices after 1979 by emphasizing extreme and strict religious norms. This period coincides with the Iranian Revolution which religious discourse has been promoted to confront the Iranian threat. However, most of the norms Muhammad bin Salman mentioned were already visible before 1979. He says “we believe the practice today in a few countries, among them Saudi Arabia, it’s not the practice of Islam. It’s the practice of the people who have hijacked Islam after 1979 (Time, 2018)”.

Muhammad bin Salman tries to create a sense of belonging to Saudi identity and citizenship which is over all other traditional belongings and ideologies. His populist and nationalist discourse promotes Saudization and mobilization of Saudi youth around his leadership to create a state narrative.

5.1.4 Social Reforms and Religion

Social reforms are an important claim of the new era. There are public demands and even international pressure about human rights and freedom issues. Social restrictions particularly regarding women rights have been subject to discussions and demonstrations in Saudi Arabia for many years. Muhammed bin Salman promises reforms about these issues to modernize Saudi Arabia. Mohammed bin Salman's social reforms can be broadly defined as social engineering. He considers the historical experience of the country in these issues as a result of dominant extreme thoughts and ideologies meaning Wahhabism even though he does not state it clearly. For this reason, he claims that Saudi Arabia will be a modern and open society through reforms.

His word on main social issues in Saudi Arabia shows that social restrictions will continue to be relaxed in the future. He confirms that women rights were restricted in the country and the government wants to promote the participation of women in society (Bloomberg, 2016). He also frequently mentions the establishment of the General Entertainment Authority and various projects regarding opening society to the global world and community (Arab News, 2021). However, although he explains such situations as mistakes of the past, he shows extremist thoughts and norms, not the regime, as responsible (The Atlantic, 2022). This narrative raises concerns about the future of the traditional religious establishment in society and politics.

5.1.5 Opposition, Suppression, and Arrests

Although Saudi Arabia claims that it has entered a period of reform and transformation, the authoritarian structure in the country and the repression and arrests against the opposition are highly controversial and create a dilemma. This is not just limited to society; pressure is also applied to royal family dissidents. The question asked Muhammed bin Salman about detaining many prominent royal family members, merchants, and ministers in a luxury hotel in Riyadh. He justifies this attempt through the implementation of Saudi law to end corruption and he rejects the claims of rivalry in the royal family (The Atlantic, 2022). Saudi Arabia experienced negative results of rivalry among royal family members on regime security, but he considers that this was part of the inspections of governmental bodies for the benefit of all Saudis and the state.

The assassination of Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on 2 October 2018 was one of the most important cases that negatively affected the political career and charisma of Mohammed bin Salman. This situation was widely discussed in the international arena and made the reform and transformation process lose its legitimacy. He takes responsibility even though he says he didn't order the assassination (CBS News, 2019).

There are different opposite groups in the country from religious leaders and intellectuals to liberal activists, feminists, etc. The institutional and authoritarian structure of the state did not guarantee basic rights to these groups, meanwhile, the new narrative presents the regime as more tolerant and accountable compared to the last decades. Mohammed bin Salman is frequently criticized and questioned on these issues. His answers offer a change, meanwhile, he passes the blame of mistakes on others, such as the religious establishment or corrupt officials, to consolidate his power and regime authority (CBS News, 2018).

5.2: National Vision 2030: Construction of a progressive and popular nationalism

National Vision 2030 is a package of reforms that aims to diversify the Saudi economy, create an open and vibrant society, and increase the national and social capacity of Saudi Arabia by modernizing social institutions and governmental bodies. I examined National Vision 2030's official website www.vision2030.gov.sa to analyze the new state narrative of Saudi Arabia which is away from the rentier mentality of state and society relationship. The leadership constructs a nationalist and progressive narrative through the National Vision 2030 national transformation program.

