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## ABSTRACT

This study is about the management of ‘truth’ in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It aims to investigate the ways in which the official ‘truth’ is constructed and institutionalised in the country. It attempts to critically analyse some of the ways in which the official ‘truth’ is tailored to rationalise the prevailing model of the distribution of power in Saudi Arabia.

This study argues that truth is not born in a power vacuum and often its construction and institutionalisation signify domination in one way or another. Hence, what the management of truth means is, in principle, the management of power, and the quest for truth is the quest for power.

The main focus of this study is Wahhabism, which functions as the official ‘truth’ of the state in Saudi Arabia. Wahhabism, which is the product of an eighteenth century revivalist movement, is portrayed as the most ‘authentic’ reading of Islam, which provides the *raison d'être* for the prevailing political mechanism in the country. This thesis puts forward an argument that there are two interrelated notions which articulate the ways in which ‘truth’ is conceptualised in Islam. One, at macro level, constitutes the trans-historical foundational principles of the religion, a set of engrained beliefs, which establish the ‘finality’, and ‘oneness’ of Islam in relation to other competing narratives, and the other at the micro level takes place internally to find ‘truth’ within the ‘truth’. Unlike Islamic truth at the macro level, which is entrenched, the Islamic truth at the micro level refers to the various attempts by different agencies to claim to have found the ‘truth’ within the ‘truth’. Wahhabism is introduced as an example of truth management at the micro level. This study underlines four factors of narrative construction, leadership, socialisation and violence, which are instrumental in the management of truth in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.



**THE POLITICS OF TRUTH  
MANAGEMENT: THE CASE OF  
WAHHABISM IN SAUDI  
ARABIA**

**Afshin Shahi**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Durham University

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the material in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree in this or any other university. I further declare that this thesis is solely based on my own research.

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Afshin Shahi



## **STATEMENT OF COPYRIGHT**

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## **DEDICATION**

For Lesley

### **Note on Transliteration**

Throughout this thesis I have used a simplified transliteration scheme that roughly follows the logic of the Library of Congress system, except principally for the diacritics. I have generally not designated the *‘ayn* or *hamza*, however, except when they are frequently used in non-Arabic sources: *ulama* (not *‘ulama*) or Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud (not *‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Sa‘ud*), but Qur’an, Ka‘ba, *shari‘a* or Ha’il. The spellings of individual and place names that are commonly used in English are adopted here – e.g., Mecca, Jeddah, Hejaz, Ibn Saud.

## **I n t r o d u c t i o n**

This study is about the management of ‘truth’ in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It aims to explore the ways in which the official ‘truth’ is tailored, sustained and promulgated in the country. It attempts to critically analyse some of the ways in which the official ‘truth’ is constructed to rationalise the prevailing model of the distribution of power in Saudi Arabia.

Indeed, ‘truth’ as a notion signifies winning and losing at the same time. It concurrently refers to superiority of a thesis and inferiority of its antithesis. It signifies the triumph of the prevailing perspectives at the expense of the overpowered ones. Truth monopolises the highest rank in the hierarchy of perspectives. Within the realm of ideas, truth is the anointed king of perspectives and it rules and dominates like a king. Indeed, once a perspective is crowned as the truth, it becomes the instrument for measuring other competing narratives and perspectives. Hence truth, more than anything, signifies power and the relations of power.

For Foucault truth is not outside power. As he puts it, ‘It is not the reward of free spirits, the child of prolonged solitudes, or the privilege of those who have been able to liberate themselves, truth is of the world, it is produced there by virtue of multiple constraints and it includes there the regulated effect of power’.<sup>1</sup> For Foucault, ‘truth’ is linked in a circular relation with the systems of power, which produce and sustain it and to the effects of power, which it induces and which extend it. As he notes: ‘Truth is not a form of power innocent of coercion, discipline and normalisation, it is not knowledge without deception’.<sup>2</sup> In this light, truth is not born in a power vacuum and often its construction and normalisation signify domination in one way or another. Hence, what the management of truth means is, in principle, the management of power, and the quest for truth is the quest for power. Although the notion of power can be conceptualised in many ways, the transitional nature of power has created many moments in history when the management of truth has shifted from one power complex to another.

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power, Truth and Strategy*, ed by Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton (Sydney: Feral Publications 1979), 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

This study aims to explore the ways in which the Wahhabi narratives, which emerged in the eighteenth century, were translated into the official ‘truth’ in the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.<sup>3</sup> The ruling mechanism in Saudi Arabia claims to be the ‘authentic’ implementer of the ‘purest’ Islamic narrative. It believes that it has rediscovered the ‘truth’ after centuries of false interpretations, which were worldly innovation promulgated by deviant Muslims. According to Wahhabi doctrine, there has been a discrepancy between the truth and the practices of the vast majority of Muslims.<sup>4</sup>

Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab, the founder of the creed was born in 1702 or 1703 in the town of al-Uyayna in the area of Najd, a rocky plateau in the hinterland of the Arabian Peninsula. Despite his humble background, Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab went on to become one of the most influential scholars of his time whose ideas and perspectives are being enforced by state machinery in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia until the present day. What he suggested in the eighteenth century is still embraced by millions of people within and without the Arabian Peninsula. Even in his lifetime, he was a very divisive character. He was either loved or hated. His followers regarded him as the ‘saviour’ of the religion, who ‘cleansed’ Islam from *bid’ah* (innovations) and returned to religious practices of the *salaf as-salih* (pious predecessors). For them, he reincarnated the ‘truth’ as it was expounded to the Prophet and his following three generations. For his enemies, however, he was a dogmatic literalist whose perspectives cultivated nothing but division and ‘hatred’ in the Muslim world.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, Wahhabism does not recognise any dialogue between the religion and the social, cultural and intellectual structures of the societies, which have accommodated Islam. There should be no reflection of the cultural particularities of an eclectic Muslim society on the

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<sup>3</sup> The term Wahhabism was originally used derogatorily by its opponents. People who adhere to its principles would not usually refer to themselves as ‘Wahhabi’. The term of *Muwahidin* is more commonly used for the followers of this school of thought. This study only uses the term of wahhabism, because it is most commonly used and recognised in the western world.

<sup>4</sup> Al Ymani al Fakhrani, *al Nezateh al-Tajfiriyyeh fi fikr al-Wahabyeh* (Cairo: Maktabeh Mdbouli, 2012),19.

<sup>5</sup> The divisive nature of his ideas has hugely affected his biographies. It is extremely difficult to find objective sources, which can depict him as a person or a religious leader. Of course, there never can be an absolute ‘objectivity’ for any form of historiography. Often, ideological and religious perspectives of historians influence the way they choose to shed light on the past. Indeed, there is no such as thing as ‘objective’ history as our account of the past equally signifies the socio-political particularities of the present and this study does not pretend to be free from the obstacles that most historical narratives face. Although ideally, the aim should always be objectivity, it is impossible to escape from the gravity of the present in order to view the past from a neutral ground.

religion; otherwise worldly ‘innovation’ would replace the ‘truth’. Indeed, the notion of *takfir* is a familiar tool, repeatedly used in classic Wahhabi literature to declare various Muslim groups as ‘non-believers’.<sup>6</sup> Any ‘inauthentic’ correspondence between culture and religion is portrayed as ‘moral corruption’, and therefore Wahhabism pays an extraordinary amount of attention to the ways in which believers express their faith. For the Wahhabi doctrine, the methods of expression are as important as the ways in which the believer has internalised the faith.

Wahhabi tenets, which include a mission for ‘authentication’ of Islam, constitute the basis of the ideological structures of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Hence the Saudi regime finds its *raison d'être* in restoring the ‘truth’. The Saudi state takes various measures to enforce its official regime of truth, hence it cannot be indifferent towards the agencies and structures, which shape the collective consciousness in society. What is meant by official truth here is a combination of certain official narratives, tenets, dogmas, principles, symbols and institutions, which seek to articulate the ways in which society should function. As well as providing a normative yardstick for the ways in which society should be organised, it offers a guideline for the division of power and the ways in which power should be distributed to maximise the chances of reaching the desired ‘ideals’.

Accordingly official truth provides the *raison d'être* for the monopolisation of power for the prevailing social groups who claim to be best placed for reaching the ‘ideals’. Wahhabism constitutes the ideology of the state in Saudi Arabia. It provides the blueprint for the division of power and provides comprehensive moral, ritual and cultural guidelines for the ways in which that society should operate.

### **Focus of the Thesis**

This study attempts to explore the mechanisms, which were adapted to canonise Wahhabism as the indisputable ‘truth’ in the official discourse of the state. This study will focus on the capacity and the operations of those social, cultural, religious and political institutions, which

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<sup>6</sup> Takfir refers to the practice of one Muslim declaring another Muslim an ‘unbeliever’ See, Al Ymani al Fakhrani (2012). And Sami Qasim Amin al Maliji, al Wahhabiyyah (Cairo: Maktabeh Madbouli, 2008).

are adapted to affect the prevailing discourse in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Along with using transformative violent instruments to shape the society in accordance with the ideological mandate of the state, the regime uses creative measures to reshape the collective consciousness.

This study attempts to investigate the ways in which these transitions have been taking place in the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It will examine the creative and violent measures which have taken place to constitute Wahhabism not only as the state's *raison d'être* but also as the 'most authentic' frame of reference to arrange a system of human organisation generating distinctive cultural patterns and institutions.

In a similar way to many schools of thought, Wahhabism has not been a constant creed. Although there are some core beliefs, which define the creed, Wahhabism has been subject to factionalism as well. Although Wahhabism has been an instrumental legitimising narrative for the state of Saudi Arabia, some grassroots forces have been challenging the state, using the very same Wahhabi pretext in order to undermine the religious legitimacy of the state. In fact, some of the forces who have actively opposed the regime have criticised the state for the incomplete implementation of Wahhabi doctrine. Hence, this study recognises that Wahhabism is not a monolithic entity but that it is composed of various orientations. It also recognises that the conflation of Wahhabism and the Saudi state would be a simplification. Although Wahhabism has manifested itself in various ways, this study is primarily interested in looking at 'official Wahhabism', which is still used as the ideological foundation of the state in Saudi Arabia.

The modern Kingdom was officially established on 23 September 1932; from 1902 the House of Saud conquered and ruled much of the Arabian Peninsula. The modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded by Abd- al-Aziz Ibn Saud (Ibn Saud) who established the near absolutist political system which has remained intact until the present day.<sup>7</sup> Like his

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<sup>7</sup> Some scholars such as Steffen Hertog and Madawi Al-Rasheed have argued that the power is divided between various factions within the House of Saud. Hence the system should not be regarded as absolutist per se. Although one cannot deny the existing factionalism within the Saudi regime, there are no official structures for the division of power. In absence of a defined political structures to distribute power, the system floats between absolutism and de facto-absolutism. Indeed there are factional forces in the Saudi politics, but the division of power is decided in an arbitrary manner, this is one the main characteristics of absolutist regimes. There are on-going competition over power and resources within the regime, but the internal



ancestors, Ibn Saud had a religious mission to implement the purest Islamic state possible based on Wahhabism. The ties between the House of Saud and Wahhabism go back to the eighteenth century. In two separate periods of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, the House of Saud briefly conquered and ruled parts of the Arabian Peninsula. In both the emirate of Diriyah (1744–1818) and the emirate of Nejd (1818–1891) Wahhabism was the main frame of reference for articulation of both politics and religion.

Almost as soon as the first Saudi-Wahhabi emirate was established, Wahhabism came to the attention of the outside world. Wahhabism was radical and did not recognise the Islamic legitimacy of the Ottoman Empire, which was still the major power in the region. The Saudi-Wahhabi attempts at expansionism resulted in the collapse of the first emirate at the hands of Ottoman forces who could not tolerate Saudi-Wahhabi invasion of the holiest Islamic cities in Hejaz. The second Saudi-Wahhabi emirate did not last long either; it collapsed due to tribal rivalries within the peninsula. However, the third Saudi-Wahhabi attempt at establishing an autonomous religio-political unit was successful and it has continued until this day.

Since 1932, the modern Kingdom has always maintained its Wahhabi characteristics. The state regards itself as the Islamic state, which implements the will of God and the edicts of the Qur'an in their purest sense. Hence, almost every facet of political and social life is organised in a way to correspond with the state's ideology. Like many other states, which seek to gain legitimacy from ideology rather than a democratic mandate, the Saudi state has been heavily dependent upon socialising agencies to perpetuate the applicability of its ideology in everyday life. In other words, if the state's *raison d'être* depends upon an ideology, that ideology has to be continuously reproduced and implemented in order to prevent a crisis of legitimacy. Subjects constantly have to be reminded about the '*sui generis*', the 'authenticity' and the 'exceptionality' of the ideology and develop a sense of trust that the state is the best implementer of this 'authentic', 'unique' and 'empowering' ideology, which not only serves

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political rivalry alone cannot disqualify the Saudi regime to be an absolutist state. Despite the complex internal rivalry, the office of the King remains an indispensable source of power in Saudi Arabia. Having said that, the personality of the King matters significantly. For example, under the reign of King Khalid the nature of the regime was far from being absolutist. He was weak and effectively the state was run under the supervision of his brother Faisal. However, the shift of power changed the political dynamics again, under the rule of the King Faisal the Office of the King started to be the ultimate platform for the arbitration of power. See, Michael Herb, *All in the Family: Absolutism, Revolution, and Democracy in Middle Eastern Monarchies* (New York: State University of New York, 1999)

well in this world but also prepares the followers for the afterlife. For the modern Saudi state Wahhabism is an indispensable ideology, which rationalises the status quo in the country, so that it has to be reinforced on a daily basis through various instruments, including productive social mechanisms.

Although its terrain is a mostly uninhabited and sandy desert, the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an important country in many ways. It is the largest and most populated country within the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>8</sup> In terms of land area it is the largest country in West Asia and the second largest in the Arab world.<sup>9</sup> The modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia accommodates the region of Hejaz, which is the birthplace of Islam. Hence, the country is home to the holiest sites in the Islamic Umma (community of faith).

Sometimes it is represented as *ard al-Haramayn al-Sharifayn* (The Land of the Two Holy Mosques) in reference to al-Masjid al-Haram in Mecca, and al-Masjid al-Nabawi (Prophet's Mosque) in Medina. Every year, millions of Muslims from across the world fulfil their religious obligations by visiting the country in order to perform *hajj*. Every day hundreds of millions of Muslims turn towards Mecca to pray. It is indeed the religious heart of the Islamic world. Hence, regardless of the state's status the country has a unique religio-historical importance in the Islamic Umma. The guardianship of these holy sites has been a great source of religious capital for the ruling family, which claims to be the licit enforcer of the most 'uncontaminated', 'undiluted', 'unalloyed', 'flawless', 'irreproachable' and genuine' form of Islam.

However, the importance of Saudi Arabia goes far beyond its religious heritage. From the mid-twentieth century factors such as geopolitics, natural resources, instrumental ties with the United States and the ongoing assertion for regional leadership have made Saudi Arabia one of the most important countries in the Middle East.<sup>10</sup> The country possesses around

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<sup>8</sup> Border countries: Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, UAE and Yemen. It has also 2,640 km of coastline between the Persian Gulf and Red Sea.

<sup>9</sup> Comparatively Saudi Arabia is slightly more than one-fifth the size of the United States, totaling 2,149,690 sq. km.

<sup>10</sup> The Saudi state has been playing a leading role in many international organisations such as Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and the Gulf Cooperation Council and joined the World Trade Organisation in December 2005.

one-fifth of the world's proven oil reserves and ranks as the largest exporter of petroleum.<sup>11</sup> For decades Saudi Arabia has been seen as a middle power state in the international system with unavoidable regional influence. The ideological nature of the regime plus unprecedented new wealth generated from natural resources paved the way for conditions whereby the state could exercise power even beyond its own borders.

Indeed, the influence of Saudi Arabia has been felt not only in the region but also in the wider international context. Besides its political position and assertion of regional leadership, religious ideas coming from Saudi Arabia carry great influence in different corners of the world. Thanks to the unprecedented wealth generated from petroleum, Wahhabism is penetrating various Islamic communities from central Asia to Western Europe and from North Africa to North America. Thus, the set of pre-modern ideas that emerged in the eighteenth century, are adapting well in the age of globalisation, and Wahhabism remains a small but influential school of thought, which continues to influence the Muslim consciousness within and beyond the Arabian Peninsula.

In this light, the demand to study Saudi Arabia from different angles is not surprising. However, this study does not aim to provide yet another account of the country's history, nor is it intending to examine the country's position in the international system and its interstate relations. Rather, the central question of this study is: how has the Saudi state constructed and managed the prevailing regime of truth?

Although truth management is instrumental in maintaining the status quo, it is not the only factor which guarantees the continuity of the regime. Of course, factors such as rentier economy have been vital for the survival of the regime since the discovery of oil. Indeed, providing the social classes with generous resources has constituted an indispensable legitimacy for a state, which invests heavily in the country's infrastructure and expects minimal taxation in return. There is already a wide literature available on the ways in which the rentier state works in Saudi Arabia. Although from time to time inevitably there will be references to political economy and its implications, this study will focus primarily on the ideological mechanisms of the state.

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<sup>11</sup> The oil sector in Saudi Arabia accounts for about 80% of budget revenues, 45% of GDP, and 90% of export earnings.

## **Methodology and Structure**

This study adopts a qualitative approach in order to investigate the research topic. It will rely upon both previous research studies, and data gathering from primary sources such as press releases, policy statements, governmental data and reports from various non-governmental organisations focusing on relevant issues in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Materials have been collected both from English and Arabic sources.

This study attempts primarily to constitute a framework to analyse the ways in which the official truth is constructed, sustained and enforced in the country from its establishment in 1932 until the present time. Given the nature of the enquiry, it would be difficult to cover a more specific period within the life of the modern state of Saudi Arabia, because most of the state's policies targeting the official ideology have been long term and interconnected. Given the fact that this study attempts to cover an extensive period, it is impossible to pay equal attention to every historical zone from 1932 until the present time. Thus, our focus has to be targeted and the attention has to be given only to those issues and developments, which relate the most to the core of this study.

This enquiry is undertaken within five interrelated chapters, each of which will address a theme. In the first chapter there will be an attempt to provide a conceptual framework for the entire study. Accordingly, this chapter draws on various theories to build a conceptual framework to explain the management of truth in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Social constructionism informs the theoretical perspectives of this study. Social constructionism is a useful tool, which determines the historicity of knowledge and helps us to analyse the ways in which knowledge is conditioned by the prevailing forces of the time. This approach that knowledge is rooted in specific historical and social context immensely helps us to understand the ways in which we conceptualise truth management in this study.

Truth and truth management are overarching notions in this study. Hence there will be an attempt to theorise both truth and truth management in this chapter. However, we cannot sufficiently conceptualise the politics of truth management in Saudi Arabia unless we pay

adequate attention to the context in which truth management takes place. Since the Wahhabi frame of reference is Islam, it is essential to determine the ways in which the notion of truth is conceptualised in Islam. Through this 'top-down' approach, we start from the general Islamic narratives of truth, which in their turn have shaped Wahhabism's particular conceptualisation of truth. Hence, through this deductive approach we will move from the more general to a more specific account of 'truth'. To this effect this study introduces two interrelated notions to articulate the ways in which 'truth' is conceptualised in Islam. One, at the macro level, constitutes the unchanging foundational tenets of the religion, a set of entrenched principles, which establish the finality, and oneness of Islam in relation to other competing narratives, and the other at micro level takes place internally to find 'truth' within the 'truth'.

As will be discussed, there are certain tenets which have remained constant and have constituted the precondition of what it is to be Islamic. Regardless of the conflicting interpretations and implementations, all Islamic schools of thought and *madhhabs* (legal schools) share these foundational elements, which compose the macro 'truth' of Islam. Understanding Islamic truth at the macro level is a prerequisite for addressing Islamic truth at the micro level. Unlike Islamic truth at the macro level, which has been entrenched, Islamic truth at the micro level has been ductile, pliable and eclectic. Unlike Islamic truth at the macro level, which can be defined in a trans-historical manner, Islamic truth at the micro level refers to the various attempts by different agencies throughout Islamic history to claim to have found the 'truth' within the 'truth'. However, the historical struggle to find the 'true' path to the 'truth' has created and sustained various strategies of interpretation, which have influenced Islamic consciousness and undermined attempts at Muslim unity throughout different ages. These various interpretations have paved the way for the creation of various religious entities with wide and influential constituencies across the Islamic world. Indeed, when one is referring to the intellectual, theological, philosophical, jurisprudential and ritualistic eclecticism of Islam[s] this statement is being contextualised within the framework of Islamic truth at the micro level.

This study is primarily interested in Islamic truth management at the micro level, as Wahhabism and its on-going mandate is a manifestation of a truth finding mission within the truth. In order to constitute a sufficient theoretical basis for Islamic truth management

at the micro level the first chapter will identify and conceptualise the factors that pave the way for the successful assertion of truth within the truth; leadership, narrative construction, socialisation and violence. Subsequent chapters will elaborate on these factors.

The second chapter, will elaborate on the Wahhabi construction of narrative and articulate important dimensions of its perspectives. In addition, there will be a discussion of the role of the House of Saud and how it offers effective leadership in promoting Wahhabism as the official ‘truth’. However, we cannot address the two notions of narrative construction and leadership without the historical context. Indeed, we cannot ignore those dominating structures that were, in place when Wahhabi agency was in formation.

The following two chapters (third and fourth) will focus on socialisation, which is one of the significant four factors mentioned above. Since socialising and associational agencies are preconditions for effective socialisation, the third chapter attempts to examine the process of institution building in Saudi Arabia after 1932. This chapter aims to examine the formation of some specific organisations and ministries, which have helped the House of Saud to recondition national religious consciousness in accordance with its official regime of ‘truth’. For example, Dar al-Ifta, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and the Ministry of Hajj will be examined, and their role in establishing Wahhabism as the unquestionable ‘truth’ will be analysed. Furthermore, there will be an attempt to analyse the role of religious practitioners within these state institutions.

The fourth chapter aims to examine the process of socialisation of the Wahhabi regime of truth and its challenges, through pedagogic action and the educational mechanisms, which were constructed after the formation of the Saudi nation-state. Before the establishment of the modern kingdom, the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance was prone to continuous conflict and friction. Accordingly, the pedagogic basis of Wahhabism was influenced by conflict and ideological confrontation. The polemical nature of Wahhabi education in these periods of conflict reached on into the modern era. Within the modern nation state system, education started to be more systematic with a defined scope and clear objectives, and then the discovery of natural resources, which shifted the political economy, resulted in the further institutionalisation and bureaucratisation of education. Further institutionalisation

meant further vertical control, which enabled the state to use the educational system to embed its regime of truth in the country.

In this light, a more complex educational infrastructure emerged in order to accommodate the ideological demands of the new polity. From the early stages of building the educational infrastructure, the religious practitioners close to the fledgling establishment played an active role in creating vertical national subjectivities according to the religio-political mandate of the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance. Thus, education was used as a powerful instrument of social control to standardise the collective consciousness according to the Saudi-Wahhabi narratives. The Saudi education system is a wide and complex mechanism, which cannot be scrutinised in its entirety. In this light, there will be a particular emphasis on subjects such as religious studies and history due to their potential for ideological manipulation by the state.

Chapter five will deal with violence as another of the main four ingredients of truth management in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This chapter will address the violent mechanisms of social control and scrutinise the capacity of violence to enforce the state's regime of truth. Although the state has heavily invested in creative measures to standardise the collective consciousness in accordance with its official discourse, violence remains an essential instrument in preserving the official status of truth. Indeed, the state has continuously relied upon violent mechanisms of social control to enforce its ideological mandate to foster a utopian model of social and moral standards and of governance which, it asserts, is morally superior and final.

As will be discussed, violence does not only refer to the limited definition of physical harm and death. It is multifaceted and it can be defined in various ways. Indeed, there are many forms of ideological violence, which include religious hatred, racism, homophobia and sexism. These may not necessarily result in bodily harm, but they can psychologically damage the victims. This study will pay attention to various forms of violence such as structural and economic violence and examine their role in the politics of truth management. It examines the wider implications of violence in the ways in which women and minorities are ideologically targeted. Some of the policies, which constitute structural violence, will be identified and their relationship with the official management of truth will be examined. It

will also examine how notions of governance endear the King with a unique hybrid authority to employ violence in enforcing his state's policies and will examine violent instruments of social control such as the *mutawwi'in* (religious police). They are portrayed as the 'guardians of morality', controlling and rigidly monitoring public as well as private spheres to standardise collective behaviour in accordance with the recognised ideals.



# Chapter 1

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will examine the analytical framework by which Saudi management of the ‘truth’ is explained in this thesis. Social constructionism informs the theoretical framework of this study. Although social constructionism has been a controversial approach, it has been widely used in social sciences and humanities over the last few decades. Since social constructionism is highly multidimensional and multifaceted, we cannot proceed unless we rigidly define the basic tenets of this approach, which inform the formative perspectives of this study. This chapter does not necessarily aim to add new perspectives to the already established theories of Social Constructionism, but it will attempt to articulate those relevant aspects which correspond to the theoretical themes of this study.

‘Truth’ and truth management are overarching notions in this research. Therefore, following the discussion on Social Constructionism, the notion of truth management and its relationship to power will be defined. This will set the stage for elucidating the notions of Islamic truth at the macro and the micro levels. Indeed, there are two interconnected dynamics, shaping and portraying the notion of truth in Islam. The one at the micro level constitutes the unchanging foundational tenets of the religion, a set of entrenched principles which establish the ‘finality’ and ‘oneness’ of Islam in relation to the other competing narratives and the other one at the micro level takes place internally to find ‘truth’ within the ‘truth’.

As will be discussed, there are certain tenets which have remained static and have constituted the precondition of what it is to be ‘Islamic’. Regardless of conflicting interpretations and implementations, all Islamic schools of thought share the same foundational elements, which make up the macro ‘truth’ of Islam. In this light, understanding Islamic truth at the macro level is a prerequisite for addressing Islamic truth at the micro level. Unlike Islamic truth at the macro level, which has been entrenched, Islamic truth at the micro level has been malleable and eclectic. Unlike Islamic truth at the macro level, which can be rigidly defined in a trans-historical manner, Islamic truth at the

micro level refers to the various attempts by various agencies throughout Islamic history to find the 'truth' within the 'truth'. The historical struggle to find the 'true' path to the 'truth' has created and sustained various strategies of interpretation, which have influenced Islamic consciousness and undermined attempts for Muslim unity throughout different ages. In this light, when one is referring to the intellectual, theological, philosophical, jurisprudential and ritualistic eclecticism of Islam[s], this statement is being contextualised within the framework of Islamic truth at the micro level.

This chapter aims to identify and conceptualise these factors that pave the way for the assertion of truth within the 'truth'. In this light, this chapter will suggest that 'truth' management at the micro level depends upon four interrelated factors; these include leadership, narrative construction, socialisation and violence. These factors are necessary for the registration of the account of 'truth' that attempts to represent the religious notions, which provide a theoretical context for the politics of 'truth' management in Saudi Arabia.

### **Social Constructionism**

Social constructionism has been the most controversial if not the most influential theoretical development in the past few decades.<sup>1</sup>As Holstein and Miller note, from its dawn, the social constructionist approach has been controversial since it breaks with the conventional and 'commonsensical' conceptions of social problems by analysing them as a social process of definition.<sup>2</sup>

Social construction is an umbrella approach, which is multidimensional and multifaceted. Accordingly, one cannot provide a sharp and concise definition, which would correspond with all aspects of social constructionism.<sup>3</sup>However, it is possible to assert that the most important element of social constructionism is the rejection of ontological reality and any form of knowledge, which claims to exist independently of our consciousness. Hence, most theoretical perspectives that are informed by the social construction epistemology reject the

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<sup>1</sup> Holstein, J.A and Miller, G Reconsidering Social Constructionism: Debates in Social Problems Theory (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1993), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>3</sup> The social constructionist approach can be applied to the various academic disciplines including, area studies, history, sociology, anthropology, philosophy and more recently international relations.

notion of objective knowledge on the grounds that one must already have a predefined model of 'truth' in mind in order to measure it, scrutinise it, circulate it and distinguish it from other competing perspectives.

Therefore, social constructionism has a critical stance towards any type of knowledge that is taken for granted. Indeed, there are various categories of knowledge, which inform our values, concepts and definitions. These categories of knowledge shape the way we evaluate the world and can constitute filters for the way we internalise and objectify our social environment. John Wild referred to this as 'imprisonment in a world of our own construction'<sup>4</sup>. Thus, social constructionism attempts to analyse the ways in which knowledge is constructed and institutionalised in social environments.

As Crotty puts it:

The sense we make of things [tends] to be the way things are. We blithely do that and, just as blithely, hand on our understanding as quite simply 'the truth. Understanding transmitted in this way and gaining a place in our view of the world takes deep root and we find our self-victims of the 'tyranny of the familiar'. Inherited and prevailing understanding becomes nothing less than, in William Blake's time honoured phrase, 'mind-forg'd manacles.'<sup>5</sup>

With that in mind social constructionism seeks ways to overthrow this tyranny of the familiar and analytically challenge the limitations it creates. Social constructionism invites us to be apprehensive about how the world appears to be. Hence, the prime concern of social constructionism is to critically investigate the nature of what is perceived as 'truth'. As put forward by Nowell-Smith, 'Social constructions must be seen in an institutional context, as arising from the institutionalisation of patterns of interaction and meaning in society leading to a construction of social institutions and institutionalised perspectives and understandings.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John Wild, *The Challenge of Existentialism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 191.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Crotty, *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and perspective in the research process* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 59.

<sup>6</sup> Nowell-Smith P.H, "The Constructionist Theory of History", *Journal of History and Theory*, Vol. 16, No. 4, Beiheft 16: *The Constitution of the Historical Past*, (1977), 1-28.

With this in mind, social constructionism contests the formation of powerful and highly sedimented social institutions such as religion, which have been successful in creating and sustaining collective values and definitions. Social constructionism contests what is perceived as the ‘essential’ character of other social categorisations such as race, gender and class. Indeed, social constructionism investigates the way in which these categories have been institutionalised and portrayed as brute facts. As Berger and Luckmann state, within such enquiries ‘the philosopher is obliged to take nothing for granted and to obtain maximum clarity as to the ultimate status of what the man in street believes to be reality and knowledge.’<sup>7</sup>

Of course this line of analysis only applies to social phenomena. In other words social constructionism does not claim that literally nothing can exist independently of our consciousness. As Greenwood puts it:

Physical and social phenomena... differ in one essential respect. Chairs may exist independently of our knowing that they do; our knowledge of the existence of chairs is not constitutive of their existence. In contrast, social phenomena do not exist independently of our knowledge of them... social realities therefore, are constructed and sustained by the observation of the social rules which obtain in any social situation by all the social interactors involved... social reality is a function of shared meanings; it is constructed, sustained and reproduced through social life.<sup>8</sup>

Social constructionism encourages us to be wary of historical and cultural specificity since the categories, concepts and definitions we utilise are culturally specific and accordingly our perception changes historically. In *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* Foucault soundly demonstrates the case for the historicity of knowledge.<sup>9</sup> Of course, Foucault never categorically claimed to be a social constructionist. Nonetheless, his analysis was in line with the social constructionist approach of critically questioning the roots of what is perceived as ‘reality’. In particular, in relation to the

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<sup>7</sup> Berger Peter and Luckmann Thomas, *The Social Construction of Reality* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 14.

<sup>8</sup> J. Greenwood, “Action Research and Action Researchers: Some introductory considerations”, *Journal Contemporary Nurse* vol. 3, n, (1994), 85.

<sup>9</sup> Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, (New York: Vintage, 1988).

historicity of knowledge he clearly describes the process by which the same phenomenon (madness) has been perceived and treated differently in various periods of history. He portrays the rapid transition of knowledge, which, in the course of four centuries transformed madness from 'evil' unworthy of sympathy to a 'mental illness' worthy of utmost medical care and attention.

This ties in to an important element of social constructionism that knowledge is socially determined and it is only sustained by social process. Hence, it is the product of the world and it is to be constructed not to be discovered. In this light, social constructionism is inherently anti-realistic, since it rejects the idea that our knowledge is a direct perception of reality. Every narrative is culturally specific, rooted in a specific historical context.

The terminology of social constructionism mainly derives from the work of Karl Mannheim (1893-1947) and Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967), but of course, its history goes far beyond the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>10</sup> In their comprehensive and highly influential study, Berger and Luckmann discuss the process of sedimentation in social constructionism. This notion can help to explain the historical crystallisation of meanings in a social environment. As they describe it:

Only a small part of the totality of human experiences is retained in consciousness. The experiences that are so retained become sedimented, that is, they congeal in recollection as recognisable and memorable entities. Unless such sedimentation takes place, the individual cannot make sense of his biography. Intersubjective sedimentation also takes place when several individuals share a common biography, experiences of which become incorporated in a common stock of knowledge. Intersubjective sedimentation can be called truly social only when it has been objectivated in a sign system of one kind or another, that is, when the possibility of reiterated objectification

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<sup>10</sup> Although it is difficult to determine its origin, we could trace it back perhaps as far as Heraclitus and a Pre-Socratic philosopher Protagoras who shocked his generation by rejecting the objectified certainty of gods. He highlighted human subjectivity conditioned by the way we understand or even construct our world, and he famously stated, 'Man is the measure of all things'. This line of analysis has formed the edifice of social construction epistemology, which actually started to be seriously embraced from the 19th century.

of the shared experiences arises. Only then is it likely that these experiences will be transmitted from one generation to the next, and from one collectivity to another.<sup>11</sup>

Berger and Luckmann argue that all human activity is subject to habitualisation. Any action that is repeated recurrently forms a pattern, which can then be replicated with an economy of effort and which ipso facto, is apprehended by its performer as that pattern.<sup>12</sup> Hence, habitualisation implies that the action in question may be reproduced again and again in the future in the same way and with the same economic effort. They also emphasise that the formation of a pattern and its reoccurrence is not limited to collectives; even in a solitary state an individual is capable of habitualising his or her activity. They argue that habitualisation carries an important psychological benefit, which effectively minimises choices, while in theory there may be many other ways of doing the same thing; habitualisation reduces all decisions to one. This emancipates the individual from the burden of all that decision-making and offers the psychological relief that has its basis in man's undirected instinctual structure.<sup>13</sup> Hence, in terms of meanings created and presented by people for their activities, habitualisation makes re-definition of each situation unnecessary. Therefore a large range of situations maybe understood and subsumed under the pre-definition of habitualisation.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to this, Berger and Luckmann argue that the typifications of habitualised actions, which constitute institutions, are always collective. That means they are obtainable by all constituents of a particular social group and the institution itself typifies individual actors as well as individual actions. For example, the institution posits that actions of type A will be performed by the actors of type A and that actions of type B will be performed by actors of type B and so on. Such institutions entail historicity and control since the reciprocal typifications of action are constructed in the course of a collective history, they cannot be created instantaneously. Institutions always have a history, of which they are products.<sup>15</sup>

For this reason it is difficult to understand an institution sufficiently, without understanding the historical procedure which has conditioned its production. Institutions, by definition,

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<sup>11</sup> Berger and Luckmann (1991), 85.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.71.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.72.

control human behaviour by setting up predefined patterns of action. They create a framework in which there is only one 'natural' direction to follow, while theoretically and practically many other directions could be feasible. Hence, institutionalisation in this sense means the codification of collective conduct. In other words it means measures have been taken to crown one prevailing perspective over competing ones.

As Berger and Luckmann put it 'To say that a segment of human activity is institutionalised is already to say that this segment of human activity has been subsumed under social control'.<sup>16</sup> The products of these institutions can become so solidified that they confront the individual as external and coercive forces. Hence, the set of facts and values that have been objectified become sedimented to the point that it establishes itself as a reality 'external' from human consciousness. As Nietzsche would put it, the common 'lies' get repeated to the point where they eventually become static, frozen and true. Berger and Luckmann add that this objectivity of the institutional world thickens and solidifies not only for the children who are born into these institutions, but by a mirror effect for their parents as well. For children, particularly in the early phase of their socialisation, it becomes the world which they get exposed to, a 'world' which conditions them to behave, perceive and evaluate social phenomena in a certain way.<sup>17</sup>

Last but not least, it is important to highlight the social dimension of social construction theory. This brings us to the significant point that there must be differentiation between social constructionism and constructivism, which are often interchangeably used in literature. Although there are considerable similarities, they differ. Briefly, what makes constructivism different is the lack of social dimension at its core. Constructivism is primarily an individualistic understanding of the constructionist position. In contrast to the assertion of constructivism, Social construction theory does not concentrate on the social activity of the individual mind, but on the collective knowledge shaped and conditioned by the conventions of language and other social processes.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.73.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.77.

<sup>18</sup> T.A Schwandt, Counstructionist Interpretivist Approaches to Human Inquiry, Handbook of Qualitative Research , eds N.K Denzin &Y.S Lincoln ( London: Sage 1994), 127.

## Truth Management

Struggles over ‘truth’ and truth finding missions have been trans-historical features of human society. The nature and properties of ‘truth’ have been debated since the dawn of philosophy, yet there has not been any consensus on what constitutes ‘truth’ and its characteristics. It is possible to assert that nothing has been as polarising as the debate over ‘truth’ throughout human history. At almost any passage of written human history, we can see social groups struggling over determining the nature of ‘truth’. Indeed, battles have been fought to establish whose ‘truth’ pertains. Within various social environments, various belief systems have emerged asserting the possession of truth and with it the right to determine ‘good’ from ‘evil’.

However, ‘truth’ does not become important because of the sedimentation of a certain narrative which Nietzsche calls ‘the lie’ according to the fixed convention. ‘Truth’ becomes important because it is connected to power. For this reason ‘truth’, alongside other sources of power, has been subject to ‘management’. For Foucault, ‘truth’ is linked in a circular relationship with the systems of power, which produces and sustains it, and to the effects of power, which it induces and which extend it. As he notes, ‘truth’ is not a form of power innocent of coercion, discipline and normalisation; it is not knowledge without deception.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, for Foucault ‘truth’ is not outside power. As he puts it:

It is not the reward of free spirits, the child of prolonged solitudes, or the privilege of those who have been able to liberate themselves, ‘truth’ is of the world, it is produced there by virtue of multiple constraints and it includes there the regulated effect of power.<sup>20</sup>

In this light:

Each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth, this is the type of discourse it harbours and causes to function as true; the mechanism and instances,

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<sup>19</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power, Truth and Strategy* ed by Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton (Sydney: Feral Publications, 1979), 46.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*



which enable one to distinguish true from false statements, the way in which each is sanctioned, the techniques and procedures which are valorised for obtaining 'truth'; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.<sup>21</sup>

Hence, the attempt for the management of 'truth' is the attempt for the management of power and the quest for 'truth' can be the quest for some form of domination.

As Foucault puts it:

Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power; this is just a way of reviving humanism in a utopian guise. It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, he states 'the exercise of power itself creates a condition for the emergence of new objects of knowledge and accumulates new bodies of information'.<sup>23</sup> As he notes that there are manifold relations of power that permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse.<sup>24</sup> His notion of discourse may help us to shed light on the importance of the social agencies which create and socialise a type of knowledge, which strengthens the prevailing order. His definition of discourse can also be helpful in clarifying the co-operation of power and knowledge. Discourse can be summarised as 'systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak.'<sup>25</sup> As he put it in his *Archaeology of Knowledge*, discourse is 'constituted by a group of sequences of signs, in so far as they are statements, that is, in so far as they can be assigned particular modalities of existence'<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*. Ed. C. Gordon, Trans. C. Gordon, L. Marshal, J. Mephram, and K. Sober (New York: Pantheon Books 1980)52.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 51.

<sup>24</sup> Michel Foucault, "The Truth" Michel Foucault Info <http://foucault.info/Foucault-L/archive/msg04814.shtml> (accessed, October 22, 2009).

<sup>25</sup> Iara Lessa, "Discursive struggles within social welfare: Restaging teen motherhood". *British Journal of Social Work* 36: 283–298.

<sup>26</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books 1970), 107.

Foucault contextualises the role of discourse in the wider social processes of legitimatisation and power, emphasising the construction of current ‘truths, how they are maintained and what power relations they carry with them.’<sup>27</sup> He argues that power and knowledge are inter-related and therefore every human relationship is a struggle and a negotiation of power. Hence, power is always present and can both produce and constrain the ‘truth’.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, a discourse provides structures and guidelines to interpret the world in a certain way. It sets prevailing strategies for the interpretation of social phenomena. For Foucault, within any social framework, knowledge and the established perspectives are tied to power. Prevailing perspectives pave the way for the emergence of certain practices, which marginalise and exclude alternative choices. Therefore, the empowerment of one set of ideas within a discourse can be understood as the marginalisation and exclusion of the competing perspectives.<sup>29</sup>

Hence, the power to gain influence and resources depends upon knowledge dominating in society. For Foucault, we can exercise power by adapting discourses, which empower our action. Thus, for him power should not be seen as a form of possession, but as an effect of discourse since it helps us to construe the world in a way that allows us to attain what we seek. When we define or represent something in a specific way we are basically exercising power, we are producing a particular knowledge that constitutes power. Thus, knowledge is a power over others, a power to define others.<sup>30</sup>

Foucault does not recognise power as coercion and compulsion per se; he claims that repression is used, when there is a lack of power.<sup>31</sup> In fact, force is used when the limits of power have been reached. As he puts it, ‘What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things’.<sup>32</sup> Power is most effective when it produces knowledge.

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<sup>27</sup> Iara Lessa.

<sup>28</sup> S. Strega, The view from the post-structural margins: Epistemology and methodology reconsidered. In L. Brown, & S. Strega (Eds.), *Research as Resistance* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2005) 199-235.

<sup>29</sup> Burr Vivien, *An Introduction to Social Constructionism* (London: Routledge, 1995), 64.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 139.

Hence, discourse can effectively control society, by means of social engineering without much force or any disciplinary measures.

Although Foucault's input regarding social discourse and productive power is extremely helpful, it does not help us to fully understand the explicit role of violence in societies in which the ruling orders have an Islamic mandate. Although social engineering plays a fundamental role in creating consent in a society like Saudi Arabia, violent mechanisms of social control maintain their explicit positions, they act as bodyguards defending the prevailing regime of 'truth'. In other words, the ruling mechanism in Saudi Arabia is not merely attempting to 'effect the discourse' through social engineering, but it is actively and explicitly combining 'positive' and 'negative' power to impose and sustain its official narrative.

In socio-political systems like Saudi Arabia affecting the prevailing discourse through productive powers is essential, but the transformative nature of violence remains instrumental in imposing the official narratives. In other words, while the system uses productive social agencies such as education and religion to control the social discourse, it reserves an explicit penal system to discipline non-conformers. Of course, violence, disciplinary measures and penal systems are ingrained in all hierarchical social systems and all systems have their own narrative of legitimisation for the use of force.

Although Saudi Arabia shares the same features, its narrative of legitimisation is connected to an unearthly authority. Since the unearthly authority is not perceived to be the product of a social contract, it cannot be disputed by 'earthly means'. These 'divine and unearthly', narratives legitimises the earthly mechanisms to violently confront any resistance. Hence, the use of 'holy' violence becomes a religious duty to preserve the 'truth'. The system creates a context beyond the disputation of earthly agents legitimising its use of violence. Although systems like Saudi Arabia claim such legitimacy for the monopoly of violence, there is no guarantee that every subject will subordinate to this model.

However, as Foucault points out 'Where there is power, there is resistance'. For this reason, even systems such as that in Saudi Arabia which claim to have a divine mandate to rule, resort to the amalgamation of both negative and positive power to minimise resistance to their

claim of power. Of course, there are opposing elements within these societies who state an equal claim to have a more ‘truthful’ reading of Islam. However, their opposition to a dominating order, which has access to violent mechanisms of social control, is a very difficult task.

Therefore, what is meant by ‘truth management’ in this context is not only creating consent through implicit instruments of thought, but also constructing a framework by which various violent mechanisms of social control can be legitimised through a set of ideas, which the dominating political order indicates are transcendental narratives and divinely inspired ‘truth’. Of course, this process of truth management cannot take place in a vacuum. As the case of Wahhabi Islam demonstrates, the management of truth at the micro level builds on already sedimented narratives. For the sake of clarity, I call these sedimented narratives Islamic truth at the macro level.

### **Islamic Truth at the Macro Level**

There are certain tenets of Islam which have remained intact from the advent of Islamic history. These tenets bring all the conflicting interpretations under a single umbrella, Islam. In other words, these principles constitute the prerequisite for what it is to be Islamic. Regardless of these interpretations and implementations, all Islamic schools of thought and *madhhabs* share these foundational elements that make up the fundamental truth of Islam, which is perceived to be absolute and final. Therefore, it is imperative to articulate these foundational elements, which constitute the basis of all Islamic interpretations including Wahhabism. Although Islamic truth at the micro level in the case of Wahhabi Islam is the main focus of this study, we cannot proceed unless we rigidly define what is meant by Islamic truth at the macro level.

Indeed we cannot understand these conflicting interpretations without contextualising the core foundation. Accordingly, it is necessary to define Islamic truth management at the macro level in order to pave the way for a deeper understanding of Islamic truth management at the micro level. Every reformist, correctionist and revivalist movement which emerged in Islamic history has had a mandate to reinforce the true reading of the ‘truth’. In this light, various

interpretations have emerged to offer ‘authentic’ narratives and to put believers in the only ‘true’ direction.<sup>33</sup> The nature of conflict between competing narratives has been partly based on authenticity. Thus, the emerging narratives and interpretations could not fundamentally transfigure Islam in a theoretical vacuum, as they had to contextualise their truth finding mission within a conceptual framework where the core values of Islam would be protected and reinforced. Every new interpretation or school of thought regardless of its theoretical and ritualistic content had to correspond to the following principles to be identified as Islamic.<sup>34</sup>

As in other prevailing Abrahamic religions, God is perceived to be the supreme source of ‘truth’, which is final and absolute. This ‘truth’ is portrayed as unchangeable which is repeatedly reflected in the Qur’an. For example, ‘and the Word of your Lord has been fulfilled in truth and in justice. None can change His Words. And He is the All-Hearer, the All-Knower<sup>35</sup>. Thus, Allah is seen as the cause of the causer, the first with no beginning, omniscient, everlasting, alive and totally independent, with no equal competitors or partners.

According to Muslims, the best way to understand His will is to refer to the revealed book of the Qur’an, which Muslims affirm to be the supreme ‘truth’ of God. One can argue that there are two overarching principles, which constitute Islamic ‘truth’ at the macro level and form the ultimate foundation for any belief system that claims to be under the banner of Islam. These two fundamental principles are none other than the finality of truth and the oneness of truth, which are indispensable features of Islamic truth at the macro level.

*Tawhid* is one of the defining concepts of the Islamic faith, which is uncompromising and indispensable. *Tawhid* advocates none other than the ‘oneness’ of Islamic ‘truth’. Simply,

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<sup>33</sup> Mohammed Arkoun was self-consciously aware of the constant search for authenticity in Islam. For example see, Mohammed Arkoun, *Al-Islam: Asala wa Mumarasa* (Beirut 1986) Mohammed Arkoun, *Mina-l-ijtihād ila naqd al-aql al-islami* (Dar al-Saqi 1991).

<sup>34</sup> The first is indeed testifying the ‘truth’, declaration of the *shahada* that ‘I bear witness that there is no deity but, Allah, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah’. The acceptance of this statement, constitute the pre-condition for the membership of the Islamic *umma*. Hence, Muslim is a person who has submitted to the ‘truth’ that there is no higher being than Allah, and Muhammad is the highest and final Messenger. In fact, the very term Islam etymologically can be translated as submission. To this effect Qur’an states that ‘And that those who have been given knowledge may know that it [this Qur’an] is the ‘truth’ from your Lord, so that they may believe therein, and their hearts may submit to it with humility. And verily, Allah is the Guide of those who believe, to the Straight Path. That is because Allah - He is the ‘truth’ (the only True God of all that exists, Who has no partners or rivals with Him), and what they (the polytheists) invoke besides Him, it is *batil* (falsehood). And verily, Allah - He is the Most High, the Most Great’ (22:62).

<sup>35</sup> Qur’an, 6:115.

‘there is no God but God’. Building on this basis, in terms of political philosophy, some Muslims affirm that there can be only one sovereign and that is God.<sup>36</sup> The notion of the exclusive possession of ‘truth’ by Islam constitutes the theoretical foundation for the entire religion. Although there are variations in interpretations and implementations, the oneness of ‘truth’ is the fundamental aspect of all Islamic creeds including Wahhabism. All the Islamic sects, which take the Qur’an as the word of God, agree that the divine revelations given to the previous prophets were part of an evolutionary process in which Islam is the final point. Hence, there cannot be any further development, since perfection has been reached and the divine mission is completed.<sup>37</sup>

‘Finality of truth’ is another fundamental feature of Islamic ‘truth’ at the macro level. The notion of the finality of ‘truth’ is entrenched in the Qur’an.<sup>38</sup> Muhammad is referred to as ‘the seal of the prophets’. It is not certain how this was initially interpreted, but now it is universally understood by Muslims that Muhammad is the last prophet, after whom there will be no other. Thus, the ‘truth’ that is revealed to Muhammad cannot be replicated and there cannot be any further developments in revelation, since the ultimate ‘truth’ has been already revealed. In this light, the Qur’an asserts, ‘The true religion with God is Islam’.<sup>39</sup> It confers finality to Islam because it is based upon the ultimate ‘truth’ and for that reason it prevails over other competing narratives. As was noted before in the Qur’an, Allah affirms that ‘He it

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<sup>36</sup> John L. Esposito and John Obert Voll, *Islam and Democracy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 23. Also see, Asef Bayat, *Islam and Democracy: What is the Real Question?* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press).

<sup>37</sup> Although Islam theoretically put itself above all the competing narratives, it simultaneously acknowledges the truth of other Abrahamic religions. For example Qur’an states that ‘Nay! he (Muhammad) has come with the ‘truth’ (i.e. Allah’s religion - Islamic Monotheism and this Qur’an) and he confirms the Messengers (before him who brought Allah’s religion). (37:37). However, as Islam recognises the divine prophethood of the other Abrahamic messengers, it asserts that their divine revelations were already corrupted by their followers. In this light there are verses in Qur’an, which directly accuse the Jews to alter the revelation of their divine prophets. (4:46) For example in chapter al-Tawbah of Qur’an explicitly challenges the Jewish and Christian claim of ‘truth’ ‘And the Jews say: ‘*Uzair* (Ezra) is the son of Allah, and the Christians say: Messiah is the son of Allah. That is their saying with their mouths, resembling the saying of those who disbelieved aforetime. Allah’s Curse be on them, how they are deluded away from the ‘truth’ (4:46, 9:30) One has to note that, following the Qur’anic claims over the ‘corruption’ of ‘truth’ in previous religions, Muslim scholars in the first century of Islam used the Qur’anic verses to articulate a theory of the complete corruption of the Jewish and Christian scriptures. Particularly, they relied on verses that used the word alter (yuharrifuna) which is usually translated as corruption (tahrif). Nonetheless, it was not clear if it was the ‘corruption’ of the text or only the meaning.

<sup>38</sup> Qur’an 33: 40.

<sup>39</sup> Qur’an 3:19.

is who sent His Apostle with the Guidance and a religion of the truth, that He may make it victorious over every other religion.’<sup>40</sup>

Accordingly, Islam claims to be the final arbitrator of the ‘truth’. For this reason Muslims should not submit to any other religious perspective since their share of truth is minimal if not completely absent. In order to emphasise this point, the Qur’an states, ‘If anyone desires a religion other than Islam, never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost their selves in the hell fire’.<sup>41</sup>

The belief in the finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad is crucial and definitive, in the same way as is faith in the Oneness of God or belief in the hereafter. Anyone who denies these fundamental principles cannot be considered a Muslim. Similarly, anyone who claims to be a prophet or who tries to promulgate a new law transcending these principles can be perceived as an ‘apostate’.<sup>42</sup> As will be discussed later, these ideas profoundly shape the Wahhabi perspective regarding the validity and authenticity of competing narratives of Islam.<sup>43</sup>

The notion of oneness and the finality of ‘truth’ have various implications for the way in which Islam accommodates itself in relation to other competing narratives. Arguably, these notions of oneness and finality create an attitude, which assumes a natural superiority for the Islamic faith. This religious belief advocates that the ‘truth’ is only one and absolute and that Islam is the most perfect and final window through which higher knowledge can be revealed. The belief claims that ‘divine knowledge’ was handed over from prophet to prophet for centuries until it reached the Final Messenger, where the passing of ages no longer mattered

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<sup>40</sup> Qur’an 9:33.

<sup>41</sup> Qur’an 3:85.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> In principle, Islam does not recognise the validity of any perspectives, which attempts to transcend the finality of Islam, as Muhammad is seen as the last connection between humankind and the supreme ‘truth’. In a Islamic context, if a person claims to have direct connection to the divine after Muhammad will be seen as heretic and in profound odds with the orthodoxy of the ‘unchanging’ ‘truth’. One can point to the Ahmadiyya community, which is subject to considerable level of discrimination and repression in the Muslim world, particularly in Pakistan where they were declared non-Muslims. Although they identify themselves as Muslims and believe in the oneness of Allah and His book, which was revealed through Muhammad, they are facing harsh prejudicial treatments. The Ahmadiyya Jama’at started in the late 19th century by Mirza Gulam Ahmad (1835-1908). For more information see, Simon Ross Valentine, *Islam and the Ahmadiyya Jama’at: History, Belief, Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) and Antonio R. Gualtieri, *The Ahmadi: community, gender, and politics in a Muslim society* (McGill University Press, 2004).

and the final ‘truth’ will always remain in the same terms as were revealed to the final messenger. This has paved the way for what one may call intellectual self-sufficiency and moral supremacy, which is in principle similar to other sematic including Christianity and Judaism.

Of course, historically, various Islamic schools of thought have borrowed extensively from non-Islamic sources. For example, various Islamic scholars embraced some Jewish, Persian and Byzantine ideas in the early years of its history. In particular, various aspects of Greek philosophy, such as ideas associated with Plotinus and some Islamic schools of thought borrowed Neo-Platonism. Even in the contemporary era there are Islamic narratives, which accommodate the intellectual particularities of the modern time.<sup>44</sup> Although at many levels Islamic narratives are evolving in accordance with changing times, the fundamental principles of finality and the oneness of truth have remained intact. In other words every perspective that is sourced from other non-Islamic sources can be considered Islamic as long as it does not contradict the Islamic macro ‘truth’, which is perceived to be the ultra-knowledge gained through revelation. In this light, evolving philosophical and theological thought has to correspond to the hierarchical knowledge in which nothing can transcend the oneness and the final ‘truth’ which reached the Messenger through divine revelation.<sup>45</sup> Thus, regardless of the theological, philosophical and ritualistic diversity in Islam, all Islamic sects

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<sup>44</sup> See, Mohammad Sadri and Ahmad Sadri Reason, Freedom and Democracy in Islam, Essential writings of Abdolkarim Soroush (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Mohamed Mahmoud , Islam and modernity: Muslim intellectuals respond ( London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2000).

<sup>45</sup> Qur’an uses different words to describe the divine revelation, *Tanzil* , *Ruh* , *Wahi* and *Ilham* . *Tanzil* is derived from *Nazala*, which means ‘to descend’ . *Anzala* means ‘to send down’ or ‘send a revelation’ . This implies the message of God descend from the sky through His angel to communicate with the Prophet who is chosen as God’s agent to enlighten the rest of people. The idea of *Tanzil* reenforces the aforementioned binary of ‘earthly’ verses ‘unearthly’ narratives, which entail that the ‘truth’ is independent of consciousness and external from our natural faculty of reasoning. Thus, the assumption that ‘truth’ is ‘descended’ implies that the origin of the “truth” is unearthly and mysterious by nature. Hence, before being revealed it was out of reach for the ‘unenlightened’. *Ruh* is another term for revelation that can be translated as the ‘breathe of life’ and ‘soothing mercy’. Etymologically it is related to the word ‘*Rahat*’ which means ‘rest from sadness’. Arguably, this implies the ‘life giving’ nature of the ‘truth’, which emerges to shed light on darkness and emancipate humankind from their miseries. Not only the ‘truth’ provides the guidance but also offers the unearthly soothing comfort for the earthly journey of life. *Wahi* literally means to communicate in a form of whisper. That can be understood as the ‘voice of truth’ targeted the messenger carefully, so only him, in absence of any other inferences can be exposed to the divine knowledge. Hence, this implies the elitist status of the agent or the messenger. He selectively has been chosen to hear the ‘truth’. The ‘truth’ and the absolute knowledge have to be circulated through his medium. He is, therefore, the only bridge between the supreme wisdom and the earthly life. The word *Ilham* also is used in occasion for the divine revelation, which literally means ‘instinct’ or ‘intimation’.



build their theoretical propositions and truth-finding missions upon these two fundamental principles.

