QATAR UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

THE SAUDI-WAHHABI ALLIANCE:

A CASE STUDY ON GOVERNANCE IN SAUDI ARABIA

BY

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

College of Arts and Sciences

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

January 2016

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ABSTRACT

The origins of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia date back to the alliance forged between the AlSaud and the preacher Muhammad Ibn AbdulWahhab in the 18th century, and the subsequent establishment of the first Saudi state. Since then, the religious scholars, or *ulama*, have played an important role that is still vital to the continued survival of the Saudi regime's credentials. However, that role has changed overtime. Historically, the AlSaud and the *ulama* were elites of equal standing, but oil resources, bureaucratization and modernization have altered the state-society relations, and decreased the influence and importance of the religious establishment vis-a-vis the state.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the role that the *ulama* play in the political structure of Saudi Arabia, and how, this role has changed over the course of the last three-hundred years since the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance was established. As such, it investigates whether the Saudi *ulama* continue to be a primary elite, or if in fact they have fallen to the level of secondary elites. The main conclusion reached is that in the century since the unification of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by AbdulAziz ibn Saud, the political elites, namely the royal family, have systematically co-opted the *ulama*, and effectively rendered them government bureaucrats that are dependent on the AlSaud for their power, employment, and consequently their influence and wealth. Thus, it is argued that the *ulama* have become secondary elites, dependent on the primary elite of the AlSaud for access to resources. This research relies on

both secondary and primary sources, such as interviews with academics,
policy-makers, and citizens; media sources; fatwas; and royal decrees.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, the author would like to thank everyone without whose tireless and at times superhuman efforts none of this would have been possible. *¡Vaya parto!* Specifically Abdullah Baabood, Marta Saldana, Luciano Zaccara, Khaled AlHroub, Khaled Mezaini for their guidance; and to everyone else who helped in the birthing of this thesis.

Chapter 1- Introduction

1. Rationale and aim of the study

The contemporary Saudi state was formally declared in 1932. However, its origins date back to 1744, when the emir of Diriyah, Muhammad Ibn Saud, extended his protection to Muhammad Ibn AbdulWahhab. Ibn AbdulWahhab was determined to restore the purity of Islamic doctrine to the populations of the Arabian Peninsula, and Ibn Saud promised to uphold the preacher's religious teachings. AbdulWahhab contested the status of the Ottomans as the defenders of Sunni Islam. He blamed the Ottomans' religious tolerance for allowing heresy to flourish throughout the Ottoman empire. This theological challenge "was harnessed by Ibn Saud to legitimise his plans of territorial expansion, and it infused his fighters with the iconoclastic zeal that led to the wholesale destruction of Sufi shrines, the bloody sacking of the Shiite town of Karbala' in 1801, and the occupation of Mecca from 1803 to 1812" (El Shamsy, 2008, 114). As such, the nascent Wahhabi movement helped to initiate the political and military campaign that culminated in the creation of the Saudi state. By launching the theory of a central state, the emergence of the Wahhabi movement represents the beginning of the modern history of Arabia (Al-Dakhil, 2008, 23-35). The Saudi state was subsequently founded according to the strict doctrine of the

Wahhabi movement, or Wahhabiyyah.[1] Because Wahhabiyyah claims to represent the only true Islam, this serves to further heighten the link between Saudi Arabia and Wahhabi Islam.

This thesis examines the governance of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and attempts to discern whether in fact the government and the religious scholars, or *ulama,* continue to be equal partners in the governance of Saudi Arabia, first by contextualizing their respective roles during the creation of the Saudi-Wahhabi doctrine, and then by analyzing how, if at all, these roles have changed over the course of the last three-hundred years since the formation of the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance in the late eighteenth century. Until now, there has been no academic study of the governance in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia based on the premise that the Islamic orthodoxy of the Wahhabiyya, which is a cornerstone to the regime's power, is a social construct. If in fact the orthodoxy of the Wahhabiyya is a result of the cultural and institutional environment of the times in which it was established, this will have important effects on the future governance of Saudi Arabia, particularly in light of the various inevitable reforms looming on the horizon. While the Wahhabiyya continues to be the corner-stone of the Saudi-Wahhabi doctrine of governance, it will continue to constrain government policies. However, if the Wahhabiyya's orthodoxy is a social construct, those contraints will eventually

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[1] For an explanation of the term *Wahhabiyya* please see the Theoretical and Conceptual Framework section below

become susceptible to society's evolution, as opposed to remaning uncompromising in perpetuity.

The first chapter of the thesis will include a brief the introduction of the research, including a general overview of the research topic, as well as a review of the relevant theories and concepts. In the second chapter, the legacy of the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance is contextualized in order to examine the significance of the development of the Saudi-Wahhabi doctrine of governance. The first section chronicles the establishment of the Holy Alliance between Muhammad ibn Saud and Muhammad ibn AbdulWahhab. The second section focuses on the development of Wahhabism from a relatively insignificant movement into its current preeminence over other interpretations of Islam. The third section examines Wahhabism within the framework of the social construction of orthodoxy, in order to better understand the significance of religion as the foundation for constructing the Saudi national identity discussed in section four. Finally, the fifth section looks at the recurring pattern, particularly ideological threats, of employing the authority of fatwas solicited from Muftis during times of crisis. The chapter mainly focuses on the development of Wahhabism and the Saudi-Wahhabi Alliance, and the influence of the Holy Alliance on the Saudi-Wahhabi doctrine of governance.

The third chapter will examine the construction and implementation of the Saudi-Wahhabi doctrine of governance--first by outlining the creation of

the third Saudi State, and then, in the second section, by evaluating how the government consolidation of power after the establishment of the state. The third section analyzes how the *ulama* became dependents of the state, and as a result lost their autonomy from the government. The fourth section uses the theoretical framework of the rentier state to contextualize the changes occurred after the discovery of oil. And finally, the fifth section investigates the possible resurgence in the *ulama's* autonomy as a result of an increased relevance of their authority.

The fourth chapter will look at the resurgence of domestic opposition movements that contest the status quo in Saudi Arabia. The first section analyses the development of a grassroots disenchantment with Wahhabi establishment. The second section chronicles the rise and fall of Ikhwan, the government's first domestic opposition. The third section examines the emergence of the Neo-Ikhwan movement, a new generation of Islamist opposition to the government. The fourth section evaluates the resurgence of government opposition in the 1990s, specifically as a backlash against government policies during the First Gulf War. Last, but not least, the fifth section analyses the protests of Arab Spring, particularly focusing on how they differ from previous Islamist opposition movements.

2. Research Questions

With this theoretical framework in mind, this thesis will attempt to answer who governs the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and specifically whether

the precedent established by the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance where the political leadership and the *ulama* continue to uphold the separate and autonomous spheres of influence.

The main research questions are:

1) What was the effect of the Saudi-Wahhabi Alliance?

2) What effect have the *ulama* had on government policy?

3) What effect has the government had on the *ulama*'s authority?

In order to better understand the main research questions, it will also attempt to answer the following:

1. Were the *ulama* established as primary elites by the Saudi-Wahhabi Alliance? Are they still currently primary elites in KSA?

2. Are the *ulama* autonomous from the government?

3. If so, what has made them become dependent? How does the government subjugate the *ulama*? What are the effects of this?

3. Hypotheses

The main hypotheses of this research are:

1. The government is able to implement and enforce policies without the approval of the *ulama*.

2. The *ulama* are not completely autonomous from the government, and therefore cannot do the same.

4. Findings

The government is able to implement and enforce policies without the approval of the *ulama*. However, the *ulama* still have an important role in Saudi Arabia's political landscape, though it has shifted over time, they are still important to the continued survival of the regime. While the cornerstone of the regime's legitimacy is still its Islamic credentials, which are not insignificant because the Wahhabiyya claims to have a monopoly on true Islam, the AlSaud are therefore able to continue presenting themselves as the protectors of the two Holy Mosques and true Islam itself.

The *ulama* are not completely autonomous from the government, and therefore cannot do the same. Over the course of the last century, oil wealth has shifted the dynamics between the state and society, and the rise of resource rents of oil revenues allowed for an explosive growth of the state bureaucracy and modernization. Where once the *ulama* had exclusive jurisdiction over the spheres of religious practice as well as judicial and education sectors, their functions have been limited by the growth of government bureaucracy. Today, the *ulama* still provide an important legitimizing function to the regime, but as secondary elites they are completely dependent on the regime for their access to resources and hegemony.

When the government has compelled the *ulama* to do their bidding, there have been mixed results, as evidenced by the various Islamist

opposition movements that have risen, especially in the decades after the establishment of the third Saudi state.

5. Theoretical and Conceptual Overview

This thesis makes use of these four theoretical frameworks, the following is a quick review of each. Each framework will then be used in the subsequent chapters.

Theoretical Overview

- Social Construction of Orthodoxy

In his chapter 'The Social Construction of Orthodoxy,' El Shamsy (2008) argues that orthodoxy is a social phenomenon, a 'thing,' and therefore not a process by which theological doctrines become established as orthodox when they "find a place in the constantly changing (...) society" (El Shamsy, 2008, 97). El Shamsy concludes that the history of orthodoxy is not therefore "simply a history of ideas, but rather a history of how (...) claims to truth came to be enshrined in social practices and institutions, like the 'community of scholars'" (El Shamsy, 2008, 97). This theory provides a framework for analysing "the social and institutional environments in which the [discourse] of orthodoxy in Islamic theology were formed, propagated, and resisted" (El Shamsy, 2008, 97). This framework will then be applied specifically to this case study, pertaining to the Saudi-Wahhabi Alliance.

- Sociology of Power in Today's Arab World

In their chapter 'Sociology of Power in Today's Arab World,' Izquierdo and Lampridi-Kemou (2012) define elites as "individuals with superior hierarchical position within social institutions and whose survival in this position depends on their capacity to compete for power accumulation" (Izquierdo and Lampridi-Kemou, 2012, 11). Primary elites, they explain, are able to compete effectively with each other in order to best accumulate the greatest amount of resources, meanwhile secondary elites are dependent on their relationship with primary elites in order to access those resources. In their opinion, the three main strategies primary elites in rentier states use to secure their power are the "distribution of income obtained through appropriated resources, cooptation of secondary elites, and repression" (Izquierdo and Lampridi-Kemou, 2012, 26). Certainly, each of these is employed by the House of Saud. However, although the authors refer to the alliance between Al Saud and Ibn AbdulWahhab as an alliance between primary elites (Izquierdo and Lampridi-Kemou, 2012, 15), the argument could be made that this is no longer the case.