National Vision 2030 has 13 vision realization programs to implement the goals. These are Financial Sector Development Program, Fiscal Sustainability Program, Health Sector Transformation Program, Housing Program, Human Capability Development Program, National Industrial Development and Logistics Program, National Transformation Program, Pilgrim Experience Program, Privatization Program, Public Investment Fund Program, and Quality of Life Program. The ultimate common goal of all programs and reforms is to increase the capacity of the state and society in social, economic, and cultural areas. The rentier mentality based on immense external rents created an insufficient and undeveloped national capacity and human capital that caused an unsustainable future at the end of the day (Ilardo, 2021). Saudi leadership aims to meet the necessary national capacity to diversify the economy by achieving in these transformation programs. Vision 2030 was declared as “the world's most transformative citizen empowerment program”. It shows the progressive national aspirations of the leadership to create a new state and society relationship.

The official website emphasizes the construction of a Saudi identity shaped by national ambitions, social contribution, and social responsibility. The difference between the old

Saudi nation branding and the new constructed one is the lack of religious and ideological focus on the national identity. The new narrative highlights the important roles of different social classes such as women and youth in the implementation of Vision 2030's goals. Saudi society is represented as an open, modern, and vibrant society without strict social norms. This does not mean that religion is not part of national identity anymore. Strengthening Islamic identity together with national identity is one of the goals of Vision 2030. However, there is a new interpretation of religion and the role of religion in society. The traditional understanding of religion formed by the Wahhabi understanding of Islam does not have a place in this interpretation. This situation demonstrates that the religious establishment is no longer a pillar of the social contract between the state and society.

Muhammed bin Salman is the face and main executive of the National Vision 2030. The personality and role of Muhammed bin Salman are quite visible on the official website. A cult of personality and leader is created around Muhammed bin Salman and his aspirations. There is an emphasis on Saudi leadership and its role in the development of the country. The cult of the leader is necessary to construct a nationalist narrative. The popular and charismatic leadership of Muhammed bin Salman as potential king of the country strengthens the support of the regime among the unsatisfied people in the society such as youth and women.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This thesis analyzes the transformation of the Saudi social contract from a rentier mentality of state and society relationship to a progressive and populist nationalism. Saudi rentier social contract sustained for a century with the benefit of immense oil revenues. Abdulaziz Al Saud managed to unify under the leadership of the House of Saud. He used traditional ways to consolidate his power such as mobilization of religious clerics, alliances with tribes, granting governmental privileges, and polygamic marriages. Oil provided the regime an external power and a huge amount of rents to modernize state institutions and develop public services. Saudi leadership used oil to buy the loyalty and political support of the people in exchange for providing wealth and prosperity. Saudi rentier social contract was constructed based on three pillars in this way. The regime, religious establishment, and oil-related prosperity have been three pillars of the Saudi state and society relationship.

As a result of domestic and regional developments, the significance of these pillars has fluctuated over time. This research examines the historical development of the state and society relationship in Saudi Arabia. The establishment process witnessed the consolidation of power of the House of Saud as legitimate rulers of Arabia. Also, the impact of the religious establishment made religion an important element of state-making and nation-branding processes in this period. Oil started to improve the state institutions and public services in the period of 1953-1979. The state institutions modernized with the benefit of oil rents. The regime consolidation reached its peak by providing huge wealth and prosperity to society. The impact of religion and political Islam increased in the 1970s and 1980s due to regional polarization and Iranian Revolution. The regime understood the necessity of balancing the role of the religious

establishment and confronting extreme ideologies (Dekmejian, 1994). Saudi Arabia experienced the first critical effects of social change and globalization on society and public demands in the 1990s. The state has been a loyal partner of the United States as a result of regional challenges such as the invasion of Iraq. This affected public opinion in the country against governmental decisions. While there has been unrest among religious groups against the royal policies, relatively liberal and secularist groups have demonstrated for freedom and the elimination of rigid social norms. The regime acknowledged the public demands for reforms in the 2000s by initiating some social and economic reforms. But the majority of the reforms failed to change the status quo (Krane, 2019a).