### **Truth Management at the Micro Level**

The internal struggle to find the true path to the ‘truth’ started to unfold as soon as the Prophet died. Muhammad was seen as the messenger and the divine bridge between earthly and divine knowledge. Once he left the scene, there was a vacuum, which left his followers the problem of how to perpetuate his legacy. Finding the leadership to perpetuate the Prophet's legacy was the beginning of a long struggle over the ‘true path’, which is still gaining momentum after 1400 years. Indeed various struggles have taken place to determine the true leadership; those will implement the supreme word of God. The most important of these struggles resulted in the emergence of two distinct groups of Muslims known as Shiites and Sunnis.

The religious group identified as Shiites claimed that the arbitration of ‘truth’ had to remain the monopoly of the Household of the Prophet. Hence they believed that Ali the son-in-law and the cousin of the Prophet should have been his legitimate successor. Nonetheless, the Sunnis believed that Abu Bakr, the Prophet’s Companion who was much older and much more experienced than Ali, should take the position after the Prophet’s death. Factionalism did not stop there. Shiism and Sunnism started to get fragmented too. Various divisions and sub-divisions were created assuming the authority for the ‘true’ knowledge of, Islam.

Shiism, which is a minority belief in the Islamic world, became highly fragmented. Various divisions emerged, some of them losing momentum while they were still fledgling religious movements and some of them have lasted until today.<sup>46</sup> The same set of struggles has been prevalent in Sunni Islam, which includes many revivalist movements such as Wahhabism.

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<sup>46</sup> Apart from the Twelver Shiism, which constitutes the largest faction, there are other major Shiite groups such as Zaidiyyah who are primarily concentrated in Yemen. Sometimes, they are known as the ‘Fivers’ because they follow the first four Imams of the Twelver Shi’ism but they differ on the Fifth Imam. The Zaidiyyah people believe that Zayd Ibn Ali and not his brother Muhammad al-Baqir should be the ‘true’ fifth Imam. The other major sect in Shi’ism is Ismailism, which is considered to be the second largest Shiite group in the Islamic world. As their name suggests they adhere to Ismail, the son of Imam Jafar Sadeq, the Sixth Imam and the founder of Ja’fari jurisprudence. This is one of the points where they differ from the Twelver Shiites, who accept Musa al-Kazim, the younger brother of Ismail, as the ‘true’ divine Imam.

Conflict over interpretations and implementations have resulted in the formation of various sects in Sunni Islam. There are many factors, which could explain fragmentations in Islam, but a close link between the idea of ‘true path’ and the question of ‘true leadership’ has been one of the main causes of factionalism. Indeed, struggles over leadership have been an indispensable feature of Islamic history. The question of leadership more than anything else has affected the Islamic narratives through various ages. In this light, it is possible to assert that continuous leadership crises over who should lead the *umma* or more accurately fractions of the *umma*, have paved the way for the emergence of competing theological and political narratives. Often political competition over leadership has been articulated through religious language. In other words, the political actors who strove for power and prestige had to establish close links between their earthly domination and divine ‘legitimacy’.

Thus, any claim for power could potentially mean a claim for possession of the truth. In this light, access to the various means of power determines the chances of survival for a competing regime of truth. Historically, there have been various religious movements such as Kaysaniyya, who could not survive, even though they enjoyed a relatively good position during the formative periods of Islamic history.<sup>47</sup> The socio-political conditions, competitions, and unfavourable power dynamics of the time did not allow them to survive. Hence, their regime of truth lost the chance of continuity.

Daftary notes that:

In such a milieu of diversity and conflicting communal interpretations abundantly manifested in the heresiographical tradition of the Muslims, general consensus could not be established regarding the definition of ‘true’ Islam, as different religio-political regimes were legitimised in different states by the ulema who in return, were accorded a privileged social status among the elite of the society.<sup>48</sup>

Often ‘true Islam’ has been synonymous with ‘official Islam’ where the political and military power of the dominating factions enforced certain narratives in order to sustain and legitimise

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<sup>47</sup> Farhad Daftary, *A short History of Ismailis: Traditions of a Muslim Community* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 22.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 22.

their dominance. Thus, the transitory nature of ‘truth’ at the micro level has been largely vested in conflict. Conflict has paved the way for the transition of one power complex to another. Often, transformations have been sustained and legitimised through a supporting regime of ‘truth’. Indeed, conflicting narratives have emerged to serve the two purposes of ‘domination’ and ‘resistance’. In other words, conflicts over power and resources paved the way for the emergence of competing ideas, which were constructed in order to accommodate the socio-political particularities of the hegemony or the counter- hegemony. The binaries of domination and resistance, which were vested in conflicts, constantly packaged and repackaged Islam with the new brands of ‘truth’.

As the previous section suggested, the main tenets of Islamic ‘truth’ at macro level claim to be timeless, final and absolute. The ideas of the finality and oneness of ‘truth’ through revelation to the last Prophet are the foundation of all interpretations of Islam. However, given the eventful history of the Islamic *umma*, which has been shaped by factionalism, divisions and doctrinal rivalries one can assert that there have been more disagreements than agreements among Muslims about the ‘true’ path to the ‘truth’. Although all *madhhabs* and Islamic schools of thought adhere to the timeless, oneness and final truth in Islam, there have been constant disputations about how to internalise, objectify and institutionalise the true’ path to the ‘truth’.

As was suggested before, there are two dynamics of ‘truth’ management taking place simultaneously. The one at macro level aims to establish the superiority of Islam in relation to the other competing narratives and the other takes place internally to find the ‘truth’ within the ‘truth’. Indeed, the historical struggle to find the ‘true’ path to the ‘truth’ has created and sustained various strategies of interpretation, which have influenced the Islamic consciousness and scattered Muslim unity throughout different ages.

The emergence of Wahhabi Islam is an example of this ongoing struggle to find the ‘truth’ within the ‘truth’. However, the truth finding missions of movements like Wahhabism do not take place in a vacuum. There are grounds for the argument that certain conditions are necessary to help these conflicting movements to register and sustain their narratives as ‘truth’. This study suggests that the process relies on four interrelated factors, which include leadership, construction of narratives, socialisation and violence. These four factors have

been indispensable for the success of the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance. These four factors were essential in constructing and sustaining the necessary framework for the monopolisation of power by the House of Saud. Indeed, they have maintained and rationalised the existing narratives of official Islam in Saudi Arabia. In other words they have paved the way for the officialisation of Wahhabism as the indisputable ‘truth’ within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Thus, it is imperative to briefly conceptualise each of these factors before proceeding to the next stage of the inquiry.

## **Leadership**

Conceptualising leadership is a complex and elusive problem because the nature of leadership itself is complex.<sup>49</sup> The notion of leadership can be defined differently within different disciplines and its meaning may differ from one context to another. There has been a historical fascination with conceptualising the leader and the properties of leadership. Theoretical discussions over leaders and their qualities can be traced back to Plato’s *Republic*. Today for the sake of clarity we could broadly see leadership as:

A personality attribute, as the art of inducing compliance, as an exercise of influence, as a particular kind of act, as a form of persuasion, as a power relation, as an instrument in the attainment of goals, as an effect of interaction, as a differentiated role and as the initiation of structure.<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps a more concise definition of leadership would be ‘a process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task’.<sup>51</sup> Although over the last seventy years alone more than 3000 leadership studies have been conducted, there is still no overarching theory of leadership, which could be universally accepted.<sup>52</sup> For decades social theorists have attempted to determine the importance of leadership in transforming and sustaining social structures. As early as the

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<sup>49</sup> Richard L. Daft and Patricia G. Lane, *The leadership experience* (United States: South-Western Press, 2010), 4.

<sup>50</sup> Mitchell R. Waite, *Fire Service Leadership: Theories and Practices* (United States: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 2007), 1.

<sup>51</sup> Martin M. Chemers, *An Integrative Theory of Leadership* (United Kingdom: Psychology Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>52</sup> Mitchell R. Waite, 1.

nineteenth century, the Great Man Theory was developed to articulate the role of ‘great men’, in the making of history. This theory advocated that the ‘great men’, possessing superior personal qualities were the agents acting as the vanguard of all major historical developments. This view put forward the idea that powerful, wise and charismatic leaders are needed for any major historical transition. Scholars such as Francis Galton and Thomas Carlyle led the debate in developing the Great Man theory.<sup>53</sup>

In 1840 Thomas Carlyle noted that:

For as I take it Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of Great Men who have worked here. They were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain; all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realisation and embodiment of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history, it may justly be considered were the history of these.<sup>54</sup>

For Carlyle, ‘The history of the world is but the biography of great men’. Therefore, leaders were portrayed as the single most important movers and shakers of the world, responsible for paving the way for change and development. These so-called ‘great men’ were perceived to be the vanguard for social transition. ‘Great men’ were represented as the driving engine of history pushing the boundaries, influencing, guiding, inspiring, sparking and mobilising the masses for great courses of action.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> The Great Men theory had many other supporters such as Frederick Adams Woods who promulgated the same views by writing the *Influence of Monarchs: Steps in a New Science of History*.

<sup>54</sup> *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (United States: Harvard College, 1924) 3.

<sup>55</sup> In 1869 Francis Galton took further steps to determine how the ‘great men’ are born to influence the course of human history. Clearly if the role leaders were perceived to be essential, there were demands to establish how these great men were emerged. Galton individuals do not became leaders through complex social procedures, but they are born with their super characteristics to lead. In his *Hereditary Genius* (1869), he asserted that ‘a man’s natural abilities are derived by inheritance, under exactly the same limitations as the form and features of the whole organic world. Consequently, as it is easy, notwithstanding those limitations, to obtain by careful selection a permanent breed of dogs or horses gifted with peculiar powers of running, or of doing anything else, so it would be quite practicable to produce a highly-gifted race of men by judicious marriages during several consecutive generations’. See:

Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: an Inquiry into Its Laws and Consequences* (United States: Macmillan & CO, 1869) 1.

Although the notion of the Great Man provided simple answers for difficult questions, it faced considerable criticism. Herbert Spencer, who was probably one of the most influential intellectuals of his time, questioned this ‘indispensable’ role of leaders for the making of history. He asserted that leaders are the products of their societies and accordingly one cannot reduce historical developments to the leadership of individuals with ‘superb’ personal qualities. In his famous book, *The Study of Sociology*, he noted, ‘you must admit that the genesis of a great man depends on the long series of complex influences, which has produced the race in which he appears, and the social state into which that race has slowly grown.... Before he can remake his society, his society must make him’.<sup>56</sup>

Many other theorists such as William James supported the idea that leaders and their social frameworks mutually influence each other. This approach did not necessarily make the role of leaders irrelevant, but it attempted to bring other social factors into the equation. More importantly, it developed the idea that leaders as agents are mutually influenced by structures.

From the mid-twentieth century, many other alternative leadership theories emerged underlining the other driving forces behind leadership.<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, leadership was no longer reduced to continuing individual traits, but as a more complex, multidimensional and multifaceted agency, which could influence and at same time be influenced by its social environment. However, to determine the primacy of social environment over leadership or leadership over social environment is like attempting to resolve the classic discussion over the primacy of either structure or agency in human behaviour. This continues to be a central debate in the social sciences.

In brief, agency refers to action or the capacity of individuals to act independently. Structure, broadly, refers to social patterns, which influence the course of actions, which individuals may take within a social framework. Of course, structure does not only refer to material patterns such as economic and political institutions, even cultural patterns and prevailing normative narratives can also be seen as social structures. Some theoretical approaches such

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<sup>56</sup> See, Herbert Spencer, *The Study of Sociology* (New York: Appleton & Company, 1896) .

<sup>57</sup> For example, Situational and contingency theories, Transactional and transformational theories and the functional leadership model.

as structuralism claim that the actions and thoughts of individuals are primarily determined by overall structure, and the perceived agency of individuals can be explained by the operation of this structure.

On the other side of the spectrum, theories such as social phenomenology, interactionism and methodological Individualism give more weight to the agency for determining patterns of social framework. Although there are merits in each of these theories, there is still a gap in the equation. For this reason steps were taken to build up a theoretical framework, which could offer a ‘third way’. Accordingly, some theoretical approaches have developed to avoid the explicit dichotomisation of structure and agency and instead, have attempted to reconcile the two. For example Berger and Luckmann argued that there could be a dialectical relationship between structure and agency.<sup>58</sup> Structure forms agency and agency forms structure or society forms the individuals who create society.<sup>59</sup> As Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead note: Berger and Luckmann’s approach ‘ties the subject and the social world together by the dialectical process of cognitive internalisation, objectification and externalisation.’<sup>60</sup>

Reconciliation between structure and agency can sufficiently explain the role of leadership in the politics of truth management at the macro level. Although the role of leadership has been fundamental, there were other factors contributing to the success of Wahhabism in establishing itself as a dominant force in the Arabian Peninsula. Leadership has been an important driving force for the dominance of the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance, but it has also been an integral part of a more complex social process, that has paved the way for the prevalence of the current religio-political model in Saudi Arabia.

### **Narrative Construction**

Throughout Islamic history, any assertion of leadership has always been accompanied by a narrative, which religiously legitimises and validates the ‘truth’. Accordingly, various

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<sup>58</sup> Murray Milner, *Status and Sacredness: A General Theory of Status Relations and an Analysis of Indian Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 260.

<sup>59</sup> Ole Riis, Linda Woodhead, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 117.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

narratives have emerged to function as an authenticating stamp for the assertion of power. Power does not necessarily mean direct domination backed up by various governing mechanisms. As was discussed before, power also refers to an attempt to affect the discourse through productive agencies shaping the collective consciousness.

Therefore, narrative construction refers to the construction of knowledge, which serves the power mechanism, in its broadest sense. To be more specific, in the Islamic context, narrative construction refers to a set of ideas and perspectives built on the macro truth of Islam to assign the power of representation of the ‘truth’ to a certain individual or a group of people in one way or another. In other words it refers to the chronicles, concepts, symbols and doctrines, which are formed to justify the eligibility and the legitimacy of certain agencies to articulate the ‘truth’ and its power relations. It is an empowering process, which can provide the power of representation over the wider belief system. Any narrative, which claims to have the monopoly over ‘truth’, is exclusionary by nature. As truth in itself is about winning and losing at the same time, it concurrently signifies the superiority of one perspective over the inferiority of another.

For example, the Wahhabi narrative constitutes sharp binaries of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ by which the majority of Muslims are reduced to ‘deviants’ and ‘innovators’. Indeed, it constitutes exclusionary parameters in which the representation of the truth is solely given to Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s interpretation. Thus, at different times new standardising ideas have been introduced to measure the ‘faithfulness’ of the believers. In other words Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab introduced a new frame of reference to measure ‘truth’ and to determine ‘good’ and ‘evil’. It is imperative to acknowledge that such narratives cannot be constructed in a vacuum; they are the very product of their time. They were formed in reaction to the prevailing power dynamics and socio-political and intellectual conditions of their time.

### **Socialisation**

Following the discussion in the previous section, it is important to consider the ways in which constructed narratives become effective. As already stated, it would be too simplistic to



reduce 'truth' management at the micro level to a form of conflict, which only entails force and repression. The implementation of the prevailing narrative requires more than brute power. Indeed, power is most effective when it is productive that is, when it produces knowledge.

However, reaching this productive stage requires a set of preconditions. Productive knowledge cannot be produced in a vacuum. It cannot emerge in the absence of a necessary infrastructure, which could transform direct repression based on brute power to indirect control based on consent. By a necessary infrastructure, I refer to a set of associational and socialising agencies, which could effectively socialise a regime of truth within a social framework. Socialisation not only refers to the process of transmitting a specific culture, it also refers to the process which attempts to guarantee a continuing consensus pertaining to the essential elements of the social world. Social control, which is the product of socialisation, attempts to contain individual or collective resistance within tolerable limits.<sup>61</sup>

There is another critical process that serves to support the influential edifice of social order. This is the process of legitimisation, which justifies socially objectified knowledge.<sup>62</sup> Through socialisation the individual not only acquires knowledge about objectivated meanings but also identifies with and is formed by them. With this process he observes the objectified knowledge and becomes not only one who possesses these meanings, but also one who represents and articulates them.<sup>63</sup>

Social agencies and institutions are constructed within various societies to socialise the perspectives associated with the prevailing social order. These socialising agencies, which include educational institutions, religious establishments and communication agencies, socialise their members to standardise the collective consciousness and prevent major resistance against the status quo. Clearly, some aspects of socialisation can be about social control, which entails power. Therefore, social institutions rely on co-operation between power and knowledge to retain their objectives. Since power and knowledge are mutually

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<sup>61</sup> Berger Peter, *The Social Reality of Religion* (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 31.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* 25.

supportive and directly imply one and another.<sup>64</sup> However, when narratives are generated they cannot be influential unless they are socialised through various effective social agencies. For example, the House of Saud, which represents the Wahhabi narrative, embarked on a sophisticated programme of socialisation to internalise the official discourse. Gradually, various religious and social institutions were constructed to promote the Wahhabi narrative and discredit incompatible religio-political perspectives.

The knowledge created and circulated within the newly established education system attempted to create a national subjectivity, which would empower the ruling family and its ideological mandate. Powerful socialising agencies such as mosques were monopolised by the state to expose the people to the tailored religious narrative. More complex religious institutions were constructed to control the production of *fatwas* and religious knowledge. Indeed, effective socialisation cannot take place without effective institutions. Institutions, by definition, control human behaviour by setting up predefined patterns of action. They create a framework in which there is only one ‘natural’ direction to follow, while theoretically and practically many other directions could be feasible. Hence, institution building exists as an attempt at the standardisation and codification of collective conduct.

## **Violence**

Although social engineering through socialisation plays a fundamental role in imposing the perspectives of the ruling class, in Islamic truth management violent mechanisms of social control maintain their explicit positions in order to protect the prevailing regime of ‘truth’. In other words, ‘truth’ management at the micro level is not a mere attempt to ‘affect the discourse’; it is a combination of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ power to impose and sustain a regime of ‘truth’. While effecting the prevailing discourse through productive power is essential, the transformative nature of violence remains instrumental in managing ‘the official truth’.

As will be shown in the case of Wahhabism, the political system takes measures to create complex social agencies to transform the collective consciousness in accordance with its

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<sup>64</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish - The Birth of the Prison* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 27.

ideological mandate. Nonetheless, the system simultaneously relies on various violent strategies (explicitly or implicitly) to offset any social resistance to the status quo.

It is crucial to determine that the meaning of violence in this context goes beyond the classic usage of brute force, as violence is highly multifaceted and multidimensional. <sup>65</sup>Violence is ubiquitous and omnipresent. In the same way that it is responsible for shaping our past, it continues to be a defining means of social control and domination. It is possible to assert that all social organisations contain the historical use of violence as a means of social control. <sup>66</sup>

Hence, there is no single way of defining violence. Although one can benefit from a multidisciplinary conceptualisation of violence as a baseline, there has to be a clear definition, which will set the stage for deeper analysis. Hence, for the sake of clarity, one can start addressing the notion by referring to a generic definition proposed by the World Health Organisation (WHO), ‘The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.’ <sup>67</sup>

Etienne G. Krug notes that:

The inclusion of the word ‘power’ in addition to the phrase ‘use of physical force’ broadens the nature of violent acts and expands the conventional understanding of

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<sup>65</sup> Regimes such as the modern Saudi state which actively attempt to manage the prevailing ‘truth’, utilises wide-ranging violent mechanisms to offset any resistance to the ways they try to construct and impose their narratives. Violence is imposed in multiple ways to achieve various objectives. For this reason it is important to contextualise violence and define its multidimensional nature which becomes instrumental to establish various mechanisms of social control.

<sup>66</sup> Correspondingly, various narratives have emerged to explain violence, justify it or even prevent it. Just in the same way that many philosophers have been preoccupied by the nature of violence and its cultural roots, scientists have also attempted to explain it through the methodical lens of science. Thus, many narratives have emerged to explain this timeless practice that is ingrained in human collectivities. As many scientists have searched our biological structure to find the driving genes of violence, linguists have attempted to find the roots of violence within the boundaries of the language, which defines the boundaries of perception. Some political economists have referred to the unequal systems of the distribution of wealth and some political scientists have held that the brutal mechanisms of states are responsible for violence. Many dichotomising belief systems such as religions and ideologies also have been held responsible for instigating violence.

<sup>67</sup>Etienne G. Krug, World Report on Violence and health, Volume 1 (Washington: World Health Organisation, 2002), 5.

violence to include those acts which result from a power relationship, including threats and intimidation. The 'use of power' also serves to include neglect and all types of physical, sexual and psychological abuse, as well as suicide and other self-abusing acts.<sup>68</sup>

The inclusion of psychological harm, deprivation and maldevelopment indicates that the implications of violence go beyond causing injury and death.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, there are many types of ideological violence, which include religious hatred, racism, ageism, sexism, and homophobia, which may not necessarily result in physical harm, but they can psychologically scar the victims. Hence, psychological pressures, which affect the well being of individuals, can also be seen as acts of violence. The wide personal, social and political aspects of violence have paved the way for an extensive body of research explaining the various implications of violence. In his comprehensive study of violence, Krug refers to three types of violence: self-directed violence, interpersonal violence and collective violence.<sup>70</sup> Krug subdivides collective violence into social, political and economic violence. Social violence includes systematic crimes of hate, terrorist acts and mob violence. Political violence includes violent conflicts, state violence and similar acts organised by large groups. Economic violence includes the economic marginalisation of individuals or social groups and the denial of access to economic and financial facilities.<sup>71</sup>

From the 1960s onwards there have been some more rigorous studies of violence and its wider social and political implications. Many of the typologies which have developed, can be helpful in deepening our understanding of violence; this will be an important notion in this study. James Gilligan was one of the first scholars who developed the notion of

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

The advent of the World War II and its brutal repercussions, which resulted in the massacre of millions of individuals pushed many scientists, social scientists and philosophers to pay a more rigorous attention to violence and its implications. Philosophers such as Hannah Arendt, who was herself a victim of violent acts, devoted much of their post-war intellectual lives to explain the various dynamics of violence. For instance, in her theoretical studies, Arendt differentiated between the concepts of violence and power. She suggested that power and violence are opposites. Her argument was not Gandhi's belief in nonviolence, but an argument for power, which is most powerful when it is nonviolent. As Elisabeth Young-Bruehl noted that in Arendt's terms, the power is more likely to be lasting, the one that can sustain the actors' humanity in the best way. It is the power that arises from nonviolent action. Nonviolent action requires continuing discussion and a respectful exchange of views, which are a means of regenerating power. For more information see: Elisabeth Young-Bruehl *Why Arendt Matters*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) 90.

structural violence; this discussed the implications of the systematised or even rationalised violence that can be embedded in various social organisations.

Gregg Barak refers to structural violence as the most fundamental form of violence.<sup>72</sup> Barak describes the term as:

Expressive of the conditions of society, the structure of social order and the institutional arrangements of social order, and the institutional arrangements of power that reproduce mass violations of personhood 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Such violence is accomplished through ‘policies’ of informal and formal denial of civil, criminal and basic human rights for all people.<sup>73</sup>

Structural violence has been described as the ‘violence of the status quo’.<sup>74</sup> Structural violence can be multidimensional and complex. Structural violence finds its place in enforcing, sustaining, expanding, or reducing hierarchical structures. These hierarchies of privilege and systems of inequality can be portrayed and perceived as universal.<sup>75</sup> By taking the systems of inequality into account, Peter Iadicola and Anson D. Shupe argue that systematised disparities can instigate institutional and structural violence.<sup>76</sup> They argue that each form of institutional violence replicates a pattern that places the victims in a subordinate position. Hence, those who are committing violence are those who are in the dominant positions.<sup>77</sup> They also argue that structural violence is the most hidden form of violence. With the assistance of prevailing ideologies, violence can be legitimatised and accordingly people are prevented from identifying it as a form of violence.<sup>78</sup>

There are various implicit and explicit mechanisms of violence, which have assisted regimes such as Saudi Arabia in sustaining their political and ideological dominance. For example, through structural violence, the modern Saudi state has systematically

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<sup>72</sup>Gregg Barak, *Violence and Nonviolence: Pathways to Understanding* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 113.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Peter Iadicola and Anson D. Shupe, *Violence, Inequality, and Human Freedom* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 374-5.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

marginalised those religious minorities who have not subscribed to the official discourse. Indeed, deprivation, favouritism, impoverishment and marginalisation are violent instruments used by the state to maintain the status quo. In addition to indirect violent strategies, the state actively uses controlling agencies like the religious police to impose its religious narrative upon the masses. Accordingly, a wide range of violent strategies is employed to put pressure on nonconformists and simultaneously create incentives for other subjects to embrace the official narrative. Therefore, such regimes institute explicit and implicit penal systems to encourage conformity, and discipline any form of resistance to the official discourse.

It would be inconceivable to imagine a state without violence. The state's mechanisms of law and order, instruments of social control and hierarchical structures are sustained and perpetuated by violence. As Trotsky said at Brest-Litovsk, 'every state is founded on violence'<sup>79</sup>. It does not matter how 'civilised' a state is, its law enforcement and wide programme of social control rely on violence or the threat of violence. From the beginning, the construction of the nation state has been heavily dependent upon violence. Indeed, violence has been instrumental in constructing and sustaining political units, thus maintaining their tailored territorial integrity.

Fernando Coronil and Julie Skurski note that:

Violence pushes the limits of the permissible, opening up spaces where customary and unexpected meanings and practices are brought together in unprecedented ways, illuminating hidden historical landscapes in a flash and leaving behind the opaque memory of ungraspable territories. In the crisis of meaning that violence conceives, the territoriality of nations and corporeality of people become privileged mediums for recognising the body public and forcibly controlling the movement of persons and ideas within the nation's material and cultural space.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Max Weber and Sam Whimster, *The essential Weber: a reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), 131-2.

<sup>80</sup> Jo-Marie Burt, Philip Mauceri, *Politics In The Andes: Identity, Conflict, Reform*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press), 82.

Max Weber was a defining political sociologist in the twentieth century who provided some influential perspectives on the state and violence. What he suggested continues to enforce the status quo as he justifies the monopolisation of ‘legitimate violence’ by the state. For him, a state without the monopoly of violence by state order can never be achieved. Weber notes that ‘if there were structures in which violence as a means was unknown, then the idea of the state would have disappeared and anarchy in its literal sense would appear,’<sup>81</sup> He suggests that violence is not the normal means of the state, but it is specific to the state. Hence, Weber established a very intimate relation between the state and violence.

He noted that in the past physical force was perceived as a wholly normal means of control by most bodies starting with kinship groups. Now in contrast, territory is considered as a characteristic of the state and the human community within the territory accepts the monopoly of violence as the states legitimate right.<sup>82</sup> Hence, the state is the main source of authority in controlling the use of violence. Any individual or social group that wishes to employ violence should receive a legitimising sanction from the state. Any use of violence outside the parameter of the state is considered illegitimate. The state is the only structure which possesses the ‘right’ of exercising violence.<sup>83</sup> Clearly, this model of the distribution of ‘rights’ to exercise violence is only designed for a state system, since it would not be applicable to a feudal or tribal society where violence is exercised by multiple agencies.

Within tribal and feudal systems, where various political units are constantly in competition over power and resources within the same territory, violence cannot be monopolised. In fact, violence becomes the transformative means, utilised by competing actors, in order to change the balance of power in their own favour. For Weber this transformative means of violence, which is constantly utilised by competing agencies, creates anarchy. Thus, the use of violence has to be in the monopoly of a single organisation (the state) in order to prevent anarchy. The state as the main instrument of ‘legitimate violence’ or what is seen as ‘legitimate’ supports Herrschaft’s relationship of the domination of human being over human being.<sup>84</sup> Thus, for a state to exist, it has to force people to obey the ‘authority’ of the dominating class. Hence, without the employment of force, the state cannot homogenise the

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<sup>81</sup> Max Weber and Sam Whimster (2003), 131-132.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

political landscape and compel the subject to obey the hierarchical order. In this light, violence is used to enforce a mechanism of distribution of power favourable to the dominant class.

The Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 paved the way for the idea of national sovereignty based on territoriality and the absence of a role for external agents in the domestic affairs of states. Therefore, states have used their sovereignty to impose violence on their subjects with often minimal interference from external agents. Many atrocities have taken place within the boundaries of nation-states. Although the idea of absolute sovereignty is no longer an acceptable notion within international customary law, states continue to enjoy immunity when it comes to their violent programmes of social control. Even after the atrocities of World War II, when the international system pretended to be more attentive to the prevention of extreme state violence against citizens, humanitarian interventions have often been both limited and controversial.

There is no super state mechanism to effectively curb a state's violent policies against its own citizens, and existing international bodies, such as the Security Council within the United Nations, have proved to be highly ineffective. Although Westphalian sovereignty in its original form may not be accepted, states continue to enjoy immunity with minimal interference from external agencies while violence and threat of violence remain the main instrument for enforcing the status quo in the society of states. Modern Saudi Arabia has enjoyed similar privileges of immunity. As a sovereign state it has removed the historic tribal competing claimants of power within its territory and has monopolised the right of exerting violence with minimal interference from external agencies. Unlike the First and the Second Saudi Emirates, the universally accepted structures of the modern nation state has given the House of Saud the legitimate means to widen its control and enforce its ideology within the defined territory, which is internationally recognised as its fiefdom.

## **Conclusion**

Social constructionism rejects any form of social knowledge, which claims to exist independently of our consciousness. Hence, most theoretical perspectives that are informed



by social construction epistemology oppose the notion of objective knowledge on the grounds that one must already have a predefined model of 'truth' in mind in order to measure it, scrutinise it, circulate it and distinguish it from other competing perspectives. Accordingly, knowledge is the product of a social process and is subject to historical conditions. Indeed, social constructionism contests the formation of influential and highly sedimented social institutions such as religion, which have been successful in creating and sustaining collective values, narratives and definitions.

Drawing on the theoretical propositions of social constructionism, this chapter attempted to conceptualise truth and truth management. Accordingly, there was a suggestion that the attempt for the management of 'truth' is the attempt for the management of power and the quest for 'truth' can be the quest for some form of domination. Foucault obviously came to mind. As he suggested that, 'Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power; this is just a way of reviving humanism in a utopian guise. It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power'.<sup>85</sup> In this light, the Foucaultian argument that power is always present and can both produce and constrain the truth was reinforced. Following that, there was a suggestion that there are two interconnected dynamics, shaping and portraying the notion of truth in Islam. The one at the macro level constitutes the unchanging foundational tenets of the religion, a set of entrenched principles which establish the 'finality' and 'oneness' of Islam in relation to the other competing narratives and the other one at the micro level takes place internally to find 'truth' within the 'truth'. The historical struggle to search for the 'true' path to the 'truth' has created and sustained various strategies of interpretation, which have influenced Islamic consciousness and fragmented Muslim unity throughout different ages. Indeed the ongoing quest to find the 'truth' within the 'truth' turned Islam into one of the most fragmented religions in the world.

This chapter attempted to identify and conceptualise the important factors, which pave the way for the assertion of 'truth' within the 'truth'. Accordingly, this chapter suggested that truth management at the micro level depends upon four interrelated factors, which include

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<sup>85</sup> Michael Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*. ed. C. Gordon. Trans. C. Gordon, L. Marshal, J. Mephram, and K. Sober (London: Pantheon Books, 1980), 52.

leadership, narrative construction, socialisation and violence. Wahhabism is yet another manifestation of Islamic truth at the micro level which attempts to 'authenticate' Islam by 'rediscovering' its 'true' narrative. These factors have been essential for the establishment of Wahhabism as 'the official truth' in Saudi Arabia.

## Chapter 2

### NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION AND LEADERSHIP

Every ideology is conditioned by the prevailing socio-political particularities of its time. Ideas are not born in a vacuum; they are the products of the dialectical relationship between agent and structure. As was discussed before, we cannot separate the agency from the structure, because they mutually produce each other. Structures produce agencies and agencies produce structures. Accordingly we cannot be indifferent towards the prevailing structures at the time that the Wahhabi agency was in formation. Indeed, Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab's ideas were products of his environment. Thus, exploring the socio-political environment in which he lived may help us to have a deeper understanding of the creed's initial hopes, inspirations and anxieties as these were translated into a religious discourse.

It was in the eighteenth century that Wahhabism, as a distinct religio-political expression, came to the attention of the Muslim world, within and beyond the Arabian Peninsula. Although in many ways Wahhabism was the product of its own time and was shaped by various driving forces in Najd, it offered hardly any original thought. In fact, as a belief system, it opposed any sign of originality and innovation in faith. Like many other revivalist movements it wanted to 'restore' the true foundations of the religion. Its frame of reference was the past and it had a vision of building a future based on 'authentic' Islamic values.

Indeed, many of the perspectives championed by Wahhabism, had been debated and advocated by other religious agents through the centuries, but the structural conditions of the eighteenth century Arabian Peninsula allowed Wahhabism to establish itself as a recognisable religious narrative. In many ways Wahhabism became the loudspeaker for the previously advocated religious perspectives. Thus, Wahhabism was a continuation of a religious trend, which became more visible after being adopted by the House of Saud.

Although this chapter primarily aims to address the notions of narrative construction and leadership, it is imperative to widen our historical lens, in order to achieve a better understanding of the religious foundation, which is at the heart of the politics of truth management in modern Saudi Arabia. We have to go briefly beyond modern Saudi Arabia to trace ideas that affected the social and religious perspectives of Abd-al-Wahhab, who founded the movement and seeded an ideological foundation for what is recognised today as the modern Saudi State. This chapter will attempt to provide a brief historical context for Wahhabism. It also aims to shed light on the structural conditions of the time, which allowed the new religious agency to flourish. This chapter will attempt to show the Wahhabi construction of narrative and elaborate important dimensions of its perspectives. Furthermore, it will discuss the role of the House of Saud and how it offered effective leadership to promote Wahhabism as the official ‘truth’. This chapter will cover the Saudi-Wahhabi initial conflictual steps for state building until the official formation of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

### **The Genealogy of Wahhabism**

The genealogical roots of Wahhabism can be traced back to the Hanbali school of Jurisprudence in Sunni Islam.<sup>1</sup> The Hanbali School of Jurisprudence does not appear to have made any major geographical expansion until the eighteenth century. It is possible to argue that the emergence of Wahhabism as a religio-political force revived the Hanbali school of law. Wahhabism helped to extend the influence of the Hanbali *madhhab* in Africa, Egypt and India and above all in the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>2</sup> Prior to the emergence of Wahhabism, the Hanbalism did not enjoy the popularity of other legal traditions. There are many reasons, which could partly explain this unpopularity of the Hanbali school in the Muslim world before the emergence of Wahhabism. Factors such as its aversion to personal opinion, a dismissal of the *qiyas* or legal analogy, which were only used as a last resort, and its perceived illiberality towards other traditions, are among many reasons which did not work in favour of Hanbali *madhhab* in expanding its sphere of influence.<sup>3</sup> The role of

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<sup>1</sup> See, Bkr Bin Abdullah Abu Zayd, *Ila Fiqha al Imam Ahmad Bin Hanbl: wa Takhrijat Alashab* (Dar Alasameh), 550.

<sup>2</sup> Abu Umar Faruq Ahmad, *Theory and Practice of Modern Islamic Finance: The Case Analysis from Australia* (Florida, BrownWalker Press, 2010), 80.

<sup>3</sup> Jamal J Nasir, *Islamic Law of Personal Status* (London: Graham & Trotman, 1990), 18.

political patron is also important for expansion of religious ideas. *Hanbali madhhab* hardly enjoyed strong and continuous political agency, until the House of Saud adapted Wahhabism. Hence, through the political presence of Wahhabism, Hanbali ideas started to be promulgated in the wider Islamic world. There are four major schools of *Fiqh* in Sunni Islam, Hanafi, Maliki and Shafi'i and Hanbali. Although the School of Hanbali is the smallest, it is seen to be the most conservative and strictest school of law in Sunni Islam.<sup>4</sup>

The school was founded by Imam Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Hanbal (d855).<sup>5</sup> He was known to be an uncompromising defender of Islamic orthodoxy. During the Abbasid period, an inquisition, *Mihna*, was established whereby scholars were scrutinised about certain aspects of their religious opinions and those who did not conform to the Mu'tazili's dogma were punished.<sup>6</sup> Imam Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Hanbal attained widespread respect by refusing to compromise his orthodox beliefs.<sup>7</sup> For this he was persecuted by Al-Mamun, the Abbasid Caliph who backed the doctrine of the 'creation of the Qur'an' by the Mu'tazili school of thought.<sup>8</sup> The *Hanbali* School of Jurisprudence was partly a counter-

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<sup>4</sup> Just in the same way that Shafi'i jurisprudence is considered to be more relaxed, the Hanbali School is seen as the most restrict among the Sunni Madhhabs.

<sup>5</sup> Bayly Winder, *Arabia in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*: (London: Macmalian, 1965), 9.

<sup>6</sup> Mu'tazilism believed that God's action and creation is rational. Hence, He would never allow *istisfad al-adilla* (corruption of evidentiary proofs), that is contravention of the customary pattern of the way things happen in the physical universe. They affirm that God would not defraud His creatures by creating an irrational universe. All the laws of nature follow a coherent and logical structure designed and sustained by the rational creator. The Basra branch of Mu'tazila constructed metaphysics of atomistic occasionalism. Similar to Greek Atomists, they affirmed that physical reality consists of basic physical entities or atoms and attributes that give beings their shape, colour and other distinguishing qualities. In that light, God creates the world in each instant by creating atoms and attributes that inhere in the physical substrates that atoms form. Therefore, creation is a continual divine process as every instant the world is recreated. In contrast to their orthodox rivals, they did not regard the creator as the cause of all that happens in the nature. Instead they allocated more power to human agency. They envisaged a capacity for human beings to make choices and to impose those choices on the world.

For more information see Christopher Melchert, *The religious policies of the caliphs from al-Mutawakkil to al-Muqtadir A H 232-295/AD 847-908* *The journal of Islamic Law and Society*, vol. 3, No. 3 1996, p116-342, p 322 and Richard Martin, Mark Woodward, Dawi Atamja (1997) *Defenders of Reason In Islam, Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to a Modern Symbol*, One World Press, Oxford and Harry Austyn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Kalam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> Abdul Hakim I Al-Matroudi, *The Hanbali School of law and ibn Taymiyyah: Conflict or Conciliation* (London: Routledge, 2006) 8.

<sup>8</sup> Regarding the book of the Qur'an, Mu'tazila *kalam* represented a relatively strong pro-reason reaction against the traditional account of the text. The traditional narrative interpreted the text as an integral part of God's mind. Hence, it was co-eternal with God himself. This narrative was a pretext for the absolutist objectification of Qur'an. Within that context it was not possible to question any aspect of the book, since it was inseparable from God. The Mu'tazila rejected the orthodox narrative and warned about the absolutist conceptualisation of the text turning it to a second God, which is unquestionable and unchangeable. Instead, they suggested that Qur'an is a creation just like any other phenomena created by God. Thus, it should not necessarily express the essential nature of God more than any of his other creations. Hence, the text must be

reaction to Mu'tazili doctrine, which was based more upon 'rationalism' and independent reasoning.

Ibn Hanbal is the author of *Al-Musnad*, the extensive encyclopaedia of the hadith collection, which contains approximately 80,000 *hadiths*.<sup>9</sup> He was a student of Imam Shafi'i the founder of Shafi'i School of Jurisprudence.<sup>10</sup> The Hanbali Jurisprudence is known to be the most literalist among the other schools of law in Sunni Islam. Accordingly, the *Hanbali* School limits the use of analogy and human reasoning, basing most legal verdicts on a literal interpretation of the Qur'an and the *hadith*, and rejecting tools of adaption such as *istihsan* and *maslaha*.<sup>11</sup> In literal terms, *istihsan* means to deem something preferable. Jurisprudentially, it means to see, independently, a method of exercising personal opinion in order to stay away from any rigidity and injustice that might result from a literal enforcement of the law.<sup>12</sup> *Maslaha* is literally a cause or source of something good; in English often it is translated as 'public interest'.<sup>13</sup> It is seen as a legal instrument to maximise the public welfare and public interests.

The Hanbali School actively opts for a weak hadith over a strong analogy. Some *Hanbali* scholars believe that *ijma* (consensus of opinion) is only permissible between the Prophet's companions.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, this school of law largely restricts analogical deduction, *qiyas*. As Jamal Nasir notes:

Hanbali madhab derives its provisions from the Qur'an and the Sunna prevailing over any consensus, opinion or inference. It acknowledges without question an opinion given by a Companion of the Prophet if there is no dissension, otherwise the opinion

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subject to the interpretation. By applying reason they could extract the 'right' meanings within various situations. They regarded reason as the best hermeneutical warrants and the most efficient instrument to access Qur'an. Thus, if anything in the text seems contrary to reason, it must be reinterpreted in accordance with the faculty of reason.

For more information see George Walsh, *The Role of Religion in History* (New Jersey, Transaction Publishers, 1998) 93-4.

<sup>9</sup> Abu Umar Faruq Ahmad (2010) 80.

<sup>10</sup> Imam Abu Abd Allah Shafi'i (767-820) wrote the first treaties of Jurisprudence in Islam. For more information see: Christian D. Von Dehsen *Philosophers and Religious Leaders* (United States: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999), 173.

<sup>11</sup> Abu Umar Faruq Ahmad, (2010), 80.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 65

<sup>13</sup> Abbas Amanat and Frank Griffel, *Shari'a: Islamic law in the Contemporary Context* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 62.

<sup>14</sup> Abu Umr Faruq Ahmad (2010), 80.

of the Companion nearest to that of the Qur'an or the Sunna shall prevail. Quite often the Hanbalis do not indicate a preference where there are conflicting rulings by the Companions, but declare them all potentially valid. The traditions of the Prophet according to the Hanbalis are either valid or exhibit varying weaknesses which are nevertheless acknowledged.<sup>15</sup>

Ibn Hanbal was famous for his dislike of 'opinion', *ra'y*. His adherence to the strict text of the Qur'an and the Sunna reached such a point that some prefer to include him among the traditionalists, *muhaddith*, rather than among those who qualified to use independent reasoning, *mujtahit*.<sup>16</sup> Among those who considered Ibn Hanbal only as a traditionalist was ibn- al-Nadim who put him in the same category as Al-Bukhari. (Al-Bukhari was a famous traditionalist scholar who was known for his collection of *hadith*, his most important work is known as Sahih Bukhari). Ibn Abd al-birr does not even mention the biography of this Imam in his book *al-Intiqa fi Fada'il al-Fuqaha* (Selection of the virtues of the Imams of Jurisprudence).<sup>17</sup> Neither al-Tabari in his book *Ikhtilaf al-Fuqaha* (The Disagreement of the Jurists), nor Ibn Qutaybah in his book *Kitab al-Ma'arif* makes any mention of the Hanbali school of jurisprudence.<sup>18</sup>

The ideas, which derived from the teaching of Ibn Hanbal, remained alive in central Muslim countries and particularly in Baghdad and Damascus.<sup>19</sup> Hourani notes that:

Despite the many divergences amongst them, those who traced their intellectual ancestry to Ibn Hanbal were united in their attempt to maintain what they regarded as the true Islamic teaching, that of those who adhered strictly to God's revelation through the Prophet Muhammad. For them God was the God of the Qur'an and hadith, to be accepted and worshipped in His reality as He had revealed it. The true Muslim was he who had faith: not simply acceptance of the revealed God, but action in accordance with God's revealed Will. All Muslims formed a community, which should remain united; no one should be excluded from it, except those who exclude

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<sup>15</sup> J Nasir. Islamic Law of Personal Status (1990), 18.

<sup>16</sup> Subhi Rajab Mahmasani, *Falsafat al-Tashri fi al-Islam: The Philosophy of Legislation in Islam* (Beirut: Dar al-Ilm lil Malayin, 1961), 30.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Albert Habib Hourani, *A History of the Arab People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2003), 79.

themselves by refusing to obey the proscriptions of religion, or spreading doctrines, which were incompatible with the truths revealed through the prophets.<sup>20</sup>

In thirteenth century Syria under Mamluk rule, the Hanbali ideas were voiced by a forceful scholar Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328).<sup>21</sup> Although there have been many notable scholars in the history of *Hanbali* Jurisprudence, Wahhabism is said to gain much inspiration from Ibn Taymiyya's perspectives. Hence, it is imperative to pay some attention to the intellectual legacies of Ibn Taymiyya to deepen our understanding of Wahhabism within a historical context. Unfortunately, a comprehensive study of Ibn Taymiyya's ideas will be beyond the scope of this chapter.<sup>22</sup> He was a prolific writer and there is a vast amount of literature assigned to his name.<sup>23</sup> Hence, for the sake of clarity and conciseness, we can only highlight some of the important and relevant ideas that may have informed the religio-political perspectives of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab.

In brief, Ibn Taymiyya also called for a fundamentalist and puritanical approach to religion, a back to basics stance, which attempted to cleanse Islam of all polluting innovations, and instead focussed exclusively on the pristine values of the Qur'an and the Sunna.<sup>24</sup> He militantly opposed beliefs and rituals including saint worship and pilgrimages to shrines.<sup>25</sup> Since he was a strong advocate of *tawhid*, he opposed giving any religious honours to shrines and places of worship and as he had a literalist interpretation of the Qur'an, he rejected any kind of 'innovation' in religion.<sup>26</sup> He attacked prominent scholars such as the mystic Ibn Arabi and attempted to invalidate most of the customs that have been adopted by various Islamic traditions.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Şaliḥ, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Şaliḥ, al-Fiqh al-usrah inda al-imam shaykh al-Islam ibn Taymīyah fi al-zawaj wa-atharih / i'dad Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Şaliḥ al-Şaliḥ (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Malik Fahd 1996)

<sup>22</sup> See Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed, *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times* (Karachi, Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>23</sup> Some of his books include: *Fundamentals of Enjoining Good & Forbidding Evil*, *Diseases of the Hearts and their Cures*, *The Concise Legacy*, *the Friends of Allah and the Friends of Shaytan* and *Kitab al Iman: The Book of Faith*.

<sup>24</sup> Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2000), 242.

<sup>25</sup> al Yamani al Fakhrani (2012), 30-33.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



He was one of the most prominent *takfiri* thinkers of his time. In brief, *takfir* means to declare others to be *kuffar*, the punishment for which in strict Islamic terms is death.<sup>27</sup> In other words, it is a form of legal ascription of unbelief excommunication to individuals and groups.<sup>28</sup> Throughout his career he declared many groups *kuffar* and stigmatised them as infidels.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, he declared Jihad against the Shiites, the Isma'ilis, Alawis, Druze and many Sufi sects and advocated placing restrictions on non-Muslims.<sup>30</sup>

He classified the so-called 'enemies of Islam' into various groups. The first group of infidels were social groups such as Christians, with whom it was possible to make peace; they could share meals, and Muslims could marry their women. Their lives could be spared if they were made prisoners. Then there were the Muslims who deviated from the true path of Islam. For him no reconciliation was possible with them and they should be confronted if they refused to return to the true path. Then there were those who identified themselves as Muslims, but did not adhere to the 'true' Islamic values, they should be killed without mercy. And finally, there were those who rejected the true faith while still claiming to belong to it. Thus, they also should be killed under any given circumstances.<sup>31</sup> Many scholars did not share his highly confrontational ideas. He faced some challenges from his contemporaries.

His main concern was to build *ta'awun*, a moral solidarity, on the basis of strict Islamic ideology and its enforcement in the society.<sup>32</sup> In response to the threats facing the lands of Islam in his lifetime, he aimed to transform the moral solidarity of the Muslims into a united commitment to jihad against the *kuffar*. Hence, for him fighting in jihad was even more important than other Islamic obligations such as pilgrimage, fasting and prayer.<sup>33</sup> It is reported that he was the man of the sword himself and he took part in some battles including fighting the crusaders.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Alison Pargeter, *New Frontiers of Jihad: The Radical Islam in Europe* (London: I B Tauris, 2008), 9.

<sup>28</sup> Barry M Rubin, *Revolutionary and Reformers: Contemporary Islamic Movements in the Middle East*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 13.

<sup>29</sup> Muḥammad Abu Zahrah *Ibn Taymiyah : ḥayātuḥu wa-aṣruḥ, arauḥu wa-fiqḥuḥ* (Cairo: 1950).

<sup>30</sup> Al Ymani al Fakhrani (2012), 66-70.

<sup>31</sup> Charles Allen, *God's Terrorists, the Wahhabi Cult and the Hidden Roots of Modern jihad* (United Kingdom: DA CAPO press, 2006), 46-47.

<sup>32</sup> Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 39.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> As'ad AbuKhalil, *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power* (New York : Seven Stories Press, 2004), 54.

Indeed, Ibn Taymiyya's militant ideas were not born in a social and historical vacuum. They were the products of the highly turbulent times that he was exposed to in the thirteenth century. The political instability and insecurities of his time largely informed his religious perspective. Apart from the Mongol invasion, the Tartars and the Crusaders who were threatening the sovereignty and the integrity of the Muslim lands, he perceived many other social and religious 'hazards' threatening the 'authentic' nature of the Muslim society. During his time, many new religious practices, cults and belief systems inspired by eclectic mysticism and neo-platonic philosophies were 'polluting' what he considered was the 'true' Islam. Thus, he wanted all the 'true' Muslims to go back to the basics of the Islamic values and emancipate themselves from these 'innovations', which he perceived to be the greatest danger to Islam and the Islamic civilisation. Indeed the main issue was nothing short of preserving the 'truth' and how it should be promoted. He actively theorised and legitimised means of conflict in order to safeguard the 'truth'.

His method was an amalgamation of the selective use of traditions or Sunna and a direct use of the Qur'an.<sup>35</sup> Some scholars have argued that he relied heavily on a literalist use of the Qur'an. By employing a selection of the Qur'anic verses he attempted to give a quality to his religio-political discourse, which his followers found compelling. After all, if he used many of the words of God and direct Qur'anic references, then his ideas could be perceived as more authentic than those of others whose discussions were 'corrupted' by man-made reason and interpretation.<sup>36</sup>

He did not believe in the separation of state and religion and he regarded the state as a natural agency to safeguard Islam. Ibn Taymiyya argued that, Islamic duties such as *amr Bi'l- ma'ruf WA nahi al-munkar* (encouraging good and forbidding evil) could not be fulfilled without state power. He also affirmed that other Islamic duties such as jihad, implementing Islamic Shari'a and the realisation of Islamic social justice required the power of the state. He argued that religion needed the state to realise itself and affirmed that political power was necessary for religious excellence.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

He also highlighted the significance of the security and military functions of the Islamic state. Hence, he regarded the state as a coercive means to expand and spread the faith beyond the boundaries of *dar al-Islam* (realm of Islam). Hawkesworth and Kogan note:

Ibn Taymiyya's Islam is one, which is deeply motivated by insecurity and fear that the faith and its polity are under siege and about to be destroyed. This insecurity more than anything else is the cause for his image of the state as an Islamic Leviathan that exercises absolute power within and ferociously attacks threats from without.<sup>38</sup>

What makes Ibn Taymiyya important is not only his intolerant and illiberal attitude, which later on influenced the Wahhabi discourse; it was also his rigid recipes of 'truth management'. He provided militant strategies with which to physically and ideologically confront anything that does not correspond to 'true' Islam. His method of returning to 'true' Islam could be accommodated mainly through conflict. His call for jihad was not limited to issuing *fatwas* against intruders such as Mongols. He invited the 'true' Muslims to physically confront their fellow Muslims who failed to internalise 'the true path' in order to save Islam. He developed both the strategies and the means of protecting the 'truth'. He also wrote extensive treatises to specify how the nonconformists should be treated. He created various categories of *kuffar*, and stigmatised many social groups as infidels.<sup>39</sup>

He measured the value of a person's life upon his or her method of conceptualisation and internalisation of the 'truth'. Following the notions of the oneness and the finality of the 'truth' he was against any new adaptations and developments. He felt that innovation would pollute the 'truth' and would put it on an evolutionary path such that in the course of time it may transform its authentic nature. Therefore, he was determined to push the *umma* into a situation whereby fellow Muslims could experience the truth as it had been revealed for the first time.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> See, John L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) Tahir Abbas, *Islamic Radicalism and Multicultural Politics: The British Experience* (London, Routledge, 2011) 30.  
Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 40.  
Mansoor Jassem Alshams, *Islam and Political Reform in Saudi Arabia: The Quest for Political Change and Reform* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2011), 54.

His vision was looking back rather than looking ahead. He created this utopian vision that was chained in the passage of time. The real essence of truth was left there, hence if the ‘truth’ had to be realised, one had to embrace the past in every possible sense of the term. The customs, the narratives and the values of the time of the revelation had to be readapted for the present and all new ‘innovations’ and perspectives had to be removed from collective Islamic consciousness. These ideas profoundly affected the Wahhabi discourse, which will be critically analysed in the following sections.

### **Embryonic Construction of Wahhabi Narratives**

As was suggested in the previous chapter, narrative construction in this study refers to the creation of knowledge to serve power in the broadest sense of the term. As was suggested before, narrative construction refers to a set of ideas built on the macro truth of Islam to assign the power of representation of the ‘truth’ to a certain individual or a group of people. In other words, it refers to chronicles, concepts, symbols and doctrines which are formed to justify the eligibility and the legitimacy of certain agencies to articulate the ‘truth’ and its power relations. It is part of an empowering process, which can provide the power of representation over a wider belief system. The construction of narratives by Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab’s was the first step towards a more complex politics of truth management, which was later adapted by the modern Saudi State.

Given the importance of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab’s perspectives in forming the ideological basis of a system, which claims to have the monopoly over ‘truth’, it is imperative to explore Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab’s ideas in detail. Although today Wahhabism is considered to be a distinct belief system, its foundational ideas were hardly original. Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab’s writings were primarily concerned with rituals of worship rather than adding new theological, philosophical and jurisprudential dimensions into the existing religious framework of the time. The past was both his frame of reference and his destination. Primarily his ideas were spinning around one key concept, ‘return’ to the religious practices of the *salaf as-salih*. The Golden Age of Islam was his ideal destiny. He took measures to find ways to take Muslims back to a time when ‘truth’ was not corrupted by

*bid'ah* and man-made innovations would not constitute a gap between Allah and his faithful followers.

Accordingly, Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab's perspectives did not have any base in philosophy. In fact he had some fundamental issues with philosophy, since it could pave the way for alienation from that ultimate 'truth', which had been already provided for Muslims through revelations. He actively attempted to avoid 'earthly' systems of logic and analytical tools to give more weight to his religious framework. He believed that man-made instruments of thought would corrupt the relationship between the faithful believer and his creator. He was not interested in accommodating his perspective to a rational framework and he was hardly impressed by 'reason', which he viewed to be a mere construction.

His cosmological understanding of the universe was also based on the notion of an uncreated creator. For him, every essential thing that we need to know is brought to us through revelation. Therefore, he never offered any fresh theological treatise and he was strongly against any attempts to philosophise religion. Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab's criticism of *taqlid* (blind imitation) and his support for *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) have given him the title of a 'reformer'. Nonetheless, one can argue that in practice he was too preoccupied with Qur'anic absolutism to embrace independent reasoning.

Qur'anic absolutism refers to the belief that all the narratives and the conceptual properties of the Qur'an are absolute and independent of historicity, time and space. Its truth is sourced from the divine creator who is the highest authority in the universe. The Qur'an, which is the revealed word of God, is superior to any form of knowledge and in no circumstances should man-made law and logic compromise it.

Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab was a religious scholar who aimed to transform the social edifice of Muslim society and create an Islamic utopia on earth. Unlike most visionary thinkers whose utopias were located somewhere in the future, his preferred destiny was in the past. For him the truth, which was the remedy, the power and the source of all wisdom, was already given to humanity, but Muslims had deviated from the right path and lost their connection to that divine revelation. Hence, Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab's task was to create a social programme to make Muslims return to what he considered was the ultimate

realisation of human consciousness. His programme of social engineering was an attempt to re-format Muslim consciousness so that it corresponded with the original message of Islam.

Although he only resorted to the text of the Qur'an to rescue the 'truth', he never suggested any hermeneutic strategy to reinterpret the text. He adhered to an extreme Qur'anic literalism with minimal scope for any philosophical elucidation that would entail any abstract intellectualisation of Islam. It is possible to assert that his main 'interpretational theory' was in principle against any form of interpretation.

The Qur'an and the Sunna were given indispensable roles because they were directly based on 'divine laws'.<sup>40</sup> Following the lines of Ibn Taymiyya, who condemned the use of Greek logic and the commentaries of scholars as means of seeking truth, he invited Muslims to put the Qur'an and the Sunna above every other available source to find the truth. For this reason the 'holy texts' had superiority over jurisprudence, which was supposed to be a mere interpretation of divine law.<sup>41</sup> Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab's only resorted to interpretation when the Qur'anic sources were ambiguous. In such cases he resorted to the sayings of the Companions. However, in every case the verdicts had to fully correspond to the Qur'an and the Sunna.<sup>42</sup>

Unlike the religious reforms of Protestantism, which were partly based on new approaches to theology and the restructuring of the Church to meet the socio-political particularities of the time, Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab's was determined to go back to the very basis of Islam. He sought to create a situation in which the 'ultimate truth' of Islam would prevail again. He sought strategies to re-inject the Islamic soul with the 'truth' and eliminate all the decadence which was paralysing the Islamic anatomy. His anti-interpretational perspectives implied that there could not be various interpretation of the 'truth', because it is inherently 'one' and 'absolute'. Hence, there had to be a 'unity' of understanding of the truth of Islam.

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<sup>40</sup> See, Ahmad 'Abd al-Ghafur 'Aṭṭār, Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab (Riyadh: Imam Mohamed Bin Saud Islamic University, 1979).

<sup>41</sup> Natana J. DeLong-Bas, Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2007), 96.

<sup>42</sup> See, Imam Jalal Abualrub, Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab: His Life Story And Mission (Madinah Publishers and Distributors, 2003).

He affirmed that the only true version of Islam is to be found in the literal writings of the Qur'an and then the Sunna.<sup>43</sup> Hence, he was more interested in the 'recovery' rather than the 'discovery' of the 'truth'. His strategies of 'truth recovery' implied the standardisation of collective practice and the homogenisation of collective consciousness in accordance with his understanding of the 'holy text'. He strongly criticised religious scholars who, dependent upon classical books, regarded them as a source of truth equal to the Qur'an and the Sunna.

Unlike the other major Islamic reformers who emerged after him, he had no preoccupation with modernity and was not concerned about how to accommodate Islam in the modern world. In other words, Wahhabism in its original shape was not exposed to those products of western modernity such as industrialisation, nationalism, liberalism, capitalism and colonialism. Indeed, western colonialism and the cultural hegemony of the west were not any of his concern either. Of course, in the eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was still in place and the West was not yet in a position to exert control over Muslim territories. Hence, he never offered any strategies to prepare Islam conceptually or ideologically to accommodate those gradual emerging forces, which were going to deeply influence the Islamic world for centuries to come. This was in contrast to later Islamic revivalist movements, which were preoccupied with the challenges of modernity. His ideas implied that reunion with the final truth would be the best and only immune system for the *umma* at any time. Hence it was not the Islam, which had to be flexible to accommodate the emerging social changes, but Muslims themselves had to return to the 'empowering' zone of 'truth'.

He asserted that Muslims were still living in the age of *jahalyeh* (ignorance) and the 'final' message of the supreme creator was polluted through generations of innovation and deviation. In principle, everything that had been borrowed from 'non-Islamic' cultures and traditions to make Islam applicable in different places and ages were now considered as '*shirk*' (polytheism).

According to Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab, the Qur'an is the final constitution of the 'truth' and it has to be internalised word by word. There is nothing beyond the literal truth of the Qur'an, and it cannot be questioned by any other sources since it is a direct word of God.

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<sup>43</sup> M. Parvizi Amineh Mehdi Parvizi Amineh, *The Greater Middle East in Global Politics* (Leiden: Brill, 2007) 213.

Therefore, the Sunna is only second in importance to the Qur'an. Moreover, *ijma* is limited to the first three centuries of Islam. The restriction on the liberating and important Islamic doctrine of *ijma* and the rejection of the open gate of *ijtihad* are among the ideological differences between the Wahhabi doctrine and later Arab reformists such as Muhammad Abdu.<sup>44</sup>

Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab condemned many traditions, practices and beliefs, which were an integral part of the religious and cultural consciousness of the Muslim community.<sup>45</sup> He condemned all Muslims who did not embrace his religious reform agenda and stigmatised the nonconformists as 'unbelievers' and '*kuffar*'.<sup>46</sup> For example, in his *Kitab al-Tawhid* (The Book of Monotheism) he uses various Qur'anic verses and hadiths to back up his argument regarding the fallacy of intercession. Although intercession was a common practice among Muslims he labelled it as 'un-Islamic'.<sup>47</sup>

Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab shared the views of Ibn Taymiyya on the shrines and the graves of saints and religious leaders. He stated that 'exaggeration in the graves of righteous persons tends them to become idols worshipped besides Allah'<sup>48</sup>. As he always did, he attempted to legitimise his claims by referring to selected hadiths. For example, in Chapter twenty-one of *Kitab al-Tawhid*, he refers to two hadiths from the Prophet, which criticise the formation of any shrines for intercession. The first one was about Muhammad's observation of women who visited the graves reported by Ibn Abbas. 'Allah's Messenger cursed the women who visited the graves, also cursed those who set up mosques and lights over graves.'<sup>49</sup> The second hadith, which was reported by Imam Malik, is Muhammad's request to Allah, as Muhammad contemplates his own death. 'O Allah! Never turn my grave into an idol to be worshipped. Allah's wrath is intensified on a people who turn their Prophet's

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> See, Arshad Khan, *Islam, Muslims, and America: Understanding the Basis of Their Conflict* (United States: Agora Publishing, 2003), 235-6.

<sup>46</sup> Ahmad al Kateb, *Al fekr As-siyasi al-Wahhabi* (Cairo: Mactabe Madbouli 2008), 20-23.

<sup>47</sup> For example he refers to verse (2:256) that, 'Whoever disbelieves in *taghut* and believes in Allah then he has grasped the most trustworthy handhold'. Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab's believed that *at-taghut* is inclusive of all that is worshiped other than Allah.

See: Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab, *Kitab al-Tawhid: The Book of Monotheism*, (Saudi Arabia, Darussalam Publication, 1996), 20.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 86.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 87.



graves into *Masjid*.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, for Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab, visiting the graves of the ‘righteous people’, including the grave of the Prophet, is an act of intercession, which violates the oneness of truth. He opposed the excessive honouring of the Prophet, a practice that he regarded as seriously violating the oneness of truth. He even regarded the celebrating of the Prophet’s birthday as an excess.<sup>51</sup>

For him the act of *tawassul* (intercession) could promote the belief that there are agencies capable of change and control other than Allah. He regarded Allah as the omnipotent and omnipresent uncreated creator in absolute control over the universe. Hence, anyone attempting to attribute the qualities of Allah to other agencies is in principle questioning Allah’s absolute power. Any thought which questioned the ‘monopoly’ of Allah over the notions of ‘change’ and ‘transition’ is a mere act of blasphemy. Every process of change and transition has to be seeded with the acknowledgement that Allah is the ultimate agency behind it. Thus, Muslims have to accept their fate since God has determined everything. The cause of every action and event cannot be challenged or questioned, as it is the intention of God. Like many of his predecessors he had an ambiguous position about the notion of free will. On the one hand Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab believed in an extreme fatalism where everything has been pre-planned by Allah and on the other hand, he held fellow Muslims responsible for their actions.

He also strongly condemned incantation and seeking blessing through any agency but Allah. For him seeking invocation and protection from anything other than Allah can be translated as an attempt to find a partner for God. Thus, seeking help and refuge from anything other than Allah and making vows to anything other than Allah constitutes acts of *shirk*.<sup>52</sup> He refers to the hadith reported by Jabir ibn Abdullah that ‘Whoever meets Allah (on the Day of Judgment) not having associated anyone with Him (in worship), shall enter Paradise; and whoever meets Him having committed *shirk* in any way will enter the Hell-fire.’<sup>53</sup> In the seven chapters of the Book of Monotheism he repeatedly warns about the sinful nature of intercession and condemns the act. He also condemns the making of an oath to any being

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> However graves maybe visited to show respect for the dead and remind themselves of the nearness of death, and Muslims may pray for the dead. But they should not resort to the dead to intervene and intercede with God.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 33.

other than Allah. He stated that it is better ‘to swear by Allah while lying than to swear by other than Him while speaking the truth.’<sup>54</sup>

It is possible to argue that ‘exclusion’ was an unavoidable aspect of his narrative. For example, those who engaged in *tawassul* or strayed from the literal text of the Qur’an or the Sunna were excluded from the ‘true’ Muslim community and would face the consequences. Clearly, any form of exclusionary doctrine cannot be instigated without its own antithesis. Its identity, mode of thought and medium of expression are conditioned by the particularities of the entities and the narratives that they attempt to oppose. Hence, it thrives on the binaries of ‘us versus them’ or ‘truth versus falsehood’ without acknowledging any middle ground. Exclusionary doctrines are often derived from collectivising social constructions such as race, class, ideology and religion. Often individuals or groups who adhere to exclusionary narratives claim to be on the side of the ‘truth’ and assume themselves to be enriched by higher ‘moral’ standards. This very much describes the anatomy of exclusion in Wahhabi doctrine.<sup>55</sup>

For example, in keeping with his objections to *tawassul*, Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab condemns all mystics, Sufi orders, saints and Shiite Imams, because they claim a ‘special relationship’ with Allah.<sup>56</sup> Their techniques and approaches in their relationship with Allah were strongly condemned and regarded as sacrilegious. Practices including ecstatic group chanting, music, dancing, individual ecstasy and those who engaged in worship around sacred stones or high places were obviously labelled as the practises of idolatrous polytheists.<sup>57</sup> He strongly criticised the Shiite faith and the general edifice of Sufi orders. He considered their practices as ‘innovations’ and alien from the form of Islamic truth, which was advocated by the Prophet. His *takfir* verdicts were not only limited to the ‘deviant’ Sufis and Shiites. In fact, many Sunni traditions were also considered to be decadent. Many of the Sunni practices, which had been part of their religious and cultural life for centuries, were

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid, 89 .

<sup>55</sup> see, Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab “Clarification Of The Doubts A Decisive Reply To The Doubts And Arguments Of The Associationists”, Islamicweb, [http://islamicweb.com/beliefs/creed/Clarification\\_Doubts.htm](http://islamicweb.com/beliefs/creed/Clarification_Doubts.htm) (accessed May 21, 2012).

<sup>56</sup> Muḥammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Khuṭab al-Imam Muḥammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab wa-baḍ , aḥfadih raḥimahum Allāh ta‘ala* (Riyadh : al-Amānah al-Ammah lil-Iḥtīfāl bi-Murūr Mi‘at Am Ala Ta’sis al-Mamlakah, 1999).

<sup>57</sup> Bayly Winder (1965), 9-11.

attacked and stigmatised as ‘un-Islamic’ as well. <sup>58</sup>His ‘reform’ mandate was not limited to doctrinal issues, he also attacked many everyday habits such as smoking tobacco, wearing silk, fortune telling, telling beads and wearing talismans. The shaving of beards, the wearing of robes that failed to show the ankle, and the use of rosaries were declared illegal as well. <sup>59</sup>

The focus of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab was not only the individual, it was the community, and what he declared the community should do, was to implement the laws of Allah. Since the purpose of community was to fully implement God’s word, obedience to the ruler and imam is an absolute obligation on the individual unless the ruler orders him to transcend the rule of God. A ruler can impose ‘true’ Islamic practices on his people. He can force individuals to implement the duties that God ordered them to do. For example, the ruler can force people to go to prayer on time, make them fast and pay the religious taxes *zakat*. Hence, conformity was a precondition for collectivisation of morality in accordance with the true religion.

For Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab, even external appearance and behaviour was a visible expression of inward faith. Thus, according to him everything including prayer, dresses and behaviour becomes a public statement of whether one is a ‘true’ Muslim. Because practising true Islamic duties is visible in perceptible ways, the Muslim community can measure the quality of a person’s faith by observing their actions. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of each Muslim to examine the behaviour of their fellow Muslims in order to correct them if they go wrong. Hence adhering to Islamic practices is not a matter of choice, but a set of compulsory measures enforced by the community and of course, the leadership. Muslims who do not obey the rules would face exclusionary measures and punishments for not respecting the laws of God on earth.

Since he believed that the true Caliphate had ceased to exist after the death of the four caliphs who followed the Prophet, he felt a true Muslim state should be governed by the partnership of the amir and an imam to apply the laws of Shari‘a correctly. This was the theoretical basis for the future Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which is based on a hybrid system of control.

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<sup>58</sup> Charles Allen (2006), 56.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

For Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab, there could be no compromise about the absolute morality of the Prophet, the verdicts of the Qur'an or the existence of Shari'a law. The truth had to be implemented at any cost and if 'heretical' Muslims refused to turn from their 'idolatrous practices', he declared jihad against them.<sup>60</sup> Thus, in practice he developed a religious and ideological right to declare jihad on 'enemies'; people who identified themselves as equally Muslim as the followers of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab. Accordingly, Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab justified the need for jihad against all *kuffar* and classified the 'deviant' Muslims as nothing short of infidels.<sup>61</sup>

### **Socio-Political Conditions in Najd before Wahhabism**

Having explored the ideas of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab, it is imperative to briefly explore the conditions in which his ideas were formed. Wahhabism emerged in the region of Najd within the Arabian Peninsula. The region is mainly made of a rocky plateau sloping eastward from the mountains of the Hejaz. On the southern, northern, and eastern borders, it is next to the sandy deserts of al-Nafud, al-Dahna, and the Rub al-Khali. The population of these settlements was highly scattered, except for those groups living in the fertile oases strung along the escarpment of Jabal Tuwayq and the al-Aramah plateau.<sup>62</sup> If there was enough rain, settlers could cultivate dates, barley and millet, and trade them for livestock such as camels, sheep and horses. Farmers and Bedouins exchanged their limited crops and livestock with traders from Syria, Iraq and Yemen in return for pots, swords and coffee.<sup>63</sup> Before the advent of Wahhabism, the region had never enjoyed any political or social significance as such. It was extremely isolated and hardly any external forces had any interest in it; this was mainly due to the harsh living conditions. Unlike Hejaz, which was historically more cosmopolitan and prosperous, Najd never enjoyed an extensive intellectual, cultural and

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<sup>60</sup> Charles H Parker, *Global Interactions in the Early Modern Age: 1400-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 199.

<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, Abdul Wahhab advocated that there is only one 'true' monotheist religion and that is, Islam. Although this idea was hardly new, he put a lot of emphasis on it. He strongly criticised the previous religions such as Christianity, which in principle questioned the uniqueness of God, and allocated partners for Him on earth.

<sup>62</sup> Britannica Encyclopedia, "Najd"

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/401967/Najd> (Accessed June, 12, 2010)

<sup>63</sup> Mark Weston, *Prophets and Princes : Saudi Arabia from Muhammad to the Present* ( New Jersey: Wiley Press, 2008), 86.

economic interaction with the outside world. It was mainly seen as a desert wasteland with minimum productivity.

Gradually, after the formative years of Islam, the Arabian Peninsula lost its political significance. Nonetheless, millions of Muslims from the new Islamic centres kept going back there to fulfil their religious duty. Hence, the inhabitants of certain parts of the peninsula enjoyed continuous interaction with fellow Muslims who were visiting the holy sites of Islam. However, apart from some pilgrims from Iran and Iraq most other caravans avoided the routes through Najd. Most of the travellers from North Africa, Egypt and Turkey came via the Red Sea and from the vast Indian Ocean basin, Muslim travellers sailed under monsoon winds to Yemen and Red Sea ports.<sup>64</sup> Thus, Najd enjoyed minimal interaction with the outside world.

Any major Islamic empire had hardly ever ruled Najd since the Abbasids in the tenth century. Even the Ottomans, who made one of the largest empires of the world, which stretched from Baghdad to Budapest, had minimal reasons to invade and control the area. It did not have any economic, strategic or political significance for the Sultans of the Ottoman Empire. The rulers of the Ottoman Empire regarded the Arabian Peninsula as an insignificant and rather primitive zone whose only importance was the holy sites such as Mecca and Medina. Yet one of the main sources of religious legitimacy for the Ottoman Sultans was the ‘guardianship’ of the holy sites. Thus, as long as their religious status remained intact and their caravans could safely travel through the region, they were satisfied with the arrangements coordinated by their proxy powers in the area.<sup>65</sup> Although Ottoman political domination was tangible in areas such as the Hejaz, Najd for the most part was free from the intervention of the regional powers of the time.

The inhabitants of Najd were partly nomadic and partly settled, with the residents of the settlements inhabiting a number of small oases.<sup>66</sup> The general scale of political power was small in terms of both the population and the geographical areas that were under outside control. There were considerable political differences between the nomadic and settled

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<sup>64</sup> David Dean Commins *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2006), 7.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

populations, each was characterised by a fairly small scale of political organisation<sup>67</sup>. The major differences between the nomadic and settled units related to the degree in which kinship figured as a factor in social relations.<sup>68</sup>

Before the emergence of the Wahhabi order, petty tyrants mainly ruled the small oasis-states. Insecurity, political instability and ongoing conflict between the oases seemed to be part of everyday life and conflict did not seem to have resulted in any tangible political evolution.<sup>69</sup> Although some temporary alliances used to be made between various settlements and tribes, there were endless raids and counter raids between rival entities. Conflict seemed to be omnipresent and most tribes were affected by constant rivalry and antagonism. For example, al-Uyayna, which was the hometown of the founder of Wahhabism, faced conflicts nearly every three years.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, continuous instability, conflict, insecurity, impoverishment and isolation were prevailing factors, which had their effect on the religio-political perspectives that were produced in the region. In this situation, Wahhabism emerged to transform the Arabian Peninsula, the birthplace of Islam, for centuries to come. The ideas, which were cultivated in this region, seeded the eventual creation of the modern Saudi state; Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab's religious perspectives were to become the basis for a way of life for millions of people for generations to come.

Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab was born into an impoverished tribe known as *the Beni Temin*, who were mainly famous for the quality of their horseflesh.<sup>71</sup> Before the emergence of Wahhabism there was a very limited history of Islamic education in the area. Only in some of the settlements did certain family lineages specialise in maintaining and transmitting the Islamic tradition. The main focus of learning was applied jurisprudence. The majority of local scholars were followers of the Hanbali School of Jurisprudence while only a few followed other schools such as Shafa'i and Maliki.<sup>72</sup> Accordingly, even before the advent of the Wahhabi mission, the *Hanbali* School of Jurisprudence was influential in the area.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 9.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Mark Weston (2008), 86.

<sup>71</sup> Charles Allen (2006), 48.

<sup>72</sup> Commins (2006), 10.

For these reasons, Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab had modest access to Islamic education while he was still in his youth. During this time, he received his education primarily from his father who was a Hanbali jurist.<sup>73</sup> It is reported that, as a child, he had a high capacity for studying the Qur'an, and by the age of ten he could recite the whole Qur'an by memory.<sup>74</sup> His family had already produced many notable Hanbali jurists and theologians. His grandfather, Sulayman ibn Ali ibn Musharraf, was also a recognised judge in Najd. His uncle, Ibrahim ibn Suleiman, was both a judge and a mufti in the settlements around al-Uyaynah.<sup>75</sup> When Abdul Wahhab was about twenty he moved to Medina where he could take his educational path further. In Medina he studied under Ibrahim ibn Sayf, a known admirer of Ibn Taymiyya and an Indian hadith scholar Muhammad Hayat al-Sindi Al-Sindi's theological orientation was Shafi'i, but he also respected Ibn Taymiyya.

There are various reports that Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab travelled widely before going back to Najd. There are conflicting narratives.<sup>76</sup> This study does not seek to find a resolution for the conflicting narratives of his journeys; it is enough to conclude that Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab almost certainly spent part of his life outside Najd. It is possible to assume that his travelling and wider exposure to the regions beyond Najd may have informed some of his religious perspectives.

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<sup>73</sup> al Ymani al Fakhrani (Cairo, Maktabeh Mdbouli, 2012),19.

<sup>74</sup> Commins (2006), 10.

<sup>75</sup> Natana J. Delong-Bas (2007), 17.

<sup>76</sup> Although a detailed examination of his journeys is beyond this study, it is important to mention some of his experiences outside the remote region of Najd. According to Cook, the Wahhabi sources provide a restrained account of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab's itinerary. Accordingly, he visits Medina; he returns, then goes to Iraq, visiting Basra and he comes home via al-Ahsa. There is little variation in Wahhabi sources, apart from the order of visits as some sources indicate that he visited Basra before Medina. One late Wahhabi source suggests that he visited Baghdad as well. The Wahhabi accounts also indicate that while he was residing in Basra he wished to go to Damascus, which was a major centre for Hanbali scholarship then, but he did not have the necessary means to do so and decided to return home. Some of the non-Wahhabi sources have a more colourful account of his travelling. According to some of these accounts, Abdul Al-Wahhab starts his traveling from the age of 37. Initially he went to Basra where he attracted the patronage of the governor. Accordingly he spent six years in the city. Then he lived for five years in Baghdad. The same sources suggest that he travelled through Kurdistan and eventually he ended up in Iran where he spent two years in Hamadan and then seven years in Isfahan. During his stay in Isfahan he mastered Peripatetic philosophy and became familiar with Ishraqism and Sufism. Then he proceeded to Ray and then Qumm. He also spent time in Anatolia Aleppo, Damascus, Jerusalem and Cairo before returning to Najd via Hejaz. However, this account has been questioned and as Michael Cook notes, 'despite its occasional references to specific but anonymous sources neither the picaresque character of the account nor its impossible chronology inspire any confidence'. For more information see: Michael Cook, 'On the Origins of Wahhabism', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Jul., 1992), 191-202.

It is reported that after his travels he went to Huraymila, where his father had a residence. Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab seemed to be productive in Huraymila, as that is where he wrote his best-known treaty, *Kitab al-Tawhid* (The Book of Monotheism), which continues to act as the canonical text for the Wahhabi religious order.<sup>77</sup> However, his religious opinions caused him some problems even to the point that he had to leave the settlement of Huraymila and repatriate to al-Uyaynah. It was in this area that Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab managed to secure the protection of a new ruler, Uthman ibn Hamid ibn Muammar. Now with the political and military support of this petty tyrant, Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab was in a better position to promote his ideas of instigating ‘reform’.

In al-Uyaynah, Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab committed himself to a course of controversial actions, which defined his religious dogma at that early stage. Following his determination to achieve ‘unity’, he started to undermine anything that he considered would contradict his understanding of Islam. He started his efforts by physically shattering anything that symbolised a violation of the unity. For example, in the area of al-Uyaynah there were some trees, which were considered to be blessed by some ‘super material’ powers, people hung various items in the branches of the trees hoping they would receive blessings or good luck from them. For Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab, this was a direct violation of the *tawhid*. He gave orders to cut down the ‘sacred’ trees and personally took part in destroying what he considered to be enemies of the Islamic unity. Then he destroyed the shrine of Zayd ibn al-Khattab, an early associate of the Prophet and a brother of the second Sunni Caliph.

Many people considered that shrine holy but Ibn Abd al-Wahhab razed it to the ground, asserting there should be no appeal for blessing to any agency but God. He proclaimed that only Allah should be subject to reverence, not human beings. The shrine played an important role in the religious life of the community, and was a symbolic connection between the locals and the historic origin of their faith. Nonetheless, despite the physical resistance of the local population, he destroyed the shrine. He also ordered an adulterous woman to be stoned to death. It is reported that his teachings, which were often translated into controversial actions, galvanised the local clerical community and soon a circle of

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<sup>77</sup> More than 90% of this book is collection of quotations and Qur’anic verses.



people who had religious, financial and political weight started to pressurise Ibn Muammar to end his support for Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab.

Ibn Muammar was informed that if he maintained his ties with Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab, he would risk political instability and even worse some serious financial losses. He was told that he should either kill him or send him into exile, otherwise his tax revenues would be jeopardised. Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab asked the ruler to show his true faith by maintaining his support for the message of unity. Nonetheless, soon Ibn Abdul Wahhab had to leave the settlement and find a new base of support. This time he accepted the political patronage of Mohammed Ibn Saud in the settlement of Diriyah.

### **The Saudi Leadership and the Expansion of Wahhabism**

It is possible to argue that Wahhabism could never register as a considerable religio-political narrative without the effective leadership of the House of Saud. The House of Saud has acted as the political engine broadening the Wahhabi sphere of influence within and beyond the Arabian Peninsula. It provided the indispensable agency for the religious interpretations of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab. It also provided an effective mechanism whereby Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab's rigid religious perspectives could be translated into power. The House of Saud created a framework for 'ideologisation' of Wahhabi narratives, which until today functions as the basis of the modern Saudi state.

When Ibn Al-Wahhab reached Diriyah in 1740, it was an insignificant settlement in Najd; the small population consisted of farmers, artisans, religious figures and slaves. Some sources suggest that the settlement did not have more than seventy households, and since 1727 a member of the Al Saud clan Mohammed Ibn Saud had been the ruler.<sup>78</sup> The origin of the Al-Saud family is often attributed to Masalikh Banu wa'il, a tribal section of the north Arabian camel herding *Anayza* tribe. This association with the Al Saud family remains dubious since there is no proof that this tribal group contributed to the family's expansion in later years in Arabia.<sup>79</sup> Some scholars have suggested that the Saud family was a sedentary group who founded a settlement in Diriyah. The Saudi leadership in the eighteenth century corresponded

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<sup>78</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 15.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

to a traditional form of governance, which was common in many settlements in the area and the wider Arabian Peninsula.<sup>80</sup>

There is much speculation as to what drove them to become the political engine of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab's teaching. There have been debates on how and why this union was made between a relatively insignificant tribe and a controversial religious figure who had been expelled from two neighbouring settlements. Al-Rasheed analyses the Al Saud's motives and suggests that the lack of tribal prestige and wealth were the two motivating factors behind the Al Saud family in giving protection to Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab. Al-Rasheed notes that Al Saud lacked the identifiable tribal origin, which could have given a strong association with a tribal confederation similar to that of Bani Khalid of Hasa. Furthermore, the Saudi family lacked any surplus wealth. Hence, they did not have the economic capacity to expand their influence gradually to other settlements.<sup>81</sup>

Given the Al Saud's tribal, political and economic limitations, it is possible to assume that they saw the Wahhabi religious mandate as an opportunity to give them a 'super material' legitimacy as well as 'earthly' political and financial gains. There are also some popular narratives suggesting that the political and financial expansion of Al Saud was only a serendipity, which emerged out of the sincere commitment of Al Saud to the religious cause of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab's.<sup>82</sup> It is impossible to determine the inner motives of Al Saud for sheltering Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab's, but there is no doubt that the political marriage between the two changed the fate of House of Saud for centuries to come. Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab's provided the ideological framework, which transformed a small and insignificant tribe into the eventual rulers of the modern Saudi State. The pact between the two paved the way for the establishment of a religious emirate, which soon started to assume political significance.

After the aforementioned pact between the House of Saud and Abd-al-Wahhab, the army of Muhammad Ibn Saud, equipped with new ideological force, started offensive campaigns to

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<sup>80</sup> Sami Qasim Amin al Maliji , *al Wahhabiyyah* (Cairo: Maktabeh madbouli, 2008),77.

<sup>81</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed (2002), 15.

<sup>82</sup> Some narratives suggest that Ibn Saud 's two brothers were already students of ibn Al-Wahhab when he was still teaching in al-Uyaynah. Hence they played an active role to convince Ibn Saud to invite ibn Al-Wahhb to the settlement. Some other sources also suggest that Ibn Saud 's wife played a central role to convince the Amir to provide political sanctuary to Al-Wahhab.

take over towns and villages in Najd. By 1765 most of Najd was under the political and religious domination of the Saudi forces. The Wahhabi-Saudi co-operation did not come to an end after the death of Muhammad Ibn Saud in 1765. His son Abd al Aziz took over the responsibility of the Amir and became the new champion of the Wahhabi cause, and the expansion continued. In 1801 Saudi forces invaded Karbala one of the most important cities in Shiite Islam. The invasion of the Shiite city was recorded as being particularly brutal, as many Shiite Muslims were killed at the hands of the Saudi-Wahhabi forces. They destroyed the religious monuments and grave markers that were being used for prayer to Shiite saints and for votive rituals, which the invaders considered acts of polytheism.

By razing the objects of Shiite rituals the Wahhabi forces claimed to replicate the act of the Prophet who destroyed the idols in the Ka'ba in Mecca upon his victorious return to Mecca from Medina in 628. In 1804 they invaded the city of Medina, the second most important city in the Islamic *umma*. They repeated their actions in Karbala by destroying many sites, which were considered as holy by many Sunni and Shiite Muslims. The Wahhabi forces also made an attempt to despoil the grave of the Prophet. In the following year they occupied the city of Mecca and killed many Muslims. Before this attack, the House of Hashem had held the traditional title Sharif of Mecca, custodian of the holy cities. Although they were nominally sovereigns, after 1517 they became subordinate to the authority of the Ottoman Empire and ruled with the blessing of the Sultan.<sup>83</sup>

These actions shook the foundations of the Ottoman Empire. After all, the Sultan gained his legitimacy from his guardianship of the holiest sites of the Islamic world. The Wahhabi advances undermined both the religious and the political reputation of the Ottoman Sultan. Apart from two brief periods, under the rebel Ali Bey (1770-1773)<sup>84</sup> and a decade of Saudi-Wahhabi rule (1803/4-18120) by the House of Hashim, the Ottoman governors maintained their control over Hejaz until the late the nineteenth century.<sup>85</sup> Although the Sultan was under tremendous pressure to recapture Mecca and Medina, the Ottoman Empire was not in a position to commission another military expedition. The empire had been the process of decline for about two centuries and its military was infirm and overextended. European

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<sup>83</sup> Wayne H. Bowen, *The history of Saudi Arabia* (United States: Greenwood press, 2008), 68.

<sup>84</sup> See, Arthur Goldschmidt, *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Egypt* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

opponents were already exerting pressure on the Ottoman frontiers. In this light, the Ottomans commissioned an ambitious Albanian born general, Muhammad Ali (1769 – 1849)<sup>86</sup>, who was in charge of their semi-independent garrison in Egypt to defend their interests. The general handed over the job to his son Tursun who led the campaign into Hejaz in 1816, but Mohammed Ali later joined the expedition to lead it in person.<sup>87</sup> Meanwhile, Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab died in 1792 and Abd al Aziz died shortly before taking over Mecca, at which point his son Saud ibn Abdul Aziz ibn Muhammad Ibn Saud took over the movement. In 1814 he too died and his son Abdullah Ibn Saud took command and faced the Egyptians.

The recapturing of Mecca and Medina did not require much effort for the Egyptian forces. Having lost Hejaz, Abdullah Ibn Saud decided to retreat to Najd and take the battle to his stronghold. Mohammed Ali also decided to chase the Wahhabi-Saudi forces there. He commissioned another army led by his other son Ibrahim to finalise the collapse of the first Saudi state. Although Saudi forces resisted the Egyptian offensive for a while, their opponents outnumbered them and the Wahhabi zeal could no longer mobilise the Saudi forces to overcome the modern Egyptian army. In village after village Ibn Saud watched the triumph of the Egyptian forces and finally he gave in and Diriyah fell in 1818.<sup>88</sup> The conduct of the victors was recorded as being brutal and the invading forces captured most of the Saudi family. Abdullah Ibn Saud, the leader of the family was sent to Istanbul to be executed.<sup>89</sup> The death of Abdullah Ibn Saud brought an end to the so-called ‘first Saudi state’ and with it the first attempt for the official conversion of the Arabian Peninsula to Wahhabism had failed.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Mohammed Ali was one of defining leaders of Egypt in modern times. Although he was not a modern nationalist in the contemporary sense of the term, later he was dubbed as the ‘Father of Modern Egypt’. Often his is credited for much of Egypt's modernization in military, economic and cultural spheres. He also ruled other territories outside Egypt. The dynasty that he founded continued to rule Egypt and Sudan until the Egyptian Revolution in mid twentieth century. For more details see, Afaf Lutfi Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>87</sup> Federal Research Division, *Saudi Arabia a Country Study* (Unites States: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 54-5.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Henry Dodwell, *The Founder of Modern Egypt: A Study of Muhammad Ali* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 48.

<sup>90</sup> It is technically wrong to equate the Saudi-Wahhabi domination within that limited period with the formation of a ‘Saudi state’. In technical terms, a sovereign political unit needs to meet some preconditions to be qualified as a state. For example, a sovereign state must have a permanent population, a defined territory and a systematic administration with the capacity to enter into relations with other sovereign states. Clearly

Although the Wahhabi-Saudi forces were paralysed, it was only a matter of time before the House of Saud began to rule again. In 1824 Turki ibn Abdullah recaptured Riyadh from the Egyptian forces. This was the second major watershed in the political history of the House of Saud. The military triumph of Turki ibn Abdullah was considered the beginning of the so-called 'Second Saudi State'. The conditions for the recapturing of Riyadh emerged when the Egyptian forces decided to strengthen their position in Hejaz where their main geo-political interest was based. Hence they did not remain in Najd.

The House of Saud maintained its previous ties with Wahhabism. However, this time the territorial gain was not considerable and only the area of Najd became subject to Saudi-Wahhabi control. The most successful phase of the Second State was between 1843 and 1865 under the leadership of Faysal ibn Turki. In this period, the ruler focused on a 'Wahhabism in one country' policy rather than attempting to expand outside central Arabia. Faysal was pragmatic enough to acknowledge the Ottoman authority through the payment of an annual tribute. This recognition of the Ottoman Empire contributed towards the consolidation of his own position.<sup>91</sup> However, this time the internal divisions in the House of Saud undermined their establishment and weakened their domination of Najd.

In 1887 Ibn Rashid, the ruler of Ha'il in the north of peninsula eventually captured Riyadh and made it part of his emirate. The House of Rashid was an historic dynasty, which was primarily centred in northern Najd in the city of Ha'il. They were considered the most dangerous opponents of the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance in the area. The House of Rashid imposed a bitter defeat upon the House of Saud in the Battle of Mulayda, which was indeed the last major conflict during the existence of the 'second Saudi state'. Abd al-Rahman ibn Faisal, the main claimant to the leadership of the House of Saud, took flight from Najd and took refuge in Kuwait. Abd al-Rahman ibn Faysal and his son Abd al-Aziz stayed in Kuwait until 1902.<sup>92</sup>

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the Saudi establishment did not meet the above criteria. Yet the existing literature predominantly recognises the periodic dominations of the House of Saud within the Arabian Peninsula as 'Saudi States.'

<sup>91</sup> Tim Niblock, *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival* (London: Routledge, 2006), 29.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

## Towards Formation of the Modern Saudi State

Ibn Saud or Abd al-Aziz (1876-1953), who spent much of his life in exile, decided to regain his 'right' to rule. He founded the third Saudi state, which has lasted until the present time. In 1902, Ibn Saud and about twenty companions launched an offensive campaign against the House of Rashid. With a rather minimal effort he managed to recapture Riyadh. Soon the previous power base of the House of Saud, Najd, went under the control of Ibn Saud.<sup>93</sup> By 1913 he conquered the eastern province of al-Hasa and by 1920 most of the Asir region went under his control.<sup>94</sup>

In 1925 he invaded the city of Mecca and captured the holy site from Sharif Hussayn ibn Ali. The fall of Mecca marked the end of almost 700 years of the Hashemite guardianship of the Islamic holy sites.<sup>95</sup> As soon the situation was under control, the House of Saud made sure that its rule was compliant with the Wahhabi religious framework.<sup>96</sup> Arguably, this was an attempt at emerging 'worldly domination' within a religious context. It seemed even from the early stages Ibn Saud wanted to portray himself as a 'religious reformer' rather than a brutal conqueror.<sup>97</sup> Although his path to power was extremely violent, he was aware of the significance of religious legitimacy for his campaigns. In April 1925, the forces of Ibn Saud complied with the Wahhabi edicts, and destroyed some of the holiest sites of Islam, Jannat al-Baqi and Jannat- Al-Mualla. These sites held great significance for the vast majority of the Islamic *umma* who strongly criticised the Wahhabi-Saudi action. These sites contained the shrines and graves of many of Muhammad's relatives and companions. Many of the mausoleums, which had been destroyed had particular significance for the Shiites. Many Shiites still mourn the day of the demolition and remember 21 April 1925 as the 'Day of Sorrow', *Yaum e Gham*.<sup>98</sup> However, the

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<sup>93</sup> Askar H. Al-Enazy, *The creation of Saudi Arabia: Ibn Saud and British Imperial Policy, 1914-1927* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>94</sup> Tim Niblock (2006), 29.

<sup>95</sup> See, Mohammed Almana, *Arabia unified : a portrait of Ibn Saud* (London: Hutchinson Benham, 1980).

<sup>96</sup> See, H.C Armstrong, *Lord of Arabia, Ibn Saud : an Intimate Study of a King* (London: Baker, 1934).

<sup>97</sup> See, Kenneth Williams, *Ibn Sa'ud : the Puritan king of Arabia* ( London: J. Cape, 1933).

<sup>98</sup> Many of the personalities who were buried in Jannat al Baqi are considered as major religious figures in Shiite Islam . The planned demolition included the graves of Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet and the wife of Ali the first Imam of Shiite Islam. The graves of Imam Hassan ibn Ali , Imam Jaffar Sadiq , Imam Mohammed al\_Baqir and many other defining Shiite leaders were destroyed . Many of the major graves which were considered as significant for the Sunni Muslims were also destroyed. i.e the grave of Uthman ibn Affan , the third Caliph of Sunni Islam, Uthman Bin Mazoun , Malik ibn Anas and many other significant personalities of the early Islamic history.

condemnation was not limited to the Shiite minority, with many Sunni communities disapproving of the demolitions as well.

By January 1926, Ibn Saud had fully strengthened his position in the western Arabian Peninsula. Hence, leading civic and religious figures in Mecca, Medina and Jeddah recognised him as the king of the Hejaz.<sup>99</sup> Gradually, through conquest, the Image of Ibn Saud changed. Initially, he ruled over villages and settlements, which had minimal geo-political or economic significance for the major powers. However, the conquest of the Hejaz brought Ibn Saud to the attention of the outside world. Due to its religious and political importance, Hejaz accommodated various diplomatic and consular offices, which connected the area to Europe and other important Muslim countries. Hence, the emergence of Ibn Saud as a formidable political actor and the belief system that he represented was noticed by the main political players of the time.<sup>100</sup>

On 20 May 1927, the British government signed the Treaty of Jeddah (The Anglo-Saudi Treaty), which paved the way for further expansion of Ibn Saud 's political jurisdiction. The British Empire officially recognised the independence of the Hejaz and Najd and Ibn Saud as its ruler. In return he was obliged to respect British interests in the neighbouring emirates. Muslims particularly Shiites from Persia and India were afraid of Wahhabi domination over the heart of the Islamic *umma*, many of them preferred some form of rule by Islamic consensus over the Hejaz, not by a Saudi *fait accompli* authorised by the British Empire.<sup>101</sup> As Leatherdale noted 'the likelihood that Ibn Saud would not be the unanimous choice of the Muslim world may be an additional factor behind his securing the throne for himself so quickly.'<sup>102</sup>

It is important to mention that, although the personality and the conduct of Ibn Saud played a crucial role in the construction of Saudi Arabia in the twentieth century, his military campaigns alone could not guarantee the establishment of a new political unit in

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<sup>99</sup> Clive Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia, 1925-1939: the Imperial Oasis* (London: Rutledge, 1983), 59

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 60

one of the most strategic regions of the world.<sup>103</sup> During the creation of Saudi Arabia, major foreign powers were present in the entire region.<sup>104</sup> By 1900 most of the coastal rulers of the Arabian Peninsula from Kuwait to Muscat had already signed protection treaties with Britain.<sup>105</sup> After the World War I, and the final collapse of the Ottoman Empire, European influence over the region increased. There is a wide literature on British-Saudi relations in the early years of the twentieth century. Hence, analysing the role of superpowers in the establishment of modern Saudi Arabia is beyond this study. It is important just to bear in mind that the establishment of a political unit without the sanctioning of Britain in the early twentieth century would have been very unlikely.<sup>106</sup> It is ironic that a religio-political movement, which theoretically would not tolerate infidels, relied on British support to establish itself as an effective power within the peninsula.

Although, after 1927, Ibn Saud benefited from the political support of the superpowers, conflict was his main ticket to power. Through conflict and the brutal elimination of his rivals in the peninsula, he convinced the imperial actors that he could establish a formidable authority in the new political unit, which would also benefit their interests.<sup>107</sup> Thus, the foundation of the third Saudi State was largely vested in violence utilised by Ibn Saud to pave the way for domination of the House of Saud in the Arabian Peninsula. It is important to observe the role of conflict in Saudi state building, for this was to support the Wahhabi doctrine for decades to come.

From the early stages, Ibn Saud and his fledgling religio-political establishment primarily relied on brute power to meet the requirements of the first stage of control. Through conflict the Saudi-Wahhabi forces eliminated the other claimants of power. His ambition for domination of the Arabian Peninsula could not be achieved without a formidable military force to pave the way for the creation of a more complex political unit, which would utilise positive as well as negative power to maintain social control. The Ikhwan (brothers) was the

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<sup>103</sup> see, Ibrahim al-Rashid, *Establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under Ibn Saud, 1928-1935* (New York: Salisbury, 1976).

<sup>104</sup> see, Leslie McLoughlin, *Ibn Saud : Founder of a Kingdom* (New York : St. Martin's Press,1993)

<sup>105</sup> As'ad AbuKhalil, *The battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism and Global Power* (Seven Stories Press, 2003),76 .

<sup>106</sup> Haifa Alangari, *The Struggle for Power in Arabia: Ibn Saud, Hussein and Great Britain, 1914-1924*, London: Ithaca Press, 1998).

<sup>107</sup> Ibrahim al-Rashid, *Establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under Ibn Saud, 1928-1935*(New York: Salisbury, 1976).



name of the militia group which constituted the main military force of Ibn Saud. It played a crucial role in establishing him as the king of Saudi Arabia. The Ikhwan were primarily made up of Bedouin tribes.<sup>108</sup> Between 1902 and 1912, Ibn Saud's army consisted of men from the towns and settlements who had a financial interest in participating in his raids. His most loyal men were from Arid in southern Najd. They were the vanguard of Ibn Saud's military and they were considered jihad fighters.<sup>109</sup>

However, in 1907-08 Ibn Saud faced threats from the insubordination of the Ara'if segment of his own family. They were the descendants of Ibn Saud's uncle, Saud.<sup>110</sup> The Ara'if rebellion was aided by a nomadic tribal confederation. Ibn Saud came to the conclusion that his domination in Qasim and southern Najd would be undermined as long as they exerted control and maintained their political autonomy.<sup>111</sup> Hence he created this semi-permanent warrior machine from the tribal confederations (Ikhwan). This formidable military force conducted some of the most strategic military campaigns of Ibn Saud, which paved the way for the formation of the third Saudi state.

Many crucial areas such as Hejaz, al-Hasa and Ha'il could not be conquered without the Ikhwan.<sup>112</sup> Habib describes the militia as:

Those Bedouins who accepted the fundamentals of orthodox Islam of the *Hanbali* school as presented by Ibn Abdul Wahhab which their fathers and forefathers had forgotten or had prevented and who through the persuasion of the religious missionaries and with the material assistance of Abdl-Aziz abandoned their nomadic life to live in the Hijrah, which were built by him for them.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> John Habibi, *Ibn Sa'ud's Warriors of Islam: the Ikhwan of Najd and their Role in the Creation of the Sa'udi Kingdom, 1910-1930* (Leiden: Brill, 1978).

<sup>109</sup> Rasheed, (2002), 59.

<sup>110</sup> Vassiliev Alexi, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (London: Saqi Books, 2002).

<sup>111</sup> I Rasheed, (2002), 59.

<sup>112</sup> By 1912, over 11,000 Ikhwan were settled in newly established agricultural settlements. Farming proved to be unsuccessful for the Ikhwan, hence they relied on the financial assistance of Ibn Saud. For more information see: Sebastian Maisel and John Shoup, *Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Arab States Today* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2009), 213.

<sup>113</sup> Rasheed, (2002), 59.

The Ikhwan participated in all the major military campaigns starting with the conquest of Al-Hasa 1913. They also defeated The House of Rashid and Shammar in 1921 and the Hashemites of the Hejaz, taking the cities of Ta'if, Mecca and Jeddah in 1924-1925, and they also took part in smaller military campaigns against Yemen. For many years the relation between Ibn Saud and Ikhwan was mutually beneficial.<sup>114</sup> However, gradually some members of the Ikhwan started to express their dissatisfaction with the warming relations between Ibn Saud and the British who were considered as 'infidels'. This was only the beginning of a controversial and rather paradoxical relationship between the House of Saud and the so-called '*kuffar*', which continues to create tendentious debates in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

At this stage, the segments of the force that he created himself now used the very ideas which had been championed by Ibn Saud against him. For the Ikhwan the close ties with Britain were a contradiction to the 'puritan' Wahhabi teaching, which was preached by Ibn Saud himself. Hence, a rebellious faction, led by Faysal al-Duwaysh, ibn Bijad and ibn Hithlayn, emerged to challenge the conduct of Ibn Saud and his new policies.<sup>115</sup> The failure to respect the newly established borders and the raids against neighbouring countries, were among their many activities, which antagonised Ibn Saud and his regional allies such as Britain.

Nonetheless, he managed to remobilise his forces and eventually defeated them in the Battle of Sibilla in 1929. Ironically, Ibn Saud who represented a 'puritan' Islam resorted to British military support to defeat the Ikhwan, the very warriors who had once helped him to broaden the Wahhabi influence within the Arabian Peninsula. Britain provided its modern air force for Ibn Saud to use to defeat the ideas, which were once preached by him and his crony *ulama*. The defeat of the Ikhwan, who adhered to the ultra-conservative messages of Wahhabism with the assistance of the modern military might of the *kuffar*, was a base for the contradictions and paradoxes of the House of Saud, which continues until today.

Of course, the Ikhwan's opposition against Ibn Saud was not only based on religious ground. Tribalism also contributed to the formation of the opposition against Ibn Saud in

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<sup>114</sup> Maisel Shoup (2009), 213.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

with the Ikhwan movement. Some fighters from different tribes were afraid that the eventual domination of House of Saud would lead to the marginalisation of their own tribes.<sup>116</sup> However, once they were defeated, Ibn Saud did not fully dismantle the Ikhwan. Although the official organisation was abolished, some of them continued to work and live in agricultural settlements and received financial benefits from the new administration. Some of them received jobs in the new political establishment and even joined the military. In 1956 Tribal forces were reorganised in a paramilitary unit called the Saudi Arabian National Guard. Later on some other segments of the Ikhwan were remobilised against the state. The group, which seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979, were said to be the descendants of the first Ikhwan.<sup>117</sup>

The defeat of the rebellious faction of the Ikhwan was one of the last challenges that Ibn Saud had to face before establishing the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In 1932, having conquered most of the peninsula, Ibn Saud renamed his dominions ‘Saudi Arabia’ and proclaimed himself ‘the King of Saudi Arabia’. The choice of the household name for the new kingdom was an explicit indication of the fact that the House of Saud viewed the new state as nothing less than its own private property.

Clearly, the establishment of the modern Saudi-Wahhabi state could never have materialised without the instruments of violence as the main means of negotiation of power. The state of Saudi Arabia could never be constructed without the initial role of conflict, which physically cleansed all the claimants of power. Although Wahhabism was the ideological engine of the House of Saud, there was no doctrinal contest with the rival parties, which contributed to the eventual supremacy of the belief system in the Arabian Peninsula.

## **Conclusion**

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, the notion of the prevailing truth at the micro level has often been synonymous with ‘official Islam’. Official Islam does not necessarily refer to what is considered a ‘universal truth’ in the wider *umma*. It refers to the prevailing

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. 214.

perspectives within a defined geo-political unit conditioned and controlled by a certain power complex and its ideological affiliation.<sup>118</sup> This chapter described some of the ways in which Wahhabism became an official religion of the House of Saud, an indispensable political force behind the creation of Saudi Arabia. To this effect, the two important factors of truth management at the micro level involving narrative construction and leadership were highlighted. These factors were instrumental in transforming Wahhabism into the prevailing ideology of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This chapter started with addressing the genealogy of Wahhabism and the structural conditions in which Wahhabism was born. Accordingly, the key figures that have theologically influenced Ibn Abdul Wahhab were identified and their perspectives were briefly analysed.

Indeed Wahhabism never could register as a significant religio-political narrative without the forceful leadership of the House of Saud. Although the House of Saud had been facing various internal and external impediments, it had also acted as the political engine of Wahhabism to broaden its sphere of influence within the Arabian Peninsula. It also provided the indispensable agency for the religious interpretations of Ibn Abdul Wahhab. The House of Saud provided an effective mechanism whereb Ibn Abdul Wahhab's rigid religious perspectives could be translated into power. The leadership, which was provided by the House of Saud, took Wahhabism into the twentieth century as the ideological base of the new nation-state.

The original seeds of Wahhabism were cultivated through conflict in the first Saudi state. Wahhabism as a religio-political system of social control did not emerge through organic dialogue with the other competing perspectives of the time. It became a formidable force through the military expansion of the House of Saud, which was ideologically boosted by the edicts of Ibn Abdul Wahhab. In retrospect, the formation of the modern Saudi-Wahhabi state was the continuation of the first model, which was based on collaboration between the House of Saud and Ibn Abdul Wahhab. Through conflict and the political cleansing of the Arabian Peninsula, the House of Saud created the necessary conditions for the normalisation and officialisation of Wahhabi Islam. In other words, without the political and military leadership

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<sup>118</sup> Of course, what may be considered as official truth within one unit may differ from the prevailing perspectives of other political units.

of the House of Saud, Wahhabism would have been just like thousands of other sects, which emerged and perished through the centuries.

As was discussed before, in the context of Islamic history, conflict has often paved the way for the transition of one power complex to another, and each transformation was sustained and legitimised through a regime of truth, which would justify the change and legitimise it within a transcendental context. Indeed, conflict constitutes a framework for the collision of contradicting and competing social and political forces and it has been an important dynamic for social transition, which has shaped much of Wahhabi history. By using an effective leadership backed up by an ideological narrative, the House of Saud employed various violent strategies to pave the way for the establishment of a new kingdom. The following chapters will address the policies that were adopted to socialise Wahhabism as the natural and organic 'truth' within the state of Saudi Arabia.

## Chapter 3

### TOWARDS SOCIALISATION

#### Introduction

As was suggested before, historically ‘official Islam’ has been synonymous with ‘true Islam’. However, it would be too simplistic to reduce the officialisation of the truth to a conflictual process, which only entails force and repression. As was argued before, other factors such as narrative construction, leadership and socialisation are also essential to maintain and perpetuate the ‘official truth’. However, effective socialisation of official narratives requires a set of preconditions, as collective socialisation cannot take place within an institutional vacuum.

Indeed, the process of top-down socialisation capable of exercising power cannot emerge in the absence of a necessary infrastructure, which could effectively translate direct repression based on brute force to indirect control based on consent. By necessary infrastructure, I refer to a set of social agencies that have been developed and employed by the ruling order to promote and promulgate its own ideological perspectives to gain legitimacy. Through various socialising and associational agencies, the state attempts to synchronise its subjects with its own legitimising narratives.

As already stated, the House of Saud utilised violence as the first step for domination. However, once their internal rivals were physically removed, they were in need of a *raison d’être* for their monopolisation of power. They needed a form of legitimacy, which could sustain their rule in the long term. Hence, their continuity and political sustainability required more complex mechanisms of social control. In other words, they had to create institutions, which would solidify the official ‘truth’ and standardise religious consciousness in accordance with the ideological narratives of the ruling order.

This chapter aims to examine the process of institution-building in Saudi Arabia after 1932. Although constructing effective state institutions was essential for the continuity of the House of Saud, there were many impediments, which slowed the process. For example, tribalism, which was embedded in the political culture of the Arabian Peninsula, constituted an obstacle against the formation of effective central institutions for the House of Saud. This was partly because of the fact that in practice the House of Saud still did not possess all the essential elements for constructing a new nation-state. How could the House of Saud establish a trans-tribal hegemony within a highly tribal society? How could central political authority be established when tribalism could create cultural, territorial and political divisions?

Indeed the officilisation of Wahhabism could not materialise in the absence of a central authority. Therefore, the first step for political and ideological domination within the new territory was to create a nation-state.<sup>1</sup> Thus, unlike the first and second Saudi emirates, the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia embarked on an ambitious project of constructing a modern nation-state. Within the previous chieftaincy framework, the House of Saud had to resort to military muscle to sustain its power; only a favourable balance of power could guarantee its dominance within the given territory, which was constantly in the process of change and transition.

However, in the nation-state model, functioning states have no choice but to bind their identity to their nations. In other words, functioning states institute the necessary mechanisms to serve nations and in doing so they form and mould nations to suit their own needs.<sup>2</sup> This process of alteration and adjustment, which includes conformity and

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<sup>1</sup> The nation-state as an idea and a framework for organisation of politics never existed in the Arabian Peninsula in the modern sense of the term until the twentieth century. Originally, Wahhabism emerged as a pre-modern religio-political movement in the absence of the nation-state model. Although Wahhabism as a regime of truth had an explicit political character and sought power, it never contextualised its mandate within the boundaries of the modern nation-state before 1932.

<sup>2</sup> George W. White, *Nation, State, and Territory: Origins, Evolutions, and Relationships*, Volume 1. (United States: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 65.

uniformity, became an important aspect of the nation-state building to which Saudis were committing them. In this light, there will be a discussion on the measures which were taken by the House of Saud to construct a 'horizontally bonded' society in which they could be perceived as the natural possessors of power within an 'organic' territory whereby the state and the nation were 'naturally' connected. Nation building is a social construction, which touches on every aspect of life including its most mundane elements.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the institutions of the state constantly enforce policies to intervene in the production of culture and identity.<sup>4</sup> Nation building also includes the creation of a national consciousness, which corresponds to the political orientation of the state.

Once the formation of the nation-state is addressed, this chapter aims to examine the formation of some specific institutions and ministries, which have helped the House of Saud to recondition national religious consciousness in accordance with its official regime of 'truth'. For example, Dar Al-Ifta, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of hajj will be examined, and their role in establishing Wahhabism as the unquestionable 'truth' will be analysed. Furthermore, there will be an attempt to analyse the role of religious practitioners within these state institutions.<sup>5</sup>

Last but not least, the chapter will examine the role of *ulama* in modern Saudi Arabia. The *ulama* have played an essential role in the moral leadership of the society. They have enjoyed a unique position within the Saudi establishment and wider society. They have been the arbitrators of the official truth and yet some members of the same social group have questioned the official narrative and proposed alternative perspectives. For the House of Saud they have been their best friend and yet their worst enemy for the management of official truth.

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<sup>3</sup> George W. White (2007), 79.

<sup>4</sup> Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (London: Routledge, 1998), 26.

<sup>5</sup> This chapter does not explore organisations such as the World Assembly of Muslim Youth and the Muslim World Congress. It is not because they have not been helpful for the construction of Saudi hegemony; it is because they have primarily been targeting Muslims beyond the boundaries of Saudi Arabia.