- Rentier State Theory (RST)

The Rentier State Theory (RST), is a political economy approach that was coined in the late 1980s, and also serves to examine state-society relations in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Early RST attempts to explain the relationship between the state and society relations, where large proportion of states income is earned from external rents (Gray, 2011, 1). When states derive

such a significant amount of revenues from external rents they are therefore less likely to democratize. In states that derive most of their income from resource rents, as opposed to taxes levied on domestic populations, citizens become primarily engaged in the consumption and redistribution of said rents, thereby decreasing the likelihood of generating opposition movements which would advocate for social or political change (Beblawi & Luciani, 1987). Matthew Gray (2011) argues that RST is still essential in understanding the politics of the Gulf monarchies politics. Late RST, a term coined by Gray, is characterized by a responsive but undemocratic state, an opening up to globalization, but with some protectionism still remaining, an active economic and development policy, an "energy-centric" economy, and an active and innovative foreign policy (Gray, 2011, 23-35). Therefore, RST is functionally diametrically opposed to the slogan popularized during the American Revolution "no taxation without representation." In the case of Saudi Arabia, the government drives the domestic economy, and the private sector becomes reliant on the state's redistribution of rents in order to survive, as well as depending on the government for access to capital and licenses in order to do business. As a result of resource rents, the government is able to provide services directly to citizens for free, or at least heavily subsidized (Gause, 1994, 43). Therefore by controlling the mechanisms by which oil wealth is redistributed, the state is able to manage its relationships with the

elites (Gray, 2011, 6-7), which for the purpose of this study will be focused on the religious establishment.

Conceptual Overview

The following terms will be used throughout the thesis. The definitions were chosen based on the criteria of most relevance to the subject matter. Italicized words are English transliterations of Arabic words.

AlSaud, AbdulAziz	Founder of the third Saudi emirate, usually who is meant by 'Ibn Saud', and father of all subsequent kings of Saudi Arabia to date
amir	Ruler, prince
bay'a	Oath of obedience
bida	Innovation, heresy
doctrine	A stated principle of government policy
elites	Survival as a member of the elite depends on their capacity to accumulate greater power than the rest of their rivals. Each one's specific power is measured against that of the other elites (Izquierdo and Lampridi-Kemou, 2012, 9)
primary elites	Their main interest in social hierarchy is to accumulate more power than their competitors, primary elites are those who

	can compete effectively for state control, foreign income, private capital, and, most relative to this study, ideology (Izquierdo and Lampridi-Kemou, 2012,14)
secondary elites	Occupy a subordinate position in the hierarchy of power. Even when a group has an important power resource at their disposal, like the *ulama* in Saudi Arabia, who provide legitimacy to the Al Saud, they are in a position of dependency (Izquierdo and Lampridi-Kemou, 2012, 15)
fatwa	Religious opinion issued by the *shari'a* experts
Hejaz	Coastal Region of Arabian Peninsula on the Red Sea
hisba	The maintenance of Islamic public morals
ibn AbdulWahhab, Muhammad	Islamic scholar whose followers, referred to as Wahhabis in Western writings, refer to themselves as Unitarians, due to their emphasis on *tawhid* (monotheism), or the oneness of God (Bligh, 1985, 37).

ibn Saud, Muhammad	Founder of the first Saudi emirate, sometimes known as Ibn Saud
ikhwan	Muslim brothers/companions, also tribal force
imam	Prayer leader/ leader of the Muslim community
islah	Reform
'ismah	Infallibility
jihad	Holy war
kufr	Unbelief
khususiyaa	Uniqueness of the Islamic tradition of Saudi Arabia
mufti	Religious scholar charged with issuing religious opinions
mujahideen	Those fighting jihad; i.e. Arabs who fought in Afghanistan, Islamist insurgents in Iraq
Muslim Brotherhood	Set up in Egypt in 1928, first group in modern 'Political Islam' in the Arab world
mutawwa	Religious specialist/volunteers who work for the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice
Najd	Central region of Arabia

nasiha	Advice
orthodoxy	Authorized or generally accepted theory, doctrine, or practice
qadi	Judge
Sahwa	A movement of reformers in Wahhabi Islam from the 1980s
Salafis	Fundamentalists who advocate returning to the ways of the early Muslims who witnessed the lived example of the Prophet
shari'a	Islamic legal code and rules
shaykh	Tribal leader/religious scholar
shirk	Polytheism
Social Constructivism	Theory that argues values are attributed to our beliefs, which are socially constructed. In other words, the value that is attached to concepts like national identity, citizenship, and social norms would not exist had they not been created. If a different type of society had been generated, then those concepts would have different values.
Tawhid	Central principle of Wahhabism, the oneness of God

*ulama (*sing. '*alim)*	Islamic religious scholars. In the context of this thesis the term will refer to the official scholars who make up the religious establishment in Saudi Arabia unless otherwise noted, such as the opposition *ulama* or the *Sahwa ulama*.
umma	Muslim community
Wahhabiyya	Disciples of Muhammad ibn AbdulWahhab
Wahhabism	Refers to the Sunni legal tradition and religious teachings prevalent in Saudi Arabia, derived from the 18th century preacher ibn AbdulWahhab
waliyya al-amr	'Guardian' of the state
wilaya	Guardianship

6. Methodology

The methodology of the thesis will be a qualitative, critical instance case study that will take a structured analytical approach. It will use theoretical frameworks from state-society relations, political sociology, political Islam and Gulf studies.

This research will rely on both primary and secondary sources, such as interviews with academics, policy-makers, and citizens; academic literature; media sources; fatwas; and royal decrees.

The target for interviews was thirty; however, due to travel constraints, only twenty were completed. Most interview subjects were contacted via email, and of those, some were interviewed over Skype and others preferred to respond in writing. Some of those who were contacted declined to participate in this study. The rest were interviewed in Doha. The following is a list of the experts interviewed for this study:

- David Commins, Professor of History at Dickins College, expert on Modern Middle East history with a focus on Islamic thought.

- Angeles Espinosa, Senior Correspondent for EL PAIS newspaper in the Gulf region since 2005, based in Tehran and in Dubai.

- Steffen Hertog, associate professor of comparative politics at the LSE, expert on Middle East comparative political economy.

- Joseph A. Kechichian is a Senior Fellow at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, author of 11 published books on the Arab Gulf region of which four deal specifically with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

- James Piscatori, Professor of International Relations at Durham University, expert on Political Studies and Islamic Politics.

- Mark Thompson, Assistant Professor of ME Studies at King Fahd of Petroleum and Minerals, Saudi socio-political change and societal transformation.

The rest preferred to remain anonymous, as did the citizens who were interviewed.

The academic literature surveyed for this study comes from a purposeful sampling of the leading researchers on Saudi Arabian political culture and Islamic theology, specifically those which address the research questions and therefore fit our research goals.

Chapter 2- The Development of the Saudi-Wahhabi Doctrine of Governance

This chapter examines the significance of the Saudi-Wahhabi Alliance, as it relates to the creation of the subsequent Saudi states. It specifically focuses on the relationship between religion and politics that is so unique to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The first section details the forging of the Holy Alliance established between Muhammad ibn AbdulWahhab and Muhammad ibn Saud in the 18th century, which laid the foundation for the current Saudi state. The second section evaluates the development of the Wahhabi doctrine and chronicles how it laid the foundation for its future ascendancy to its current level of global prominence, arguably far exceeding the reach of other interpretations of Islam. The third section makes the argument that the Wahhabi orthodoxy is a social construct in order to better understand the significance of Wahhabism to the Saudi national identity, which will be the focus of the fourth section. Finally, the fifth section assess the role of the *mufti*'s during times of ideological threats to the government's legitimacy. The chapter mainly shows the role that the Saudi-Wahhabi Alliance played in the construction of the Wahhabi ideology, the creation of the subsequent Saudi states, and the struggle to conserve its legacy in the modern world.

1. The Holy Alliance

The AlSaud originated from the settlement of Diriyah, south of the capital Riyadh, where Muhammad Ibn Saud was the amir of the local oasis. Even before his alliance with Muhammad Ibn AbdulWahhab, Muhammad Ibn Saud had gained prestige for his ability to guarantee protection from possible attacks from other rulers, and for providing Diriyah with a period of stability for almost two decades without challenge to his authority (Delong-Bas, 2004, 53). He welcomed the religious scholar Muhammad Ibn AbdulWahhab and offered his protection after the latter was expelled from Uyaynah by the local amir Uthman Ibn Muammar for his teachings, which had upset the local chiefs (Al Rasheed, 2010, 16).

In 1744 the famous alliance that led to the foundation of the first Saudi state was sealed by a mutual oath of loyalty. Ibn AbdulWahhab was determined to restore the purity of Islamic doctrine to the populations of the Arabian Peninsula. Ibn Saud promised to uphold the preacher's religious teachings, and in return Ibn AbdulWahhab was not to interfere with Saudi state consolidation efforts (Delong-Bas, 2004, 34). Ibn AbdulWahhab was to have authority over all matters of the Book (Quran) and the religious, moral, and educational matters would be entirely his domain. Ibn Saud was to have the power of the Sword, and his domain would essentially be limited to the political and military spheres (Delong-Bas, 2004, 58). They each had supreme but not absolute power in their own sphere of authority, because

they each retained substantive checks on the authority of the other (Habib, 2009, 58).

All the affairs of the first Saudi state were run through full cooperation between the AlSaud and Ibn AbdulWahhab, all military matters were left to the former, while the religious and educational were under the jurisdiction of the latter. Ibn AbdulWahhab held a great deal of political power, and peace initiatives as well as plans for war were made at his command. According to scholars, Ibn AbdulWahhab was the head of the system to whom everything was referred, and on his command the delegations that came to Diriyah took the oath of allegiance to AbdulAziz bin Muhammad Al Saud after his father's death in 1765 (Al-Uthaymin, 2009, 73-74). It is because of this that Izquierdo and Lampridi-Kemou (2012, 15) refer to the alliance between Muhammad Ibn Saud and Muhammad Ibn AbdulWahhab as one between primary elites. Their success can be attributed to having established their alliance as an equal division of power. Accordingly, while the House of Saud provides the kingdom with its military strength and maintains continuity, the Al alSheikh has the religious-moral authority and ideology that legitimizes the government.

The first Saud-Wahhabi emirate lasted until 1818. Overambitious territorial acquisitions were a factor in the demise, but ultimately it was the Wahhabi fanaticism that compelled the Ottoman Empire to set about eliminating it. The first Saudi-Wahhabi Emirate challenged the authority of the Ottoman Empire in Hijaz, Iraq, and Syria. This challenge resulted in the

occupation of central Arabia by the Egyptian viceroy Muhammad Ali's forces in 1818 (Al-Rasheed, 2010, 13). The second Saudi emirate was formed in 1824 based on the same Wahhabi credentials of the first, but it quickly fell apart by 1891 as a result of contested succession. While intra-AlSaud family fighting divided their ranks, the AlRasheed family, which controlled a negligible amount of territory to the north, with the support of the Ottomans exploited the rifts and ousted the AlSaud and consequently made Riyadh their capital. AbdulRahman, the last ruler of the second Saudi state, and his son AbdulAziz were forced to seek exile in Kuwait (Bligh, 1985, 59).

2. The Preeminence of Wahhabi Doctrine

Ibn AbdulWahhab and his descendants provided the leadership and canon for the new scholastic culture of Najd, but it also needed scholars to preach the doctrine. In order to secure positions as preachers, teachers and judges it was required that scholars study under the Wahhabi shaykhs in Diriyah and Riyadh, and those who studied in the Ottoman centers of learning were increasingly overlooked for positions as judges of Islamic law, or *qadis*, in favor of their Najd-trained fellows. At the center of the network of religious authority were the descendants of AbdulWahhab, the Al alSheikh, who were able to consolidate the religious scholarship in Najd. Thus, by the mid-nineteenth century the Wahhabiyya had transformed the religious scholarship of Najd by establishing new centers of learning and monopolized control over

the religious leadership. Saudi political power preserved this arrangement through the subsequent Saudi states (Bligh 1985, 37-43).