Saudi rentier social contract sustained for a century. However, it is no longer sustainable for future generations because of various reasons. The first reason mentioned in this thesis is the unsustainability of oil as the locomotive of the Saudi economy. Saudi economy and wealth depend on the unstable global oil market. Also, technological developments and energy transition indicate the end of oil in the near future (Fattouh, 2021). The second is the rising population and demographic problems of the country. Saudi youths don't look at the future with hope (Fadaak & Roberts, 2019). The third reason is the high cost of domestic consumption of energy and subsidies. The rising population increases the cost of subsidies in the country. Subsidies are important elements of the state and society relationship. However, the state may not be able to provide generous subsidies as it did for a century. The thesis focuses on the public demand for social change as the last reason for the unsustainability of the Saudi rentier social contract. Public unrest has been building up due to rigid social norms for decades. Saudi leadership must initiate reforms to confront the potential danger of public unrest.

Saudi rentier social contract experienced radical challenges with the rising power of Muhammed bin Salman. The state initiated deep reforms and a national transformation program named National Vision 2030. Muhammed bin Salman has been the face of the new era. He represented himself as part of the change and transformation with acknowledgment of previous mistakes, strict social norms, and the unsustainability of the socioeconomic model. He gave importance to the unsatisfied classes of society such as women and youth. He consolidated his power and gained support in society in this way. The cult of personality and leader was constructed around Muhammed bin Salman. His progressive and popular nationalist discourse created a sense of belonging to Saudi identity and national interests.

National Vision 2030 aims to diversify the economy to create a sustainable economic model in Saudi Arabia. Saudi leadership attempts to create an open and vibrant society away from extreme ideologies and strict social norms. The new state narrative does not prioritize the role of religious establishment as a pillar of the state and society relationship. It prioritizes a state-driven nationalist narrative and Saudi identity. The progressive nationalist discourse emphasizes the need to focus on increasing the social and national capacity of Saudi Arabia with a sense of social responsibility and adherence to national interests.

There may be some potential limitations in this research. The scope of the research is limited to analyzing the internal socio-political dynamics, which is quite important, and the impact of these internal dynamics on state and society relationship and the political direction of the country. However, Saudi Arabia is a country that is under the impact of global and regional economic and political changes. The country's economic dependency on the global oil market and its close relationship with the USA and other global powers make internal politics sensitive to global issues. Regional conflicts and

concerns also have an impact on Saudi internal dynamics. The last decades demonstrated that political issues, uprisings, social movements, and economic crises, such as the Arab Spring, create ripple effects in the Middle East. These regional and global concerns have an impact on Saudi Arabia's state and society relations. However, the internal socio-political structure and the rentier social contract, that this research focuses on, pose urgent concerns due to its unsustainability for current circumstances and the next generations.

The construction of a new state and society relationship contains many challenges in the Saudi Arabian context. The rentier social contract was based on a hypothetical mutual agreement between the regime and the Saudi people on the distribution of wealth and political support. Further research must be done to investigate the potential political effects of the transformation in Saudi Arabia. Also, it is a matter of discussion to what extent the capacity Saudi state and society are capable of such a deep transformation. The labor, lack of a developed production industry, and commitment to reforms are concerns about the transformation processes. These issues are worth researching to examine different aspects of Saudi national transformation.

In conclusion, this thesis argues that the traditional Saudi rentier social contract is obsolete. Oil, the locomotive of the socioeconomic model, is unsustainable and comes to an end. The traditional religious understanding does not have a place in the new state narrative due to public demand for change and social unrest. The regime and the new reformist leadership build a progressive and popular nationalist narrative to sustain regime stability and socioeconomic sustainability. The new Saudi social contract is constructed on Saudi nationalism, identity, and adherence to Saudi interests over any other affiliation.

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