## **Trans-Tribal Saudi-Wahhabi Order: Towards Construction of the Nation-State**

As was indicated in the previous chapter, historically the House of Saud had relied on the ideological perspectives of Wahhabism for expansion and legitimacy. The ruling élite in the family and in particular Ibn Saud regarded themselves as the protectors and the promoters of ‘the truth’ which were promoted by in the eighteenth century. The first two Saudi emirates did not provide any opportunities to establish sophisticated social mechanisms to sustain and enforce the Saudi regime of truth in an encompassing manner. However now, under the rule of the third emirate, there have been empowering opportunities to take more active measures to promulgate the Wahhabi perspectives.

Until the early years of the twentieth century, Saudi-Wahhabi rule was often faced with various internal and external impediments. However, with the start of the third emirate, the future looked much brighter for the House of Saud. The Ottoman Empire, which was considered as the main opponent of the Saudi-Wahhabi project, was already dissolved and the internal struggles with the rival powers such as Hashemites and Rashidis had ended in the Saud’s favour. Furthermore, for the first time the House of Saud and its ideology received a stamp of approval from a major superpower in the international system. As the Ottoman Empire was disintegrating, Britain and France emerged as new power brokers in the region. Although Britain had close ties with Ibn Saud’s rival, the Hashemites, it eventually opted for the House of Saud, and as we saw in the first chapter, Ibn Saud received the necessary support and blessing from Britain to create a nation-state.

Although the right conditions were met for the creation of a new political unit, the Al Saud family had to set the stage for the process of state building to sustain their power. Nation-states and state building are modern phenomena. Hence, both notions had not been theoretically accommodated by the Wahhabi discourse. Indeed, the state as an idea and a framework for the organisation of politics had never existed, in the modern sense of the word, in the Arabian Peninsula. Wahhabism emerged as a pre-modern religio-political

movement. Although Wahhabism had an explicit political character and sought power, it never contextualised its mandate within the boundaries of the modern nation-state.

In the first and second periods of Saudi dominance within the Arabian Peninsula, the Saudi leaders never attempted to maintain power through the framework of the nation-state. Arguably, there can be two factors to explain the lack of any vision or any attempt at state building in the periods of Saudi dominance before the official construction of Saudi Arabia. Firstly, in the first and second period of Saudi dominance in the Arabian Peninsula, the Saudis had no defined territory and their jurisdiction was subject to constant change and transition. Their control always depended upon the balance of power in the peninsula. Therefore, they had to face serious challenges from rivals such as the Ottomans, Hashemites and the House of Rashid over territory and control over the population. Secondly, within those sporadic periods, power was primarily articulated through the medium of tribal politics. Tribal politics had its own parameters for the management of affairs. Hence, co-operation and conflict had to be conducted within the existing framework. Tribes and their resources defined and affected the balance of power. The capacity of emerging political entities was measured, and values were given based upon their access to tribal support and resources.

Joseph Kostiner defines a tribe as:

A political unit that was identified or appeared in historiographical accounts... It consisted of group of people who shared a common territorial base, true or mythological kinship ties and a corporate existence. The members' political allegiance was to the tribe, and in return they received physical and economic protection and social status.<sup>6</sup>

Although a tribe was not a monolithic structure and was divided into families and clans, it was often bound together in large political units. Tribes did not operate in a

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Kostiner, *The Making of Saudi Arabia 1916-1936: From Chieftaincy to Monarchical State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3.

political vacuum however; they were an integral part of what Kostiner calls chieftaincies, larger socio-political frameworks, which provided security and economic protection. The chieftaincies were made of uncertain tribal alliances based on power sharing, reciprocity among nomadic tribal groups, more sedentary inhabitants centred in towns and villages, and a ruler who governed these alliances.<sup>7</sup> The chief was part of a leading family in the dominating tribe who had the authority and the obligation to maintain order and security. Often, the leader had power to wage war, distribute resources and offer protection in return for his subject's loyalty and subordination. The chieftaincy's remit had no territorial definition, no clear borders and no permanence. Its area of control was conditioned by the military position of its member tribes at a given period.

Furthermore, the chieftaincy had no modern bureaucracy or any advanced administrative institutions; its political structure was fragile, transitory and lacked complexity. As Kostiner points out, the intermixing of the various segments of the chieftaincy was based on co-operative partnership among the existing tribal groups rather than a nationalist or broad civic solidarity.<sup>8</sup> Theoretically and practically the chieftaincy model differed from the modern state model, which Saudis started to construct after 1932. For statehood the House of Saud required nothing less than a defined territory, central government, organised economy, circulation system, permanent resident population, expectation of permanence, sovereignty and the recognition of other states.<sup>9</sup>

It is possible to argue that the early stage of building a nation-state model was more coincidental than systematic. The House of Saud was in control of a permanent territory, which was recognised by the major actors in the international system, and internal rivals were removed. The Saudis had no choice but to recognise the wider international system, which was state centric where the states were the only viable players. As was indicated before, the Saudis already owed their survival to external powers like Britain and they

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Kostiner (1993), 4.

<sup>9</sup> George W White (2004), 66-67.

could not set their own parameters of power in isolation. For the perpetuation of their dominance they had to bow to the inevitable and pave the way for the transition from chieftaincy to nation-state. The construction of a nation-state was the most convenient step towards control over their newly established territory.

However, one can ask if the recognition of the superpowers and control over permanent territory and population alone could qualify the Saudis as sufficient nation-state builders? As George White points out, in the nation-state era, states are connected to nations like the body is connected to the soul. States derive their *raison d'être* and legitimacy from nations; in return they have to serve and protect nations. Thus, to perpetuate their own existence, states bind their identities to nations. They tailor their mechanisms to serve nations, but in doing so they form and mould nations to suit their own needs as they adjust themselves to serve nations.<sup>10</sup> These processes of alteration and adjustment, which include conformity and uniformity, become an important aspect of nation-state building. Hastings also notes, 'nation-state is a state which identifies itself in terms of one specific nation whose people are not seen simply as subjects of the sovereign but as horizontally bonded society to whom the state in a sense belongs. There is thus an identity of character between state and people. In some ways the state's sovereignty is inherent within the people and expressive of its own identity. In it, ideally, there is a basic equivalence between the borders and character of the political unit upon the one hand and a self-conscious cultural community on the other.'<sup>11</sup>

Clearly, at this early stage the fledgling state mechanism lacked the complex infrastructure to constitute this horizontally bonded society where the state could drive its *raison d'être* and legitimacy from the nation. Thus, the new rulers had to seek measures to create that 'horizontally bonded' society in which the house of Saud could be perceived as a natural possessor of power within an organic territory whereby the state and the nation were 'naturally' connected.

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<sup>10</sup> George W White (2004), 65.

<sup>11</sup> Adrian Hastings The construction of nationhood: ethnicity, religion, and nationalism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3.

Throughout modern history, there have been various examples of top-down nation building. This process of construction has included the top-down readjustment of the socio-political particularities of the given populations to fit the political agenda of the new political order. This top-down process of construction resonates with a famous statement of Mazzini, a leading Italian figure who played a leading role in the Risorgimento, which constructed Italy as a new nation-state. He famously said ‘we have created Italy, now we have to create Italians’. This very much highlights the process of construction whereby a collective identity is created to sustain a political project such as state building. As White points out, ‘The states’ action can profoundly affect the identities of the people within their territories. This process is often called ‘nation building’. Nation building is a social construction, which touches on every aspect of life including its most mundane elements’.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the institutions of the state constantly enforce policies to intervene in the production of culture and identity.<sup>13</sup>

Nation building also includes the creation of a ‘national consciousness’ that corresponds with the political orientation of the state. Accordingly, history is recreated, myths and legends are constructed, and tailored social perspectives are institutionalised in order to redirect collective values and attitudes in accordance with the narratives of power. Therefore, national identity can be viewed as a form of conscious cultural production, a production with the purpose of constructing a national subjectivity.<sup>14</sup> The state institutions themselves involve most aspects of social life, controlling and conditioning actions and redirecting thoughts in accordance with the basis of the state’s political authority, objects and situations that are moulded by government policies. Nation building is also about creating a collective imagination, which simultaneously serves to unify and even homogenise the given population and make its relationship to the state look ‘organic’. Thus, in addition to state involvement in the production and dissemination of ideology, it is responsible for

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<sup>12</sup> George W White (2004), 79.

<sup>13</sup> Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (London: Routledge, 1998), 26.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

active engineering of collective consciousness, which can be remoulded to serve the narratives of power.

However, taking such constructive measures proved to be difficult for the House of Saud. For centuries, religion and tribes were two major sources of identity in the Peninsula. Hence, one could ask how theoretically the House of Saud could embark on the project of nation building? What were the preconditions to collectivise the Saudi national identity in the presence of tribalism, which was indeed the antithesis of nation building?

Of course, within modern Saudi Arabia there was a shared language and a shared geographical space, but often people's loyalty would go to their tribes before anything else. In other words, there was no collective desire for a self-conscious trans-tribal identity. Of course, religion was a main source of identity, but religion itself was a tribal matter too. People were born within their tribes and they would almost automatically inherit the tribal religion. Islam was the main religion, but there was no systematic mechanism to religiously synchronise the tribes within the given territory.

In this situation, what could be the source of cohesion in this newly constructed nation? How could it embark on the construction of national subjectivities? What could create a cohesive discourse to create national self-identification? Anderson argues that national self-identification is only an imaginary process. Hence, a nation is an 'imagined community' constructed and sustained through communicational and associational agencies.

As Anderson puts it, a nation 'is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.'<sup>15</sup> Therefore, he suggests that communities are to be distinguished not by their felicity /genuineness but by the style in which they are imagined, in fact all the communities larger than the primordial villages of

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<sup>15</sup> Anderson Benedict, *Imagined Community* (New York: Verso, 1991), 6.

face-to-face contact are imagined.<sup>16</sup> However, this collective imagination does not happen in a vacuum. There has to be an active construction of a national discourse, which can produce and institutionalise the national subjectivities. Once these subjectivities are collectively socialised, people within the same framework may identify with each other as the fellow members of the same 'nation'.

Gellner asserts that:

Two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating...Two men are of the same nation if and only if they recognise each other as belonging to the same nation. In other words, nations make the man; nations are the artefacts of men's convictions and loyalties and solidarities. A mere category of persons (say, occupants of a given territory, or speakers of a given language, for example) becomes a nation if and when the members of the category firmly recognise certain mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of their shared membership of it. It is their recognition of each other as fellows of this kind which turns them into a nation, and not the other shared attributes, whatever they might be, which separate that category from non-members.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, the élite of the new state had to actively engage in a programme of social engineering, to create a common culture and a system of ideas and symbols, which could interconnect the subjects. Instruments of thought had to be created to shape the narratives of power and socialising agencies had to be instituted to internalise the values of the ruling élite. Although, as we have already noted, religious pluralism existed in Saudi Arabia, the élite opted for the utilisation of Wahhabism for the construction of a distinct narrative which would promote uniformity and translate the existing pluralism into conformity. The

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 7.

officialisation of Wahhabism seemed like a natural path to homogenise the masses in order to serve the interests of the ruling class.

Of course, an attempt to officialise Wahhabism in the new nation-state was hardly a surprise. After all, the House of Saud mainly appeared on the political map of the Arabian Peninsula due to its religious character, which was justifying the Saudi expansionism. After the famous pact between Ibn Abdul Wahhab and Ibn Saud in the eighteenth century, Saudi political existence was legitimised only within the Wahhabi context. Historically, the House of Saud was inseparable from the Wahhabi mandate, and Wahhabism functioned as the main ideological engine for the Saudis. Just as the Wahhabi doctrine owed its wider recognition to the Saudi political capacity, the House of Saud became equally recognisable through the lens of Wahhabi Islam. Hence, Wahhabism had to be in the forefront of the Saudi's attempt for nation building. If they branded their given territory after their name, 'Saudi' Arabia, they would equally enforce their religious doctrine on the given people.<sup>18</sup> However, the new state lacked the necessary structure to disseminate its ideology. Ideological domination cannot be born in the abstract. It has to be created by the right social mechanisms such as major educational, communicational and religious institutions. The Saudi state had to construct a trans-tribal national structure, which could ideologically socialise Wahhabism as the official truth, which could both horizontally and vertically

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<sup>18</sup> Although we should avoid over interpreting the early stage of nation building, Wahhabism became a dominating narrative which was utilised to synchronise people independent of tribal structures. The modernist scholars of nation argued that the ideas of nationhood were the products of modernity and they emerged to replace the religious orders of the agrarian means of production. However, in the case of Saudi Arabia, the elite embarked on the process of nation building using a set of pre-modern narratives of religion within a tribal society. It has to be mentioned that Saudi Arabia was not the only country, which used a set of pre modern narratives in order to construct and sustain the nation state. In many other more developed countries religion along other social constructions historically has played an essential role in creating self-conscious communities. In Europe Christianity was the cause for creation of national churches and was essential for the formation of national identities. There is a wide literature available on Christianity, national churches and national identity. The notion of the national church in Christianity links a church with a specific ethnic group, nation or nation state. There have been many national churches, which acted as the milestone for formation of national identities in Europe. Indeed, until the present day many modern and post agrarian European societies are using a set of religious narratives and symbolism to enhance their national identities. For example, St Patrick and his associated symbols and narratives is attached to the Irish nationhood and state. Even in the Islamic world there are number of examples where religious narratives are used for the construction of self-conscious communities. In the contemporary era a collective religious conscience resulted in the creation of Muslim separatist movement in India, which eventually paved the way for creation of a distinct nation-state of Pakistan.



connect the state to the nation and synchronise the various social forces together. Indeed, after monopolising the political and military mechanisms of the state, the Saudi order had to monopolise the instruments of thought in society in order to portray the Saudis and their Wahhabi discourse as nothing less than moral and natural. The next section will attempt to portray the early process of institution building, which the Saudis had to undertake in order to retain control and domination.

### **Towards Institution-Building**

Evaluating the early processes of institution-building in Saudi Arabia is a difficult task. When the modern Saudi Arabia was in the process of construction, the country was extremely underdeveloped.<sup>19</sup> Apart from the more cosmopolitan urban centres of Hejaz, the rest of the country had not much exposure to the outside world. Although many tribes were now under control of the House of Saud, the state had minimal resources to constitute the trans-tribal social organisations to psychologically condition the masses for nationhood. It was not only the communicational infrastructure that was underdeveloped; there was also a lack of vision from the ruling family, which made the process quite slow. The reign of Ibn Saud did not achieve much in terms of institution building.

Ayman Al-Yassini noted:

For over two decades, from its proclamation as a unified kingdom in 1932, Saudi Arabia survived without any major elaborate administration and institutions. During this period Ibn Saud ruled personally and informally. He administrated the country like a big household and he did not allow any concentration of power in the system.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See, Yukihiro Takabayashi, *Toward a modern Islamic kingdom : a socio-political analysis of contemporary Saudi Arabia* ( Japan: Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, International University of Japan, 1986).

<sup>20</sup> Ayman Al-Yassini, *Religion and State in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* (United States: Westview Press, 1985).

Advisers who enjoyed his trust surrounded him. The advisors ‘never demanded, seldom suggested, and only advised when advice was actively sought.’<sup>21</sup>

Before the establishment of the Council of Ministers, he only established some ad hoc committees and structured some state organisations. For example, after the conquest of Mecca the Domestic Council of Mecca was established. There were about twenty-five members in the council. Following annexation of Jeddah, the Domestic Council was dissolved and the Instructive Committee was established. The three members of this Committee were appointed by the King and in 1927, he established the Committee for Investigation and Reform to review the government organisations. A Council of Deputies was created in 1930 to help his son, Faisal, administer the Hejaz region, and eventually in 1953 the Council of Ministers were instituted to act as a cabinet for the King.<sup>22</sup> (After the death of Ibn Saud, the Council of Ministers was subject to some further reform, which defined the scope of the council and created the position of deputy Prime Minister. However, in 1964 King Faysal took more steps for further centralisation and re-established the Council as the supreme organisation at the direct service of the monarch, to monopolise control over all socio-political affairs of the kingdom.)<sup>23</sup>

Although there were some minimal attempts to build more complex institutions to accommodate the emerging needs of a nation-state, most of the power was concentrated in Ibn Saud’s own household.<sup>24</sup> In many ways, he attempted to rule the new emerging nation state through the parameters of tribal politics. There was extreme centrism and there was a minimal bureaucracy and socio-cultural infrastructure to effectively socialise the narratives of power. At this stage there was minimal evidence of a vision for instituting a horizontally bonded society where the state could derive its *raison d’être* and legitimacy from the nation. Ibn Saud was a good warrior and accordingly his statesmanship was more about putting

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> In the 1960s many other agencies were established to expand the state’s bureaucracy; therefore many new institutions such as Centre for Research and Economic Development, Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency, the Red Crescent and etc.

<sup>24</sup> See, Mohammed Almana, Arabia unified : a portrait of Ibn Saud (London: Hutchinson Benham 1980).

down rebellious tribes rather than actively envisaging the ways in which to create national subjectivities for a more cohesive society. He believed himself to be on the side of the 'truth' and viewed himself as someone who had triumphed over the '*munharifin*' (deviators). Nonetheless, he was unable to create effective mechanisms to promulgate his regime of truth.

In the early stages of the existence of Saudi Arabia, Ibn Saud continued resorting to tribal patrimonial politics in which power was devised by means of patrilineal descent. Arguably, patrimonialism was nothing original within the Arabian Peninsula. Within the aforementioned chieftaincy some element of patrimonial politics always existed. The relationship between the subordinate and dominant tribes was an amplification of client and patron ties which was extended to the modern Saudi state. In theory, patrimonialism in the government offices originated in the household administration of the ruler.<sup>25</sup> In the Weberian sense of the term, all political transactions which do not involve the household directly are nonetheless fused with the corresponding function of the court. Thus, state administrators are personal servants and personal representatives of the ruler. The administrators are recruited from amongst the dependents, slaves, serfs and others on whose obedience the ruler can rely.<sup>26</sup> In return they enjoy some privileges given to them by the ruler. Nevertheless, the ruler is always in a position to withhold the privileges at will, in the same way that the patriarchal master might penalise a member of his household.<sup>27</sup>

Ibn also resorted to sexual politics in order to create some short-term consent among his subjects. Sexual politics have been widely debated in sociology and scholars such as Kate Millett have developed the notion in specific ways. Nonetheless, by sexual politics I am primarily referring to the patriarchal attitude of the House of Saud in marrying women from various tribes as a mechanism of political control. Ibn Saud took many wives and concubines

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Bendix, *Max Weber an Intellectual Portrait* (London: Methuen & Co, 1966).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 335.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

According to Weber, patrimonialism is compatible with many different economic structures. Although the development of strongly centralised patrimonial order is often dependent upon trade in which the ruler engages as his personal prerogative, the Saudi economic infrastructure at the time would still be compatible with the patrimonial rule.

to tie his household to other tribes in his new territory. He attempted to use marriage as a political networking mechanism, which could connect his household to the wider tribal society through blood.

The House of Saud's and in particular Ibn Saud's practices commodified women for personal and political interests. The number of his wives has been a subject of amazement for external as well as internal observers. There are contesting accounts of the number of his wives and children. According to one account, by 1953 he had forty-three sons and more than fifty daughters.<sup>28</sup> Some accounts suggest that he has admitted to having married more than one hundred and as many as two hundred and thirty-five women. Within the Islamic Shari'a, he was allowed to have four wives at a time. Hence, he was constantly in the process of divorcing a previous wife to prepare the legal conditions for marrying a new one. As marriage with tribal groups was part of Ibn Saud's agenda, a series of marriages with rival tribes such as the Rashidi was carried out in Riyadh.<sup>29</sup>

Although in Arabian tradition marriage can constitute closer ties between tribes and families, there is no certainty as to what extent Ibn Saud could create consent by his short-term sexual policies. After all, the rule of the iron fist was in place. Many tribes went along with Ibn Saud's excessive marriages, because they had no choice. Because, Ibn Saud chose his wives from positions of power, this humiliated the subordinated Arab tribes. In Arabian tradition, women are a symbol of honour; it is likely that many tribes were chastened to subordinate their women to the will of Ibn Saud. Possibly, at the same time there were many tribes who could see Ibn Saud's ferocious appetite for marriage as a political opportunity to get closer to his household and enjoy his patrimonial support. Nonetheless, there is no certainty about how successful or how greatly resented such policies were, in the early stages of nation building in Saudi Arabia.

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<sup>28</sup> James Wynbrandt and Fawaz A. Gerges, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia* (Checkmark Books, 2010), 194.

<sup>29</sup> Mawdawi Al Rasheed, *Politics in An Arabian oasis the Rashidis of Saudi Arabia* (I.B.Tauris, 1997), 250. According to Philby, those of Ibn Saud's wives who bore children were provided houses to bring up royal children; many of these children went to construct the modern state of Saudi Arabia after the death of Ibn Saud in 1953.

It is enough to point out the fact that Ibn Saud was slow in constructing the hegemonic mechanisms of social control through positive and productive powers. Although the ruling élite lacked the vision for bureaucratisation and institution building, the discovery of natural resources paved the way for the emergence of a more complex state mechanism. The next section will attempt to portray the ways in which the discovery of oil pushed the process of institution-building in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The discovery of oil paved the way for a more rigorous programme of institution-building to accommodate the process of economic modernisation as well as maintaining the ideological dominance of the House of Saud in the new era.

### **Oil: A Determining Factor for Institution-Building**

Increasingly, a change of situation in modern Saudi Arabia was pushing the House of Saud to embark upon the bureaucratisation of the state and the systematic construction of productive social agencies. The discovery of oil was the major factor forcing the Saudis to abandon traditional ways of running the state. In fact, in the context of Saudi Arabia, we cannot talk about a major economic, social and political transition without talking about oil.<sup>30</sup> Following Iran, Iraq and Bahrain, Saudi Arabia also discovered oil before World War II. When the war ended the, Saudi kingdom was producing about sixty thousand barrels of oil per day.<sup>31</sup> At the beginning of World War II Abqiaq was discovered, right next to the Dammam wells.<sup>32</sup> Dammam is the capital of the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia, which is now considered the most oil-rich region in the world.

The discovery of oil wells in Dammam, in the 1940s and 1950s, started major developmental projects which fundamentally transformed the economic infrastructure of Saudi Arabia. The

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<sup>30</sup> See, Mordechai Abir, *Saudi Arabia in the Oil Era: Regime and Elites; Conflict and Collaboration* (London : Croom Helm ,1988).

<sup>31</sup> Matthew R. Simmons, *Twilight in the Desert: the Coming Saudi Oil Shock and the World economy*, John Wiley & Sons, 2005), 31.

<sup>32</sup> Experts and technicians from throughout the Kingdom and the world gathered to help search for new oil fields and bring them on-stream. New pipelines had to be installed, storage facilities built and jetties constructed to handle tankers.

discovery of Abqaiq became one of the most prolific and most reliable oil fields of all time<sup>33</sup>. In the 1940s, American geologists concluded that potentially, Saudi Arabia had two billion barrels of proven reserves, five billion probable reserves and twenty billion barrels of possible reserves.<sup>34</sup> Although the figures were exciting for the 1940s, the possible reserves were immensely underestimated. As Simmons puts it 'the possible reserves were underestimated by more than an order of magnitude'.<sup>35</sup> Once World War II ended, the drilling started and with it the economic fabric of Saudi Arabia was transformed in an unprecedented way.<sup>36</sup> Soon, new fields such as Qatif, Ain Dar and Ghawar, were ready for exploitation, which expanded revenues. Before Ibn Saud died, he witnessed a significant increase in his country's wealth, from \$200,000 prior to World War I to \$10,000,000 in the interwar period, \$60,000,000 in 1948; \$160,000,000 in 1952 and \$250,000,000 in 1953.<sup>37</sup>

With this new source of wealth, the House of Saud had to find new measures for the management of affairs. There is already some detailed literature on the process of economic bureaucratisation and the gradual formation of key ministries. Although we cannot fully separate politics from economy, we cannot pay much attention to the formation of economic and financial institutions in the Kingdom. For the sake of this study, we pay attention primarily to the construction of social agencies, which were formed and sustained to socialise and internalise the Saudi ideological narratives. We are primarily interested in the formation of those agencies which helped to institutionalise Wahhabism as the official 'truth'.

However, when the economic infrastructure being transformed with such a speed, the state had to systematise its mechanisms of social control beyond violence. At this point, the country was beginning to be exposed to the outside world, probably more than ever before in its history. The influx of technicians, advisers, engineers and scientists from the Western countries as well as the rapid change of means of production, made the politics of truth

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<sup>33</sup> Matthew R. Simmons (2005), 31.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> See Irvine H. Anderson, *Aramco the United States and Saudi Arabia: a study of the dynamics of foreign oil policy, 1933-1950* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1988).

<sup>37</sup> Al-Yassini (1985), 61.

management more essential than in any time before, in the short history of Saudi Arabia. The rapid emergence of the new wealth and more complex economy necessitated a more complex socio-cultural infrastructure to accommodate these rapid transitions.

The oil economy was gradually exposing the Saudi population to the new world, which was often in conflict with the ideological parameters of the state.<sup>38</sup> On the one hand the state had to welcome the modernisation process, and on the other hand it was afraid of compromising its 'authentic' mission, which provided religious legitimacy for the ruling family. Indeed, the economic development and modernisation could not come without its social 'dangers' for a system, which claimed to be puritan in implementing the will of God on earth.<sup>39</sup> Hence, the state had to compensate the modernisation process with instituting effective organisations to bodyguard the Wahhabi character of the state. The next section will examine one of the institutions, which was created to standardise the religious opinions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

### **Dar Al-Ifta**

Arguably, Dar Al-Ifta was one of the first and the most efficient agencies constructed in modern Saudi Arabia, to systematically target the trans-tribal religious consciousness. It became an important agency to disseminate the Wahhabi discourse as well as attempting to objectify the intellectual and moral leadership in Saudi Arabia. Dar Al-Ifta is a closet agency of productive power, which could promote a set of trans-tribal religious and political perspectives to sustain and legitimise the monopoly of power by the House of Saud.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See, Hossein Askari Saudi Arabia's economy :Oil and the Search for Economic Development (London : Jai Press, 1990).

Steffen Hertog , Princes, brokers, and bureaucrats : oil and the state in Saudi Arabia, Cornell University Press (Bristol : University Presses Marketing, 2010).

<sup>39</sup> See, Abdelrahman Munif , Cities of Salt (Vintage, 1989).

George Arthur Lipsky, Saudi Arabia: its people, its society, its culture ( HRAF Press, 1967).

<sup>40</sup> There are some other religious organisations in the region which share the same name, such as Dar Al-Ifta in Egypt which according to Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen appeared in the Egyptian national court system between 1880 and 1900.

See, Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, Defining Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and Fatwas of the Dar Al-Ifta (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

The history of Dar Al-Ifta in Saudi Arabia goes back to the early 1950s, a short while before Ibn Saud died. Since the Saudi Wahhabi pact in 1744, muftis have practiced *Ifta* in an informal manner. As was discussed before there was no sophisticated structure for the dissemination of the Wahhabi discourse. The Wahhabi religious activity often depended upon the political position of their patrons and the general balance of power in the Arabian Peninsula. Towards the end of his life Ibn Saud took some measures to modernise the religious structure of the newly constructed Saudi Arabia. He appointed Shaykh Mohammed Ibn Ibrahim Al-Shaykh, one of the most recognised Wahhabi muftis, to head Dar Al-Ifta and other religious agencies. However, Dar Al-Ifta became a one-man religious agency, as Shaykh Mohammed Ibn Ibrahim Al-Shaykh enjoyed the highest religious authority until his death in 1969.

After the death of Ibn Saud and the emergence of new economic conditions, the institutionalisation of Dar Al-Ifta, as a core agency to issue religious *fatwas*, was part of a wider attempt for constituting social control through conditioning the collective religious consciousness. Not surprisingly, the establishment of Dar Al-Ifta was not an attempt to diversify the sources of power in the new state. In contrast, it was a new measure for a further concentration of power, which would feed into the aforementioned Saudi style of patrimonial order. Dar Al-Ifta has been playing a crucial role in the religious life of the kingdom.<sup>41</sup> Thousands of *fatwas* were issued after they had been solicited either by the subjects or by the state. The topic of these *fatwas* covered a wide range of topics. Most of them addressed orthodox ritualistic matters and some provided solutions to modern social developments. Dar Al-Ifta would act as a trans-tribal institution, which would fuse the political perspectives of the House of Saud with the religious doctrine of Wahhabism. The impact of Dar Al-Ifta's religious production and interpretive policies could potentially synchronise the ruler with the subjects.

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<sup>41</sup> See, Muhammad K. Al-Atawneh, *Wahhabi Islam Facing the Challenges of Modernity: Dar Al-Ifta in the Modern Saudi State* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).



However, there has been an obvious correlation between the leadership and the sufficiency of the organisation. For example, despite the rapid economic changes, Ibn Saud's successor was a weak leader who influenced the operations of the organisation. When the founder of the kingdom passed away in 1953, he was replaced by his oldest surviving son, Saud bin Abdul Aziz (1902-69), who was a crown prince since 1933. Saud's reign is often associated with mismanagement and extravagance. Following the path of his father, he took an excessive number of wives and produced many children. However, unlike his father, he was not a uniting and powerful politician. He enjoyed an extravagant lifestyle and exploited public resources for maintaining his expansive demands. Primarily, he concentrated power amongst his own immediate family, when his brother Faysal who had become the Crown Prince became Prime Minister; he exercised greater influence in the Council of Ministers than his brother.<sup>42</sup>

When he was in power, the Middle East was heavily involved in the so-called 'Arab Cold war'. Arab nationalism, which was led by Nasser, threatened the fledgling kingdom. King Saud proved to be an uneven match for Nasser's nationalist challenge. There was a fear that the corruption and mismanagement, which was undermining the kingdom to make the anti-Saudi propaganda, made broadcasts from Egypt more appealing to Saudi subjects. As Al-Rasheed notes, Saud and Faysal continued their power struggle until 1962, when Faysal formed a cabinet in the absence of the King, who had left the country for medical treatment.<sup>43</sup> When the king returned, he was confronted with the new arrangements. However, with the pressure from the Royal family and the religious figures, he abdicated in favour of his brother and left Saudi Arabia until his death in 1969.<sup>44</sup> The change of leadership in the House of Saud paved the way for more resources for Dar Al-Ifta. The new leader seemed to be more aware of the challenges that the House of Saud was facing. Among many other things, he paid considerable attention to Dar Al-Ifta, to make it more central in standardising socio-religious consciousness in the Kingdom. In 1962 Faysal

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<sup>42</sup> Joseph A Kechichian (2001), 38.

<sup>43</sup> Al-Rashid (1997), 114.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

attempted to reform Dar Al-Ifta, to make it more in tune with the fast-changing Saudi society.

However, damage had already been done under the previous leadership. Indeed, the rule of King Saud had created a crisis of legitimacy in the fledgling kingdom. Accordingly, Faysal needed religion more than ever before, to address the crisis of legitimacy at home and resist the secular Arab nationalism abroad. Of course, even under King Saud, Wahhabi Islam was an indispensable part of the Saudi discourse. Nonetheless, Faysal had to reform the religious infrastructure to harmonise the official religion with the emerging changes in the Kingdom. Indeed, as the political system was confronted with a wide range of unprecedented issues, the pressure for instituting more complex religious structures increased. He realised that reform could not be implemented without the support of the religious establishment, especially Dar Al-Ifta. Hence, he undertook the reform programme to make Dar Al-Ifta compatible with his new social and political vision, which was represented by his Ten Point Programme.

His Ten Point Programme included 1) to Establish the relation between the ruler and the subjects and to define the state administration 2) to regulate the provincial administrations 3) to establish a Ministry of Justice 4) to establish an Ifta council, to reform the Committee for Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong 7) to Improve the nation's quality of life, 8) to initiate new social and economic transitions 9) to promote financial and economic development 10) and to abolish slavery in the Kingdom.<sup>45</sup>

His new mandate emphasised the connection between Islam and modernisation.<sup>46</sup> Although Wahhabism remained his main point of reference, Faysal showed an interest in 'modernising' the kingdom. He would introduce modernity in a way that would simultaneously 'maintain and preserve religious and moral values of Islam'.<sup>47</sup> Hence, the

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<sup>45</sup> Al-Atawneh (2010), 8-9.

<sup>46</sup> Toby Craig Jones, *Desert Kingdom: How Oil and water Forged Modern Saudi Arabia* (Unites States:Harvard University Press, 2010), 85 .

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

‘modernisation’ of the religious infrastructure of the state was his priority, as he wanted to abort a ‘discourse of modernisation within the Islamic framework’.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the management of religious consciousness had to include some elements of modernisation.

Reforming the Ifta council was an attempt for the bureaucratisation of the religious infrastructure to develop a new relationship between the state and the *ulama*. Faisal’s ideas became more tangible after 1971. At this point Faysal initiated the construction of two new agencies authorised to issue *fatwas*, the Board of Senior Ulama (BSU) and Permanent Committee for Scientific Research and Legal Opinions (CRLO). (These institutions make up the current Dar Al-Ifta in Saudi Arabia).

Faysal explicitly defined the limits of the mufti’s authority and systematised the procedure in Dar Al-Ifta. The king was entitled to appoint and dismiss muftis at any given time and reserved the right for interference and exclusive treatment in his enquiries. Arguably, such measures redefined the relation between the *ulama* and the state. The Royal Decree number 1/137, which was issued in 1971, specified that members of the High Council of Ifta had to be appointed by the monarch. Regarding their duties, the Decree stated that they are ‘to express opinion based on Shari’a regarding matters submitted to them by the *wali al-amr* i.e., the king, to recommend policy on religious matters, to guide the *wali al-amr* and to issue *fatwas* to guide Muslims in the areas of *aqida*, *ibadat*, and *mu’amalat*.’<sup>49</sup>

Accordingly, at Dar Al-Ifta the monarch, BSU and CRLO are responsible for picking the topics for discussion. However, not too surprisingly, the King’s choice had priority. In this light, thousands of *fatwas* have been issued on various subjects.<sup>50</sup> Of course, many of *fatwas* were not political, but they reflected on the wider social sphere. It is possible to assume that the Wahhabi perspectives attempting to homogenise Saudi society have doctored even those issues which included religious practices and family life. Of course, co-operation between the House of Saud and the Wahhabi *ulama* was nothing new and it had always

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Al-Yassini(1985) ,70.

<sup>50</sup> Al Atwneh (2010) 24, 25.

existed from the so-called first Saudi state. Nonetheless, the aforementioned rearrangements bureaucratized Wahhabism in a new way. Through bureaucratizing religious institutions, Dar Al-Ifta had to become officially accountable to the King. Therefore, Dar Al-Ifta's religious publications became even more synchronised with the ideological mandate of the state. The patrimonial relationship between the state and the religious practitioners became even more systematised under the new arrangements. The state (patron) provided resources for Dar Al-Ifta (client) to produce various publications and conduct research in order to solidify the Saudi perspectives within religious contexts. Through this patron- client relationship vast amounts of publications have been created by Dar Al-Ifta, to boost the religious legitimacy of the ruling order. As Al-Yassin puts it, 'the symbolic consequence of the publication and distribution of religious texts is the projection of Saudi rule as the propagator of Islam as well as the re-affirmation of its identification with Wahhabism.'<sup>51</sup>

This process of religious bureaucratisation undermined the *ulama*'s independence more than ever before, and they became an integral part of the state machinery in the most explicit sense of the term. (It also has to be noted that the dependence of the *ulama* upon the financial support of the state is rooted in a principle of Wahhabism itself, which bans the *ulama* from receiving any financial aid from people. Hence they could not survive on *awqaf*, they had to be reliant upon the Amir).<sup>52</sup> Clearly, this created a very uneven relationship in which the *ulama* had to be subordinate to the will of state in order to maintain their own wellbeing. In this light Al-Yassini argues:

The creation of complex administrative institutions has led to two fundamental changes affecting the traditional relationship between religion and state in the Saudi Kingdom. First, it has increased role differentiation between the religious and political sphere. Second, it has routinised state control of a broad range of areas that were formally dominated by the religious establishment; subsequently, the *ulama* lost

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<sup>51</sup> Al-Yassini(1985), 70.

<sup>52</sup> Ayman Al-Yassini (1985) Religion and State in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (United States: Westview Press) ,48-49.

many of their traditional functions and became a pressure group exerting limited influence over the governments activities and policies but never acting as an autonomous centre of power.<sup>53</sup>

Through the centralisation of religious agencies, the state aimed to control collective consciousness in accordance with its own parameters of ‘truth’ and their political objectives. Accordingly, the state could not ignore the production of religious opinions and *fatwas*. Linguistically, *fatwa* means an answer to a question; the question may be rhetorical or actual. In Islamic jurisprudence, a *fatwa* means the opinion of a scholar based on that scholar’s understanding and interpretation of the intent of the sources of Islam, that scholar’s knowledge of the subject in question and the social milieu that produced the issue or question. The scholar’s answer or Fatwa is not a binding rule; rather, it is recommendation. The answer (*fatwa*) may be opposed, criticised, accepted or rejected’.<sup>54</sup> Hence, the fluid nature of *fatwas*, which were based on opinions, could not create a binding ‘truth’ to affect the religious consciousness.

In order to make *fatwas* more effective for the service of the state, there had to be a rigid process of standardisation and homogenisation of the agencies, which produced the verdicts and religious opinions. Indeed the standardisation of *fatwas* was an important aspect of truth management in Saudi Arabia. These religious opinions could act as mechanisms of social control. Through *fatwas*, the state could affect the instruments of thought, and shape public behaviour without much effort. Even before the formation of modern Saudi Arabia, the House of Saud benefited from *fatwas* and the engineering of religious legitimacy. For example, in 1926, when Ibn Saud prevailed over the Hashemites and occupied Hejaz, *fatwas* were issued by sympathetic *ulama* to grant him the legal ‘authority’ to take over the holy places. They also urged fellow Muslims to subordinate to the House of Saud, as it was implementing the ‘will of God’. In 1929 the same *ulama* issued *fatwas* to crush the Ikhwan, killing fellow Muslims who were instrumental in many of the military expeditions

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<sup>53</sup> Al-Yassini(1985), 59.

<sup>54</sup> V.A Mohamad Ashrof , Islam and gender justice: questions at the interface (Kalpaz Publications, 2007), 282.

of the House of Saud<sup>55</sup>. Controlling the production of *fatwas* became even more important in recent times. For example, in 1990-1991, King Fahd turned to the United States for military support and protection from the Iraqi threat. Of course, inviting thousands of *kuffar* to the birthplace of Islam would be libellous for a ruler who regarded himself as the defender and the custodian of the two most holy places in the Islamic world.

However, in order to address this paradox, the Wahhabi *ulama* issued *fatwa* to approve the arrival of *kuffar* soldiers in Saudi Arabia. More recently, in the year of the Arab Spring, the Saudi regime had to turn to the *ulama* to issue a *fatwa* banning any protests against the establishment. As the wind of the Arab Spring reached Saudi Arabia, a *fatwa* was issued on 6th March 2011 to religiously forbid any action against the regime. The *fatwa* included praising the unification of Saudi Arabia based on the guidance of the Qur'an and Islamic tradition, and cited a hadith that included a serious threat against internal dissent: 'The Prophet again said: 'He who wanted separate affairs of this nation who are unified, you should kill him with [the] sword whoever he is'.<sup>56</sup>

Clearly, controlling *fatwas* and religious verdicts have been essential for the House of Saud. However, it takes more than doctoring *fatwas* to standardise the religious consciousness of the society. The following sections will address some other important agencies, which have been influential in constructing and sustaining the religio-political narratives of the state.

### **The Ministry of Islamic Affairs: An Agent of Religious Clientelism**

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs is a key institution in the regulation of the religious life of the country; it also acts as one of the main religious watchdogs in the country.<sup>57</sup> The

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<sup>56</sup>Irfan al-Alawi, "Saudi Arabia's anti-protest fatwa is transparent", The Guardian, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2011/apr/01/saudi-arabia-anti-protest-fatwa> (Accessed May, 10, 2012).

<sup>57</sup> It is extremely difficult to conduct interviews with the operational managers in this ministry and it is difficult to have exposure to their wider unofficial activities in the country. Nonetheless, the existing evidence suggests that the House of Saud heavily relies on such institutions to sustain its hegemony and through that

ministry plays a key role for the socialisation of Wahhabi perspectives in Saudi Arabia. One of the important tasks of the ministry is the supervision and regulation of the construction of almost all mosques in the country. In the general Islamic context mosques have been more than a place of worship. They have been historical institutions for the dissemination of political and ideological perspectives into the minds of the people. They also have been key institutions for the officialisation of religious narratives connected to the ruling establishment. They have been indispensable places in which to engage with social and political issues within a religious framework. They also have been vital in standardising religious consciousness and mobilising the faithful to pursue various objectives.

In the Arabian Peninsula and the wider Muslim world, mosques have been powerful associational agencies which acted as agents of the state working to impose the prevailing perspectives, or as places for the formation of opposition to the dominant discourse. Hence, in absence of other associational agencies such as political parties and civic organisations, mosques have been the vital ground for the imposition of hegemony and the formation of counter-hegemony. Indeed they have been indispensable spaces in the social sphere to reflect the religious consciousness as well as that of the political sentiment of the society. Mosques play a fundamental role in bringing various segments of society together (at least within the same religious framework) and providing a bridge between the ruled and the ruler.<sup>58</sup> In Saudi Arabia, approximately thirty per cent of all mosques are built and endowed by private agents for charitable reasons.<sup>59</sup> However, all mosques are under the jurisdiction and supervision of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. (Unlike the Sunni mosques, the process for obtaining a government-required license for a Shiite mosque is reported to be unclear and arbitrary.<sup>60</sup>) In 2008, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs estimated it was responsible for

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maintain its legitimacy. Until 2004, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs supported more than 50 so-called ‘Call and Guidance’ centres in Saudi Arabia. These centres are employing approximately 500 people to actively take actions to convert foreigners to Islam. Hence many sub-agencies are operating under the supervision of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs to manage and control the Wahhabi perspectives.

<sup>58</sup> See, Mohammad Ayoob and Hasan Kosebalaban, *Religion And Politics In Saudi Arabia: Wahhabism and the State* (Lynne Rienner Pub, 2008).

<sup>59</sup>International Religious Freedom Report 2004, “Saudi Arabia” <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2004/35507.htm> (Accessed March 3, 2011).

<sup>60</sup> International Religious Freedom 2010, “Saudi Arabia”,

seventy-three thousand Sunni mosques and more than fifty thousand Sunni clerics throughout the country.<sup>61</sup> However the two holy mosques in Mecca and Medina do not go under the jurisdiction of the ministry. They are exclusively under the supervision of the General Presidency for the Affairs of the Two Holy Shrines, which is directly accountable to the King.<sup>62</sup> The person responsible for this position holds a rank equivalent to a government minister.<sup>63</sup>

According to the most recently available data from 2008, the ministry employs nearly seventy-eight thousand clerical staff, including fifty thousand Sunni imams and Friday sermon leaders, who are approved by the government. Based on the size of their constituency, the ministry pays the imams stipends ranging from \$500 to \$800 (1,875 to 3,000 riyals).<sup>64</sup> Those who deliver Friday sermons are paid an additional monthly stipend of \$425 (1,593 riyals).<sup>65</sup> Although their income is considered low compared with other civil service salaries, the stipends are considered supplemental, rather than a main source of personal income. Most Imams and religious personnel have private businesses or full-time government jobs.<sup>66</sup> Hence, they enjoy wider support and patronage from the state. (Shiite clerics are not funded by the ministry and instead rely on community contributions, which vary widely, depending on the number of congregants they serve. Some private mosques employ clerics of other nationalities.)

As was mentioned earlier, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs also acts as a watchdog organisation and has its own filtering mechanisms. These systematic measures are taken to standardise the religious discourse through the standardisation of the religious personnel whose survival depends upon the state. Indeed, the ministry defines the qualifications of

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<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/publisher,USDOS,,4cf2d06d36,0.html>, ( Accessed March 3, 2011).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

According to the 2010 Report on International Religious Freedom ‘Thousands of other mosques existed in private homes, at rest stops along highways, and elsewhere throughout the country.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.



Sunni clerics and the ministry is accordingly responsible for scrutinising the conduct of Imams. The ministry is also responsible for investigating complaints against clerics said to promote intolerance, violence, or hatred.<sup>67</sup> However, it is the state which defines the scope and determines the measurements for ‘intolerance’ and ‘hatred’. In 2003, the ministry established a programme to control and monitor all government-paid imams. This complements the work of the provincial committees of senior religious scholars, who supervise the full-time ministry employees who monitor all mosques and clerics.<sup>68</sup> It is reported that the committee summons clerics accused of preaching intolerance. If the provincial committees are not able to change the perspectives of these clerics, the deviant imams are then referred to a central committee.<sup>69</sup> The ministry officials claim that from 2003 to 2006, one thousand three hundred clerics were dismissed during the first phase of this programme. The second three-year phase ended in 2009. On March 25 2009, in an interview with the daily Arabic newspaper, *Okaz*, the minister for Islamic Affairs claimed that over the five years since the beginning of the programme, three thousand two hundred clerics had been expelled; he also asserted that some imams were brought in for counselling and no clerics were sacked between 2008 and 2010.<sup>70</sup>

Therefore, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs expands its control over the religious life of the country in two ways. Firstly, through financial dependency and, secondly, through a rigid monitoring system. Since the ministry pays the salaries of the imams and the other people who work in the mosques, the state promotes a form of self-censorship. Their financial survival directly depends upon the state. Thus, any deviance from the official discourse can deprive them from the privileges which they gain from the state.

Figuratively speaking, if the imams were selling religious products, they would only have one client, which is the state. If they undermined this relationship, it would be extremely hard to resort to other sources for the continuation of their business activities. This explicit

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

dependency and the unequal relationship between the state and the religious practitioners constitute what I would like to call religious clientelism. Clientelism is a complex concept and it can be contextualised in various ways.<sup>71</sup> As Mario Caciagli puts it, it is ‘probably one of the most pregnant and utilisable categories in the contemporary political analysis.’<sup>72</sup>

The way clientelism functions in various political systems can be different from country to country. Arguably, a degree of clientelism exists in most political systems. We have seen clientelist relations in former Communist states, or former military states in Latin America or in the current theocratic and authoritarian states in Iran and the wider Middle East; clientelism could also be functioning in democratic societies. There is a large literature available, examining the various manifestations of the concept within different socio-economic and political frameworks.<sup>73</sup> However, for the purposes of clarification, we can refer to definition, which was put forward by Clapham, which simply suggests, ‘Clientelism is a relationship of exchange between unequals.’<sup>74</sup> In general, the concept refers to informal hierarchical power relations, which entail the uneven distribution of power. This relationship is mostly between individuals or groups in unequal positions, based on an exchange of benefits. A person with higher authority provides resources for someone or a social group with lower status. In return the beneficiaries have to reciprocate the favour and directly or indirectly serve the interests of the person in a higher position who provided them with resources.

According to Ben Aston:

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<sup>71</sup> See, Steffen W. Schmidt, *Friends, Followers, and Factions: a Reader in Political Clientelism* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1977).

<sup>72</sup> Junichi Kawata, *Compering Political Corruption and Clientelism*, (Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 157. Also see, Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson, *Patrons, Clients and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>73</sup> See, Philip Keefer and Razvan Vlaicu, *Democracy, Credibility, and Clientelism* (Washington: D.C. : World Bank, 2005).

ashraf Sad al-Dīn Ibrahim (1996) *al-Mujtama al-madani wa-al-taḥawwul al-dimuqrāṭi fi al-waṭan al-Arabi* (Cairo: Markaz Ibn Khaldūn).

<sup>74</sup> C. Clapham, *Clientelism and the State*, in Clapham (ed) *Private Patronage and Public Power: Political Clientelism in the Modern State* (London: Pinter, 1982) .4.

The exchange between patron and client is reciprocal although not necessarily even. The patron needs the client's support to maintain their position and the client receives the benefits from supporting their patron. Patrons, therefore, in order to maintain the reciprocal arrangement, must be in a position of power or at least wealth in order to reciprocate the support of their clients.<sup>75</sup>

Aston also suggests that, although there is no official written contract obliging the parties involved, there is ambiguity which sustains the relationship as both client and patron look to continuously gain advantages from each other.<sup>76</sup> He adds:

Clients are free agents and are rational, self-maximising individuals. If they believed they would benefit more greatly from a different patron, they could seek their patronage. In terms of clientelism in political hierarchies clients, who in the system of clientelism are aspiring politicians, may have more than one patron and may switch mentors in order to increase their chances of climbing the political ladder.<sup>77</sup>

This general account of clientelism can summarise the edifice of the relationship between the religious practitioners and the political establishment. However, the Saudi clientelism culture may still differ in a few aspects. Firstly, the main agents of religious thought have only one main patron in Saudi Arabia. They cannot simply switch their patrons to speed their own advancement. Of course, within the framework of the state, there is some factionalism and there are various agents and institutions which may offer minor alternatives, but the choices are often within the state framework and the state is increasingly pushing for further homogenisation. Moreover, there is not much ambiguity over the relationship between the religious practitioners and the state. The state explicitly

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<sup>75</sup> Ben Aston, "Are the political systems of developing countries intrinsically clientelist?" <http://ebookbrowse.com/are-the-political-systems-of-developing-countries-intrinsically-clientelist-doc-d139861654>, ( Accessed December 11, 2003).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

has attempted to control the religious agents and it has practically officialised the relationship through creating explicit financial dependency.

The religious agents do not gain support and resources in return for conformity in an unsystematic context. In fact the relationship is highly systematised and is 'official' in the real sense of the term. The agents disseminate the state ideology and officially receive resources for their services. The King and his Household require legitimacy and good public relations in a religious context, and in return the establishment provides resources and protection.

Although often clientelism is an unofficial tie between unequal parties, the Saudi establishment has attempted to regulate the dependency and make it as explicit as possible. In this light, some of the main agents of the social sphere have become an integral part of the state. The clientalist relations between the state and the religious practitioners are the ultimate example of monopolising the instruments of thought to reproduce a set of narratives to serve as the ideological ammunition of the state. Indeed, in the Saudi context religious institutions can no longer be perceived as the agents of civil society. They are almost completely operating to sustain the state's hegemony. The Imams who are playing key roles for dispersal of social and religious ideas need to go through a governmental process to obtain 'qualifications' for their jobs. Hence, ideologically they are scrutinised before being allowed a social platform.

However, as was mentioned before, despite the heavy control of the mosques, they cannot be completely dominated by the state. Despite the infiltration of the state, mosques still can provide ad hoc platforms for counter-hegemonic activities. The religious root of the *sawha* movement, which opposed the Saudi monopolisation of the religious sphere, is an indication of the fact that the state has not been able to fully homogenise mosques. Hence, mosques in Saudi Arabia enjoy a hybrid nature, which is capable of enforcing hegemony and counter-hegemony at the same time.

It is also possible to argue that both Dar Al-Ifta and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs are active in addressing practical issues that are connected to the religious sphere of the country. However, in addition to these practical operations, the state relies on symbolic institutions, which can boost the legitimacy of the House of Saud. The next section will briefly examine the role of symbolic entities, which are providing a *raison d'être* for the monopoly of power by the House of Saud. Indeed, through controlling the practical engines of religious life and claiming symbolic capital from historical religious entities, the House of Saud has been attempting to officialise Wahhabism as the only undeniable religious 'truth'.

### **Symbolic Capital: The Guardianship of the Holy Sites**

'Symbolic capital' is a notion which was developed by the French sociologist Bourdieu. Siisiäinen explores Bourdieu's theory that the concept of social capital puts the emphasis on conflicts and the power function (social relations that increase the ability of an actor to advance her/his interests). Social positions and the division of economic, cultural and social resources in general, are legitimised with the help of symbolic capital. From the Bourdieuan perspective, social capital becomes a resource in the social struggles that are carried out in different social arenas or fields.<sup>78</sup>

For Bourdieu, 'social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.'<sup>79</sup> He does not exclusively talk about the values of religious sites and their symbolic association with the people in charge of them. Nonetheless, he talks about resources available to individuals and social groups on the basis of honour, prestige or recognition, and functioning as an

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<sup>78</sup> Martti Siisiäinen, "Two Concepts of Social Capital: Bourdieu vs. Putnam" Paper presented at ISTR Fourth International Conference 'The Third Sector: For What and for Whom?' Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland July 5-8, 2000 <http://www.istr.org/conferences/dublin/workingpapers/siisiainen.pdf> ( Accessed February 2, 2011)

<sup>79</sup> Bourdieu, P. and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* ( United States: University of Chicago Press, 1992),119.

authoritative embodiment of cultural value. Such values can assign legitimacy and distinction to individuals and social groups in society. For Bourdieu, symbolic power rests on recognition. For example, someone who is perceived as a war hero enjoys symbolic capital, enabling him or her to run for political office. Symbolic power rests on legitimate recognition. In other words, those with legitimate control of symbolic power can give recognition. For example, some secular agents may not have the legitimate control of symbolic power to assign religious recognition to the House of Saud, for their guardianship of the holiest sites in the Islamic world, but the *ulama*, with socially recognised religious credentials, can.

Arguably, from the early stages of the establishment of the modern Saudi order, the House of Saud has shown a great awareness of the symbolic capital of their actions. They have taken calculated measures to gain necessary legitimacy through their symbolic actions. They have used many opportunities to build institutions and establish an apparent connection between their political dominance and the narratives of ‘truth’ in Islam. For example, in 1926 Ibn Saud chose the Grand Mosque of Mecca to proclaim his new position as the King of Hejaz. There has been a constant attempt to portray the Saudi dominance through symbolic actions, which involve Islam. From the early days of the Saudi Kingdom, the House of Saud had considerable ideological and religious interest in the holy places in Mecca and Medina. Historically, the various political establishments and caliphates gained legitimacy from the guardianship of such significant places in the Islamic world. The Ottoman Empire was the last major establishment, which vested its Islamic legitimacy in protecting the holy sites.

According to James Piscatori :

The Ottomans in the mid-16th century carried out a major redevelopment that gave the holy places the form that Saudi Arabia, the current custodian of the sanctuaries of Mecca and Medina, inherited. They also undertook to build a railway from Damascus to Medina, to facilitate the pilgrimage but mainly to support Ottoman garrisons in

Arabia. Its strategic value was recognised in the Arab Revolt of 1916 that pitted the local rulers, the Hashemites, against the Turks, and today the Saudis have announced their intention to rebuild some of the lines that were destroyed then.<sup>80</sup>

Clearly, the custodianship of these sites has considerable symbolic value as people securing these sites are seen as housekeepers of the most important physical places in the *umma*. This is where the ‘final truth’ of Islam becomes symbolised in a physical manifestation. There are many transcendental narratives assigned to these physical places. Hence, the Ka‘ba metaphorically is perceived as the home of ‘the truth’, a place where millions of Muslims return in order to pray and practice the most important rituals of their faith, as turning in the direction of the Mecca they attempt to connect to the Ultimate Being.<sup>81</sup> Regardless of their location in the globe, they have to pray in that direction and if consciously they do not turn to Mecca, their prayer may not be accepted. Hence, Mecca is a physical place with a transcendental function. With the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent defeat of the Hashemite tribe in Hejaz, the House of Saud became the custodian of Mecca and Medina.

From the early stages of Saudi dominance in Hejaz, there have been attempts to regularise the pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina.<sup>82</sup> Accordingly, controlling and institutionalising the *hajj* became one of the first priorities of the House of Saud to prevent any infiltration from the rival tribes such as the Hashemites who were previously the guardians of the holy places. In November 1926, the son of the new ruler Prince Faysal issued a decree, *nizam*, to

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<sup>80</sup>James Piscatori, ‘Hajj: Journey to the Heart of Islam’, Times Higher Education, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=418769&sectioncode=26>, (Accessed 18 May, 2012).