Over a period of fifty years, Ibn AbdulWahhab developed his doctrine of orthodoxy and executed his vision of proper religious practice throughout the territories under the rule of the AlSaud. He cleansed the Najdi *ulama* of scholars that disputed his teachings and replaced them with others devoted to his doctrine. This was how the Wahhabiyyah established a tradition of religious scholarship that was separate from the historical tradition, and how they developed new techniques to assert and maintain its authority (Commins, 2009, 39). Ibn AbdulWahhab and his descendants, the Al AlSheikh, provided the leadership and precept for the new scholarly culture of Najd, but it still needed scholars to preach the doctrine. In order to secure positions as preachers, teachers, and judges under AlSaud rule, scholars were required to study under the Wahhabi sheikhs in Diriyah and Riyadh. Those who travelled to Ottoman centers of learning were increasingly overlooked for positions as judges of Islamic law, or *qadis*, in favor of their Najdi trained scholars. The Al alSheikh had the ability to consolidate the religious scholarship in Najd and became the center of the network of religious authority. By the mid-nineteenth century the Wahhabiyyah had managed to successfully transform the religious scholarship of Najd, they established new centers of learning, and monopolized control over the

religious leadership. This arrangement was preserved through the second Saudi state by the AlSaud's political power (Commins, 2009, 41-43).

The idea that Wahhabiyyah initiated the process of nation building in the 18th century, reducing Wahhabism to simply being a religious movement, is both an oversimplification and inconsistent with its nature and history (Bligh, 1985, 29). A more accurate description would describe Wahhabism as the ideological arm of the Saudi-Wahhabi religio-political movement. Muhammad Ibn Saud used Wahhabism as a tool, both to legitimize his rule and to subdue the tribes of Arabia under the guise of teaching them the "true" Islam and converting them to the Wahhabi ideology. To this day, the continued public support from senior members of the *ulama*, is a cornerstone of government's legitimacy. The official Saudi *ulama* have never developed a comprehensive political theory of their own, following in the example of AbdulWahhab who in his *The Book on God's Unity* makes no reference Islamic law and instead focuses exclusively on matters of ideology. The continued stability of the Saudi state is a necessary for the continuation of the *ulama's* power, both in terms of personal interest and in terms of corporate interests, making the *ulama* dependent on the AlSaud for their continued existence. The *ulama*'s fortunes and religious hegemony are now intrinsically linked to the continuation of AlSaud rule in Arabia (Thompson, 2014, 50).

Successfully promoting Islam as the state religion bestowed a prestige which allowed for the favourable status of the religious

establishment. "The *ulama* are part of the cornerstone on which the legitimacy of the country's political ideology is built" (J. Kechichian, personal correspondence, May 16, 2015). This allows the Saudi *ulama* to occupy a prominent position within the state's political elite, one which is unparalleled in any state in the contemporary Sunni Muslim World. The *muftis*, the most distinguished members of the religious hierarchy, particularly enjoy power and authority never dreamed of by their peers in other Muslim countries (Nevo, 1998, 41).

3. Wahhabi Orthodoxy as a Social Construct

In order for the Wahhabi doctrine to become established as orthodox, it needed to find its place in the society. The first Saudi emirate was without a doubt a result of the preachings of AbdulWahhab's. However, the continued survival of the Saudi state soon became indispensable to the maintenance and spread of Wahhabism throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Indeed, had it not been Turki bin Abdullah AlSaud, who established the second Saudi emirate, Wahhabism would most likely have been permanently marginalized or eliminated entirely. The *ulama* understood the importance of the state structure; without whose political order the application of orthodoxy and orthopraxy would otherwise be impossible to uphold (Mouline, 2014, 87). According to El Shamsy orthodoxy is a social phenomenon, rather than a "thing." It is a two-way process where ideas influence society and institutions, then society receives ideas and either promotes or suppresses them. Thus

orthodoxy is a history of how claims to truth have come to be enshrined in social practices and institutions, like the *ulama* (El Shamsy, 2008, 97).

The defining characteristic of Wahhabism is the importance given to the way of life of the first generation of Muslims, known as *salaf*, from which the term *Salafi* is derived. According to AbdulWahhab "the pious ancestors, who lived between the first and third centuries of the *Hijra* (…) are to be scrupulously imitated. All religious rites established after the 3rd century of the *Hijra* are blameworthy innovations and categorically condemned" (Mouline, 2014, 72-74). However, it wasn't until

> the end of the tenth century, [that] the broad outlines of the developed Sunni orthodoxy had taken shape. Over the next few centuries, the *'ulama'* worked out a system of mutual tolerance that was based on universal agreement regarding the sacred sources, a pragmatic acceptance of and respect for differences of opinion, and an ideal of intellectual humility (El Shamsy, 2008, 107).

Indeed, Wahhabism teaches that any all religious rites established after the 3rd century of the *Hijra* are innovations that should be purged. This evidences the clear break between status-quo in Islamic orthodoxy before AbdulWahhab began his ministry. It also mirrors the disregard, bordering on contempt, that Wahhabis have for differences of opinion. The result of such confining theological perimeters is a pervasive paradigm of 'better safe than sorry' replaces independent, circumstance-based reasoning. This approach to Islam

allows the Wahhabi *ulama* to question the legality of interpretations made after this period and discourage *ijtihad*, or independent reasoning, based on the teaching that all religious rites established after that period are *bidaa* (innovations) and, therefore, punishable offenses.

4. Wahhabism as Saudi National Identity

Social constructivism argues that our identity and interests do not exist separately from the social situations to which they are appropriate, or interests and identities depend on the context in which they find themselves. Thus, identities and interests are socially constructed by the particular way we interact with one another. Such collective understandings, and their accompanying social identities and interests, can be reified or embedded over time so that alternatives seem unimaginable. Notions of what is right or wrong, feasible or infeasible, indeed possible or impossible are all a part of an actor's social context, and it is these ideas that shape what actors want, who actors are, and how actors behave" (Sterling-Folker, 2006, 128-129).

The collective identity of most Muslim Arabs of the Middle East incorporates three elements: the Islamic, the Arab, and the national (which still consists of traditional factors such as tribe, extended family or geographical region). These components do not necessarily complement each other and are not always in harmony. In Saudi Arabia, religion (primarily Wahhabism) has played a prominent role not only in shaping the individual's private and collective identities but also in consolidating its national values, as

religious norms and practices are encouraged, promoted and even enforced by the state (Nevo, 1998, 34-35). Religious faith and loyalty to the ruling family are predominant components of the collective national identity, which is the Saudi version of nationalism. The bond between the state and the *ulama* marks the modern inception of the use of religion as an instrument for both consolidating a collective identity and legitimizing the ruling family. The ongoing incorporation of the *ulama* in the civil service also routinized the use of religion and the religious establishment as a source of legitimacy. Yet whenever religious legitimacy was needed they enjoyed higher status, and once other sources of legitimacy were available, their importance decreased.

The House of Saud along with the House of ibn AbdulWahhab, now known as the Al alSheikh, were parties to a unique coalition in the eighteenth century. As a result Saudi nationalism is based on two pillars: the tribal-aggressive House of Saud and the religious-zealous House of Al alSheikh (Bligh, 1985, 37). The state dictates myths and symbols, which is significant due to the fact that narratives and symbols are a necessary part of the basic human interaction that produces identities and interests. If the social world is linguistically constructed and reproduced through the act of communication, then the words we use and the narratives that influence the social that surrounds us. By choosing particular narratives to justify our actions, we do not simply make sense of the world, but actually make the world according to those narratives" (Sterling-Folker, 2006, 132). The Saudi government has

introduced and promoted national symbols such as an anthem and a flag that are dominated by Islamic motifs.

Meanwhile, the schism between Sunni Muslims and Shiites is entirely ignored in the official state historiography, as are regional culture and contributions, which is a result of the supremacy of Najdi people and culture over those of Hijaz, Asir, and al Hasa. Hence, the centennial celebrations in 1999, according to the Islamic *Hijri* calendar, provided an orchestrated and opportune occasion to celebrate the official narrative surrounding the capture of Riyadh and the founding of the Saudi Kingdom. According Al-Rasheed, "the centennial celebrations were obviously not meant to mobilize the country along broader national themes. [They] were a glorification of the era of Ibn Saud. Above all they were homage to the achievements of a single man rather than to the achievements of the 'people' or the 'nation'" (Al-Rasheed, 2010, 201).

The religious ideals of Wahhabism were translated politically into a state ideology in which the primary duty of Saudis was to obey their rulers (Thompson, 2014, 48). For this reason, Wahhabism stresses the importance of allegiance to the ruler and disloyalty is regarded as a sin. It can also be deduced that the *ulama* continues to support the political regime in order to ensure its continued funding and maintain their religious hegemony. Because Wahhabism advocates absolute obedience to the House of Saud, the "official" *ulama* vociferously condemn all insubordination toward Saudi authority.

5. In Case of Emergency: Call the *Muftis*

Over the course of more than 250 years of Saudi history the Wahhabi *ulama* have developed a noteworthy political pragmatism. In order to preserve their alliance with the rulers, they supported Saudi policy even when it conflicted with their religiously based convictions. This pragmatism has repeatedly led "radical" Wahhabis, who demanded an uncompromising implementation of Wahhabi tenets, to oppose the religious establishment (Steinberg, 2005, 11). The state has practically deprived the *ulama* of their exclusive position in the judicial system and the legal interpretation through modernization of this system and the introduction of decrees and regulations extraneous to the sharia. But the authority of the *mufti*s has been honoured and respected by the Saudi kings so long as the former provided the latter with the sanction of fatwa (legal opinion) as an endorsement for their own rulings.

AbdulAziz's endeavours in modernization and nation building first brought to the surface the conflict between the state and Wahhabiyyah. The technical innovations he introduced, which were essential for consolidating his authority and implementing his political aims, were prescribed by religion as *bid'a*. AbdulAziz had to mobilize the *ulama* to legalize them. These religious leaders who formerly had been responsible for encouraging and strengthening the Islamic faith in the spirit of the uncompromising Wahhabism, were now required to function as state agents and to check

manifestations of religious radicalism. They had to explain and justify secular reforms and changes, against which they had preached constantly in Islamic terms. The king's request for a legal opinion was intended to secure his own political ends, yet by so doing he also promoted the importance and authority of the muftis, as well as of the other *ulama* in exchange for their contribution to the stability of the regime by providing its religious legitimacy (Nevo, 1998, 39-42). The government need to intervene in the sphere of *ulama* was a direct response to perceived political threats. "This need was underpinned by the frequent intertwining of state legitimacy with religious authority, the state bolstered its domestic sovereignty by portraying itself as the guardian of orthodoxy. As a result, political opposition to the ruling regime easily acquired an air of heresy." (El Shamsy, 2008, 114).

The *ikwhan*, literally the brethren, were Bedouins drawn from the tribal confederations that had accepted the teachings of ibn AbdulWahhab and were the first military force subjected to the education programs implemented among the formerly nomadic peoples (Al-Rasheed, 2010, 57). To obtain the loyalty of the *ikhwan,* Ibn Saud permitted a rejuvenation of the original Wahhabi fanaticism, and with their help he started a series of campaigns, eventually conquering the Hijaz, home to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, and the oil-rich province of Al Hasa in the east with the help of his religious army. However, the differences between the *ikhwan* began to appear as early as 1925 (Abukhalil, 2014, 83). The *ikwhan* raised religious

objections to the rule of Ibn Saud, who rallied popular support and gathered the loyal *ulama* to quell the revolt. With the help of obedient clerics, Ibn Saud marshalled a fighting force in 1929, and with the help of the British, quickly put an end to the threat of the *ikhwan*.

Whenever the regime faces a serious ideological threat, like in the case of the Mecca Rebellion in 1979, the *ulama* have come to their defense, thereby reinforcing the king's position and undercutting the opposition's religious claims (Lippman, 2012, 194). Juhayman AlOtaibi's *Al-Jamma'a Al-Salafiyya Al-Muhtasiba (JSM)* was a result of the frustration experienced by ultra-conservative Islamist fundamentalists with the perceived failings of the *ulama* to uphold the Wahhabi teachings. A small core of the JSM carried out the seizure of the Grand Mosque of Mecca on November 20, 1979, which is sometimes also referred to as the Mecca Rebellion. Juhayman and a group between two hundred and three hundred followers stormed the mosque. It took two weeks for Saudi forces to restore control of the mosque, and only succeeded with the help of French counter-terrorism units (Lacroix, 2011, 92-99). After the JSM stormed the Grand Mosque, the government turned to the leading *ulama* for support and religious justification to combat the rebels. It was the first time the *ulama* had been asked to support the regime in political issues. Feeling threatened, the regime decided to re-empower and co-opt domestic critics and promote religiosity (Bar, 2006, 14). Twenty-nine leading members of the religious institutions issued a fatwa sanctioning the use of

force; however, they stopped short of declaring the rebels non-Muslims (Gause, 1994, 138). The Saudi *ulama* have never taken sides in Saudi politics before the emergence of a clear winner (Bligh, 1985, 47). Juhayman accused the *ulama* of being creatures of the Saudi state, and in this case they behaved as such by delegitimizing the rebellion and rallying support for state leaders, while remaining silent on the rebels' charges against the regime (Gause, 1994, 139). "The fear of contagion of the Iranian revolution was made more real after Mecca uprising" (A. Espinosa, personal correspondence, May 16, 2015).

After Iraqi troops entered Kuwait August 2, 1990, the Saudi government decided to call in American troops in order to defend the Kingdom from further advance of the Iraqi army to the Eastern Province (Steinberg, 2005, 29). And once again the government was forced to turn to the Council of Senior Scholars, who not only provided religious sanction to its foreign policy decisions in the Gulf War but also supported its subsequent crackdown on the *salafi* opposition critical of the presence of foreign troops on Saudi soil (Gause, 2009, 139). The Saudi rulers turned to the official *ulama* for support during the Gulf crisis, and the *ulama* did not disappoint. Sheikh AbdulAziz bin Baz issued fatwas giving religious sanction both to the government's invitation to the US and other foreign forces to enter Saudi Arabia, and to the war to drive Iraqi forces out of Kuwait (Gause, 2009, 140). Once again the official religious establishment supported the rulers' decisions,

particularly the alliance with the United States, in the face of Islamist opposition. The official *ulama* gave the regime the religious cover it needed to pursue a policy based explicitly on state and regime interest, and not Wahhabiyyah (Gause, 2009, 141). By legitimizing controversial steps taken by the government, the Wahhabi scholars left a wide space for radical Wahhabis that opposed the pragmatic attitudes of the official *ulama* (Steinberg, 2005, 13).

Conclusion

This chapter examined the significance of the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance's legacy throughout the three Saudi emirates. It also discussed the foundation of the relationship between religion and politics that is unique to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the effect of the government and the *ulama* have on each other's authority: first, by establishing that the *ulama* were in fact primary elites during the times of the first Saudi state, and then by discerning how the limits on their authority have changed over time. This chapter focused mostly on the development of the Saudi-Wahhabi Alliance, and the subsequent development of its doctrine of governance. By establishing that the Wahhabiyya's orthodoxy is a social construct, this will serve as the foundation for subsequent chapters, which will focus on the consolidation of the government's power at the expense of the *ulama*'s, and the effects this had on the authority of the *ulama*.

Chapter 3- Implementing and Constructing Saudi-Wahhabi Doctrine of Governance

This chapter will evaluate the middle-to-long term effects of the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance, with special focus on the influence that both the *ulama* and the government have on each other's authority. It will attempt to determine whether the government and the *ulama* have continued on as power-sharing primary elites after the establishment of the third Saudi state. The first section chronicles the creation of the third and last Saudi State. For the Saudi-Wahhabi Alliance it would seem that the third time was indeed the charm. The second section examined the consolidation of power after the establishment of the vast Saudi emirate on the Arabian Peninsula. The third section will examine the changes in the *ulama*'s authority throughout this process. In the fourth section looks at the maelstrom that was the Arab Oil Embargo of 1979 as it ushered in the golden age of the rentier state, and its effects on the relationship between the government and the *ulama*. Then in the fifth section assesses whether a resurgence in the *ulama*'s authority is likely.

1. The Establishment of the Third Saudi State

In the aftermath of World War I Ibn Saud's descendants still flying the metaphorical banner of Wahhabi ideology, made a successful bid for power that would eventually bring about the declaration of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932 (El Shamsy, 2008, 115). But in 1902 Riyadh was under the

control of the rival emirs when AbdulAziz (referred to from here on out as Ibn Saud) returned from exile in Kuwait to conquer Riyadh with 40 men killing the emir's representative (Thompson, 2014, 44). From there he started a series of campaigns, eventually uniting the territories south of Transjordan; including the Hijaz, home to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, to the west and the oil-rich province of al-Hasa in the east. After securing most of the Arabian Peninsula under his reign, Ibn Saud focused on consolidating his control and power. An initial strategy was to marginalize collateral branches of the AlSaud, effectively eliminating their ability to challenge the power of his descendants.

Ibn Saud was the first powerful ruler in central Arabia since the death of his grandfather Faysal some 30 years earlier. During that time, Wahhabi *ulama* adjusted to difficult political circumstances and dissident *ulama* exploited the lack of dynastic backing for the mission to challenge it. Ibn Saud restored the Al AlSheikh to their prominent role, and rehabilitated *ulama* that had fallen out of favor with the local emirs while eliminating dissent. The consolidation of Saudi political power injected new energy into the Wahhabi mission and allowed it to attain uncontested supremacy in *Najd*.

But Ibn Saud realized that survival in the international arena required that he curbed Wahhabiyya's xenophobic impulses, particularly the doctrine that restricted travel to the land of idolaters. He swiftly silenced critics who advocated for doctrinal purity and attempted to challenge Ibn Saud's

pragmatism in the late 1920s. Thus, the Wahhabi *ulama* could dislike his policies, but they accepted their role as guardians of ritual correctness and public morality while allowing Ibn Saud to pursue what policies he deemed necessary for the kingdom's and his dynasty's security (Commins, 2009, 71-72).

By the time of the oil concession in 1933, the government of Ibn Saud was deeply indebted. He then used the sudden drastic increases in revenue to further consolidate power, first by eliminating taxes on his subjects and then by increasing handouts to loyal subjects. Though oil brought great wealth to the royal family, the *ulama* foresaw that the royal family's commitment to Wahhabiyya would become subordinated to its political and financial interests (Abukhalil, 2014, 90). The subordination of the *ulama,* and their relegation to secondary elites as a direct result of the oil wealth will be discussed further later on in the next section, on the rentier state. The relationship between the government and the *ulama* did in fact change over the course of time. Ibn Saud made good use of the Wahhabi ideology in the early days of uniting the kingdom. However, the *ulama* have since begun losing their status as primary elites, which they enjoyed during the times of Muhammad ibn AbdulWahhab. Some Wahhabi chronicles it he was the dominant authority until his death in 1792 (Steinberg, 2005, 12).

2. The Consolidation of Government Power

Ibn Saud established a feudal system of sorts, which gave rise to multipolar centers of power, and which eventually led to a political crisis when King Saud bin AbdulAziz, who ascended the throne after the death of his father Ibn Saud, attempted to exclude his brothers and cousins from power. After the death of Ibn Saud in 1953 the eldest of his sons, Saud, became King and Saud's half-brother Faysal was made Crown Prince. The fierce power struggle between the two is usually attributed to Faysal's desire to curb Saud's spending in an attempt to solve the growing financial crisis (Al-Rasheed, 2010, 103). This caused the House of Saud to split into two main factions, one formed around King Saud and his sons, and the other around his half-brother Crown Prince Faysal. The crisis continued to intensify, evoking the nineteenth century conflicts over succession and their politico-religious consequences that led to the fall of the previous Saudi emirate. It culminated in Saud's abdication on March 28, 1964. He died in Greece in 1969 (Al-Rasheed, 2010, 110).

Inter-AlSaud conflict, however, runs counter to the Wahhabiyya's teachings on sedition, or "war in the heart of Islam," (Mouline, 2014, 120) which is believed to be a permanent threat to the continuity of Muslim society. This worried the Wahhabi *ulama*, who felt that the disintegration of the political order would disrupt the application and spread of orthodoxy and orthopraxy and disturb paths to salvation. The weakening or disappearance of

the political partner would once again challenge the hegemony of the Wahhabi corporation, and this fear was fed by the concurrent fall of the Egyptian, Tunisian, Iraqi, and Yemeni monarchies. Therefore *fitna*, or sedition, had to be avoided at all costs (Mouline, 2014, 120).

Beginning in 1958 the *ulama* turned to the Islamic practice of good advice to encourage reconciliation or at least good relations and fair distribution of powers within the royal house. By the 1960s the *ulama* began to favor of the faction headed by Crown Prince Faysal, who was a descendent of AbdulWahhab on his mother's side. In order to avoid a destructive confrontation, on January 1, 1964 the *ulama* met on the request of the most influential members of the royal house, essentially legitimizing the decisions of the faction that was most capable of ensuring and maintaining order once in power. However, King Saud continued orchestrating behind the scenes in an attempt to recover the power he had lost. Crown Prince Faysal, and his allies, felt they were left with no other choice than to force King Saud to give up pretensions. In 1964, the kingdom's pre-eminent Wahhabi *ulama* issued a *fatwa* which served to legitimize the actions of the Crown Prince, effectively forcing King Saud to abdicate the throne. In order to justify their position, the *ulama* drew upon no scriptural evidence. No text in the Wahhabi tradition or indeed in the entire Sunni body of work authorized the *ulama* to act in this way or make this decision (Mouline, 2014, 121- 122). This, indeed, set a precedent for when the AlSaud needed to enshroud political policies

with Islamic legitimacy in order to avoid dissent, a phenomena that is discussed in greater detail in chapter 2 and 4.