<sup>81</sup> See, Muassast al-Balagh, *al-Hajj, ibadah wa-tarbiyah* (Tehran: Mu’assasat al-Balagh, 1980).  
Peters, F. E., *The Hajj: the Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>82</sup> See, *Expansion of al-Haramayn al-Sharifeyn*, (Saudi Arabia: Ministry of Information, Al-Mutawa Press), Dale Eickelman & James Piscatori, *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious Imagination* (Barkley: University of California Press, 1992).

form a comprehensive set of regulations to control pilgrimages in Hejaz.<sup>83</sup> The decree provided regulations for various aspects of hajj including logistics.

Article I of the decree defined *mutawwifin* as ‘persons of the population of Makkah nominated by His Majesty of the King from among people of religion and trustworthiness, to provide for all those who come for the hajj and to each of them will be assigned a group of Pilgrims’. Of course, this was partly about regulating the financial part of the process, but at the same time by providing a license system the government attempted to enforce its own religious agenda. *hajj* was the ultimate opportunity for exposure to the wider Wahhabi discourse. The House of Saud recognised this opportunity from a very early stage. The current regulations for *hajj* are based on number of decrees starting from 1938, and in 1965 all the regulations were brought together into a single act Royal Decree, *marsum*.<sup>84</sup>

The hajj has been subject to rigid institutionalisation for two main reasons; revenue and legitimacy. The fact that one of the pillars of Islam is a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina provides a guaranteed source of revenue for the state. In November 2009 Saudi Arabia accommodated approximately twenty-five million Muslim pilgrims from different corners of the world.<sup>85</sup> The pilgrims visit the country throughout the year to perform the *Umra*, which is considered as a lesser pilgrimage, and to visit holy sites there and in Medina.<sup>86</sup>

The guardianship of these sites contributes to Saudi hegemony. The Saudi connection to these secret sites provides religious legitimacy for the ruling order. The Saudi state heavily banks on their role as the guardians of such places; in various official publications the Saudi establishment portrays itself as the ultimate housekeeper, who provides essential services for Muslims worldwide. For example, the official website of the Saudi embassy in the United States states that:

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<sup>83</sup> David Long, *The Hajj Today: A Survey of the Contemporary Pilgrimage to Makkah* (United States: State University of New York Press, 1979), 38.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* 39.

<sup>85</sup> Report on International Religious Freedom 2010.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*



The vast financial and human resources Saudi Arabia has committed to the *hajj* reflect the dedication of the leadership and citizens of the Kingdom to the service of Islam and the holy sites and to preserving them as a haven of peace for all Muslims. To Saudi Arabia, caring for the holy cities of Makkah, the birthplace of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad, and Medina, the Prophet's burial place, is a sacred trust exercised on behalf of all Muslims. Recognising the unique and historic tradition these holy sites represent, King Fahd bin Abdul-Aziz adopted the official title of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques as an expression of his deep sense of responsibility toward Islam.<sup>87</sup>

The official website of the Ministry of Hajj states that:

In the late King Fahd's reign, this tradition was maintained and, with the benefit of increased revenues, a program of expansion and refurbishment on an unprecedented scale was implemented. Of all the projects with which the late King Fahd was personally identified, none was closer to his heart than the expansion of the Holy Mosques in Makkah and Madinah. To emphasise the monarchy's commitment, and his own, to this responsibility, in 1986 King Fahd adopted the title of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques in preference to the title of His Majesty. On the death of King Fahd on 1st August, 2005, the title of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques was assumed by King Fahd's successor, King Abdullah.<sup>88</sup>

As already mentioned, the person in charge of the Two Holy Mosques is only and directly accountable to the King and has a kind of ministerial status. Today, as well as in the past,

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<sup>87</sup> The Official Saudi Embassy in Washington,  
[http://www.saudiembassy.net/about/country-information/Islam/guardian\\_of\\_the\\_Holy\\_Places.aspx](http://www.saudiembassy.net/about/country-information/Islam/guardian_of_the_Holy_Places.aspx),  
(Accessed March 1, 2011).

<sup>88</sup> "Kingdom as Guardian of the Holy Places", Ministry of Hajj,  
<http://www.hajjinformation.com/main/d10.htm>, (Accessed March 1, 2011).

his title of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques provides an indispensable legitimacy for the King and his household.<sup>89</sup>

The House of Saud has regarded itself as the only genuine protector of ‘authentic Islam’ through adapting the teaching of Wahhabism. It is possible that their role in controlling the most important sites in the Islamic world is giving them the religious legitimacy they need for the monopolisation of power in Saudi Arabia. Although there is no way to measure the exact influence of these symbolic positions in gaining legitimacy, the custodianship of these holy sites is providing the House of Saud with an indispensable context for any religious claims. Controlling the most important places in the Islamic world has helped them to authenticate their narratives. This symbolic significance maintains the role of the Ministry of Hajj as an essential institution for the management of truth in Saudi Arabia.

## **Ulama**

In the broadest sense of the term, refers to Islamic scholars engaged in the study and the arbitration of *Shari‘a* law, legal *fiqh* (jurisprudence) *hadith* and *tafsir* (Qur’anic exegesis). Within different Islamic legal traditions, there is a relatively well-defined hierarchical structure to rank the position of *ulama* within religious establishment as well as socio-political framework. Clearly, to reach the higher ranks requires years of reading and education in various fields and subfields of Islamic studies. Socially and politically, they are not monolithic social groups, as they have diverse socio-political orientations. Within Saudi Arabia and the wider Islamic context *ulama* have diverse relations with the ruling system. Some are integral parts of establishments and some are in opposition to the ruling order.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Paul Dresch and James Piscatori, *Monarchies and Nations: Globalization and Identity in the Arab States of the Gulf* (I.B. Tauris, 2005).

<sup>90</sup> See, Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

M.b.A.b.Ş al-Şaliḥ, *al-Shura fi al-Kitab wa-al-Sunnah wa- inda ulama al-Muslimīn* /talif Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Şaliḥ al-Şaliḥ (Riyadh : 1999).

There are about thirty to forty *alims* who constitute the core of *ulama* leadership in Saudi Arabia.<sup>91</sup> These *alims* who are appointed by the king have direct access to the king and other senior members of the ruling family. The king and ministers consult them about religious as well as important political affairs of the state, so they have capability to influence policy making in the country.<sup>92</sup> Within all the above Saudi state institutions (Dar Al-Ifta, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and the Ministry of Hajj) the *ulama* play a significant role in maintaining the official status of Wahhabism as the religion of the state. The role of *ulama* in socialising and sustaining the religious narratives of the state has been indispensable. Hence, it is imperative to pay more attention to their role in Saudi Arabia. Clearly, the special relationship between the House of Saud and the Wahhabi *ulama* goes back to the early days of Saudi-Wahhabi co-operation in the eighteenth century. Previously, this special relationship was analysed in the context of religious clientelism, which entails an unequal relationship between the House of Saud and the religious practitioners. Nonetheless, not all Wahhabi *ulama* are the clients of the state. Indeed, one cannot homogenise all the *ulama* into a singular and static social category, which has been subservient only to the will of the House of Saud. Not all Saudi *ulama* are Wahhabi and not all Wahhabi *ulama* are alike. At times the *ulama* have confronted the House of Saud. For example, before, the establishment of the Saudi Kingdom there were many *ulama* who disagreed with the Saudi claim for power and opposed the Wahhabi reading of Islam.

Even after the establishment of the Saudi Kingdom, the House of Saud failed to completely standardise the *ulama*'s religious and political orientation. During the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, even some of the Wahhabi *ulama* opposed the state's policies. They disagreed with some of the modernising policies of the state such as introducing education for women. More recently, many important figures such as those *ulama* involved in the *sahwa* movement disagreed with the Saudi elite and criticised the role of the state *ulama* in Saudi

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<sup>91</sup> Mordechai Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Society, Government and the Gulf Crisis: Society, Government and the Gulf Crises* (London: Routledge, 1993), 10.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

Arabia. The *sahwa* (awakening) movement emerged in the 1990s, which provided some challenges for the state and disputed some of the official policies of the Kingdom.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, the *sahwa* movement in Saudi Arabia became a Salafi assembly line and *ulama* such as Safar bin Abdul-Rahman al-Hawali and Salman al-Awdah worked on increasing the political and Islamic awareness of the youth.<sup>94</sup> This involved criticising various social and political policies of the state.

The *ulama* have been the loudspeakers of the definitive interpretation and yet some members of the same social group have questioned the official narratives and proposed alternative perspectives. Hence it is difficult to explain the functionality of *ulama* within a theoretical framework. We know their role in the formation of Saudi hegemony has been essential. But as the implication of the aforementioned *sahwa* movement implies, a social group, which has been vital in sustaining hegemony at certain times, can deviate and constitute an effective counter-hegemony against the state.<sup>95</sup> Therefore, it is possible to argue that for the House of Saud the *ulama* have been their best friend and yet their worst enemy for the management of official narrative. So how can the role of *ulama* be explained? Are they simply the state clients serving the religious interests of their patrons? Are they functioning as intellectuals? Or are they forming a unique social category?

In Saudi Arabia, there are different categories of *ulama*. We have to remember that, when the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established, a considerable proportion of the population of Saudi Arabia had not been socialised into the Wahhabi understanding of Islam. Accordingly, there were religious leaders who represented schools of thought other than Wahhabism. There were *ulama* in Hejaz who did not subscribe to the Hanbali *madhhab*. However, there are grounds for the argument that, in the ‘battle of ideas’, the non-Wahabbi

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<sup>93</sup> See, Stephane Lacoix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>94</sup> Jarret Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2008), 55.

<sup>95</sup> As was explained, this pattern can apply to the general Islamic truth management at the micro level. Historically, various political establishments have officialised certain narratives in order to gain legitimacy. Hence, their legitimacy depended upon the institutionalisation of what they portrayed as official Islam. Yet, always competing narratives emerged to contest the official truth. Although the political establishments could monopolise the official religious infrastructure, they could not completely homogenize Islamic narratives.

*ulama* were ideologically pacified. In theory, they were independent of the state and its ideological framework; nevertheless they largely accepted the supremacy of the prevailing order and did not oppose it directly. In this light, they still had historical ‘continuity’ in spite of the challenges and discriminations they may have had to face. Despite their perceived independence from the state, they have been largely conservative. This conservatism, as well as their inability to constitute any tangible ideological resistance, has served the interests of the state. In effect, we can regard the minority *ulama* as traditional actors who do not necessarily share the perspectives of the ruling class, but they have reached a compromise with the state and its ideological apparatus, in part because of institutional pressure and financial incentives. On the other hand, the role of calibrating Wahhabi *ulama* can be understood in the context of patron-client relations, which are essential for the socialisation of the prevailing ideology. However, the critical Wahhabi *ulama* constitute the greatest danger for the religious legitimacy of the state. For example in the case of the aforementioned *sowha* movement the *ulama* used the same religious language and ideological instruments to undermine the state.

## **Conclusion**

Historically, Wahhabism has functioned as the ideological engine of the House of Saud. Before the creation of the nation-state, Wahhabism provided the House of Saud with an indispensable sense of religious mission, which motivated and mobilised the Saudi forces. It provided the House of Saud with a sense of religious purpose and identity, which would effectively distinguish them from their rivals. The foundational elements of the creed were based on binaries of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ and ‘us’ versus ‘them’. Wahhabism claimed to be the representation of the ‘truth’ and the House of Saud claimed to be the instrument to disseminate it.

This sense of religious mission was important for the House of Saud since it provided a ‘legitimate’ context for claiming power. In 1932, when finally the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was declared, the mandating machine of Wahhabism did not lose its significance for

the House of Saud. As a matter of fact, it became even more instrumental in helping the House of Saud to build a new nation-state. The House of Saud wanted to make Wahhabism officially the 'national' creed of the state. They wanted to turn Wahhabism into a national frame of reference to synchronise the existing tribes with the ruling family. However, the official recognition of Wahhabism as the national belief could not occur in the abstract.

The regime needed effective trans-tribal institutions to socialise their narratives and establish their authorities transcript. This process of top-down socialisation could not emerge in the absence of a necessary infrastructure, which would effectively translate direct repression based on brute power to indirect control based on consent. By necessary infrastructure, I referred to a set of social agencies, which were developed and employed by the ruling order to promote and promulgate its own ideological perspectives for gaining legitimacy. Thus, through various socialising and associational agencies, the state has attempted to synchronise its subjects with its own legitimising narratives. Accordingly, as has been demonstrated, the new state took measures to construct a horizontally bonded society in which they could be perceived as the natural possessors of power within an 'organic' territory in which the state and the nation were 'naturally' connected.

This chapter examined the formation of some specific institutions and ministries, which were created by the House of Saud to recondition the national religious consciousness in accordance with its official regime of 'truth'. This chapter addressed the construction of those national institutions that have attempted to control religious consciousness through the lens of official truth. This chapter argued that Dar Al-Ifta was one the most significant institutions built to systematically target the trans-tribal religious consciousness in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It became an important institution for the promotion of official 'truth' through producing and doctoring *fatwas* and religious opinions. Dar Al-Ifta's religious productions and interpretive policies have been essential in synchronising the ruling class with their subjects. This chapter also examined the Ministry of Islamic Affairs which functions as one of the main religious watchdogs in the country. The ministry played

a significant role in socialising the official truth in Saudi Arabia. One of the important tasks of this ministry is to supervise the activities of almost all the mosques in the country.

The ministry employs nearly all clerical staff, including over fifty thousand Sunni imams and Friday sermon leaders, who were approved by the government. All of these Imams and religious practitioners receive their salaries from the state. The ministry has been taking systematic measures to standardise the religious activities of their employees. The ministry is actively responsible for scrutinising the conduct of the imams who are responsible for instilling the ‘right’ religious values in their constituencies. This chapter argued that the Ministry of Islamic Affairs expands control over the religious sphere in two ways: firstly through financial dependency and, secondly, through a rigid monitoring system. This explicit dependency and the unequal relationship between the state and the religious practitioners have constituted what I called religious clientelism. Although often clientelism is an unofficial tie between unequal parties, the Saudi establishment has attempted to regulate the dependency and make it as explicit as possible. In this light, some of the main agents of the social sphere became an integral part of the state. The clientelist relation between the state and the religious practitioners is the ultimate example of monopolising the instruments of thought to reproduce a set of narratives to serve as the ideological ammunition of the state.

This chapter also paid attention to the Ministry of Hajj and the symbolic value of the most holy sites of Islam, which are now under custodianship of the House of Saud. As was demonstrated, from the early days of the Saudi Kingdom, the House of Saud had a considerable ideological and religious interest in the holy places in Mecca and Medina. Clearly, the custodianship of these sites has considerable symbolic value as those people securing these sites are seen as the housekeepers of the most important physical places in the *umma*. This is where the ‘final truth’ of Islam becomes symbolised in a physical manifestation. The guardianship of these sites has contributed to Saudi hegemony. The Saudi’s connection to these secret sites provides religious legitimacy for the ruling order. The Saudi state banks heavily on their role as the guardians of such places. In various

official publications the Saudi establishment portrays itself as the ultimate housekeeper who provides essential services for Muslims worldwide.

Finally, this chapter assessed the role of the *ulama* in Saudi Arabia. The Wahhabi *ulama* have been indispensable agents in disseminating the official 'truth' in the kingdom but the state failed to homogenise all the *ulama* into a single and static social category, which is subservient to the will of the state alone, since not all Saudi *ulama* are Wahhabi and not all Wahhabi *ulama* are alike. Although there have been religious leaders who represented schools of thought other than Wahhabism, in the 'battle of ideas' the non-Wahhabi *ulama* have been ideologically pacified. Their conservatism, as well as their inability to constitute any tangible ideological resistance, has served the interests of the state. On the other hand, the role of the orthodox Wahhabi *ulama* can be understood in the context of the patron-client relations, which are essential for the socialisation of the prevailing ideology.



## Chapter 4

### EDUCATION

#### Introduction

This chapter aims to examine the process of socialisation of the Wahhabi regime of truth and its challenges, through both pedagogic action and the educational mechanisms, which were constructed after the formation of the Saudi nation-state. In order to scrutinise modern Saudi education effectively, it is necessary to provide a historical context. This can help us to analyse the historical continuity of the use of education for the dissemination of the religio-political perspectives of the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance, which developed between the Saudi state and Wahhabism. Of course, within the first and second Saudi emirates, education lacked structure and was a highly irregular and unsystematised activity. Nonetheless, the notion that education was a vehicle that existed to spread and solidify Wahhabi perspectives took root.

Before the declaration of the kingdom in 1932, the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance was prone both to continuous conflict and to friction.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, the intellectual basis of Wahhabism was influenced by conflict and ideological confrontation. The polemical nature of Wahhabi education in these periods of conflict reached on into the modern era. As part of the organisation of the nation-state, education started to be more systematic, with a defined scope and clear objectives and the discovery of oil, which shifted the political economy and paved the way for the further institutionalisation and bureaucratisation of various sectors, including education.

In this light, a more complex educational infrastructure emerged in order to accommodate the socio-political particularities of the new polity. From the early stages of building the educational infrastructure, the *ulama* played an active role in creating a single subjective

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<sup>1</sup> See, Hamid Algar, *Wahhabism: a Critical Essay*, (Unites States: Islamic Publications International, 2002).

national vision from the base to the peak of Saudi society, which accorded with the religio-political mandate of the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance. In this light, a modern educational mechanism was built so that the Wahhabi mission for the management of the official truth in Saudi Arabia could be continued. It became an instrument for ideologically cleansing ‘innovations’ and spreading the ‘true’ teaching of Islam. Thus, education was used as a powerful instrument of social control to standardise the collective consciousness in accordance with the Saudi-Wahhabi narrative.

The Saudi education system is a large and complex mechanism, which cannot be covered in its entirety. This chapter will only look at some of the specific subjects and textbooks, which are taught at elementary and secondary school level in Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, there will be two interrelated sections analysing the teaching of religious studies and history across the education system at school level.

For centuries, the main pedagogical activities were primarily limited to Islamic studies within the Arabian Peninsula. There was hardly any serious scholarship on any ‘secular’ subjects, as the main focus was often on the memorisation of Qur’an, Qur’anic exegesis, study of the *hadith* and Islamic jurisprudence. Although the introduction of modern educational structures in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia modernised the education system, Islamic studies still continued to be the core subject to study. From the inception of modern schooling in Saudi Arabia, the state had a considerable interest in the subject and vast amounts of resources have been devoted to Islamic studies. Hence, it is essential to pay special attention to religious studies and the way in which it articulates the narrative of power in a religious context in the Kingdom.

Along with religious studies, history has been the most significant subject to be doctored within the official education system. The function of history as a mechanism of ideological enforcement goes back to ancient times. Throughout the ages and within various differing socio-political frameworks, history has been part and parcel of the time and has been employed to aid the articulation of prevailing social perspectives. Since history is a living

narrative and it has powerful indoctrinating properties, those who are in charge of controlling the reflections of the past are in a position of great power. It is indeed the power of representation. Saudi official historiography has been very much aware of this empowering tool of representation. Accordingly, the official history, which is taught across the education system, is tailored to create a 'natural' historical context for the existing power complex in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Thus, the study of history and the ways in which historical narratives are constructed and conveyed require special attention in this chapter.

Following the same analytical approach, this chapter will continue by addressing the role of higher education in Saudi Arabia. There will be a critical discussion of the role of universities and their involvement in the politics of truth management in Saudi Arabia. Finally, this chapter examines the educational reform agenda, which was initiated after 9/11. The alleged involvement of a number of Saudi nationals in terrorist operations in New York and Washington raised many questions about the sources of motivation of the hijackers. After 9/11, many scholars and policy makers started to scrutinise the social, religious and cultural environment of Saudi Arabia to find possible factors that could provide an inspiration for extremism. In the fierce climate of the 'War against Terror', the Saudi educational system was accused of producing people like Muhammad Atta, who carried out a major terrorist action in the US. During these intense years, new education reforms were introduced to harmonise Saudi foreign policy symbolically with its internal socio-political dynamics. This chapter attempts to critically scrutinise the scope of the reform agenda and its implication for the Saudi politics of truth management.

### **On Education**

Indeed, when we are talking about the process of truth management and the role of socialisation in that process, we cannot ignore the educational agencies and social mechanisms which build the necessary edifice for the packaging and branding of ideas as 'truth'. Of course, as already put forward, 'truth' does not come from the possession of pure knowledge, which is objective and static. The construction of 'truth' happens over time and

indeed it is not an undemanding procedure. The accepted 'truth' can be objectified and internalised to the extent that one may completely cease to see that these metaphors are constructed and do not actually represent what they claim. Berger and Luckmann refer to this process as 'sedimentation'. The perpetuation of Saudi dominance has been partly dependent upon this attempt at the inter-subjective sedimentation of certain interpretations of the 'truth', which in turn enforces a theoretical justification for a model of the distribution of power favourable to the House of Saud.

Historically, the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance has been based on an amalgamation of power and knowledge. Arguably, the brute power of Saudi forces has been a precondition for the promotion of the Wahhabi narrative and equally Wahhabi perspectives to provide a 'legitimate' context for the application of that force. Hence, power and knowledge have always complemented one another in sustaining and perpetuating a historic alliance, which has lasted until the present day, and therefore education, as a productive means of the management of knowledge, is important to the House of Saud. Thus, before analysing the educational strategies of the country, it is imperative to have a broad theoretical understanding of education as the historical means for the social transition and management of knowledge. It is therefore beneficial to provide a wider context for education and its multi-faceted features before addressing the Saudi educational policies.

Although education as a practice and concept is part and parcel of all societies, it is difficult to define it as a monolithic notion. According to Scott and Marshall, 'Education is a philosophical as well as sociological concept, denoting ideologies, curricula, and pedagogical techniques for the inculcation and management of knowledge and the social reproduction of personalities and cultures.'<sup>2</sup>From the age of antiquity to modern times, education has been seen as an instrument for social transition. Many visionaries and thinkers regarded education as the best means of attaining 'ideals'. We can even trace these ideas back to ancient times.

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<sup>2</sup> John Scott & Gordon Marshall, *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 205.

For example, the way, in which education was theorised by Plato, influenced people's understanding of education for many centuries to come.<sup>3</sup>

Within the Platonic world, the 'right' education to create the 'right' men was seen as a precondition to create the 'ideal state'. As later writers and thinkers were to do, he sees education as an effective means of social engineering, which would create and sustain a utopian state. This perception of education as an agent of change travelled through the ages and shaped various social and political frameworks throughout history.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, many social systems have recognised education as a means of providing 'liberty' and 'emancipation' from worldly impediments. (Many of these narratives conceptualise education within a framework, which today is recognised as objectivist. Objectivist education implies that knowledge is independent of the learner. In other words, there is a distinction between knowledge and the knower, so that knowledge and 'truth' are out there for the learner to go and discover.)

Of course, the appreciation of education as an agent of change and transition has not been limited to western civilisation. In fact, education as a powerful means of social engineering has been adapted within various socio-cultural frameworks and often there are interconnecting links between their approaches and methodologies. Accordingly, education is profoundly valued within the Islamic context as well as in the West. Islam mirrors the Platonic approach in seeing education as a means of attaining 'ideals'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Plato's philosophy puts forward both the theoretical and practical scope of education. His theory of education is primarily accommodated within two Dialogues, *The Republic* and *The Laws*. For Plato, philosophical objectives within a full education enable people to transcend their desires in order to reach true knowledge. For him, arriving at 'true' knowledge was the only way to break the chains, which hold back man's perception of the true forms. Thus, he refers to education as a means of reaching an ideal society. He provides practical and theoretical details for his educational programme. Plato notes that in his ideal state, the guardian class supervises matters since they have received the right education.

<sup>4</sup> For example Plato's emphasis on the gravity of education was disseminated by Rousseau in *Émile* (1762), and in his other influential classic, 'The Social Contract'. In *Émile*, Rousseau was seeking a strategy to employ education as a powerful social device able to emancipate man from ethical and social erudition. As William Boyd notes, Rousseau explores a system of education, which would enable the natural man whom he identifies in *The Social Contract* to overcome a corrupt society. See, William Boyd, *The Educational Theory of Jean Jacques Rousseau*, Longmans, (Green and Co, 1911) 127.

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, there are many *hadith* assigned to the Prophet of Islam, emphasizing the role of education and the importance of accumulating knowledge. It is not without benefit to point out a few important *hadith* regarding education, to highlight the institutional importance of the notion in Islam. 'Seek knowledge though it be in

In the same way as many other belief systems, Islam proclaims as sacred a set of definitions and normative knowledge, both of which are prescribed for the faithful to internalise in order to reach personal salvation and create the 'ideal state'. Of course, Islam's understanding of true knowledge is objectivist. Hence, there are independent 'truths' out there for the faithful to discover. Thus, a faithful follower is expected to embrace the Qur'an, which is described as independent knowledge, directly descended from God. Hence, the spread of Qur'anic words and Islamic knowledge, through formal and informal education, has been an important way of perpetuating the religion. This is a classic example of 'inter-subjective sedimentation', by which knowledge is passed from one generation to another.

Arguably, in the same way as in the Platonic utopian vision, which idealises 'perfect knowledge', in Islam Qur'anic knowledge is considered as final, thus enabling the believer to reach perfection and understand its ideals. There are many verses in the Qur'an which emphasise the importance of travelling along the path of knowledge in order to find the way to paradise. Islam, as well as many other belief systems, envisages a utopia, which can be reached through the adaption of 'true knowledge'. Through the internalisation of true knowledge, the faithful follower could adopt the 'right' set of practices, which would help him or her to reach the ideal state. Hence, there is a connection between utopia and education in Islam as well. It is through education that a believer evaluates his worldly journey and apprehends the truth, which is the only key to the ideal Islamic position.<sup>6</sup>

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China' is one of the Prophet's defining sayings about education, which is used as a motto for the promotion of education in the Islamic world. It is reported that the Prophet stated that 'The seeking of knowledge is a duty incumbent on every Muslim, man and woman' and 'An hour's contemplation and study of God's creation is better than a year of adoration'. Uthman also has reported on the Prophet stating, 'The best among you is he who learns and teaches the Qur'an'.

<sup>6</sup> Abu al-Fazl Izzati and A. Ezzati suggest that the main objective of religion according to the Qur'an is education, hence in the early days of Islamic history new provisions were made for educating recent converts. Converts had to learn some of the Qur'an, which was considered as the ultimate revelation of truth, and they had to be trained in the Islamic creed and practices. This process started from the time of the Prophet himself and was adapted by the following Islamic rulers. Umar assigned teachers in every land where Islam had penetrated. Abu al-Fazl Izzati and A. Ezzati also suggest that the importance of Islamic education was so significant that soon it became an independent responsibility. Thus, education played an important role in widening the boundaries of Islam. Hence, as the geographical boundaries of Islam expanded, the Islamic imperial administration sought ways to socialise the new subjects into the prevailing belief system. This policy or approach resulted in a successful programme of Arabisation, which linguistically and

Indeed education, whether conducted formally or informally, is the product of accumulated human experience and is the historical locomotive for the transition of ideas from one generation to another. Within the context of any civilisation, cultural framework or belief system a practice, which is often identified as education, is responsible for the standardisation of collective consciousness. It carries a set of normative and ideological perspectives that are vital for the maintenance of collective consciousness. In this light, education has been associated with social engineering. Although social engineering can be a by-product of education, it can be manifested through other social agencies as well.

Adam Podgórecki, Jon Alexander and Rob Shields summarise social engineering as 'arranging and challenging environmental and social forces to create a high probability that effective social action will occur. The word 'engineering' suggests the designing and erecting of structures and process in which human beings serve as raw material'.<sup>7</sup>

Usually, the notion of social engineering comes with negative connotations and we often associate the term with states, which are obviously ideologically based. Nonetheless, ideology is a part and parcel of all nation-state projects, and a degree of top-down social engineering to create and sustain a unified subjective national consciousness, must exist within the socio-political framework of all nation-states.

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doctrinally harmonised most of the new subjects into the official narrative of the Islamic Empire. Within a short time, most subjects spoke the language of their rulers and subscribed to the official creed of the empire. Hence, spreading the religion of the empire as the narrative of power through the language of the rulers helped to harmonise the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. Clearly, through the homogenisation of the means of communication and the standardisation of the collective consciousness, there could be a broader scope for cultural hegemony, which would maintain the hierarchy of power.

For more information see: Abu al-Fazl Izzati, A. Ezzati, *The spread of Islam: the contributing factors*, (Islamic College for Advanced Studies Publications, 2002) 346.

<sup>7</sup> Adam Podgórecki, Jon Alexander, Rob Shields, *Social Engineering* (Carleton University Press, Canada, 1996), 1.

However, the interference of the political powers in shaping the social sphere and affecting the collective consciousness is not necessarily a Westphalian product. Such practices are not limited to a specific space and time and they go back to antiquity. Despite its long history, the notion of social engineering did not become the subject of rigid academic study until the end of World War II. The modern study of the notion, as in the social science discipline of socio-technics only began in the 1950s. Socio-technics emerged as a general theory of how efficient methods for inducing collective action work.<sup>8</sup>

Adam Podgórecki, Jon Alexander and Rob Shields suggest that the state, in the form of various organisations and social agencies, embarks on major interventions in the name not only of national interest and strategy, but of social order and morality.<sup>9</sup> In the context of the twentieth century, many totalitarian states imposed their top-down policies using the pretext of creating a better social order. These states claimed to have the best vision of the future and thus of the ways to shape it. They framed their intervention within an ethical framework and they acted as if they were the only people who could distinguish good from evil in the social sphere.<sup>10</sup> According to Adam Podgórecki, Jon Alexander and Rob Shields, ‘They also claim to have the technical knowledge necessary to attain what is good and eliminate what is bad. The latter holds priority; their first task is to eradicate evil.’<sup>11</sup>

In order to broaden our understanding of social engineering, we can examine it as a mechanism of social control. In every social framework, there are various mechanisms of social control, which Berger defines as ‘various means used by a society to bring its recalcitrant members back into line’.<sup>12</sup> Mechanisms of social control vary and the social situation and the character of the groups condition them. However, in general one can define them as formal or informal measures patterning and regulating individual behaviour.<sup>13</sup> This

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.3 (Although this chapter primarily looks at top-down social engineering, the practice also can take place from the bottom up).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Berger, *Invitation to Sociology* (Anchor, 1963), 69.

<sup>13</sup> James J Chriss , *Social Control: an Introduction* (Polity Press, 2007), 1.



direct control can entail regulations, laws and punishment, while indirect control is about shaping and reshaping patterns of behaviour through socialising agencies such as education. Edward Ross argued that:

Society is not a magical super-organism or a social mind, neither is it a mere assemblage of human beings. The true constitution of human society is to be found somewhere between the lone individual and the social group. For him, there are sources of influence and control whereby individuals are transformed into social beings. These distinct forces create patterns of association between members of society.<sup>14</sup>

Accordingly, individuals are socialised into their roles and there are certain social mechanisms such as education, which control and enforce this. There is a vast body of literature consisting of hypotheses and theories that deal with social control.<sup>15</sup> For example, one can touch briefly upon the notion of symbolic violence by Pierre Bourdieu who extends

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>15</sup> In order to clarify the concept, I refer to Peter Berger's definition, as it is relatively precise and comprehensive. In his classic *Invitation to Sociology*, he articulates six mechanisms of social control. The first category is violence, which consists of physical force and the threat of violence. (The following chapter will exclusively deal with violence as a defining mechanism of social control in Saudi Arabia) The second category is economic pressure. For example, before an individual adheres him or herself to a nonconformist codes of conduct might have the fear of being fired and fear of not being hired. The economic consequences of certain actions can standardise his or her scope of activities to at least accept if not respect the status quo. The third mechanism is the verbal and mental pressures, which include persuasion, ridicule, social marginalization, ostracism and fraudulent claims and the fear of losing one's social status. This pattern of control is very much applicable to the Saudi's treatment of religious minorities, in particular Shiites. The state actively responds to religious and ideological nonconformity through ostracism and spreading ideas that the Shiites are 'innovators and 'deviants' from Islam. The fourth category is morality, custom and manners. They are also part of a written or unwritten social contract, which is the product of social construction that conditions human behaviour. Although some are legal, most are enforced informally. As will be discussed later, through this category Saudi Arabia attempts to enforce its hegemonic narratives to condition the collective behaviour. Fifth is the occupational control. This includes the formal rules and regulations of employers and 'professional codes of conduct'. The final category is family and personal friends, which can have considerable psychological influence on our objectification and evaluation of social reality. All the above instruments enforce social conformity, which condition the individual's modes of thought and constitute patterns for their behaviour. Hence, if these standardising mechanisms are challenged, it will cause some repercussions. The behaviour of the individuals and the groups that are challenging these standardizing mechanisms are seen as unordinary and nonconformists. However, the mechanisms of social control cannot completely eliminate the minority influence. Minority Influence, which is also a theory in social psychology, advocates that, as long as the minority group is consistent, there is always scope for their impact and influence on the majority. Therefore, despite the social cost, there are always platforms for minority militants and nonconformist to exercise influence.

the notion of violence to incorporate various mechanisms of social control. This notion is particularly helpful in scrutinising those education systems with an implicit ideological mandate. For Bourdieu, symbolic violence is the mostly unconscious form of domination which social habits maintain over a subject's consciousness. Bourdieu notes that:

Symbolic violence is the coercion which is set up only through the consent that the dominated cannot fail to give to the dominator (and therefore to the domination) when their understanding of the situation and relation can only use instruments of knowledge that they have in common with the dominator, which, being merely the incorporated form of the structure of the relation of domination, make this relation appear as natural; or, in other words, when the schemes they implement in order to perceive and evaluate themselves or to perceive and evaluate the dominators (high/low, male/female, white/black, etc.) Are the product of the incorporation of the (thus naturalised) classifications of which their social being is the product.<sup>16</sup>

Richard Jenkin summarises Bourdieu's symbolic violence as:

The imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning (i.e. culture) upon groups or classes in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate. This legitimacy obscures the power relations, which permit that imposition to be successful. Insofar as it is accepted as legitimate, culture adds its own force to those power relations, contributing to their systematic reproduction. This is achieved through a process of misrecognition: the process whereby power relations are perceived not for what they objectively are but in a form which renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder... the mainstay of the exercise of symbolic violence is pedagogic action, the imposition of a cultural arbitrary, of which there are three modes: diffuse education, which occurs in the course of interaction with competent members of the social formation in question (an example might be the informal peer group), family education, which speaks for itself, and institutionalised education (examples of which might be age-set initiation rituals, on the

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<sup>16</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, United States: Stanford University Press, 2000), 170.

one hand, or school, on the other). The symbolic strength of any pedagogic agency—its capacity successfully to inculcate meaning—is a function of its weight in the structure of power relations.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, in this context, pedagogic action represents the interests of the dominant class. By reproducing culture it is reproducing the power relations, which legitimise its own operation.<sup>18</sup> Pedagogic action selectively excludes or includes ideas and values in accordance with the interests of the prevailing group.<sup>19</sup> Hence, the set of ideas and perspectives, which are included, are portrayed as being natural and ideologically uncontaminated. Indeed, pedagogic action has been an indispensable part of the politics of truth management in Saudi Arabia.

### **Education in Saudi Arabia: An Overview**

Before the establishment of Saudi Arabia as a nation-state, education was primarily an informal activity within the territory. From the time of the arrival of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula, more cosmopolitan cities such as Mecca and Medina accommodated some Islamic schools and scholars. As was mentioned before, Ibn Abdul Wahhab, the founder of the Wahhabi creed, received part of his education in Hejaz where he studied the science of *hadith* and jurisprudence. However, despite the fact that it accommodated the holiest sites in the Islamic world, the Arabian Peninsula was never a major educational centre in the Muslim world.

After the Ottoman occupation of the Peninsula in 1517, some other educational institutions were erected in Mecca and Medina.<sup>20</sup> Some of these early institutions included the school of the Sultan Qayt Bay, the Sultan of Egypt, the Sultan Gayath al-Din and the Sultan of Bengal.<sup>21</sup> However, most of the Ottoman schools primarily provided education for the

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Jenkins, Pierre Bourdieu (London: Routledge, 1992), 65-66.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Mahmoud Abdullah Saleh, "Development of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia", *Journal of Higher Education*, Volume 15, Issue 1-2, (1986) 17-23.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

families of the colonial officials.<sup>22</sup> During the period of Ottoman rule in the Hejaz, the colonial government provided a six year education programme which included geography, history and even art along with general Islamic studies, but the programme was not in the students' native language, as the courses were taught in Turkish. Along with language problems, many parents refrained from sending their children to these schools, as they feared they would be conscripted into the Ottoman army.<sup>23</sup>

Hence, it is possible to assert that, even by colonial standards, the country did not benefit much from the Ottoman educational heritage.<sup>24</sup> The main providers of education were the *kutabs*, which were ungraded Qur'anic schools attached to the mosques.<sup>25</sup> These *kutabs* remained popular in Saudi Arabia until they were gradually replaced by the modern school system. However, even in terms of orthodox Islamic education, they were limited and they did not provide any dynamic scholarship. The main function of the *kutabs* was to memorise the Qu'ran and other religious texts. The memorisation and recitation of the Qur'an and other basic texts continue to be the defining feature of much of the educational system of Saudi Arabia even today, and can be traced back to the practices in the *kutab* schools.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, through the centuries, the main centres of Islamic education moved to other parts of the Muslim world such as Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus and Najaf. There can be many reasons for this lack of educational development in pre-modern Saudi Arabia. Arguably, the isolation of the land minimised wider exposure to the developing world and led to educational bodies stagnating. Of course, there is also a connection between power and education as there is interdependence between power and the production of knowledge. Historically, major Islamic educational bodies mushroomed within the centres of power. For example, in Andalusia cities such as Cordoba provided world-class education, and during the Abbasid or

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<sup>22</sup> Wayne H. Bowen, *The history of Saudi Arabia* (United States: Greenwood Press, 2007), 12.

<sup>23</sup> William A. Rugh, "Education Saudi Arabia: Choices and Constraints", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. IX, no. 2, (2002).

<sup>24</sup> see, Abd al-Rahman al-Shamikh, *al-Ta'lim fi Makkah wa-al-Madinah akhir al-ahd al-Uthmani*, (Riyadh: al-Shamikh, 1973).

<sup>25</sup> Mahmoud Abdullah Saleh (1986).

<sup>26</sup> William A. Rugh, (2002)

Fatimid domination, Baghdad and Cairo both became major centres of Islamic scholarship. Clearly, within these centres of power, schools and scholars were able to find patrons to fund their activities while Arabian peninsula lagged behind in educational development, as it remained politically insignificant for centuries.

However, from the early stages of their emergence as a major religio-political entity, the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance gave attention to education, so that it could promote their perspectives and expand their religious constituency. During the first Saudi emirate (1744–1818) the Saudis set up four *madrasas* in al-Diriyah where Shaykh Muhammad's four sons taught. It is reported that, the Saudis provided support for teachers and pupils from poorer backgrounds.<sup>27</sup> The Saudi educational mandate went beyond the capital and covered other towns in the wider region of Najd as well. It is also reported that some of the early Saudi rulers ordered the governors of towns to select ten to fifteen young students to be trained and educated at the treasury's expense.<sup>28</sup> In theological classes, the *ulama* under Saudi control taught Abdul Wahhab's *Kitab al-Tawhid* and focused on one of his treatises that discredited the critical perspectives of his opponents.<sup>29</sup> For the Qur'anic exegesis, the *ulama* taught the works of al-Baghawi, Ibn Kathir, al-Tabari and al-Baydawi.

For legal theories and Islamic jurisprudence, Wahhabis taught and studied classic works by Hanbali authors like Ibn Qudama and al-Hujawi.<sup>30</sup> For the Wahhabi *ulama*, the Qur'anic exegesis was instrumental in authenticating their views. They also paid considerable attention to the selection of *hadith*, which tallied with their own interpretation. After all, *Kitab al-Tawhid* which was the defining text by Ibn Abdul Wahhab, was a mere selection of *hadith* and Qur'anic verses without any major philosophical debate. Despite the efforts of the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance to promulgate their regime of truth, educational development was still minimal and unsystematic. There are two possible explanations for the slow educational development in this period. Firstly, the constant tribal warfare and conflict with the Ottoman

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<sup>27</sup> David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 124.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

Empire had its effect in preventing the formation of a solid educational infrastructure. Secondly, the Saudis were dominant in the region of Najd, which was historically isolated and undeveloped. The lack of a major educational heritage, as well as the necessary social capital in the region, made the construction of an infrastructure more difficult. For these reasons, the expansion of Wahhabism in this period had to rely primarily on conflict and warfare to reach other corners of the territory.

During the second Saudi emirate (1824–1891), the Wahhabi educational framework was a continuation of the same educational pattern as that of the first emirate. Following the first Saudi emirate, education failed to be a major hegemonic force in systematic and comprehensive socialisation of the Wahhabi interpretation. Education continued to be unstructured, irregular, uncoordinated and inconsistent. However, within this disorganised framework of education, there were some additional materials to cover in the Second Saudi emirate. The main addition was the polemical and rather acerbic treatise by Bad al- Latif ibn Abd al-Rahman and Abdullah ibn Aba Butayn aimed at arming Wahhabi students with arguments against the traditional Ottoman *ulama*.<sup>31</sup> This new addition was added as a response to the increasing pressure on the Wahhabi narrative from contesting *ulama* both within and beyond the peninsula.

The news of the controversial actions of the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance, such as the massacre of Shiites in Karbala and the bloody occupation of Mecca, reached the far corners of the Muslim world. Thus, increasingly more *ulama* began to refute the Wahhabi creed.<sup>32</sup> As there were more refutations from the opponents, the Wahhabi *ulama* became more polemical and defensive in response. This polemical and self-justifying pattern in Wahhabi educational materials, continued into the twentieth century. (As mentioned before, from the beginning of

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Refutation of Wahhabism started as soon as Abdul Wahhab started to promulgate its views. One of the earliest opponents of his views was his brother, Sulayman ibn Abdul Wahhab, who wrote a book, Divine Thunderbolts of Wahhabism. He criticized his brother's dogmatic approach to Islam. He accused his brother of adding sixth pillar to Islam, which was 'Anyone who does not follow me is not Muslim'.

For more information see: Wyche Fowler Jr. and Mark Weston, Prophets and Princes (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 93.

the Wahhabi mission, many *ulama* refuted the teachings of Ibn Abdul Wahhab, among Sunni scholars who rejected Wahhabism we can mention Sayyid Dawud Ibn Sulayman, Mawlana Khalid al-Baghdadi, al-Halabi al-Makki al-Hanafī, Muhammad Ma'sum al-Sarhindi and Muhammad Ibn Sulayman al-Madani.) Clearly, criticisms by such *ulama* added to the defensive nature of Wahhabi scholarship. The more the traditional *ulama* criticised the teaching of Wahhabism, the more self-justifying the Wahhabi *ulama* became.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the civil war between the House of Saud and tribal rivals such as the Hashemites and House of Al-Rashid, delayed the establishment of modern schools. As previously mentioned, the emergence of a modern bureaucracy and its institutions coincided with the discovery of oil, and the new oil economy became a major push for the systematisation of the education system. Although, the new state started to establish some schools in the thirties and forties, the development was still far from the production of an effective hegemonic force.

By the 1950s, there were fewer than twenty elementary schools in Saudi Arabia outside the region of Hejaz (six in Najd, six in al-Ahasa, five in Asir). Hejaz had four secondary schools.<sup>33</sup> In order to justify these schools to the Wahhabi *ulama*, their curricula primarily focused on religious studies and Arabic. Accordingly, as much as 80% of class hours were dedicated to these subjects. Only in the fourth year of school did Qur'anic instruction consist of fewer than ten hours per week.<sup>34</sup> The Kingdom started to mandate elementary schools for boys in 1954.<sup>35</sup> In fact, the country's first department of education started in 1926, but for the aforementioned reasons its progress and development was limited.<sup>36</sup> In 1938, the Directorate issued regulations confirming that it had control over all the educational matters in the kingdom except for the military academies.<sup>37</sup> In 1953 during the reign of King Saud the Department of Education turned into a ministry and Prince Fahd, who later became King,

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<sup>33</sup> David Commins (2006), 125.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Wayne H. Bowen (2007), 12.

<sup>36</sup> Since the 1920s, a small number of private schools offered limited secular education for boys, but it was not until 1951 that a major programme of publicly funded secondary schools was initiated.

<sup>37</sup> William A. Rugh (2002).

was appointed as the minister.<sup>38</sup> The structure created in 1925-6 provided six years of elementary and five years of secondary schooling. However, in 1958, the Saudi state along with other members of the Arab League, agreed upon a uniform educational system which provided for a 6-year elementary, a 3-year intermediate and a 3-year secondary cycle with a separate higher education programme.<sup>39</sup> The Educational Policy Document was issued by the Council of Ministers in December 1969; this has been the fundamental frame of reference for the principles, goals and objectives of education in the country. This comprehensive document put a lot of emphasis on Islamic teachings.<sup>40</sup>

According to the Education Policy Document, it is the responsibility of the State to provide education at all stages. Furthermore, Article 233 of the Educational Policy stated that all types of education at all stages should be free and that the State should not charge tuition fees.<sup>41</sup> These provisions started to pave the way for more widespread education in the country.<sup>42</sup>

Although the foundation of the Saudi state was based on Wahhabism, many *ulama* were still hesitant about the formation of modern schooling. Their reluctance was based on the fact that they would lose their monopoly over education. Within the pre-modern Saudi Arabian context education was synonymous with Islamic studies. Hence, most of the *ulama* regarded education as an inseparable segment of their territory.

As learned men of religion, they wanted to preserve their traditional role in delivering education. Yet, the state represented itself as the enforcer of pure Islamic teaching and still required substantial support from the *ulama* to enforce its policies. Despite the attempt to

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<sup>38</sup> Mahmoud Abdullah Saleh (1986).

<sup>39</sup> "Educational System in Saudi Arabia Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" (Washington: Ministry of Higher Education Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission 200), [http://www.sacm.org/Publications/58285\\_Edu\\_complete.pdf](http://www.sacm.org/Publications/58285_Edu_complete.pdf), (Accessed March 16, 2011).

<sup>40</sup> "World data on Education", The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002116/211628e.pdf>, (Accessed March 15, 2011).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> See, Abd-el Wahab Abd-el Wassie, *Education in Saudi Arabia: a History of Fifteen Years Effort to Spread Education in a Developing Country, an Orthodox Diagnosis, and Some Proposals for a Better Future* (London: Macmillan, 1970).



standardise schooling, the state granted the Wahhabi *ulama* many unmatched privileges to shape the new education system. For example, at some point King Faysal appointed a leading Islamic scholar Shaykh Hassan Al al-Shaykh as the Minister of Education. Hence the ministry became a stronghold of conservative bureaucrats.<sup>43</sup> In 1970, King Faysal established a general directorate of the religious institutions and colleges, which the state utilised in its creation of a religious system of education. Later, in 1975 when Prince Fahd rearranged the government, the Ministry of Higher Education was created and Shaykh Hassan was appointed as its head.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed in the modern Saudi state, education became the indispensable bridge, which connected the *ulama* to the wider state bureaucracy. The education system also started to symbolise the profound interdependence between these two groups. Through the powerful socialising agency of education the *ulama* were put at the forefront of creating a national vision of the state's values, which tailored the official narrative of the state. From the early stages of the institutionalisation of education, the *ulama* played a leading role in writing school materials and preparing the textbooks exactly in accordance with the religio-political parameters of the Wahhabi-Saudi alliance. Having said that, the Wahhabi *ulama* were never a monolithic group. Although the Saudi state adopted Wahhabism as its official creed, many *ulama* were still uncomfortable about the emergence of bureaucracy and with it modern education institutions. Nonetheless, the necessary synergy was in place to implement the new state policies. The state's resources were fundamental in creating and sustaining the 'mainstream' Wahhabi *ulama* who were a part of the policy-making and its enforcement.

In addition to his modernisation policies, co-operation between the *ulama* and the House of Saud harmonised under King Faysal.<sup>45</sup> Although he tried to bureaucratise the *ulama* and bring them under his control by rigidly defining their institutional role, he gave them the power to control the education system. From time to time the conservative Wahhabi *ulama* were

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<sup>43</sup> Mordechai Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Government, Society, and the Gulf Crisis* (London: Routledge, 1993), 16.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Joseph Kechichian, *Faysal: Saudi Arabia's King For All Seasons* (United States: University Press of Florida, 2008).

angered by his educational policies, but in the end compromises were made and the special relationship between the House of Saud and *ulama* was preserved. A classic example of one of these compromises was the introduction of female education in the Kingdom, which infuriated many orthodox Wahhabi *ulama*.<sup>46</sup>

The idea of education for women, put forward by King Faysal, sparked controversy among the orthodox Wahhabi *ulama*. Many *ulama* argued that, education for women breeds immorality by corrupting their thoughts and turning girls away from their traditional roles as good mothers and wives.<sup>47</sup> These *ulama* were afraid that a major societal transition could be sparked off by female education and they resorted to various interpretational strategies to offset the plan. Despite their determined resistance, Faysal enforced the policy. The traditionalists were then galvanised into demonstrating at the gates of schools expressing their anger with the state, and blaming the parents who registered their daughters for education. The disturbance had to be curbed by the National Guards.<sup>48</sup> However, in order to prevent any further damage in the special relationship between the *ulama* and the House of Saud, Faysal offered two major concessions.

Firstly, the government pledged to introduce female education strictly within the socio-cultural framework of the country so that, for example, rigid gender segregation in school was enforced.<sup>49</sup> Secondly, the government introduced a special body called the General Presidency for Girls' Education, which had special responsibility for female schooling.<sup>50</sup> It has to be noted that the negative attitude towards female education was reflected in the ratio of school-age boys to girls in primary school enrolments. In 1960, only 22% of boys and 2% of girls were registered in schools. Nevertheless, within a few years the public's perception of female education changed, and the general population became more supportive of the idea. For example, in 1981 enrolments were 81% of boys and 43% of girls. In 1989 the number of

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<sup>46</sup> See, Willard A. Beling, *King Faysal and the Modernisation of Saudi Arabia*, (London:Westview Press, 1980).

<sup>47</sup> B.D. Usmani, *Women Education in Twenty First Century* (Anmol Publications, 2004), 285.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

girls registered in the public school system was close to the number of boys: almost 1.2 million girls out of a total of 2.6 million students, or 44%<sup>51</sup>. Arguably, this achievement could not be reached without the support and legitimising role of the mainstream *ulama*. These rapid shifts in public perception are partly an indication of the political pragmatism shown by the *ulama* in accommodating the policies of the King. Although many of them were disheartened by these unprecedented social transitions, they were capable of continuing in their loyalty to the King. Secondly, the cost of reaching compromise was the creation of an educational apartheid, which would enforce the two-tier system in the country, which lasted for decades.

Through the creation of the two-tier system the *ulama* could socialise the state narrative in accordance with the student's gender role as laid down in the Wahhabi moral and social framework. Thus, two organisations oversaw almost all education institutions in the kingdom.<sup>52</sup> The Ministry of Education was responsible for education of boys, special education programmes for the handicapped, adult education, and junior colleges for men. Girls' education was administered and strictly supervised by the Directorate General of Girls' Education.<sup>53</sup> Primarily, the *ulama* constituted the personnel of this organisation, collaborating with the Ministry of Education. The Directorate General supervised the general education of female students, and women's literacy programmes, as well as colleges of education and junior colleges for girls.<sup>54</sup> The organisation acted as a mechanism to filter and standardise the female education system in accordance with the religio-political model recommended in the Wahhabi teaching of Islam. The division of labour among the above educational organisations made the enforcement of ideology on target bases. However, the General Presidency was merged with the Ministry of Education in 2002 after an incident in a girls' school in Mecca in which 15 girls died.<sup>55</sup> Since then the Ministry of Education has been the main body responsible for delivering and monitoring education in the Kingdom.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> See, Abd-el Wahab Abd-el Wassie , Education in Saudi Arabia ( London: Macmillan, 1970).

<sup>53</sup> See, Cheris Kramarae and Dale Spender, Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women: Global Women's Issues and Knowledge( Routledge, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> B.D. Usmani (2004), 285.

<sup>55</sup> See, Wyche Fowler Jr. and Mark Weston (2008), 412.

Among all the Saudi rulers, Faysal was the one who more than anyone else had an appetite for modernisation, and it is possible to assert that he was the first effective Saudi ruler who understood the importance of education as an instrument of state hegemony.<sup>56</sup> With the new oil revenue, he wanted to make a leap forward into the future and by it to shift the country to a new stage. His aforementioned modernisation policies required a wider educational establishment in the country. However, did he simply need a more educated élite to help him to push the country into its next phase of development? Of course, one cannot deny that the major allocation of public expenditure into education was due to a genuine modernisation drive aimed at qualifying the workforce to meet the new developmental demands. Nonetheless, the highly ideologised character of the education system also indicates that education has been adapted as a mechanism of social control.

Indeed, Faysal used the education system as a new frontier to combat the secular ideas of Arab nationalism, which were undermining the conservative nature of his Kingdom.<sup>57</sup> It seems that, in the sensitive years of the Arab Cold War, he saw in education the opportunity to spread his Islamic discourse so that he could immunise his kingdom against the threatening ideologies.<sup>58</sup> When Arab nationalism mobilised the masses in the region, he retreated to Islam. By blending the Islamic narrative with some aspects of economic modernisation, he attempted to offer a third way and the education system was the best medium in which to spread the philosophy behind his policies. When he became the crown prince in 1961, he was supportive of the foundation of the Islamic University of al-Madinah al-Munawarah, a university focusing on Islamic studies. He encouraged the enrolment of foreign students in this university so that Saudi Islamic discourse could be widely disseminated. Even today, the

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<sup>56</sup> See, Willard A. Beling, *King Faysal and the Modernisation of Saudi Arabia* (London: Croom Helm, 1979).

<sup>57</sup> See, Itamar Rabinovich and Haim Shaked, *From June to October: the Middle East between 1967 and 1973* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1978).

<sup>58</sup> See, Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and his rivals 1958-1970* (London: Oxford University Press for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1971) and Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism In The Twentieth Century: From Triumph To Despair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

vast majority of students at this university are foreigners studying Islam through the lens of Wahhabism.

Faysal also founded many other educational, cultural and political institutions to act as the engines driving his policies.<sup>59</sup> Some of these organisations had a wider international dimension. For example, in 1962 he established the Muslim World League. This organisation became involved in various cultural and educational projects. Although Faysal used this organisation as a form of soft power to gain legitimacy, the organisation was also penetrated by the Ikhwan al-Muslimeen (Muslim Brothers) who had recently escaped from persecution in Syria and Egypt.<sup>60</sup> During the Arab Cold War he gave sanctuary to Muslim refugees escaping persecution from secular states. Although this policy was meant to be more symbolic in boosting his notion of pan-Islamism, later on some of these refugees penetrated a number of educational institutions and had a debatable impact on the general discourse of education.<sup>61</sup> He also initiated the Organisation of Islamic Conference 1969 and 1972. The Muslim World League mainly targeted the grassroots, while the Organisation of the Islamic Conference was more concerned with interstate relations. He also founded some smaller agencies to promote Islamic education and culture beyond the Saudi borders.

He was determined to provide a minimum education for every Saudi and he accelerated the expansion of vocational schools secondary and higher education.<sup>62</sup> The raising of revenue through oil in the 1960s and 1970s helped to accelerate the development of the education system.<sup>63</sup> Even after the death of Faysal, his aspiration for the expansion of the education

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<sup>59</sup> See, Bilal Ahmad, *Saudi Arabia Under King Faysal* (Institute of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, 2005).

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism Since 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 18.

<sup>61</sup> When King Faysal was under pressure from Pan-Arabist ideologies he used Pan-Islamism as his counter attack. Although, Wahhabis were traditionally hostile towards other branches of Islam, he used his pan-Islamic discourse to promote Muslim solidarity and unity. This was yet another indication of the fact that the state has always been prepared to compromise some aspects of its official narrative due to political expediency.

<sup>62</sup> Mordechai Abir, (1993), 16.

<sup>63</sup> Although vocational schools are becoming more popular now, historically they were stigmatized and hardly appealed to the young Saudis. Vocational schools and manual jobs were not well received, as many Saudis were more interested in getting jobs in the oil industry and the government sector. In the 1980s when the oil prices were historically down, vocational education gained more popularity.

system was adopted by his successors. By 1989, the total number of students in school had risen to 2,650,000, which was about 40% of the population – 1,160,000 of whom were girls.<sup>64</sup> Despite the low population of students in 1953, only 33,000, the state made significant progress in expanding the realm of education in the country.<sup>65</sup>

After 1989, education continued to be important for the state, and the further growth of the education system was projected by the Kingdom's 5th development plan of 1990-95.<sup>66</sup> By 1989, Saudi Arabia had established a sizeable education system with more than 14,000 education institutions, including seven universities and eleven teacher-training colleges, as well as schools for vocational and technical education, special needs, and adult literacy. The system was enlarging so fast that in 1988-89 alone, 950 new schools were opened to accommodate 400,000 new students.<sup>67</sup>

All teaching, books, and health services were given to students by the state, which assigned about 20% of its public expenditure, or US\$36.3 billion, to human resources under the Fourth Development Plan, 1985-90.<sup>68</sup> The Fifth Development Plan, 1990-95, proposed a total expenditure of about US\$37.6 billion.<sup>69</sup> It is also relevant to note here that the political economy of the Kingdom corresponded to a rentier state model, which entails 'rent' in terms of free state services in place of representation and accountability. The state provides free health care and education to give legitimacy to its indisputable monopoly of power.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.17.

<sup>65</sup> Mordechai Abir argues that Saudi statistics do not pay much attention to the low level of education and the social composition of students. He asserts that the quality of schools is different according to geographical location and social environment. He also refers to other important social impediments, such as religious discrimination, which affected some minorities such as Shiites. Until the 1980s, Shiites were subject to discrimination. Hence, their access to education above elementary school could have been problematic. The Shiites' best chance of education beyond primary school was through scholarships provided by Aramco. Aramco also provided some schools in the eastern provinces.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> 67 Helen Chapin Metz, "Saudi Arabia: A Country Study". (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress 1992) <http://countrystudies.us/saudi-arabia/>, (Accessed March 10, 2011).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> The term rentier is mainly applied to states rich in valuable natural resources such as oil and gas, or states rich in financial instruments such as reserve currency. Saudi Arabia is considered as rentier state because it is rich in natural resources and it is using the vast amount of income generated from oil to maintain political

The state used its vast resources from its oil revenues to produce containment. Hence, the idea of free education provided by the state was part of a greater effort for political control. Thus, it is possible to assert that the ideological nature of the education system as well as its rentier character, portray the two dimensions of social and political control promoted by the enrolled in grades 1 through 12 had reached almost 4.11 million. Male students supervised by the Ministry of Education constituted 2.16 million (52.5% of the total). There were also 12,000 in special education (for blind, deaf or retarded children) and 108,000 in adult education. The number of teachers in grades 1 through 12 was 333,000, of whom 157,700 were at boys' schools agency of education in Saudi Arabia).<sup>71</sup>

Today, the government continues to invest heavily in general education. The upward trend of budgetary allocation indicates the state's conviction of the importance of the education sector in the country. In Saudi Arabia, public spending for education is estimated at 5.7% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), comparable with the UK (5.3%), Germany (4.3%), and South Korea (4.2%)<sup>72</sup> By comparison with many states in the region and beyond Saudi Arabia spends a vast amount of its resources on education. However, as it will be considered in the following sections the nature of the Saudi education is highly ideological and this may indicate that the heavy investment in education is more about the dissemination of Saudi-Wahhabi narratives than investing in key skills and training which could benefit the economy in long term. See Table 1.

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consent. The generated income from oil sustains the country's welfare system, which provides many free or highly subsidised services for people. In absence of democratic mandate or taxation, the state's welfare system helps the regime to main its legitimacy. Many scholars have argued that the rentier state model is indispensable for the survival of the Saudi regime. See, Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani, *The Rentier State: Nation, State and Integration in the Arab World*, Vol 2, ( London: Routledge, 1987).

<sup>71</sup> William A. Rugh, Education in Saudi Arabia; Choices and Constrains, *Middle East Policy*, Vol IX, NO. 2, JUNE 2002

<sup>72</sup> U.S.-SAUDI ARABIAN BUSINESS COUNCIL

[http://www.us-sabc.org/files/public/Education\\_Brochure.pdf](http://www.us-sabc.org/files/public/Education_Brochure.pdf), (Accessed March 12, 2011)

**TABLE 1: EDUCATION BUDGET**<sup>73</sup>

Fiscal Year	General State budget	Male education budget	Female education budget	Education budget as % of State budget
1999/00	185,000	20,249	23,909	23.8
2000/01	215,000	21,172	21,695	19.9
2001/02	202,000	21,724	25,129	23.2
2002/03	209,000	22,471	25,775	21.1

In million of Saudi Riyal.

**TABLE 2: MALE AND FEMALE STUDENT ENROLMENTS**<sup>74</sup>

	Male	Female	Totals
Primary	1.19 mn	1.09 mn	2.28 mn
Intermediate	582,000	491,000	1.07 mn
Secondary	390,000	366,000	756,000
Subtotal 1-12	2.16 mn	1.95 mn	4.11 mn
Special Ed.	8,000	4,000	12,000
Adult	34,000	74,000	108,000

Year 2000.

<sup>73</sup> UNISCO Institute for Statistic “The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia”

[http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/archive/Countries/WDE/2006/ARAB\\_STATES/Saudi\\_Arabia/Saudi\\_Arabia.htm](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/archive/Countries/WDE/2006/ARAB_STATES/Saudi_Arabia/Saudi_Arabia.htm), (Accessed October 21, 2011)

<sup>74</sup> William A. Rugh, Education in Saudi Arabia: Choices and Constrains, Middle East Policy, vol. IX, nO. 2, JUNE 2002.



## Religious Studies: The Wheel of Truth Management in the Education System

As already mentioned, for centuries pedagogical activities were limited primarily to the Qur'anic and Islamic studies within the Arabian Peninsula. There was hardly any serious scholarship on any other subjects, as the main foci were often recitation of the Qur'an, study of hadith and Islamic jurisprudence. Although the introduction of modern educational structures in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia diversified education, Islamic studies still remains the key subject to study. The state has considerable interest in the subject and vast amount of resources are devoted to Islamic studies so that the subject has to have the maximum effect on the religio-political consciousness of pupils and students across the Saudi education system.

Religious studies have been mandatory in public schools at all levels in Saudi Arabia. Regardless of students' religious background and religious persuasion, they have to study Islam as seen through Saudi-Wahhabi perspectives. Muslims adhering to any versions of Islam other than Wahhabism are banned from teaching in schools.<sup>75</sup> Although students in private international schools are not required to study Islam, non-Saudi Muslim students still have to receive permission from the Ministry of Education to attend private international schools. The authorities do not permit the establishment of any private religious schools which aim to promote anything other than the official state's discourse. Hence, educational structures are fully sheltered from any religious pluralism.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, religious pluralism is the

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<sup>75</sup>Robert Murray Thomas, *Religion in Schools: Controversies Around the World* (Praeger Publishers, 2006) 183.

<sup>76</sup> From the beginning of Saudi-Wahhabi rule, the Shiites' religious and educational institutions have been severely restricted. In 1927, the Wahhabi *ulama* published a *fatwa* calling upon the Shiites to convert to Islam. Some Shiite notables submitted to the rule, while others left the country. Publication, education and circulation of Shiite religious books were forbidden, the Shiite call to prayer was banned, and centres of religious studies. Therefore, the Shiites religious schools ( *hawzas*) were allowed to exist until the mid-1940s. After the closure of the Shiites learning centres, the role of Shiite *ulama* was undermined to a greater degree than at any time before. Many had to leave for the Shiite cities of Iraq such as Karbala and Najaf. From 1990s onwards, some of the historical restrictions on Shiism have relaxed. Nonetheless, the Shia *ulama* did not achieve a social position to have a full educational freedom. Some Shiite *ulama* such as Fouad Ibrahim and Shaykh Hasan al-Saffar, attempted to oppose the Saudi establishment through direct confrontation after 1979. Nonetheless, they never had the capacity to challenge the Saudi establishment either through direct confrontation or counter-hegemonic activities. For more information see: Joshua Teitelbaum, "The Shiites of

antithesis of the Saudi educational mandate. According to the establishment, there is only one ‘truth’ which has to be fully disseminated by education mechanisms across the country.

Schools and universities are unique platforms for religious and ideological socialisation. They are unique because they are predominantly in the monopoly of the state, so the state is free to create every aspect of education in accordance with its own ideology. It is also a platform which can facilitate a gradual religious socialisation in this way; it is more effective than many other socialising agencies, such as the media, which people are exposed to on an unstructured basis. In a similar way to most other countries, formal education is a long process in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, it starts at the time of infancy, continues into the formative years of adulthood. Hence, the long and structured exposure to the education system creates an indispensable platform for dissemination of the ideological perspectives of the state.

Clearly, the religious nature of the state’s ideology makes religious studies a very sensitive subject in the long educational process in Saudi Arabia. As the state claims to gain its legitimacy from its religious mandate, any agency, which is responsible for teaching religion, is micro managed. There are rigorous mechanisms in place to monitor Islamic studies. Although the state may not have direct control over the primary socialisation of students, it uses the educational platforms to shape the religious consciousness of students in accordance with the prevailing narratives of the state.

As mentioned before, the Wahhabi *ulama* have played a central role in managing education in Saudi Arabia. There is a widespread belief that the state has made concessions to the *ulama* to control the cultural and educational spheres in return for their support in other areas of policy-making in the country. After the Mecca uprising in 1979, which galvanised the House of Saud, the state reinforced Islamic education in the country. It seemed that the state believed that the lack of religio-political conformity, which led to the uprising, was the result of incomplete Islamic education. There was a belief that the education system failed to

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Hudson Institute, “Saudi Arabia”, <http://www.currenttrends.org/research/detail/the-shiites-of-saudi-arabia>, (Accessed March 12, 2011)

synchronise the people's religious views with those of the establishment. Accordingly, some radicals took arms to challenge the state and its religio-political mandate. The uprising, which was led by Juhayman al-Utaybi, resulted in the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. Hegghammer and Lacroix regard the incident as 'one of the most spectacular and tragic events to befall the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, if not the whole Muslim world, in the twentieth century'<sup>77</sup>.

Juhayman al-Utaybi, used an Islamic narrative to give legitimacy to his actions and to question the religious authority of the House of Saud. He declared his brother-in-law, Muhammad Abdullah al-Qahtani, to be the redeemer of Islam, the Mahdi, whose Messianic arrival was foretold in a *hadith*. The religious nature of the uprising shook the regime to its foundations; armed religious opposition was not supposed to confront the state, which claimed to be the implementer of the purest Islamic teaching. The siege, which ended violently after two weeks, paved the way for a more systematic approach to Islamic studies, to standardise the religious consciousness of the nation.

Accordingly, the state provided more resources for Islamic education to prevent a further crisis of legitimacy. In addition to general Islamic education, which was provided during the term time, schools started to run summer courses to strengthen students' faith in Islam and the official creed of the state. However, one has to note that the expansion of religious education was more than merely increasing the general study of Islam in the curriculum. As the state attempted to be more selective in the usage of Islamic materials, every aspect of Islam had to be rigorously standardised by specific Wahhabi perspectives. In other words, the rapid 'Islamisation' of the education system was nothing more than the 'Wahhabisation' of educational materials, which were tailored to rationalise the existing power structures.

By 'Wahhabisation' of Islamic education, I simply refer to the process of reshaping educational materials in accordance with rigorous Wahhabi teaching. This process intensified

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<sup>77</sup> Thomas Hegghammer and Stephane Lacroix, *The Meccan Rebellion* (Bristol: Amal Press, 2011), vii

the normative character of the education system socially, culturally and politically to engineer society in accordance with the monocratic ideology of the state. The violent uprisings of 1979 convinced the élite that they had to invest heavily in education, not only as a mechanism of social control, but also as a tool of survival to perpetuate a ‘legitimate’ context for the monopoly of power by the House of Saud.<sup>78</sup> Wahhabism has traditionally sustained this monopoly of power. Thus, at a time of crisis, the state had no choice but to give more ground to the Wahhabi *ulama* so that it could protect cultural and social spheres from nonconforming voices. Indeed, the fluctuation of ‘Wahhabisation’ has always been dependent on the strength of the state, as at a time of crisis the state often intensified its Wahhabi character.

The process of devoting a vast amount of resources to Islamic education continued during the mid-1980s, when the state’s income from oil fell significantly.<sup>79</sup> In this light, by 1986 more than 16,000 of the kingdom’s 100,000 students were enrolled in Islamic studies. By the early 1990s, one quarter of all university students were studying in religious institutions.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, Islamic studies have been omnipresent across the education sector. In all stages of education, ‘Islamic studies’ is prevalent; this is now structurally embedded in the system.

According to a report conducted by the UNESCO, International Bureau of Education, one of the main objectives of elementary education in Saudi Arabia is ‘instilling the correct Islamic creed in the spirit of the children and providing them with comprehensive Islamic education and feelings of belonging to the Islamic nation’<sup>81</sup> For example, in grade I, out of twenty-eight total weekly hours, nine hours are devoted to Islamic studies, while only two hours are given to mathematics and no time is spent on science and geography. In grade VI, out of thirty-one total weekly hours only five hours are given to mathematics and three hours to science while

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<sup>78</sup> Yaroslav Trofimov , *The Siege of Mecca: The 1979 Uprising at Islam's Holiest Shrine* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2008).

<sup>79</sup> Michaela Prokop , “Saudi Arabia: the Politics of Education”, *International Affairs*, Vol 79, no1 (2003).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, “The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia” , , [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/archive/Countries/WDE/2006/ARAB\\_STATES/Saudi\\_Arabia/Saudi\\_Arabia.htm](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/archive/Countries/WDE/2006/ARAB_STATES/Saudi_Arabia/Saudi_Arabia.htm), (Accessed May 11, 2011).

Islamic education takes nine of the total number of hours more than any other subject.<sup>82</sup> Some of the main objectives for Intermediate and secondary education are identified as ‘Stimulating the students’ ambition to restore the glory of the Islamic nation to which they belong and resume the march on the path of dignity and glory’ and ‘training students to use their time for useful reading and in religious activities and to employ their efforts in strengthening and advancing their Islamic character.’<sup>83</sup> Accordingly, the amount of hours given to Islamic Studies exceeds those given to any other subject in the timetable. See Tables 3, 4 and 5:

**TABLE 3: ELEMENTARY EDUCATION FOR BOYS<sup>84</sup>**

Elementary education for boys: weekly lessons timetable							
Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade						
	I		II	III	IV	V	VI
	1 <sup>st</sup> semester	2 <sup>nd</sup> semester					
Islamic education	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
Arabic language	12	11	9	9	9	8	8
Mathematics	2	4	4	4	5	5	5
Science	-	1	2	2	2	3	3
History	-	-	-	-	1	1	1
Geography	-	-	-	-	1	1	1
Civics	-	-	-	-	1	1	1
Physical education	3	2	2	2	2	2	2
Fine arts	2	1	2	2	1	1	1
Total weekly periods	28	28	28	28	31	31	31

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> World Data on Education 2010-11, "Saudi Arabia", United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002116/211628e.pdf>, (Accessed March, 12, 2012).

**TABLE 4: INTERMEDIATE EDUCATION FOR BOYS<sup>85</sup>**

Intermediate education (lower secondary) for boys: weekly lessons timetable			
Subject	Number of weekly periods in each form		
	I	II	III
Islamic education	8	8	8
Arabic language	6	6	6
English language	4	4	4
Mathematics	4	4	4
Science	4	4	4
History	2	2	2
Geography	2	2	2
Civics	1	1	1
Fine arts	2	2	2
Physical education	1	1	1
Total weekly periods	34	34	34

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<sup>85</sup> World Data on Education 2010-11, "Saudi Arabia", United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002116/211628e.pdf> (Accessed March, 12, 2012).

**TABLE 5: GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR BOYS<sup>86</sup>**

General secondary education for boys: weekly lesson timetable									
Subject	Number of weekly periods in each form								
	I	Religious Education and Arabic		Administration and social sciences		Natural sciences		Technical science	
		II	III	II	III	II	III	II	III
Islamic education	5	12	12	6	6	5	5	5	5
Arabic language	6	9	9	4	4	3	3	3	3
History	1	1	1	2	2	-	-	-	-
Geography	1	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	-
Psychology	-	1	-	1		-	-	-	-
Sociology	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
Management	-	-	-	2	3	-	-	-	-
Economics	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
Accounting	-	-	-	2	2	-	-	-	-
Sciences and technical sciences	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	14
Physics	2	-	-	-	-	4	4	-	-
Chemistry	2	-	-	-	-	4	4	-	-
Biology	2	-	-	-	-	4	4	-	-
Earth science		-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-
Mathematics	5	-	-	4	4	6	6	5	5
English language	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Computer science	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Library and research	1	1	1	1	1				
Civics	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Physical education	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Activities	2	1	1	1	1	1	1		
Total weekly periods	35	34	34	34	34	36	36	35	35

The schoolbooks, which are provided free by the state, are explicitly anchored in Wahhabism. The supremacist and exclusionary religious perspectives, which were put

<sup>86</sup> World Data on Education 2010-11, "Saudi Arabia", United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002116/211628e.pdf>, (Accessed March, 12, 2012)

forward by Ibn Abdul Wahhab in the eighteenth century, are omnipresent in official textbooks in Saudi Arabia. The Book of Unity, which is the central book written by the founder of the creed, casts its shadow over almost the entirety of official Islamic education in the country. These textbooks openly reduce almost any Islamic interpretation other than Wahhabism to ‘innovation’ and ‘falsehood’. Accordingly, Muslims who adhere to any other interpretations than Wahhabism are denounced as ‘unbelievers’. Until recently the official textbooks used derogatory terms for Shiites and openly called for their destruction.<sup>87</sup> Until 1993, schoolbooks blatantly used the derogatory term of *rafida* to describe Shiites. The students were warned against mixing with the ‘innovators’ unless it was to advise them, as mixing with them could put them in contact with a dangerous influence.<sup>88</sup> These statements were officially taught in a state where a large segment of the population adhered to the beliefs of Shiism.<sup>89</sup>

After a lot of internal and external pressure, some modest revisions were made in 1993, and the term *rafida* is no longer used in official school materials. Since then, false religious practices are no longer attributed to one specific Islamic sect. Nevertheless, Shiite beliefs continue to be denounced in books circulated at Saudi-financed mosques both within the country and beyond the Saudi borders.<sup>90</sup> (Places such as Mosques which provide informal education, are often more antagonistic in their views of religious minorities such as Shiites.)

Although the notion of *rafida* is no longer used, textbooks have maintained their strong critique of Islamic interpretations other than Wahhabism. Some of the divisive Wahhabi perspectives, which call for religious hatred, are openly taught in schools. Shiites are often reduced to *Mushrekin* (polytheists), against whom it is a duty to lead jihad.<sup>91</sup> Students are warned against mingling with the ‘innovators’ unless it is to guide them to the *sirat al-mustaqim* (the straight/true path), which is offered by the official religious establishment in

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<sup>87</sup> Michaela Prokop (2003).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> See, Fouad Ibrahim, *The Shi'is of Saudi Arabia* ( London: Saqi, 2006).

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Michaela Prokop (2003).



the Kingdom. The state exercises a considerable amount of power over the representation of minorities. In the official state's representation of them, non-Wahhabi Muslims are portrayed as people who have corrupted Islam by their bad practices.

Their deviation from the true path is blamed for many of the problems that the *umma* had to face through the centuries. The textbooks actively attempt to galvanise students to be defensive of their creed, which they are told is the only 'true path' to salvation. The textbooks provide a rigorous exposure to Wahhabi norms and practices and forbid rituals, which are considered as 'innovations' by Wahhabism.<sup>92</sup> For example, the celebration of the Prophet's birthday, which is a common practice across the Muslim world, is portrayed as 'innovation' and 'deviation' from the 'true path'. The official Islamic textbooks cover a wide range of topics for every grade within the formal education.

The textbooks at elementary school provide some basic discussion about Islam's role. As early as grade I, the supremacy of Islam over other religions is established and there is open criticism of people who choose a religion other than Islam.<sup>93</sup> In grade IV, in the book of *Monotheism and Jurisprudence*, the discussion of true belief and its characteristics are covered.<sup>94</sup> Accordingly, as early as grade IV, strong binaries are established to portray Wahhabi Islam as the only true interpretation of Islam.

In grade V (first Semester) in the book of *Monotheism, hadith, Jurisprudence, and Qur'anic Recitation* there is a discussion about some of the 'friendships' which Muslims are suppose to avoid, to remain true to Islam. The textbooks give instructions for students to develop an enmity towards nonconformists. For example, this textbook openly states, 'Whoever obeys the Prophet and accepts the oneness of God cannot be loyal to those who oppose God and His

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<sup>92</sup> Hudson Institute, "2007-2008 Academic Year Excerpts from Saudi Ministry of Education Textbooks for Islamic Studies", [http://www.hudson.org/files/pdf\\_upload/Excerpts\\_from\\_Saudi\\_Textbooks\\_715.pdf](http://www.hudson.org/files/pdf_upload/Excerpts_from_Saudi_Textbooks_715.pdf). (Accessed 26. March 2011).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

Prophet, even if they are his closest relatives'.<sup>95</sup> In this light a faithful Muslim is forbidden to love and aid the unbelievers. This book covers some of the Islamic legal rulings on loyal friendship and the impermissibility of love for unbelievers.

Accordingly, the book provides religious and legal instructions for the approach that true Muslims should take towards people who are officially recognised as 'innovators' and 'infidels'. Of course, the textbook materials also cover a wide range of issues regarding rituals, practices and norms. For example, in the grade VI, in the book of 'Monotheism, hadith, Jurisprudence, and Qur'anic Recitation' there is a wide discussion about rituals such as prayer, which are elucidated from the strict Wahhabi perspectives.

According to an investigation conducted by the British Broadcasting Corporation, there is some explicit evidence of inciting violence, against Jews, homosexuals and other Muslim nonconformists. According to the report, one of the textbooks prescribes execution as the penalty for gay sex, and outlines differing opinions as to whether death should be by immolation by fire, by stoning or by throwing offenders off a cliff.<sup>96</sup> Within the textbooks various punishments prescribed by *Shari'a* law for theft, including amputation of hands and feet are discussed. These Saudi textbooks generated a lot of controversy when they were found to be also taught at Saudi-backed schools and clubs in the UK. Indeed, these violent and homophobic references appear in many official textbooks in various grades in Saudi Arabia. For example, 'The grade IX book of *hadith*, published by the Ministry of Education, states that, 'The act of the people of Lot (Sodomy) leads to many harms and evils including: The severe punishment on earth which is death, being subjected to serious diseases such as AIDS and Herpes and others.'<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> "Lessons of Hate at Islamic Schools in Britain", New York Times.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/23/world/europe/23britain.html> ( Accessed , 14 May, 2011).

<sup>97</sup> Centre for Religious Freedom, Hudson Institute, "Ten Years On: Saudi Arabia's Textbooks Still Promote Religious Violence ", <http://www.hudson.org/files/publications/SaudiTextbooks2011.pdf>, (Accessed, 01 May, 2011).

These Saudi official educational materials have been under a spotlight since the events of 9/11.<sup>98</sup> Despite criticism from important capitals across the western world, these materials continue to be used with little or no revision. For example, the religious textbooks, which were in use in 2010-2011, continue to promulgate intolerance toward other creeds. In some cases, the official educational materials openly advocate violence against people belonging to other religions. For example, some high school texts give legitimacy to violence against apostates and homosexuals and label Jews and Christians as the enemies of the believers.<sup>99</sup> In addition to explicitly intolerant statements against Jews and Christians, there are various antagonistic references to Shiites and other religious Islamic minorities.<sup>100</sup>

The newer textbooks actively encourage prejudice in students saying, that must violently contain and even physically eradicate the ‘other’.<sup>101</sup> The ‘other’ is identified as anyone who is an innovator, an infidel, or a polytheist (this includes Shiites, Muslim apostates, converters to other religions, blasphemers, and those who ‘doubt’, Baha’is, Armadas, adulterers and homosexuals).<sup>102</sup> These categories of people are repeatedly demonised and classified as morally corrupt people who are not only a liability to the Saudi state but are endangering ‘true’ Islam and Muslims as a whole. Many of the Shiite practices and rituals are constantly attacked and denounced as ‘corruption’. For example, the grade XII *Book of Monotheism for Boys* asserts that those who worship in tombs and shrines commit apostasy by action. The text goes on to state that once the finding of apostasy has been confirmed, legal consequences apply, including the sanction that if the apostate refuses to repent, he must be killed.<sup>103</sup> Many religious minorities, and in particular Shiites, constantly find themselves condemned for the religious ‘crimes’ of blasphemy and apostasy in the official textbooks.

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<sup>98</sup> See, Anthony H. Cordesman and Nawaf Corobaid , National Security in Saudi Arabia: Threats, Responses, and Challenges ( Praeger Publishers Inc, 2005).

<sup>99</sup> Annual Report of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2011.

<http://www.uscirf.gov/images/ar2011/saudiarabia2011.pdf>, (Accessed May, 02, 2012).

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Centre for Religious Freedom, Hudson Institute, “Ten Years On: Saudi Arabia’s Textbooks Still Promote Religious Violence ”, <http://www.hudson.org/files/publications/SaudiTextbooks2011.pdf>, (Accessed, 01 May, 2011).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

In 2010-2011, the textbook instructs the believers to confront the ‘polytheists’ and ‘infidels’ under certain conditions. Some of these conditions relate to the medieval *dhimmi* arrangement regarding conquered non-Muslim communities.<sup>104</sup> Some of the other conditions depend upon the strength of Muslims and whether the guardian of the faith, for example the Saudi king, permits the confrontation.<sup>105</sup> The grade XII *Book of Monotheism*, which was published in 2010-11 by the Ministry of Education, openly states that ‘Fighting the Infidels and the Polytheists has certain conditions and controls, including: That if they be invited to Islam and they refuse to enter it and refuse to pay *jizya* [tax], that Muslims have the power and the capacity to combat, that this be with the permission of the guardian and under his banner, that there be no guarantee between them and the Muslims not to combat.’<sup>106</sup>

The notion of apostasy, and the qualities that define a person as an apostate, is almost omnipresent in many educational textbooks at the various stages of education. The grade X *Book of Jurisprudence* provides a general typology of apostasy. For example, there is the category of apostasy by belief, which is the case of believing in anything that is contrary to the indisputable principles of Islam. Then there is apostasy by doubt, which doubts the validity of the reporting of the Qu’ran or the truthfulness of the Prophet. There is also a category of apostasy by utterance, which is to pray to someone other than God or to ridicule something of the Prophet’s religion. And finally there is apostasy by action, which includes sacrificing to someone other than God and genuflection before idols.<sup>107</sup>

The discussion of jihad is also generic in official Saudi educational materials. Of course, jihad as a defining Islamic concept has several meanings and it is fair to say that, the official

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<sup>104</sup> A dhimmi is a non-Muslim subject of a state governed in accordance with the Islamic law. Dhimmi law allows rights of residence in return for taxes for Christians and Jews.

For more information see: Bat Ye’or and D. Maise, *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians Under Islam* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1985).

<sup>105</sup> Centre for Religious Freedom Hudson Institute, “Ten Years On: Saudi Arabia’s Textbooks Still Promote Religious Violence”, <http://www.hudson.org/files/publications/SaudiTextbooks2011.pdf>, (Accessed, 01 May, 2011).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

materials do discuss the multidimensional nature of jihad. For one of the textbooks clarifies the idea that the notion of jihad can be understood in two ways. One is the struggle to obtain what Allah loves from faith and good deeds, and to prevent what God hates, infidelity, immorality and disobedience. It also elaborates the other meaning, which is to ‘fight for the sake of God to spread Islam and defend it.’<sup>108</sup> However, there are many references in official materials that call for pro-active campaigns to spread the ‘true’ faith and correct the beliefs of people who are still ignorant. For example, grade XII book states: ‘jihad for the sake of God is a profitable trade and saves people from painful punishment. It aims at spreading Islam and defending it and correcting the beliefs of people and directing them towards the worship of God Almighty. It also aims at preventing injustice and corruption and rooting out its origins from earth.’<sup>109</sup> Not only does the education system establish the unquestionable supremacy of official narratives, but it also provides instructions for believers so that they can correct the beliefs of those people who are not lucky enough to be blessed by Wahhabism. Students are constantly reminded about the characteristics of true belief and the worldly and unworldly punishments which are awaiting those who deviate from the truth.

As already stated, the state’s ideological narrative overshadows every aspect of the educational materials designated for religious studies in Saudi Arabia. Indeed, religious studies functions as the central subject with the capability of synchronising students with the official regime of religious truth. Of course, some segments of the materials are general and neutral Islamic teachings, but the state takes active measures to connect orthodox Islamic studies with its own exclusionary perspectives. These perspectives constitute sharp binaries of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ which are practically self-serving narratives to disseminate Wahhabi ‘supremacy’. Through the long process of education, the state portrays Wahhabism as the final truth, so that it makes it the obligation of students to be loyal to the governing mechanism, which is the only trustworthy protector of the faith. Throughout all the education materials, the notion of obedience to the House of Saud is emphasised.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

The textbooks provide a rigorous religious context, which makes obedience to the rulers as almost one of the foundations of the faith. The rulers are portrayed as truthful guardians to whom loyalty and obedience is an obligation. Some Qur'anic verses are used to religiously demand devotion and allegiance to the ruling family's authority (i.e., 'Obey Allah and his Prophet and those with authority.')

Accordingly, loyalty and obedience are portrayed as things, which would benefit the faithful, both in life and afterlife. In this life they pave the way for unity, stability and reassurance, and in the afterlife they provide both rewards and blessings from God.<sup>110</sup>

The textbooks put forward the case that disobedience results in *fitna*, dissension; therefore it has to be avoided at all cost. Hence, as long as the ruler is perceived to implement the will of God he should be obeyed in order to prevent *fitna* and disunity.<sup>111</sup> Through these religious proscriptions, which are disseminated in the formal education system, the state attempts to homogenise the masses and to use religion as a means of discrediting any political or social opposition. Indeed, religious studies are used to promote a conformity, which prevents students from questioning the authority of the rulers. In this light, 'unearthly' narratives are heavily employed to sustain the 'earthly' survival of the ruling family. Islamic studies more than any other subject attempts to create religious authenticity for a ruling mechanism, which carries no accountability to its subjects. Through the articulation of a certain model of 'truth', the system attempts to excuse itself from any answerability to its people. The system claims to be the purest implementer of God's law, hence it is only accountable to the sources of the law, and the education system is commissioned to convey this understanding. The claim of the Saudi state for its connection with the unquestionable implementation of the God's will has multiple implications. The obvious implication is a classic attempt to gain religious legitimacy for the ruler, but the less obvious one is to justify its lack of accountability to its people. The implementers of the laws are only accountable to the source of the law.

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<sup>110</sup> Michaela Prokop (2003).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

## **Rewriting History: Contextualising the ‘Truth’**

After religious studies, history has been the next most important subject to be doctored by the official education system of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. History, as a subject, has been one of the main instruments of disseminating Wahhabi perspectives. Of course, the usage of history as a tool of ideological enforcement goes back to ancient times. From time immemorial, organisations of social control such as cults and religions have often been contextualised within an historical framework. Throughout the ages, history has been part and parcel of the present and it has been used to aid the articulation of prevailing social perspectives. Indeed, the practice of manipulating history for indoctrination has been shared within various societies to meet both long- and short-term political objectives. Since history is a living narrative and thus has powerful indoctrinating properties, those who are in the position of reflecting the past are in a position of power.<sup>112</sup> It is indeed the power of representation. As is commonly acknowledged, history is collective memory as well as collective forgetfulness. Through selecting and constructing historical narratives, one is exercising a creative power, which has deep social and political implications.

However, the arrival of the Westphalian phenomenon and the emergence of the nation-state model did not change this timeless practice, and history started to be at the service of the new prevailing political entities. Nation-state models thrived on this ‘authenticating’ tool, which was used to portray the ‘inevitability’ of states and nationhood. In this way, the past became a frame of reference for the creation of national myths, legends and narratives, to boost the collective identity within the new frameworks.

Like any other models of control, the nation-state has also been based on hierarchical structures which preserved the ‘right’ of the minority élite to dominate and subjugate the majority. Hence, creative mechanisms of social control have been essential to sustain a desirable division of power for the élite. To a degree, controlling the past is connected to

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<sup>112</sup> See, Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, (University of California Press, 2005).

controlling the present. The modern state of Saudi Arabia also appreciated this power of representation. Like many new nation-states, the country recognised the indoctrinating properties of history and used it as a creative instrument to justify the new hierarchy and the distribution of power.

From the early stages of state building, the new ruling system showed interest in the formation of an official historiography, which could provide a historical context for their current dominance. As Al-Rasheed notes:

The historical narratives of the Saudi state perpetuate particular representations of the past that aim to bind rulers and ruled. These narratives are not concerned with historical accuracy or facts, but with establishing obedience to the rulers. Official narratives portray the ruling group as a hegemonic force in the history of the country. State historiography has become the medium through which this is achieved.<sup>113</sup>

In general, the social construction of the past is an essential element in the process of domination, subjugation, resistance and collusion.<sup>114</sup> Once the state represents the past, it simultaneously exercises power over the collective consciousness. Hence, the institutional power to reframe history is a source of power. As George C. Bond and Angela Gilliam suggest;

The representations may frame relationships of inequality, and be intimately related to structures of power and wealth. They contain ideological and hegemonic properties that represent historical and sectional interests. In no way simple, they express a high degree of social and poetic complexity.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed (2002), 189.

<sup>114</sup> George C. Bond & Angela Gilliam, *Social construction of the past: representation as power* (London: Routledge, 1997), 1.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*



The history of the Arabian Peninsula is almost entirely Islamised in Saudi Arabia. Every historical episode is interpreted and articulated within a fully Islamic framework. According to Joseph Nevo:

Saudi textbooks discuss history first and foremost in Islamic terms; they stress the achievements of the Islamic culture (even at the expense of Arab culture) and depict the Ottoman period favourably, referring to the sultan as the khalifa and the guardian of the holy places rather than as an oppressor of the Arabs. Even Arab nationalistic activity, such as the struggle for independence by local liberation movements against European colonialism, are usually described as jihad movements and the religious nature of their actions is stressed.<sup>116</sup>

Not surprisingly, in Saudi Arabia, the point of departure for official historical narratives is early Islamic history, which constitutes a major part of the newly-arranged curriculum. There is much emphasis on the Golden Age of Islam, and the advent of the religion marks the beginning of a tailored historical narrative. The Golden Age of Islam lasted about two centuries. At this period Islam was at the core of global affairs, while other collectivities had a lesser share of power and prestige. During this period the empire, which promulgated Islam as its official religion, covered much of the known world. Areas including North Africa, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Spain were part of this empire. This period is often associated with the advancement of science and arts in the Islamic world. The peak of the period occurred during the rule of al-Mamun, who died in AD 833.<sup>117</sup> Although this period symbolises the imperial and scientific achievements of the Islamic civilisation, by no means does it represent the entirety of Islamic history. Of course, within any national education system there is an emphasis on the glorious past in order to enhance the sense of national pride. However, in Saudi Arabia the glorious past is an inseparable part of the state's ideology and constitutes the major bulk of historical texts in schools. This can be seen as an

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<sup>116</sup> Joseph Nevo, 'Religion and national identity in Saudi Arabia', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 34, no. 3, 1998.

<sup>117</sup> Arshad Khan, *Islam, Muslims, and America: understanding the basis of their conflict* (Algora Publishing, 2003), 15.

attempt by the state at a collective forgetfulness of the past, to meet current ideological objectives.

As previously stated, pedagogic action represents the interests of the dominant class. By reproducing culture, it is reproducing the power relations which legitimise its own operation. Pedagogic action selectively excludes or includes ideas and values in accordance with the interests of the prevailing group. Hence, the prevailing social hierarchy and power relations are portrayed as natural and free of ideological contamination. Accordingly, the Saudi education system, among other things, has been using history to justify the prevailing dynamics of power in the country. As Al-Rasheed notes, in Saudi Arabia the 'Islamic history is projected as a succession of episodes, each leading to the strengthening of Islam and Muslims and the flourishing of Islamic civilisation in all its artistic, intellectual, scientific and military manifestations. A sense of a nostalgic past permeates these representations of Islamic history'.<sup>118</sup> Of course, the construction and utilisation of the politics of nostalgia is nothing new, as it has been an important ingredient in nation-building projects throughout the world. By politics of nostalgia, I refer to a top-down, systematic effort to promote and circulate a selective and sentimental understanding of the past in order to provide a justifiable historical context for the status quo. For example, within a monarchical system there may be more emphasis on the role of legendary and inspirational kings and queens who courageously shaped the fate of the nation for the better.

This is an effort to redesign and reflect the past to portray a 'natural' historical continuity, which has produced the current state of affairs. Saudi Arabia has also utilised the politics of nostalgia in order to inspire the new collectivity to subscribe to a version of history which would correspond with a political system that advocates the totality of Islam and the finality of the Qur'an. After all, Saudi Arabia bases its claim of power on representing the true Islam; it uses the religion as its frame of reference and the Qur'an as its constitution. Hence, there has been more emphasis on the kind of historical narratives which highlight the greatness, and the supremacy of the form of Islam that has now reached Saudi Arabia.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 189-190.

Even if some of the inner conflicts of Islamic history are portrayed, official narratives highlight the factors, which correlate with the current Saudi-Wahhabi perspectives. For example, some of these historical texts shed light on the issues of succession after the Prophet, an issue that is at the heart of Wahhabi ideology.<sup>119</sup> The official historical narratives emphasise the ‘negative’ implication of sectarianism in Islam and the emergence of competing interpretations of the religion. These sects are identified as *firaq monharifa* (deviated sects) and they include Saba’yya, Khawarij, Bantiyya, and Ism’iliyya.<sup>120</sup> By reducing various branches of Islam to the status of ‘heretic’ or ‘deviant’, the Wahhabi narratives seek to claim supremacy for their own interpretation.

For the 1993 editions of the Saudi textbooks, the Ministry of Education commissioned a history professor at King Saud University to write several volumes, which comprise a significant portion of the history curriculum.<sup>121</sup> Although the materials in the school textbooks were simplistic, they re-enforced the bias of the official historical narratives.<sup>122</sup> Saudi national history begins with the emergence of a Saudi-Wahhabi alliance in the eighteenth century.<sup>123</sup> The adoption of this approach deliberately aims to portray a historical purpose for the House of Saud and its adopted creed. Arguably, by excluding other influential forces from the past, the House of Saud justifies its current lack of tolerance for other claimants of power. The official narratives have a minimum amount to say on the internal conflicts before the establishment of Saudi Arabia. In general, the view of the country before the emergence of a Saudi-Wahhabi alliance is very negative. According to Al-Rasheed:

The texts emphasise that salvation comes with the Wahhabi reform movement and its adoption by the Saudi rulers. The latter are projected as saviours, who in the process of restoring their ancestors’ rights over the territories of the Arabian Peninsula managed to

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<sup>119</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed (2002), 190.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. 190.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.189

deliver the rest of the population from a state of ignorance. In this historical narrative, loyalty to the ruling group is celebrated. As local regional history is ignored, one cannot expect the development of loyalty to land or people.<sup>124</sup>

The texts also have attempted to sediment the idea that the region of Najd, which was the birthplace of Wahhabism, is an area with the most vital preconditions for the religious reforms, which eventually resulted in the establishment of the modern Saudi state. Hence, an area which was historically insignificant and isolated is described as the cultural and religious heart of the country.<sup>125</sup> This is a good example of the re-conceptualisation of space and land in order to construct a nationally subjective vision. In general, lands can retain cultural and political meanings, symbolically encoded in their spatial relations and built environment.<sup>126</sup> Spatial meanings are engineered to represent various political agendas. Najd was the cradle of the modern Saudi state and the ground, which seeded the historical foundation of the current state. Thus, it is portrayed as the natural ground for the cultivation of a 'true' Islamic interpretation.

This symbolic re-construction of space entails the mythologisation and idealisation of the past in order to recreate a legitimising historical context for the people right at the top of the power pyramid. Arguably, the active *romanticisation* of Najd as the region affiliated to the House of Saud undermines the historic importance of other regions with their tribal affiliations. For example, the current texts avoid highlighting the important role of Hashemites in the region of Hejaz, which lasted for centuries. The texts describe the pre-Wahhabi Arabian Peninsula as nothing less than the age of *jahiliyya* (ignorance).

When referring to the geography of the Arabian Peninsula, the texts divide the territory into four regions, Hejaz, the Southwest, the east and Najd.<sup>127</sup> Not surprisingly, before their

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 94.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>126</sup> Tomlinson, Alan Tomlinson & Jonathan Woodham, *Image Power and Space* (Brighton: University of Brighton Press, 2007), 100.

<sup>127</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed (2002), 192.

exposure to the Wahhabi teachings, people within these regions are described as morally deviant. Just in the same way that Islam was a waking-up point for the people of *jahiliyya*, Wahhabism portrayed as the renaissance for the re-apprehension of the truth. Therefore, the texts imply that the people of modern Saudi Arabia owe their current moral richness to Wahhabi teaching and its enforcement by the House of Saud. Through the circulation of these narratives, the House of Saud gains the credit of being the saviour tribe, which not only brought unity and prosperity, but also paved the way for the return of the ‘Islamic enlightenment’.

Furthermore, Ibn Saud’s victories are listed as historical facts without any scrutiny of their consequences and without providing any room for the claims and the perspectives of the rival tribes such as Al Rasheed and the Hashemites.<sup>128</sup> Hence, modern historical narratives provide nothing more than a list of achievements by the House of Saud and a statement of how beneficial they were for Islam and for the nation. In general, the books portray the establishment of the state as an indigenous achievement without taking other international factors into account.<sup>129</sup> In reality, if it were not for the support and the blessing of Britain, the victory of Saudi-Wahhabi alliance would be greatly in doubt. The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the withdrawal of British support from the Hashemite family and the regional geo-politics at the time were all-important contributing factors, which paved the way for the dominance of the House of Saud.<sup>130</sup> However, this historical background is ignored in the official teaching of history in the Saudi education system.

The textbooks depict the establishment of modern Saudi Arabia as a watershed in bringing a period of prosperity and modernisation not only to the Kingdom but also to people within the region. For example, the grade VI, *History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* states that:

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.193

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> As discussed before, the British forces also played an important role to suppress the Ikhwan rebels. The rebelling of Ikhwan against the House of Saud was one of the last challenges that the House of Saud had to face in bringing the new territory under its control. The Ikhwan forces also attacked the areas under British control. Hence, The RAF played a role in repressing the Ikhwan.

Abdul-Aziz made great efforts to unite the country, ensure its security, and lay the foundation for progress. Thanks to the rulers who came after him, development and prosperity were achieved in various areas. Yet the efforts of the Kingdom's leaders, from its foundation upwards and through the present time, have not been limited to internal reforms. They have also made great efforts in the international arena. First and foremost among these, and an object of the Kingdom's ongoing engagement, are the issues of Palestine and international and regional organisations and bodies.<sup>131</sup>

The texts also portray a dynamic and vital image of the country and its rulers in recent history. In many ways the country with its Wahhabi characteristics is introduced as the champion of Arab causes and the texts describe the ways in which Saudi rulers played and still play a vital role in the global Muslim identity.

According to the grade VI, *History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, Abdul-Aziz tried to convince the leaders of the great powers to save the Palestinians from injustice. A division of the Saudi Army was deployed to join the Arab armies and help the Palestinians in the war against the Jews. The Kingdom has provided ongoing material and moral support to the Palestinians and their just cause'<sup>132</sup> The grade XII Studies from the Islamic World states that 'jihad for God is the only road to liberate Palestine. For the Muslims did not enter Jerusalem except by jihad. The Crusaders were not kicked out of Palestine except by jihad and the Jews will not leave Palestine except by jihad.'<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Hudson Institute, "2007-2008 Academic Year Excerpts from Saudi Ministry of Education Textbooks for Islamic Studies"  
[http://www.hudson.org/files/pdf\\_upload/Excerpts\\_from\\_Saudi\\_Textbooks\\_715.pdf](http://www.hudson.org/files/pdf_upload/Excerpts_from_Saudi_Textbooks_715.pdf) (Accessed, 26 March 2011)

<sup>132</sup> Ibid

<sup>133</sup> Centre for Religious Freedom, Hudson Institute, "Ten Years On: Saudi Arabia's Textbooks Still Promote Religious Violence", <http://www.hudson.org/files/publications/SaudiTextbooks2011.pdf>, (Accessed, 01 May, 2011).

In this light, the history textbooks portray a very demeaning image of the Jews to reinforce Saudi foreign policy towards the state of Israel. For example, one of the official textbooks openly states: ‘Judaism all together had no significance in the world for more than twenty-seven centuries. It was never counted amongst colonisers, powerful in government and army, but its work in colonisation was that it was hiding behind it, paving the way for it, and depending on it in exploiting peoples and sucking their blood’.<sup>134</sup> Most of the official material that is taught on Jews is a replication of the anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, which reduce Jews to a static and singular group of people who are responsible for most of the world’s problems. For example, one of the official textbooks asserts that:

The Zionist movement aims at reaching one main goal, and that is Jewish domination of the world and controlling its destiny, achieving this through sub goals: 1. Igniting the fighting spirit of the Jews, and their religious and ethnic fanaticism, to stand up to religions, nations and peoples. 2. Igniting the flames of hated rivalry between the powers so they would fight, and igniting the flames of war between States, to weaken all States so their State stands. 3. Establishing their government on the Promised Land, which extends from the Nile River to the Euphrates River.<sup>135</sup>

The textbook claims that World Zionism has been achieving its objectives through underground and secret organisations. Thus the Freemasons, Bnai Brith and, the International Lions Clubs and Rotary Clubs, it claims, are all Jewish-led organisations working in the dark to maximise Jewish interests, which include undermining Muslim societies.<sup>136</sup> These totalising narratives are not articulated in a vacuum. However, like most other things, the Saudi education system contextualises these perspectives within a rigid Islamic framework. The articulation of these ideas through Islamic language is a way of authenticating their claims. By using selective Islamic Qur’anic and hadith sources, they attempt to find solid ground for their assertions. In other words, by religiously framing these ideologically tainted ideas they attempt to make their policies indisputable because they are backed up by so-called

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

divine sources. For example, the grade X textbook, *History of the Prophets and Story of the Prophet and the Spread of Islam*, rails against the Jewish claim of being ‘chosen people’. ‘The vanity of the Jews and their arrogance in dealing with others, and their claim to be God’s Chosen people, although God Almighty, impugned them and pitched upon them humiliation and wretchedness and led them astray and made some of them apes and swine.’<sup>137</sup> The textbooks go deep into Islamic history in order to seek Islamic justifications for current Saudi policies. For example, according to the grade IX, *History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*:

The incontrovertible truth is that the Jews lived all their lives without a homeland. Wherever they settle, the peoples hate them and cast them away. They do not relate to any community that they live in except in a relationship of material benefit and interest through extorting money by usury and gambling and bribery in addition to being callers for sedition and people of the schemes and conspiracies that they are brought up with. And what the Jews of Medina did to the Prophet (PBUH) in many situations shows their malicious intentions and their evil spirits. In their book the Talmud, [is written] that which encourages them to harm anyone who is not a Jew. They also have traditions and lowly maxims, which are rejected by every human being who respects himself. An example of those maxims is: The End justifies the Means.<sup>138</sup>

According to the textbook the Jews do not deserve the land because they have deviated from the ‘truth’. Hence, a relation to what is considered as the divine truth qualifies or disqualifies claims over land. According to a grade XII textbook, ‘Palestine is an Islamic land owned by those who submit their faces to God and the Jews have diverted from the true religion of Moses and distorted the Torah and they are the source of corruption and corrupting.’<sup>139</sup> The textbook also provides an explanation for the weakness of Muslims and their unsuccessful resistance against the Jews. This textbook provides reasons for Muslim defeat by the Jews:

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.



1. Adjudication without God's law whereas most of the Arab states apply positive laws. 2. Spread of many vices among the people. 3. Distancing Islam from the circle of struggle with the Jews and the appearance of invalid calls and slogans such as Arab Nationalism and Socialism, and the ignorance of many of the children of this nation of the truth of our struggle with the Jews which is purely a struggle of beliefs. While, the Jews derived their teachings from their distorted books.<sup>140</sup>

Clearly, these explanations imply that it is Muslim deviation from the truth which is weakening them against the so-called enemies of Islam. This reasoning implies that Saudi Arabia is the only state compliant with God's law, but other Arab states are corrupted because of their man-made laws. Hence, indirectly the text implied that all Muslims should embrace the Saudi authorities transcript, which is not based on positive laws, and once the Muslim belief is strengthened by the truth, Islam will prevail over its enemies.

As the above text suggests, the state has been very antagonistic towards ideas and ideologies such as Arab nationalism and socialism which were popular across the Arab world in the fifties, sixties and seventies. The textbooks imply that all these ideologies have failed because of their alienation from God's laws. These man-made ideas are identified as sources of corruption and weakness in the Islamic world, emphasising that that's why they all failed. However, the text implies that Saudi Arabia has remained strong because it has distanced itself from these man-made laws and has embraced the truth.<sup>141</sup>

Thus, the state has been employing history as a tool to give its official narratives and policies a context. Accordingly, history has been rewritten to authenticate the existing status quo. A historical 'immunity' has been provided for the ruling family to protect them from any blame or wrongdoing. Therefore, the official historical narrative provides a legitimate context for the prevailing power structures, and it finds a *raison d'être* for the imposing of a regime of

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

truth in the country. Through the power of representation, the enemies of the House of Saud are demonised and the country is portrayed as the beacon of faith and prosperity.

### **Higher Education: the Continuation of Wahhabisation**

On 23 September 2009 when the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology was officially opened, there was a great sense of national pride in the country. The King invited hundreds of distinguished national and international figures to join him in celebrating the opening of this major new university. The University even provided online facilities for people around the world to participate in the opening event. For many observers who followed the event and the construction of this major university it was hard to believe that higher education only arrived in the country in the mid 1950s. It was 1957 when the Saudi state took its first step towards starting university education in the country. Hence the first university was established. The institution was originally named Riyadh University, but in 1982 it was renamed King Saud University. In 1975, a segment of the Ministry of Education became a separate entity, and was re-named the Ministry of Higher Education, with the purpose of dealing exclusively with higher education.<sup>142</sup> The Higher Education Council is the supreme authority for post-secondary education affairs with the task of supervising and co-ordinating its institutions, with the exception of military education.<sup>143</sup>

The first university began to operate with an enrolment of only twenty-one students and a staff of nine.<sup>144</sup> Within three decades, by 1982, there were already seven established universities with 63,563 students and a staff of 6,906.<sup>145</sup> This major expansion was the result of major state investment in the sector, as Saudi Arabia is seen as one of the countries with

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<sup>142</sup> “Educational System in Saudi Arabia Kingdom of Saudi Arabia” ( Washington: Ministry of Higher Education Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission200), [http://www.sacm.org/Publications/58285\\_Edu\\_complete.pdf](http://www.sacm.org/Publications/58285_Edu_complete.pdf), (Accessed March 16, 2011).

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Mahmoud Abdullah Saleh (1986).

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

the highest public expenditure for higher education per student in the world.<sup>146</sup> By 2006, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had about 11 major universities (109 colleges and 9 institutes) 18 primary teacher's colleges for men, 102 primary teacher's colleges for women, 40 colleges and institutes for health 24 technical colleges and 9 private universities and colleges.<sup>147</sup>

The Saudi Higher Education institutions provide different programmes of study. For example, some of the institutions such as the King Saud, King Abdul Aziz and King Faysal Universities and King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, offer more 'secular' courses. While some of the other institutions such as the Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University and the Islamic University of Medina and Umm University al Qura primarily offer various branches of Islamic studies.<sup>148</sup>

As the institutions of higher education spread in the kingdom, the Wahhabi *ulama* started to lobby for the establishment of religious universities to balance what they considered as secular education in the country. In response, in 1961, The Islamic University of Medina was established. As Commins notes, this university also served a foreign policy objective by offering a religious alternative to the secular nationalist universities in the Arab world as the institution opened its doors to a large number of non-Saudi Arab students.<sup>149</sup> By 1985, this university accommodated 2,798 students including a few hundred graduate students. The Islamic University also offered a college preparatory course, which specialised in teaching Arabic and religious studies; in 1985, 1,835 students were registered at the university, all but 279 of them foreign.<sup>150</sup> This university provided an educational platform with which to disseminate the Wahhabi interpretation outside its native constituency. Many students who were educated at this university, became educators themselves and promulgated the

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<sup>146</sup> Helen Chapin Metz, "Saudi Arabia: A Country Study". (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress 1992) <http://countrystudies.us/saudi-arabia/>, (Accessed March 10, 2011).

<sup>147</sup> Educational System in Saudi Arabia Kingdom of Saudi Arabia"

<sup>148</sup> William A. Rugh (2002).

Um al Qura developed out of two older institutions in Mecca, the *Shari'a* College and the Teacher's College. Although its main focus has been on religious studies, in recent years it has offered some courses in non-religious studies.

<sup>149</sup> David Commins (2006), 126.

<sup>150</sup> Helen Chapin Metz (1992).

core precepts of the Wahhabi belief system. The state provided facilities and support to encourage further enrolments at this university.

Another key higher education institution to promote the Wahhabi narratives has been Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud University, which is a very conservative university, developed in Riyadh from a cluster of colleges for theology and law first established in 1953. A special section to educate Shari'a court judges started in 1965, and a faculty for Arabic language studies followed in 1970. These various bodies were combined into a single entity in 1974.<sup>151</sup> This university became one of the key Wahhabi institutions in the country, producing theologians, teachers, judges, and preachers. Many students specialised in Arabic language and Islamic studies with a significant focus on Wahhabi teaching. The university also offered subjects such as State policy in Islam, Islamic sects, and Islamic culture and economics. By 1986, about 12,000 students were registered with an additional 1,000 in graduate programmes. More than 1,500 of these students were women.<sup>152</sup>

Regardless of the institution and the course of study, all institutions in Higher Education include a great deal of Islamic studies. In this light, even the most non-religious universities accommodate departments of religion as well as including rigorous programmes of Islamic studies during the course of a degree; these are compulsory for all students. Many 'secular' subjects still cover a substantial amount of material related to Islam and students are required to memorise substantial portions of the Qur'an in order to graduate.<sup>153</sup>

Indeed, across the Higher Education sector, the most popular subjects have been in the field of Islamic studies. Unlike many other countries in the region, colleges of arts, letters and humanities are not widespread, and there are only few colleges of business and political sciences. Moreover, less than one-third of students gain degrees in science or technology; this is the lowest percentage in the Arab world.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

Questions can be asked if this disproportionate demand for religious studies is generated organically, or if the state actively paves the way for wider Islamic education in the country. One can argue that there is a combination of both factors, and that these are interrelated. In many ways the state imposes and encourages religious studies across the Higher Education sector. For example, there is a belief that graduates from Islamic studies universities and Islamic education background are preferred for employment in the governmental sector, because of their religious education.<sup>155</sup> Hence, many students may see Islamic studies as an educational opportunity to gain the right credentials for getting the benefits of employment in the public sector.

At the same time, the state's top-down policies of social engineering, have created a highly Islamised society. In other words, the over-Islamification of the society by which everything is given its perspective through Wahhabi lenses has made religion omnipresent in every aspect of life. Hence, it may not be unusual that many students respond to this highly Islamised society by taking their education further in the field of Islamic studies. When there is a social framework which holds Islam as the main frame of reference for addressing any issue, it is understandable for the majority of people to want to seek their education in a subject which is perceived to be the most essential for the maintenance of their society. Hence, state policies as well as the highly religious character of society, pave the way for mass enrolment in Islamic courses across the country.