The international support that Ibn Saud received in the early days of the third emirate played a significant role in sustaining the regime until the discovery of oil. Before then, Saudi Arabia depended principally on the influx of foreign capital for development, specifically British and American subsidies. Later on royalties from the oil concessions, along with the influx of religious pilgrims to the holy cities of Islam, Mecca and Madinah would provide the regime with economic sustenance (Determann, 2013, 16). The British also played an important role in helping to quell the *Ikhwan* rebellion in 1930, by providing the airpower that effectively eliminated the threat of the *Ikhwan*, literally brothers, who had once formed the backbone for Ibn Saud's military force.

The Arab oil embargo of 1973 produced a dramatic increase in state revenues and ushered in a new era of affluence that was previously unimaginable to a peoples who just a few decades before were still mostly nomadic. From 1972-1973 GDP rose from SR 40.5 billion to SR 99.3 billion. This allowed then King Faysal to essentially transform the economy by increasing spending on education, health services, transportation, communication, Bedouin sedentarisation schemes, and the military (Al-Rasheed, 2010, 133). Saudi *ulama* were brought into the government, but as a subservient arm, and not as an independent edict-issuing body of

independent scholars. Faysal created the Ministry of (Islamic) Justice in 1970, staffed by well-earning clerics that toed the government line (Abukhalil, 2014, 96). All religious courts throughout the kingdom however, are now subject to the political authority of the government through the justice ministry (Bligh, 1985, 48). He also institutionalized clerical roles in the government in order to better serve the interests of the royal family. Over time the *ulama* were bureaucratized and made subservient to the ruling family (Okruhlik, 2009, 92).

3. The Subordination of the *Ulama*

The centrality of religion to public discourse and the fact that the regime bases its power and legitimacy on the faith have resulted in a more or less continuous struggle for control of religious rule making. That is the reason King Abdullah issued a royal decree in the summer of 2010 barring the issuance of *fatwas*, or religious edicts, by anyone other than the senior *ulama*, or the official religious authorities appointed by the king (Lippman, 2012, 16-22). This was a clear example of how the Saudi regime uses the power of religion, and manipulates the long-standing partnership of politics and religion, to reinforce its own authority. The Grand Mufti and other senior religious figures are employees of the state who are appointed by the king and his advisers. They live very well because of the positions they hold and are therefore reluctant to incur the king's displeasure by challenging his policies. A royal affirmation of their authority, as in the *fatwas* decree, only reinforces their loyalty to the monarch (Lippman, 2012, 194).

In spite of their prestigious status, the dependence of the *ulama* (in their capacity as representatives of Wahhabism) on the royal house has increased, especially since the collapse of the power of the *ikhwan* in the late 1920s. As early as the 1950s the *ulama* role was confined to the interpretation of the civil and criminal aspects of the *sharia* laws. The configuration of the legal system of Saudi Arabia has been the result, to a great extent, of the relationship between the *ulama* and the government, and of the increasing challenges that the Saudi Arabian Kingdom has faced. The *ulama* and the government have shared a quota of control, sometimes based on co-operation and at other times on conflict with one another.

Since then courts other than *sharia* tribunals have also been established. In 1970 a Ministry of Justice was formed, and in 1971, a Supreme Judicial Council (sometimes called, the Council of the Senior *Ulama*). The Minister of Justice inherited the authority of the Grand Mufti and Chief Justice, who had died in 1969. While the Grand Mufti, a member of the Al AlSheikh family, had not been accountable to anybody and his religious rulings as a mufti were final, the Minister was subject to the government and the king. The formation of the Council of the Senior *Ulama* signified even further consolidation of the state's control of the religious establishment. Previously, as a part of the state bureaucracy it was in charge of interpretation of the *sharia* and of the provision of religious sanction for the state's rulings (Nevo, 1998, 44).

The trend of containing and even weakening the institutional power of the *ulama* intensified in the 1990s, according to the fundamentalist wave of anti-government criticism, with the reorganization of the Council of the Senior *Ulama* in 1992, the formation of the new *Majlis al Shura* (Consultative Assembly) in 1992-1993, and the establishment of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in 1994. In fact, the modernization process which Saudi Arabia has undergone occasionally pushed the *ulama*- who were pressured by the royal family to take part in the execution of reforms, into awkward situations when they were required to give religious endorsement and legitimization to government decisions which undermined their own position and authority. The ruling house let them exercise power and responsibility in many domains as long as they interpreted and construed Islamic tradition in a way that would serve the interests of the royal family and glorify its image. State funds, control of several government agencies, and influence over several others enabled them to affect Saudi daily life (Nevo, 1998, 35-42).

These moves were designed to introduce younger scholars, with a more progressive outlook on relations between religion and modernization of the nation, into the system replacing older *ulama* with uncompromisingly conservative views (Nevo, 1998, 44-46). The death of the charismatic Grand Mufti Muhammad bin Ibrahim Al AlSheikh in 1969 cleared the way for the government to intervene in the religious space. Between 1969 and 1971, King Faysal created the Ministry of Justice, an example of the subordination of the

religious elite by the AlSaud, the High Council of the Magistracy, and the Committee of the Grand *Ulama* in an attempt to split up the juridical-religious powers that had formerly been held by the grand mufti. The office of the grand mufti itself was eliminated and would not be reestablished until 1993.

The subordination of the religious elite by the state is what led to the creation of a religious establishment (Soler and Zaccara, 2012, 160). King Faysal's objective was to fragment their religious authority in an attempt to co-opt their political power and use it as he saw fit, rather than simply marginalize and weaken them. "Faysal's reform period advanced their position, allowing them influence over the education system, but bureaucratization also endowed the state with power to control them" (J. Piscatori, personal communication, May 20, 2015). And because of this bureaucratization, the religious establishment began to receive state-approved appointments in exchange for financial support (J. Piscatori, May 20, 2015).

Having failed to persuade the government to do away with civil judicial institutions, the Wahhabi *ulama* instead attempted to regain control over them. One such way being by the marginalization of *qadi* who had received (a non-Wahhabi) modern training in the Islamic sciences. However, the sudden spike in oil revenues that allowed the regime to need the Wahhabi narrative a little bit less as a source of legitimacy. It also spurned the development of a new social contract based on redistribution of oil wealth in

exchange for the renunciation of political participation (Mouline, 2014, 144-150). The effects of this new social contract between the government and its subjects will be discussed later in this chapter, a brief overview of the Rentier State Theory can also be found in the theoretical framework section of the first chapter.

The *ulama* are therefore, a state establishment, whose power and authority derive from the state, and therefore the ruling family, whose decrees and directives regulate its activity. The actual authority of the *ulama* stems not so much from their religious prestige as from their appointment by the king. Since 1929 they have essentially been civil servants, part of the state bureaucracy, not an autonomous center of power. As a result, their religious rulings do not always reflect knowledge of Islam so much as the desire to keep their jobs. Juhayman al-Utaybi, who headed the takeover of the Grand Mosque of Mecca in 1979 and which is discussed briefly later on in this chapter, accused the *ulama* of interpreting the Quran in a way that justified the corrupt and non-Islamic policy of the Saudi royal family. Indeed, according to Nevo (1998, 42), the *ulama's* position, income, and activity have been controlled, determined and changed by the state's needs and interests.

Having seemingly become the junior partner in the ruling coalition, the *ulama* were no longer able to insist on the implementation of strict Wahhabi doctrine (Steinberg, 2005, 13). At times the rigidity of the Wahhabiyya has run counter to the needs and objectives of the state's

political leadership, imposing a straightjacket that has limited the scope of socio-economic development. The *ulama* have become a "subordinate partner to the AlSaud with a limited amount of veto power over specific socio-cultural policy issues and significant control over public morality, educational establishment and judiciary" (S. Hertog, personal correspondance, May 15, 2015). Officers of the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, the country's feared religious police also known locally as the *mutawwa*, roam the streets enforcing strict segregation of the sexes, an absolute prohibition of the sale and consumption of alcohol, a ban on women driving and many other social restrictions. As a result, the state's often-repeated desire to reduce dependence on migrant labor is complicated by some of the restrictions on the employment of women in a non-segregated environment, which tend to be vigorously upheld and monitored by the *muttawa* (Migdal, 1988, 29-30)*.

4. Emergence of the Rentier State

By the mid-twentieth century the Saudi state apparatus relied increasingly on global demand for oil for to fund its ever expanding bureaucracy. As one of the largest oil exporters, Saudi Arabia's most distinctive political feature is its rentier economy, when large proportion of the state's income is earned from external rents (Gray, 2011, 1).The operation of the government in rentier states depends on resource rents, which are allocated and then redistributed to the state and population. In the case of

Saudi Arabia, and the other Gulf monarchies, the government has complete ownership of the national oil company Aramco (Saudi Arabian Oil Company, formerly the Arabian-American Oil Company), which according to Forbes Magazine, is the world's largest oil company (World's 25 Biggest Oil Companies). Saudi Arabia is also home to the world's largest known oil reserves. According to data from the World Bank, oil rents made up 43.6% of Saudi Arabia's Gross Domestic Product in 2013, the last year for which data was available, or about $326 billion dollars; oil revenues make up roughly 90% of the government's budget[2].

This theory helps to contextualize the relationship between the state and society in Saudi Arabia. The rentier state model remains politically stable as long as both sides adhere to an implicit social contract between state and society, through which the state provides welfare in lieu of political rights. In Saudi Arabia, the government subsidies a wide range of goods and services, but most significant are fuel subsidies. We will further discuss subsidies as benefits provided by the state to its citizens below. This unofficial agreement is only sustainable so long as there are sufficient rents to be allocated to both state elites and the rest of society. Should the state fail to fulfill its part of the social contract, resistance to the regime increases. In times of surplus rents it hinders the emergence of independent political interests demanding democratization and strengthens the autonomy of the state. Non-

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[2] NRGI 2013 Country Report: Saudi Arabia

governmental interests are usually organized around the state's allocation system. The rentier state model runs into difficulties in times of declining natural resources, it becomes markedly unstable in times of fiscal crisis (Schwarz, 2008, 607-610). Surplus oil revenue reduces the state's necessity to extract taxes from its own population.

In the rentier state, citizenship becomes a source of economic benefit. The government provides services to citizens, and in exchange citizens keep their political and social behavior within specific limits (Gause, 1994, 58). Due to the government's dominance in the economy, a majority of the population are public sector employees. Their livelihood depends on the state, and a result they are less inclined to vocalize opposition to government policies (Gause, 1994, 60). In an attempt to prove that the personal well-being of the citizens is intrinsically tied to the continued existence of the political system, the state provides a variety of benefits, which include free education from preschool to the university level; grants and interest-free loans (interest is prohibited in Islam) for anything from starting a business, to getting married, to building a house; social security for the retired, widows, divorced women, and the disabled; and subsidies on food and public utilities like gas, water, and electricity (Gause, 1994, 61). Saudi society has become a hierarchy of renters, where the widespread exploitation of the social services becomes an easier source of wealth than productive labor (Niblock, 2006, 207). Vast resources has allowed for the state to create a complex government structure

with a large and inefficient bureaucracy, where public sector employment becomes a form of state patronage which allows for extensive government control over society (Gause, 1994, 43).