Furthermore, it has to be noted that, in line with the aforementioned ideological character of the Saudi education system, the universities have enforced policies that put the corner stone of the Wahhabi belief system at the forefront of their organisational methods. Some of these policies have resulted in systematic discrimination against religious minorities who are considered as 'innovators' if not *kuffar* under the official religious creed. Accordingly, the Shiites are treated differently in many areas of Higher Education. For example, in the selection process for students, professors, and administrators at public universities, the Shiites

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

are an estimated 2% of professors at a leading university in al-Ahsa, an area with a population which is at least 50% Shiite.<sup>156</sup>The current discrimination against the Shiite population indicates that Wahhabi principles are still part and parcel of the policy-making mechanisms of the state. It is possible to assert that, in addition to modernising the workforce through higher education, the expansion of universities has created even more grounds for the enforcement of Wahhabi principles, as most universities have to constantly comply with the Wahhabi regime of truth. These rigid rules and regulations are a continuation of the state ideology's aim that is to harmonise learners with the religio-political character of the state.

### **Paradoxes of Reform and Dilemmas of the 'New' Educational Direction**

The events of 9/11 and their repercussions in many ways sparked a shift in the international system and the internal policies of many states.<sup>157</sup>The atrocities in New York and Washington raised many questions about the possible motives of the people who carried out that suicidal mission. As soon as the news reached the public about the considerable involvement of Saudi nationals in the operation, scholars and policy makers started to scrutinise the social, religious and cultural environment of Saudi Arabia to find any possible factors which could provide the motivation for such actions. Accordingly, the Saudi educational system went under the spotlight and many observers claimed that the Saudi educational system contains elements which could expose its youth to radicalisation and a phobia of the west. Claims were made that the religious and ideological nature of the Saudi education system allegedly was capable of producing people like Muhammad Atta who reportedly took action to kill thousands of individuals in the World Trade Centre.

As soon as it became apparent that most suicide hijackers were Saudis, the Saudi state expressed its eagerness to be on the side of the United States in the 'War against Terror'. The regime also claimed to be a victim of terrorism itself and offered its support to Washington to

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<sup>156</sup> Report on International Religious Freedom - Saudi Arabia 2010.

<sup>157</sup> See Brian Michael Jenkins and John Paul, *The Long Shadow of 9/11* (Rand Cooperation, 2011).

combat extremism.<sup>158</sup> Despite these measures, the country was still under fire from the Western press and consequently its education system was blamed for spreading radicalism. Under this intense pressure, the Saudi state pledged to take measures to reform the education system.

As has been shown, from the establishment of the modern Saudi state, education was used as a mechanism of social control and an instrument for disseminating the Wahhabi discourse. However, after 9/11 the thing, which had helped the House of Saud to sustain its power internally, became an external liability. In order to address Western concerns, the Saudi state started a programme of reform to prevent extremism. In this light, the state launched a campaign contesting the very thing it had itself promoted for decades. The state took an active role in removing some of the extreme statements, which were particularly sensitive to Western ears. Some of the pejorative and derogatory references about Jews were removed, and the state claimed to monitor those teachers and preachers who were still keen to circulate orthodox ideas.

The debate over religious intolerance in Saudi schools led to some minimal revision in at least one text prepared for the academic year of 2003–2004, some of the extreme references about Christians and other *kuffar* were removed from the textbooks. In addition, the new edition of the text removed entire sections that instructed students to regard non-Muslims and non-Wahhabi Muslims as enemies.<sup>159</sup> Instead, it highlighted the common heritage that Islam shares with these people by referring to a Qur'anic verse that regards the Torah, the Psalms and the Gospel as divine revelations.<sup>160</sup>

Furthermore, the idea of educational reform was debated in three National Dialogues initiated by the ruling élite in 2003–2004, in order to boost national solidarity. However, there are grounds for the argument that the external implications of these initiatives were more

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<sup>158</sup> See Ali .S .A Asseri See, *Combating Terrorism: Saudi Arabia's Role in the War on Terror* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>159</sup> David Commins (2006), 202.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

important than their internal impact. By orchestrating these conferences, the Saudi regime aimed to convince the key allies that it was moving in the right direction to prevent the radicalisation of its subjects. During this time, many Western papers criticised the controversial invasion of Iraq and accused Saudi Arabia of being the main source of terrorism in the region.<sup>161</sup> In the intense climate of the ‘War against Terror’ and the repercussions of the invasion of Iraq and the consistent pestering of the Western press, the regime had to take measures to offset the pressure. Although the measures were more cosmetic than concrete, the Saudi state at least symbolically had to show more harmony between its foreign policy and its internal socio-political dynamics.

In these conferences some unprecedented issues were discussed. For example, the conferences recognised religious pluralism in the country. Although these developments were artificial and still only limited to verbal recognition, they gave the religious hard-liners enough ammunition to react against the state. There was no easy way out of this problem. On the one hand, the regime had to retain what it had advocated itself for decades and on the other hand the state had to curb the intense pressure from the western capitals. Many hard-liners reacted to the new reform agenda and reduced it to obvious submission to the west and the United States. In 2004, Safar al-Hawali, a major ultraconservative figure, supported a petition to contest the educational reforms. He saw the policy as the raising the white flag to a Washington, which aimed to ‘deviate’ the country from its Islamic path and reduce it to ‘the infidel camp’.<sup>162</sup> Salman al-Awda attended a National Dialogue session in 2003 and met with Shiite religious leader Shaykh Hassan al-Saffar. Nonetheless, Safar al-Hawali refused to meet with Shiites, still regarding them in traditional Wahhabi terms as infidels.<sup>163</sup> Through decades of the Saudi rule, the regime had allocated vast resources to sediment and socialise its regime of truth, but now amending it and harmonising it with the prevailing political expediency of the time proved to be strenuous.

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<sup>161</sup> See, Dore Gold, *Hatred's Kingdom: How Saudi Arabia Supports the New Global Terrorism* (Regnery Publishing, 2004).

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*



While the regime had to maintain the ideological fabric of its society, the King took further measures by instructing the Council of Senior Scholars to include scholars from all four schools of Islamic jurisprudence in 2009.<sup>164</sup> From the advent of the modern Saudi state, the government only adhered to the Hanbali school of law as the state declared two Hanbali sources as the only legitimate references for Saudi judges.<sup>165</sup> Although most scholars and judges are still Hanbali, the re-organisation of the council can be seen as the first official recognition of the other three schools in the country. Although, this step has not changed the status quo yet, theoretically it has created possibilities with which to challenge the nature of Wahhabism in the future, but the process of change continues to be extremely slow. Yet the top-down initiatives to reform the education system continued to arrive. For example, in February 2007 the state allocated \$2.4 billion to facilitate a six-year pilot programme for the modernisation of the education system. Furthermore, the Minister of Education signed a five-year collaboration agreement with the King Abd al-Aziz Centre for National Dialogue to promulgate religious and cultural understanding in the classroom through teacher training programmes.<sup>166</sup> Nonetheless, despite the apparent attempts by the Saudi state to initiate change, the education system is still functioning as an ideological instrument. For example, the 2010 Report on International Religious Freedom states that:

Although some overtly intolerant statements in textbooks have been removed or modified following the stated government intention to reform educational materials to remove or revise such statements, textbooks continued to contain overtly intolerant statements against Jews and Christians and subtly intolerant statements against Shia and other religious groups. For example, during the reporting period they continued to state that apostates from Islam should be killed if they do not repent within three days of being warned and that treachery is a permanent characteristic of non-Muslims, especially the Jews.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Report on International Religious Freedom 2010.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

Some educational materials, which were published in 2010-2011, continue to openly advocate those radical Wahhabi perspectives, which were taught in previous decades. Religious and historical contexts are continually provided to demonise social groups who are considered the ‘enemies’ of ‘true Islam’. One can still read calls for jihad for ‘spreading Islam’ by ‘fighting unbelievers.’ in official education materials.<sup>168</sup> As in the past, books, which were circulated in 2010-2011, continue to be preoccupied with Jews and conspiracy theories. In this light Jews are constantly dehumanised, and targeted for violence. Historic accounts continue to be wildly distorted and with many inconsistencies and factual errors blaming Jews for all the world’s problems. For example, Darwin, who is seen as the satanic father of the theory of evolution is identified as a ‘Jew’ conspiring to undermine monotheism.<sup>169</sup> A grade XII book in the same academic year stated that:

For since the Jews were scattered sundries they never knew peace with a single nation because of their proclivity for deceit, lying and conspiracy. Nothing proves this more than the Muslims’ experience with them in Medina as the Prophet (PBUH) deported them and recommended that they be driven out from the Arabian Peninsula and as happened with them in other countries such as Germany, Poland, Spain and others.<sup>170</sup>

The Centre for Religious Freedom, in its report in 2011, concluded that:

The Saudi educational system for grades I through 12 rejects critical thinking and independent reasoning. Under the Saudi Education Ministry’s method of rote learning, these dogmatic teachings are tantamount to indoctrination. This starts in First Grade and intensifies in number and virulence in middle school and high school. By occupying much of the school day, the Wahhabi religion courses crowd out ones on

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<sup>168</sup> “Ten Years On: Saudi Arabia’s Textbooks Still Promote Religious Violence”.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

math, science and the humanities, leaving students poorly prepared for work in the modern world and vulnerable to the messages of terrorist recruiters.<sup>171</sup>

In this light, two points can be highlighted about the reform programme. Firstly, the process has been very slow and in many areas intangible. Secondly, the question can be asked, if that limited reform will do more good than harm for the state. The consequences of the reform agenda could easily antagonise that conservative segment of the state and society who genuinely believe in the Wahhabi framework of teaching and learning. Indeed, the current programme of reform can be seen as an act of submission to the Western superpowers by the hardliners. The portrayed defeatism and the lack of strength from the state could potentially create fertile ground for the cultivation and circulation of conspiracy theories to undermine the state's hegemony. Some hardliners have already perceived this as a deliberate American policy to corrupt the birthplace of Islam. In the past, similar narratives have been used by the ultra conservatives to mobilise and radicalise youth against those state policies which accommodated American interests.

After all, the American intervention and the Saudis' consent for the US military presence in the country have been the single most effective cause of alienation among conservative Saudis.<sup>172</sup> These policies have created the ground for counter-hegemonic struggles against the regime. Some hard-liners have used these policies to declare that the House of Saud is the enemy of Islam as it allowed American troops into that holy land.<sup>173</sup> The late Bin Laden and his supporters used the similar narratives to undermine the claim of the House of Saud to be the 'servant of Islam'.<sup>174</sup> Hence, such policies can result in the emergence of dangerous counter-hegemonic narratives, which could undermine the self-claimed transcendental legitimacy of the House of Saud.

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Mordechai Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Society, Government and the Gulf Crisis: Society, Government and the Gulf Crises* (Routledge, 1993) 180-182.

<sup>173</sup> Bahgat Korany and Ali E.Hillal Dessouki, *The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Globalization* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010) 243-346.

<sup>174</sup> See, Bruce Lawrence, *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden* (United States: Verso Books, 2005).

Indeed, there is a limit as to how far the regime can commit itself to change without undermining its hegemonic infrastructure. There are tangible pressures and the Saudis are aware of them. For example, in August 2009, there was unprecedented media criticism of the government's educational reforms. A popular television series, ' *Tash ma Tash*', broadcast a controversial programme that concentrated on educational reform. This TV show pictured the attempts of ultraconservatives to block educational reform and showed the Minister of Education ordering a delegation of religious conservatives out of his office.<sup>175</sup> Some newspapers reported on this controversial episode.<sup>176</sup> This event is quite telling since the media is heavily monitored in the country. These repercussions reflect on the sensitivity of the reform agenda and what the state really has at stake.

As was argued, Saudi Arabia by definition is an ideological state and depends upon its active programme of truth management to sustain the status quo and like most ideological states cannot afford to undermine its own official narratives. The House of Saud has an existential dependency on Wahhabi Islam. Hence, pluralism and national dialogue are valuable as long as they serve the external objectives and do not compromise the dominance of the official creed.

The hegemonic influence of the mainstream Wahhabi *ulama* has been essential for the maintenance of the status quo.<sup>177</sup> Hence, there is a limit as to how far the ruling élite can use the Wahhabi *ulama* to justify a reform agenda that refutes some of their own teachings. Of course, there are historical precedents for the Wahhabi to favour state expediency at the expense of their own dogma. There have been many occasions when *ulama* have produced pragmatic verdicts contradicting their own principles, in order to serve the state. The aforementioned *fatwa* to legitimise the US military's entry into the country is the most obvious one.<sup>178</sup> Nonetheless, the superficial nature of the changes indicates that the state

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<sup>175</sup> Report on International Religious Freedom - Saudi Arabia 2010.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Peter Mandaville, *Global political Islam* (Rutledge, 2007), 156.

<sup>178</sup> Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent* ( New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001), 37.

is very much aware of its limitations. Limitations in terms of implementing reform without losing hegemonic control and limitations in terms of state controlled socialising agencies to legitimise the reform. Accordingly, the reform agenda has been a mere scratch on the surface for external political consumption. Although there have been some revisions and adjustments in the system, the old hegemonic forces are still in place and the ideological scope of the state is still largely intact. Wahhabism continues to be the main frame of reference and the education system is still an effective mechanism for the politics of truth management in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Thus, as long as rents are paid in place of accountability, and a transcendental legitimacy used in place of a democratic mandate, the House of Saud cannot abandon its mechanisms of social control. As long as the Saudi establishment claims to be only accountable to God, it requires a highly ideologised education system to sustain its religious legitimacy. Within this system, education will remain a vital instrument to standardise the collective consciousness and justify the current hierarchical order, distribution of power and wealth in the country. The Wahhabi *ulama* are the cornerstone of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and it is very unlikely that they are going to lose their monopoly of the socio-cultural sphere in the near future. The ideologised education system sustains the current status quo. Thus, as long as there is no concrete plan for political transition, the education system remains at the service of the ruling élite. Education cannot be separated from politics in the Kingdom. The only precondition for major educational reform is political reform. As long as the political system remains resistant to change, one cannot expect a major change in the nature of education in the country.

## **Conclusion**

Pedagogical action has been one of the main instruments of sustaining and promulgating the official narratives in Saudi Arabia. Like many other states, which seek to gain legitimacy from ideology rather than a democratic mandate, the Saudi state has been heavily dependent upon socialising agencies to perpetuate the applicability of its ideology in everyday life. In other words, if the state's *raison d'être* depends upon an ideology, the ideology has to be

continuously reproduced and implemented in order to prevent a crisis of legitimacy. Subjects constantly have to be reminded about the authenticity of the ideology and develop a sense of trust that the state is the best implementer of that authentic and empowering ideology. For the Saudi state, Wahhabism is an indispensable ideology, which rationalises the status quo in the country, so it has to be reinforced through productive social mechanisms on a daily basis.

In this light, the modern state has invested heavily in education to effectively synchronise people with its own ideological mandate. For decades, considerable resources have been devoted to build up a wide educational infrastructure to reshape the collective consciousness in accordance with Wahhabism. Accordingly, education always has been in the monopoly of the state in order to cleanse the competing perspectives and train subjects who would obey the prevailing order. All ideological education systems rationalise the structures of power in society and they use various narratives to make the existing order look ‘natural’ and organic. Saudi education undertakes the same process of rationalisation, but it does it in a crafted religious framework. The Saudi education system intensified its Islamisation policies, particularly after the Islamic uprising of 1979, the uprising which had resulted in the seizure of the Holy Mosque at Mecca. Through the disproportionate Islamisation of the education system, the state attempted to standardise the religious consciousness of people so that this would result in homogeneity and conformity. As has been discussed, the Islamisation of the education system did not necessarily expand general Islamic education in the curriculum. However, it was an attempt to expand Islamic studies within the ideological framework of the state. In other words, the Islamisation of the education system was nothing more than the Wahhabisation of those educational materials, which were tailored to rationalise the existing power structures. Historically, the education system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has used the power of representation to regard any sign of nonconformity as sacrilegious and blasphemous. Through re-writing history, the education system has attempted to demonise competing perspectives and canonise those historical narratives which correspond with the core teaching of Wahhabism today. Through manipulation of history, an organic historical context is provided for the domination of the House of Saud. Accordingly, every historical narrative that does not correspond to the socio-political particularities of Saudi Arabia has

been eliminated in textbooks. Official historiography has become a continuation of the war against those incompatible forces standing against the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance.

As the national education system is highly ideological, the state cannot afford to undertake reform without possible consequences. As long as there is no concrete plan for political transition, the education system will be used to legitimise the existing power structures. As long as the political system remains resistant to change, one cannot expect a major change in the ideological nature of education in the country. In this light, the education system will remain as an indispensable instrument of 'truth management' in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

## **Chapter 5**

### **ON VIOLENCE**

#### **Introduction**

Previous chapters have demonstrated that truth management depends upon the interrelated factors of leadership, narrative construction, socialisation and violence. In the previous chapters I have attempted to analyse the various socio-political agencies which have been tailored to disseminate the Wahhabi narrative in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This chapter will specifically deal with violent mechanisms of social control and examine the functionality and the capacity of violence to enforce the state's regime of truth. Although the state has heavily invested on the creative measures to standardise the collective consciousness in accordance with Wahhabism, there is no sign of a comprehensive conformity. Therefore, the state has continuously relied upon violent mechanisms of social control to impose its ideological vision. Although the system has already developed sophisticated social, educational and religious agencies to spread its rationalising narratives, it is still heavily dependent upon violence to accommodate its policies of social engineering.

Modern Saudi Arabia is an ideological state by definition. It claims to have a religious mandate to create the ideal Islamic state. Like many other ideological states, the Saudi kingdom has relied on violence to enforce its social engineering programmes. In a similar way to communism in the former USSR, Maoism in China or the Islamic Republic of Iran, Saudi Arabia justifies the use of violence as a necessity with which to homogenise the nation in accordance with its 'true' doctrinal characteristics. Like many other ideological states, Saudi Arabia has a utopian model of social and moral standards and of governance, which it asserts, is morally supreme and 'final'. Hence, the system wants to mobilise the rest of the nation to share in its utopian vision. To this effect, it creates sharp ideological binaries and by doing so, it claims to be on the side of truth. Accordingly, the system uses various



instruments of violence to eliminate those incompatible forces who are not on the side of truth’.

As was shown in detail in the first chapter, violence does not only refer to the limited definition of physical harm and death, violence is multidimensional and it can be conceptualised in many ways. In the first chapter violence was referred to as ‘the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or depravation.’<sup>1</sup> Indeed the inclusion of ‘power’ in addition to the ‘use of physical force’ widens the definition of violent acts, and expands the conventional understanding of violence to include those acts which result from a power relationship, including threats, intimidation and discrimination. The ‘use of power’ also serves to include neglect and all forms of physical, sexual and psychological harm.<sup>2</sup>

As was discussed before, there are many forms of ideological violence, which include religious hatred, racism and sexism; these may not necessarily result in bodily harm, but they can psychologically damage the victims. We also referred to structural violence which is seen as that systematised or even rationalised violence, which can be embedded in various social organisations. It is ‘expressive of the conditions of society, the structure of social order and the institutional arrangements of social order, and the institutional arrangements of power that reproduce mass violations of personhood 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Such violence is accomplished through policies of informal and formal denial of civil, criminal and basic human rights for people.’<sup>3</sup> In this light, this chapter has a very broad understanding of violence and the ways in which it helps the Saudi state to enforce its policies.

First and foremost, Saudi Arabia is a nation-state and accordingly we cannot talk about violence without considering the characteristics of nation-states and the ways in which they accommodate, rationalise and legitimise violence. Thus, this chapter will begin by briefly

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<sup>1</sup> Etienne G. Krug, World report on violence and health, Volume 1, (World Health Organization, 2002), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

addressing violence in the context of a modern nation-state. In the current international system, there is a universal understanding suggesting that the state is the only legitimate entity holding the monopoly of violence. Although the King, as the head of state in Saudi Arabia, enjoys a monopoly recognised by the international system, he enjoys an additional source of legitimacy, which permits him to exercise power and monopolise the use of violence.

After all, Saudi Arabia, as well as being a member of the society of states, is a religious polity where religion constitutes the main source of legitimacy. Indeed Wahhabism bases the broad authority of the King on the notion of *siyasa shar'iyya*, a significant legal doctrine in Islamic jurisprudence, which constitutes the relationship between the ruling system and its subjects in an Islamic state. This gives the King a unique authority to employ violence in enforcing his state's policies. After briefly re-highlighting the conflictual strategies that led to the formation of the Saudi nation-state, there will be a discussion on the ways in which the state has used the various categories of violence to pave the way for a homogeneous society based on its official regime of truth. In order to demonstrate these cases, the state's official policies towards 'incompatible' religious minorities, such as Shiites and Ismailis, will be examined.

In any consideration of the violent mechanisms of social control in Saudi Arabia, one cannot ignore the instrumental role of the *Mutawwi'in* (religious police). The *Mutawwi'in* are a powerful socio-political force that acts as the vanguard of the Wahhabi state. Its members are portrayed as the 'guardians of morality', monitoring public as well as private spheres to standardise collective behaviour in accordance with Wahhabi ideology. This chapter will argue that although the religious police attempt to enforce the official mandate, in reality they symbolise the politics of fear, which the state depends upon for its continuity. This chapter suggests that operations of the religious police are a constant reminder that the state is vigilant in confronting any sign of nonconformity, as religious nonconformity is seen as more than mere moral negligence. Religious nonconformity is seen as a symbolic act, which questions the moral prescriptions of the state. Accordingly, violent strategies are used to repress any act or conduct which does not correspond with the official narratives of the state.

This chapter also examines the wider implications of violence in the ways in which women are ideologically targeted in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Some of the policies that constitute a ‘sexual apartheid’ in the country are identified, and their relationship with the official narratives will be examined. This chapter puts forward the argument that these policies correspond directly to the official ideology of the state. In the absence of a democratic mandate, the state promises to establish an unsullied society where the ‘purest’ Islamic principles are observed. Enforcing such policies portrays an uncompromising commitment to uncorrupted Islamic tenets. Such heavy-handed policies reinforce the state’s claims to be committed to the ‘truth’, regardless of the consequences. Furthermore, by enforcing such policies, the House of Saud perpetuates its historic relationship with the conservative *ulama*, who have been fundamental in the survival of the regime. Hence, in spite of the socio-economic costs of these policies, the state has invested heavily in forcing them to stay true to its religious mandate.

### **State and Violence: An overview**

It would be inconceivable to imagine a state without violence. The state’s mechanisms of law and order, instruments of social control and hierarchical structures are sustained and perpetuated by violence. As Trotsky said at Brest-Litovsk, ‘every state is founded on violence’<sup>4</sup>. It does not matter how ‘civilised’ a state is, its law enforcement and wide programmes of social control rely on violence or the threat of violence. From the beginning, the construction of the nation-state has been heavily dependent upon violence. Indeed, violence has been instrumental in constructing and sustaining political units, and thereby maintaining their tailored territorial integrity. Fernando Coronil, and Julie Skurski note that ‘violence pushes the limits of the permissible, opening up spaces where customary and unexpected meanings and practices are brought together in unprecedented ways, illuminating hidden historical landscapes in a flash and leaving behind the opaque memory of ungraspable territories. In the crisis of meaning that violence conceives, the territoriality

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<sup>4</sup> Max Weber and Sam Whimster, *The essential Weber: a reader*, (London: Routledge, 2003) 131-2.

of nations and corporeality of people became privileged mediums for recognising the body public and forcibly controlling the movement of persons and ideas within the nation's material and cultural space.<sup>5</sup>

Max Weber was a defining political sociologist in the twentieth century who provided some influential perspectives on the state and violence. What he suggested continues to enforce the status quo as he justifies the monopolisation of violence by the state. For him, a state without the monopoly of violence by state order can never be achieved. Weber notes that 'if there were structures in which violence as a means was unknown, then the idea of the state would have disappeared and anarchy in its literal sense would appear.'<sup>6</sup>He suggests that violence is not the normal means of the state, but it is specific to the state. Hence, Weber established an intimate relation between the state and violence. He noted that in the past physical force was perceived as a wholly normal means of control by most bodies, starting with kinship groups.

Now in contrast, territory is considered as a characteristic of the state, and the human community within the territory accepts the monopoly of violence as the state's legitimate right.<sup>7</sup> Hence, the state is the main source of authority in controlling the use of violence. Any individual or social group that wishes to employ violence should receive a legitimising sanction from the state. Any use of violence outside the parameter of the state is considered illegitimate. The state is the only structure, which possesses the 'right' of exercising violence.<sup>8</sup>

Clearly, this model of the distribution of 'rights' to exercise violence is only designed for a state system, since it would not be applicable to a feudal or tribal society where violence is exercised by multiple agencies. Within tribal and feudal systems, where various political units are constantly in competition over power and resources within the same territory,

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<sup>5</sup> Fernando Coronil and Julie Skurski, *States of Violence* (The University of Michigan Press, 2006), 84.

<sup>6</sup> Max Weber and Sam Whimster (2003), 131-2.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 132.

violence cannot be monopolised. In fact, violence becomes a transformative means, utilised by competing actors, in order to change the balance of power in their own favour.

For Weber, this transformative means of violence, which is constantly utilised by the competing agencies, creates anarchy. Thus, the use of violence has to be in the monopoly of a single organisation (the state) in order to prevent anarchy. The state as the main instrument of 'legitimate violence', or what is seen as 'legitimate', is supported by *Herrschaft's* relationship (the domination) of human being over human being.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, for a state to exist, it has to force people to obey the authority of the dominating class. Hence, without the employment of force, the state cannot homogenise the political landscape and compel subjects to obey the hierarchical order. In this light, violence is used to enforce a mechanism of the distribution of power favourable to the dominant class. Although Weber justifies the state's monopoly of violence to prevent anarchy, state machineries have undertaken most major examples of violence. Whether that violence has been exercised through interstate conflicts, civil wars or internal oppression, states have been responsible for instigating and perpetuating the most catastrophic violence in the known history of humanity. The Treaty of Westphalia, in 1648, paved the way for the idea of national sovereignty based on territoriality and the absence of a role for external agents in the domestic affairs of states. Therefore, states have used their sovereignty to impose violence upon their subjects with often minimal interference from external agents. Many atrocities have taken place within the boundaries of nation-states. Although the idea of absolute sovereignty is no longer an acceptable notion within international customary law, states continue to enjoy immunity when it comes to their violent programmes of social control. Even after the atrocities of World War II, when the international system pretended to be more attentive to the prevention of extreme state violence against citizens, humanitarian interventions have often been limited and controversial.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

There is no super-state mechanism to effectively curb a state's violent policies against its own citizens, and existing international bodies, such as the Security Council within the United Nations, have proved to be ineffective. Although Westphalian sovereignty in its original form may not be accepted, states continue to enjoy immunity with minimal interference from external agencies so that violence and the threat of violence remains the main instrument for enforcing the status quo in the society of states. Modern Saudi Arabia has enjoyed similar privileges of immunity. As a sovereign state it has removed historic competing tribal claimants of power within its territory and has monopolised the right of exerting violence with minimal interference from external agencies. Unlike under the First and the Second Saudi Emirates, the universally accepted structures of the modern nation-state have given the House of Saud the legitimate means to extend their control and enforce its ideology within a defined territory, which is internationally recognised as their fiefdom.

### **The Use of Violence and the Saudi-Wahhabi Alliance**

In the previous section, there was an attempt to explain the role of violence within the boundaries of the nation-state. Modern Saudi Arabia shares most of the features of the states described in the first chapter. The modern state emerged and asserted its monopoly of the use of violence and accordingly disfranchised other agencies from sharing the 'right' to use violence.<sup>10</sup> This is how a pre-modern narrative like Wahhabism used a modern entity such as the nation-state to flourish and expand its dominance. Perhaps without the empowering characteristics of the nation-state, Wahhabism as a pre-modern phenomenon could not have attained its present position of pre-eminence. Therefore, in one way or another, modernity and its legacies has been a lifeline for the continuity of a pre-modern phenomenon. Despite the claim of Wahhabism to challenge the cultural values of modernity and its products, these very phenomena have played indispensable roles in its survival.

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<sup>10</sup> See, Nestor Sander, *Ibn Saud : King by Conquest*, (Hats Off Books, 2011).

The House of Saud claimed that national sovereignty was based on territoriality. It also prevented external agents from interfering in the territorial organisation of its politics. Hence, by creating the statecraft, the House of Saud started to enjoy a widely accepted justification for the exercise of power through violence and the threat of violence. However, there are grounds for the argument that the Saudi *raison d'être* for the monopoly of violence goes beyond Westphalian sovereignty, which assigns to the state the authority of using violence.

In addition to state sovereignty, the House of Saud has contextualised its authority to employ violence within a religious framework. From the early days of the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance, religious narratives were utilised to legitimise a means of control and expansion. These legitimising religious narratives became inseparable aspects for the organisation of politics by the regime within the first and second Saudi emirates.

However, the transformation of political structures in the twentieth century, and the creation of the nation-state did not undermine the importance of these narratives. After the construction of the modern nation-state, religious perspectives continued to be incorporated in order to rationalise the prevailing hierarchy and to claim the monopoly for the use of violence as the right of the dominating tribe. As well as using that prevailing norm in the international system, which gives the state the exclusive right to exercise violence within a territory, the House of Saud used its religious 'mandate' to disfranchise competing agencies from resisting its authority.

As previously stated, Wahhabi doctrine asserts that Islam is not only a religion, but also a comprehensive way of governing, and Islamic law is an absolute moral code, which provides guidelines for every dimension of governance. For this reason, the way in which political authority is contextualised in Saudi Arabia is different from that in classic nation-state sovereignty, which holds the Prince or the ruler as the ultimate monopoliser of power. Although Wahhabism incorporated itself within the boundaries of a nation-state, it believes authority belongs to the *ulama* as well as to the King. Hence, one could argue that there is a

hybrid system of sovereignty managing the affairs of the state in Saudi Arabia. Of course, it goes without saying that, in most areas the King is in absolute control. Nonetheless, his legitimacy depends upon the *ulama* who give him the religious mandate to govern the state.

Classic Wahhabi political thought affirms that the main function of government in Islam is to preserve and enforce the *Shari'a* law.<sup>11</sup> To enforce this law, a temporal ruler is needed and subordination to him is a religious obligation. Nonetheless, the ruler needs to consult those *ulama* who have the authority to clarify the principles of the *Shari'a*.<sup>12</sup> The founder of the Wahhabi sect divided the authority of government between the *ulama* and the ruling *umara*.<sup>13</sup> Thus, within an ideal state there are *umara* (princes) with the power of enforcing the *Shari'a* and there are authoritative *ulama* who would feed the ruler with advice and consultation. However, as Atawneh notes, in classical Wahhabi thought there is neither a standard model of co-operation between the *ulama* and the *umara*, nor is there a structure and/or defined functions for the Wahhabi state.<sup>14</sup>

After all, Wahhabism was a pre-modern religio-political narrative, which was not concerned with the organisation of politics within the nation-state model. Hence, there are a lot of ambiguities concerning precisely how power should be distributed in the Wahhabi state. Despite the uncertainties the contemporary Wahhabi *ulama* continue to endorse the traditional division of authority between the *ulama* and *umara*. This principle is evident in modern Wahhabi *fatwas* and writing.

For example Ibn Baz, who was a defining Wahhabi scholar in the twentieth century, noted, 'The authority holders are both the *ulama* and *umara* of the Muslims, who must be obeyed

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<sup>11</sup> See, Aḥmad ibn Ḥajar Al Abu Ṭami al-Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab: Aqidatuhu al-Salafiyah wa-Da'watuhu al-islāhiyah Wa-thana al-Ulama Alayh, al-Amanah al-Ammah lil-Ihtifal bi-Murur Mi'at Am ala Ta'sis al-Mamlakah, (Riyadh, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> Muhammad Al Atawneh, Wahhabi Islam Facing the Challenges of Modernity, Dar Al-Ifta in the modern Saudi State, (Leiden, Brill Press, 2010), 38.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



on condition that their decrees match the will of God and do not contradict it.’<sup>15</sup> Therefore, as long as the ruler and *ulama* are in conformity with *Shari‘a* law, there should be no resistance to them and there should be no attempt to challenge their power. However, even if their ruler deviates from the *sirat al-mustaqim* or the true path, he should not be overthrown. Ibn Baz suggests that even when the ruler avoids his duties, his Muslim subjects should not actively oppose him, but rather should remind him to stay faithful to the laws of God. Therefore, the ruler’s diversion from Islamic law does not automatically provide a license to take arms to resist him. Arguably, this interpretation denies any major form of resistance to the ruling mechanism on religious grounds. Therefore, no one can challenge the king by exercising violence as he has religious immunity, as long as he corresponds with the *Shari‘a*. The religious state strengthens his monopoly over violence to enforce order and comply with Wahhabi laws. In other words, the monopoly of violence by the Saudi regime is justified on the grounds of statehood and religion at the same time.

Wahhabism bases the broad authority of the King on the notion of *siyasa shar‘iyya*, a significant legal doctrine in Islamic jurisprudence, which delineates the relationship between the ruling system and its subjects in an Islamic state.<sup>16</sup> The doctrine reflects the position of the Wahhabi jurists since it is closely connected with Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qasim, both of whom played a significant role in shaping the doctrine of *siyasa shar‘iyya* from ancient precedents.<sup>17</sup> As Frank E Vogel notes that ‘*siyasa shar‘iyya* declares that the ruler may use any acts, including legislation to supplement the *Shari‘a* and create new courts, that are needed for public good (*maslaha amma*) providing that the *Shari‘a* is not infringed thereby, or, in another formulation, as long as the *Shari‘a* has ‘no text’ (*la mass*) on the matter’.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 38-41

<sup>17</sup> Frank E. Vogel, *Law and legal system: studies of Saudi Arabia*, (Leiden, Brill Press, 2000) 173.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

See, ibn Taymiyya, *al-Siya*

*asa al-Shar‘iyya fi Islâh al-Râ‘î wa-l-Ra‘iyya*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘rabiya, 1966)

The notion of *siyasa shar'yya* is considered to be an indispensable tool in the hands of Saudi rulers for exercising power in the state. The Basic Laws of the Kingdom reflect the King's authority based on *siyasa shar'iyya*. (*al-nizam al-asasi*). For example both Articles 55 and 67 of the Basic Law outline the King's authority to undertake the governing of the state in accordance with the Islamic principles. Therefore, the King enjoys authority not only as head of the state but also as the enforcer of the 'truth'. These dual sources of power give the King the political and religious *raison d'être* to defend his right to his power and to resort to any violent mechanisms to confront threats against his hybrid authority. Hence, the tailored religious narratives as well as the Westphalian state model give the House of Saud a legitimate pretext to employ violence and the threat of violence, to confront any resistance to their unaccountable exercise of power. Accordingly, the state has never hesitated to utilise violence in the enforcement of its policies and the maintenance of its ideological infrastructure. The state has used various violent instruments to protect its official narrative and sustain its policies of social engineering, with which it enforces its official version of truth.

### **Violence: The Historic Foundation of the Modern Saudi State**

It is possible to argue that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, violence was the single most important factor in making the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance noticeable in regional politics. Ibn Abdul Wahhab's teaching had hardly received wide attention until the House of Saud started to use Wahhabi narratives for offensive campaigns against rival tribes in the Peninsula. The army of Muhammad Ibn Saud, equipped with this new ideological force, started to take over towns and villages in Najd. These actions brought the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance to the attention of tribal actors in the peninsula as well as the regional powers such as the Ottoman Empire. By 1765, most of Najd was under the political and religious domination of Ibn Abdul Wahhab and the Saudi forces. The expansionist momentum was not stopped by the death of Muhammad Ibn Saud in 1765. His son Abd al Aziz took over the responsibility of Amir and became the new champion of the Wahhabi cause. In 1801,

the Saudi forces invaded Karbala, one of the most important cities in Shiite Islam.<sup>19</sup> This invasion of the Shiite city was recorded as being particularly brutal; many Shiite Muslims were killed at the hands of the Saudi-Wahhabi forces. The same forces destroyed the religious monuments and grave markers that were used for prayer to Shiite saints and for votive rituals, which the invaders considered acts of polytheism.

By violently destroying symbolic objects of the Shiite faith, the Wahhabi forces claimed to replicate the act of the Prophet who destroyed the idols in the House of Ka'ba upon his victorious return to Mecca from Medina in 628.<sup>20</sup> In 1804, the Saudi army attacked the city of Medina, the second most important city in the Islamic *umma*. They repeated their actions in Karbala by destroying numbers of sites which were considered as holy by many Shiite as well as Sunni Muslims. The Wahhabi forces also made an attempt to despoil the grave of the Prophet. In the following year, they invaded the city of Mecca and massacred many Muslims.<sup>21</sup> Throughout these campaigns violence was used as the main engine of the Wahhabi conversion machine.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to actively destroying symbols and objects, which were not compatible with Wahhabism, the Saudi forces did not hesitate to employ force to 'save deviated' Muslims. Although using violence for religious conversion is nothing new in the history of the region, it is extremely doubtful that the Saudi forces had much success in terms of redirecting people to *sirat al-mustaqim* at that stage. Hence, their violent actions, in the absence of any major creative measures for dissemination of Wahhabism, were ineffective. (Needless to say, the Saudi-Wahhabi dominance in the first and second Saudi emirates were short-lived, and in both periods their relative domination was ended militaristically by rival powers such as the Ottomans and the House of Rashid.)

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<sup>19</sup> Dilip Hiro, *War without End: The Rise of Islamist Terrorism and Global Response: The Rise of Islamist Terrorism and the Global Response* (London: Routledge, 2002), 40.

<sup>20</sup> Don Peretz, *The Middle East Today* (Greenwood Press, 1994), 467.

<sup>21</sup> I. M. N. Al-Jubouri, *Islamic Thought* (Xlibris Corporation, 2010), 252-3.

<sup>22</sup> Dore Gold, *Hatred's Kingdom: How Saudi Arabia Supports the New Global Terrorism*, (Regnery Publishing, 2004) 235.

Like many other modern states, the formation of the Saudi nation-state never could be successful without the heavy-handed use of violence.<sup>23</sup> As we have seen, Ibn Saud, the founder of the modern Saudi State, employed the Ikhwan, a notorious militia group, to conquer much of the territory, which now is part of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Ibn Saud created this semi-permanent warrior machine from the tribal confederations. This formidable military force conducted some of the most strategic military campaigns of Ibn Saud; these paved the way for the formation of the current Saudi state. The successful conquest of many important areas such as Hejaz, al-Ahsa and Ha'il could not be achieved without the fearsome role of the Ikhwan. They had a reputation for being brutal warriors, driven by religious dogma.<sup>24</sup>

However, eventually the alliance between Ibn Saud and the Ikhwan was undermined, due to the Ikhwan's deviation from Ibn Saud's control. As previously stated in chapter two, for the Ikhwan close ties with Britain a *kuffar* country was not acceptable. Furthermore, against the wishes of Ibn Saud, the Ikhwan continued to invade neighbouring countries where Britain had major interests. A rebellious faction led by Faysal al-Duwaysh, Ibn Bijad and Ibn Hithlayn, emerged to challenge the conduct of Ibn Saud and his British allies. This rebellious episode came to an end when Ibn Saud received support from Britain to crack down violently upon a once fearsome militia. Despite their resistance, the Ikhwan were eventually defeated in the Battle of Sibilla in 1929. The victory against the Ikhwan was one of the last challenges that Ibn Saud had to face in his establishment of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The establishment of the Kingdom did not reduce the dependency of the House of Saud upon violence. In fact, the modern nation-state created a viable infrastructure to make the use of violence more systematic and institutionalised. Accordingly, after the advent of the modern nation-state, the Saudi ruling machine continued to rely on violence to maintain the new power structures, which were now tailored in favour of the House of Saud and its ruling

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<sup>23</sup> See, David D. Laitin, *Nations, States, and Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> See, John Habibi, *Ibn Sa'ud's warriors of Islam: the Ikhwan of Najd and their role in the creation of the Sa'udi Kingdom, 1910-1930* (Leiden: Brill, Press 1978).

ideology. Once rivals were eliminated from the political landscape, the Al Saud had fewer challenges against the implementation of its historic religious mandate. In this way the House of Saud, as the main monopoliser of power, it had an opportunity to enforce the supremacist narratives of Wahhabism, which would result in the marginalisation and violent mistreatment of many religious sects, which were considered to be enemies of the new state and of Islam.

The situation did not change for the religious minorities overnight. In fact, from the early days of the first Saudi emirates, the Shiites who live in the coastal region of the Eastern Arabian Peninsula had been threatened by the strong anti-Shiite sentiment of the Saudi-Wahhabi forces. Years before the establishment of the Kingdom, in fact as early as 1913 and 1925/6, Saudi forces attacked Al-Ahsa, Asir and the Hejaz. All of these areas accommodated a significant Shiite population. Although Ibn Saud did not have a monolithic policy for all these areas, he was pushed by his Wahhabi *ulama* to cleanse the ‘*shirk*’ and spread *tawhid*. It has been suggested that his approach to these areas was based on those political and economic compromises essential for his fledgling central state and at the same time the Wahhabi ideology.<sup>25</sup>

Although Ibn Saud was pressurised to embark on an immediate policy of Wahhabisation, he hesitated due to possible repercussions from the Muslim world, which he felt could weaken his new nation-state project. From 1926, the money generated through the hajj constituted the main segment of the national budget. However, some of the radical policies of the emerging order disturbed many Muslims throughout the Islamic world. The destruction of holy shrines was among the acts which galvanised many potential pilgrims, who would have brought revenue into the country if they had made the pilgrimage. Some religious organisations and high profile Muslims in India and other countries called for a boycott in reaction to Saudi religious policies<sup>26</sup>. By enforcing violent Wahhabi policies against the Shiites, Ibn Saud ran the risk of endangering the economy of his emerging state and sparking a heavy reaction from minority locals particularly in Hejaz. At this sensitive stage Ibn Saud could not afford

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<sup>25</sup> Rainer Brunner, Werner Ende, *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture & Political Culture* (Leiden: Brill Press, 2001) 236.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 237.

troubled relations with the regional powers and other important Muslim countries.<sup>27</sup> Despite some evidence of political pragmatism regarding the treatment of religious minorities, Ibn Saud could not afford to ignore the pressure from the Wahhabi *ulama* either. After all, the new state was based on an ideology which represented a set of ideas which demonised Shiism and other interpretations of Islam that were not in conformity with Wahhabism. From the start, Ibn Saud imposed difficult conditions on the Shiite population. This was the beginning of exerting an economic violence, which came in various shapes against minorities, in particular Shiites; this continues until this day.

The jihad-tax was a significant policy, which exerted particular pressure on the Shiites.<sup>28</sup> This form of taxation was designed for that part of population, which did not provide soldiers for the Saudi forces. In the beginning, the jihad-tax was primarily imposed before military expeditions, but later on it became a regular form of taxation, whether at times of war or of peace.<sup>29</sup> The early imposition of economic violence, in the form of excessive taxation, made the financial pressure so intense that many Shiites families migrated to Bahrain. This policy met two objectives at the same time; it generated relatively good revenue for the state and simultaneously exerted pressure on that segment of the population, which was guilty of heresy. Economic violence was only one aspect of the pressure exerted on the Shiites. Soon other forms of violence became ubiquitous.

As early as 1915/16, as Saudi forces became more visible in al-Ahsa, religious policy towards the Shiites became harsher. Soon some ferocious controlling mechanisms were put in place to deny Shiites their religious rights and expressions of belief. Most defining Shiite religious practices were banned; they were prevented from celebrating Ashura and many people were killed for minor offences such as smoking and wearing silk.<sup>30</sup> In every conquered province, Ibn Saud appointed a chief judge to supervise the legal structure and pave the way for the enforcement of Wahhabi and Hanbali laws and regulations. This judge was also in

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 246.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

charge of implementing Wahhabi norms in public life. This was an explicit policy of homogenisation, which was primarily implemented by force.

Clearly, the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance had military superiority, and they attempted to use their military might to standardise the Shiites, both religiously and ideologically. As already stated, in the earlier years Ibn Saud tried to avoid controversy by appointing less hard line judges, but as the pressure increased from the *ulama* from Riyadh, Ibn Saud took more drastic steps for centralisation of religious policy in al-Ahsa, and enforced a greater, more ferocious control through the Wahhabi *ulama* of Riyadh.<sup>31</sup>

The religious policies of Ibn Saud towards Shiites entered a more radical stage after 1927. Ibn Saud was under pressure from the Ikhwan and some conservative *ulama* to end co-operation with Britain. However, the emerging Saudi-Wahhabi state was at least partly dependent upon the supporting role of Britain, and Ibn Saud was pragmatic enough to avoid antagonising one of the main power brokers of the region. Hence, he was not in agreement with the Ikhwan forces, who continued to attack the borders of Iraq and Transjordan where Britain had strategic and economic interests. In order to offset his external policies towards Britain, Ibn Saud saw the religious and political pressure on heretic Shiites as a good opportunity to appease the conservative elements of his emerging state. Arguably, Ibn Saud wanted to prove that he was still faithful to the tenets of Wahhabism and he had no choice but to compensate for his external policies and warm relations with the infidel actors in the region. In a situation like this, internal politics comes to address the ‘shortcomings’ of external politics. In February 1927, Ibn Saud reached an agreement with the Ikhwan and other conservative forces to intensify the process of Wahhabisation in return for the Ikhwan’s silence towards Ibn Saud’s foreign policy. Hence, Ikhwan forces would channel their energies into ‘reforming’ Shiites instead of attacking the other *kuffars* in Iraq and Transjordan. In this light, there was a more systematic approach to denying the Shiites any religious expression of their beliefs. Even worse, high profile Shiite figures had to publicly go through a process of

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 248.

conversion. During this conversion, Shiites were forced to deny their religious values and promise to abstain from Shiite celebrations.

Furthermore, during this period the Shiite mosques and *husayniyyas* (mourning centres) were destroyed, and visits and pilgrimages to holy Shiite cities were banned. They also had to subscribe to the teachings of the newly appointed Wahhabi teachers and judges.<sup>32</sup> Many Shiites found the emerging religious persecution intolerable and they were forced to flee. Some Shiite leaders appealed to Ibn Saud and asked him for a reconsideration of his radical religious policies. Ibn Saud was even reminded about his pledge offering freedom of religion in 1913<sup>33</sup>. However, Ibn Saud continued the victimisation of Shiites to prove his determination to construct a Wahhabi state. Although the Ikhwan, as an influential political force was eliminated in 1929, Ibn Saud continued his radical policies against Shiites. After the defeat of the Ikhwan, the ultra-conservative Wahhabis lost their muscle and also their ability to pressurise the King and in fact, until the present day in the House of Saud, the King has continued to be in control.

Despite the elimination of the Ikhwan and the weakening radical *ulama*, Ibn Saud never hesitated to make the social and religious lives of the Shiites hard in Saudi Arabia. Not surprisingly, after 1930 the Shiites were prevented from building new mosques and *hussayniyyas*. Furthermore, state restrictions provided minimal opportunities for the development and continuation of the Shiite educational infrastructure. Despite the rich natural resources in the eastern provinces, the Shiite community has been kept as a deprived and impoverished group in society.<sup>34</sup> One can argue that the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia, which resulted in a major economic transition, was in some ways bad news for the Shiites. This oil-led economic transition worsened the lives of religious minorities in at least three ways.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 249.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> See, Thomas W. Lippman, Saudi Arabia on the Edge: The Uncertain Future of an American Ally ( Potomac Books Inc , 2012).208-10.



Firstly, the revenue from the oil made the kingdom less dependent upon the money generated from religious pilgrimages. Hence, the House of Saud and the Wahhabi *ulama* were now less constrained in imposing their religious policies. In the past, the House of Saud had no choice but to minimise its antagonistic policies to avoid alienating pilgrims who visited the country to perform hajj, as hajj was one of the main sources of revenue for the new state. Accordingly, the controversial religious policies of the Saudi regime encouraged diverse groups of Muslims, from the near and far corners of the Muslim world, to boycott the pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia. However, the discovery of the oil made the Saudi state less dependent upon Muslim opinion across the *umma*, so they could enforce their controversial policies with less constraint. Secondly, the discovery of oil created new revenue, which was spent on establishing new state mechanisms, and these would rigorously enforce the state's religious policies. Hence there were more resources than ever before to enforce the process of Wahhabisation in the country. The new resources meant that the 'law enforcement' agencies could be strengthened to impose the strictest religious regulation possible and they would also lead to the emergence of a more systematised education system, which could be used as an indoctrinating machine to demonise Shiites and other minorities. Thirdly, the discovery of oil resulted in some socio-economic transitions, which were not necessarily palatable for the conservative Wahhabi *ulama*.<sup>35</sup> For example, an influx of foreign workers, engineers from the 'infidel' countries plus the emergence of instruments of modern communication, made some of the Wahhabi *ulama* uncomfortable. In order to appease the *ulama*, the state increased the pressure on its subjects through its religious mandate. Therefore, it provided more resources to reject any religious forms other than the 'true' Islamic teaching to compensate for the changes and transitions. This also put more pressure on religious minorities.

The discovery of oil, which brought rapid wealth into the country, did not improve the lives of the religious minorities in the same way. Discriminatory regulations based on the Wahhabi teaching were enforced, to prevent the minorities from benefiting from the new developments. These discriminatory policies enforced a systematic economic violence

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<sup>35</sup> Mordechai Abir, *Saudi Arabia in the Oil Era: Regimes and Elites - Conflict and Collaboration*, (London: Routledge, 1987).

against Shiites, which continues today in various shapes and forms. As was mentioned before, economic violence includes the economic marginalisation of individuals or social groups; this denies access to economic and financial facilities. Although most Shiites were already subject to social violence, including hate crimes and stigmatisation, the economic policies of the state, which targeted them, put them in a graver situation.

In the 1950s, deprivation and impoverishment among Shiites became so evident that Aramco; the major American oil company operating in the country feared a revolt. It thought social divisions and systematic discrimination against the Shiites could trigger an uprising, which could undermine the company's operation in the region. Hence, Aramco started to lobby the ruling system to allow it to employ Shiites from Qatif and Sihat. Although initially they were employed for menial jobs, some of the Shiites gradually rose through the ranks.<sup>36</sup> Even though eventually the Shiites made up a large work force, they were still lacking in equal rights, and they faced both vertical and horizontal discriminatory policies.<sup>37</sup> Eventually, the Shiites made up as many as 50% of the labour force in Aramco; this alarmed the state and raised concerns about the security implications. Shiites continued to be discriminated against and were prevented from taking jobs in other sectors, including the army and higher educational institutions. In general, the Shiites' lifestyle continued to be economically overshadowed by the Wahhabis. The state hardly made any concessions and even if there were some softening approaches, they were often due to external pressures from human rights organisations or to offset potential revolts, which could destabilise the state.<sup>38</sup>

The events of 1979, and the victory of the Iranian revolution, made the Shiite's life even more difficult in Saudi Arabia.<sup>39</sup> Khomeini regarded the Persian Gulf rulers as 'corrupt men' who fostered what he called 'American Islam' or 'Golden Islam'.<sup>40</sup> He strongly criticised

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<sup>36</sup> John R. Bradley, *Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside a Kingdom in Crisis* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)78-9.

<sup>37</sup> Tim Niblock, *Saudi Arabia: power, legitimacy and survival*, (London: Routledge, 2006), 82.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 79

<sup>39</sup> Pascal Menoret and Patrick Camiller, *The Saudi Enigma: A History* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2005),33-38.

<sup>40</sup> Afshin Shahi, "Iranian Revolution: Thirty Years on", *e-International Relations*, <http://www.e-ir.info/2009/02/14/thirty-years-on-the-iranian-revolution-and-its-impact-on-the-region/> (Accessed, 01 May, 2010).

their policy of reducing the valuable natural resources of their country in order to satisfy the US, whom he described as the ‘Great Satan, the number one source of corruption on earth’. Despite the extreme censorship of the Persian Gulf state’s media in covering the revolution, the provocative speeches were heard across the region.<sup>41</sup> The wind of the Iranian revolution was now on the air in every country in the Middle East. Bahrain, Iraq and Saudi Arabia with substantial Shiite populations were particularly threatened by the ideas from across the border, which at any time could trigger a Shiite revolt. From this very early stage, the Sunni politicians expressed their distrust of the emerging Shiite order in Iran. This view was classically represented by the King of Jordan in an interview with *The Times* in January 26, 1982, where he referred to the Iranian Revolution and stated that: ‘we are facing the most difficult time that I ever witnessed in this region of the world. The threat of Zionism is not any greater than the threat of Shiite fundamentalism’.<sup>42</sup>

Following the repercussions of the Iranian Revolution, many Saudi Shiites were inspired to challenge the regime in order to regain their religious and political rights. In many areas including Qatif, there were Shiite demonstrations. The state responded heavy-handedly and cracked down on the protestors by employing the National Guard. In the following year, Shiites in Qatif were attacked by helicopter gunships during Ashura, which they had decided to celebrate in public for the first time. Many were killed and hundreds of Shiite religious leaders were imprisoned.<sup>43</sup>

These religiously-inspired political events alarmed the Saudi authorities; they were concerned about the potential ‘danger’ of Shiites in the Kingdom. They were particularly afraid of the connection between the Shiites, Saudi nationals and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The more radical a role Iran played, the more the Saudis had reason to be suspicious of their own Shiite subjects. The regime openly supported Iraq during the eight years of war with Iran. Like most other Arab states, it regarded the war as a chance to defeat the only Shiite state in the region.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> John R. Bradley (2006),82-3.

It is possible to argue that the increasing religious sectarianism in the region gave more ideological ammunition to the Saudi state in its marginalisation of the Shiite community, who were perceived as a natural ally of Iran. As the regional rivalry increased between Iran and Saudi Arabia, pressures on the Shiite community increased.

Not surprisingly, the Ismailis like any other religious minority have been subject to various forms of violence from the state. In fact, the history of the Ismailis in Saudi Arabia has been a history of discrimination. Like other religious minorities, they have been viewed with suspicion and mistreated because of their religious beliefs. Najran, which is located in the southwest of Saudi Arabia near the border with Yemen, accommodates a large Ismaili community. The Ismaili religion has about 100,000 adherents in Saudi Arabia, and they continue to be the main victims of the religious policies of the Wahhabi state.<sup>44</sup>

Although all revolt was violently suppressed by the Wahhabi forces, Najran was the setting for one of the estimated twenty-six anti-Saudi tribal and other rebellions, which took place between 1916 and 1928.<sup>45</sup> In these conflicts, in which the Wahhabi forces clearly had the upper hand, many civilian victims, women and children, were massacred. It is suggested that about 7,000 people in Najran alone may have perished through the actions of the Wahhabi forces.<sup>46</sup> Persecution of Ismailis did not only take place during the formation of the Saudi state. Ismailis have been subject to the same religious policies and have suffered from the same economic, social and ideological violence as the Shiites. Economically, they have been marginalised and socially discriminated against. Over the last decade there have been clashes between the state and the Ismailis. The state continues to persecute them over their religious convictions. Their determination to maintain their religious and social heritage has led to some heavy-handed reactions from the Saudi state.

For example, in April 2000 the state backed religious police, a group who will be discussed later, stormed a major Ismaili mosque and arrested some clerics. Ismailis reacted by firing on the security forces. Consequently, as many as forty people were killed and many were

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 74.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

injured. Soon the army got involved in the clashes and many Ismailis were arrested. The bloodshed, and the events which sparked it, were based purely on the ideological mandate of the state and provided yet further evidence that the regime would resort to any measures to impose its programme of religious conformity.<sup>47</sup> These clashes were triggered when, for the first time in many years, the Ismailis decided to celebrate Ashura publicly.