The subsequent distributive policies designed to ensure domestic peace have created large and complex state administrations that consume resources instead of generating revenues (Crystal, 1989, 427). The sociology of power theory once again serves to explain how the control over resources of power determine the status of elites within the power structure, and how the ability to compete for said resources is what dictates the transformation from primary into secondary elites of those who no longer are able to compete as effectively for said resources. The political ramifications of these state structures will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

5. The *Ulama*'s Comeback?

Wahhabism has been the main source of legitimacy for all three Saudi emirates, and their first line of defense against ideological threats. However, the relationship between the top clerics of the Wahhabiyya and the Saudi state had transformed over the course of the twentieth century, and the religious establishment have become increasingly subordinate to the will of the royal family, as well as bureaucratized by the political system (Jones, 2009, 111). The religious establishment has in fact been demoted to secondary elites, and are no longer completely autonomous from the government. Nonetheless, several significant events led to a resurgence in

the relevance and authority of the Wahhabi *ulama* in Saudi Arabia. This section will only examine two such cases, the Iranian Revolution and the invasion of Kuwait. In such times of crisis, circumstances have allowed the *ulama* to act as primary elites, however in reality due to the fact that their power is inherently linked to their usefulness in legitimizing the actions of the government, it can be concluded that they have already being relegated to the role of secondary elite. In the following chapter this issue will be discussed more at length.

Since 1979 the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran has deteriorated into a rivalry regional for regional hegemony and Islamic credentials. After the 1979 revolution, Iran was renamed the Islamic Republic of Iran, giving it a new dimension in its religious relationship with Saudi Arabia (Badeeb, 1993, 90). The Iranian Revolution was made in the name of Islam and the oppressed Muslim masses, and it was intended for exportation throughout the Muslim and Third worlds. Iranian politicians frequently and enthusiastically attacked Saudi Arabia, and Ayatollah Khomeini encouraged pilgrims to spread revolutionary propaganda during *hajj*. Declaring (Shia) Islam to be the basis of the Iranian Republic was a direct challenge to the legitimacy of the AlSaud (Fürtig, 2002, 23-26). Once again the Wahhabi *ulama* were called upon to reaffirm the regime's Islamic credentials. The role of the Wahhabi *ulama* in helping to counter the ideological threat to the AlSaud will be examined in greater detail in chapter 4.

The invasion of Kuwait in 1990 by Iraqi forces exposed the rift between religious establishment aligned with the regime, and the younger generation of opposition *ulama* when King Fahd invited U.S troops to protect Saudi Arabia from the threat of Iraqi forces. After the discovery of oil reserves, the United States had replaced the British influence in Riyadh. Well before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia had enjoyed a close relationship built over decades of close cooperation. First in the building of the Arab-American Oil Company (ARAMCO), and then by the 'just over the horizon' security arrangement between the U.S. and the Gulf littoral states. However, the Iraqi invasion brought the 'over the horizon' to an abrupt end and ushered in a new era of U.S. military power in their proverbial backyard. U.S. troops were deployed to Saudi Arabia, which would go on to trigger a backlash from Islamists that had not been seen in well over a decade.

The issuing of the controversial *fatwa* by the Grand Mufti AbdulAziz bin Baz, which authorized the deployment of U.S troops on Saudi soil sparked furor among Islamists who opposed the presence of non-Muslim troops on the holy land of Islam (Abir, 1993, 180-184). This new wave of Islamist opposition would prove to be renewed threat to the Wahhabi credentials of the official *ulama* and the religious establishment as a whole. This neo-fundamentalist opposition to the Wahhabi religious establishment would prove to be a real threat to the Islamic credentials of the regime. The effects of these events and others on the legitimacy of the official *ulama*, and the

ulama's evolving relationship with the AlSaud will be the subject of the two subsequent chapters. The Saudi government's recourse to the Wahhabi *ulama* to validate their decision to allow foreign troops on Saudi soil serves as yet another example of the 'on-call muftis' and will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4. Today, the relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia is arguably more complex than it has been at any previous point in time, however military ties between the two remain close. Saudi Arabia, and the other Gulf monarchies retaining their long held top spot, as the world's leading buyers of U.S. military weapons and technology.

Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed the shift in the relationship between the government and the *ulama*, specifically since the establishment of the third Saudi state. In contemporary Saudi Arabia the *ulama* are employees of the state. They can be, and have been, silenced or dismissed when they have failed to toe the line. As a result, they tend to defer to the monarch. The government and the *ulama* are stuck in a perpetual struggle for power, a result of the government's repeated attempts to limit the authority and influence of the religious establishment. Therefore, it can be concluded that although the government may not be able to retain its legitimacy and therefore its power without the support of the *ulama*, the religious establishment is not autonomous from the state, and in fact has become a

bureaucratized institution dependent on the government's largesse (Thompson, 2014, 117).

Chapter 4 - Contesting the Status Quo:

the Resurgence of Domestic Opposition

There have been relatively few cases of violent opposition to the rule of the AlSaud since the foundation of the third Saudi state by AbdulAziz bin Saud in 1902. While the Islamist opposition has historically been the most significant source of opposition to the Al Saud dynasty, other trends of opposition have come and gone throughout the years, but they have had little real impact on the state or society. Today the legitimacy of the Saudi leadership is being questioned by two key sectors of Saudi society, Islamists and liberals (Al-Rasheed, 2005, 190). The 1950s and 1960s witnessed a few episodes of leftist and communist unrest in the kingdom, which reinforced the regime's conviction that a reliance on religious forces was the best means of social control. Increased the budgets and the influence of the religious establishment and Islamic organizations in Saudi Arabia. This created a favorable environment for the development of local incarnations of Islamism, from which several political-religious opposition movements would emerge (Hegghammer, 2007, 105).

This chapter will focus on effect of the government on the *ulama'*s authority, as well as when and how the government has used it to it's advantage. It will attempt to discern any lasting remnants of the original Saudi-Wahhabi Alliance's legacy. The first section contextualizes the status quo in Saudi Arabia, where a fragmented Wahhabiyya in embroiled in a

conflict over the very nature of Wahhabism. The second section examines the original Islamist domestic opposition movement in Saudi history, the *Ikhwan* Rebellion in the early 20th century. The third section looks at the next major resurgence of significant Islamist opposition, the neo-*Ikhwan* influenced by the concurrent Muslim Brotherhood movement. The fourth section looks at the Islamist opposition in the 1990s, who vehemently opposed the presence of non-Muslim troops on Saudi soil Finally, the fifth section attempts to put the Shia protests within the broader socio-economic and political context, in order to differentiate them from the various other protests during the Arab Spring, But most importantly the chapter focuses on the *ulama*'s diminished autonomy vis-a-vis the government, and the mixed-results when the government has attempted to co-opt that authority f in order to secure validation for their policies. It will attempt to further prove that the *ulama* have been demoted to secondary elites, as they have become dependent on the government.

1. Disenchantment with Wahhabi Establishment

Over the course of almost three centuries, the Wahhabi *ulama* have developed an important political pragmatism in order to preserve their alliance with the government. This pragmatism has repeatedly led 'radical' Wahhabis, who demand an uncompromising implementation of Wahhabiyya, to oppose the "official" *ulama*. As a result, the Wahhabiyya gave rise to opposition

groups from within its own ranks, and Saudi militant Islamists who joined al-Qaeda are the descendants of these radical wings of the Wahhabiyya.

By legitimizing controversial steps taken by the government, the Wahhabi scholars left a wide berth for radical Wahhabis who opposed their pragmatic attitudes. As a result, the history of the Wahhabiyya has been marked by a continuous struggle between radical elements demanding an uncompromising enforcement of the original Wahhabi code of conduct as established during the eighteenth century, and the 'official' *ulama*, scholars with political functions or other influential positions close to the government, who acted according to the wishes of the ruling family. In this regard, the wider the division between the official *ulama*'s political pragmatism and the teachings of the original Wahhabiyya, the more violent the conflict has become (Steinberg 2005, 11-13). Ironically this is also a fitting metaphor for the broader Saudi society, where radical elements continue to demand an uncompromising enforcement of the original Wahhabi code of conduct, and others who hold a more pragmatic view on modernization and globalization.

The self-styled *'ulama* of the center' have attempted to act as intermediaries between the government and the radical Wahhabis whose main grievance is their staunch opposition to social reforms. The attempts to reconcile, or at least mediate, between the government and radical Wahhabis by members of the Saudi *ulama* is an attempt by moderate Islamists to gain radical Islamists a fair hearing in exchange for their public repentance. This is

a reflection of the emerging schism within the *ulama* themselves. On one hand are the religious scholars whose livelihoods depend on the continued endowment by the government and therefore employ a political pragmatism in order to ensure their continued security; and on the other there are the Wahhabi dissidents that publicly question the legitimacy of the Saudi monarchy. This is not insignificant, considering that the formation of the third Saudi state was at least partially founded in the defense of "true" Islam (Sager, 2005, 235-245).

Overall, we can see a two distinct groups emerging from within the Saudi *ulama*. The first group is comprised of those *ulama* who continue to provide legitimacy to the ruling family in exchange for power and prestige. The second group of *ulama* is comprised of those sympathetic with the radical Islamists, and those who feel the royal family have lost their religious legitimacy by failing to uphold the Wahhabi code of conduct.

2. The Ikhwan

The *ikhwan* were from the first recruits from the nomadic bedouin tribes to take part in sedenterization experiments of the third Saudi state. They underwent training programs that attempted to civilize the nomadic bedouin, while converting them to Wahhabism. They became the backbone of Ibn Saud's army as he set about uniting the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula under his rule. They were known for their religious zeal, which would seem to compensate for their lack of education in the Islamic Sciences. "Ordinary

believers were not passive recipients of ideals of orthodoxy proffered by scholars and rulers: they were actively engaged in evaluating, propagating and forging beliefs and rituals that contributed substantially to the construction of orthodoxy" in Arabia (El Shamsy, 2008, 97).

But by late 1920s they were beginning to become disillusioned with Ibn Saud. They wanted to continue their raids passed the kingdom's borders in Jordan, Iraq, and Kuwait; and onto the Shia of the Western Province. They felt compelled to rid the Arabian Peninsula, and the Muslim world beyond, of *shirk*, or idolatry. They became increasingly frustrated with Ibn Saud, who feared of upsetting the British should they conduct cross border raids, and who they felt was failing to uphold the teachings of Wahhabism. After some internal strife, including a mock abdication by Ibn Saud, the *ulama* sided with the king and recommended the *ikhwan* defer to Ibn Saud. The conflict, however, did not end there. The *Ikhwan* Revolt in the 1929 culminated in the massacre of most of the fighters, who had been on route to cross the northern border into Trans-Jordan when they were ambushed by British jets (who had been alerted by Ibn Saud). The remaining *ikhwan* went on to surrender a short time later. Ibn Saud's crushing defeat of the *ikhwan's* rebellion marked definitively the end of the conquest phase and the beginning of the consolidation phase of the third Saudi state. It was also the first time that Ibn Saud made clear that when push came to shove, political pragmatism was more important that Wahhabi zeal.