These radical campaigns resulted in many arrests and arbitrary punishments and even land confiscation became a commonplace. The state took measures to forcefully transform the demographic composition of the city. Accordingly, two Sunni-majority Yemeni tribes were granted Saudi citizenship, and were offered land and jobs in Najran while many Ismaili Saudis were impoverished and unemployed. After the incident in April 2000, many local people were fired or forcefully moved from Najran, and hundreds of Ismailis who were employed by the state were sent to other regions of the kingdom. Among many other things, four Ismaili students were arrested and whipped for arguing with a Wahhabi teacher, who publicly denigrated Ismaili religious beliefs. They were sentenced from two to four years in prison, and 500 to 800 lashes.<sup>48</sup>

Of course, it has to be mentioned that from time to time the Saudi state has adopted a more pragmatic approach towards Twelver Shiite, Ismailis and other minorities in order to prevent major destabilisation. Although the vast majority of these minorities are still disadvantaged and discriminated against, there are signs of a growing middle class among the Shiite community. Now there is a small flourishing Shiite population, which is emerging as a result of the state's pragmatism and the external pressure to improve religious rights in the country. As already mentioned, after the atrocities of 9/11 Saudi Arabia was subjected to criticism for

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<sup>47</sup> As John Bradley notes, the decision was part of an international campaign to highlight the lack of religious freedom and other human rights violations in Saudi Arabia. Previously, some minimal improvements had been made in terms of religious freedom in the Eastern Province, which had been partly influenced by external pressures. The Ismailis had hoped they could gain some similar concessions. Prior to the incident, the persecution of the Ismailis had increased significantly and the state officials had started yet another campaign to eliminate the Ismaili faith and other expressions of the 'infidel' religions. The pressure for conversion was still in place and following the official creed one of the officials had stated that 'We don't eat their food, we don't intermarry with them, and we should not pray for their dead or allow them to be buried in our cemeteries.' See John Bradley, *Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside a Kingdom in Crisis*, 74.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 78.

being one of the worst countries for human rights and freedom of expression. This vast media attention and criticism from important western capitals in the climate of ‘War Against Terror’ pushed the state to soften their decades-old violent policies of social homogenisation. However, within the context of an ideological state, there is a limit to how far compromise can go without undermining the core principles, which provide both the mandate and the legitimacy for the regime. Accordingly, most of the reforms have been mainly cosmetic and the situation for minorities has largely remained the same.<sup>49</sup>As previously stated, national dialogues, which were initiated by the King, did not create a major shift in the improvement of human rights. Recent human rights reports indicate that systematic discrimination against minorities is still on-going and the conservative Wahhabi *ulama* are still pushing to ‘cleanse’ the country from ‘infidels’ and ‘innovators’.

The International Religious Freedom Report in 2010 highlights many incidents that reflect the continuing Saudi institutional violence against minority groups. A large number of incidents are reported in which religious minorities, and in particular Shiites, are harassed or denied access to ‘Muslim’ mosques. The report refers to an incident where the authorities stopped some prominent Shiites in al-Khobar from praying in Sunni Mosques. Furthermore, the report refers to another incident in January 2010, in which the state detained a prominent Shiite figure, Sayyid Mohammad Baqer al-Nasser, for having performed Friday prayers in a Sunni mosque.<sup>50</sup>

These incidents portray that the sense of Wahhabi moral supremacy is still prevailing so that Shiites can face arrest and harassment if they even try to pray in mainstream mosques. These events indicate that the Shiites are still perceived as the ‘untouchables’ of the Saudi social system with minimal rights and protection from the state. In recent years, the state has continued to close down Shiite mosques and yet the Shiites are prevented from praying with

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<sup>49</sup> “Saudi Arabia: Stop Arbitrary Arrests, Travel bans on Opposition” Human Rights Watch, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/03/28/saudi-arabia-stop-arbitrary-arrests-travel-bans-opposition> , ( Accessed June 5, 12)

<sup>50</sup> International Religious Freedom Report 2010, “Saudi Arabia”, Accessed via internet <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148843.htm>, (Accessed March 6,12)

Sunni Muslims. For example, on November 9, 2009, state officials in the eastern province (Ras Tanura and Abqaiq) closed down two Shiite mosques, which had been centres of worship for many years. State officials have reportedly closed at least five other Shiite mosques and religious foundations in the Eastern Province within that period, as well as closing two other mosques in al-Khobar in August 2009.<sup>51</sup>

Religious minorities, in particular Shiites, are continually arrested and punished for voicing their plight.<sup>52</sup> Any attempt to express the systematic discrimination against Shiites is met by a heavy-handed reaction from the state. For example in 2009, intelligence officers detained a Shiite activist Munir Jassas who was blogging about the state's poor treatment of Shiite Muslims in Saudi Arabia. Reportedly, he spent at least four months in solitary confinement although no formal charges were filed.<sup>53</sup> In addition, the state has attempted to penetrate the most private domains of the 'heretics' in order to stop their 'blasphemous' practices. The Wahhabi state, with its 'puritan' narrative of Islam, does not distinguish between the private sphere and public sphere. The state has taken a totalitarian approach in imposing its regime of truth, thus preventing other individuals and groups from subscribing to any religious and political narrative that is not in full conformity with its official creed of state. In March 2010, Mohammad Jasim al-Hufufi, a Saudi Shiite teacher, was arrested. He was accused of reading 'polytheistic' and 'sacrilegious' Shiite supplements at al-Baqi cemetery. Sources revealed that al-Hufufi was sentenced to three months detention and 60 lashes for reading non-Wahhabi religious materials as a personal and private act not, it must be emphasised, one in which he was using his professional position to influence others.<sup>54</sup>

The argument that what conceptually constitutes violence goes beyond physical injury and harm, has already been presented. Ideological harassment and religious discrimination are considered to be violent acts. In addition to the policies of the Saudi state, which have

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> As'ad AbuKhalil, *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power* (United States, Seven Stories Press, 2004), 174-5.

<sup>53</sup> International Religious Freedom Report 2010.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

resulted in physical harm and intimidation, the regime has been responsible for heavy-handed ideological violence against those who did not subscribe to the official regime of truth. It is possible to argue that the decades of ferocious ideological campaigns against non-conformists have profoundly influenced the collective culture and have also deepened religious divisions, which have resulted in an extreme polarisation of Saudi Society. For decades, the Shiites have been portrayed as the enemies of ‘true religion’. Since the state claims to encapsulate the ultimate faith, Shiites are therefore considered as the enemies of the state as well as of the true religion. The state has been using its vast resources, including educational establishments, religious organisations and the media, to portray the Shiites as a ‘corrupted’ community who have deviated from the *sirat al-mustaqeem*.

Once ideas are repeated for a long time, they become socially sedimented and accepted. For decades, the state and its religious establishment have promoted pejorative ideas, portraying Shiites as infidels. They are pejoratively referred to as *Rifiḍa* which is the derogatory term used to describe Shiites in Saudi Arabia. As mentioned before, until recently official educational materials referred to the Shiites as *Rifiḍa*. These propagandist narratives falsely regarded Shiites as non-Muslims and represented them as a sect who believed in Ali as a prophet. The idea circulated that Shiites do not believe in the universally accepted version of the Qu’ran, because they have secretly changed the text and added chapters of their own.<sup>55</sup> Reportedly, in Saudi Arabia there are rumours being circulated to warn Sunni Muslims to avoid mixing socially with minorities such as Shiites, with warnings like ‘Shiites will spit in cups of water before they hand them over to Sunnis’ and ‘an inherent tenet of Shiite belief is the absolute necessity of betraying Sunnis.’<sup>56</sup>

This is indeed the power of representation, which is exercised by the state over minorities. The state uses both brute power and creative measures to represent non-conformists in the worst possible way, so as to undermine their social status in society. Whilst minorities such as the Shiites do not have the resources to resist state violence, there is minimal social

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<sup>55</sup> John R. Bradley (2006), 80-1.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.



resistance from the mainstream in Saudi Arabia calling for minority protection. Although the state claims that it is taking more measures to include Shiites in Saudi society, there is still substantial evidence that there is a systematic violation of human rights and discrimination against groups who are not of the Wahhabi faith. In 2009, the authorities instituted a ban on the building of Shiite Mosques, marking a significant reversal of the policies that had offered the Shiites some religious freedom in recent years.<sup>57</sup>

### ***Mutawwi'in: The Violent Guardians of Morality***

From the early stages of state building, the regime enforced a controlling mechanism to standardise the conduct and behaviour of Saudi subjects through force. This controlling mechanism has resorted to various forms of violence and intimidation in order to create an 'ideal' Islamic state in which Wahhabi values and practices are observed. This is none other than the fearsome religious police (*Mutawwi'in* plural and *mutawa* singular) in Saudi Arabia,<sup>58</sup> the *Mutawwi'in* is the vanguard of Wahhabism, which is commissioned to cleanse the Saudi society from 'corrupt', 'polytheistic' and 'sacrilegious' practices and enforce the state's regime of truth. This agency otherwise is known as the Committee for Encouraging Virtue and Preventing Vice (*Hay'at al-Amr bil-ma'ruf wal-Nahi 'an al-Munkar*).

Although the *Mutawwi'in* are known as the religious police force, they are a highly politicised mechanism, which is primarily responsible for enforcing the state's ideological and religious narratives. Their job is to explicitly monitor the personal affairs of the Saudi subjects or foreign expatriates, to ensure their full conformity with Wahhabism. The Saudi religious police actively operate to ensure conformity with the national culture in accordance with the state's ideology. This organisation actively challenges any form of religious individualism and suppresses any sign of religious or social expression, which is not acceptable to the prevailing Wahhabi doctrine. Throughout its history in modern Saudi Arabia, the *Mutawwi'in* has forcefully striven to homogenise the individual and make life

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<sup>57</sup> Freedom House Report 2011.

<sup>58</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia Enters the 21st Century: The Military and International Security Dimensions Vol 2* (Greenwood Press, 2003), 294-95.

extremely difficult for those who do not conform. The *Mutawwi'in* are extremely hostile towards any religious narratives, which question the finality and the totality of Wahhabi Islam. Therefore, they constantly seek measures to prevent any non-Islamic (non-Wahhabi) religious practices. They actively attack non-Wahhabi religious congregations and confiscate religious materials and arrest worshippers who do not adhere to the prevailing religious narratives of the state.

Although there are no official Christian, Jewish and Hindu places of worship, the *Mutawwi'in* do not even tolerate worship in secret. If they find people practising their religion within their own private sphere, the worshippers may still face heavy-handed consequences including imprisonment, lashing and deportation if the transgressors are not Saudi nationals. Any form of religious symbolism, which contradicts Wahhabi Islam, is harshly repressed by the vigilant religious police. By law, all Saudi nationals are required to be Muslims. This law, which enforces the totality of Islam, justifies the ban on the public practice of any religion other than Islam. Of course, the government claims to respect the right of non-Muslims to worship in their private sphere, but often in practice it does not respect this right.<sup>59</sup>

The current organisational structure of the Committee for Encouraging Virtue and Preventing Vice is not transparent. There is no easy way for observers to study the organisation closely. Its members are said to be from the lower segment of society and often with minimal religious or secular education. Of course, there is much speculation about the motivation behind people's desire to join this organisation. Some individuals may join because they are from less privileged social backgrounds and the organisation provides them with jobs and economic prospects. Others may join out of conviction, and they may believe that this job is offering them a chance to fight both the moral corruption and the nefarious beliefs, which stand in the way of the truth'. Thus, this job may give them the empowering role of guarding the moral parameters of society. They are active all over the kingdom. However, their presence is felt to a greater degree in places such as Riyadh, Qasim and the surrounding Najd

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<sup>59</sup> Freedom House Report 2011.

region, the origin of the Al Saud while places like Jeddah are perceived to be less intensively patrolled.

In 1980, a legal mandate was given to the *Mutawwi'in* permitting them to arrest, detain and interrogate people for undefined criminal offences. In the following year, an amendment was made to the law preventing the *Mutawwi'in* from detaining and interrogating suspects in their own centres and in 2006, the government went even further by banning the *Mutawwi'in* from entering private homes.<sup>60</sup> However, in July 2007, Prince Nayef, the Interior Minister, reaffirmed the 1981 decree, hence contradicting and rolling back the ban on entering private homes. This was followed by the statement made by Shaikh al- Ghayth in 2006, that the *Mutawwi'in* could enter private homes if they knew of a grave 'crime' in progress.<sup>61</sup>

The current head of the organisation is Shaykh Abdul Aziz al-Humayn who started his job in February 2009. He replaced Ibrahim Al Gayth who supported those extremists who wanted to kill the owners of television networks broadcasting 'corrupt' programmes. Al-Humayn is considered to be a learned man in Wahhabi Islam, with a more moderate approach than his predecessor. There are different estimates for the exact numbers of *Mutawwi'in* in Saudi Arabia. According to one source, there are approximately 3,500 *Mutawwi'in* working for the organisation; most of these are full-time and they receive a monthly income of roughly 3,000 Rials.<sup>62</sup> However, Human Rights Watch asserts that in 2005, there were 5,000 official members, together with 5,000 volunteers.<sup>63</sup> It is said that the part-time members receive no money and they do their job out of religious and ideological conviction.<sup>64</sup> The head of organisation also has the support of 600 administrative staff, over 100 security officials, around 100 messengers, 350 drivers and 250 other workers.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Human Rights watch (2008),58.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> 3000 Rials is about 800 US dollars per month, which is not considered a high salary in Saudi Arabia.

<sup>63</sup> Human Rights watch (2008), 58.

<sup>64</sup> Joy C Raphael (2009), 16.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

Reportedly, the religious police in Saudi Arabia have a well-connected network of spies. It has been alleged that some expatriate organisations act as informers for the *Mutawwi'in*. Although there is no explicit evidence Joy Raphael, an Indian journalist who spent many years in Saudi Arabia, claims that organisations such as the Islahi Group based in the Batha quarter of Riyadh, are flourishing due to their collaboration with the religious police. He suggests that the members of The Islahi Group spy on people from Kerala and other Indian states noting any misbehaviour; in return for their services, they receive financial rewards and well-paid government jobs.<sup>66</sup>

The *Mutawwi'in* have a distinctive appearance. They usually wear ankle-length white robes and a chequered or pure white headdress without the circular black bands, which are widely used in Saudi Arabia. Since 2006, those members who do not wear uniforms must wear identifying badges.<sup>67</sup> In the 90s, many of them were recognisable from their choice of car, some of them used to patrol the streets with GMC Suburbans.<sup>68</sup> Literally, '*Mutawa*' means 'volunteer'. The *Mutawwi'in* were organised into local committees in the earlier years of the modern Saudi State. Historically, they played a crucial role in establishing Al-Saud's power in Najd by spreading Wahhabism to the Bedouin. Once the Saudi forces had conquered Hejaz, the *Mutawwi'in* became instrumental in converting Muslims to Wahhabism and therefore, accordingly, the committees were incorporated into the civil service. The roots of the *Mutawwi'in* can be traced back to the Ikhwan who were considered to be dogmatic Wahhabis with strict social values. The *Mutawwi'in* are organised under the King and they collaborate with the ulama. The head of the organisation has ministerial status and holds cabinet rank. Hence, the *Mutawwi'in* are incorporated within the official political structure of the state. Currently the headquarters of the organisation is in the Murabba area of Riyadh.

The *Mutawwi'in* influence has varied from time to time, but their nature of activities has more or less remained the same.<sup>69</sup> For example, following the Iranian Revolution in 1979,

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>67</sup> Human Rights watch, (2008),58.

<sup>68</sup> Joy C Raphael (2009), 17.

<sup>69</sup> Anthony H Cordesman, Saudi Arabia: National Security in a Troubled Region (ABC-CLIO, 2009), 286.

and the seizure of the Holy Mosque, social and religious rules became stricter and the operations of religious police were intensified. A similar process of intensification took place after the First Persian Gulf War, when the US army entered the Kingdom to protect the Saudi state. The events of 9/11 and their consequences in the region, also increased the activities of the religious police inside Saudi Arabia, and the enforcement of the rules became much stricter.

There are grounds for the argument that if at any time the state is facing a political challenge, it intensifies the role of the *Mutawwi'in* in society. It is difficult to explain this correlation, but one can relate it to the crisis of legitimacy. Arguably, at a time when the Saudi state faces major political challenges, it reminds its subjects that the House of Saud is primarily in power to enforce the true Islamic *Shari'a*. Even if the state is challenged by internal and external political dynamics, it is still a 'legitimate' system based on transcendental narratives. Thus, even if the political problems have resulted from mismanagement, corruption and a lack of transparency, it is the religious root of the system, which is called upon to justify the Saudi state's continuity.

The *Mutawwi'in* as the vanguard of Wahhabi Islam, have played an active role in broadening the Wahhabi's sphere of influence throughout the newly built kingdom.<sup>70</sup> As well as their aforementioned programmes of conversion they attempted to minimise the boundaries between the private and the public sphere in the country. For them Wahhabi Islam is the absolute truth which needs to be applied comprehensively in every facet of society. Accordingly, Saudi subjects have to observe the Wahhabi code of conduct in its entirety even within their private domain. Some of the most personal life choices, about how to socialise, what to eat, what to wear and when to pray are subject to the *Mutawwi'in*'s scrutiny. Being fuelled by this Wahhabi moral supremacy as well as the necessary support of the state, the *Mutawwi'in* are constantly searching to find signs of nonconformity. When the *Mutawwi'in* observe any individual behaviour, which is outside strict Wahhabi parameters, they use their

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

power to arrest or harass the ‘sinner’. They are particularly fixated on rituals. In 2005 alone, the *Mutawwi‘in* carried out 40000 arrests.<sup>71</sup>

They engage in forceful action to ensure conformity. For example, they close down all the commercial places they can during prayer time in order to compel Muslims to pray on time and<sup>72</sup>to prevent any consumption of food and drink in public during the month of Ramadan, they patrol the cities and look vigilantly for any offenders. They constantly search to stop activities such as men advancing towards women, unrelated men and women socialising, disrupting prayer by playing media near mosques, celebrating events inconsistent with the official creed, selling and buying non-Islamic religious symbols, gambling and any other acts which are considered as heresy.<sup>73</sup>In addition to public places, the *Mutawwi‘in* regularly monitor places such as *halal* slaughterhouses and women’s tailors.<sup>74</sup>Although alcohol is strictly forbidden in the Kingdom, various alcoholic brands are available on the black market. The *Mutawwi‘in* are particularly harsh if they find someone consuming alcohol or watching ‘indecent’ movies coming from the West. Generally, Western cultural productions are perceived negatively and the religious police force seeks to minimise public exposure to any ‘immoral’ materials.

However, it has to be noted that, despite the strict surveillance of the religious police, many Saudi subjects defy the strict Wahhabi regulations and break the laws in secret. For example, data collected by the World Health Organisation Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean in 2003 estimate that the extent of alcohol use in Saudi Arabia is considerable and that there is a steady consumption of alcohol in the Kingdom. (See figure 1)<sup>75</sup> According to that report, ‘The unrecorded alcohol consumption in Saudi Arabia is estimated to be 0.6 litres pure alcohol per capita for population older than 15 for the years after 1995.’<sup>76</sup> The

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<sup>71</sup> Human Rights watch (2008) Saudi Arabia, Precarious Justice, Volume 20, p 58.

<sup>72</sup> Anders Jerichow, The Saudi File: People, Power, Politics (Palgrave MacMillan, 1998) 71.

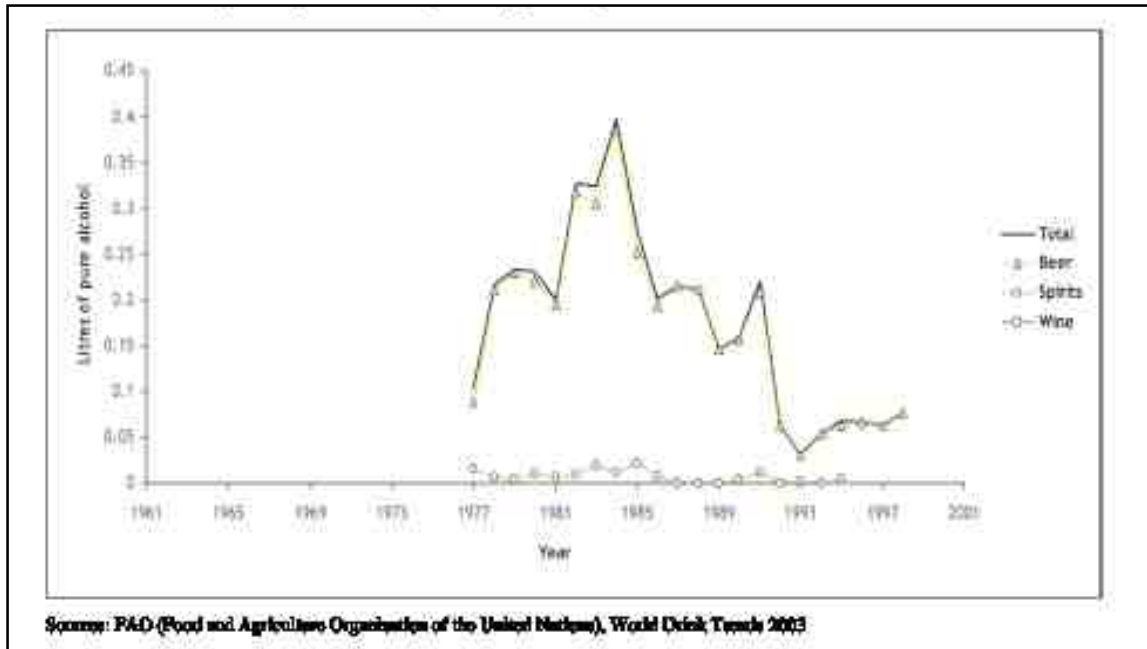
<sup>73</sup> Human Rights watch (2008) ,59.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Data collected by the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean in 2003, [http://www.who.int/substance\\_abuse/publications/en/saudi\\_arabia.pdf](http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/en/saudi_arabia.pdf), (Accessed, March 8, 2012).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

report highlights a cross-sectional study conducted in al-Amal Hospital in Riyadh in March 1998, which found that out of 160 male patients aged 20 years or older, 23.75% consumed alcohol.<sup>77</sup>



**FIGURE 1: RECORDED ADULT PER CAPITA CONSUMPTION**

Throughout the twentieth century, a number of ideological states emerged which used the transformative nature of violence to reshape the cultural characteristics of the nation in accordance with each state’s dogma. Like the Saudi state, they thrived on sharp ideological binaries and reserved the ‘moral’ right to cleanse the society from ‘evil’ elements. For example during the Cultural Revolution in China (1966-1976), Mao asserted that the ‘corrupt’ bourgeois culture was hindering the success of his socialist revolution.<sup>78</sup> He was also a pious ideologue who believed in the fundamentals of the ideology, which he was advocating.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> See, Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Therefore, he attempted to remove ‘deviant revisionist’ elements from the state and society. To this effect, the Red Guard was mobilised to cleanse the system and pave the way for the establishment of an ‘ideal’ social and political system. The Red Guard, which was invigorated by the supremacist ideology of the state, used violence to disfranchise that section of the population, which was perceived to be ‘deviant’ and ‘corrupt’. Clearly there are some similarities between the Red Guards and the *Mutawwi’in*, as both use violent instruments to ‘transform’ their particular society in accordance with the supremacist ideology of the state. Apart from some obvious differences in terms of tactics, implementations and the nature of ideology, there is one striking difference, which is the longevity of the operation. Unlike so many other ideological states, the Saudi kingdom has been on a constant ‘cultural revolution’ from its advent until the present day.

Although both external and internal influences may have affected the zeal with which they pursued their chosen cause, the determination to tailor the social and religious fabric of the society has always remained the same. Indeed, there has not been any major revision in the state’s methods of ideological enforcement. The Saudi state continues to use heavy-handed violent instruments to impose its transcendental ideological vision of creating a utopian society, a society where politically and socially homogeneity is a given and whose people are fulfilled because they live with the strongest personal moral precepts under the ‘highest’ moral order possible as prescribed by their rulers.

However, as the data from the World Health Organisation also indicated, despite the violence employed by the state to create an ‘ideal’ society, people find ways to challenge official ‘ideals’. As the religious police use violent instruments to standardise people, so people find new channels to defy the state. Although the state authorities are aware of this trend, they cannot fully stop the activities of the religious police, as the role of the religious police is both symbolic and tactical.

On the one hand, the religious police attempt to tactically homogenise the masses in accordance with official narratives and on the other hand, they symbolise the state’s mandate



aimed at purifying society, purging all ill practices. Indeed, the Islamisation/ Wahhabisation policies of the religious police are but practical extensions of the religious mandate, which the state claims to have. The religious police attempt to eliminate any expression of ideas other than the official narrative.

Hence, as long as signs of nonconformity are openly repressed, the state can claim that it is doing its duty by maintaining the ethical structures of society. By incorporating these violent mechanisms of social control, it aims to enforce obedience and conformity, which are both essential for the survival of the state. The religious police also symbolise the politics of fear, which the state depends upon for its continuity. The activities of the religious police are a constant reminder that the state is vigilant and will repress any sign of nonconformity. For a highly ideologised state, any activity in the social sphere may symbolise a political message. Therefore, religious nonconformity is seen as more than mere moral negligence, as it is seen as a symbolic act which questions the moral prescriptions of the state.

### **Sexual Segregation**

Shiites and other religious minorities are not the only victims of institutional violence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. There are grounds for argument that women are also subject to distinct ideological treatment by the state, which have some violent implications. Ultra social conservatism has been embedded in the Wahhabi discourse and accordingly Wahhabism has strong views on gender segregation and has a strict set of principles concerning the role of women in society.<sup>79</sup> Although these ideas, historically, were inseparable aspects of Wahhabism, the emergence of a modern nation-state provided the House of Saud and *ulama* with greater opportunities to systematically enforce sexual segregation in the country. The role of women, and the ways in which they are expected to behave, are almost entrenched in the official narratives of the state. Hence, the state uses both various mechanisms of social control and law enforcement agencies to implement sexual segregation in the country.

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<sup>79</sup> See, Rajaa Alsanea, *Girls of Riyadh* (London: Penguin Books, 2008) and Mona Almunajjed, *Women in Saudi Arabia Today* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1997).

What is meant by sexual segregation here is an official and systematic segregation of unrelated men and women in the public sphere in Saudi Arabia. This sexual segregation, which is based on gender discrimination and social marginalisation, is an obvious example of the institutional violence against women, which is rationalised both through religious narratives, and the laws and customs of the country. It is possible to argue that sexual segregation is an attempt to minimise any social platform for the intermingling of men and women who are not *mahram*.

In Islamic jurisprudence there are two categories of *mahrams*. Firstly, it refers to relatives with whom sexual intercourse is believed to be incestuous. For example, *mahrams* for Muslim women include father, grandfather, son and grandsons.<sup>80</sup> Secondly, a Muslim can become *mahram* to other people through marriage for example father-in-law and son-in-law. In other words, the circle of *mahram* includes either immediate relatives through blood or immediate relatives through marriage. *Khalwa* (privacy) between man and women beyond the circle of *mahram* is haram and therefore, religiously forbidden.<sup>81</sup>

These principles are deep-seated and officially enforced by the state.<sup>82</sup> Thus, the regime in Saudi Arabia constantly seeks to enforce measures to prevent *Khalwah* between unrelated men and women. If a Muslim woman goes beyond purdah (it literally means a curtain, but it implies the limit of exposure between unrelated men and women) she can face consequences.<sup>83</sup> As will be discussed later, these laws have profound implications for the social, political and economic lives of women in Saudi Arabia.

Wahhabi Islam is particularly strict about *ikhtilat* (gender mixing) and has taken heavy-handed measures to force the Saudi subjects and foreign expatriates to respect their preferred

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<sup>80</sup> Florian Pohl, *Modern Muslim Societies*, (Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 2010), 15.

<sup>81</sup> Yusuf Al-Qardawi, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam* (Al-Falah Foundation, 2010), 145.

<sup>82</sup> Farida Deif, *Rights Perpetual Minors: Human Rights Abuses Stemming from Male Guardianship and sex segregation in Saudi Arabia* (New York: Human Rights watch, 2008).

<sup>83</sup> Inger Marie Okkenhaug and Ingvild Flakerud, *Gender, Religion and Change in the Middle East: Two Hundred Years of History* (Berg Publishers, 2005), 198.

boundaries laid down between men and women. Since the formation of the modern state, the Saudi regime has utilised various strategies, both those dependent upon force and those dependent upon education, to systematically prevent male and female socialisation beyond the circle of *maharms*. However, these policies have been intensified since the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and its repercussions on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Today, in Saudi Arabia, women have to be covered in black and strictly avoid any attempt at individual expression through their clothing. Any individual expression, which breaches the concept of womanhood in Wahhabi Islam, is legally forbidden and any attempt to challenge it faces a heavy-handed reaction from the state's mechanisms of social control. Among many other roles, the religious police are responsible for maintaining this sexual segregation in the Kingdom.<sup>84</sup> They patrol the streets looking vigilantly for any sign of socialisation between the opposite sexes. They actively stop and interrogate couples who do not come across as husband and wife or close relatives. Most public places such as cafés and restaurants are segregated. Often there is a designated place for men and an area for families. The *Mutawwi'in* go and monitor the family areas to make sure unrelated men and women are not mingling in any shape or form.

If unrelated couples get arrested they can face harsh treatment from the religious police. Of course, the judiciary as an enforcer of the Hanbali/Wahhabi laws treat the 'sinners' equally harshly and often those who are convicted, face torturous punishments such as lashing or imprisonment. In the case of adultery and sex outside marriage the transgressors can face harsher sentences such as the death penalty. All married couples appearing in public should be prepared to produce documents to prove their legal status, if the *Mutawwi'in* stop them. Failure to produce documents may lead to consequences such as detention until the couple is proved innocent.

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<sup>84</sup> Minky Worden, *The Unfinished Revolution: Voices from the Global Fight for Women's Rights* (New York Seven Stories Press, 2012).

Sexual segregation is not only applicable to the Saudi subjects. In fact all expatriates and foreign workers are subject to the same rigid laws.<sup>85</sup> For example, in 2008, a 37-year-old American businesswoman, a married mother of three, was thrown in jail for sitting with a male colleague at a Starbucks coffee shop in Riyadh.<sup>86</sup> She and her colleague went to the family area of the café to use the wireless Internet when they were arrested. There are many other cases showing the uncompromising approach taken by the *Mutawwi'in* to enforce the state's 'ideal' social model for interaction between men and women. For example, in 2007 in the city of Tabuk, Ahmad al-Bluwi who was fifty, died in custody after he invited a woman outside his immediate family into his car.<sup>87</sup> In the same year the victim of a gang rape was sentenced to two hundred lashes and six years in jail for having been in an unrelated man's car at the time. Although the King pardoned her, he maintained that the sentence had been fair.<sup>88</sup> One of these incidents, which resulted in the death of fifteen schoolgirls in the city of Mecca, galvanised many people both nationally and internationally. There were about 800 pupils inside the school in the holy city when fire started. However, the uncompromising *Mutawwi'in* actively hindered the efforts of the fire brigade to save lives. It was reported that *Mutawwi'in* prevented the firemen from going in because the girls were not dressed in accordance with strict Wahhabi dress code. One witness stated that he saw three *Mutawwi'in* 'beating young girls to prevent them from leaving the school because they were not wearing the abaya'.<sup>89</sup>

As mentioned before, in 2006, after much national and international criticism, the Saudi state declared that it was taking measures to gain more control over the conduct of its controversial religious police force. The Interior Minister, Prince Nayef, who had been a strong supporter of the *Mutawwi'in*, resisted calls for it to be dismantled. However, in order to ease the situation he declared that the force was obliged to hand suspects over to prosecutors

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<sup>85</sup> See, Nisha Varia, 'As If I Am Not Human': Abuses Against Asian Domestic Workers in Saudi Arabia,, New York: Human Rights Watch, 2008).

<sup>86</sup> The Sunday Times ( February 7. 2008).

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> BBC News, "Saudi Police Stopped Fire Rescue".

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/1874471.stm>, (Accessed March, 15, 2003).

immediately after identification.<sup>90</sup> In 2008 King Abdullah took further steps to reform the *Mutawwi'in*. A training programme was initiated to help the religious police to deal with suspects in a civil manner.<sup>91</sup> However, recent human rights reports suggest that the religious police consistently ignore the law and that things hardly have changed.<sup>92</sup>

Having said that, even if the Religious Force did hand over the 'sinners' to other law enforcement agencies, the subjects would still face harsh treatment if it could be proved that they had violated the Wahhabi laws. For example, among many other cases, in that same year, an academic and his female student were arrested, convicted and subject to harsh punishment for transgressing the strict Wahhabi sexual segregation laws. Their telephone conversations, which they claimed to be work-related, were suspected as being a front for a 'love affair'. The academic was sentenced to eight months in prison and 800 lashes; the female student received four months in prison plus 350 lashes.<sup>93</sup>

Wahhabi sexual segregation has wider applications; these structurally marginalise women who are legally considered as minors. The strict enforcement of gender segregation throughout the kingdom, include workplaces, hinder women's full participation in public life.<sup>94</sup> A survey, which was conducted in March 2010, suggested that today women make up 14.4 % of the workforce, triple the rate in 1992.<sup>95</sup> However, women's unemployment rate is four times that of men.

Despite the presence of a large educated female population, Saudi women's share of employment and economic participation is minimal. According to the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report in 2009, Saudi Arabia was ranked 130th out of 134

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<sup>90</sup> BBC News, "Saudi religious police face curbs", [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/5016962.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/5016962.stm), (Accessed May, 25,2006).

<sup>91</sup> Joy C Raphael (2009), 18.

<sup>92</sup> World Report 2011, Human Rights Watch.

<sup>93</sup> Joy C Raphael (2009), 20.

<sup>94</sup> Eleanor Abdella Doumato and Marsha Pripstein Posusney, *Women and Globalization in the Arab Middle East: Gender, Economy, and Society* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), 2.

<sup>95</sup> World Report 2011, Human Rights Watch.

countries for gender parity. In 2010 the same report ranked the country 129th. Even those Saudi women, who are employed, are confronted with various obstacles including transport and logistics. A report in 2010, suggested that some 35% of Saudi women's monthly income is spent on drivers and taxis as they are not allowed to drive and they are largely excluded from the Saudi public transport system.

It is possible to argue that the existing restrictions, and the discrimination against women, represent a form of structural violence, which systematically disfranchises a large segment of the population. Those who are committing the violence are those who are in dominant positions, and structural violence is a hidden form of violence that affects women in many aspects of their lives. With the assistance of prevailing ideologies, violence can be legitimatised and, accordingly, victims are prevented from identifying this structural violence as a form of violence. As religion, coupled with ideology, rationalises discrimination against women, there are limited social platforms from which to resist the existing discourse.

Although the state asserts it is making progress, Human Rights Watch report highlights the fact that there are minimal signs of improvement. In fact a report finds that the legal system continues to discriminate against women institutionally in accordance with the laws of the state. Among many other cases, the report refers to the case of a medical doctor in her forties who lost a court appeal to remove her father as her guardian after he refused to give her hand away in marriage and confiscated her income. She ended up living in a women's shelter as the result of the dispute.<sup>96</sup>The report also highlights forced marriages, which continue to be imposed on women by their guardians. For example, the brothers of two unrelated women, one in Burayda, the other in Riyadh, acting as their guardians, compelled their sisters to marry five men each, against their will, for the money and other benefits which would accrue to the brothers.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, the report referred to a case in January 2010 in which a court in Qasim province sentenced Sawsan Salim to 300 lashes and one-and-a-half years in prison

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

for appearing in court without a male guardian.<sup>98</sup> Although this case was extreme even by Saudi standards, it shows the capability of the legal system to disfranchise women.

The law strictly states that all women, regardless of age or status, are required to have a male guardian. Either they have to be 'protected' by the males in their immediate family, or their husbands. Accordingly, all women require their guardian's permission for most essential activities in their lives. Activities such as marriage, divorce, education, employment, opening a bank account, elective surgery and travelling (if under 45), require the prerequisite permission from a male guardian.

These violent mechanisms of social control, which champion the 'ideal' social order, institutionally paralyse a large segment of the population. The state uses its legal and law enforcement instruments to impose a regime of truth, which systematically disfranchises women.<sup>99</sup> The conservative *ulama*, who feed the state with their religious zeal, refer to the literal reading of the Qu'ran to justify the law. For example, they refer to a segment of the Qu'ran which states that, 'Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard.'<sup>100</sup>

However, it would be a mistake to assume that there is a monolithic approach to many of these laws. From time to time, there are debates within the establishment and there are calls for reform from influential people. For example, recently Shaykh Ahmad Qassim Al-Ghamdi, Chief of the religious police in Mecca, told the Arabic-language daily newspaper *Okaz* that '*Ikhtilat*' (mixing) was part of normal life for the *umma* and its societies...'In many

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Although many liberal Saudi women have been active in challenging the guardianship law for women, there is evidence to suggest that some Saudi women would prefer to maintain the status quo. For example in 2008, a campaign was launched to preserve the Saudi's unique heritage. A petition 'My Guardian Knows what's Best for Me,' was signed by over 5,000 Saudi women. The petition asked to preserve the strict Wahhabi norms and punish those who want to challenge them.

<sup>100</sup> Quran 4.34.

Muslim houses – even those of Muslims who say mixing is haram – you can find female servants working around unrelated males,<sup>101</sup>

However, Shaykh Ahmad Qassim al-Ghamdi was confronted with heavy criticism from other influential figures in the state and beyond. For example, Shaykh Muhammad al-Nujaimi, professor of Comparative Jurisprudence at the Higher Institute of Law at the Imam Muhammad Bin Saud Islamic University in Riyadh, went on a Saudi television programme *Al-Bayina* and publicly rejected gender *Ikhtilat*. He endorsed a issued by Shaykh Abdul Rahman Al-Barrak that forbids the mixing of genders.<sup>102</sup> Despite theological factionalism, the orthodox Wahhabi norms are entrenched. Although various programmes of reform were initiated, sexual apartheid remains a part of the institutional character of Saudi society.

In March 2004, the Saudi government initiated a National Society for Human Rights (NSHR), which is the country's first and only independent human rights organisation. There are 41 members in NSHR including 10 women. This organisation reports its recommendations directly to the King. The NSHR third annual report was issued in 2010, outlining some of the violations of human rights in the Kingdom and offering various recommendations for reform. This report welcomed the recent actions of the state aimed at stopping the violation of human rights, but it criticised the ongoing *Mutawwi'in*'s conduct and re-emphasised the various restrictions imposed on women.

Nonetheless, there is no sign as yet of a major policy shift in Saudi Arabia regarding women. In spring 2011, the country witnessed some sign of social disobedience from women who wanted to contest the restrictions on driving. Many women broke the law and drove their cars in public despite the restrictions. Nonetheless, the state was determined to impose its regulations. At least one Saudi woman was arrested after uploading a video of her driver.

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<sup>101</sup> By Rob L. Wagner, "Saudis Debate Gender Segregation"  
<https://sites.google.com/site/roblwagnerarchives/s>, (Accessed May, 05, 2012).

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.



Manal al-Sherif was accused of ‘besmirching the kingdom's reputation abroad and stirring up public opinion’. She was freed after 10 days but she had to promise to not drive again.<sup>103</sup>

These ultra-conservative principles are embedded in Wahhabism and officially promoted and enforced by the state. The state does not hesitate to use violent mechanisms of social control, the legal system and law enforcement agencies to implement its mandate to keep the society ‘safe’ by enforcing sexual apartheid. The violence inflicted on women is multifaceted. They are subject to economic, legal and social violence and the state uses a rigid religious framework to rationalise its support for these various forms of hidden violence. These policies correspond directly to the official ideology of the state. In the absence of a democratic mandate, the state promises to establish an unsullied society where the ‘purest’ Islamic principles are observed. By enforcing such policies, the state expresses its uncompromising commitment to ‘uncorrupted’ Islamic tenets. Such heavy-handed policies reinforce the state’s claims to be committed to the ‘truth’ regardless of any consideration of the prevailing socio-political particularities of the time. Regardless of the rapid changes in the global attitudes towards women, the Saudi state has to prove that it is fully committed to its official regime of truth. Furthermore, by enforcing such policies, the House of Saud maintains its historic relations with the conservative *ulama* who have been fundamental in ensuring the survival of the regime. Hence, in spite of the socio-economic costs of these policies, the state has invested heavily in enforcing them so that it can stay true to its religious mandate. Clearly, without the state employing violent mechanisms of social control, it is doubtful whether such policies could be successfully enforced.

### **Violence and Political Control**

As previously argued, the Saudi state rarely hesitates to employ violent strategies to impose its interpretation of Islam. However, the enforcement of these violent measures is not only limited to religious and social policies. The state uses the same iron-fist politics to protect its

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<sup>103</sup> BBC News, “Saudi Arabia Women Drive Cars in Protest at Ban”  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13809684>, (Accessed May 03, 2012).

interests in the political sphere as there is no theoretical distinction between religion and state. Religion and politics are indeed two sides of the same coin. In the eyes of the rulers, Wahhabism did not emerge as the result of the formation of the modern state, but on the contrary the state emerged to enforce the true interpretation of Islam. Although the Saudi state is not a theocracy, it is constructed, sustained and legitimised through religious narratives. It uses religion as a frame of reference for governance and for the management of affairs in almost every facet of its society. As was discussed before, the modern Saudi state is not based on any official constitution. There is no set of constitutional laws determining the political structure of the state. In 1992 the state introduced the Basic Law, which was the closest document it has to a constitution. The Basic Law reaffirmed the indisputable monopoly of power by the House of Saud and declared that the Qu'ran and the Sunna are the country's constitution.

Beside some family rivalries within the House of Saud, the King has near absolute political power. Of course, in many areas he has to negotiate his policies with other influential figures such as the high-ranking *ulama* and other senior members of the House of Saud. Nonetheless, he is not legally accountable to anyone. The cabinet acts as a kind of deliberative assembly with the power to pass, amend, and repeal legislation. What they propose becomes law only once it is ratified by royal decree. The King appoints all the cabinet ministers in the first place. There is also the Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council) which only functions as an advisory body; the King, himself, appoints a hundred and fifty members.

Limited elections for advisory councils at the municipal level were introduced in 2005; however, women were excluded from participation. Having said that, in 2011 King Abdullah pledged that women will be given opportunities to vote and stand in 2015 municipal elections.

There has been minimal electoral development since 2005.<sup>104</sup> Although the state indicated it would hold an election in 2009, they have postponed until 2011. Although some limited elections have been taking place, all political parties are still banned in the Kingdom. The state does not tolerate any form of political opposition and many of its opponents organise their anti-government activities outside the Kingdom. During the Arab Cold War, the Kingdom welcomed many political activists with Islamic orientations from such opposing countries as Egypt and Syria. In the West, London became one of the main hubs of Saudi opposition.

Freedom of expression is almost non-existent as the state heavily supervises the activities of the press and the media. Recent human rights reports suggest that the state continues to prevent public criticism of officials or government policies.<sup>105</sup> The Ministry of Culture and Information has to approve the appointment of newspaper and television editors, and heavily censors print and broadcast media. Recently, a Sunni human rights activist Shaykh Mikhlif bin Dahham al-Shammari was arrested for ‘annoying others’ for articles he wrote criticising prominent Sunni clerics for their anti-Shia perspectives.<sup>106</sup> The state has taken measures to control the virtual world as well. It is estimated that the state has blocked over four hundred thousand websites, which are perceived to be either politically sensitive or religiously unsuitable.<sup>107</sup> Those who attempt to cross this ‘red line’ will face persecution.<sup>108</sup>

The state uses various measures to penalise activists whom it judges act against the interest of the state.<sup>109</sup> One of the punishments that the state uses to restrict nonconformists is to deny them freedom of movement. There are some cases suggesting that the state punishes critics by limiting their ability to travel outside the country. Those who campaign for

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<sup>104</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia: National Security in a Troubled Region* (Santa Barbara: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2009), 320-1.

<sup>105</sup> Human Rights Watch Report 2011.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Freedom House Report 2011.

<sup>108</sup> Human Rights Watch Report 2011.

<sup>109</sup> See, Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001).

reform are often stripped of their passports.<sup>110</sup> However, it has to be mentioned that the state has not been applying the same heavy-handed policies against all opposition groups in recent years. For example, around 2006, the state took a new initiative to deal with jihadi activists in Saudi Arabia. The Ministry of the Interior initiated a new ‘rehabilitation’ prison to redirect inmates’ ideological affiliations. The Ministry of the Interior oversees this new scheme and has created the Ideological Security Unit (ISU), which is in charge of coordinating the project.

This prison is not like a normal prison, as all the inmates enjoy comfortable, air-conditioned accommodation, gardens and wide-ranging recreational facilities such as swimming pools, video games and table tennis. In return for these exceptional facilities, the inmates have to participate in religious classes. Within this privileged climate, prisoners receive education and training in accordance with the state’s ideological parameters.

In fact, the privileges go beyond recreational facilities. If prisoners get ideologically ‘redirected’ in accordance with the prevailing ideology, they are given financial packages including the cost of their weddings if they are single, and home refurbishments along with new cars.<sup>111</sup> In other words, the state provides generous financial support and a comfortable ‘re-education’ period in return for ideological loyalty. Although it is too early to determine the success of this new policy, the state has tried to offset jihadi ideologies in the kingdom.

Although the authorities have shown some new initiatives aimed at dealing with the religio-political polarity, the state’s approach to political opposition remains intact. Overall, the state does not tolerate the formation of any political platform with which to challenge the status quo. The king, the House of Saud and the state’s Wahhabi *ulama* remain as the indisputable political actors of the Kingdom. There are minimal grounds allowed for challenging the prevailing ideology and its attached utopian social model and there are almost no grounds for meaningful political participation. The state continues to resort to the

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<sup>110</sup> Freedom House Report 2011.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

use of various violent instruments to repress any political opposition, and freedom of expression remains the victim of this prevailing absolutist ideology.

As in the case of the rehabilitation camp, the state is prepared to be financially generous in return for conformity. However, if loyalty is not given the state does not hesitate to use its iron fist. For almost a century, the state has used powerful mechanisms to sustain its version of 'official Islam'. Although it has created various social mechanisms to socialise its ideology, it continues to be dependent on violence to enforce its chosen social, religious and political model. In many areas the state's educational and social establishments may have been successful in creating some conformity, but there are enough social paradoxes in the Kingdom to prevent the state from attaining its utopian vision.

## **Conclusion**

There are various implicit and explicit violent mechanisms, which have helped the state of Saudi Arabia to sustain its political and ideological dominance. People's exposure to the violent mechanisms of the state is determined in accordance with the ways in which the official ideology defines and represents them. Accordingly, religious minorities, women and nonconformists are the most exposed to the violent mechanisms of the state.

The state, through both economic and ideological violence, has continuously punished those who failed to subscribe to the official regime of truth. For example, by using the denial of economic opportunities as a means of discrimination, the state has pushed religious minorities onto the fringes of Saudi society. Deprivation, favouritism, impoverishment and marginalisation are violent instruments used by the state to punish those who do not subscribe to the official narratives. Through ideological violence, the state promotes hatred towards nonconformists who do not fit in with the religious mandate of the state. The state also structurally marginalises social groups such as women, who are defined and represented in a certain way by the state's ideology. Of course, these discriminatory policies are both economically and politically costly for the state. Nonetheless, in the

absence of democratic legitimacy, enforcing such policies shows the uncompromising commitment of the state to what it regards as the purest Islamic values. This highlights the state's commitment to the 'truth' regardless of any consequences. Furthermore, such policies serve to preserve historic relations with the conservative *ulama*, who have been fundamental to the survival of the regime and at the same time provide a cosy religious legitimacy for the state.

Through organisations such as the religious police, the state attempts to eliminate any expression of ideas other than the official narrative. Hence, so long as nonconformity is restrained, the state feels that it is doing its duty by maintaining the 'ethical' structures of society. By incorporating these violent mechanisms of social control, it aims to enforce conformity and at the same time displays the politics of fear, those very politics the state depends upon for its continuity. The activities of the religious police are a constant reminder that the state is vigilant in monitoring and subjugating unorthodox activities.

Any unorthodox activity in the social sphere could symbolise a political message with various possible implications. In particular, the religious nonconformity is seen as more than mere moral negligence of the citizens, because any religious 'deviation' could cause the state's moral supremacist claims to be questioned. The state portrays its ideology as a kind of 'vaccine', which immunises the believers from 'moral corruption'. Therefore, explicit and implicit punitive systems operate to add to the pressure for more conformity and homogeneity, and at the same time discipline any form of resistance to the official regime of truth.

## Conclusion

The central question of this study was: how has the Saudi state constructed and managed the prevailing regime of ‘truth’? It aimed to explore the ways in which the official truth is constructed and promulgated in the country. It attempted to analyse some of the ways in which the official truth is constructed to rationalise and reinforce the prevailing model of the distribution of power in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The central concepts in this study were thus truth and truth management. This study attempted to highlight the link between power and ‘truth’ and elucidate why and how the management of ‘truth’ is at the heart of the Saudi state.

It suggested that there are two interrelated notions with which to articulate the ways in which ‘truth’ is conceptualised in Islam. One, at the macro level, constitutes the unchanging foundational principles of the religion, a set of entrenched beliefs, which establish the finality and oneness of Islam in relation to other competing narratives, and the other, at the micro level, takes place internally to find ‘truth’ within the ‘truth’. Understanding Islamic truth at the macro level is a prerequisite for addressing Islamic truth at the micro level. Unlike Islamic truth at the macro level, which can be defined in a trans-historical manner, the Islamic truth at the micro level refers to the various attempts by different agencies throughout Islamic history to claim to have found the ‘truth’ within the ‘truth’.

This study suggested that Wahhabism, which has been adopted as the official creed of the Saudi state is the manifestation of Islamic truth management at the micro level as it claims to have the interpretation of Islamic orthodoxy. Wahhabism emerged with the mission to offer the ‘purest’ narrative of Islam and emancipate Muslims from *Jahiliyya*. Now it is a creed with the assertive mandate of ‘authenticating’ Islam. According to Wahhabism the ‘truth’ has been the hostage of earthly interpretations for centuries and heretic practices. These ‘false’ interpretations, which have been the product of both culture and man made

reasoning, have corrupted the religion and deviated Muslims from the rightful path. Thus Wahhabism founds its justification in ‘reconditioning the truth’.

The main ingredients of truth management at micro level are leadership, narrative construction, socialisation and violence. This work attempted to elucidate the ways in which these factors helped the House of Saud to turn Wahhabism into the official truth of the state and to demonstrate how they are intimately interconnected.

In a similar way to other religious and social phenomena, Wahhabism was the product of its own time and was shaped by the different driving forces in Najd. As in many other revivalist movements, Wahhabism sought to restore the true foundations of the religion. Its frame of reference was the past and it had a vision of building a future based on what it supposed to be the ‘authentic’ Islamic values. Thus, Wahhabi narratives did not seek to introduce radical new interpretations, but paid a tremendous amount of attention to the ways in which Muslims should internalise the faith in the way it had been introduced by the Prophet and his followers. Hence, Wahhabi narratives are more about the recovery rather than the discovery of the ‘truth’. Although Wahhabi narratives were hardly original, Wahhabism found its way to the twentieth century to form a legitimising context for the assertion of power by the house of Saud. The leadership, which was offered by the House of Saud, brought Wahhabism into the forefront of religious and political life within the Arabian Peninsula. The Saudi leadership provided the political engine for Wahhabism so that it could broaden its sphere of influence within and beyond the Arabian Peninsula. The House of Saud provided an effective mechanism whereby Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab’s rigid religious perspectives could be translated into power.

This sense of religious mission was vital for the House of Saud, since it would provide a rational context for the monopoly of power by the House of Saud. After the official declaration of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932, the mandating machine of Wahhabism became even more instrumental in helping the House of Saud to strengthen their control. Indeed, Wahhabism became a national frame of reference with which to synchronise the



existing tribes with the ruling family. Wahhabism became a useful instrument with which to create religious notional subjectivities naturally linking the rulers and the ruled.

Indeed, the fledgling regime required operative trans-tribal institutions to socialise the Wahhabi narratives, which would in effect legitimise its rule. This process of top down socialisation could not emerge in the absence of a necessary structure, which would effectively translate direct repression based on brute power to indirect control based on consent. By necessary structure, I referred to a set of social agencies which were developed and used by the ruling regime to foster its own ideological perspectives for gaining legitimacy. Accordingly, the new state took measures to construct a horizontally bonded society in which they could be perceived as the 'natural' possessors of power within the organic territory in which the state and the nation were naturally connected.

Various national institutions such as the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Ministry of Hajj and Dar al-Ifta emerged to standardise the collective consciousness in accordance with the official truth. For example, the Saudi state relied heavily on the education system to socialise Wahhabi narratives as unquestionable truth. Indeed, all ideological education systems share a common task. They attempt to rationalise the prevailing structures by using various pedagogical activities to portray the prevailing order so that it appears legitimate, natural, rational and authentic. The Saudi education system implemented the same task, standardising the collective consciousness in accordance to the prevailing regime of 'truth'. Socialising agencies like education have been responsive to socio-political dynamics and are constantly on guard to prevent a crisis of legitimacy. For example, since the Islamic uprising of 1979, which resulted in the seizure of the Holy Mosque in Mecca, the Saudi education system intensified its Islamisation policies. Indeed, the Islamisation of the education was an attempt to expand Islamic studies within the ideological framework of the state. In other words, the Islamisation of the education system was nothing more than the Wahhabisation of educational materials, which were tailored to rationalise the existing power structures.

Socialising agencies such as education and religious institutions have been constantly on guard using the power of representation to reduce any sign of nonconformity as heretical and profane. In a climate in which the state is regarded as the guardian of the divine truth, any resistance to the state is always going to be projected as sacrilegious. Through re-writing history the education system has attempted to demonise competing perspectives and canonise those historical narratives, which correspond to the core teaching of Wahhabism. Through manipulation of history an ‘organic’ historical context is provided for the domination of the House of Saud. Accordingly, every historical narrative which does not correspond to the socio-political particularities of the state has been eliminated in the textbooks. Education has become the continuation of the war against any incompatible forces standing against the state.

Although the state heavily relied on positive power and creative measures to institutionalise its official truth, it has never hesitated to use violence to maintain the status quo. As was elucidated in this study, violence has always remained as one of the key elements of the Saudi-Wahhabi truth management. The state has justified its heavy-handed use of violence as an avoidable consequence of its religious mission to cleanse the society from ‘heresy’ and ‘corruption’. Violence is rationalised in a religious context to justify those forceful mechanisms of social control, which attempt to socially, politically and culturally standardise the masses both in the public and in the private sphere.

The Saudi state through both economic and ideological violence has continuously marginalised those who failed to adhere to the official regime of ‘truth’. Through denying economic opportunities, the state has punished religious minorities for their resistance to the official ‘truth’. Deprivation, favouritism, impoverishment and ostracism are all part of violent mechanisms of control to discipline those who do not endorse and accept the official narratives. Through ideological violence, the state sponsors enmity towards who resist religious and social homogeneity.

The violent standardising activities of organisations such as the Mutawwi‘in are a reminder that any unconventionality and rebelliousness in either the public or the private sphere could be the symbol of a political message with grave implications. In particular, religious nonconformity is seen as more than the mere moral negligence of the citizens, because any religious deviation could question the state’s claim to moral supremacy. Indeed, the official ‘truth’ is holistic; hence it applies to every facet of society. The ways in which people live, worship, and socialise becomes the subject of scrutiny by the guardians of the ‘truth’ who show little mercy for those disregarding the moral prescriptions of the state.

This attempt at the collectivisation of morality, which is enforced by violence and discrimination, is costly for the state and its Realpolitik objectives, but the state remains resilient. What encourages the state to absorb this cost? In the absence of democratic legitimacy, enforcing such policies shows the hard-nosed commitment of the state to the ‘truest’ Islamic edicts. In other words, when there are no meaningful representative institutions, these policies symbolise the state’s commitment to the ‘truth’ regardless of the depth of the scars, these policies inflict on its anatomy. Therefore, in absence of a democratic mandate the state has no choice but to stick to its religious mission to prevent a crisis of legitimacy. The state believes that it is enforcing the laws of God, as the Qur’an is its constitution. This creates a situation in which the state becomes accountable to God alone rather than accountable to its people. This lack of accountability to its people and the need for legitimacy continue to make the politics of truth management vital for the survival of the Saudi state.

## Appendix 1: Map of Saudi Arabia<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.al-islam.org/ziyarat/saudimap.gif>

## Appendix 2: Map of Najd<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bc/Ibrahin-pasha-english.jpg>



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