3. The Neo-Ikhwan: the Rise of a New Generation of Islamists

Of the two different types of Islamism developed in Saudi Arabia, the Islamic Awakening *(al-sahwa al-Islamiyya)*, or simply *Sahwa,* was more pragmatic, political, and elitist. It represented the mainstream of the Saudi Islamist movement. The other homegrown Islamist movement was a rejectionist and pietistic phenomenon emerging mainly among the lower classes, known as neo-*Salafis*. Salafism advocated for a return to the practices of the earliest generation of Muslims, those who witnessed firsthand the lived example of the Prophet. From the 1960s to the 1990s, the two strains coexisted, representing relatively distinct ideological approaches and sociological phenomena, although the former remained politically and numerically more significant.

The *Sahwa* developed primarily on university campuses after the arrival, from the late 1950s onward, of large numbers of members of the Muslim Brotherhood fleeing persecution in countries such as Egypt and Syria. The development of education in the kingdom relied on the import of educated foreigners. Between the 1940s and 1970s, large parts if the public education sector became 'Egyptianized', as the Saudi Ministry of Education hired numerous Egyptians as teachers, administrators, and consultants. These individuals, many of whom were academics or well-trained professionals, rapidly became the backbone of the newly established Saudi education and media sectors. In fact, it was partly through their impulse that

the *Sahwa* gained momentum in Saudi universities in the 1970s and 1980s, before spearheading the reformist Islamist opposition of the early 1990s. Ideologically, the *Sahwa* represented a blend of the traditional Wahhabi focus on mainly social issues, coupled with the more contemporary, and political-oriented, Muslim Brotherhood approach to Islamism. And while the *Sahwa* have sought to reform the Saudi state's policies, they have done so without ever straightforwardly questioning the state's legitimacy (Hegghammer, 2007, 105).

Meanwhile, the secular Arab Nationalist movement was gaining momentum throughout the region, and as a result King Faisal felt pressured to promote a pan--Islamic foreign policy doctrine; an ideology based on the idea that all Muslims are one nation and should unite to face the challenges of the modern world, as a response to Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser's pan-Arabism. Beginning in the mid-1980s, alarmist pan--Islamism played an increasingly significant role in Saudi political culture, for a number of historically specific reasons. Firstly, the pan--Islamic activists gained momentum as a social movement as a direct result of the jihad in Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion in 1980. Second, the decline in oil prices in the mid-1980s produced a deterioration of the social contract between the state and its people due to the decrease in resource rents, which directly increased the degree of political dissent in the Kingdom. This served to embolden the reformist Islamist movement known as the Islamic Awakening (al-sahwa al-

Islamiyya), or simply *Sahwa*. Third, in order to deflect domestic political criticism, the Saudi government bowed to the pressure to promote populist pan-Islamism domestically by praising the Afghan jihad in official media, as well as providing support to those Saudis who wanted to fight in Afghanistan (Hegghamer, 2008, 704).

Among neo-Salafi groups, *al-Jamaa al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba* (JSM) emerged as the most notorious. It was formed in Medina in the mid-1960s by a small group of religious students who were believed that mainstream Islam, including the Wahhabiyyah of the Saudi religious establishment, needed to be purified of innovations. They were also looking to counter the growing influence of other groups on the religious scene in early 1970s Medina, including the Muslim Brotherhood. In that regard, some of the most prominent religious scholars in Medina at the time, including future Grand Mufti AbdulAziz bin Baz, believed in the necessity of promoting a purified Wahhabism and providing an alternative to existing forms of Islamic activism. Indeed, some of the founding members of the JSM developed personal contacts with these scholars and considered bin Baz their spiritual leader. Initially, the JSM focused on moral and religious reform, rather than politics, but they became increasingly rejectionist, calling for the fall of the regime which they claimed no long upheld the ideals of the Wahhabiyya. They believed Islam had been corrupted by the introduction of innovations in religious practice and society's deviation from religious principles. They

advocated a return to a strict and literal interpretation of the Qur'an and *hadith*, and they rejected imitation of all subsequent scholars, including scholars that are revered in the Wahhabi tradition, such as Ibn Taymiyya and AbdulWahhab (Hegghammer, 2007, 106-108).

On November 20, 1979, the first day of the 15th century of the *Hijri* (Islamic) calendar, a group of approximately 300 rebels led by Juhayman al-Utaybi stormed and seized control of the Haram, great mosque in Mecca and the holiest place in Islam. The militants barricaded themselves in the compound, taking thousands of worshippers hostage. On December 4, 1979, Saudi authorities regained control of the sanctuary with the assistance of three French special-forces. In order to conduct this operation, the Saudi ulama issued a fatwa at the petition of the government, which authorized the use of force in the Haram, where it is Islamically forbidden to do so. The rebels were tried and sentenced with quickly. On January 9, 1980, sixty-three people were executed in eight different cities throughout Saudi Arabia. The list of convicts, which was published in the Saudi press, included forty-one Saudis, ten Egyptians, six South Yemenis, three Kuwaitis, a North Yemeni, an Iraqi, and a Sudanese. Sheikh AbdulAziz bin Baz, chairman of the Board for Islamic Research of Riyadh, condemned the attack as sedition, insurrection, atheist, and a perversion of the ideas of Islam, refuting the JSM's claims by stating that the Saudi government had done nothing to warrant

rebellion. Saudi forces eventually retook control of the Haram, captured the rebels, and freed the hostages still alive (Ochsenwald, 1981, 277).

The Siege of Mecca shook the regime, which had been focusing on leftist groups and never expected opposition to come from religious circles. As a result, the powers of the religious establishment and its control on Saudi society were reinforced, in hopes of preventing such unrest from happening again. Ironically, it was the other main Islamist current, the more institutionally integrated Sahwa, which benefited from these new policies and grew stronger throughout the 1980s until it openly confronted the regime in the early 1990s (Hegghammer, 2007, 113). "If the Iranian Revolution aroused the ghost of the coup d'Etat, Al Utaybi action questioned openly the legitimacy of the royal family," (A. Espinosa, personal communication, May 15, 2015).

4. <u>Opposition in the Nineties</u>

By the 1990s, the traditional alliance between 'mosque and state' in Saudi Arabia, which was conditional on the regime's preservation of the Wahhabiyya's hegemony, was no longer being threatened after the abovementioned JSM uprising of 1979. However, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, which took the Saudi population completely by surprise, posed a new challenge to the regime. The presence of thousands of Western, non--Muslim troops in close proximity to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina was seen as an act of heresy by many Saudis, particularly the more conservative and Islamist factions within Saudi society. The reliance on

foreign troops for defense served to highlight the vulnerability of the monarchy and it seemed to insinuate that, in view of the billions spent, the defense of the Holy Land had been mismanaged. Thus, in the eyes of Saudi religious opposition, the Islamic credentials of the monarchy were being called into question. Saudi Arabia's invitation to American troops to fight Saddam and liberate Kuwait was in their eyes a violation of the principles of calling for assistance.

Sheikh AbdulAziz bin Baz, the Grand *Mufti*, was called once again to the rescue in January 1991. He issued a controversial *fatwa* authorizing *jihad* against Saddam. Sheikh Muhammad bin Saleh, the second-highest ranking cleric, announced that the presence of the American soldiers in the kingdom 'was the lesser of two evils' and, thus was a sufficient justification for the invitation extended by the government to the American troops. Moreover, at a *jihad* convention that took place around that time the *ulama* loyal to the ruling family justified the war against Iraq, asserting that Muslim law allows believers to call on non-believers for assistance in a *jihad*.

Opposition among the *ulama* to the American presence in the kingdom (but not the government's policies) was also on the increase, as many Saudis believed that the US would not relinquish its bases in the kingdom after the war. Yet, the great majority of the establishment *ulama* continued to support the regime and its policy despite their concern about foreign influences on the Saudi society (Abir, 1993, 180-185). The presence in the kingdom of

hundreds of thousands of 'infidel' American servicemen, and servicewomen, increased neo-fundamentalists tendencies in Saudi Arabia and created grave problems for the conservative Wahhabi kingdom. When Western troops remained in Saudi Arabia even after the end of the Gulf War, the radical opposition viewed them as a prop for what had become, in their eyes, an illegitimate government. More importantly, since then Saudi Islamists have remained divided on whether the Saudi political system as a whole represents an 'Islamic leadership' (Sager, 2005, 236-243).

5. <u>The Arab Spring</u>

Exclusion is the primary mechanism of enforcement of the orthodoxy available to scholars. On the simplest level, basic human courtesies were denied to those who were deemed to have moved outside the boundaries of orthodoxy, smiling at them, initiating the Islamic greeting and participating in their funerary prayers. Scholars sought to dissuade the public from accepting certain heretics as qualified to lead communal prayers, which in principle is allowed of every Muslim. This prohibition was only to be applied to those heretics who practiced and professed their beliefs openly. (El Shamsy, 2008, 108).

Historically, oil revenues have allowed the state to subsidize the allegiance of the tribal leaders, thus allowing the AlSaud to consolidate their power and eliminate any contentions to their authority. In return for their loyalty, tribal sheikhs were compensated with gifts that included cash

handouts, land, and *wasta* (clout). By ensuring the allegiance of important tribal leaders to the state apparatus, the AlSaud also managed to circumvent the necessity of civic engagement. However, this method of power consolidation failed to integrate ethnic and religious minorities into the society, like the Shia, and effectively excludes them from accessing the resources that are readily available to others. As such, the Shia minority, which mostly resides in the oil-rich Eastern Region, has been historically excluded from accessing such resources. They are unable to join the armed forces, the police, and are systematically discriminated against both by the state and society. This becomes particularly difficult in light of the high degree of patriarchy that still exists in Saudi society, where petitioning the local Prince for handouts or intercession is still a widespread and common practice. The Shia in the Eastern Province are therefore disproportionately motivated to protest because the state has failed to comply with their end of the rentier state social contract with this sector of the Saudi society. Discrimination against the Shia is institutionalized in the Saudi political system, effectively ensuring that no Shia political leader in the last century was able to make any real difference in the situation of the Shia in Saudi Arabia. The Shia protests were then used as a justification by the government to discourage protests by Sunnis and fuel sectarianism.

The first protests and tensions came amid heightened online activism and a campaign on Facebook for a 'Day of Rage' on March 11, 2011 in Saudi

Arabia. Young activists proved that the Internet, social media, and smartphones are effective tools for organizing protests, though admittedly easy for the state to monitor. Given the pace with which protests had spread from Tunisia to Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Oman and elsewhere, questions over the stability of Saudi Arabia were raised in the international media (Matthiesen, 2014, 1-23). Protests in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia began in February 2011 and quickly turned into the largest and longest protest movement in Saudi Arabia's modern history. On March 3, 2011 small protests were again held in the villages of Awwamiyya and Qatif. While the placards mainly demanded the release of prisoners, protesters also demanded equality for Saudi Shia.

The largest protests were held on March 4, in both Qatif and al-Ahsa, just one week ahead of the planned nation-wide protest on March 11. On April 8, hundreds of men and women marched in Awwamiyya and Qatif, waving Bahraini and Saudi flags. The protests in al-Ahsa were particularly worrying for the regime because of its mixed Sunni-Shia population. On August 19, seven prominent Shia clerics from all the major political strands, many of whom had signed two earlier petitions calling for a stop of protests, issued yet another statement in order to placate tensions with the government. The statement condemned any use of violence or spreading of rumors on social media, and it affirmed the unquestionable loyalty of the Shia to Saudi Arabia.

The 2011 protests were led by young activists and largely independent of organized affiliations. This challenged the position of Shia notables as relevant mediators, which in turn were pressure being by the government to convince the youth to stop the protests. Only one cleric, Nimr al-Nimr, publicly endorsed the demonstrations and argued that they were not contrary to religious law, stating that protests did not hinder a dialogue with the government. While this mainly sought to contradict those Shia clerics who had called for a halt to the protests, it was also a rebuke of the official Saudi *ulama* who decried protests de facto illegal in Saudi Arabia (Matthiesen, 2014, 2-23).

It is clear that the Saudi royal family has survived the Arab Uprisings without the kinds of mass protests seen in other Arab countries, even though the country witnessed the largest protest campaign in its modern history. After Bahrain, the protests in Saudi Arabia are the largest and most sustained counterparts of the Arab Uprisings in the GCC states. The protests in the Eastern Province failed to spill over to the rest of the country, and were used by the government to undermine calls for reform by Sunnis. Moreover, the few Sunni liberals who criticized the government crackdown on the Qatif protesters were quickly silenced. In other parts of Saudi Arabia, the state was largely able to prevent protests through a mix of cooptation, repression and a network of patronage that works through state institutions and religious and tribal networks (Matthiesen, 2014, 23-4).

<u>Conclusion</u>

The royal family has until now managed to successfully portray itself as a mediator between the various social and political factions; including liberals and Islamists, and the old religious establishment and the new Sahwa *ulama*. In this regard, the strategy has been to play these groups against each other, exploiting divisions in order to divide and conquer. The official state media is known to exaggerate these divisions, especially that between liberals and Islamists (Al-Rasheed, 2005, 204-212). Meanwhile the ruling family still has enormous co-optative and repressive resources at its disposal, and it is still able to present itself as the glue that binds the country together. This chapter has examined how the government exploits social faultlines in order to preserve the Wahhabi orthodoxy to their own greatest benefit. In this way, the government has been able to benefit from the authority and legitimization of the *ulama*, at the expense of the *ulama*'s autonomy.

Chapter 5- Conclusion

Can the government of Saudi Arabia stay in power without the help of the *ulama*? The jury is still out on that one. The current preeminence of the Wahhabi *ulama,* and the clout that accompanies it, would be impossible to sustain without the support of the AlSaud. The purpose of this thesis was essentially to prove whether the Wahhabi *ulama*'s authority was in fact dependent on the government. However, the same cannot be proven. Therefore, the *ulama* are dependent on the government for their authority and power.

Where in the past they provided the raison-d'etre of the state, oil wealth has provided a new dimension in the social contract between the state and society, where social services and security are provided directly by the state to its citizens in return for loyalty to the regime. Likewise, the bureaucratization of the religious establishment has made them become literal dependents of the state, where the state functions as a benefactor by providing salaries for bureaucrat *ulama* and funding for their religious institutions. Thus, this thesis concludes that the *ulama* have become secondary elites, dependent on the AlSaud for access to resources.

1. Looking Forward

In Saudi Arabia, the current social contract in place between those who rule and those are ruled is based on extensive state-subsidization at the expense of civil society and political participation. In December 2015 Saudi

Arabia held its third ever elections, these municipal elections held the extra significance of being the first time that women could not only vote but run for office. However inconsequential an elected public office might be, it comes at a time when oil prices are predicted to never again return to a triple digit status quo. All the while the government is shifting spending priorities into key sectors, attempting however superficially to diversify the economy before the oil wealth runs out. One could argue that the government is attempting to cover its bases, in hopes in when the pressure for political participation intensifies; the political process will continue to be under their purview.

It is also important to note that Islamic orthodoxy in Saudi Arabia is nearly the sole basis of Saudi national identity. But as previously discussed, orthodoxy is a construct. And in this case it was constructed from the teachings of Ibn Wahhab and conserved by the government. This is root of the *ulama*'s power- the Wahhabi orthodoxy with they are entrusted to uphold is the foundation of the Saudi national identity.

National identity is a novel concept in the Middle East, where many Arabs identify first as Muslims, and everything else second. In Saudi Arabia the national identity will inevitably have to be adjusted as social values shift, this is a natural process that reflects social changes. Saudi society has undergone traumatic changes over the last century, and the national identity remains anchored in the Wahhabi orthodoxy almost against all odds. However, it wouldn't be out of the realm of possibility that future generations

of Saudis will identify as Saudis first, and Muslims second. It is entirely plausible that other identities will become as important as or more important than that of "Muslim". The importance of the internet age and an interconnected globalized *umma,* cannot be ignored. In the past the Wahhabiyya has had no real threat from other Islamic movements. With the proliferation of Islamic sciences and centers of learning, the Wahhabi orthodoxy might lose its monopoly status. The Wahhabi orthodoxy's, and by extension the *ulama*'s, protective status would also be threatened should the Wahhabiyya's in global influence wane. All in all, a future in which Wahhabism is not be the cornerstone of Saudi national identity is at the very least plausible. The government might shift it's source of domestic legitimacy from ideological to economic, focus on generating wealth on par with it's notorious consumption. However, the Wahhabiyya's austerity may not be able to allign with a consumption-based economy.

Nonetheless, Saudi Arabia is in the process of diversifying it's economy, and if it's done right could become an economic powerhouse in its own right, even without the oil wealth. In this eventuality, the Wahhabi *ulama* will only be able to survive intact by privatizing religious institutions, effectively ending their status as protected government institutions. In this way the *ulama* can continue to perform their duties, but without the help of neither government largesse nor ideological monopoly. The status quo cannot stand; the *ulama* cannot realistically continue their balancing act, their wardship of

the Wahhabi orthodoxy on one hand and their jobs civil servants on the other. The best case scenario would be that the government and religious establishment become separate, autonomous institutions.

2. Policy Recommendations

Revolutions occur when there are fundamental ideological challenges to the status quo. However, good government policies can implement reforms that can take the metaphorical wind out of an opposition's sails. In order to preserve the status quo in Saudi Arabia, where the moral and spiritual spheres are the exclusive dominion of the Wahhabi *ulama*, and the government has absolute political authority, certain policy changes could go a long way.

Firstly, however improbably it is may, there must be an end to public funding of religious institutions, whether they be religious schools or the seemingly infinite number of mosques throughout the country. By privatizing the funding for religious institutions, the *ulama* and *imam*s would no longer answer directly to the government, because they would no longer be employees of the state.

Likewise, the government must stop sanctioning *fatwas* from the *ulama* in order to sway public opinion in favor of unpopular government policies. In a post-globalization, post-Internet future, dissent and public opinion will not be as easily contained. An end to sanctioned *fatwas* will also serve to improve the reputation of the Wahhabi *ulama*, which alone would have significant

outcomes. As previously discussed in this thesis, the Islamist opposition movements that have posed real threats to the Saudi-Wahhabi Alliance as it stands today, were motivated by what they felt was the corruption of the Wahhabi *ulama*. Which one could argue is inevitable without a secular government. However, while the word 'secular' itself remains such a dirty word in Saudi Arabia, the very idea of a secular Saudi government yearns for the status of pipe dream.

Lastly, public and business spaces need to desegregated. The argument can be made that if in the holiest place in Islam, in the Prophet's Mosque, there is no segregation between men and women, therefore why should there be anywhere else? Desegregating of public spaces, but especially in the business sector, will go a long way in eliminate roadblocks to economic development. While current attitudes towards mixed-gender working environments, particularly for Saudi women, will likely endure, the shift from de-jure segregation to de-facto segregation will nonetheless have significant effects on economic development in Saudi Arabia.

3. Conclusions

This thesis examined the relationship between the Saudi *ulama* and the government, first by looking at the role the *ulama* played historically in the governance of the Saudi emirates. By chronicling how their role has changed over the course of the last three centuries since the establishment of the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance and the subsequent establishment of the first Saudi

state in the late eighteenth century. It has done so using the theoretical frameworks of sociology of power (Izquierdo, 2012), as well as the social construction of orthodoxy (El Shamsy, 2008). The main hypothesis was that the government is autonomous from the *ulama*, but the *ulama* are not able to do the same and are therefore dependent on the government. Primary elites are able to compete effectively with each other in order to best accumulate the greatest amount of resources, meanwhile secondary elites are dependent on their relationship with primary elites in order to access those resources. Though the alliance between Al Saud and Ibn AbdulWahhab is considered to be an alliance between primary elites, the argument could be made that this is no longer the case. According to Izquierdo and Lampridi-Kemou, the three main strategies primary elites in rentier states use to secure their power are the "distribution of income obtained through appropriated resources, cooptation of secondary elites, and repression" (Izquierdo, 2012, 26). Each of these is clearly employed by the House of Saud. Meanwhile, secondary elites occupy a subordinate position in the hierarchy of power. Even when a group has an important power resource at their disposal, like the *ulama* in Saudi Arabia, who provide legitimacy to the Al Saud, they are in a position of dependency and therefore function as secondary elites. Because primary elites, in this case the Al Saud, will establish their relationships with secondary elites, the *ulama*, in an attempt to prevent the latter from gaining

access to the main power resource, which in this case would be breaking the monopoly of control the rulers has over the power-accumulation process.

The focus of Chapter 2 was to contextualize the significance of Wahhabism to the Saudi state, in order to better understand the role of the *ulama* in the governance of Saudi Arabia. By examining the significance of the Wahhabi doctrine as the ideological foundation of the three Saudi emirates, specifically how the Wahhabi doctrine has become a cornerstone in the development of state-society relations. The Wahhabi orthodoxy has, since the establishment of the third Saudi state specifically, become a fundamental component in the Saudi national identity. As a result, in times of crisis the role of the *ulama* as a source of legitimacy for the regime has served to bolster their position in the governance of the Saudi state.

Chapter 3 chronicles the construction and consolidation of the Saudi-Wahhabi doctrine of governance after the establishment of the third Saudi state. The relationship between the *ulama* and the government during the first and second Saudi states remained constant, one of power-sharing between two primary elites. The *Wahhabiyya* played a crucial role in countering ideological threats to the legitimacy of the Saudi regime, but the consolidation of state power by AbdulAziz Ibn Saud in the third Saudi emirate, but then due to the rentier nature of the state after the discovery of oil, the government was able to exclusively consolidate economic resources, and as a result become autonomous from the *ulama*.

In chapter 4 the emergence of various domestic opposition movements to the government are surveyed, particularly Islamist threats to the status quo. It detailed how the subordinate role of the *ulama* has led to the development of Islamists' disenchantment with Wahhabi religious establishment, and by extension, the government. This disenchantment of the Islamists with the Wahhabi *ulama* functioned as a catalyst for the resurgence of Islamist opposition movements over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mainly, it focused on how the actions of the *ulama* in support of the government's policies led to the emergence of a new generation of Islamists, and how the government's policies evidenced the dependency of the *ulama* whose most important function would seem to have become the legitimization of controversial policies in service of their benefactors.

Overall, the conclusion of this research is that in the century since the unification of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by AbdulAziz ibn Saud, the political elites, namely the government, have systematically co-opted the *ulama*, and effectively rendered them government bureaucrats that are dependent on the government for their power, employment, and consequently their influence and wealth.

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